

Is It "My Account" or "Your Account"?

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Abstract

How do people relate to the terms my and your when they visit different websites or use a software application? To answer these questions this comparative and user study is conducted. This study suggests that there is not always consistency in the usage of the words my and your in labelling. The word my is more commonly used for labelling folders only when the user is in control of making changes to the content of the web application. On the other hand, the word your is used when the user does not have control over the system and can only view information (not including situations where the user must update something, such as an email address). In the folders descriptions, your must always be used. *1 line space*

Keywords: UI Labelling, UI Design, Words Usage in UI

1. Introduction

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2004) the word my is defined as “of or relating to me or myself especially as possessor, agent, or object of an action <my car>, <my promise>, <my injuries>,” whereas the word your is defined as “of or relating to you or yourself or yourselves especially as possessor or possessors <your bodies>, agent or agents <your contributions>, or object or objects of an action <your discharge>.”

How do people relate to the terms my and your when they visit different websites or use a software application? If you are a Microsoft Windows user, on your desktop you see icons labelled “My Computer” or “My Documents.” Microsoft (1998) uses “My Computer” to represent “a user's private, local system.” If you visit the Wells Fargo website (wellsfargo.com), for example, you are asked to log in to "View Your

Account," but if you go to Verizon.com you are asked to log in to "My Account." This difference raises several questions:

- How do different websites use the terms my and your in their user interface?
- When and where should my and your be used?
- Do all websites use these terms consistently?
- Is there any defined boundary for the usage of these terms?

To answer these questions we conducted a comparative study to investigate the usage of the words my and your in the user interface. We compared the usage of these terms in public websites. We also compared some of the public websites to their versions in Spanish, French, and Chinese and analyzed the differences, if any, between the languages in reference to the choice of pronouns used. Following the comparative study, a user study was conducted using a questionnaire.

2. Method

Two types of investigations were conducted: a comparative study of 27 public web pages and a user study through questionnaires.

2.1. A Comparative Study of 27 Web Pages

After selecting 27 pages from a variety of domains, all components of the pages that used either the word my or your were analyzed.

Three techniques were used to differentiate the usage of my or your. The first technique was to observe websites that required users to log in with my and your before and after entering their username and password. The second technique divided the websites into three different categories: web services, online purchase, and banking services. The terms could be used differently in the three different types of websites. The third technique separated the websites into editable and display-only websites (Figures 1 and 2).

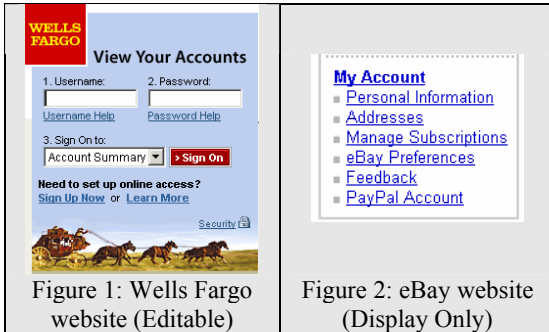


Figure 1: Wells Fargo website (Editable)

Figure 2: eBay website (Display Only)

2.2. A User Study Through Questionnaires

Following the comparative study, a questionnaire was designed that included three questions. This questionnaire was distributed to three groups of people: technical consultants of a computer company, user experience professionals working for a user experience group, and a group of participants randomly selected in the entourage with no relationship to any specific company.

3. Results

3.1. Comparative Study

Comparison of the Use of My and Your Before and After Login Among Public Websites: In the first method, we found 11 websites that used labels including the words my or your before and after login. In some cases, the usage of my and your varied before

and after login. In 3 out of those 11 websites the word your was used before login, but the labels changed to my after login. The labelling for the other websites did not change before and after logging in to the accounts. None of the 11 websites used my before login and your after login.

Comparison of the Use of My and Your in Web Applications: There were a total of 27 web pages that were classified into the three categories of web services, online purchase, and banking services. Table 1 displays the labelling used in the different categories and shows that web services (for example, MSN and Yahoo websites) used the word my seven out of eight times, whereas banking services (for example, Wells Fargo and American Express) used the label your six out of nine times. Online purchase websites were almost evenly split, with five out of nine using the word your and the rest using my.

	Web Services	Online Purchases	Banking Services
My	7	4	3
Your	1	5	6

Table 1: Labeling of Web Applications

Comparison of the Use of My and Your in Display-Only Pages: In the third method, we examined editable and display-only websites (Table 2), which used both my and your labels. A total of 11 websites were considered editable. The word your was used in 7 out of those 11. Out of the 15 display-only websites, only two used your as the label, whereas 13 out of 15 used my. (Table 3),

Website	Editable
Barnes&Noble.com	<p>Account Settings</p> <p>Personal Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change your name, e-mail address, or password Update your communication preferences Change your birthday
Comcast.com	<p>ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>Set Comcast E-Mail Preferences Ask Comcast</p> <p>Sign Up for Newsletters Pay Your Bill Online</p> <p>For all Account Management functions, click here.</p>

Table 2: Examples of Editable Websites.

Cross-Lingual Analysis: In order to obtain a different linguistic perspective on the usage of these terms, we examined four public websites in English and their versions in French, Spanish, and Chinese, and analyzed the usage of my and your within the three languages.


Website	Display Only
Ebay.com	
Verizon Wireless	

Table 3: Examples of Display Only websites

The sites we considered were Yahoo, MSN, eBay, and Citibank, and we studied only the pages that asked the user to sign in to his or her account or profile.

The data from these websites proved that the use of my and your was consistent between English, Spanish, French and Chinese. There were no situations where one language used my and another used your in the same website.

However, the only differences that were noted were in situations where a possessive term was included in one language and omitted in the other. This occurred in two of the Spanish/English sites. On the Yahoo Spanish site, the user is prompted to sign in to read “your” email, whereas in English, the statement is stated in the infinitive, “Please sign in to read or send mail,” without an indication of possession. On the MSN site, the same distinction exists but this time it is the Spanish site that uses the infinitive statement, “Initiate sign in automatically” (or “Sign in automatically”). On the other hand, the English site uses possession to state, “Sign me in automatically.” Therefore, the use of the infinitive versus the possessive is the only main difference between the Spanish and English versions of these four websites.

3.2. User Study

Following the comparative study, a user study was conducted by using a questionnaire. Three participant groups were surveyed.

The first group comprised 44 technical consultants in a computer company. Females made up 30 percent of the respondents and 70 percent were male. The age range included 15 percent under the age of 30, 47 percent

between 30 and 40, 33 percent aged 40 to 50, and 5 percent over 50. The level of education included 48 percent with college degrees, 41 percent with graduate school, and 9 percent with high school only.

The second group comprised 27 participants who were all professionals in the area of human-computer interaction and usability working for a user experience group in a computer software company. Their primary working language was English. Females made up 45 percent of the respondents and 55 percent were male.

The age range included 29 percent under 30, 47 percent between age 30 and 40, and 24 percent aged 40 to 50.

The level of education included 24 percent with college degrees, and 76 percent with graduate school or more.

The third group comprised 20 participants randomly selected to participate in this study. In this group females made up 39 percent of the respondents, and 61 percent were male. The age range included 47 percent under 30, 32 percent between 30 and 40, and 21 percent aged 40 to 50. The level of education included 50 percent with college degrees, and 50 percent with graduate school.

Between all groups combined, 35 percent of the respondents were female and 65 percent were male.

The age range included 31 percent under 30, 39 percent between 30 and 40, 25 percent between 40 and 50, and 6 percent over 50. The level of education included 44 percent with college degrees, 52 percent with graduate school, and 6 percent with other levels of education.

Question 1

Participants were asked to select a label name of My Folder or Your Folder, assuming that the items in that folder are Personal Information, Preferences, Feedback, and Accounts. Do you think this folder should be called “My folder” or “Your folder?”

In the first group, 95 percent of the respondents chose My Folder, and only 5 percent chose Your Folder. In the second group (usability and HCI professionals), 92 percent of the respondents chose My Folder, and only 8 percent Your Folder. In the third group, 89 percent of the respondents chose My Folder, and only 11 percent Your Folder. In all groups combined, 92 percent of the respondents chose My Folder, and only 8 percent Your Folder. (Chart 1-Table 4)

Question 2

Participants were asked the following question: “You are required to log in to your account in order to view your account information. Do you think the label should say: ‘View Your Accounts’ or ‘View My Accounts’?”

In the first group, 74 percent of the respondents chose View My Accounts, and only 26 percent View Your

Accounts. In the second group (usability and HCI professionals), 54 percent of the respondents chose View My Accounts, and 46 percent chose View Your Accounts. In the third group, 67 percent of the respondents chose View My Accounts, and 33 percent selected View Your Accounts. In all groups combined, 65 percent of the View My Accounts, and only 35 percent chose View Your Accounts (Chart 2-Table 5).

Question 3

Participants were asked to examine the five options shown below and select the one that they would want to see after logging in to the web site (entering the username and password).

- My Statement and Pay My Bill
- Your Statement and Pay My Bill
- My Statement and Pay Your Bill
- Your Statement and Pay Your Bill
- No difference

In the first group, 75 percent of the respondents chose My Statement and Pay My Bill, 11 percent selected Your Statement and Pay My Bill, and 14 percent selected the other options. In the second group (usability and HCI professionals), 48 percent chose My Statement and Pay My Bill, 28 percent were in favour of My Statement and Pay Your Bill, and 24 percent selected the other options. In the third group, 83 percent chose My Statement and Pay My Bill, 17 percent chose Your Statement and Pay Your Bill. In all groups combined, 69 percent chose My Statement and Pay My Bill, 18 percent chose Your Statement and Pay My Bill, 13 percent chose the other options (Chart 3-Table 6).

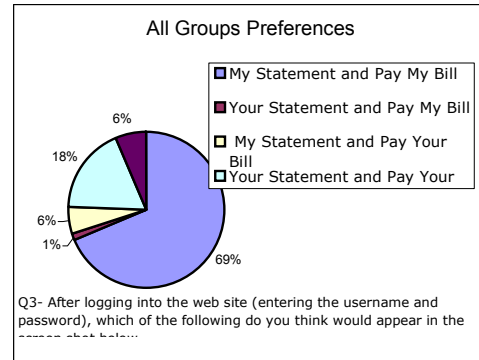


Chart 2

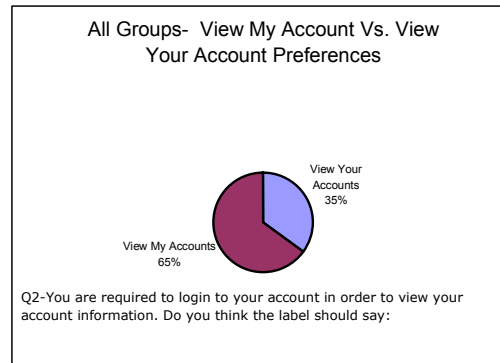


Chart 3

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	All
My Folder	95%	92%	89%	92%
Your Folder	5%	8%	11%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4

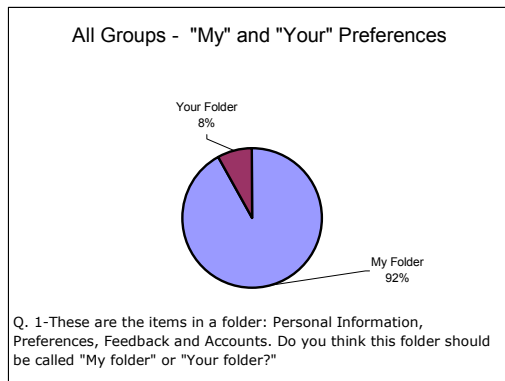


Chart 1

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	All
View My Account	74%	54%	67%	65%
View Your Account	26%	46%	33%	35%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 5

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
My Statement and Pay My Bill	75%	48%	83%
Your Statement and Pay My Bill	0%	4%	0%
My Statement and Pay Your Bill	5%	12%	0%
Your Statement and Pay Your Bill	9%	28%	17%
No difference	11%	8%	0%
	100%	100%	100%

Table 6

4. Discussion

As the comparative study of the public websites suggests, it seems there is not always consistency in the usage of the words my and your in labelling. This inconsistency correspondingly exists in the translated websites. We observe that the usage of my and your in the other languages stays inconsistent. In contrast, our user study suggests that the preference of users is to consistently use the word my in the labelling of folders or forms that include user information. This preference exists for these labels both before and after logging in to a system. It is interesting to observe that among user experience professionals there are more differences in the use of my versus your than the user group. This might explain why the different websites use different labelling if we assume that this diversity mirrors the difference in view of user experience professionals. On the other hand, the clear preference of using my rather than your among the users shows that users prefer a more consistent way of labelling with less discrepancies.

5. Conclusion

This comparative study suggests that in most public websites that are controlled or operated by the user, the word my is more commonly used in labels. In some cases, your is used before login and my is used after login. This confirms that once the user is in control of the application, the word my is used.

Based on this study of the terms my and your it is clear that the word my is more commonly used for labelling

folders only when the user is in control of making changes to the content of the web application. On the other hand, the word your is used when the user does not have control over the system and can only view information (not including situations where the user must update something, such as an email address). In the folders descriptions, your must always be used. However, the user study suggests that users prefer a consistent use of labelling. This is characterized by the preference for the term my in labelling both before and after the user has logged in.

This investigation was conducted by a questionnaire and users did not have the opportunity to evaluate labelling in the context of a real website during the usability testing session. However, based on the number of people who responded to this survey (91 subjects) and the high percentage rate of preference for the usage of my in the labelling suggests that my is recommended for labelling folders, such as “My Favourites” or “My Documents.” The word your is preferable in folder descriptions, mouse-over texts, and instructional texts.

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