

# Bringing affective behaviour to presentation agents

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## Abstract

Interface agents are more and more often leaving laboratories to be used as commercial products. We can see them presenting news on the Internet or as tour guide in 3D worlds. These agents present a new opportunity for authors to create a new kind of presentation, more attractive and interactive. However, as many interface agent systems are now available, controlling them needs advanced knowledge of programming languages such like JavaScript or Visual Basic script. Our motivation is to provide classical author with a powerful but easy-to-use language to control interface agents: Multimodal Presentation Mark-up Language (MPML). Our main focus has been to provide emotional control on the agents to make the communication with the user even more natural.

**Keywords:** *presentation agent, affective behaviour, MPML, language.*

## 1. Introduction

The main goal of our research is to create presentation with animated agents, which will be used on the Internet. Indeed, human presentations are still much better than those given by agents and so, when a traditional presentation is possible, it should be used, as for conferences or courses. However, as soon as computers are integrated between two humans, the effectiveness of the presentation will depend on the tools they are using, like of the Internet.

The purpose of MPML is to make it possible for authors to add agents on their Web pages, which will greatly improve simple images or texts, without the high requirement of videos [Wong, 1999]. Our motivation is mainly based on the assumption that humans treat computer socially [Reeves&Nass, 1996]. The interest of using agent systems is then to increase this effect and to permit more human-like interactions (facial expression, gaze, voice tone, etc.). We are not

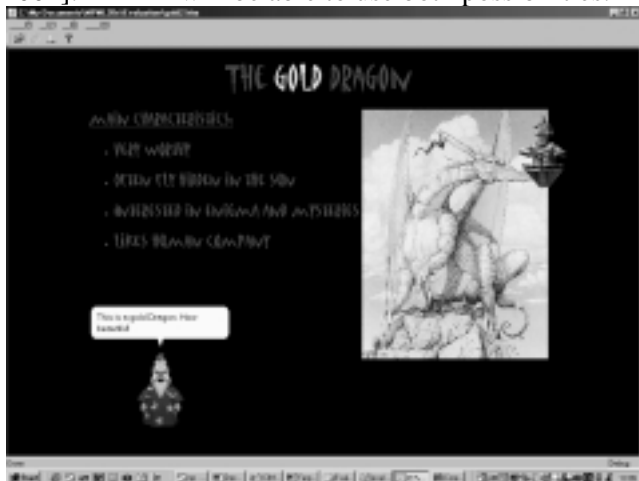
the only ones to consider this kind of systems, practical for enhanced presentation. Indeed, Microsoft Narrator [Microsoft] allows authors to add simple agent script to a PowerPoint presentation. It can then be used through the Internet. This looks mostly like a PowerPoint presentation, and lacks traditional features of Web pages. Other tools can be found on the Internet to ease the use of Microsoft Agent, like MASH [Bellcraft]. The salient features of MPML are the presentation scripting facilities, the interaction with the HTML background and emotional expression for the agents.

The rest of the paper is organized as follow. Section 2 will present the interface agent system we are using and its advantages. Section 3 will then describe how MPML controls the system. It will first explain how to structure a presentation using MPML, interacting with the Web page background and then it will present how we provide emotional control for the agents, thereby increasing the believability of the presentation.

## 2. Presentation Agents

There are several types of *interface agents*. These agents can be either human-like [Cassell, 2000] or more cartoon-like [Lester, 2000], and they can have a full body or only a face. When on the screen, they can play some animations representing gesture, body language or facial expression, sometimes concerning emotion like *sadness* or *happiness*. Cartoon-like agents use exaggerated gestures and unambiguous meaning. The Visual Software Agent is on the other extreme, a human face, showing natural expression [Dohi, 1997]. Some other research groups chose a virtual face, to present news for example [Ananova, Winteractive]. We are using mainly Microsoft Agent (see Screenshot 1) and thus full-body cartoon-like characters. However, we also have a human-like single-face and full-body interface agent system in progress. The single-face agents are more likely to be used only for speaking to the user. Full body agents

are more like puppets, there can be more on the screen and it looks more like a theatre [Prendinger&Ishizuka, 2001]. MPML will be able to use both possibilities.



*Screenshot 1:* Microsoft Agent used with MPML

The second part of an interface agent system concerns the voice management, with two components: the voice generation module and the voice recognition module. Voice generation can be done either using recorded speech (audio files) or Text-To-Speech engines (TTS engines), which can read text aloud. In our case, we are using TTS engines compatible with the SAPI norm, which can be used with Microsoft Agent. One problem here is that we only have controls for three parameters: pitch, volume and speed. When we plan to generate affective voice to express an emotion, we are restricted [Cahn, 1990], but we can still have naturally sounding results. The other direction for the voice is from the user to the computer. However, even without dealing with natural language understanding, sentence matching can still be a problem. The user may sometimes have to repeat his/her order several times, but it can still be used. More complex systems exist, using 3D immersion, wearable, camera [Cassell, 2000], but we are dealing with systems that can be used without special equipment.

### 3. MPML for presentation agent control

#### 3.1. Introduction about MPML

The main goal of the MPML project is to enable easy creation of Internet presentations using agents. For now, MPML is able to command two different agent systems. However, our main recent interest

concerns the Microsoft Agent system. The second system is a 3D agent currently developed in another laboratory. There are also at least three other agent systems currently under construction in our laboratory, a human face in a powerful environment [Dohi, 1997], a VRML full-body agent, and another 3D human face. All these are or will be controlled via MPML.

As indicated in its name, MPML is above all a language. However, it is really easy to use. It is similar to HTML in the format (mark-up language), but with much less tags and a globally high level use. We will detail its characteristics in the following parts. There are two ways of using an MPML presentation once written right now. The first one is to use a plug-in of Internet Explorer 5 or higher based on XML technology [XML homepage]. It allows the MPML script to be used directly by the browser, focusing on the use of button, textbox and other useful web content. The second way is a converter software. It reads the MPML script and creates complex JavaScript code corresponding to the simple MPML instructions. Once converted, the presentation can be read directly into Internet Explorer. The main addition concerns the affections system. Indeed in this version the agent shows affective behaviours easily described in the script. We will detail all these characteristics in the following sections.

#### 3.2. Agent action in MPML

The available actions for the agent defined in MPML are as follow. We call *action tag* a tag used to make the agents act. Agents can do several actions: speak, think, play, and move.

- *Speak*: The agent speaks one or several sentences and the text is displayed in a balloon. The parameters of the voice are set using the current emotional state of the agent (emotion and mood). Some actions can occur at the same time as the speech when a strong emotion arises.
- *Think*: Like *speak*, but the agent does not speak aloud. Instead there is only the text in a balloon. This is practical when several agents would like to “say” something in the same time. Indeed using the <THINK> tag, several balloons can appear and only one agent will be speaking, keeping the voice understandable, instead of having everyone speaking in the same time.
- *Play*: The agent can play an animation, like *greet* or *announce*. This adds meaning to the presentation.
- *Move*: The agent moves on the screen.

### 3.3. Organisation of an MPML presentation

The organization of presentation in MPML is mainly accomplished by a graph-like structure. A first tag, the <SEQ> tag, defines part of the presentation where the actions of the agents happen sequentially. This will certainly be the case for most of the presentation, since if too many things happen in the same time the user would be lost. However, there is the possibility to define some parts in which actions will happen simultaneously, using the <PAR> tag. With a nice combination of both tags, it is possible to generate almost any profile for the flow of the presentation (see Figure 1).

The last presentation tag concerns more the intelligibility of the script. It is very convenient to separate long parts of a presentation into several *scenes*. Like in theatre performance, the agent will play the scene one after another, going in and out, as required by the scenario of the presentation.

can change the background page to match the explanation of the agents, using the <PAGE> tag.

Another important point concerning the background is that a large number of people already have a Web page, but only a few are using interface agent systems. It would be very unpractical for Web masters to have to rewrite every Web page in order to add agents in it. So, MPML can use any existing Web page as a background, and then add the agents to make it livelier. Only a very few adaptations may have to be made manually.

Finally, in order for MPML to be not only easy to use but also a powerful language, we provide a simple interface with JavaScript functions.

### 3.5. Affective behaviour: mood, emotion, and personality

#### 3.5.1. Work related to emotion

Emotion is one important challenge for agents. Indeed, in human-human communication, emotion plays a very important role, as it adds a second meaning to the dialog, and so, conveys more information. To be able to control emotion would make the conversation between the user and the agent more natural.

Several models have emerged from psychologist studies. One of them is the famous model from Ortony, Clore and Collins (OCC model). [Ortony, 1988] The OCC model classifies 22 emotions depending on what makes them occur, and their influence on the environment of the agent. This model seems more useful when there is computation about the emergence of the emotions, like for autonomous agents with automatic emotion. Another theory is the "basic emotion" theory from Ekman [Ekman, 1992]. It filters out 6 emotions (*anger, fear, sadness, enjoyment, disgust, and surprise*). It is argued that every emotion can be expressed as a combination of these basic emotions. It also explains that positive emotions have almost all the same expression. In this direction, there are several works concerning the voice associated with an emotion. Murray and Arnott [Murray, 1995] gave some results about how the voice changes according to the emotion involved. They also considered 6 emotions with only slight differences from Ekman (*anger, fear, sadness, happiness, disgust, and grief*). We used their research but we had to extend to other positive emotions like *surprise* or *gratitude*.

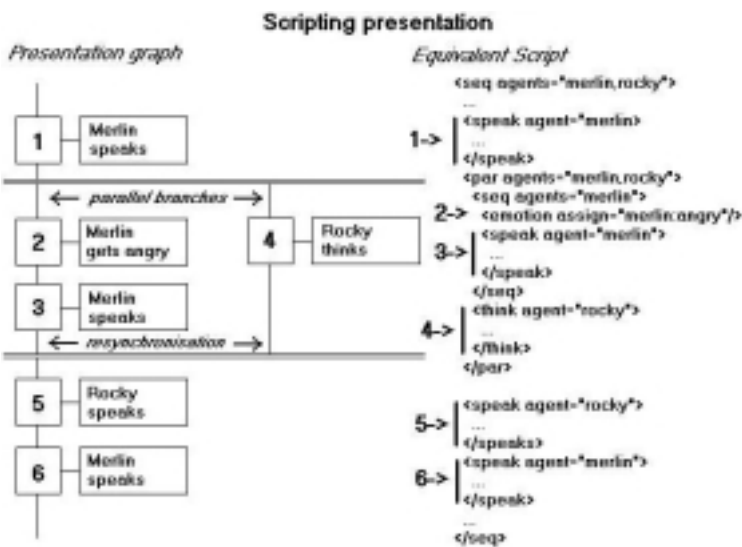


Figure 1: Presentation structure

### 3.4. Content of an MPML presentation

In a MPML presentation, we can consider that there are two different components: the agents and the background. The agents are the actors, they speak, move and thus present. But the background is what they actually present. Except for the case of virtual theatre where the presentation can be self-sufficient, the background plays a very important role as a support for the presentation, as in the case of human presentation. To manage the background, MPML enables a new navigation method. Indeed, the script

### 3.5.2. Emotion and mood in MPML

Our interest is more focused on the expression of emotions rather than emotion models. Indeed, the author decides which emotion he/she wants to use and so we need meaningful names for emotions useful in case of presentation, and then find an accurate way to express them. As we mentioned before, the main two components of agent communication are the voice and the gestures. In the case of Microsoft Agent we have very little liberty regarding the gestures and we can use only predefined behaviours. However, we have more control on the voice; we can set the speed, pitch and volume and add some emphasis on words. We then used Cahn and Murray and Arnott's research [Cahn, 1990, Murray, 1995] to set the voice parameters according to the emotion. We also use some expressive gestures to accentuate the emotion understanding. The emotions we chose until now are *joy*, *sadness*, *gratitude*, *anger*, *shame*, *surprise* and *fear*. We can still adjust the proposed emotion easily.

Besides emotion, we are also using mood. While emotion is defined as short and intense, mood is longer and with a lower intensity. It works more like a background emotional state, when no strong emotions are occurring. The main function of moods in MPML presentation is to define how the author wants the agent to behave when no emotions occur. We only defined three moods: happy mood, neutral mood, and unhappy mood. As the intensity of the expression is lower, there is little interest in using more. The mood of an agent can change during the presentation. This should not happen too often, as mood is a long term emotional state, but when an emotion occurs the author can decide that the mood of the agent goes better or worse (if Rocky has an unhappy mood but gets a gift, then the *joyful* emotion occurs and the mood can raise to neutral or even happy).

The way we combine mood and emotion is simple. When there are no emotions occurring, we simply use the parameter values defined for the mood. We also add a slight perturbation to increase the believability. Then, when an emotion occurs, we switch to the emotion parameters quickly, as emotion is intense and fast, and then we gradually come back to the mood parameters (see figure 2). It gives a natural expression for the emotion. We will explain how the personality influences this system in the next Section.

Evolution of the voice parameters with emotion

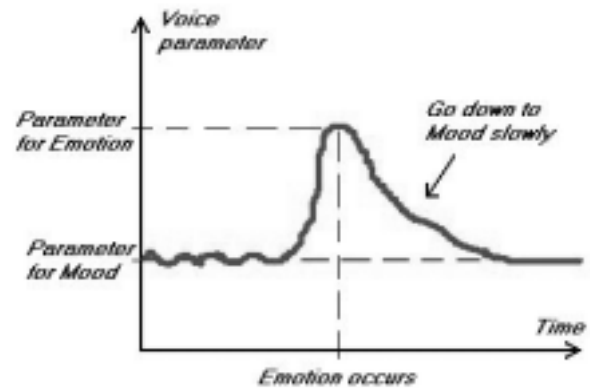


Figure 2: Voice parameter evolving with an emotion

### 3.5.3. Personality in MPML

Personality is another very important feature of agents. Indeed, as soon as several agents appear on the screen, they may all behave the same way, speak with the same voice, and do similar gestures. Personality is one of the characteristics of humans that makes everyone act in its own way, which gives us uniqueness and makes us interesting [Moon, 1996]. And so an agent needs such a characteristic to act in a way different from the other agents on the computer screen.

One personality model coming from research in psychology is the Five Factors model [McCrae, 1992]. It is purely descriptive but it gives a nice way to describe a given personality and it seems commonly used. It deals with five dimensions for the description of the personality: *extraversion*, *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*, *neuroticism*, and *openness* (please refer to the original article for further details). These five dimensions form a very complete model, however, for practical use, only two or three dimensions are used [Andre, 2000, Ball, 2000]. In our case, the author has a lot of liberty to define the personality of the agents as he/she can choose what they say, how they speak, and how they react to events; almost everything depends on the choice of the author. Some other models exist [Rousseau, 1998] but most of them seem to include the two dimensions we are using.

From the Five Factors model, we are only using two dimensions: *agreeableness* and *activity* (from *extraversion*). *Activity* only affects the average frequency of gestures the agents makes. The author should then respect the trait of personality in the dialog content. *Agreeableness* has more impact on the

presentation. Indeed, we explained how emotion and mood work together, but the agreeableness has its impact on the system. Indeed, friendly characters and unfriendly characters will not react the same way to an emotion. For example, when an agreeable agent with a happy mood is insulted by another agent then it will get angry. However, as it is an agreeable character, it will soon recover to its happy mood. On the opposite, if it gets joyful, it will stay joyful longer.

### 3.6. Implementation of emotion, mood and personality in MPML

We will describe how to use emotion, mood and personality in an MPML script. Combining these tags, it is possible to render believable behaviour for the agents (see *Demonstration 1*). In case of only one agent, it may not be necessary to use personality, but as soon as there are two or more agents, it greatly increases their believability. The meaning of the <EMOTION> tag is the emergence of the emotion, and so it is punctual. However, the effect can last longer, depending on the emotion and the personality.

Below is a detailed description of the emotional tags available. Please refer to the demonstration (*Demonstration 1*) to have an example of the effects of the tags and the corresponding output.

- *Agent*: This is the definition of an agent. It gives an agent an id, a voice, a personality and an initial position. This agent will then be used in the presentation.
- *Mood*: This is a tag to define the mood of the agents. It can contain a large part of the presentation, as moods are often stable over a long period of time. It can however change when required by the action involved in the presentation, especially when some emotions occur. The author has to decide how to use it well.
- *Emotion*: This is a tag defining a short event. For example if an agent gets angry or is very pleased by a good answer from the user (who can be a student), it will make some gestures to demonstrate the emotion and its voice will also change for a while. Then the emotion intensity decreases and the emotion stops. The personality influences the variation of the emotion intensity (an agreeable agent will stay angry shorter for example).

Result of a simple MPML script	
<pre> &lt;body&gt;   &lt;seq actors="merlin,rocky"&gt;     &lt;mood assign="neutral"&gt;       &lt;page ref="intro.htm"&gt;         &lt;scene agents="merlin"&gt;           &lt;emotion assign="merlin:joyful"&gt;             &lt;speaker agent="merlin"&gt;               Welcome to my presentation.             &lt;/speaker&gt;             &lt;NB/&gt;             My name is Merlin. I am glad to be here.             ...             But let me present my partner.           &lt;/scene&gt;           &lt;scene agents="merlin,rocky"&gt;             &lt;par agents="merlin,rocky"&gt;               &lt;emotion assign="rocky:angry"/&gt;               &lt;speaker agent="merlin"&gt;                 You are just on time!               &lt;/speaker&gt;               &lt;speaker agent="rocky"&gt;                 I don't think so, you already started!               &lt;/speaker&gt;             &lt;/par&gt;           &lt;/scene&gt;         &lt;/page&gt;       &lt;/mood&gt;     &lt;/seq&gt;   &lt;/body&gt; </pre>	<pre> -&gt;Start of the presentation. -&gt;Everyone has a neutral mood. -&gt;The background appears. -&gt;Only Merlin appears. -&gt;Merlin makes a big smile.  and begins to speak with a joyful voice. The voice gradually becomes neutral.  -&gt;The scene changes and Rocky appears! -&gt;In the same time, two actions: - Rocky makes an angry gesture - Merlin speaks  -&gt;End of the simultaneous part -&gt;Rocky speaks and sounds angry -&gt;The agents disappear  -&gt;End of the presentation </pre>

*Demonstration 1*: A simple MPML script illustrates the effect of emotional tags.

## 4. Conclusion

We presented MPML as a mark-up language to create Web-based presentations using interface agents. MPML enables authors to create more attractive WebPages without too much difficulty, as MPML is easy to use. The script will describe the presentation flow, and it is possible to interact with the background pages to have more powerful content. We can use one or several agents, which will speak and makes attractive gestures to communicate with the user. The agents will also show emotion and mood, and will be directed by their own personality to become unique.

The interface agent system we mainly use has been Microsoft Agent but we are now developing interfaces with new systems such like 3D faces and VRML Agents to enhance the use of MPML for presentation with interface agent. We also plan to begin an evaluation period for our system to be sure the emotion system is convincing and to adjust it depending on the results.

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