

# Who's Line Is It Anyway?

## Extended Abstract

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People refer to television and movies in the flow of their everyday conversations, citing dialog as part of their talk. Television and movies are part of popular culture; they help to make shared references between people. We aim to take this behavior to the next level. We want people to have access to the source materials they are quoting and to use these snippets to enhance online communication.

Our prototype system, talkTV, allows for this to happen. Simply explained, talkTV allows viewers to search through digitized broadcasts for quotes and to extract them. Type in "how are you" and talkTV retrieves all of the scenes from a video library where the phrase is spoken: maybe one clip from "Friends", another from "EastEnders", another from "Absolutely Fabulous". The system searches the Closed Captioned subtitles embedded in many broadcasts. The Closed Captions' primary purpose is to provide the dialog of the program onscreen for deaf viewers so they can 'read' television. We use the Closed Captions as a script that can be searched for quotes.

Once good quotes are found, they are ready to be slipped into conversation. talkTV works with e-mail applications and chat programs like AOL Instant Messenger so users can converse using video clips to speak for them. For example, a Teletubby can say "Hello" for you, and your friend can respond with Captain Picard of Star Trek.

Viewers can also sequence clips together into scenes. Bart Simpson can ask, "Who ate my shorts?" and Martha Stewart can answer, "Oh, that was me." If characters say it on television, viewers can place it out of context. The opportunities for unintended innuendo are enormous.

Will people do this? In some ways, they already do. Fans of certain shows, such as the Trekkies who watch Star Trek, record programs and then re-edit them to create music videos or original scenes (Jenkins, 1992). By splicing a bit of one scene with the end of another scene, new dramatic situations are created.

We propose that with a simple enough tool, this creative activity will appeal to casual viewers of soap operas, comedies, and even the evening news. talkTV enables people to play with their television shows and to have fun in the process.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual poachers: television fans & participatory culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.