Reviewing A Bilingual Blog

This post is in response to the question: In what ways does the bilingual blog/wiki you find align with or violate Redish's advice for writing for the web or any of the chapters you have read in Cummings and Barton?

I looked at this blog: http://mademoisellespleasure.wordpress.com/, primarily because it was in French and English. I personally found the blog to be attractive, but not useful to read. The pictures drew me in, and the discovery of the English and French text are what convinced me to analyze this blog. This analysis is based on Ginny Redish's book, Letting Go of the Words.

Content: Initially I thought the blogger was a writer, but after looking further, I'm not so sure. The description in About says: Amateur photographer , sunday's writer, quote's lover but-not-able-to-remember-them, music-mad, serial dancer at concert, hopeful but not a cook at all… " This doesn't tell me much, aside from the amateur photographer. I did a search for "sunday's writer", to see what that is supposed to mean. The results are about as clear as this blogger's self description.

Purposes, Personas, Conversations: After looking around the blog, I've come to the conclusion this is an amateur photographer and creative writer who is trying to create a bilingual blog. Most of the blog is composed of pictures, so this is the major focus. The demographic for this blog is narrowed by several things. First, it is an English-French blog, so it narrows the audience to those two languages. Second, most of the writing is fictional creative writing, rather than informative. Third, she is an obvious supporter of Michelle Obama, which would alienate anyone who doesn't like Michelle Obama. Fourth, the values expressed, (such as the picture with the caption "End of the Talk") where the young couple is discussing making love, indicate that this blog is intended for a younger audience.

Designing for Easy Use: I'll admit it, this blog is not easy to use. **Background, color and text** – The background of the blog is black, with small, white text and yellow subheadings. This violates Redish's first recommendation to use light on dark sparingly. This blog certainly gives a visual reason why that is a good recommendation.

The first computer I used to look at it was a netbook, which made reading the text extremely difficult. Yes, my bifocals don't help, but the text is not a legible font size, and it does not stand out well against the background. By contrast, the pictures do stand out well. So, I have to lean toward the idea that the blogger is more of a photographer than a writer. They have a good eye for showcasing their pictures. They don't do a good job of making the text stand out.

I then tried the blog on a 21" screen, to see if it was any easier to see things and navigate. No. Same issues as with the netbook. One of the things the author does correctly is not writing in all capitals.

Home Page: The home page of this blog does follow Redish's principle of having few words, but I do not believe it is content rich. It is difficult to identify, at a glance, exactly what is the purpose of this blog. It takes far too much time and digging to verify the purpose.

Pathway Pages: If I thought the home page was frustrating, the pathway pages are worse. There is no rhyme or reason for where or how to get anywhere in this blog. It is a child's toy box full of objects. Reach in, dig around, and see if you can find what you want. There is no organization.

Navigation and links: The navigation isn't clear, and the About doesn't help clarify the author's intent. So, I guess this blog violates Redish's tenant about being clear and concise. The navigation and links are minimal. The blog is divided into Recently and My Pleasure, along with Flikr Photos and Blogs I follow. Recently is nearly all link to photos. My Pleasure is difficult to identify. They appear to be pages with lists of links that circle back to pages, such as pictures that are linked from the Recently list.

My Pleasure makes no sense to me as a visitor, so I have to believe that this entire blog is for the author and not intended for wide dissemination. One of the things I found frustrating is the items under My Pleasure. Selecting any one of the items opens a new page. In many of the cases, every word is hyper linked, but many of them go nowhere. It becomes a game of cat-and-mouse trying to figure out which words are good links and which are not.

Writing Meaningful Links: The links for the pictures are clear. I have a good idea, before I even click on a link, what to expect of the picture. Some of the links for the creative writing must make sense to the author, but are not clear in either a heading or in the text. Sometimes, I'm left scratching my head wondering if the link text has to do with anything. For instance, Cliches opens a page full of links to pictures of flowers. The links below each of the links to the flower pictures go nowhere. They are a list of French and English words that link to nothing.

Titles and headings: The blog title is not descriptive. The picture headings are descriptive of the images. Other headings on the pages that link from the My Pleasure menu do not make much sense. In all honesty, they are aggravating, because you tend to feel like you are moving in circles every time you select a link.

Tuning up Your Sentences: I do like the dual language aspect of the blog. It consists of a written topic in English, followed by the same topic in French. Even for someone who doesn't know French, it would be really clear that the two sets of text are the same. It has been a long time since I've studied French, and it was fun trying to see how much I could understand.

The author utilizes Redish's suggestion to use "you" to talk to visitors. It is effective in helping relate to the few pieces of nonfiction. However, it is very distracting reading nonfiction that is full of grammatical errors. In addition, the nonfiction pieces would have been easier to read had the writer not tried to write them as creative writing pieces, and utilized Redish's recommendations to keep it clear, short and simple. By doing so, it would have showcased the topic, and not frustrated the reader with poor writing.