

A TURING TEST PASSED

Many people have read or heard of the ELIZA program developed by Professor Joseph Weizenbaum of MIT. The enclosed is a true story told by Daniel G. Bobrow of Bolt Beranek and Newman Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts about the time a version of this program was mistaken for him. This is one of the first times a computer has been actually known to pass Turing's imitation test.

One Saturday morning about 9 A.M., a BBN Vice President in charge of selling our Telcomp commercial service arrived at our PDP-1 Computer Room hoping to be able to use the computer for a demonstration. He found a note on the PDP-1 teletype that read: "TYPE ALL MESSAGES INTO THIS TELETYPE, AND END THEM WITH A PERIOD." This note was left there by one of the programming bums who had just succeeded in making run a LISP version of the DOCTOR program (based on ELIZA as developed by Weizenbaum). However, the VP thought that this note indicated that this teletype was linked with the one in my home, since I often used the computer all night. Therefore, he started typing to "me", but in fact was typing to this version of the DOCTOR program. The following conversation ensued:

VP: DO YOU THINK THAT I CAN USE THE COMPUTER THIS MORNING?

Teletype Response: WHY DO YOU ASK?

VP: I MIGHT BE ABLE TO MAKE SOME ADDITIONAL TELCOMP SALES.

Teletype Response: WHY AREN'T YOU SURE?

VP: MY PERSPECTIVE CUSTOMERS HAVE NEVER SEEN A DEMONSTRATION OF THE SYSTEM.

Teletype Response: DOES THIS MEAN VERY MUCH TO YOU?

VP: OF COURSE IT DOES.

Teletype Response: YOU SEEM VERY POSITIVE ABOUT THAT.

VP: THIS IS RIDICULOUS.

Teletype Response: WHAT DO YOU MEAN THIS IS RIDICULOUS?

VP: IS THERE ANY REASON WHY I CAN'T USE THE COMPUTER NOW?

Teletype Response: TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR PERSPECTIVE CUSTOMERS.

VP: PLEASE DIAL ME UP ON 491-1850

Note that after the last remark the VP did not obey instructions, and left out the period. Therefore, of course, the computer didn't answer him. This so infuriated the VP, who thought I was playing games with him, that he called me up, woke me from a deep sleep, and said:

VP: Why are you being so snotty to me?

Bobrow: What do you mean why am I being snotty
 to you?

The VP angrily read me the dialog that "we" had been having, and couldn't get any response but laughter from me. It took a while to convince him it really was the computer.