

TELEMATICS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES COMMISSION REPORT

TU AND VOUS IN HYPERTEXT

The pronouns *tu* (T) and *vous* (V) are fundamental elements of interpersonal communication, and our students often learn the basic rules for their use in the first chapter (or the *chapitre préliminaire*) of the first-year textbook. At the outset, the rules seem clear because a distinction is made, for the singular, between using T with friends, family members, and animals, but using V with strangers, older people, and/or anyone with a higher social or professional status. Even though such basic rules often convey fundamental aspects of the T/V distinction, it is nearly impossible to provide students with a list of the rules (and exceptions) for all possible contexts. When T and V are then used during interpersonal communication, the situation becomes even more complicated if learners realize that their determination of appropriate pronoun use should match the interlocutor's view of how these pronouns should be used by the participants. In addition to the aforementioned factors, once a conversational exchange has begun, both parties must decide how to interpret the initial use of these pronouns since they might not match the anticipated indications of social distance and/or status. As Kinginger (2000) explains, "[s]ociopragmatic ambiguity arises because two maxims [i.e., social distance and status] guide the speaker to make the same linguistic choice: The choice of second-person pronoun is a case of *maxim confluence* because the same linguistic behavior can be interpreted as following from either of the preceding maxims" (27). Therefore, it is clear that learners need opportunities to analyze and participate in a wide variety of communicative situations since "language acquisition entails acquiring the social meaning of linguistic structures" (29).

For learners—and also to some extent for native speakers—the French address pronoun paradigm becomes even more complex when regional variation throughout the Francophone world is factored into the equation. Fortunately, over the past few decades, the globalization of various media outlets and delivery/transportation systems has made increased access to international magazines, films, and other types of content possible. Moreover, the rapid development of the World Wide Web has exponentially increased access—in some parts of the world—to a wide range of authentic audio, (hyper)textual, visual, and video content as well as new types of communication environments (e.g., chat, blogs, discussion boards, and so forth). However, the discourse in online materials and new types of communication can be quite different from

what is found in traditional communication. As such, this report highlights some of these differences with specific focus on the address pronouns *tu* and *vous* in hypertext.

Excerpts of on-line discourse have been reproduced exactly as they were found in hypertext on selected Web pages, and is not used to indicate non-standard forms or missing punctuation. The URLs provided in this report were functioning at the time of publication; however, as most readers will already know from personal experience, on-line content can be modified or removed at any time. Nonetheless, the sites mentioned below are owned by international corporations with significant marketing budgets; therefore, it does not seem likely that they will disappear anytime soon. The goal of this report is to provide analysis and commentary for purposes related to research and teaching. Sites featuring food items, different beverages, or other products could just have easily been chosen, and any teachers who do not wish to use these sites should be able to find similar corporate or non-corporate sites related to different products or topics.

Table 1 will be used to illustrate the main differences between traditional printed text (henceforth referred to simply as *text*) and hypertext (see Kress, 2003, p. 136). First, most text is produced for left-to-right reading. In both English and French, we normally begin reading documents from the upper-left corner to the lower-right corner, and we can expect to read each line, paragraph, and page of printed text in the same way. However,

hypertext is not restricted to a predictable format. Instead, hypertext is organized on Web sites by zones. We can often recognize words, phrases, and symbols that belong to the same zone due to similar font color, size, and type. In most cases, the visual layout of hypertext on a Web page allows the reader to organize the content, and since the Web page is so common, most frequent readers of Web sites probably already understand that a certain amount of standardization has occurred regarding format: navigation bars are on the left and/or across the top, and the "main" content is in the middle of the page. Regardless of the amount of format-

ting standardization that has occurred, many corporate Web sites promoting goods and services do not always have substantial amounts of text as part of the first two levels of a Web site. In order to maximize choices for consumers, there seems to be a trend of presenting all the options and areas on an initial page with many different zones; nonetheless, there are many exceptions and different formats for so-called "welcome" pages.

A second main difference between text and hypertext is the typical lack of linearity in the hypertext of Web pages. The reader can read zones in any order, and at any time hyperlinks can be used to navigate to a different part of the document/site. It is obviously for this reason that most multi-level Web sites have a zone set aside for navigational purposes, and most such Web sites also have on every page a link for a site map. Although we do not call this navigational tool in a book or magazine a site map, most books and magazines provide a table of contents (and page numbers) for this same purpose: navigation.

The excerpts in Table 1 are from three different zones of the *Welcome* page of Pepsiworld France, the France-based Web portal of the Pepsi-Cola Co. Excerpt 1 is from a contest zone; excerpts 2 and 3 are from a *Goodies* zone, and excerpt 4 is from an external link zone. Of note on this page of hypertext is that not all the zones use forms

Table 1. Pepsiworld France site: *Welcome* page [www.pepsiworld.fr]

Pronoun	Text
1. T	Gagne un voyage à Cuba
2. T	Retrouve Pepsiworld sur ton mobile
3. T	Télécharge des vidéos et des fonds d'écrans exclusifs de tes footballeurs préférés!
4. V	Pour votre santé, évitez de grignoter entre les repas (in white) www.mangerbouger.fr (in yellow)

of the same second-person pronoun. This Web page has an especially informal, fun feel to it, which is reinforced by the pronoun *tu*, among other linguistic features; however, the use of *vous* forms appears on this same page because this company provides a public service announcement about the dangers of snacking between meals. The link from the zone with the *vous* forms takes visitors to the government-affiliated site of *L'Institut national de prévention et d'éducation pour la santé*.

Table 2 shows a similar contrast with *tu* being used in hypertext on one part of the

Coca-Cola France Web site, yet the reader sees *vous* being used on another part of the site. Although this may appear on the surface to be the same issue as was found in Table 1, there is actually another nuance of the differences between text and hypertext that has been revealed: authorship. In the top half of Table 2, there are three excerpts (with T forms)

taken from one URL, and in the bottom half of the same table there are three excerpts (with V forms) from a different URL. However, as a visitor to the Coca-Cola France Web site will notice, the *Goodies* area of the Coca-Cola France site seems to be seamlessly integrated, even though *Goodies* is itself part of an entirely different site (i.e., with its own URL).

In addition to unknown or collective authorship being an issue for visitors to the site, this is also an indication that sites can be updated, separated, and merged at any time. The inconsistent use of second-person pronouns appears to be a direct result of having multiple authors who have worked on different parts of the site or different sites that have been cobbled together over time.

The excerpts in Table 3 extend the analysis by demonstrating a distinction that can be made between the corporation's official web site and the separate web site designed for current or potential consumers of a specific product, in this case Fanta. Excerpts 1, 2, and 3 are from the same page, yet there is some inconsistency with T and V use. Excerpts 4 and 5 are part of a different type of zone that includes a link in excerpt 4 (with V forms) to a pop-up Flash presentation in which only T forms are used. If the visitor to this page clicks on the link *Site de la marque*, the site dedicated to Fanta appears, and here there is a consistent use of T forms (see Table 3, excerpts 6, 7, and 8), except if a visitor to this site selects the *Contact* link, which sends visitors to all

the Coca-Cola France brand sites to a centralized *Contact* page on which only V forms are used.

Many of the features of hypertext ana-

Table 2. Coca-Cola site: Main page & *Goodies* page

Main page [www.coca-cola.fr]	
Pronoun	Text
1. T	inscris-toi vite sur coca-cola.fr
2. T	Découvre l'univers de Coca-Cola France
3. T	Entre dans le stade avec l'équipe de France
Goodies page/site [www.formulessecrete.fr/FR/#/goodies/]	
4. V	Choisissez La collection de bouteilles Coca-Cola
5. V	Choisissez La collection de bouteilles historique Coca-Cola
6. V	Ajoutez votre bouteille Coca-Cola préférée ou une image de John Pemberton à votre messagerie instantanée préférée

lyzed in this report might already be obvious to experienced—or even less experienced—users of the Web. However, a close analysis of one or more specific linguistic elements will allow students to see more clearly how the formatting, authorship, and production of hypertext can contribute to communication-related inconsistencies that probably would not occur as often in text or spoken discourse. This analysis has provided a brief overview of the use of T and V forms in hypertext, but there are many other tasks that could be done in class or as homework, either with hypertext or on-line interpersonal communication environments such

Table 3. Fanta site and *Nos boissons* page of Coca-Cola France site

<i>Nos boissons</i> page of Coca-Cola France site [www.cocacola-france.fr/nos-boissons-fanta.html]	
Pronoun	Text
1. T	Libère ton imagination (Fanta ad slogan in browser title bar and tab)
2. V	Le saviez-vous? (Facts about Fanta provided by the Coca-Cola Co.)
3. V	Votre carrière (Job information provided by the Coca-Cola Co.)
4. V	Comment est fabriqué Coca-Cola ? Découvrez toutes les étapes de sa fabrication! (Link to an interactive pop-up Adobe Flash presentation of the manufacturing process provided by the Coca-Cola Co.)
5. T	[Tu is used in the entire interactive pop-up Adobe Flash presentation of the manufacturing process.]
Fanta Web site [www.fanta.fr]	
6. T	Crée tes avatars persos
7. T	Goodies pour ton mobile
8. T	Goodies pour ton PC

as chat, discussion boards, blogs, Second Life, and so forth.

The following list offers ideas for electronic literacy tasks and also for expanding the analysis of T and V forms in hypertext and other parts of cyberspace:

1. Ask students to identify the zones on the Pepsi-Cola France site or the Coca-Cola France site in order to compare and contrast how Web page developers use font type, color, and size to create these zones that are visually recognizable as separate areas. Then ask students to identify the function or purpose of each zone (e.g., navigation, contest, product information, etc.).
2. Ask students to compare the U.S. site of Pepsi-Cola or Coca-Cola with the French site in order to see which zones, if any, are on both sites and how the same/different font types, colors, and sizes were used to create separate zones.
3. As students are working on #2, ask them to see how much English influence there is on the French site of either company.
4. Before looking at a wider range of products, ask students to visit the *Nos boissons* area of the Coca-Cola France site so that they can compare the use of second-person pronouns in each product description on the Coca-Cola France site, then the use of these pronouns on each product's own site.
5. Ask students to visit two or more French Web sites related to a different product or theme in order to undertake the same kind of comparative analysis of T and V forms.
6. If the students are directed toward a large food conglomerate such as the Nestlé group or the Cadbury group while they are doing #5, an additional activity on globalization could be added to the list of tasks. For example, the students might not know that the Poland Spring brand of bottled water is owned by the Nestlé group and the Hollywood brand of chewing gum is a Cadbury product. Although this might seem to have little to do with electronic literacy, the task could be adapted to have students use the Web to trace any product to its parent company,

which is often unknown to the average consumer.

7. Ask students to visit a discussion forum, a chat site, and/or a blog in order to see if there are any patterns regarding the use of T and V forms. In most cases, if students are asked to report back to the class, it should become obvious during the classroom discussions that there are many factors that complicate T and V use in on-line communication environments because in some cases, macrosociological factors (age, social class, level of education, gender, etc.) are unknown to participants, but in other cases, some of this information is available, although not always verifiable.
8. For a long-term project, students could engage in an investigation of their own with a focus on T/V use or some other linguistic aspect of communication. It would be helpful to explain two main approaches: horizontal and vertical. Using a vertical method, students would focus on learning as much about one site, blog, chat room, or forum as possible; however, with a horizontal approach, students would choose one type of text/communication (e.g., hypertext, chat, blogs, etc.) and look at small samples from many different sources.

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