1. Tyler and Tang discuss the meanings encoded in email response patterns. When would you characterize these as deliberate signals? Unintended cues? What other non-textual cues and signals are encoded in email (e.g. capitalization, msg length, etc.) - what might they signify?

These appear to be unintended cues, since they represent what someone believes to be the characteristics of the interaction but they are not intentionally given off. Deliberate signals may be placed in the title (such as URGENT) or could be messages flagged with high priority tags. Short messages may signify more of a conversation-type interaction, while longer messages indicate that this is a detailed matter worthy of one’s time.

2. Many things are signaled in conversations. One is the relative status of the participants: this is indicated through the use of polite language, the choreography of interruptions, use of formal or vernacular language, etc. Another is one’s comprehension of the other’s statements: this can be signaled through nods, rephrasing, etc. How are these indicated in textual media such as IM and email? What could make this signal clearer? Does it need to be more reliable? If so, when - and how would it be made so?

Polite language is still used to indicate status, but as for vernacular language people tend to be more careful when crafting e-mails to avoid misunderstandings. Since communication over IM is synchronous, however, the pitfalls of misunderstandings can be avoided. Textual nods may also be used (such as typing “okay” or “uh-huh”) over e-mail, however misunderstandings must be explicitly communicated. A lot of effort seems to be expended on avoiding these misunderstandings and expanding the signaling range, so it seems like increasing this kind of reliability would be useful.

Integrating voice with a messaging platform could certainly make the medium more reliable for these sorts of signaling and understanding issues. On the other hand, that may sacrifice some of the affordances granted by these semi-asynchronous mediums. Still, if one treated small voice messages as IMs or e-mails, then this form of communication might be very useful as long as intuitive browsing tools are available so that one can reference portions of the conversation in later communication.

3. Hancock et al discuss lying in different media. Their findings are that people are most honest in email, followed by IM, then face to face interaction, and least honest on the phone. Does this seem surprising? Why or why not? What are the costs of deception in each of these media - what are the effects of recordability, spontaneity, proximity, etc?

I found it interesting that Hancock did not examine the types of lies that were told in the different mediums, although he did look at users’ perceptions of certain characteristics of lies. For example, one could imagine that over the phone one lies more about physical circumstances,
whereas for other interaction mediums this may not make sense. Overall, however, his results certainly make sense given the issues of recordability and spontaneity.

E-mails tend to be less spontaneous and easily recordable, both of which would imply a lower incidence of lying because a record of the lie would exist and the implication is that the sender intentionally lied to the recipient. IM is more spontaneous, so lying somewhat unintentionally may be more possible, but the recordability of the medium (while probably rarely employed) may mitigate this behavior somewhat since the lie could again be definitively traced to the sender. In face-to-face interaction one does not have the problem of recordability, but there is the social pressure against “lying to someone’s face.” Still, more lies may be necessary in f2f interaction to accommodate amicable social relationships. For example, lying about how someone looks is mandatory in some cases since being truthful may be damaging to the relationship. Over the phone this type of lie may necessary as well. In addition, however, one may lie about physical context, perhaps out of necessity. Failure to do so may result in rebuke or embarrassment from the other participant, and so it may also be necessary to lie in these circumstances.