Paris, December 17th

Article: « Discursive Strategies in Style Guides Negotiation on GitHub »

Dear colleague,

The RESET Editorial Board has reviewed your proposed article, which has generated a great deal of interest and enthusiasm. The coordinators feel that your article would be a great fit for the final issue. However, for the reasons outlined below, the text in its current version is not yet ready for publication.

The board therefore warmly encourages you to resubmit a revised version of the manuscript, following the recommendations below. In the following pages, you will find general feedback from the coordinators, as well as detailed comments from reviewers.

The Editorial Committee would like to receive the new version of your article by March 26, 2021. This new manuscript should be accompanied by a separate document, in which you outline the main responses to the comments and questions detailed below.

We remain at your disposal for any further information.

Yours sincerely,
The editorial board

General comments

Dear colleague,

We read your paper with great enthusiasm, which was visibly shared by the external reviewers. All the reviews (including ours) agree that the paper should take its argument even further, so as to better achieve its stated goals.

Detailed feedback is available below ; it is up to you to see how to use it to produce a new version of the article. Here is a summary of the main recommendations that emerged from the evaluations: we encourage you to treat them as a priority for the reworking of the manuscript.

1. Length: reviewers felt the paper should get to its point even faster. For instance, the introduction gets to your methodology rather late. In general, the manuscript is already at the length limit for the journal. The revised version should aim at about 60 000 characters (including spaces). This could be achieved by getting to the crux of your argument a lot sooner.

2. Method: the analysis of comments and discussion has generally impressed reviewers. However, the method section should be more precise (see reviewer 1). The coordinators feel that the paper should reflect on potential limitations and biases: users discussing the style guides on Github might only represent a motivated subset of their users. Who is more likely to open an issue, complain or suggest a change?

3. Description: the revised manuscript should better portray discussions on Github. While the sheer number of issues referenced is impressive, reviewers felt the paper sometimes failed to bring to life these (sometimes) lively discussions. Reviewer 2 suggests the new version include more verbatim from the comments, as well as screenshots – we agree.

4. Analysis: while the argument is clearly laid out, the analytical framework should be better introduced (see following point). Taken separately, the analysis of each case studies is very clear. But, like

reviewer 1, we would like the paper to draw more explicit comparisons and to bring all case studies together in the conclusion.

5. References: the manuscript currently glosses over some references, only mentioning a vast field of research (« sociology of style », « intermediary objects ») while they should be explicitly introduced first, then directly adressed and discussed.

6. Effectiveness of style guides: we would also like you to specify and discuss the effectiveness of style guides. Successful style guides, you argue, *work* because they offer linters, executable code that directly enforces their norms. However, the hypothesis feels more like a statement — although a reasonable one — and not yet earned through demonstration. Even though your data does not include interviews with or direct observation of programmers, we think you could make your point using posts that outline why developers appreciate the linter or how they use it, perhaps by directly quoting and commenting on verbatim.

7. Negotiation or discussion: as food for thought, we would also like to point out that style guides appear to be discussed, and rarely negotiated, since the point of a guide is often to be « opinionated » (the engineering issue of backwards compatibility also comes to mind, see reviewer 2). Perhaps the paper should explore further this distinction / tension coming from the conflicting expectations from users.

The detailed evaluations contain more specific remarks, suggestions and concrete proposals to help you rework the manuscript.

We look forward to receiving the revised version of your article. We remind you that it must be accompanied by a separate document that addresses the main points of the evaluations and indicates the major changes made to your paper.

Yours sincerely,
The coordinators

Reviewer 1

General comments

The article examines the discursive strategies deployed by programmers to negotiate the construction and the adoption of style guides for the JavaScript programming language. It highlights the different types of arguments used by "commenters" and "contributors" in the negotiation of stylistic norms and shows how the technical environment in which they take place influences these negotiations.

The article takes as a case study the GitHub development platform. It is based on a discourse analysis of the discussions happening on three GitHub repositories that represent different approaches to style guides : airbnb/javascript, prettier/prettier, standard/standard

The subject is interesting and relevant to this RESET issue, but the paper could probably be improved on several points.

Analysis

The author raises three main questions in the introduction: "Which discursive strategies are used by contributors around the formation and implementation of style guides? How are those strategies affected by the specificity of a socio-technical environment such as GitHub? How are users of these style guides involved in these negotiations?" Those questions are quite clear although a little descriptive.

The theoretical framework mobilized by the author is not as clearly stated. The introduction mentions the "sociology of style and the sociology of organizations", as well as the concept of "intermediary objects". However, these references are not much discussed in the introduction or in the article itself. It could be relevant to affirm a clearer theoretical positioning in the introduction and to integrate some of the other references that are scattered throughout the article.

Moreover, the structure of the article may be questionable at two levels:

- for the moment, the explanation of empirical materials – GitHub and three particular open-source repositories on this platform – seems to

come rather late in the article (p. 6-7). The methodology is also presented a little late (p.8). Perhaps the first part of the article ("The need for style in programming") - even if it's interesting – could be shortened to get to the materials and the methodology more quickly.

- the results are presented in the last three parts of the paper, each presenting one of the three repositories (Airbnb, standard and prettier). This successive analysis of the discussions happening in each repository shows the specificity of each of them. However, it reduces the possibility of a transversal analysis and the production of more general results. The conclusion of the paper presents some results of this type that might be interesting to expose in the body of the article.

Method

The paper is based on the discourse analysis of individual issues in each examined repository. It proposes an approach of discourse based on « the framework of communicative competence ».

Some of the methodological choices are explained : the three examined repositories are the top three most popular repositories for the JavaScript langage (stars and forks are the indicators of popularity) ; the analysis focuses mainly on the most debated (i.e. those with the most comments) issues within these three repositories.

However, the method section could be more precise. How many comments have been analyzed? How were they collected? How was the discourse analysis done ? Have any software programs been used to analyse users' and contributors' arguments? Is there information about the users and contributors debating these issues?

Form

The author makes an appreciable effort to clarify the technical vocabulary. The paper is clear overall, but some sentences are a bit long and some orthographic mistakes still remain.

Reviewer 2

General comments

- It would be good for readers to have more concrete examples and extended quotations, for instance some parts of source code, screenshots etc.
- p. 4, the notion of style could also be explained with the help of Gilles Gastobn Granger's Essai pour une philosophie du style (1968)
- p. 10, a more detailed list of the functions of langage than Habermas' can be found in Jacobson : not only referential, emotive and conative, but also poetic, metalinguistic and phatic
- p. 14, the notino of « benevolent dictator » may be borrowed from the Linux world, since it is the way Linus Torvalds is described in that community
- p. 16, an analogy with the notion of « backwards compatibility » could be drawn

Analysis

The paper is conceptually precise. The argumententation is continuous, for the author explains first why there is a need for style guides in general and the various ways it was adapted to collaborative platforms. It is very pleasant to read.

Method

The author's methodology is perfectly clear and its application is rigorous.

Form

- p. 3, « this article aims at investigating which discursive strategies are used by contributors around the formation and implementation of style guides? » : I think that the ending question mark should be removed since it is an indirect question.
- p. 9: to analyze (1) how different ⇒ to analyze how (1) different
- p. 9 : take place, is based ⇒ take place is based
- p. 22, techincal ⇒ technical