

## **Click Here if You Want to Know Who I Am. Deixis in Personal Homepages**

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### **Abstract**

*Personal Homepages (HPs) belong to an emerging genre. Confronted with a kind of text which is still rather undefined, whose form and content are not fixed and to which they haven't had exposure before, authors of HPs tend to take as their model other personal HPs, thus ultimately participating in the conventionalization of a genre. By examining the system of deictic elements that can be found in personal HPs, I study these emerging patterns and show rules of function and stylistic characteristics of these texts. This ultimately leads to a tentative definition of the genre of personal HP.*

### **1. Introduction**

Little attention, if any, has been paid to how authors of digital documents grammaticalize the (electronic) context in which they are writing and the strategies they adopt to address the potential reader. In this study, I address these issues and argue that through an examination of spatial, personal and temporal deixis, interesting insights can be gained on the internal structure and functioning of personal homepages (HPs), a subset of digital documents available on the Internet.

Deixis is a pervasive element of natural languages that has triggered much philosophical and linguistic interest. Deictic terms gesturally or symbolically [1] point at elements of the interactional context of utterance. They grammatically encode elements of the context in which the interaction is taking place. Interpretation of deictics thus depends exclusively on the particular speech event in which they are anchored.

Traditionally, archetypal deictic elements in pragmatics literature are:

- (i) *Person deixis*: 1<sup>st</sup> person pronouns (singular and plural) and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns. It is only by knowing "who speaks to whom" in the context that we know who "I" and "You" refer to in a text.
- (ii) *Time deixis*: tense and mood markers; temporal adverbs whose interpretation depends on the time of utterance (e.g. now, then, yesterday, tomorrow); frame adverbials (*i.e.* complex time expressions of the type *deictic modifier* (e.g. this, that, next, last) and *non-deictic name* or *measure word* (e.g. last week, next month).
- (iii) *Place deixis*: spatial elements whose reference can only be understood in function of the place of utterance (e.g. here, there).

In studying the system of deictic elements found in the corpus, I will show that a number of patterns emerge. These patterns interact and combine together to create a certain type of text perceived and received by the reader as being a personal HP, distinct from other types of text, with its own singularities and stylistic tendencies. To show this, I will examine a sample corpus of 38 Georgetown students' HPs that were pulled down from G.U.'s student "Users" directory (these can be found online at the URL: <http://www.georgetown.edu/users/> ).

Selecting these pages required a pre-theoretical notion of what a HP should be. In building the corpus, I selected pages that responded to a number of criteria I expected to be representative of personal HPs, *i.e.* pages that (i) explicitly claimed in the body of the text to be HPs (even if the page reduced minimally to a title mentioning it without any subsequent body of text); (ii) presented *personal* information (this is to be taken

largely. In *personal information* is included: resumé and lists of hyperlinks as a reflection of someone's own personal interest); (iii) represented one particular individual (as opposed to representing a group, a company or the like). In section 2, I will try to show how the electronic space is organized and grammaticalized through a study of spatial deixis. Sections 3 and 4 will be respectively devoted to a study of person and temporal deixis. I will examine the type of social relationship and temporal framework assumed in HPs. In sections 5 and 6, I will present a tentative definition of the genre of personal HPs and present some of the perspectives this definition opens.

## 2. Spatial deixis

Spatial deixis is usually defined as concerned with the encoding of spatial location relative to the location of the participants in the speech event. *Primary spatial deixis* refers to pairs such as *here/there*, *this/that*, *come/go*, i.e. deictic expressions whose reference is bound to a particular speech situation and cannot be interpreted outside of it. They are distinguishable from *secondary spatial deictics* (up, down, right, left). The latter are spatial expressions which can be said to be used deictically when their interpretation is a function of their situation in relation to a deictic center (or *origo*). An examination of space deictics thus requires that we define the deictic space in which the author of an Internet page is writing to be able to analyze how this encoding is being done in the specific context of personal HPs.

### 2.1. Setting up the deictic space

At a more macro-level, the first obvious characteristic of HPs is that they support hypertextual features. Carr [2] distinguishes between what he calls: (i) *Hypertext in the small*: that is "hypertext concerned with a local context"—usually a single text or a group of intimately related text; and (ii) *Hypertext in the large*: namely "hypertext concerned with a global context—not just a single text or group of intimately related texts but hypertext as a universal resource". Carr also notes that documents on the Internet tend to fall within one of the following two broad categories: (i) *Content-bearing documents*. These are documents concentrating on a particular topic. They usually don't make much use of links; and (ii) *Catalogue documents*. These are documents "which contain no subject-domain

information themselves, but do contain many links to other information sources. These other sources may themselves be content-full documents or may be further catalogue documents".

Personal HPs fall in Carr's category of Hypertext in the small (each HP may be composed of one or more documents provided that these are perceived as being part of one conceptual HP by the reader), and seem generally to be content-bearing documents (which allows for more insights on person, time and spatial deixis).

### 2.2. Fixing the deictic center

The notion of "Home" is a recurrent one in the data and one that seems to recover different spaces. In the very name of "Homepage" is encoded the notion of "home". Observe:

- (1) Welcome to my very own home-on-the web page.
- (2) Welcome to my tiny little corner of cyberspace.
- (3) Welcome to my fast-paced life.
- (4) Come on in and make yourself at home.

The notion of Home may present variations. Examples (1)-(4) portray the idea of a limited space, abstract ("Welcome to my fast-paced life") or concrete ("Welcome to my page"), belonging to the author ("my very own home-on-the-web page", "my tiny corner of cyberspace") and to which the reader is invited. The use of the diminutive ("tiny") creates a homelike ambiance more suitable for 1<sup>st</sup> person writing. Other writers, possibly more aware of the huge audience of people that can potentially access their page and thus perhaps willing to present themselves in a more neutral way, choose a less personally involved style that may be called the "office" style (term credited to Catherine N. Ball). Characteristics of the "office" HP include less narrator presence (few or no personal pronouns) and less invitation to the reader to participate; content is more factual, and facts are usually linked to professional activities.

Note that the invitation to come in (4) ("Come on in and make yourself at home") situates the reader outside of the deictic space of which the author is an element. A position confirmed by the address in (5).

- (5) Hi, there !

This correlates with the use of primary spatial deixis "here" in reference with the HP (italics are mine):

(6) Hi, and welcome to my perspective on the World Wide Web. *Here* you will find resources that I reference daily in my business life and hopefully some helpful tips on how to better utilize Georgetown University's Internet Resources.

(7) I am glad you're *here*

Note that "here" refers ambiguously to the abstract concept of HP or to the physical reality of the page, as illustrated in the following examples:

(8) *Here* are some of my favorite pages:

(9) *Here* is a quick list of the things you will find *here*:

The last example distinguishes between "the menu listed here below this sentence" and "here in this document".

Fleischman's [3] suggestion that the deictic center of a text is the current position of the text from the text point of view, and not from the author's point of view, is confirmed in this data as illustrated in the following examples, which make heavy use of primary and secondary spatial deictics:

(10) Please, scroll *down* or click on one of the topics in the menu *below* if you dare to find out more about me.

(11) *Up* to the table of contents.

(12) If you'd like to get in touch with me *here* are some options.

(13) Go back to top

(14) [Linguistics][Language technology][Multimedia Lab]  
[Curriculum Vitae] [Top]

In examples (10)-(11)-(13)-(14), "down", "below", "up", "top" are grammatical items whose interpretation depends on the space of the page in which they are anchored. They encode movement away from the particular sentence being read, which can be seen as the deictic center in function of which these secondary deixis elements are being organized. Movements within the page are restricted along the axis up/top - down/below. Invitations for a movement "up-down" (10)-(12) are *catalectic* procedures: the deictic expressions point *forward* within the text. Invitations for movement "down-up" (11)(13)(14) are *anadictic*, pointing *back* within the text. "Go back to top" implies a movement away from an origo situated at the bottom of the page to a place already visited. In all cases, the point of departure for the reader is thus supposed to be the "top" of the page. A first generation of enthusiastic literary theorists saw in hypertext the first physical realization of a mode of writing, which, assuming to be non-linear, would precisely transform the linear reading of texts. From the elements just underlined, we see that

pages on the Internet are still objects having intrinsically a beginning and an end, a top and a bottom and that the reading process is organized as with non-hypertext text.

There are other ways in which authors of hypertext make use of deictic terms. Observe:

(15) Click here to return to the top of the page.

(16) Follow this link to acquire various versions of the Elmo system, including source code, original Colin code, etc.

(17) Born: Media, Pennsylvania

(18) Reside: Washington, DC

Deixis etymologically encompasses the notion of "pointer". Hyperlinks can be considered as having such a function. Although they can not refer to anything outside of their universe of discourse (the limit within which they operate is *Hypertext in the large*), they too serve as pointers, to other documents, or places within documents. This occurs much in the same way, as a table of contents or an index would in a non-electronic document. It is very clear in examples (15) and (16) that they behave so much like pointers that deictics seem to serve naturally as hyperlinks.

In example (14), reproduced for convenience as (19), I have analyzed [top] as being a secondary deictic expression.

(19)[Linguistics][Language technology][Multimedia lab]  
[Curriculum Vitae] [Top]

Given the distribution in this table of contents, we might hypothesize that in fact each of these noun phrases (NPs) points back to a specific section in the text and is in this sense used anadictically as well. Hyperlinks could thus be analyzed as "creators of shared domains" between the writer and the reader [4].

The distribution of the syntactic forms of the links given in Table 1, which shows that hyperlinks are in great majority NPs, corroborates this analysis of hyperlinks as "creators of shared domains". Indeed, NPs are entities without which there would be nothing to talk about.

Much in the same way as a title encapsulating a text can create a new domain to be shared, a hyperlink will serve to refine the expectations of the reader about the document s/he is about to read next.

**Table 1. Distribution of the (syntactic) form of hyperlinks**

Noun Phrase	1120	82,96%
Mailto-links	101	7,48%
Full Sentences	64	4,74%
Prepositional Phrase	18	1,33%
Verb Phrase	17	1,25%
Http/ftp	11	0,81%
Adverbial Phrase	9	0,66%
Partial Sentences	6	0,44%
Adjective Phrase	4	0,29%
Total	135	100%

To sum up, in personal HPs, when the author makes use of a hypertext device, the deictical space created through the use of spatial deictic expressions can be roughly divided between:

- (i) deictic expressions anchored to the text itself. These are expressions such as anadeictics and catalectic, pointing back and forward within the document (primary, secondary spatial deixis, hyperlinks referring to some place within the document).
- (ii) deictic expressions anchored to the text pointing to other documents exophorically (hyperdeictics, hyperlinks referring to other documents than the one in which they appear and creating a new frame of reference).

Following Ehlich, we can thus say that in Internet HPs, “text deixis is used to structure the text and present the identification of its parts and subparts” [5] and is used to bring the reader’s focus of attention to specific parts of the text or to other documents available in the system. A shift from one part to another is usually marked by a title to indicate a new section. This title is sometimes accessible from another place in the document by clicking on a hyperlink which refers backward or forward to the subsection.

### 3. Person deixis

In general terms, following Levinson, we can define person deixis as related to the “encoding of the role of the participants in the speech event in which the utterance in question is delivered”. [6]

This definition calls again for a specification of the speech event with regards to the data.

### 3.1. Definition of the speech event

As a first approximation, we note that personal HPs present the following recurrent patterns. HPs are for the most part:

- (i) first person narration (we will see that there are exceptions).
- (ii) they often comprise one or two of the following type of information :
  - (a) personal
  - (b) professional
- (iii) they are personal introductions.

As we will see, the different types of information often correspond to shifts in the use of personal pronouns. Being personal introductions, they are germane to what Charlotte Linde [7] defines as Life Story: (i) they primarily give information about the speaker, not the world, (ii) they are constructed to be coherent and acceptable, (iii) they are subject to revision across a lifetime. In her study, Linde excludes written presentations of the self from her definition of Life Stories. She considers Life Stories to be exclusively an oral form. The other genres she proposes for written forms corresponding to Life Stories are autobiography/biography, journals, or diaries. All three genres are a means to build a social self. The difference between autobiography and diary is generally a question of audience. If every adult has a life story of his/her own, not everybody can publish it and unless one is already known to be “someone”, there is little chance for him/her to sell his/her autobiography. However, journals and diaries are by nature written for a small audience; they are private text, usually written for the author alone [8]. The problem with that classification is immediately evident. What genre do personal HPs belong to? They are not autobiography, because they are written by the ordinary citizen, and they are not journals and diaries because they are designed for a potentially wide audience like a book would be. They are nevertheless a written genre and thus cannot fall into Linde’s categorization of Life Stories. A closer look at person deixis will show that they actually have many features of oral forms that some people have called characteristics of “secondary orality”.

### 3.2. Establishing Inter-personal Relationships

Writing a HP seems to be a highly social activity. The purpose of writing a HP serves essentially the function of introducing oneself to the world of Internet readers. One can introduce oneself for different reasons: professional, social, etc. Given the large audience one may potentially address, this activity is closely related to publishing, or to

create oneself as a public figure. But exactly who addresses who ?

It seems to be a convention of the genre that most HPs start with the name of the individual who wrote the text much in the same way as a title would encapsulate a text (26 pages out of 38 bear a title that is the name of the assumed author of the page; 9 bear another title such as "Homepage", "Welcome"). The title serves as a frame to indicate to the reader in whose universe of discourse s/he is entering. Like published text, HPs are addressed to a public audience. Unlike published text, in which the relation speaker/hearer (writer-reader) is considered generally extremely depersonalized and abstract in comparison with face-to-face spoken discourse [9], the relationship between author and writers in HPs tends to be personalized. A means of personalization regularly used is to open the text with greetings and self-introduction, as illustrated in the following examples (the degree of narrator presence varies nevertheless. There is a whole spectrum from domination to self-effacement of the narrator) :

(20) Hi, I'm J. D. Welcome to me.

(21) Howdy-do!

(22) Welcome to Ernie's Homepage.

To these can correspond closing statements which can be invitations to pursue the social relationship just initiated (33 HPs out of 38 bear a *mailto* link that is the e-mail address of the author).

(23) How to contact me

(24) Thanks for visiting !

Greetings directly ratify the presence of the addressee and establish with him interpersonal relations. The choice between the full name or the first name, the choice of the contracted form (*I am*) or non-contracted (*I'm*) denotes different degrees of formality, different conversation styles. The greetings seem to establish a rather friendly atmosphere,--an invitation to read on in a usually informal setting. The following examples corroborate this affirmation:

(25) Hey, that's me ! *[next to a picture]*

(26) Some people know me as Jacko, others know me as the Pumpkin Peasan'. You can just call me Steve. If you want to talk to me on the air everywhere, you can call my radio show on the WGTB 92.3 cable FM between 8 and 10 pm on Wednesday nights at (202) 687-WGTB

(27) And on a different note, my wife Lynn is an experienced jeweler and goldsmith; one of these days we're going to scan some pictures of her work and put

them here. Until then, if you're interested in seeing her work ... send me e-mail and we can talk.

In (25) the exclamation mark and the discourse marker "hey" contributes to install an informal setting. Example (26) invites a relation on a first name basis and to pursue a relationship via another communication channel. In (27), the invitations to "show a wife's art" also contributes to install a pseudo-dialogical setting. Some HPs are thus in a way more akin to the letter than to the published text. They are nevertheless addressed to a public audience and the authors have no control over who will read them. Given this paradox, how does the author addresses his/her reader ? What kind of relationship does he create?

The English pronominal system no longer encodes a difference between the familiar form of address and the polite one, but cross-linguistic evidence and other cues in English permit us to analyze the participants footing in HPs. The examination of a set of students' HPs in French indicates for example that the preferred form of address is the polite "Vous" (99% in our data). This may be accounted for by the fact that the addressee, being generally unknown, is not yet a peer. In English, this can be best confirmed by examining the use of particular moods in verbs, or other forms showing deference or politeness:

(28) Where am I ? *If you'd like* to get in touch with me, here are some options:

(29) *Please*, scroll down or select from the following table.

The conjunction "if" functions as an option-giver, which is a way to offer to pursue the relationship without imposing on the addressee.

Different conversation styles are also reflected in the choice of the writer to talk about himself in the third person (see (22)).

Another pattern is recurrent. We have said that HPs bear either personal or professional information or both. Systematically, when the writer turns to the *résumé* part of his text (assuming there is one), there is a drastic change in the use of pronouns. The shift of genre is usually indicated by another "capsule", such as "Résumé", or the name and address of the writer justified in the middle of the page, which creates another space in which the first person pronoun (or any other pronoun) disappears, to leave a text totally depersonalized. It notably correlates with a change of addressee, who becomes the potential employer (which may happen to be the reader but need not be). This absence of personal involvement is a requirement of the *résumé* genre. The

author can thus split the use of pronouns he uses to refer to himself. 1<sup>st</sup> person for personal, casual information, null-subject pronoun for professional, formal, resumé formatted text.

The discussion above shows that the author's role may be enacted by different pronouns and not only the generic first person singular pronoun that could have been expected. As for the 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns, they may also encode different reception roles. In several cases the author selects a particular subset of readers as being his/her addressees. It is the case when including a resumé, as already mentioned. The recipient of this section of the text may no longer be the addressee if s/he is not a potential employer. Observe other cases:

- (30) Special thanks goes out to Steven Flanagan for his cool graphics.
- (31) If you are a native of the Appalachian region ... please contact me at [jonr@gusun.georgetown.edu](mailto:jonr@gusun.georgetown.edu) if you have any information to share regarding Appalachian English. Please contact me if you have any information on voice recognition as well.

In these examples, the intended recipients are again a subset of the potential readers (Steven Flanagan, readers native of the Appalachian region).

In sum, personal HPs are thus "stories" in which (i) in most cases, the 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun dominates the text with various degree of presence of the author (Note however that nothing prevents the text from being written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person (even possibly in the 2<sup>nd</sup>); (ii) the pages are often headed by a title which is the *name* of the individual to which the HP belongs. Proper names are essential in that they permit the unique identification of the "I" (or the s/he) that is writing and takes the responsibility of the text. The name refers to a person that exists in the real world (and not to a character of fiction as could be the case in Web fictions, possibly another genre in use), which means that the facts that this person enunciates are, in principle, verifiable. Moreover, the *mailto* links render it possible to actually communicate with that person and ask for clarifications or make comments about what has been read. I contend that this uniquely identifiable name (whether as a title heading the page or as introduced by a form such as "Hi, my name is...") is what ultimately makes the page a *personal HP* (as opposed to the HP of a group, an organization, a commercial site). Another possible sign that it is a personal HP lies in the explicit statement that it is one (as in "Welcome to my HP", "Welcome to X's HP", with the possessive or the name referring again to a uniquely identifiable individual).

Another feature that we have noted is that, in personal HPs, authors often acknowledge the presence of their reader. 1<sup>st</sup> person pronouns indeed cannot function without referring (explicitly or implicitly) to 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns. This acknowledgment can be done by greeting the reader, introducing oneself to him/her, inviting him/her to perform an action (click on a link, send a message). The footing adopted is generally one of respect or politeness.

Pages vary concerning the degree to which they involve the reader's participation. They can be personalized to feel like "home" or be more factual, or both. One section of the HP might be a resumé and the other one a more personal presentation in a chat-tone. A page can be made of only one of these parts or combine both.

## 4. Temporal Deixis

Temporal deixis can be defined as related to the "encoding of temporal points and spans *relative* to the time at which an utterance was spoken (or a written message inscribed)" [10]. Temporal deixis is thus concerned with those elements in discourse whose interpretation depends on knowing the time at which a proposition was uttered.

An important difference between written text and oral discourse lies in the fact that writing is always deferral. What characterizes the written text, with regards to deixis, is a phenomenon of displacement between writing time (or *Coding Time* [CT]) and reading time (*Receiving Time* [RT] for Levinson). Given this fact, one might wonder how time is indexed in personal HPs. Is it a function of the time of writing, or of the assumed/intended time of reception [11]? And more generally, what is the temporal frame in which authors of HPs are writing ?

### 4.1. A work in progress

Tense morphemes are indexical in nature. They ensure that sentences are anchored to a specific context of utterance. They characterize the narrated event with reference to the speech event. Observe Tables 2 and 3.

Two tenses seem to dominate the data: the present tense (largely favored by the writers of HPs) and the preterit. The use of each of the tenses and aspects produce different effects on the reader, and usually combines with other elements to set a temporal framework whose design is repeatedly found in personal HPs. I will concentrate on the most significant distinctions.

Table 2. Distribution of tensed verbs in the data

Mood →	Indicative		Conditional
Tense ↓		Progressive	33
Present	441	37	
Preterit	209	2	
Present perfect	34	10	
Future	27	1	
Total	711	50	33

Table 3. Distribution of untensed verbs in the data.

Mood	Imperatives	Infinitives	Gerunds
	57	152	104

Total verbs: 1107

Total tensed verbs: 794

Total untensed verbs: 313

**4.1.1. The present.** Much literature has been devoted to the complexities of tense and aspect systems in English. Among others, Schiffrin [12] and Fleischman review some of the stances taken towards the use of the present tense. Broadly speaking, the analyses of the present tense seem to fall into two categories. For some linguists, the present tense is considered a timeless, default tense. For others, it is a “time span that includes the moment of speech” [13]. Fleischman, for example, contends the view that “the *basic meaning* of present tense is ... ‘unmarked for time’”. If this is so, then the present tense used by authors of personal HPs must convey another meaning because they do not seem to abide by the second definition. HPs seem conversely rooted in a present that does not appear to be the unmarked for time, default tense suggested above. Several elements seem to favor an analysis of the use of present tense in the data to create a sense of immediacy. Let us consider them in turn.

**4.1.2. Under construction.** Personal HPs are usually perceived by their authors as being “works in progress”, bound to be revised on a more or less regular basis, as shown in the following examples:

- (32) Will be updated soon...
- (33) That's all I have to say for now
- (34) This page is still under construction

“Now” seems to imply that there will be a later, “still under construction” and “will be updated soon” convey the idea that the author is aiming at perfecting or augmenting his work.

13 pages out of 38 also contain indication of when the page was written or last updated, or some other indication of the life span of the page. The forms taken by these indications fall under what Hinrich [14] calls *complete* or *independent* dates, i.e. non-deictic forms that can be used for a proper interpretation of deictic terms:

- (35) Copyright 1997
- (36) Page last updated March 4, 1997
- (37) Visits since 02/12/97

These indications are necessary to ensure that the information contained in the page is not obsolete and/or that deictic terms can be properly interpreted. For example, the reference time in sentence (38) (belonging to the same HP as (36)) can only be properly understood in relation to (36):

- (38) This semester's class

In this last example, we see that time is typically indexed to the time of writing (Coding Time).

By inserting indication of the life span of the page, the writer ensures that deictic elements will always be interpretable even if the author postpones for an indefinite time the updating of his HP. If time was indexed to the CT initially, but clues that the information registered on the page may be obsolete are absent, the reader can only interpret from his/her own origo and assume that the information is up-to-date.

This brings to light an important assumption--the idea that personal HPs should be updated, that they are texts in the making to which authors return or are expected to return regularly and revise with time. Through regular updates, authors can keep the content of their text as close as possible to what is currently of interest to them.

**4.1.3. Now, last X, past X, this X, next X.** The sense of immediacy is also triggered by a class of adverbs or complex time adverbials pertaining to the semantic field of proximity, simultaneity in time. The archetypal example is “now”, as already mentioned in some of the examples above:

- (39) That's all I have to say for now...
- (40) My home state is just a few miles West of where I now live.

- (41) I enjoy running, playing basketball and hitting the links (golf), but don't have the time to do any of them now.

Reference time is often stated with close reference to the present, and the measure of time elapsed since Coding Time is generally in terms of semester, seasons or limited number of years.

- (42) Unfortunately, they declined to hire me this past fall.  
 (43) Over the past few years, I have primarily been studying the French language.  
 (44) This semester, I spent most of my time relaxing and studying, in that order.  
 (45) After I read Machiavelli's *The Prince* and finish my math homework, I'm sure that I'll be able to improve it. Till then, at least you can e-mail me from my page, ...

In (42) *This past fall*, the complex time adverbial creates a direct relationship of *the fall* with Coding Time; *over the past few years* goes back in time but typically not very far back (except when mentioning a time or place of birth, authors of personal HPs in this corpus do not usually start writing about their childhood, teenage experience, or other information that would take them out from the university time-frame). In (45), *After I finish Machiavelli's The Prince and my math homework*, also creates clearly a sense of limited time within which the page should be adapted to reflect the most recent facts in the author's life.

The choice of an adverb such as *currently* also pertains to the same set of adverbs or complex time adverbials with the semantic connotation of closeness to the present.

- (46) I am currently a grad student in Linguistics, at Georgetown University, in Washington, DC.

**4.1.4. Present and progressive form.** Not only are texts in the present, but also often in the progressive form (see Table 2). According to Traugott and Pratt, while the "present tense, as deictic, indicates proximity to the narrator and implies the narrator's involvement in the action," the progressive is an aspectual marking, that has the effect on the reader of creating the impression that elements introduced by this aspectual progressive are part of an incomplete process. The use of -ing "presents objects and actions as persisting through time and as incomplete in themselves". [15]

In English, the contrast expressed by the use of the present versus progressive form is thus a difference of stance towards the action. Whether an action is perceived in terms of completion or duration is what determines the choice of tense/aspect.

Present tense, progressive form, temporal adverbs and complex time adverbials thus all tend to combine to create a sense of immediacy, of activity in progress.

## 4.2. The past

In personal HPs, narration of activities in progress combines with narration of completed activities. The past tense is the second most used tense in the data. Past events that occurred prior to Coding Time are expressed in the past form—typically previous studies, previous activities, etc.

Two subdivisions, each with its own linguistic particulars, emerge within the past experience recounted. The first subdivision is the use of the past as part of the narrated presentation of the self: stories that happened to the author, thoughts, professional or non-professional activities *embedded in a text*:

- (47) Below are a few notes about me that I scribbled on a paper bag on the bus on my way here.  
 (48) I studied at Simon Fraser University.  
 (49) I was born in Easton, PA.

This combines with the use of the past as part of the resumé formatting of strictly professional experiences. Typically, in resumés, the past form is accompanied by a null first person pronoun and dates and places of the activity performed:

- (50) May 1994-Sept 1995.  
 Worked on team projects to resolve customer's account problems.

We thus have different subsystems of language:  
 (i) accounts alternating in the present/progressive form for current activities; (ii) accounts of past activities embedded in a text dedicated to introduce the author in an informal way; (iii) use of the null pronoun and simple past when activities are part of the professional (resumé-formatted) presentation.

## 4.3. The future

Rather understandably in a text bound to the present, little is said about the future. Recall that, from the examples seen above, we showed that the text is assumed to be updated as the future becomes present. A number of comments are in order here. First, in the same way as events of the past were sometimes presented as activities that were completed but had some present relevance (*this past fall, etc.*), the future is often a *near future*:

- (51) ... I've only been in contact with the NC Lumbee community, though I intend to do a comparative study of the dialects of both communities in the near future.
- (52) Maybe I will add more to this page next semester
- (53) Well, this is it for now, but I'll be back next week, hopefully with some new pictures and info !
- (54) Now I am working on a Dissertation proposal, and one day soon I'll be a Real Boy.

In parallel to what we saw for the past tense, whether with the use of complex time adverbials such as *this upcoming February, this Spring, next year, next semester*, or by indications such as "I will update as soon as my homework is done", the future tends to be in a relatively close relationship with the present.

The future is also used to encode actions that can be conducted by the reader, or to refer to subsequent information in the text (55)-(57):

- (55) If you would like to leave me a message, enter it here:  
(Text will scroll)
- (56) Here you will find resources that I reference daily in my business life and hopefully, some helpful tips on how to better utilize Georgetown University's Internet resources.
- (57) Here is a short list of fairly uninteresting stuff that you'll want to read.

#### 4.4. Imperative and Conditional

We have already seen how greetings and the use of pronouns as acknowledgment of the presence of the reader were instruments to express and establish a social relationship between author and reader. Internet facilities also render it possible for the reader to follow up with the interaction. In this sense, although a text, Internet pages are *interactive* in a way that non-digital documents cannot be. Interaction is opened by follow-up possibilities of this kind:

- (58) Send me some mail !
- (59) Be sure to let me know if you have any suggestions:  
e-mail

*Mailto* links occur at the end (or possibly at the very beginning) of a personal HP. One hypothesis is that ends (or beginnings) of texts are salient positions. Information can be easily extracted or found. In all the examples above, the imperative is used to offer a follow up to the social relationship just initiated.

One of the functions of imperatives (defined by traditional grammars) is to be a mode of expressing orders or requests. In the same way as in our previous analysis we noted that the use of the second person

pronoun was most probably a polite use of this pronoun (although this does not surface in English), the commanding flavor of the imperative is in a number of cases softened by the addition of terms such as "just", "please", "if" that leave possibilities open without pressuring the addressee. This participates again to make us understand the type of social relationship assumed in personal HPs:

- (60) Please, scroll down or select from the following table.
- (61) Be sure to let me know if you have any suggestions.
- (62) If you would like to leave me a message, enter it here.
- (63) Please use the email link below to address any concerns or thoughts you may have directly to me.

Another use of the imperative in personal HPs is to invite to the performance of an action on the part of the reader (click, send an e-mail). This type of participation is facilitated in a system supporting hyperlinking of documents.

- (64) Return to Slackerland
- (65) Return to top of page
- (66) Click on the icon to view all the latest info about really happy techno music.
- (67) Follow a list's link to its archive.

The imperative is used as an instrument of navigation between documents or within a document.

To sum up, apart from past activities presented within a resumé, present activities or past activities with a relation to the present are favored by authors of HPs. Personal HPs are works in progress, describing ongoing activities or situations, and are assumed to be updated each time ongoing activities or situations reach an end and are replaced by new activities and actions. Personal HPs, unlike any other form of writing, are thus intrinsically ephemeral.

#### 5. Tentative definition of personal HPs

With these generalizations in mind, we can now attempt a definition of the genre of personal HPs.

Personal HP: presentation of the self in digital (hypertextual) form, authored by one individual, and which (i) emphasizes a person (minimally, by a picture or a name); and/or (ii) a person's current activities; and/or (iii) professional experience; and/or (iv) displays a person's interests (in the body of the text and/or through hyperlinks to other sites).

This definition presents a set of disjunctive statements, a device that should be avoided in definitions, if possible. It is indeed a sign that a complete unification of the object being defined has probably not been reached, which thus escapes being captured in an elegant and concise formulation. It seems nevertheless to account for the whole spectrum of pages studied in the corpus. Ultimately, it seems that what matters for a page to be a *personal* HP is that we recognize it as having been authored by one particular individual with no other purpose than presenting one's interest and persona.

## 6. Conclusions and Perspectives

I started from a study of deictic elements in personal HPs and ended by attempting to define some characteristics of the *genre* of personal HPs. The definition presents the bias that was already identified in the section describing the corpus; it reflects the pre-theoretical notion I had about what a HP should be. Other researchers might not, for example, have chosen resumés as being part of the HPs when these were presented as separate documents. It is also a tentative definition in that it relies mainly on a study of deixis in the text and does not pretend to account for other choices in the content or the form that might also be privileged by authors of personal HPs.

Further research should now be undertaken in order to evaluate this definition. This would include looking at a much broader corpus (that would not be limited to students' HPs), comparing the stylistic tendencies of personal HPs to the stylistic tendencies of other types of texts on the Web and extrapolating from the pure domain of deixis. This next step is essential in order to test both the validity and scope of the definition and to be able to propose a refined version of what is at present, still tentative.

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