1. Introduction

Personal Weblogs can be roughly described as **diary-like texts which are usually written by one author in a reversed chronological order** (newest entries first). Griddle Bandits (2011) provides a typical example of the genre.

Personal Weblogs can be considered a **phenomenon that spread virally around the beginning of the new Millennium**. The earliest Weblogs, however, date back to the **late 90s**, as for instance, *Flutterby* from 1998.

In my rough definition of the genre, I **did not make any reference to the function these texts are designed to fulfil**. Indeed, it seems to be quite hard to pinpoint the exact purpose of the genre. During the 15 years of blogging, scholars have repeatedly asked the question of **why people blog**. The chart presents a selection of key studies.

The table illustrates the **sheer diversity of different purposes or functions scholars have come up with so far**. Especially ethnographic studies provide interesting insights into the author’s view of their texts’ functions. There are, however, some **problematic aspects**:

- The studies are **not focussed on the Personal Weblog** as a specific weblog genre.
- The typology proposed by Susan Herring and her team is **too broad** to capture the diversity of weblog functions; the results of the ethnographic studies, on the other hand, are **too diverse and mirror idiosyncratic uses**.
- Some bloggers such as Rebecca Blood indicate that **changes of the textual functions of the Personal Weblog might have taken place already**. This diachronic dimension is, if at all, only marginally reflected in those studies.
Therefore, my research questions are the following:

1. What textual functions can be considered typical of the genre Personal Weblog?
2. What is the diachronic dimension of these functions in terms of stability, diversity, and change as far as the Personal Weblog is concerned?

I will proceed as follows:

- I shall briefly cover the data and the theoretical and methodical framework of my study.
- Looking at a variety of sample blog entries, I will suggest several textual functions. I can only present a small selection here. My suggestions are the preliminary results of work in progress.
- I will close with an attempt at sketching out the diachronic dimension of the functions proposed.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework

2.1. Data

My analysis was based on three types of sources:

- categories generated in ethnographic studies (see above)
- a diachronic corpus.

Corpus texts were collected using the Internet Archive and applying an inductive approach. The corpus consists of two parts. Part I contains specimens of the very few earliest Weblogs (1997-2000). They form the root for the differentiation of several weblog genres in the following years.

Part II assembles specimens of the more specific category Personal Weblog (2002-2012). These texts were collected from the oldest blog directory The
Globe of Blogs, which was founded in 2002. The gap of one year between period I and II is therefore due to the availability of sources.

2.2. Theory

For the current purposes, I shall conceptualise the textual function as a complex task a text is designed to fulfil. This complex task may contain various simultaneous components which are inspired by the basic textual functions proposed by Klaus Brinker in German text linguistics. I shall follow current trends in text linguistics and assume single genres to be characterised by a set of functions rather than one single function. The task a text is designed for has to be reconstructed from various sources:

- First, the metadiscourse of a genre’s community about its purpose(s).
- Second, texts may contain metacommets regarding their function.
- Third, texts provide indicators on several layers. As part of his approach to textual functions, Brinker proposes the following indicators for the functional analysis.

2.3. Method

I tried to integrate both textual indicators and metacommments in a multi-stage process inspired by Grounded Theory. Basically, I try to find out what the bloggers say they do and describe it linguistically.

- I started with generating preliminary categories from the metadiscourse of the blogging community represented in insider reflections and ethnographic studies.
- Secondly, I moved on to Weblog postings containing explicit functional labels or comments to refine the category system and generate new categories. The postings were analysed to gain first category descriptions.
• The results served as **input for step three**, where all postings were coded and analysed. Step three is **circular**, moving towards an ever increased understanding of the categories.

• Lastly, whenever new material is found, the steps are run through again.

Therefore, the process is an **open-ended, reconstructive process geared towards theoretical saturation**. As in Grounded Theory, I try to **preserve the category names** used by the bloggers themselves. The terms *Filtering, Updating* and *Sharing Experience* are used repeatedly in the blogger’s discourse about their texts’ functions.

### 3. Textual Functions

#### 3.1. Filtering

The filter function is probably the **core function of the weblog in period I**. The posting from *Scripting News* shows how authors *filter* the growing *World Wide Web* and *share links they consider interesting*. Sometimes, these links are presented without any commentary. More often, however, weblog authors provide a *synopsis and an evaluation of the source*. The weblog entries often take the form of **lists of mainly unrelated items**.

Another example is taken from *Research Buns*. It illustrates the **language** used in filter postings: We find **deictic pointers** to the sources (*at, this*), a dominance of **present tense** and sometimes **imperatives** urging the reader to *check out* the sources. The various topics are mostly treated **descriptively in a matter-of-fact style**.

As the posting from *Fairytale* indicates, the filter function **continues in texts from period II**. However, filter postings in period II tend to contain **lengthier expressions of the authors’ opinions** on the linked sources and their content. Thus, the posting from *Coffee Stoned* does not only provide a link to an article
on daylight saving time. It also contains a longer passage serving to express the author’s opinion on the issue.

To sum up, the filter function can be characterised as informing about web-based content and its evaluation by the blogger in a concise way. **Hyperlinks are a central indicator.**

3.2. **Update**

Another important function seems to be the *update*. In general, **update postings deal with daily events.** Updates, too, can be *quite concise* as the example taken from *An Insider’s View*. In this posting, the author mimics a telegraphic style to inform about central aspects of his day, using elliptical constructions.

The extract from *... Life of L...* contains an **explicit marker**, as the author announces *updates* that *sum up* happenings as the purpose of the last section of her post. Again, **her entry shows the form of a list** of only loosely related items.

A closer look at the items reveals that **they are composed equally**: An **assertive** speech act (underlined) is followed by an **expressive** speech act (in bold) carrying an evaluation. Interestingly, many *update*-postings that I have found **tend to this basic construction principle**.

Some corpus texts indicate that updates might **typically be addressed to friends or family members**. We can also find hints at a **limited amount of writing time**: Some updates are evidently produced in lunch breaks or just before heading off to work.
3.3. Sharing Experience

The last function I would like to suggest is often circumscribed as sharing experience. The excerpt taken from EatonWeb contrasts with filter- and update postings as it treats a single incident in an elaborate, coherent way. The author uses complex sentences which are linked by various cohesive devices. The excerpt can be divided into a narrative part relating the incident and a second part containing the author’s reflections or insights triggered by it. The caesura is indicated by a shift from past to present tense. This two-fold structure – narration and reflection – can be found in various corpus texts.

In other cases, the individual reflections are extended to pieces of advice or even warnings for the reader: In the excerpt from Always Writing, the author narrates how he posted promotion links on a forum by accident, getting vicious reactions by the other forum members. Because of this experience, he warns other authors not to use that particular forum.

4. Discussion

I described some core functions of the Personal Weblog based on indicators taken from context and structure. The functional patterns described can actually be considered micro genres of postings: Genres are, essentially, fusions of structure, context and function. These micro genres operate within the category Personal Weblog and define its functional set.

Viewing the patterns as micro genres facilitates the diachronic discussion: With the patterns in mind, we can have a look at period I again. The core function in period I is the filter function. The example from Bump indicates, however, that the core function of later periods – sharing experience – can also be found in between the commented lists of links.
I approached the issue quantitatively as well in order to trace the diachronic dimensions of stability, diversity and change. The results are summed up in this diagram showing the percentages of weblogs per period exhibiting specific functional patterns.

The diagram shows: Update, Sharing Experience and some other patterns can already be found in period I. Here, the filter function is dominant and the other patterns are marginal. In period II, they become more emancipated. I would like to interpret these observations as indicators of functional stability.

At the same time, the diagram indicates that changes take place as well: We can observe a shift from one central function (filter) to another (sharing experience) and an emancipation of functional patterns such as update or review. Interestingly, the diagram shows that the percentage of weblogs including the update-function first rises to a peak in period II.A and then declines even under its period I level. I think we can assume that the launch of other communicative platforms such as Facebook (2004) or Twitter plays a crucial role here.

Finally, the categories established in my analyses are of course fuzzy and exhibit various overlaps as they are ethno categories. These overlaps can also be observed among the functions suggested here. Additionally, the overview illustrates that there are several other functions apart from the core patterns in each period. Therefore, stability and change are complemented by the diversity of the communicative reality of the Personal Weblog.