

English language teaching in non-English language countries: the curriculum impact of globalisation and computer-mediated communication

Li Wu and Tingjun Cao

Heilongjiang University, China

Introduction

The last few decades have seen a rapid growth in the role of the English language around the world, especially as the lingua franca for economic and scientific exchange. The term lingua franca means ‘any language used for communication between groups who have no other language in common’ (Matthews, 2000, p. 209). According to Crystal (1997), 85% of international organizations in the world use English as their official language in transnational communication. About 85% of the world’s film market is in English, while 90% of published research articles in the field of such as linguistics are written in English. This educational, economic, scientific and technological globalisation has greatly speeded up the growth in the use of the English language.

The consolidation in the use of English as the world’s lingua franca can be attributed to globalisation. Viewed as an economic phenomenon, globalisation involves the increasing interaction and integration of national economic systems through the growth in international trade, investment and capital flows. Perhaps more usefully, Giddens (2000) defined globalisation as both a condition and a consequence of the separation of space and time from place as one of the three sources of modernity, emphasizing that with instantaneous communications, knowledge and culture can be shared around the world simultaneously. It also includes cross-border social, cultural and technological exchanges between people, such as the movement of Visiting Scholars from China to Australia; their use of internet telephony to talk to and see their family while abroad, and their building of transnational knowledge networks.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is one of many outcomes of the process of globalisation, which is impacting on the English curriculum. Working in unison with the development of the Internet has become an important linguistic medium. CMC impacts on many aspects of human life, but nowhere is it more dominant than in the English language curriculum. McLuhan (1962) coined the term ‘global village’ to express his belief that communication via “global electronic networks” (what is today referred to as the Internet) would connect the world, and change people’s desires and imaginings. Warschauer and Healey (1998: 63) state that:

It is the rise of computer-mediated communication and the Internet, more than anything else, which has reshaped the uses of computers for language learning at the end of the 20th century. With the advent of the Internet, the computer—both in society and in the classroom—has been transformed from a tool for information processing and display to a tool for information processing and communication. For the first time, learners of a language can now communicate inexpensively and quickly with other learners of speakers of the target language all over the world.



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The qualities of CMC (including SMS), a subset of the Internet have been impacting upon the lexical, phonetic, syntactic standards of the English language and challenging the importance that teachers place on the use of ‘correct’ of this language. For example, this global technology has led to the evolution of abbreviated English words that emerged in the chat groups of this virtual world. Examples of this phenomenon include, *2day* (today), *b4* (before), *RUOK?* (Are you OK?), *c%l* (cool), *cu* (see you), and 88 (bye-bye). Capital letters are also given syllabic values, as in *thN* (then), *nEd* (need) in Internet communications. In one creation, *ru2cnmel8r?* (Are you two seeing me later?), less than half the characters used in the traditional sentence and word formation are used. It seems that this new form of English language communication means that sentence length is being shortened, and that certain types of complex structures (relative clauses, for instance) are being avoided. Such computer-mediated communication is a challenge for the writing curriculum. Further, in everyday conversation, terms from the computer technology are being given a new application among people who want their talk to have a ‘cool’ tone. Such examples include: It’s my turn to download now (I’ve heard all your gossip, now hear mine); She’s multitasking (She is doing two things at once); C U later (farewell — see you later). CMC through the Internet has important implications for the linguistic curriculum. In this context of transnational communications, this paper explores the impact of the CMC on the English language curriculum.

The Internet: prescriptive/descriptive approaches to curriculum

For some globalisation is leading to the end of cultural diversity as it imposes sameness through out the world. Everyone in the world now drinks Coca-Cola, eats American junk food, and watches American movies. Similarly, there has been an argument that the Internet is bad for the future of many languages, enables rich countries to monopolise the content generated on the Internet. In this way it becomes a form of cultural and linguistic imperialism in which Western values dominate. Given this scenario, it was argued that Internet users must generate new principles and standards in order to grow and maintain linguistic diversity (Crystal, 2001).

Traditionally, curriculum orientations to language studies have been prescriptive or descriptive (Fromkin, 2004). Prescriptivism is the view that one variety of language has an inherently higher value than the others, and that this variety of language ought to be imposed on the whole of the speech community. Prescriptivism favours a curriculum that presents a version of the standard written language that most closely reflects the literary style of great classics in a language. Those who speak or write in a standardized variety are seen to be using the language ‘correctly’; those who do not are termed to be using it ‘incorrectly’. An example of the correct usage of grammar in English is ‘Never begin a sentence with *and*’. An example of correct spelling is that ‘There must always be an *ae* in *encyclopaedia*’. However, the prescriptive curriculum ignores the realities of everyday usages of language, where most people do begin sentences with *and*, and do not put the *ae* in the spelling of *encyclopedia*.

The descriptive curriculum, by contrast, does not condemn usages that do not follow the standardized rules of language set by linguistics. Rather, it describes the variations in usage found within a language, and explains the reasons for variations in usages. The USA usage favours the spelling ‘*encyclopedia*’, whereas, traditional British usage favours the spelling ‘*encyclopaedia*’. Due to the global dominance of the USA in the later half of the twentieth century, American spelling is increasingly accepted and found in British publications. Descriptivists do not like the narrow-minded intolerance and misinformed purism of the prescriptivist curriculum. Correspondingly, prescriptivists do not like the all-inclusiveness



and egalitarian philosophy of the descriptivist curriculum, which they interpret as lacking of responsibility towards what, is best in a language (Crystal, 2001).

The controversy over these curriculum approaches to language education remains even after 250 years, with the arguments being passed on by each generation and re-energised by the most recent developments in society, such as broadcasting and the Internet. What is of interest in the rapidly developing domain of Internet literature, is the way researchers are struggling to maintain a descriptive and egalitarian language education curriculum while recognizing a prescriptive urge for a curriculum to impose regularity and consistency on this world language which otherwise might spiral out of their control (Crystal, 2001). For example, short or instant messages such as *good nite* (good night), *so wot* (so what) and *@home* (at home) have become commonly used daily expressions in England. In China, there have also appeared some new expressions from popular TV programs, such as *PK* (play kill) and *fensi* (fans). How can anyone say that such short or instant messages are not acceptable or incorrect in at least colloquial English and Chinese? But what does this mean for the more formal requirements of the English language curriculum?

From the above discussion, it appears that in the 21st century, the world's English speakers may increasingly diverge from what they have been taught is correct usage of language, in order to make themselves understood to people from around the world. Thus, the Internet is likely to alter the standardized usage of English in a globalized context, and perhaps even the curriculum.

The Internet and the English literacy curriculum

According to the American Management Association International (AMAI) (1998) e-mail is supplementing face-to-face and telephone communication as the preferred means of business communication. It has also been found to be popular among students with more than 95% of university students in the USA using the Web to conduct research and stay in touch with friends (Diederich, 1998). The development of modern information technology is occurring simultaneously with new developments borne of contemporary shifts in globalisation. Thus, it is having rapid impact on the literacy and communication curricula.

The USA remains the world leader in Internet use. Other industrialized countries also use it widely. The use of Internet is boosting emerging economies of Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. According to one estimate, China will have more Internet users than the U.S. by the year 2010 (NUA Internet Surveys, 1999). When the Internet first emerged in 1970s, the tendency among teachers of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) was to see how it could be employed as a tool in the curriculum (Warschauer, 1995). Then, computers were seen as an optional or supplementary tool among others for teaching English. Today, however, the significance of information technology for teaching or learning is widely acknowledged. To put it simply, information technology has become the fourth revolution in human communication and cognition, matched in significance only by the prior revolutions in language, writing, and print (Harnad, 1991). Information technology is now impacting on how people interact, their access to information, and their share of information. These changes are akin to the Bi Sheng revolution about 900 years ago in ancient China. (Bi Sheng, an ancient Chinese inventor in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), invented an advanced method on the art of printing by engraving/carving Chinese characters/letters on clay dices that could be set and removed in a type case/plate fixed with melted resin and wax so as to make printing possible by composing and typesetting, which was much easier and less expensive at the time.) This impact on the curriculum is occurring much more quickly than anticipated.



The Internet revolutionizes the ways of human communication and language learning. Learners of English now need a new set of literacy skills for learning this worldly language. In some developed countries such as in Australia, WebCT is broadly used in tertiary education as a complimentary teaching tool. Computers are widely used in classes in secondary and primary schools in these countries. The curriculum impact on reading and writing are further discussed below.

The reading curriculum

As a result of the IT revolution, the page has been supplemented by the screen in the reading curriculum (Reinking, 1998; Snyder, 1998). This supplementation has occurred especially among young people who have more time to engage with computers (Tapscott, 1998). Its use necessitates different psycholinguistic processes related to decoding information from a screen instead of a page, especially when the screen is helping decoding words for the reader at the click of a mouse. It is changing how educators teach skills like skimming, scanning, and guessing words from a context (Anderson-Inman & Horney, 1998; McKenna, 1998). It is forcing educators to think more about how text combines with graphics, images and audio-visual content to communicate a message (Bolter, 1998; Kress, 1999; Lemke, 1998).

Reading is not just a psycholinguistic act of decoding letters and words. Rather, it is a social practice that takes place in particular sociocultural contexts (de Castell & Luke, 1986; Gee, 1996). In this sense the supplementation of reading from the page with reading multimedia from the screen, and the new socioeconomic circumstances in which it takes place, has an even greater impact on the language curriculum. Reading from the screen is not a passive act of decoding a message, but more of a self-conscious act of creating knowledge from a variety of sources (Bolter, 1991; Landow, 1992). The following skills are central to curricula intended to develop students' ability to read from the screen (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000):

1. Finding the information to read in the first place through electronic database searches by using search engines.
2. Rapidly evaluating the source, credibility and timeliness of information once it has been located.
3. Quickly making navigational decisions as to whether to read the current page of information, pursue links internal or external to the page, or revert back to further searching.
4. Making on-the-spot decisions about ways to save or catalogue part of the information on the page or the complete page.
5. Organizing and keeping track of electronic information that has been saved.

These may seem like mysterious skills for a class of beginning ESOL learners who are still trying to figure out how to decode simple English words. But as English expands in the 21st century as the language of international communication, the number of learners who master basic English skills will grow. Furthermore, an increasing number of learners throughout the world are finding themselves in the situation of being secondary students in English-speaking countries, where the challenge is not so much to achieve basic decoding skills but rather to use English for global communication.

None of these types of skills are completely new additions to the curriculum. The need for critical, active, and interpretive reading has always been an important part of the print literacy curriculum. Nevertheless, the vast amount of information available on the Internet and its



hyper-textual organization has changed the nature of reading curriculum making these kinds of critical and creative reading skills all highly essential for the English language curriculum.

The writing curriculum

Like the changes ESOL students need to learn to read the Internet, changes are expected to be made in their writing practices (Bolter, 1996; Faigley, 1997). In much of the world, writing has been given little emphasis in English language courses. If it is emphasized at all, it is seen as synonymous with the putting on paper a series of grammatically correct sentences (Raimes, 1991). Indeed, this was sufficient for most learners' needs prior to the information revolution of the 1970s. However, the rise of informationalism, and the widespread use of computers and the Internet, has dramatically raised the profile of writing in the English language curriculum and the need for effective written communication (American Management Association International, 1998). The writing skills which are required in the context of the Internet include:

1. Integrating texts, graphics and audio-visual material into a multimedia presentation.
2. Writing effectively in hypertext genres.
3. Using internal and external links to communicate a message well.
4. Writing for an audience of unknown readers on the World Wide Web.
5. Using effective pragmatic strategies in various circumstances of CMC such as e-mail, including one-to-one and discussion lists, and various forms of synchronous real-time communication (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000).

The supplementation of reading and writing practices via the Internet necessitates the need for new curriculum frameworks for teaching of English. The following section briefly explores the significance of multiliteracies as a curriculum framework for the teaching of English in an era of globalising information and communication technologies.

The Internet and world English speakers: new curriculum approaches and practices

The global spread of English language speakers and the emergence of new technological literacies are mutually re-enforcing new trends in the global informational economy and the cultures. In response, it is argued that some common curriculum approaches might be adopted.

A key pedagogical concept that responds to those trends is 'multiliteracies', encompassing as it does resources from education, critical literacy and discourse analysis (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996). Multiliteracies were developed in recognition of the inadequacy of curricula which limit themselves to 'page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language' (New London Group, 1996, p. 61). Instead, it suggests that students should learn to negotiate a multiplicity of media and discourses. Curricula that seek to meet this challenge should include the following elements (New London Group, 1996):

1. *Immersion in situated practice*: Practice in "authentic communicative situations" is required for students to learn how to collaborate with partners, negotiate complex points, and critically evaluate information as it applies to particular meaningful contexts. At the same time, such "authentic situations" give students the opportunity to develop new technological literacies in meaningful contexts.
2. *Overt instruction*: The kinds of sophisticated communication skills required in the 21st century seldom develop through practice alone. Students need the opportunity to step



back, under the guidance of a teacher to critically analyse the content, coherence, organization, pragmatics, syntax and lexis of communication.

3. *Critical framing*: Effective cross-cultural communication and collaboration, including making effective use of information found in online networks, necessitates a high degree of critical interpretation. The teacher's overt role is to extend students' understanding of language items and to help them learn to critically interpret information and communication in a given social context.
4. *Transformed practice*: For students to improve their communication skills each new level of learning is based on situated practice, overt instruction and critical framing. This involves working toward higher-quality outcomes within particular contexts and transferring what has been learned for application in new social and cultural contexts.

Such a curriculum framework includes, but beyond the linguistic syllabi that are based on collections of syntactic or functional items. It also includes but goes far beyond the notion of task-based learning that is making progress on tasks designed principally to assist learners in grasping particular grammatical forms. Akin to the multiliteracies curriculum framework, project-based learning is a pedagogical tool that is useful in the English language curriculum (Stoller, 1997). Projects themselves may include many individual tasks, that allow collective opportunities for students to criticize and transform their literacy practices in ways that individual tasks do not.

Projects can take many forms when based on students' backgrounds, needs and interests. Today they necessarily involve electronic communication and collaboration to increase students' online literacy skills. They provide students opportunities to deal with cultural and identity issues emerging in this era of more transnational communication and interaction. These include long-distance exchange projects in which students debate and discuss issues related to cultural identity (Kern, 1996). Service learning projects enable students to use their knowledge of English and technology to assist their local communities (Warschauer & Cook, 1999).

Project-based work of this type of course is not to be suitable for all curricula. There is, for instance, a mismatch between the pedagogical values of educators from British, Australasian, or North American (BANA) settings and the actual contexts of 'TESEP' (in tertiary, secondary, and primary) English teaching in the rest of the world. The former are often working with highly motivated adult learners in small classes, while the latter frequently feature poorly motivated students in large classes (Holliday 1992; 1994). Or at least that is the stereotype. Most BANA TESOL programs favour student-centred group work and 'learning festivals' (Holliday, 1992, p. 36), whereas most TESEP institutions value educators with strong disciplinary knowledge (e.g., of linguistics or literature); firm control of the classroom, and the ability to deliver captivating lectures, 'teaching spectacles' (Holliday, 1992, p. 36). The new information and communication technologies could change this.

E-mail is a convenient medium which gives students the experience of authentic writing tasks, through communication with fellow students, teachers and native speaker contacts (Kelm, 1995; Tella, 1992, cited in Crystal, 2001). Such electronic communication is now widely incorporated into English language teaching—in those parts of the world where Internet access is routine — for a broad range of purposes. Additional textual and graphic material can be sent through the use of attachments. This is a useful and feasible tool that is included in teaching English in Chinese universities as all students have easy access to the Internet. It enables them to make a pen-friend with a native English speaker by exchanging emails on a regular basis. The use of 'Smileys' is very common among and popular with the Chinese youth, and is used as a pedagogical tool in teaching English in Chinese universities.



Chat groups are another means to teaching English to ESOL. Chat group interactions are either asynchronous with delayed-time exchanges or synchronous with real-time interactions. Both of those are used in English language teaching (Crystal, 2001). Asynchronous situations, such as mail lists and newsgroups, facilitate discussion of issues, student-student contact, and teacher-student interaction. This quickly takes on the characteristic of a virtual classroom. Synchronous interaction is also used as chat groups and as a virtual world.

The Web puts learners into contact with up-to-date information about the English language, especially through the use of online dictionaries and usage guides. These are limited due to access fees and copyright. Websites provide a great variety of materials attractively packaged, such as newspaper articles, exercises, quizzes, and self-assessments.

The use of the Internet in the English-language curriculum is in its early stages. For this reason teachers are learning search-engine skills, ways of evaluating Web pages, techniques for manipulating and creating their own Web materials, and methods for integrating Web activities into their language curriculum (Eastment, 1999).

Conclusion

With the rapid changes brought about by contemporary transitions in globalisation, especially transnational developments in information and communication technology, teachers of ESOL are coming to understand that they are on the brink of a major revolution in the English language curriculum. Many teachers and students have learned to meet the demands of the new Internet situations, such as e-mails, chat groups, Web pages. The *e*-prefix is used in hundreds of expressions by people on a daily basis. For instance, *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words* (Knowles, 1997) had already noted *e-text*, *e-cash*, *e-books*, *e-conferences*, *e-voting*, *e-loan*, *e-newsletters*, *e-cards* and *e-shop*. However, it is difficult to know how many of these *e*-expressions which originated with the Internet will remain in long-term use in the English language. Because we can only recognize and describe language change once it has occurred, this creates problem for making curriculum decisions. Linguists have begun to investigate the linguistic properties of the so-called 'electronic revolution'. It is an open question as to whether the way in which the English language is being used on the Internet is so different from previous linguistic behaviour, and should it be described as revolutionary. As Paolillo (1999, p.1) puts it, 'If we are to understand truly how the Internet might shape our language, then it is essential that we seek to understand how different varieties of language are used on the Internet.' There are over 1,000 ELT English Language Teaching (ELT) sites devoted to language learning activities, resources, and materials on the Internet. From his survey of ELT on the Internet, Eastment (1999, p.1) found that the Internet is transforming "the way that the teaching and learning of English, and the business of ELT is conducted". The continuing changes in the global spread, reception, interaction, sharing and understanding of information in English continue to alter the process of human communication. It has created a necessity for curriculum workers, especially language teachers, to better understand these factors and the Internet influence on the way the English language might now be taught. Therefore, there is a need for further analysis, evaluation and description of the changes in the language curriculum, as a result of the Internet's role as a tool and pedagogical device. There is a need to make appropriate responses in ESOL teaching and learning since the Internet has transformed CMC and the business of ELT.

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Authors

Li Wu is an Associate Professor of Linguistics in the School of Western Studies, Heilongjiang University, China. Her research interests include general linguistics, cognitive linguistics, and applied linguistics. She held a position of Visiting Scholar in the School of English Studies, University of Nottingham, UK, from January 2003 to January 2004. Email: wuli668@yahoo.com.cn

Tingjun Cao is an Associate Professor of English in the Department of Foreign Language Teaching and Research, Heilongjiang University, China. His research interests include teaching methodology and English education. He is now a Visiting Scholar in the School of Education, University of Western Sydney, Australia. Email: t.cao@uws.edu.au

