How I Wrote My Web

Now that I'm going to start my Ph.D. this fall, I thought I might need a personal website--the one that could be linked to my name on the department's page. I was going to make one through Wordpress, or Wix, until three weeks ago when I saw a post about the workshop hosted by Girls Coding Day (GCD henceforth) and thought I could get myself a little bit more productive during the long, long summer break.

It's probably not precise to call myself a total rookie in programming: I took a python course on Coursera more than two years ago; I took NLP and had to deal with python for a whole semester, during which I relied heavily on Stack Overflow; as a student in linguistics, I use LaTeX to draw syntax trees.

However, I wouldn't say I'm literate in programming, either: I dropped out of the python course on Coursera from halfway and dare not to say I remember much now; almost all the codes we needed for the NLP course was provided by the professor, and I spent almost two hours to make the regular expression (yes, only one) I wrote work properly on a presidential debate night (got an A for the course in the end; god knows what I went through that semester); up until right now, I still have paste the screenshots of the trees in the PDFs generated by LaTeX into my word document--trees are the only thing I can produce with LaTeX.

Five days before the GCD kickoff, I was notified that I successfully registered for the workshop. Due to my habitual laziness, I didn't read the tutorials before I go to the kickoff (although I was going to). Therefore, I didn't know we were going to learn HTML and CSS until I was there. My bad. To me, the way CSS works looked just like the macro packages in LaTeX: they even use the same curly brackets!

I have visited a lot of linguists' personal websites, and had a vague blueprint for my own over the past couple years. After briefly familiarizing myself with HTML, I spent about, say, three hours and finished writing my first web page.

I tried to make some minor adjustments to make the content area narrower, and centered in the browser. Somehow I had to set a transparent division on the left of the page, just so the texts are in the middle. That was when my first question came up: is the division really necessary? (Now you see how deeply Ocam's Razor has affected me.)

I was pretty happy with the outcome, and started to worry about having nothing to do in the rest of the week. I shouldn't have worried.

On Wednesday, I started to read the tutorials for CSS, and changed my one-page website into a six-page, more website-like thing with a navigation bar on the left. I used the frame tag to do it, and the outcome wasn't what I expected: I was expecting the home page to be a whole (with one single background image), not a page with two apparent columns. My mentor suggested the iframe tag. It worked.

On Thursday, I wrote the gallery page, learned how to rotate pictures, and used CSS3 for the transforming effect. the problem I had was that the subpage was under the the navigation bar; again, not what I expected. My mentor pointed out that the sum of the widths of all the items had overflowed, due to a padding I added.

On Friday, I added two divisions to the bio page, and used CSS to set the format of the horizontal lines.

In a nutshell, GCD is great and my mentor was super.

Before this turns into some awkward commercial, I should probably end here.

All hail Chomsky!