Florimond Rakotonoelina
University Paris 3

The Interactive Dimension of Self-Instruction Manuals for Micro-computing

If training in micro-computing employs the official channels of initial training (scholastic training), so- called recycled, or complementary, training and continuous professional training, it also employs unofficial channels which are often not addressed since they are difficult to evaluate (specialized press, manuals sold in the market-place, educational software and learning software sold with certain products, etc.). In a world where information and communication technologies are increasingly present in every-day life, micro computing, a crossroads for these technologies, is an area where hardware and software produce numerous publications which permit access to knowledge. Judging by the amount of shelf-space occupied in book stores, one could think that these publications (which we will call "non-instructional" manuals) constitute a means, for all those who are unable to benefit from official training (either because of time or money) by which to receive a low-cost self-training in the most basic and necessary software (word-processing, tables, charts, etc.) in order to remain competitive in the work-place which considers the use of the micro-computer a necessary prerequisite for employment.
My aim is to show how the goals of these "parallel channels" of training are identical to institutional training, that is, to train (either initially or complementarily) the users: beginners, advanced users and those who are experienced in the newer uses of the computer. Using a body of texts which consist of self-instruction manuals, I will analyze how the authors use language to introduce, within their texts, an "interactive dimension" in order to compensate for the absence of direct ties between the trainer and the user. However, this dimension is fundamental for two reasons. First, it helps the user enter into the dry discourse of these manuals (made up for the most part of declarative sequences: explanations, definitions, etc.) and instructions (explaining how to do something). Second, it furthers and facilitates the training of the user in providing him with spoken points of reference throughout the training.