

Cameron Kennedy

ENGW1111

Dr. Ethan Whittet

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Portfolio Introductory Essay

The question “who am I as a writer?” provokes a non-trivial answer from myself. The complexity of this issue results from ambiguity in the definition of the verb “write”. If we define this term as meaning the production of a purely creative work for the purpose of consumption by the public, then I do not do it much at all. However, if we define this term as meaning the production of some syntax for the purpose of expressing an idea in a limited fashion, then I do it every day. I treat language as a descriptive tool, the purpose of which is to express ideas spawned by my mind in a form consumable by some other entity. Thoughts are abstract, and language proves to be a useful tool for deriving concretions. Thus, as a programmer, I use several different modes of expression, languages, to express internal thoughts externally. I write code to communicate with machines. I write documentation to express *those* ideas to people. The actual rendition of these varieties of language is quite different, but the root purpose of said expression is the same.

Stemming from this interpretation of the verb “write”, all instances of text which I create exist for the utilitarian purpose of communicating some concrete idea. Having been exposed to programming for many years, I utilize a concise, imperative tone so as to eliminate as much ambiguity in my expression as possible. To use some more familiar terminology, I try and squash bugs not just in the code I write, but in *all* instances of language in which I participate.

The primary purpose of this portfolio is to provide examples of my writings in various genres and situations, and notes regarding my thought process which went into each. Contained within are several pieces demonstrating a variety of genres and tones which exist to exemplify the necessity of

differing species of language. There exists a model of communication abbreviated SMCR (sender, message, channel, receiver) which requires consideration of all aspects of a conversation. Whenever we as humans communicate, whether we realize it or not, we slightly modulate the syntax, diction, tone, etc. of our speech (or writing) based off of who we are communicating based off of many factors; we consider things like relative socioeconomic status, shared knowledge, environment, and many other factors when we initiate this communication. Unconsciously we recognize a need for specific types of language when communicating with an individual, and adjust our speech patterns accordingly so as to be the most effective.

Programming languages exist because of a conscious realization of the SMCR model, and serve as an excellent tool for the expression of processes in a syntactically homogeneous form. The uniformity of programming languages and the strict structure they require is alien to the uninitiated. Writing in one's first language seems natural, speaking in it more so; however, computers experience exceeding difficulty processing the dynamic and somewhat arbitrary nature of natural language. Thus, this difficulty led to the invention of programming languages. Quite frankly, humans do not inherently think in the manner which programming languages require to be effective. In order to cultivate an appropriate mental model of problem solving for an efficient utilization of programming languages, one must spend countless hours studying and practicing, and even then the nature of programming languages is antithetical to the mode of human thought. As evidence to this phenomenon, people who have spent their entire careers continue to make mistakes even after tens of thousands of hours exposed to the field.

Thus, I have come to the conclusion that no method of communication is perfect, and one's style of communication cannot remain static lest it become ineffective. In regards to the spoken word, my diction varies greatly depending on whether I am, for example, talking with friends or participating in a formal interview. Likewise, my style of writing differs in terms of genre, tone, diction, etc.

depending on whether I am sending a short email to my mother or writing an academic paper. If any one of these methods were able to stand in for the others in all situations, I would not have had to diversify my portfolio as much as it is. The difference between programming languages and natural language is just an extreme case of this dichotomy, but it exists between all forms of communications, and is inherent to the situation in which the communication is being performed.

With all these things being considered, saying that I write like a “computer programmer” is mostly accurate. Despite the fluidity inherent in communication, all renditions of it coming from myself contain common elements. I tend to write in a highly segmented, concrete way. Whenever applicable (that is to say if partitioning of the text is a logical notion), each section of my works can stand on its own, and exist in any location throughout the document without losing meaning. Additionally, I rather be too verbose in explaining an idea than risk my reader misinterpreting my words. These habits stem from my background in computer science, and thus I have a particular disdain for contextual communication. Computers do not just “know” what I mean, and I do not expect people to either. However, these phenomena tend to make reading texts written by me quite boring. Unless the purpose of the document is to be inflammatory (and sometime not even then), I probably will not excite the reader, and prefer to just relay concretions in some order.