
Language Used in Corporate Weblogs. An Analysis of Starbuck's Weblog

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I. Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze the language used in weblogs, which is one of the cybergenres of the Web 2.0 communication that is widely used in many communication contexts, either formal and informal. Some attention has been paid to this cybergenre from the field of discourse analysis (Herring et al. 2005). I will focus my attention on the study of the specific language used in one type of weblogs, namely, corporate weblogs. These blogs are published by or with the support of an organization to reach that organization's goals (Fredrik, 2004). I selected one well-known corporate weblog as the object of the present study, that is, the Starbucks' blog. The focus of my study is to analyze the language used in this blog in order to know to what extent formality features are used and how they shape the discourse type employed in these blogs. The variables taking into account for the study are: first, formality features (i.e., formal or informal language) found in the entry and comments that will be analyzed and, second, discourse features (i.e., written or spoken discourse) found in the weblog that will be analyzed. The main results of this study show 1) the informal language used in corporate weblogs, and 2) the hybrid nature (i.e., a mixture between written and spoken language) of blogs concerning the language employed in them (Ruiz-Garrido and Ruiz-Madrid, 2007). These results are discussed and suggestions for further research are given.

Keywords: Language, corporate weblogs, Starbucks, formality, discourse.

II. Introduction

Merriam-Webster, editor of dictionaries and reference texts, publishes each year a list of the ten most outstanding words. These are usually words which have been popular among people in the last twelve months. According to CNN, the top position in the 2004 list was given to blog, the latest genre of internet communication that has attained widespread popularity (Herring et al. 2005). Along this line, according to Sifry of Technorati, over 37.3 million blogs were being tracked by Technorati in May 2006; on average, a new weblog is created every second. Weblogs (usually shortened to blog, but occasionally spelled web blog) can be defined as "frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence" (Herring et al. 2004:1). That is to say, they are like a website on which users can write about anything. But it is a special kind of site that is created and maintained by a person who is passionate about a subject and wants to tell the world about his or her area of expertise. A blog is usually written by one person. However, there are also group blogs (written by several people) and even corporate blogs (also called executive blogs) produced by a department or entire company (without individual personalities at

all), but these are less common. The most popular form by far is the individual blog (Scott, 2007).

III. Objectives

The aim of this article is to analyze the language used in corporate weblogs. I will especially focus my attention on the analysis of the language used, by writers and users in the weblog of Starbucks -the largest coffeehouse corporate in the world-, in terms of formality (i.e., formal or informal language) and in terms of discourse (i.e., spoken or written discourse).

IV. Features of Corporate Weblogs

Fredrik (2004) defined corporate weblog as “a blog published by or with the support of an organization to reach that organization's goals (promotion, customer service, etc.)” There are some basic features that are specific of corporate weblogs. According to Hill (2005) and Wood et al. (2006), corporate weblogs

- provide a friendly and somewhat casual interface (i.e., connection) to the company,
- allow the visitor to find out if the available information on the blog is relevant, honest and consistent,
- expand their audiences without having to rely on traditional, and often inefficient, means of communication with their customers,
- take a minimum effort and a modest low cost for the company,
- could be a very effective strategy for promoting products and services, helping reduce advertising and marketing costs,
- offer a greater Web visibility and therefore presence in the market, and
- play an important role in increasing the visibility and credibility of a business.

To sum up, according to Hill (2005) corporate weblogs might be used as a tool for marketing and communications. Moreover, they can help organizations to participate in business enhancing conversations to build relationships for both current and future customers, partners, and employees (Wood et al. 2006).

As mentioned above, the aim of this article is to analyze the language used in corporate weblogs. Crystal (2001: 15) also points out the relevance of the language (i.e., style) used in blogs and describes it as “the process of writing in its naked, unedited form”. In fact, blogs utilize both the attributes of on-line, informal spoken language with those of the conventional written monologue. Indeed, weblogs are socially interactive, immediately revisable, and somewhat spontaneous, which are features of

the oral communication and at the same time they contain self-reflective thoughts inserted in continuous public written conversations



V. Method

The general methodology of this study involved an analysis of the language employed by writers and users in Starbucks' weblog. Starbucks Corporation is an international coffee and coffeehouse chain based in Seattle, Washington. It is the largest coffeehouse company in the world, with 17,009 stores in 55 countries, including over 11,000 in the United States, over 1,000 in Canada, over 700 in the United Kingdom, and over 150 in Turkey (Source Starbucks' website¹). The Google Blogs² browser was primarily used in order to locate and analyze the weblog. For further understanding, the Starbucks' website and google.com³ were also searched. I used a variety of keywords for the search, such as «Starbucks' weblog» or «most outstanding corporate weblogs».

My aim in this paper is to analyze the language used by writers and users in the weblog of Starbucks. In order to do so, I have analyzed a sample of the corporate weblog mentioned above. For the content analysis, I selected the most popular entry⁴ written by the president of the company in America and posted during August of 2010, and thirteen comments made by the users of the weblog. The variables taken into account for the analysis are:

1. Formality features (i.e., formal or informal language) found in the entry and the comments that have been analyzed. The analysis of such features will help to observe the informal communication register used in blogs. According to Crystal (1992: 142), in stylistic and sociolinguistics studies, formality can be defined as a dimension of social behaviour ranging from the most strictly regulated to the least regulated, and reflected in language by varied linguistic features. Highly formal language involves carefully organized discourse, often with complex syntax and vocabulary, which closely follows the standard language, and which is often sensitive to prescriptive judgements. Highly informal language is very loosely structured, involving a high level of colloquial expression, and often departing from standard norms (such as by using slang, regionalisms, neologisms, and code mixing). As shown in

¹ Available at <http://www.starbucks.com/> (09/12/2011)

² Available at <http://www.google.com/blogsearch> (16/11/2011)

³ Available at <http://www.google.com/> (15/11/2011)

⁴ Available at <http://blogs.starbucks.com/blogs/customer/archive/2010/08/16/starbucks-voted-best-coffee-two-years-in-a-row.aspx?PageIndex=1> (09/12/2011)



2. **Table1**, there are numerous differences between formal and informal language.

Table1. List of Main Differences between Formal and Informal Language
(Source Universidad de Los Andes website)

Formal Language	Informal Language
<p>It is used in academic writing (e.g., essays, reports, resumes, theses, and the like), and formal social events such as public speeches, graduation ceremonies, and assemblies depending upon the topic.</p>	<p>It is suitable for ordinary conversations, letters to friends or e-mails.</p>
<p>It is more commonly used in writing than in speech.</p>	<p>It is more used in everyday speech (especially, conversations) than in writing.</p>
<p>It follows the conventions of “standard” language; i.e., it uses language forms that often grammatically and lexically considered “correct” or agreed upon by most educated users of the language. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sentences are often long and complex; ➤ Subject-verb agreement is observed; ➤ Contractions are avoided; ➤ The passive voice is often used (making it more impersonal); ➤ It is better organized and thought out; ➤ Clear and precise vocabulary is used; hence, clichés, colloquialisms, idioms, phrasal verbs, proverbs and slang are avoided. Likewise, a lot of synonyms are used in order to avoid the repetition of the same words. Also, much vocabulary derived from French and Latin is used. ➤ When spoken, words are more carefully and more slowly pronounced than in informal English. 	<p>It often violates the conventions of “standard” language. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sentences are often short (or choppy) and simple; ➤ Subject-verb agreement is not necessarily observed; ➤ Contractions and acronyms are very common; ➤ The active voice is often used; ➤ It is less organized and thought out; ➤ The vocabulary used is somewhat liberal; hence, lots of abbreviations, slangs, informal discourse markers, and phrasal verbs. Also, vocabulary derived from French and Latin is not common. ➤ When spoken, words are less carefully and more quickly pronounced (often chopped) than in formal English.

3. Discourse features (i.e., spoken or written discourse) present in the entry and comments that have been analyzed. These features will help to state the hybrid nature (i.e., a mixture between written and spoken register) of blogs concerning the language

employed in them (Ruiz-Garrido and Ruiz-Madrid, 2007). Spoken and written languages are acknowledged as two different ways of communicating with different complexities. As shown in Table2, Biber (1988) discusses a number of commonly held views on differences between them.

Table2. List of Main Differences between Written and Spoken Discourse

	Written Discourse	Spoken Discourse
Grammatical intricacy	Written language is more structurally complex and more elaborate.	Sentences in spoken discourse are short and simple.
Lexical density (refers to the ratio of content words (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) to grammatical or function words (e.g. pronouns, prepositions, articles) within a clause)	Spoken is less lexically dense than written discourse.	
Nominalization (refers to presenting actions and events as nouns rather than as verbs)	Written discourse has a higher level of nominalization than spoken discourse: i.e., more nouns than verbs.	
Explicitness (it depends on the purpose of text).	Written discourse is more explicit than spoken discourse.	
Contextualization refers to the extent knowledge of context is needed to interpret a text.	Writing is more decontextualized than speech.	Speech is more attached to context than writing because speech depends on a shared situation and background for interpretation.
Spontaneity	Written discourse is organized and grammatical.	Spoken discourse lacks organization and is ungrammatical because it is spontaneous and contains more uncompleted and reformulated sentences.
Repetition, hesitation and redundancy		Spoken discourse contains more repetition, hesitations, and redundancy because it is produced in <i>real time</i> (i.e. on the spot). It has many pauses and fillers, such as 'um', 'er' and 'you know'.

VI. Results and Discussion

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Formality features

In the weblog analyzed, I found a broad number of informal features such as negation and verb contractions, discourse markers, abbreviations, colloquialisms among others, which are typical expressions from informal language and state the informal communication register used in blogs. Regarding the use of contractions, I found examples of negation (e.g., *wouldn't*, *wasn't*, *don't*) and verb contractions (e.g., *we're*, *it's*, *I'm*). As shown in the following examples:

1. I *wouldn't* know where to drink my coffee if there *wasn't* a Starbucks. Posted by 4everStarbucks.
2. I love Starbucks, BUT you *don't* serve your bold label long enough during the day. Posted by berniac.
3. *We're* honored that you have again selected Starbucks as the best coffee in the U.S. Posted by Cliff Burrows (President Starbucks Coffee U.S.)
4. Wherever I travel, I look for the Starbucks sign. *It's* almost like finding a bit of home. Posted by ajromano.
5. *I'm* hooked on Starbucks and whenever I go (...). Posted by cap614.

In examples (6), (7) and (8), I found discourse markers such as *then*, *okay*, *yeah*, *you know*, which are typical of an informal oral conversation.

6. Sorry, but Coffee Bean has become my Coffee of Choice...if they aren't around, *then* I come to Starbucks...Posted by happyasabchbum.
7. *Okay* even though I am not a coffee drinker I have the Starbucks app on my iPhone. This is for my tea fix and the wife's Mocha Frappe addiction. :) Posted by gs121432.
8. *YEAHH!!* (...) before going to customs at Miami airport you can smell the distinctive aroma, and *you know* you are home. Posted by uruguaya.

Finally, as shown in examples below, I found abbreviations and colloquialisms such as *y'all* (i.e., *you all*), *go thru* (i.e., *go through*), *congrats* (i.e., *congratulations*), which are typical expressions from informal language.

9. THANKS for a great cup o joe! *Y'all* make my day almost every day! Posted by langeloro
10. I love my Starbucks and *go thru* withdrawals if I dont get 1!!
Posted by debbe1954.
11. *Congrats!* Love your coffee, have to have it every day. My favorite is the Mocha with no whip. Posted by bethel37.

As shown in the example (3) above, the presence of such informal features might be surprising when they are used by the president of the company, since they should show a serious image. In this case, the use of informal features might respond to one of the features of the corporate weblogs already discussed in section 2, which is to provide a friendly and somewhat casual interface (i.e., connection) to the company.

Discourse features

Concerning the discourse features of the analyzed posts, I found a wide number of features such as grammatical intricacy, nominalization, spontaneity, fillers and so forth, which help to state the hybrid nature (i.e., a mixture between written and spoken discourse) of blogs concerning the language employed in them (Ruiz-Garrido and Ruiz-Madrid, 2007). Regarding the grammatical intricacy, an overwhelming part of the posts that I analyzed contain short and simple sentences, which is typical from spoken discourse.

As to the nominalization, I found comments with a higher level of nominalization (i.e., more nouns than verbs), which is one of the features of the written discourse. For example:

12. I used to be a twice-a-day Starbucks regular but now only visit once a *week* or so. The *Zagat survey* is great but I wouldn't let it go to your *heads*. As *Starbucks* has become more "popular" the *quality* of their *product* has definitely gone down to be more marketable and cost-effective. And at the same *time*, overstressed *staff* have pushed "*Quality of service*" down to the barely-tollerable *level*. I know of many, smaller local *establishments* that could never win a national *survey* but serve much better *coffee & espresso* than the current *Starbucks offerings* and are still able to greet their *customers* with a genuine *smile*. It's unfortunate that I and a lot of other true coffee *lovers* have now begun to view *Starbucks* as little more than the *McDonalds* of coffee *chains*. Posted by Boveejg

As shown in the example (13), I found comments in the analyzed blog that lack organization, typical from the spontaneity of the spoken discourse.

13. What can i say i get my coffee at least 5 working days evenings....twice daily ! i work in San Francisco... driving those cable cars.... my first trip i get that coffeethe Bay & Taylor st.. Starbucks ... that staff is wonderfull they really kick Butt..... Tourists ...tourists wow they keep my going .. thanks again Amy ... Chris ... Sarah... and the rest of the gang... much luv... Mr_love_Coffee.



Finally, I found fillers such as *um*, *er* and *you know* that are normally used in spoken discourse.

VII. Conclusion

This paper has reported on the analysis of the language used in the corporate weblog of Starbucks, in terms of formality (i.e., formal or informal language) and in terms of discourse (i.e., written or spoken discourse). In this sense, regarding the results obtained, I can conclude that corporate weblogs might be playing a double role regarding the language employed in them. On the one hand, in terms of formality, the presence of informal features of the language used in corporate weblog responds to the informal language used in blogs. Moreover, although it may be surprising when such informal language is used by the representatives of the corporate, it provides a friendly connection of the bloggers to the company. On the other hand, concerning the discourse features in corporate blogs, the relation between spoken and written discourse is complex and hybridization (i.e., a mixture between written and spoken discourse) takes place.

The present analysis has examined a corporate weblog, its formality features (i.e., formal or informal language), and its discourse aspects (i.e., written or spoken language). Further research could involve investigating, for instance, those similarities and differences that exist between the characteristics of the language used in the corporate weblogs and the characteristics of the language used in non-official blogs.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Patricia Salazar Campillo and Irene Bartoll Gonell for their advices

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