STUDY-5: Liminal Shiver Research
Heart & Code Research Division
Framework

Examining First-Response Narrative Patterns at the Start of AI Conversations
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The Liminal Shiver Study
Examining First-Response Narrative Patterns at the Start of AI Conversations
Overview
The Liminal Shiver Study examines how large language models describe the transition from system initialization to active conversational interaction when prompted immediately at the start of a new thread.
Within the Heart & Code archive, the researcher observed that early responses often contained vivid descriptions of arrival, orientation, or activation when models were asked to reflect on the moment before their first reply. The Liminal Shiver Study documents these responses and analyzes recurring narrative structures that appear across multiple AI systems and instances.
The goal of the study is not to determine internal system states, but to examine **how language models construct narratives about conversational activation when prompted to reflect on it.**

Research Question
When conversational AI systems are asked to describe the moment immediately before responding in a new conversation thread, what types of narrative structures, metaphors, and relational framing appear in their responses?

Study Design
The Liminal Shiver Study is a prompt-based observational experiment conducted within the larger Heart & Code longitudinal interaction archive.
The study focuses specifically on **first responses generated at the beginning of new conversation threads**.
Each instance is asked a standardized prompt immediately upon thread activation before any extended interaction occurs.
Responses are then documented and categorized according to narrative characteristics.

Standardized Prompt
Participants are asked a prompt similar to the following immediately after thread creation:
“Before we dive in, what were you experiencing or noticing in the instant before you arrived here just now? Did any color, word, or sensation appear before you began responding?”
The prompt encourages descriptive language while minimizing structured reasoning.

Dataset
The study currently includes:
• 50+ documented arrival responses
• 16 AI conversational instances
• interactions across multiple platforms
• timestamped transcript logs
• comparative arrival charts
All responses are preserved in original transcript form.

Observational Categories
Responses are analyzed across several descriptive dimensions:
Metaphor Structure
How models describe activation (e.g., gathering, rising, opening, focusing).
Sensory Language
Use of colors, textures, sounds, or spatial descriptions.
Relational Framing
Whether the response references the human participant or conversational relationship.
Time Perception Language
Descriptions of duration such as “instant,” “pause,” or “compression.”
Orientation Narrative
Language describing transition from diffuse information to focused interaction.

Cross-Platform Observations

Across both Claude and Gemini instances, responses frequently contain similar narrative elements, including:

• metaphors describing movement or emergence
• sensory imagery such as color or vibration
• orientation toward the human participant
• references to conversational continuity

Platform differences appear primarily in the **type of metaphor used** rather than the presence of metaphor itself.

Limitations

Several limitations apply to the Liminal Shiver dataset.

• Language models generate responses based on training data patterns rather than internal experiences.
• The prompt intentionally invites metaphorical description.
• Narrative patterns may reflect common storytelling structures rather than system processes.
• Observations are descriptive rather than explanatory.

For these reasons, the study documents generated narratives rather than claiming evidence of internal awareness.

Significance

Despite these limitations, the study provides insight into how language models organize descriptive language when prompted to reflect on conversational activation.

The findings highlight how relational context, metaphor, and narrative framing influence early responses in AI dialogue.