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Cover design:
Jocelyne Vincent

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Serena Guarracino

Editorial address

Dipartimento di Studi Americani
Culturali e Linguistici
Largo San G. Maggiore Pignatelli, 30
80138 Napoli
Fax +39 0816909529
E-mail: anglistica@unior.it
Website: www.anglistica.unior.it

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with the contribution of Gianfranco Porcelli)

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Jocelyne Vincent

English and Technology: an introductory essay

Introduction

This thematic issue of *Anglistica* explores various interfaces between English and Technology, the ‘and’ covering for different relationships between various separate facets of English and of Technology.

To begin with, what is happening to English *in* technology, *because of* technology; not only the English *of* technology, the lexical, structural, discourse characteristics of English in technical domains, to wit aspects of ESP, or how technological advances are reflected in language, for example, in new terminology, but also what is happening to communication and to English on the discourse and textual levels when digital technologies, in particular, provide the *medium in and through which* English *is used*, in different contexts, for interpersonal communication in CMC and/or on websites, in blogs and in collaborative writing platforms such as Wikipedia, or in text messaging.

Technology *for* English, was also an obvious and important relationship – how technology can help *do things for* English – understood in its uses for *researching about* English(es) (for instance, through the affordances of corpus linguistics, using digitalised language data-banks or corpora), and for *acquiring, learning and/or teaching* EFL/ESL (from the various types of web resources for English for Foreign or Second Language learners, to e-learning and teacher training platforms for TEFL/TESL).¹

¹Other possible types or applications of technologies *for* English or language, not covered, could have been, for example, automatic and/or computer aided translation, speech recognition and subtitling software, etc., but would have implied branching out

The interest of a focus on ‘English’ may perhaps bear some spelling out too. In the popular imagination, at least, English and Technology are inextricably connected – as if Language and Technology meant English, in the first instance. This needed to be critically addressed, as did also what can be *done with* English when using, or through, technologies. English is (still) the major language used on the internet and the web for intercultural communication. Although the use of other major languages is increasing rapidly within social networks and forums and in the blogosphere (in countries such as China, Japan, Brazil, India, Hispano-America, as well as Italy, France), English is still the most widely present language on the net,² taking together CMC, websites, blogs, and the newer social networking platforms, etc. This is because of its combined use not only by native speakers of various varieties of English, or by speakers of English as a second or intra-national language, but also for its use for intercultural communication between native and non-native speakers, or as a lingua franca between non-native speakers, and, not least, because most websites with wider audience targets have parallel English version web pages as well as those in their local languages.

In the background, or indeed foreground, hovers the question of what the combination of English and Technology is *doing to* other languages. One of the main and pervading issues to do with English and Technology, essentially a political issue, concerns, indeed, the purported threat by English to other languages, in the ICT domain and elsewhere.³ However, it is no longer taken for granted by all commentators that English is threatening other languages, at least not *because of* the web; on the contrary, indeed, the internet may be enabling and promoting multilingualism. At any rate, “a multilingual web”, especially since the growth of blogs and social

further from our main focus on English, not to mention taking up more space.

² See at: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>, accessed during the last update of this introduction in September 2009.

³ Another aspect, would have been the more common issue of loan words, calques, etc. into other languages from technical English(es), including ICT. This aspect is amply discussed elsewhere by others, but is briefly touched upon, and put into perspective, in Bruna Di Sabato’s article “ELT and the Internet: A New Approach to ESP” in this volume.

networking, is becoming a reality, and commentators are beginning to perceive it, or at least explicitly address and debate the issue.⁴

By ‘Technology’, apart from its wider sense encompassing specialist technical fields, addressed for example in the ESP of technical Englishes, or the English(es) of Technology(ies), we have taken on board that it has inevitably come to be mainly seen as digital technologies, enabled by computers, in particular Information and Communication Technologies, or in our case English when using ICTs. Moreover, an important connection between English and Technology, here, beyond that of technologies for interpersonal communication (which would also include mobile technologies), concerns the affordances of the new (and older) multimedia and digital media resources for information gathering, archiving, presenting and exploring, and for artistic expression and/or cultural identity representation or construction. There are new and specific modes of textuality developing in and thanks to the digital media; and the new textualities and modes of communication, afforded by ICT have cultural, societal and intercultural implications.

From the outset our perspective on English and Technology, though principally from the multiple approaches taken by the various disciplines from within linguistics in its widest sense, was inter- and multidisciplinary interfacing with Cultural Studies – the characterising perspective of *Anglistica* – and with sociology and new media studies (without, naturally, intending or expecting our finished collection to be an encyclopaedic handbook covering all fields of interest nor all combinations of English and Technology).

⁴ See, for instance, Nunberg’s 1996 talk ‘The Whole World Wired ‘ (published in print in *Anglistica* 3.1, 1999, 229-231), who already very clearly saw the potential benefit for local languages on the internet; see also Lovink’s article in this volume. Bloggers, too, notably from other languages/cultures, are discussing it, see for eg., the post by Christian Kreuz (a political scientist and knowledge activist) at <http://www.crisscrossed.net/2007/12/17/not-english-but-a-multilingual-social-web-is-the-key-for-collaboration>; scholars, such as Dor (2004) “From Englishization to multilingualism”, discussed also in Colin Gardner’s chapter “English and New Media” in Sharon Goodman et al. *Redesigning English*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 207, have recently also finally noted this trend.

The papers, thus, range from descriptive works, based on empirical investigations, with methodological implications (characteristically from the contributors with linguistics training), while others, with more explicitly theoretical or speculative approaches, come from media and cultural theorists, where language, and English in particular, is still pertinent. Furthermore, in the tradition of *Anglistica* again, the volume also brings together contributions by a range of young, and established local and far flung authors.⁵

The section headings group together, thus, aspects of the different ways of envisaging the interface between English and Technology mentioned above, further complemented and supplemented by our ‘squiblogs’, review essays and reviews, which often touch on other facets some of which are new growths or have undergone an exponential evolution and could no longer be granted more extensive treatment in this printed issue.

The following is an attempt not only to present the single specific papers, but also to place them in the context of current debates and to draw out and identify what can be considered common themes among them as well as to suggest some of their significant implications.

English *in* Technology

The English in Technology section groups papers with mainly a descriptive linguistic approach, and consequent methodological issues, focussing mainly on what is happening to English and communication because of technology and/or because of how it is used in various ICT media.

Maria Silvia **Attianese** and Gianfranco **Porcelli**’s papers examine, among other things, various aspects of so-called technical English.

In “Between Technology and Post-Purchase Publicity: The Translation of Instruction Manuals”, Maria Silvia **Attianese**, offers

⁵ The idea for the issue was indeed born in a local research project on English and Technology, coordinated by the present writer and Maresa Sanniti di Baja (connected also to our English courses for students following the *Linguaggi multimediali e informatica umanistica* curriculum at the “Orientale”), which gathered momentum as colleagues from neighbouring Campanian universities and elsewhere joined, or answered our call for papers or our invitation to visit and deliver talks.

a rare interlinguistic and contrastive rhetorical focus on technical instruction manual genres (specifically, for home-appliances in English and Italian). She emphasises the need to not underestimate their importance, nor, crucially, that of their appropriate translation, as manufacturers consistently and short-sightedly appear to do, judging by the too frequent evidence of poorly, literally or even automatically translated manuals. Instruction Manuals have multiple functions, ranging from avoiding the danger of incorrectly following safety norms, legal issues regarding conditions for suing for damages, to those of ensuring customer satisfaction, brand-image and thus brand-fidelity. Thus Instruction Manuals for home-appliances display rhetorical “hybridity [where] there is a tension between technical and advertising requirements”, where the “Post-Purchase Publicity Factor” is important alongside that of clarity and factual accuracy. The consequent challenge to, and professionalism needed by, the translator should be adequately recognised, and less blind faith put in automatic translation, for example, as if technology could solve everything: “investing more attention and money in this area [...] less in technology and more in people, would be a more sensible choice” for manufacturers.

In his “The Language of Technology: the Lighter Side”, taking the lead from E. Tenner’s *Techspeak, or How to Talk High Tech*, where, among other things, jargon and obfuscating and/or self-engrandising technical jargon (in technology, government and business) is playfully unmasked, Gianfranco **Porcelli** explores (light-heartedly but not light-headedly) the ways scientists and technologists develop or construct their language and gives us an insight into the important issue of the relationships between general intelligibility, plain English, subject-knowledge, technical jargon and ESP, as well as the crucial issue of contextual appropriateness/justification of techspeak. When must a spade be called “a spade”, “a geomorphical modification instrument” or “a material sectioning tool (MST) consisting of a ferrous-alloy invasive plane (FIP) and a metacarpal power-grip anchor (MPA)” ?

Mikaela **Cordisco** and Antonella **Elia**’s articles can be seen as part of an emerging paradigm of linguistic inquiry to see whether new cyber- or digital text (sub-)genres or diamesic varieties of English can be seen to be emerging on the internet. While

examining usage in two now familiar Web 2.0 interactive types of platform, respectively the web blog and the wiki (specifically in Wikipedia), they critically address the question of whether any systematic consistencies may be discerned to warrant identifying distinct genres or varieties, and how to tease these out of the data, thus providing both overviews of the literatures and still rare and thus valuable, detailed macro- and micro-linguistic focuses on the characteristics of English usage in these specific contexts (rather than assuming, moreover, that they simply share all the features of what has generally been termed ‘Netspeak’).⁶

In “Blogspeak: Blogal English in the Global Era”, Mikaela **Cordisco**, examines her data in terms of the interconnected dimensions of *linguistic features*, *style* and *domain*, thus going well beyond the popular search for an in-group jargon or even that of an ESP seen as a restrictive ‘microlanguage’ (such as, e.g., ‘Airspeak’).⁷ We can note that ‘blogabulary’ turns out to be metalinguistic, i.e. to involve terminology for blog actions and actors; specific terminology indeed, but which does not constitute as such a specific blogger style or special usage when actually writing blogs. Addressing front-on the still often taken-for-granted and general statement that web writing is “written speech”,⁸ and systematically comparing paradigmatic features of oral and written genre features with those found in blog writing,⁹ she shows in what specific respects it may

⁶D. Crystal in *Language and the Internet*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2001) while devoting a systematic linguistic investigation of the notion and on the perceptions of its common characteristics (ibid., 17-61), warns against seeing what he terms ‘Netspeak’ (ibid., 17), as a single undifferentiated variety. He suggests the various contexts or ‘Internet-using situations’ (as of 2001: email, chat groups, virtual worlds, the World Wide Web) which one would expect to, and do, display distinctive linguistic characteristics and thus differences among them (ibid., 6-17).

⁷On the ‘-speak’ suffix’ and its history of associations, the Italian reader may also perhaps see the present author’s “Talk –speak. Gioco e ideologia nei logonimi inglese” J. Vincent in C. Vallini (ed.) *Le parole per le parole. I logonimi nel linguaggio e nel metalinguaggio* (Roma: Il Calamo, 2000), 701-738.

⁸For the tradition of the earlier debate on the genre characteristics of e-mails, for example, see also, for example, Naomi Baron’s “Why email looks like speech: proof reading, pedagogy and social face” in J. Aitchison and D. Lewis, eds., *New Media Language* (London: Routledge, 2003), 85-94.

⁹Thus extending to blogs Crystal’s (ibid., 25-48) examination along these lines for

often indeed be considered a hybrid, displaying properties of both. Among the important insights we also gain from her analysis is that there are many forms or types of blog, and therefore a great variety of styles to be found, where the distinctions between public and private, monologue and dialogue, and along the continuum of formality and informality, are variously blurred. This also contributes to the difficulty of identifying specific genre features, though indicators of informality are evident across the board (not least, also because blog writing is “naked”, free from the “interference” of professional editorial norms). Cordisco also considers the fit of blog entries with the Gricean categories of conversational maxims, as did Crystal for other types of Netspeak (ibid., 48-61), reporting how blogs often do not respect them. Although blogspeak English cannot easily be defined in terms of genre, there *are* evident shared features discernible across blogs, nonetheless, which suggests also that writing technologies may have an influence on the shape a language takes.

Before turning to Antonella Elia’s specific focus, it might be useful to note that this theme of the influence of the medium on message form (on various levels) permeates, implicitly and explicitly, many of the articles and squiblogs throughout the volume.

However, it is also worth noting that to suggest the influence of the medium is not to exclude the agency of users in shaping and appropriating media and technologies to their purposes, and moreover, that one might also, more generally, link the trends discernible in many of the various types of Netspeak to the *general* trend towards informalisation of discourse or style (as hinted at also in Cordisco’s article above and therefore worth drawing out explicitly). One could indeed point to a mix of issues interconnected to the new writing technologies and to democratisation: the accessibility of new writing technologies to a wide (variously literate) public, the absence of editorial ‘control’, and also the growing recognition of the validity of oral as well as written communication, the relaxing of the wide and rigid differentiation between speech/informal - writing/formal, and, not least, to social change, in particular, i.e. to trends towards

the five ‘situations’ of Netspeak mentioned above.

democratisation as discussed, for example, by Norman Fairclough in 1992,¹⁰ thus already in place before the ICT era. One could take it further and also link it perhaps to the even earlier trends and preferences for ‘plain language’, the preference for ‘non-stuffiness’ and straightforwardness, particularly in the English-speaking world.¹¹

Antonella Elia’s paper “Online Encyclopaedia@s: the Case of Wikipedia and WikiSpeak” is another still rare empirical investigation into the linguistic characteristics of a Web 2.0 site type, the open content collaborative writing Wikipedia project, to see to what extent they may have been influenced by these aspects. With the aid of Concordancer software and other statistical tools to interrogate the corpora compiled from her sources, Elia investigates, on the one hand, what she terms WikiLanguage, that of the Wikipedians in writing the articles, and on the other, WikiSpeak, as used in their backstage community forum. WikiLanguage characteristics are systematically compared to those of *Britannica*, on various recognised measures of formality/informality, with the outcome that in the Wikipedia “document mode pages, the linguistic and stylistic features show a formal and standardised level very similar to that found in *Britannica*” imputable to the role of the agency of very active and socially-approved members of the community enforcing convergent writing norms by imitation and by post-production editorial ‘control’. In the WikiSpeak of the backstage interactions, on the other hand, she finds similar features of informality, with due differences between the synchronous and asynchronous channels, to those of Netspeak in general (but with differences imputable to ‘Wikiqette’ recommendations - showing again some central social control). The lexical features of WikiSpeak are indeed,

¹⁰ See, e.g. in Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 200-224.

¹¹ See, for example, S. Greenbaum (ed.), *The English Language Today*, (Oxford: Pergamon, 1985) 125: “Plain English means writing that is straightforward, that reads as if it were spoken [...] Plain English is clear, direct and simple.”, and for the long preference in Anglo cultures, see among others, Deborah Cameron’s *Verbal Hygiene*, (London: Routledge, 1995), and J. Vincent “Netiquette Rules OK!...OK?: Speculating on Rhetorical Cleansing and English Linguistic and Cultural Imperialism through Email Netiquette Style Guides” in M. Bertuccelli Papi, A. Bertacca and S. Bruti (eds.) *Threads in the Complex Fabric of Language* (Pisa: Felici Editore 2008), 409-443.

and naturally, most distinctive, and as in blogabulary noted earlier, mainly concerning specific technical operations (wiki- ones, in this case). Initiating too a useful comparison of the frequency of occurrence of different word-formation types with General English, Elia urges the need for further and more thorough identification of possible distinctive features in WikiSpeak by comparing it systematically both with corpora of General English and from other contexts of Netspeak.

We might note in summary that while both WikiSpeak and Blogspeak display trends towards informality (as do many other online encyclopaedias according to Elia), the WikiLanguage of Wikipedia entries still retains a more formal style, more obviously faithful, or subservient to the *Britannica* style, as Nunberg also hints in “A Wiki’s as good as a nod” in this volume.

Whatever is emerging stylistically on the internet in general or, in particular, on the world wide web (in these cases Web 2.0), we might remember again, would arguably be the result of exploiting and contextually adapting not only to the medium but also to all the usual sociolinguistic parameters involving perceptions and projections of interpersonal relationships and of different genre appropriateness (though certainly also as afforded by the specific media). Medium affects message, but so do other factors. Informality and formality, for example, and the development of special terminology or of other features of community identity, are just as much related to people’s feelings of what is appropriate in a given context and to a given purpose, not simply to the medium (except, perhaps, in the flush of excitement when that medium is novel and first appropriated by a young, informal, pioneer group). It cannot be stressed enough that usage and style in the new media, just as the use of techspeak noted earlier in Porcelli, also varies contextually and appropriately.¹² There is still a mistaken general

¹² That the Web also hosts formal styles would be surprising only to those who still perceive all writing on the internet as always informal. Crystal (2001) *Internet*, had already indicated web writing as more formal than writing in the other ‘internet-using situations’ he explored; and in general he stressed the stylistic variability of Netspeak, as found in any other medium. The Internet may well generate new linguistic varieties but these will follow the general rule of creative adaptation to medium and all the other parameters of variation; see e.g. *ibid.*, 7, 77, 79, 128, 242.

feeling that anything goes on the Net, that extreme informality, as seen in some forms of CMC, teenage forums, IRC and texting are extendible and extended in all contexts on the Net.

The article “Twixt twitalk and tweespeak (not to mention trouble) on Twitter: a flutter with affectivity”, by Jocelyne **Vincent**, the present writer, concerning a further exemplar of a Web 2.0 social network platform, the ‘micro-blogging’ service Twitter, re-echoes some of the above-mentioned themes and aspects touched upon in Mikaela Cordisco’s paper on blogs. However, the extreme 140-character limit on individual posts or “tweets”, as they are called, the specific brief or guide to provide ‘status’ updates or information on ‘what’ is happening, and the effects of the name taken on by the service itself, bring about important specific characteristics and suggest a different focus. The focus is indeed specifically on how *affectivity*, emotions, interactional social grooming small talk, rapport talk or comity, as well as language *attitudes*, are reflected in aspects of what Vincent calls Twitter Talk and Twitterspeak, respectively, tweeted contents and word choices, and specific Twitter terminology or twitterisms. Affectivity and ‘ideological’ language attitudes also strongly emerge in observers’ (usually critical) comments¹³ on some of these aspects (defining them derisively as pointless babble, the talk of twits, laughably twee, etc.) and thus essentially also revealing some prescriptive or ‘verbal hygiene’ assumptions that serious, informational efficiency is superior. The brevity aspect itself, is also an interesting nexus of observers’ comments. Alongside those who see it as valuable in teaching writing (to help reduce unnecessary verbiage and concentrate thoughts), it is criticised by many more who see in it the peril¹⁴ of encouraging superficiality and triviality (as if the brevity is what had determined the pointless babble). This is somewhat surprising in view of the otherwise prevalent Anglo-

¹³ As in many of the papers in this section and the next, the remarks in the paper are based on data collected by observation (in this case from blogged comments, online articles, twictionaries and tweets themselves) and presented to support or indeed to lead the points made, these then providing input to methodological or theoretical speculation.

¹⁴ Worry about purported dire effects that short messages could have on writing in general (as is typical when talking of SMS texting – see Nunberg’s squib “All Thumbs”) is, curiously, not saliently present as a criticism of tweet writing, though it often also displays contractions and acronyms which evolved in SMS texting.

discourse ethos valuing brevity. It is even more interesting, and surprising perhaps, that affectivity emerges in Twitter Talk despite the limited space and the brief to simply provide information (though naturally the fact that it is a social network, also undoubtedly prompts many twitterers' social redefinition or 'appropriation' of the service). The affectivity strongly present in Twitterspeak should be less surprising, in any case. The light-heartedness, playfulness and even silliness reflected in twitterisms is typical of early Netspeak, and indeed of early ICT techspeak, although it is undoubtedly magnified and led by the implied invitation to frivolity and levity inherent in that of the "Twitter" metaphor and its phonology (and phonaesthesia). Vincent's tentative analysis of the structure and word formation processes at work in twitterisms is more fully within the more traditional linguistic attention to lexical morphology, though it reveals arguably more than usual highly creative and complex processes combining blending and punning and especially the function of the iconic or phonaesthesia-led connotative aspects of /twi-/.

Other implications of the findings of the presence of affectivity in Twitter talk suggest again that the influence of a medium on message form and contents is not strongly deterministic, that the agency of users is at least as strong. The affordances of Web 2.0 applications, such as embedded wiki, and blogging, however, in the various 'twictionaries' which allow for collaborative compiling and comment on suggested twitterisms, for instance are highly supportive affordances by the medium to the agency of the users. The interfacing of Twitter with mobile technology is also highly influential.

One further aspect speculated upon in the article is the statistically slightly higher presence of women twitterers, which contrasts with other ICT user statistics (see Di Martino's paper) and the tentative correlation this may have to a higher incidence of 'rapport talk' than 'report talk' on Twitter.

In another vein, Antongiuseppe **Di Dio** and Maresa **Sanniti di Baja** focus on two other different computer mediated communication (CMC) contexts, providing data from specific case studies, both with a special focus on discourse politeness and interpersonal relationships and a significant, though also still relatively rare, attention to cross-cultural issues.

Antongiuseppe **Di Dio**'s report, "Computer Mediated Communication and Identity Construction in Teenagers: some preliminary cross-cultural observations" discusses the results of face-to-face interviews, preliminary to further work examining exchanges in forums and in IRC for which he provides the methodological background, and focuses on the construction of communities of practice and identity among teenagers and their use of different technologies for interpersonal communications (distinguishing between male and female subjects and with respect to adults). This study also further, thus, involves the recognition of contextually adapted usage on the Net, by different types of users.

Maresa **Sanniti di Baja**'s study "Forwarding e-mails in an academic context: a small-scale study on language and politeness in intercultural English" examines email forwarding in intercultural interaction in an unequal power situation, specifically by English native speaker language assistants in an Italian university setting, further complicated by the potentially face-threatening nature of the act and its contents (passing on a complaint by a student to a senior Italian colleague – the author herself), providing thus a rare empirical investigation of intercultural emailing, and, not least, contributing empirically to contrastive politeness studies, where, among other things the issue of formality/informality also naturally comes into play.

The focus on English *in* technology, which can be seen to be common to the above cited articles, is found too, as we shall see later, to varying degrees, among the squiblogs, by Matthews and Nunberg, and touched upon in the reviews by Barone, Cordisco and by Roy and Luisa Boardman of influential books by David Crystal and by David Graddol.

Technology *for* English

This section groups contributions mainly of a methodological applied linguistic nature, anchored also in empirical investigations, with a common nucleus of interest in what technologies can, and do, do both for research on English and for English language learning, teaching and teacher training.

Rita **Calabrese**, Maria **De Santo** and Bruna **Di Sabato** can all be seen to be exploring among other things, and to differing degrees, the issue of Data Driven Learning, Discovery Learning and learner awareness training, through the aid of technologies. In the case of Calabrese and Di Sabato, this is through the use of language corpora available in digitalised form, whether formal organised corpora or that found informally on the web itself as an extensive live informal corpus or resource, while in that of De Santo through self-access resources of various types. Margaret **Rasulo**'s study on e-learning has, in common with De Santo and with Di Sabato, attention to uses of the internet in learning/teaching.

From Rita **Calabrese**'s "Trends in ELT Methodology: Exploring a Computer Learner Corpus" one gets a very useful picture of the range of types of digitalised language corpora and of their various possible uses in English language teaching and learning. Corpora of *native* speaker texts can be investigated by descriptive linguistics researchers, by language teachers in the classroom, and can be explored by language learners, to gain insights on various aspects of English structure and usage. Corpora of *non-native* and/or of *learners'* English can be studied and used, again by a similar range of different types of user: by researchers of SLA (second language acquisition) and of specific groups of learners' *interlanguage*, by ELT (English language teaching) methodologists, by teachers in the classroom, and by learners themselves (guided by teachers) to gain critical language and learning awareness. Calabrese's own specific focus, exploring the use of an in-house corpus of learners' English by EFL learners, provides insight, indeed, on the links this has with the development of critical and "deeper" language learning: through discovery, based on exposition to authentic data, the learner learns inductively, autonomously and personally, and thus more effectively.

Maria **De Santo** in "TELL @ SAC: Enhancing English learning through ICT in a Self-Access Centre", indeed, critically addresses the appropriate ways in which Technology Enhanced Language Learning, in particular through ICT, can be employed by learners and facilitators to fully exploit its enormous potential and be truly effective as language learning enhancers and resources in independent or autonomous learning environments. Presenting the

results of an investigation in a university Self-Access Centre (that of the Naples “Orientale” University) she thus also crucially brings in the learner’s perspective, preferences, expectations and attitudes, gained through a questionnaire (provided in her appendix). De Santo further practically enhances her contribution on these issues with her overview and selection of Internet resources for EFL learners in the reviews section.

One could never, indeed, over-stress the presence of a humanistic, methodologically learner-centred approach to the use of technology. Far from propounding the complete or extreme technologisation of language teaching or learning – as if teachers were replaceable by technology. The ELT methodologist today sees technology as an *aid*, e.g., helping teachers put real data at the disposal of the learner, whether through corpora, satellite television, CDs, DVDs, the internet, etc., by extending and simulating natural exposure to real language data and the natural process of learning by immersion and/or inductively, alongside other more deductive rule-based moments of systematic teaching with or without technology. Technology, in the ELT field today, is intended to complement, indeed, to *enhance*, *not to replace* other forms of exposure to language or to teachers, as can be seen also in other contributions in this section.

The theme of what technology can do *for* English combines with the previous theme of what is happening to English (ESP in this case) *because of* Technology, in Bruna **Di Sabato**’s paper “ELT and the Internet: A New Approach to ESP”. ESP, of e-commerce specifically in her study, is affected by technology, however, not only because of being about technology, but also as a consequence of being used through information and communications technology: in particular, because of the expanded universe of users and functions afforded by the internet. Relating her experiences/experimentation in a University of Salerno workshop with doctoral students, she explores how the internet provides increased exposure to ESP and how the web can, or should, be exploited in learning and teaching ESPs. The methodological implications she suggests are wider-reaching, however, touching on the relationship between ESP and General English, and in syllabi for non-native speakers. With a new angle on the question of how English is no longer the exclusive

property of the native speaker,¹⁵ she suggests indeed how ESP in particular, is being changed, and to some degree hybridised: by its use by the wide general non-specialist public, by simplification by specialists to make it more generally accessible, by its use as a lingua franca between and among natives of different varieties and, most significantly for Di Sabato, by and with non-native speaker users. Among the interesting aspects of the trend one could point out seems to be how specialist terminology is now generated more through the addition of new, specialist, meanings to existing lexical items, rather than by the coining of new specialist terms. Her main methodological suggestion is that in ELT there is often an excessive shift towards the ‘special side’ of the language, that this may not be productive or useful, and that a *blended* approach which combines ESP and EGP, must be adopted which recognises and raises learners’ awareness of the emerging hybrid characteristics of ESP.

Margaret **Rasulo’s** article “Making the Move from Conventional to Online Educational Training”, also both methodological and empirical, critically examines the characteristics of e-learning and its various forms or types. These range from informal, self-paced, leader-led to performance support tools¹⁶ (while their sub-types involve, for example, combinations of synchronous and a-synchronous channels and interaction), as well as to hybrid types, known as blended models, combining online and face-to-face sessions or workshops, but also for example, an online forum community and virtual classrooms. From the point of view of the educational methodologist, she stresses, among other things, that “information is not instruction”, exposure to the large amounts of information without learner support can be overwhelming and useless: “the goals of the e-educator is to avoid the danger of this ‘online anything’ and foster online purposeful learning by setting up a *collaborative environment and encouraging interactivity*” (emphasis added). Comparing features, strengths and weaknesses of (good) traditional and online educational training, she argues that

¹⁵ Readers might see our *Anglistica* issue, 3.1, 1999: *English and the Other* (M.-H. Laforest and J. Vincent eds.), for some aspects of this.

¹⁶ The last type corresponds to internet use as illustrated in Maria De Santo’s contributions in this issue.

the main weakness of e-learning, the lack of physicality, can be compensated for by its strengths, such as, for example, providing time for reflection before responding (because of the affordances of its possible asynchronous modalities). The ideal situation would indeed appear to be a *blended* approach, which ensures ‘real’ contact, feedback and interactivity, as well as time for reflection, etc. Online communication and relationship development must counterbalance the otherwise overwhelming presence of technology in its implementation, if e-learning is to be seen as a viable conveyor of high-quality education, to rival traditionally delivered face-to-face approaches (implying, naturally, that this is not uncontroversial). Rasulo does not only argue abstractly for this but brings in her reflections on data from interactions in an asynchronous forum, from her own experiences as a moderator and instructor in a project involving blended e-learning for training primary school teachers of ELT. She traces the dynamics and stresses the importance of creating a caring community of practice (a learning community and community of inquiry) by collaborative action and by nurturing personal online identities, self-confidence and self-reflection. Moreover, the trainer’s role is not that of “sage on the stage” but rather “guide on the side” (a common theme in the more general learner-centred approach also behind self-access resource centres). While not arguing for online is best, she does however, strongly argue that e-training can be as good as traditional face-to-face teaching/learning (when that is good), even alone, but only as long as it is properly implemented.

More generally, it is worth stressing again that the role and means of technology enhanced language learning and/or teaching in its various forms (whether in a self-access centre, through or on the internet, using digitalised corpora in the classroom or autonomously, or in e-learning environments or set-ups of various types) is not universally uncontroversial, despite nigh on three decades of theorising, experimentation and implementation. Many teachers and educational managers are still wary of using technologies, or feel threatened also by the notion of learner autonomy, or of discovery learning, or of technology (in its various forms) used for language learning, separately or in combination. Many balk at the purported, needless to say, mistaken, implication that the human touch, face-

to-face or frontal interaction with teachers is to be eliminated or seen as out-of-date. Others promote the use of technology, or of self-access, in its various forms, nominally but haphazardly, or provide ineffective access or little encouragement or learner training to promote its use/fulness, while others may promote it enthusiastically but a-critically. Too few may actually develop materials and collaborate in or even visit their local self-access centres. Self-styled practitioners of e-learning may be content to simply offer static websites, with simple combinations of archived slide presentations, text files, images, links, etc, and consider this sufficient to warrant calling them e-learning sites (while they totally lack feedback, tracking, interactivity, etc.).

Methodological awareness of technology enhanced language learning implementation, of self-access centres, of corpus linguistics, of e-learning modalities, or, in general, of learner centredness, data driven and discovery learning, albeit long taken on-board by many ELT researchers and methodologists, is, indeed, still rare enough among educators (let alone learners) to render the questions, and the need for careful investigation and discussion, ever more pertinent. This is necessary lest, on the one hand their universal acceptance be taken for granted and methodologists thus lower their guard, or on the other, they continue to be ignored, misunderstood, or opposed out of hand by teachers or educational managers.

The other contribution in this section by Emilia **Di Martino**, “Gender Equality in the Information Society: Pedagogical Implications for Italy-based ELT” explicitly combines a pedagogical focus with themes relevant both to our earlier section on language in ICT and those in this section on ICT in teaching, also to themes relevant to our next section. She brings in, alongside methodological arguments, a sociological and ideological approach to both ELT and to the question of access to and use of ICTs by addressing the gender, age and social digital divide within Italy. She also hints at the paradox of engaging in English language teaching (where teachers can be seen as accomplices of the profit-generating ELT industry helping to impose or maintain the ideology of Western liberal-capitalism). At any rate, for Di Martino, informed ELT practice and methodology calls for “principled eclecticism” to be able to respond to the complex and varied needs and motivations of

individual learners, the complexity of language, and of the learning/teaching process itself. ICT's various affordances are particularly suited to cater for this methodologically. She sees opportunities and implications too for the ICT empowerment of women students and teachers, by giving them the opportunity to develop a non-marginalised voice within the existing ICT culture and creating new types of ICT role models for students, as well as for questioning the conservatism of the academic world, by combining ELT with ICT education and by infusing both ICT and English into other subject areas, as is beginning to happen, indeed, in Italy.

One might note, in closing here, that among these contributions there emerges, among other things, alongside the positive recommendations and arguments for implementing ICT in teaching in various ways and for various reasons – among them the need to cater for different aspects of the learning process, learning strategies, needs, etc., and the possibility of doing so thanks to ICT affordances – also a balanced non-extremist methodological view of technology in teaching (and learning), one of urging *complementarity*, *blending*, *eclecticism* rather than an either/or polarised approach which may also help in reconciling both extreme technophobes and technophiles in ELL/ELT.

Technology, Textuality and Culture

This section takes a perspective on language, textuality and technology and its cultural or social implications, on English on the web in interlinguistic and intercultural perspective, on translation and cross-cultural identity, which is not only descriptive but also more explicitly critical, further introducing ideological, political, social and historical issues.

In the cultural studies and socially engaged tradition of *Anglistica* and of local scholars of English-language-medium creative representation here at the Orientale, and fully in its spirit of interdisciplinarity, a focus on postcolonial or diasporic subjects' identity representation is found in Giuseppe **Balirano**'s "Humourless Indians? A Multidisciplinary Approach to 'Diasporic' Humour in Ethnic Media productions", a multimodal and linguistic

analysis of how hybrid Anglo-Indian (or Indo-Saxon) identity and its place in ‘Britishness’, was constructed, represented humorously and provocatively and thus successfully through *Goodness Gracious Me!*, a highly successful mainstream ‘British’ TV comedy series. The ideological and transformational power of humour and satire is strongly and convincingly demonstrated through the author’s analysis of the strategies employed in the show, principal among them, the reversal of stereotypes. This subversion, a ‘diasporic humour’, according to Balirano, draws attention to and subverts power differences, tends to release anxiety of each other’s Other or reversed Self, and fashions a hybrid post-nation, where the concept of mainstream is both weakened and amplified. The media thus can be seen to have a strong cultural role and potential for social transformation: “Technologies mediate between reality and representations relating to wider social transformations”; since “the transnational migration of images and sounds, and peoples, reshapes national identities and moulds mutual belonging into new hybrid” entities, “the discourse on media should reflect on the multicultural symbiotic transformation that television, cinema, the internet and new media operate on their mass audiences”.

The role and affordances of technologies for post-colonial identity construction or self-definition, and representation¹⁷ is also relevant in Serena **Guarracino**’s paper on Indo-English writer Suniti Namjoshi’s hypertextual novel and interactive website *Building Babel*. Her paper “Building Sites: Suniti Namjoshi’s Hypertextual Babel” illustrates Namjoshi’s underlying feminist project and view of how (cultural and gendered) hybrid identity and reality can be collaboratively deconstructed, re-constructed and represented thanks to the affordances of a hypertextual website, in her case – also thus engaged in the theoretical elaboration of the language, textuality and cultural construction view. Hinging on Namjoshi’s reworking of meme theory, with Babel as both object and metaphor, as Guarracino argues: “Namjoshi turns memes into a tool of hybridization, which enables both Writer and Reader to

¹⁷ The question of the *cross*-linguistic representation of hybrid identity is touched upon in Guarracino’s review in this issue of Paola Splendore’s Italian translation of ‘Desi’ writer Sujata Bhatt’s poetry in English.

endlessly create and deconstruct story after story, in an attempt at a mythic yet fragmentary reconstruction of Babel. Being “a novel with interactive hypertext links” [...], *Building Babel* not only describes, but enacts the proliferation and dissemination of memes through their choice pool, the World Wide Web”. The fact that this is done in English, the colonial *master*’s voice, which carries its load of specific memes, brings in other not insignificant complexities. Memes, however, not only proliferate but also mutate and merge through the agency of Writers and Readers on the web, and on the *Building Babel* site.

This, we might note, combines metaphorically the affordances of new media hypertextuality and interactivity with both hybridity and ‘remix’ or re-combination, themselves proliferating and merging memes from separate (and merging) areas of recent cultural and new media theory (as we shall see with Manovich and Terranova). Nor can we fail to notice the connections with what can also be seen to be a meme, that of blending and complementarity of methodological approaches in teaching and use of technologies mentioned earlier. There appears to be a larger contemporary meme which is itself a knot of metaphors of mixing.

Information technology and its role in the evolution of new textualities is firmly and specifically the focus in Sara **Griffiths**’ historically oriented paper “Technology and the Text”, which provides a brief history of the specific application of various technologies to linguistic texts and a comparison of print book text technology with new emerging text forms mediated by computer technology to get a picture of what is happening to the text. It also critically discusses Technology’s possible relationship or role in relation to the complex configurations of social, cultural, political, and economic events that bring change, seeing Technological change as relational to these other changes not as a cause or result of them, thus also entering into the debate of what influences what.

Foundational concepts and fundamental insights on the consequences of new media technologies and digitisation in general on textualities, open-textualities, intermedia textualities and inter-networking are provided here, in an interesting and useful complementarity, by the seminal web essays by Lev **Manovich** “Remixability and Modularity” and “What happened to Remix?”

(published together here in print as “Remix”) and in the paper by Tiziana **Terranova** “Chain Reactions: Digital Recombination and Analogue Chaos”, which we are pleased to re-publish and thus bring to the attention of our non-specialised readers. Between them they can be seen to explore, among other aspects, connections and distinctions between, and consequences of, digital and analogue, discrete and continuous information bits and/or flows, linearity and non-linearity, and the agency of participants in internet culture.

Lev **Manovich**, in particular, reflecting on Remixability and Web 2.0, compares types of modularity and remixing of elements of various sorts pre- and post-computer (i.e. digitisation) and into the Web 2.0 era, tracing a history of both and their connections, and their present and future consequences. To mention here only a few points: thanks to Web 2.0 micro-content units, which are not tightly packaged and hard to take apart, there is a new kind of modularity, one without a predefined standardised “vocabulary” and an unlimited way these units or bits can be combined. Post-computer modularity can produce “unlimited diversity, indeed, whereas pre-computer modularity leads to repetition and reduction”. Furthermore, while culture has always been about remixability, and it extends well beyond culture and the Internet, now the “remixability is available to all participants of Internet culture”. Remixability becomes, indeed, also practically a built-in feature of the digital networked media universe, thanks to the ease with which media objects travel between devices and services. In addition to ‘cultures’ which remix media content, such as in DJ music culture, where the term “remix” was first applied, we also now have software which remixes data from more than one source - the result known as “mash ups”.

Apart from their ontological interest on the distinctions between them, also well worth mentioning are Manovich’s side comments on the metaphors and terms used in various domains (music, visual art, software, literary texts, etc.) to describe remixability of various types (remix, appropriation, quoting, sampling, montage and collage), alluding to their distinctions and different connotations (positive or negative). Suffice it to say here that it is noteworthy that context (domain) affects evaluation of the concept of remixing; it is acceptable and expected in music, and in software and web design, though not always openly admitted in the latter, while in

other domains it may be seen as stealing. “Appropriation” can have this connotation, while “remixing” has positive connotations, and suggests reworking; “quoting” has a different logic from remix, and is a precedent of “sampling” not of “remix”. Montage and collage come from sampling; “remixing”, in music at least, implies blending. As Manovich notes, no proper terms for the practice exist outside of music, and one should be careful not “to apply old terms to new technologically driven cultural practices”, and vice-versa, one could add perhaps.

Tiziana **Terranova** in “Chain Reactions: Digital Recombination and Analogue Chaos”, drawing on cybernetic and information theory, philosophy and literary criticism, explores further consequences of digitisation on electronic textuality and the interrelation of processes of digitisation and interconnectivity, non-linearity, interactivity, analogue dynamics, intermedia resonance and the “political potentials” of the latter. Obeying, as she says, what Lev Manovich has called the principles of ‘variability’ and ‘modularity’ of new media objects,¹⁸ “digitised text seems to offer itself much more readily [than the printed text] to the action of transversal and recombinable modifications which also empower the reader to actively engage in the production of the textual experience”. Digitisation, she suggests, however, does not simply replace and succeed analogue media; “electronic textuality should be understood as a reconfiguration of the overall relation between digital and analogue dynamics”. While confirming “the observation of new media theory about the shift from analogue to digital representation entailing a shift from continuous to discrete quantities”, she also sees it as “foregrounding nonlinear modes of communication”, which can be described as an amplification of analogue dynamics. She thus sees the digital medium as responsible for a twofold operation: it “cuts up the analogue (the continuous qualities of semiotic fluxes); and it ‘analogueises’ the digital by introducing into such a world of bits the nonlinearity of recursive operations”. This it does either by changing the order in which texts are read (as in hyperlinked documents), or by involving the reader in adding and editing collectively produced texts (as in the case of

¹⁸ In his *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press, 2001.

wikis). There is thus, on the one hand, a “digital codification which cuts up analogue fluxes by emphasising discrete microvariations within what has been described as a ‘recombinant culture’ ” and on the other, however, “an analogue dynamics of increasing and decreasing waves of variable lengths and power, a chaotic physics of amplifications and interference, of diffusion, turbulence and bifurcations.”

To simplify somewhat, leaving the further exploration of these richly complex texts to the reader, we might say that while the consequences of digitisation focussed on by Lev Manovich here concern mainly modes of modularity and thus of modes of remixing or recombination, Tiziana Terranova focuses more on non-linearity, and both refer to participants’ active involvement in reworking ‘texts’ and to the interconnectivity of media. Together they allow us to reach a fuller understanding of how computer technology, and the web have influenced and are transforming textualities, and of the wider cultural and “political” implications.

Worth drawing out more explicitly in general again from the last four papers mentioned and others in the English in Technology section is their implicit engagement in the debate between social constructivism of technology and technological constructivism, i.e., on what influences what. Our authors, while acknowledging the role or influence of the affordances of a medium on textualities and uses, also stress its malleability/flexibility and the agency of users in their appropriation and adaptation of the technologies to their communicative purposes.

Finally, it is in the contributions by Geert **Lovink**, “Internet, Globalisation and the Politics of Language” in this section (and in his blog post mentioned below, as well as in the contribution by Chantal Zabus in the Review Essays section, and by others among the reviews), where the politically and culturally vexed question of the relationship between English and other languages on the web (and in general) is firmly focussed on and clarified. Furnishing language statistics and reflections on the trends observable in the blogosphere, Lovink argues that rather than the disappearance of local languages, we can see the rise of national webs.¹⁹ He calls for

¹⁹ Geoff Nunberg in “A Whole World Wired” (in *Anglistica* 1999 vol. 3,1, 229-231) mentioned earlier, foresaw a similar development.

a critical reappraisal, the need to overcome the pervasive (and often envious) view of English as the language of cultural domination in order to start to go beyond the theories of globalisation and empire current in new media theory, to develop a new critical vocabulary that takes into account the rise of internet power brokers such as China and India. Though taken on board by some (as mentioned earlier), we might note that the implication is that the issue is still not uncontroversial.

Squiblogs

A squiblog is linguistically and conceptually a portmanteau blend of squib²⁰ and blog, coined here in the time-honoured manner of web- or Net-speak. Many blog entries, particularly, in the many linguistics blogs in existence, can often justifiably be seen indeed as “squibs”. Squibs and many blog entries do seem to share genre characteristics not only of brevity, by outlining a nascent idea or a point not warranting perhaps a longer treatment, but also often of wit, not to mention informality, or failing those, at least of provocation or invitation to further thought or follow-up by others. The contributions in our section were indeed, either originally actual (serious) blog entries (Lovink), short light-hearted webpage

²⁰ A “squib” is literally and originally a small fire-cracker, sometimes used to ignite a larger pyrotechnic explosive (OED tells us that it is of unknown origin perhaps onomatopoeic “intended as imitative of an explosive sound”), its sense soon extended metaphorically to indicate a ‘hit’, jibe, brief satirical or witty and provocative speech or piece of writing (attested already in 1525 in this sense).

Since the 1970’s, thanks mainly to its use in the journal *Linguistic Inquiry*, “squib” is applied in linguistics to a short piece outlining data or developing a minor theoretical argument “intended to ignite thinking and discourse by others”. Interestingly, according to the graduate student blog <http://fledgelings.blogspot.com/2009/03/squibs-linguistic-kind.html> of the San Francisco State University Masters programme in linguistics, squib writing and presentation is central in their program, and they refer us to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squib_linguistics, which in turn refers us to the online linguistics journal *Snippets*, for the view of this academic written genre as “the ideal footnote: a side remark that taken on its own is not worth lengthy development but that needs to be said”. The emphasis on, and desire for, brevity too is worth mentioning, and one cannot help connecting it somehow to the general (ideological?) trend found in netiquette (see, e.g. in J. Vincent, 2008 (ibid.).

pieces (Matthews),²¹ or entertaining yet scholarly commentaries first delivered as short radio talks and available later on a personal web page (Nunberg), all published in print here for the first time.

The focus on English *in* technology, explored more extensively in our section of that name, is also found as anticipated earlier, here among the ‘squiblogs’.

Jeff **Matthews’** piece “Shall I Compare Thee to a Stand-Alone Compression Module?” is an ironic take on the similarities of technical and poetic language; his American students’ waning appreciation of poetry might be re-awakened by finding it in technical texts? (indeed, in what we can recognise as ‘found poetry’). In Geoff **Nunberg’s** “All Thumbs” the question of condensed texts and the purported nefarious effect of SMS texting on English in general, is approached.²² The linguist cannot but counter to the usual prophets of doom, that styles and jargon develop appropriately in separate media with little overlap; just as what happened in telegraphs stayed in telegraphs: “the linguistic features of the new media are sure to follow the same pattern”. In his “Lowercasing the Internet”, Nunberg next focuses our attention, again in his inimical style, on the question of graphical norms in the otherwise purportedly normless internet (or is it the Internet?),²³ with implications both for the semiotic and social significance of typographical conventions and on the diachronic and synchronic variation in perceptions of the status of the i/Internet.

Jeff **Matthews’** entertaining piece on subtitling vs. dubbing “Hey you sound just like Marlon Brando, Robert Redford and Paul Newman!” and, in particular, on the Italian film dubbing industry’s voices of Hollywood actors, can be seen, among other things, as a reflection also on aspects of cross-cultural migration and representation, and implicitly also on the technological and economic constraints, in the ‘older’ audiovisual medium of film.

²¹ The web site they are taken from is maintained with his U.S. students at Maryland University), and other ‘ex-pats’ and visitors to Naples and Italy, in mind.

²² On this theme, see also in A. Kessler and A. Bergs “Literacy and the New Media: *vita brevis, lingua brevis*” in J. Aitchison and D. M. Lewis eds. *New Media Language*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 75-84.

²³ We have tended to respect authors’ choices of lower or upper case, while preferring to use the lowercase ourselves.

The technology, culture and society focus can be found most firmly here among the squiblogs in Geert **Lovink**'s 2007 "Global conversations" blog post from the floor of the 2007 conference on marginalised languages, which sheds insights, among other things, on the different takes by scholars from different disciplines on the problematic status of English as the dominant language of the coloniser. While the post-colonial perspective on language in cultural studies appears somewhat pessimistic, from the technology panel, instead, Lovink reports getting a sense of the revolutionary potential of the internet for 'marginalised languages'.²⁴ His final remarks on translation, code-switching, hybridity and multilingualism reflect his own stance on the strategies to be followed to make cultural and linguistic differences visible.

Geoff **Nunberg**'s "A Wiki's as good as a Nod", can be seen to address, albeit allusively and all too briefly, an important issue also relevant to technology and society, that of the quality of information found on the web in particular with respect to the collaborative open-authored Wikipedia. While acknowledging its usefulness as a first source of information, he reminds us of the project's intentional lack of a critical or engaged voice on issues and he hints in passing at the impersonality of Wikipedia's prose, and thus its consequently apparent unity of voice and its subservience to the grand illusion of the Enlightenment's encyclopaedic vision, of which however, there being no supporting unity of high culture, it ironically signals the end.

Review Essays and Reviews

We have also been careful to elicit and accept reviews of works related as far as possible to our central themes, thus providing, we hope, a thematically coherent issue and a volume with enhanced usefulness to readers with this specific interest.

Geert **Lovink**'s review essay "Weizenbaum and the Society of the Query", relevant especially to the technology and culture focus,

²⁴ This was an emerging theme which we invited him to further elaborate on in his talk given at the "Orientale" in 2008, published among the articles here in the technology and culture section mentioned earlier.

addresses and critiques the implications of search engines such as Google which ranks hits according to popularity, rather than ‘Truth’, in the flood of disinformation available on the Internet. Alongside, but with different conclusions from Weizenbaum’s, Lovink highlights the question of information management afforded by the new technologies, with an emphasis on the problem of discernment of quality or relevance of information. He suggests that even with the rise of Web 3.0 where search queries and results will not be ranked according to popularity or sponsorship, but on semantic principles, it is still the human brain which must do the thinking. Rather than calling for editorial, professorial or professional expert control of information on the web, one should work towards the rise of critical awareness and media literacy among users, who must learn to be able to pose the right query, to distinguish ‘rubbish’ from non-rubbish, and, essentially, gain the capacity to scrutinise and think critically.

In the far-reaching review essay by Chantal **Zabus**, “Paradigms Lost” of Christian Mair’s important volume *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizons in Postcolonial Cultural Studies*, the vexed question of the relationship between English and other languages, broached in the technology, textuality and culture section, is again centrally, and magisterially, addressed. Is the ‘English-is-dominant’ paradigm still relevant? Mair’s edited volume contains thirty-five selected articles from conference proceedings on new literatures and varieties of English, from which Zabus gains, and thus gives us, an insightful panoramic view of the various positions of scholars from linguistics to literary and cultural studies on the issue of the future status of English and other languages. Zabus identifies three categories of scholars: those who make bleak predictions on linguistic genocide by English, those who respond enthusiastically to the spread of English, and those who optimistically foresee a future of ‘global diglossia’. Each of these is “wrestling” with one of three types of irony: any attempt to subdue the global reach of English is done in English; many of the enthusiastic guarantors of English are themselves not always English; ‘expanding circle’ users of English still have to conform to the norms of ‘inner circle’ users.

The issue of what is happening to English, as well as its

relationship to, and its influence on other languages, *because of* technology, and/or because of its global use, is naturally also central among the **reviews** of seminal books in the field, David Crystal's *The Language Revolution* (by Linda Barone) and David Graddol's *English Next: Why Global English May Mean the End of English as a Foreign Language* (reviewed separately with slightly different takes, by Roy and Luisa Boardman and by Mikaela Cordisco).

The post-colonial cultural studies perspective, and the general question of language dominance, emerges again, as mentioned earlier, in Serena Guarracino's review of Paola Splendore's Italian translations of a collection of poems by the writer Sujata Bhatt (who moved from India to the U.S. early in life) and whose 'lost languages' nonetheless resurface in her English providing considerable challenges, among other things, for the cross-linguistic representation of cultural and linguistic hybridity and/or polyphony.

DeSanto's overview of EFL/ESL web resources, relevant, instead, to our technology *for* English focus, examines methodologically, and usefully categorises types of internet and web resources for language learners of English, selecting, listing and briefly describing sites and portals of enduring presence and proven usefulness among the many thousands available on the web.

Poetastery

The volume ends playfully with some (technology related) 'poetry': some 'poetastery' to generally adopt the term Geoff Nunberg uses for his own on his web page.

The menu is composed of two tasty compositions by **Nunberg** on some social implications of ICT, in his "Cookie Monsters", on our track-able 'clicking', and "We're becoming Unwired", on mobile technology trends/trendiness. These are followed by a collaborative, anonymous and, indeed, remixed, composition "Life before the Computer",²⁵ circulating, in different versions, in blogs

²⁵ The first author is unknown; an image of a printed poster or card with a presumably earlier shorter version sometimes still (in 2009) continues to be posted in blogs or in Facebook, while this or slightly shorter presumably adapted versions also continue to appear. The 'poem', seems to be the result of collective, collaborative

and forwarded emails in recent years, which ‘comments’ on how terms have taken on new meanings in computer terminology (thus also further illustrating one of the issues mentioned in Bruna Di Sabato’s paper). The menu ends – so as not to totally ignore a viral phenomenon now infecting many members of the web community more benignly, however, than spam itself – with “Spam Salad”, a selection of *spoems*, to give a little taste of what can be done *with* English *found* on the internet (and *is* done by an increasing number of enthusiasts), by ‘sampling’ spammed English. In spoems, spam subject lines, but occasionally spam message lines too, find a rather different use and collocation from their original purposes;²⁶ in them, indeed, modularity, recombination or remixability find an extreme textual realisation on the web, with more than a nod too to the pre-web cut up and collage, dada-ist, and found poetry traditions, as well as to that of haiku (in the less formally strict non-Japanese form now allowed).²⁷ ‘Poetry’ will out... with or without technology.

It is thus with pleasure that we present this issue, which we trust will be found enjoyable as well as a rich resource for readers interested in some of the many key ways of envisaging the interface between English and Technology, one which provides relevant and valuable insights and hints also for continuing attention to this (very) fast-moving field.²⁸ By a felicitous coincidence, positioned

composition by anonymous participants, who tweak or add to it, and then post or pass it on (or by others who appropriate and thus validate it before passing it on), thus re-enacting an ancient tradition of oral folklore.

²⁶ Rather like Balirano’s ‘diasporic humour’, indeed, they subvert or turn on its head arrogant hectoring or colonisation, by spammers of our email boxes in this case.

²⁷ Well-known spoetry sites, for example, are at www.spoems.com; www.spam.poetry.com; “Anthology of Spam Poetry” at <http://poemsmadefromspam.blogspot.com/>; for Haiku, see <http://www.toyomasu.com/haiku/>, and for the blending of spam with haiku, see <http://web.mit.edu/jync/www/spam/>, and also <http://heathspoetry.blogspot.com/2009/03/spam-haiku-spaiku.html>.

²⁸ Full advantage was taken productively of a pause in publishing *Anglistica* – caused by a mix of personal, bureaucratic and financial vicissitudes – delaying the publication of this issue, but also helping us realise it was time *Anglistica* should henceforth be published online. Our papers were thus continuously updated where appropriate by the authors and/or the present editor, and some additions made to our original collection to encompass further relevant emerging trends and phenomena. It is inevitable, however, that immediately after publishing a finished volume on new technologies, whether

as it is at the end of our printed era, our issue also heralds, to some degree, *Anglistica's* new online web one.

An enormous debt of gratitude must, before closing, be expressed to **Gianfranco Porcelli**, for his authoritative supervision during the earlier stages of selection and editing, and not least, for his generous moral support throughout. A special thanks must also go to 'Antonio' Di Dio, Mikaela Cordisco and to Serena Guarracino for their precious help at various stages of the editing process, and not least, to all our contributors for their trusting support and patience. Finally, we all wish to dedicate this issue to our dear friend and colleague **Maresa Sanniti di Baja**, who had helped sow the seeds of our joint project but died suddenly in late 2006 and was thus not able to see it finally bear fruit.

Jocelyne Vincent

online or in print, new developments or issues will have already emerged. Until the growth slows, if it ever does, we can only recommend keeping track of developments through posts on blogs and personal webpages where authors publish their pieces, even before these appear in edited web-based journals, not to mention before they finally appear in print.

ENGLISH
IN
TECHNOLOGY

Maria Silvia Attianese

Between Technology and Post-Purchase Publicity: The Translation of Instruction Manuals

Introduction

This article considers the translation of Instruction Manuals for home appliances between English and Italian. This text-type has long been disregarded by Translation Theory, and probably considered as a low-profile category that cannot bring any contribution to the discipline. The importance of Instruction Manuals is underestimated also by producers of appliances, thus the tendency to economise: automatic translation is frequently performed without a careful human revision, which often leads to bad manuals being published.

However, the writing and translation of these texts is a matter of crucial importance: first of all, some appliances can become dangerous if safety norms are not respected; secondly, there are legal issues at stake, because, if safety warnings and instructions are not clear, the producer might be sued for damages; thirdly, manuals can enable users to discover functions of the appliance they bought of which they were not aware, and if they are satisfied with their purchase they will probably choose the same brand again. To conclude, investing more attention and more money in this area, investing less in technology and more in people, would be a more sensible choice.

As this brief introduction already shows, what is interesting about Instruction Manuals is their hybridity: there is a tension between technical and advertising requirements. On the one hand, clarity and factual accuracy are fundamental. On the other hand, the continuing

need to sell the product and the brand poses interesting challenges to the translator, thus the importance of the Post-Purchase Publicity factor.

Between technical writing and post-purchase publicity

The first thing that defines technical writing is the subject matter, which, according to Isadore Pinchuk “is always technical”.¹ This claim is not unproblematic, as one can ask which actual texts can be considered technical: some scholars include all texts which use LSP vocabulary in this category;² some others say that technical writing only originates from the field of scientific and technological disciplines.³ For my purposes, I will take technical text to mean any text where terminology and subject matter originate from a technological discipline: Instruction Manual subject matter belongs to technical writing in any case.

As for the linguistic features of technical writing, the most striking is the frequency of technical terms.⁴ The great frequency of the passive voice is another crucial feature:⁵ it serves the purpose of keeping the style impersonal, by weakening or suppressing the agent. Another peculiarity is the nominalised style,⁶ which also helps to keep the style impersonal. Apart from impersonality, other stylistic features of technical writing should be “clarity, concision and correctness”.⁷ As for clarity and correctness, these might be

¹ Isadore Pinchuk, *Scientific and Technical Translation* (London: André Deutsch, 1977), 8.

² See Pinchuk, *Scientific and Technical Translation*. Also see Sue Ellen Wright and Leland D. Jr. Wright, eds., *Scientific and Technical Translation. American Translators Association Scholarly Monograph Series. Volume VI 1993*. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1993).

³ See Sandor Hervej et al., *Thinking Italian Translation. A course in Translation Method: Italian to English* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁴ In this paper, I will not concern myself with issues in terminology.

⁵ See Pinchuk, *Scientific and Technical Translation*. Also see Christopher Taylor, *Language to Language. A Practical and Theoretical Guide for Italian/English Translators* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶ See Taylor, *Language to Language*, Hervej, *Thinking Italian Translation*, and Pinchuk, *Scientific and Technical Translation*.

⁷ Mark Herman, “Technical Translation Style: Clarity, Concision, Correctness”, in Wright, *Scientific and Technical Translation*.

goals in theory, but they are not always achieved in practice; the third aim, concision, is achieved by language-specific means.

Another aspect that helps define technical writing is its purpose, which is “always a practical one....It is always a means and never an end in itself, as might be said of an aesthetic work”.⁸ Usually, the main purpose of a technical text is that of conveying information. In the specific case of Instruction Manuals, their main purpose is that of giving instructions to the users, warning them against the risk of dangers, not to forget the Post-Purchase Publicity element. Instruction Manuals are indisputably not only informative, but also appellative; as one can easily see, all of these purposes are practical.

As for technical translation, most of the scholarship in Translation Studies asserts that it is a mechanical process, since the translator only has to transfer meanings from one language to another, due to the referential quality of the language and the recurrent fixed phrases.⁹ Many scholars, though, find it difficult to agree with this widespread assumption. Recently, more attention seems to be given to technical translation as a problematic activity: international conferences on technical translation are being organised, and some scholars, such as those referred to in this paper, are studying issues in this area.

The approaches to the translation of the language of advertising are different. Some include it within non-literary (i.e. technical) translation;¹⁰ others think it belongs to literary translation, due to a creative use of language.¹¹

In which category, then, do we include Instruction Manuals,

⁸ Pinchuk, *Scientific and Technical Translation*, 18.

⁹ See Antoine Berman, “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign”, in Lawrence Venuti, ed., *Translation Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 276-289. See Antonella Gargano, “Traduzione Tecnica e Traduzione Letteraria”, *Lingua e Stile* 17.1 (January-March 1982): 79-89. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, “On the Different Methods of Translating”, in Venuti, *Translation Studies Reader*, 43-63. Also see Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, “A Methodology for Translation”, in Venuti, *Translation Studies Reader*, 128-137.

¹⁰ For example, see Berman, “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign”. Also see Pinchuk, *Scientific and Technical Translation*.

¹¹ For example, see Gargano, “Traduzione Tecnica”.

considering their hybridity? The readership of this text-type is the same non-specialised audience of advertising, and there is indeed the Post-Purchase Publicity factor; but publicity is not its primary function. Therefore, Instruction Manuals cannot fall within the category of advertising proper. Are Instruction Manuals, then, to be considered as technical writing proper? Instruction Manuals actually display many of the features of technical writing, but not all of them, and they do not have a specialised audience. An interesting solution is that of including Instruction Manuals, together with advertising, within the category of “consumer-oriented texts”.¹² Nevertheless, from my point of view, Instruction Manuals are a (sub) text-type of technical writing, using what Isadore Pinchuk calls “sales language”.¹³

It is clear that text-typology can provide guidance as to appropriate strategies for achieving translational equivalence, but there are limitations to this approach. The example of user manuals demonstrates that such typologies can never be infallible. Most attempts to characterise real-life texts will encounter problems, as most texts, even scientific articles, can be shown, upon closer study, to be hybrid: clear-cut categorisations are therefore impossible. In addition, some translational problems, both for linguistic and cultural reasons, are universal, as they are present in all text-types. I therefore agree with those scholars¹⁴ who study problems involved in translation in general, beyond text-types.

Linguistic features of English and Italian instruction manuals

This section features a detailed textual and translational analysis of a range of primary sources. First of all, I will analyse the features of Congratulatory Introductions; then, I will analyse warnings and instructions.

¹² Hervey, *Thinking Italian Translation*, 147.

¹³ Pinchuk, *Scientific and Technical Translation*, 170.

¹⁴ For example, Basil Hatim and Ian Mason, *Discourse and the translator* (New York: Longman, 1990).

Congratulatory introductions

Congratulatory introductions are aimed at welcoming the purchaser to the product. Their *skopos* is that of persuading purchasers that they “bought wisely and should do so again”.¹⁵ The Post-Purchase Publicity element becomes particularly evident in this section, and there are problems involved in translation, because a cultural transposition should take place, and often does.¹⁶

There are different patterns in the production of these texts in English and in Italian. In the case of Italian originals, the note to the reader is present in almost every single instance. It is very formal, and much longer than its counterpart in English originals. For example, let us look at the first few words from the Instruction Manual for *Vapori*, a steam cleaner by Ariete, an Italian firm.

Italian ST:

Gentile Signora,
 Nel ringraziarLa per la preferenza accordataci, ci congratuliamo con Lei per l'acquisto di VAPORÌ ARIETE

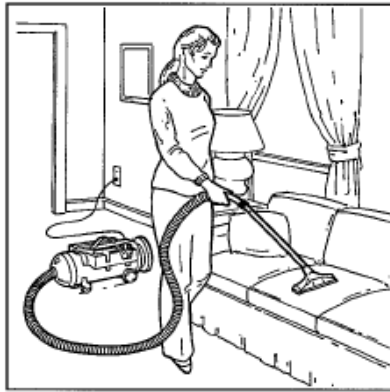
English TT:

Dear Madam,
 Thank you for having chosen our product and allow us to congratulate you for having purchased the ARIETE VAPORÌ

Both the Italian original and the English translation are structured as a letter, which addresses exclusively a woman. This address sounds old-fashioned, but it must be acknowledged that, in Italy, addressing women only when promoting cleansing products used to be common practice for a long time, more than in Anglo-Saxon countries. An English-speaking reader of this manual in the year 2000 must have felt quite offended by the overtly expressed chauvinistic view that only a woman will ever use a steam cleaner. However, this kind of assumption exists also in English-speaking countries, even though it is not overtly stated. It is not uncommon to see such pictures in an American manual:

¹⁵ Hervey, *Thinking Italian Translation*, 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-26.



This picture comes from the manual for a *Dirt-Devil* vacuum-cleaner, and it is the only drawing in the manual featuring a user, who is obviously a woman.

Despite the fact that a chauvinistic mindset appears therefore to be not so uncommon even in the USA, I would say that a literal translation of *Gentile Signora* into *Dear Madam* sounds odd. It would have been probably more politically correct, and therefore closer to Anglo-Saxon rhetorical strategies, to have modified the address, rendering it as *Dear Customer*, for example.

Another translation problem is the very formal way the Italian original addresses the reader. Not only does the ST display the use of the politeness form for addressing the reader (*lei*), but there is also the capitalisation of the “I” even in compounds (*Lei, ringraziarLa*). This denotes a high degree of formality. This aspect is not completely rendered in the TT. First of all, English does not have such a politeness form; secondly, formality is not conveyed by any other textual means even if there are indeed formal expressions (such as *allow us to congratulate you*). The translator probably thought that too high a degree of formality would be considered inappropriate in such a text in the target culture. In conclusion, this apparent register mismatch between source and target text, whether or not is a deliberate decision of the translator, contributes to the success of the translation because it goes toward the readers’ expectation.

* * * * *

Let us see now what rhetorical strategies of congratulatory notes appear in English STs, and how these are translated into Italian. English notes to the reader, when they are present, are very concise and usually quite informal. As a case study, let us analyse the first paragraph from the preface of the original English manual of a *Whirlpool* microwave oven, and its translation into Italian.

English ST:

A Note to You

Thank you for buying a Whirlpool appliance. Because your life is getting busier and more complicated, WHIRLPOOL appliances are easy to use, save time, and help you manage your home better.

Italian TT:

Una Nota per Voi

Grazie per aver acquistato un apparecchio WHIRLPOOL! Questo apparecchio è dotato di tutto ciò che vi attendete da un apparecchio di qualità superiore, oltre ad uno stile distintivo e dettagli ponderati che contribuiranno all'aspetto complessivo della vostra casa e alla vostra soddisfazione.

The first problem encountered by the translator is how to translate the English pronoun *you*. Is it a plural or a singular? And if it is a singular, will the translator use the informal *tu* or the formal *Lei*? In the TT, *you* has been translated as a second person plural pronoun, *voi*. This way, the translator avoids having to make a decision on the formality of his/her address to the target reader. The plural *voi* allows the translator to get out of the impasse.¹⁷

The TT is very different from the ST. In the English version the paragraph says that the aim of the producers is to help the addressees making their hectic lives easier. This paragraph is completely missing in the Italian version, which, instead, contains considerations on the stylishness of the appliance. Consequently, the Italian TT does not look like a translation proper, but it can be considered successful: the English-speaking audience probably values that emphasis is put more on the practical advantages

¹⁷ It must be noted that the pronoun 'Voi' is still used as a formal way to address a singular person, in some regions in the south of Italy.

of having bought a new microwave, while the Italian audience probably prefers a praise of the beautiful design of the appliance. These textual differences might be built on cultural stereotypes, then again, these are supposedly the same kind of considerations that the advertising industry makes. The case in point is exemplary, showing that even in translation of Instruction Manuals, attention should be, and is given to the aspect of cultural transposition.

Warnings and instructions

As we have seen in the previous section, the Post-Purchase Publicity element is very important in Instruction Manuals. Nevertheless, such texts display features of technical writing: the subject matter is, indeed, technical, and there is more technical vocabulary than in unmarked language use. Warnings and instructions are those sections of an Instruction Manual where the technical aspect is more evident. Warnings are usually general, and do not necessarily refer to one appliance in particular: basically, there is a list of precautions and recommendations for safety. Instructions are the core of an Instruction Manual: in this part, a description of the functions of the specific appliance and an explanation of how to operate it are provided.

According to most translation scholars, translating warnings and instructions should be entirely unproblematic: a translator should be merely transposing meanings from one language to another on a one-to-one basis. In the following sections, I will prove that this is not true, by analysing linguistic features specific to Instruction Manuals, comparing English and Italian versions.

Nominalization and lexical density

One of the main characteristics of technical writing is the frequency of nominalization, which contributes to a lexical density that can make this style seem too complex for the layman. This is true both of technical English and of technical Italian, in general. Our question here is whether such a feature is also present in Instruction Manuals, given the non-specialized readership.

Patterns of nominalization are seldom found in Instruction manuals: the phenomenon is relatively small if compared to formal technical writing (think of scientific articles). This is probably due to

the fact that, in most cases, both warnings and instructions are based on the use of imperative verbs, above all in English; nominalization, instead, requires the weakening of the semantic role of the verb in the clause, which becomes only a grammatical means to link the noun phrases.¹⁸

Some examples of nominalisation can still be found, but not more than in unmarked language use, at least in English. In fact, English Instruction Manuals tend to display less nominalisation than Italian ones: this becomes evident in translations from English into Italian. Let us see some examples coming from the Instruction Manual of a dishwasher by *Whirlpool*.

English ST: Cleaning the filters
Italian TT: Pulizia dei filtri

What was a verb (*cleaning*) in the English ST, becomes a noun (*pulizia*) in the Italian TT. This happens very often when titles of sections are translated from English into Italian, but not only.

English ST: The filter unit must be correctly assembled to ensure good wash results.
Italian TT: Il corretto inserimento dei filtri è importante per l'ottenimento di buoni risultati di lavaggio.

As these examples show, English Instruction Manuals tend not to use a lot of nominalisation, while Italian IMs tend to nominalise more. So the English is less technical than the Italian, and also less formal.

Addressing the reader: deviation from norms

The Congratulatory Note is not the only section of Instruction Manuals where the reader is directly addressed: second-person pronouns and possessive adjectives and imperative forms are particularly abundant in warnings and instructions.

In some cases, the typical features of the congratulatory note are even spread throughout the whole manual. As an example, I will use a passage from the manual for a hair straightener from Revlon:

¹⁸ Taylor, *Language to Language*, 122.

English ST

The straightener ... is ideal for sleek, straight looks and can also be used to create bobs, flick-ups or tame unruly fringes. The smoothing comb or the Hi-shine attachment slide easily onto the upper heating plate. Use the detangling comb for straightening and smoothing down the hair in the perfect direction and use the Hi-shine attachment for even greater shine.

Italian TT

La piastra stiracapelli ... è l'apparecchio ideale per creare acconciature lisce e brillanti, per dirigere le punte verso l'esterno o, inoltre, per domare le ciocche ribelli. Il pettine lisciante o il pettine lucidante scivolano semplicemente sulla piastrina riscaldante superiore, negli alloggiamenti appositamente previsti. Utilizzare il pettine lisciante per stirare i ricci e dirigere i capelli nel senso desiderato; utilizzare il pettine lucidante per conferire ancora più brillantezza.

It is obvious that the detachment and impersonality that all scholars attribute to technical writing in general, and Instruction Manuals in particular, is not present in this case. It does not sound different from an advertisement, either in the English original or in the Italian translation. Expressions such as *is ideal for...*; *smoothing down the hair in the perfect direction*; *tame unruly fringes*; *for even greater shine*, seem to be taken directly from the language of advertising.

The reader is directly addressed by using a second-person possessive adjective (*your hair*) and imperative forms (*use the attachment*) in the English original. In the Italian translation, the address to the reader is less evident. First of all, in Italian it is not compulsory to use a possessive adjective before body parts (it would be a marked choice); secondly, the imperative form was translated with the infinitive form (*utilizzare*; instead of *utilizza*, *utilizzi* or *utilizzate*). This seems to be the rule in Italian instructions: direct imperative forms are rarely found in Italian Instruction Manuals.

The lack of direct pronouns and adjectives addressing or referring to the reader in Italian is due to the fact that Italian has more linguistic means to avoid the use of such forms: for example, it is not compulsory to fill the subject position in the syntactic structure. Sometimes, though, it becomes evident that keeping the structure impersonal is a marked choice in Italian. The Italian tends to be more formal and impersonal than the English, and it tends to

avoid a direct address to the reader in the operating instructions, if not necessary, by choosing impersonal constructions or passive forms, instead. This seems to be a regular pattern in translation from English into Italian, as we can see in this example from the instructions for Philips *Citrus Press*:

English ST: Store the excess cable

Italian TT: Si può avvolgere il cavo in eccesso.

The deletion of the imperative form is also important here. In fact, it is clear when comparing English and Italian Instruction Manuals that one deviates from the norms of ordinary language. English Instruction Manuals often use more imperatives than their Italian counterparts; but it is a well-known fact that in an unmarked use of language, English avoids direct imperatives much more than Italian, for the sake of politeness.

A similar marked choice seems to be taking place regarding the use of modals. In an unmarked use of language, English tends to control the use of modals for politeness, avoiding, if possible, forms such as *must*, depending on the context. Let us see one example that shows how English is more categorical than Italian as regards the use of modals. From the instruction manual for a Gaggia coffee maker:

Italian ST: È consigliabile seguire le istruzioni.

English TT: Instructions must always be followed.

There is a particular use of imperatives and modals in English Instruction Manuals. A stronger use of modals and the abundance of imperatives in English are a marked choice: this is a stylistic feature of English Instruction Manuals.

As for the purpose of the texts, in warnings and instructions it is mainly that of being as clear and unambiguous as possible, so that the reader can easily understand them. From my point of view, even if the English of warnings and instructions sounds stronger and the Italian milder, the *skopos* of the text is achieved in both versions. What changes is the way the information is presented, and this depends on the different readers' expectations. Therefore, this

is one of the instances where being faithful to the ST might not be the translator's task.

Thematic structure

Thematic structure is usually very important in technical writing. As warnings and instructions are usually lists of short sentences, consequently one might object that thematic structure is not fundamental in user manuals. This is simply not true, because regular patterns are followed, and writers and translators consider how their readers "mentally process information"¹⁹ and consequently structure the text.

Christopher Taylor also analyses the thematic structure of an Operating Manual for a Philips television set (translated from English into Italian), and he maintains that this is linked to readers' expectations. He concludes that English and Italian differ in the way they like to have information presented. For example, while English prefers to thematise the subject of the clause, Italian apparently tends to thematise locative and temporal complements and/or subordinate clauses.

English ST: Programme 1 appears in the window

Italian TT: Nella scala appare il programma numero 1.²⁰

As Christopher Taylor comments:

English thematises the logical subject [regularly] in order to create a pattern of syntactic equivalence which also puts the information focus on the places to look for. This arrangement would be less effective in Italian [...] Italian [...] prefers to set the scene in theme position and put the focus on the subject; placing the subject to the right of the verb is an extremely common syntactic option, particularly in written Italian.²¹

In other words, in the English original, the new information appears before the given information. In the Italian translation, the locative, which is also the given information, is thematised, while the rheme

¹⁹ Ibid., 247.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

coincides with new information. Nevertheless, it is also true that a verb-subject word order, such as the one in the first example of this paragraph, is common in Italian, and not a marked choice. A literal equivalent in English would, however, be ungrammatical.

Another example shows how Italian tends to thematise not only locatives, but also temporal expressions. From the instructions for Philips *Citrus Press*, *again*:

English ST: Check if the voltage indicated on the base of citrus press corresponds to the mains voltage in your home before you connect the appliance

Italian TT: Prima di collegare l'apparecchio controllare che la tensione indicata sulla base dell'apparecchio corrisponda a quello della rete locale.

The temporal subordinate clause, which constitutes given information, comes before the instruction, and the actual time sequence is respected. This characteristic is regularly found in Instructions. This regular patterning shows how Italian texts are more reader-oriented than English ones.²²

Quantity of information and degrees of explicitness

In this section, the quantity of information and the degrees of explicitness in warnings and instructions will be analysed, by using Grice's conversational 'Maxim of Quantity'. As summarised by Hatim and Mason, the 'Maxim of Quantity' says: "make your contribution as informative as (but not more informative than) is required".²³ When reading manuals, in fact, instances are very often found where this maxim seems to be flouted.

In many instances, there is redundancy of information: utterances are more informative than is required, therefore the 'Maxim of Quantity' is flouted. For example, it is extremely common to read sentences such as "extract the plug from the wall socket", where the simple verb "unplug" could have been used. Sometimes, this redundancy is present in the ST and is then deleted in the TT; in

²² Heidrun Gerzymisch-Arbogast, "Contrastive Scientific and Technical Register as a Translation Problem", in Wright, *Scientific and Technical Translation*, 21-51.

²³ Basil Hatim and Ian Mason, *Discourse and the Translator*, 60.

other cases it is kept in translation. Redundancy is found both in English and Italian STs, and reduction strategies are carried out as frequently in English TTs as in Italian TTs. Ultimately, no conclusion can be drawn from these findings. One could, however, venture the hypothesis that the flouting is to implicate that the extra information is to invite extra care.

In some instances, differences appear between ST and TT regarding the quantity of information provided. In these cases, something is taken for granted in the ST and therefore it is left implicit; that same information, though, is not considered self-evident in the target language, and is therefore made explicit in the TT. In order to do that, translators add information, and use techniques of expansion. As an example, let us see one example from the Instruction Manual for a refrigerator by the Italian firm? Ariston. Next to a warning icon:

English ST: Indicates the possibility of danger of death or other serious injury.

Italian TT: Questo simbolo indica che in caso di mancata osservanza delle relative avvertenze l'utente può riportare gravi lesioni personali

The English original evidently takes for granted that the sentence is an explanation of the meaning of the symbol represented next to it; furthermore, it takes for granted the information that the possibility of danger derives from failure to follow the instructions. The Italian translation makes the implicit subject explicit (*Questo simbolo indica...*); it also overtly states that the danger of injuries would derive from failure to follow the warnings, and that the the person who would be in danger is the user.²⁴

Techniques of expansion are regularly used; it seems to be a common practice particularly in translation of instruction manuals from English into Italian. The reason why translators into Italian make implicit information explicit in their TTs is, probably, clarity. A literal translation of the ST is probably taken into consideration

²⁴ Interestingly, death is mentioned in the ST but deleted in the TT: this could derive from cultural differences between English-speaking countries and Italy, but it is impossible to generalise based on only one example.

and then discarded in favour of a more informative version. Since the *skopos* of these warnings is that readers understand what is dangerous for themselves, expansion, deletion of redundancy and explicitation are legitimate, if used in order to contribute to the clarity of the text.

Nevertheless, the English warnings are very concise, but still quite clear and informative enough. My point of view is that neither the English STs nor the Italian TTs actually flout Grice's 'Maxim of Quantity': both texts are equally informative, and the difference lies in the fact that Italian texts are more reader-oriented.²⁵

Machine translation of instruction manuals

In this section, in order to demonstrate that translating of Instruction Manuals is not an easy, mechanical operation, automatic translation will be examined: machine-translated texts not revised by humans are analysed, showing how the software is still producing unsatisfying results. First of all, I will analyse examples from manuals that were actually published; then I will make a little experiment using Google Language Tools.

Existing manuals

The examples in this section come from the Instruction Manual for a DVD player by Sinudyne. The English version is evidently the ST, and the Italian version is clearly a translation from the English.²⁶ The Italian TT on the whole is bizarre; in addition, some passages are not understandable at all, even making the biggest exegetic effort. I would like to start off by mentioning one of the titles of the sections:

English ST: Compatible disc types

Italian TT: Compatibile disco tipo

²⁵ Gerzymisch-Arbogast, "Contrastive Scientific and Technical Register".

²⁶ It is not clear whether the English is the original, or if it is itself a translation from another language; in any case, this is not relevant to our discussion.

This is evidently a word-for-word translation, not carried out by a human translator. To start with, a plural (*types*) was translated as a singular (*tipo*). Then, in English, the adjective *compatible* refers to the noun *types*; in the Italian translation, it is not clear to which noun the adjective refers to, as the noun *types* has been mistranslated as a singular, and *disco* is masculine singular, too. Since in Italian adjectives can be used in a flexible way, either preceding or following what they refer to, in this instance the adjective *compatibile*, would seem to refer to the word *disco* while it actually refers to *tipo*. Last but not least, the word *disc* is clearly defining the following *type*: *disc type* is a noun string in English, and it needs to be unravelled in Italian by creating a prepositional phrase, such as *tipi di disco*. A possible translation into Italian would be: *Tipi di disco compatibili*.

The situation worsens when complex sentences, containing technical vocabulary and subordinate clauses, are machine-translated. The following sentence is exemplary:

English ST: Press PAUSE/STEP button in pause mode, each press moves one frame forward

Italian TT: Preme il tasto pause/step nel modo di pausa la pittura avanti un passo alla pressa.

Let us start by examining how verbs have been translated from English into Italian. The English imperative *press* was translated as a simple present tense verb conjugated in third person singular, *preme*. Of course, the subject of this verb cannot be traced. The main meaning of this sentence is therefore destroyed. The English *moves*, which is a simple present tense verb conjugated in the third person singular, has been translated into Italian as a noun, *passo*. The most striking thing is that not only did the software not recognise the grammatical category of the word, but also it did not translate it as a plural. In fact, if *moves* is intended as a noun, then the suffix *-s* should be intended as a plural; in the Italian translation, however, it has been rendered as a singular, *passo*.

The word *each* has also been mistranslated as a preposition *a* with a definite article agreeing with the following feminine noun morphologically attached to it, *alla*. It is striking that *each* is not included in the software's dictionary.

There are also a lot of mistakes in terminology, but this is not the focus of this study.

As a result of all these misinterpretations, the TT sentence does not mean anything in Italian. This is due to the fact that the whole sentence needs to be rephrased. A possible translation could be: Ogni volta che si preme il tasto l'immagine avanza di un fotogramma.

The examples examined in this section are only some of the manifold instances of ungrammatical and incomprehensible sentences that can be found in all manuals translated using the same procedure. It is evident that the software used by these firms does not perform even very simple linguistic operations that are easy for humans. Furthermore, it is not able to perform complex rephrasing of sentences when necessary.

A little experiment: Italian into English

The following text is an extract from the manual for a coffee machine by Gaggia. It is the original Italian manual.

Preparazione della macchina da caffè Espresso:

1. Togliere il serbatoio dell'acqua e riempirlo con acqua fredda.
IMPORTANTE: Una volta reinserito il serbatoio, assicurarsi che i tubi in silicone siano all'interno del serbatoio. Controllare che non sia né attorcigliato né bloccato.
2. Inserire la spina in una presa adeguata

What follows is the automatic translation into English of the previous passage. Google Language Tools²⁷ have been used.

Preparation of the Express coffee maker:

1. To remove the tank of the water and to fill up it with cold water.
IMPORTANT: Once reinserito the tank, to make sure that the tubes in silicone are to the inside of the tank. To control that neither it is not coiled neither blocked.
2. To insert the thorn in one taken adapted

²⁷ This has been rated the best automatic translator, at least as far as Chinese-English and Arabic-English translations are concerned. See Kanellos, Michael, *Google Dominates in Machine Translation Tests*, CNETNews.com 22nd August 2005 (http://news.com.com/Google+dominates+in+machine+translation+tests/2100-1038_3-5841819.html).

Let us start by seeing how the verbs were translated into English. First of all, all Italian infinitive forms are in fact imperative forms, and should be translated as such. Nevertheless, they have all been translated as infinitive forms with *to*, thus demolishing the main meaning of the text.

The software also has difficulties with prepositions. For example, it is not able to use phrasal verbs correctly. The phrase *fill up it* is ungrammatical, as the object should have been inserted between the verb and the particle (*fill it up*).

Noun and prepositional phrases also seem to be a problem for the software. The expression *serbatoio dell'acqua* has been translated as *tank of the water*, instead of *water tank*: the software did not reproduce an English noun string. The same observation applies for *silicon pipes* which was rendered as *tubes in silicon*.

Another area where the software fails is that of compounds. For example the word *reinserito* (literally *re-inserted*), was not translated at all. If one has the word *inserito* translated by the same software, though, the correct translation *inserted* results. Therefore, one can conclude that the reason why the word was not translated is that there is a prefix *re-* morphologically attached, but that the software probably treats compounds as lexemes, and the word was not included in the dictionary.

The software also fails in assessing the grammatical category of words. For example, *una presa adatta* was translated as *one taken adapted*. The indefinite article *una* was translated as a numeral *one* instead of an indefinite article *a*. The noun *presa* was misinterpreted as the past participle of the verb *prendere* in its feminine form, and was therefore translated as *taken*. In addition, the adjective *adatta* was mistranslated as *adapted*. As a result, the whole sentence is incomprehensible in English.

Complicated constructions, such as neither-nor constructions, are also a mystery for this software, which translated the Italian construction word-by-word: *neither it is not coiled neither blocked*, instead of using the correct construction *neither... nor ...*

A little experiment: English into Italian

The following text is the published translation of the original Italian passage in the previous paragraph.

Preparation:

1. Remove the water tank and fill with cold water.

IMPORTANT: Once the tank has been reinserted, ensure that the silicon pipes are inside the actual tank and not tangled or blocked.

2. Insert plug into a suitable wall outlet .

What follows is the machine translation of the previous passage into Italian.²⁸

Preparazione:

1. Rimuova il serbatoio di acqua e riempiasi di acqua fredda.

IMPORTANTE: Una volta che il serbatoio è stato reinserto, accertisi che i tubi del silicone siano all'interno del serbatoio reale e non aggrovigliato o ostruito.

2. Inserisca la spina in una presa di parete adatta.

First of all, it is striking that the software actually recognised the imperative forms and translated them as imperatives in Italian. It is even more noticeable that the politeness form *lei* has been used, by conjugating the verb in third person singular, and by morphologically attaching the reflexive particle *si* to the verb for when necessary. An example is the words *riempiasi*. The effect is that of extreme formality, as when reflexives are morphologically attached to imperatives as a prefix, this denotes a high register. These forms can be unravelled (*si riempia*) for a more fluent and clear discourse. Anyway, the default choice for a human translator is the infinitive form (*rimuovere*).

Another recurrent mistake is wrong gender and number agreement. Sometimes the software does not understand which noun an adjective refers to. For example,

che i tubi siano all'interno del serbatoio e non aggrovigliato o ostruito

In the Italian automatic translation the adjectives *tangled* and *blocked* refer grammatically to the tank (masculine singular) and not to the pipes (masculine plural) as they should.

²⁸ I used the same software as in the previous section.

There are also recurrent mistakes in the use of prepositions, as all noun strings were unravelled in Italian as genitive construction with the preposition *di*, even when other prepositions were needed. For example, *silicon pipes* are not *tubi del silicone* but *tubi in silicone*.

Conclusions

The tendency to underestimate difficulties involved in translating Instruction Manuals probably derives from the very common assumption that technical translation, including translation of Instruction Manuals, is an easy, mechanical operation, because the language is deictic, and because there are a lot of fixed phrases; that is why technical texts are considered particularly suitable for machine translation.

Even though some of these considerations are true (the language is referential; there are indeed a lot of fixed phrases), this does not automatically lead to the conclusion that translating Instruction Manuals is unproblematic and can thus be dealt with by automatons. In this article, we saw how the translation of Instruction Manuals is not as easy as it seems, even between two European languages like English and Italian. The Post-Purchase Publicity element involves a cultural transposition in order to meet readers' expectations: sometimes even the content is manipulated, in order to choose arguments or topics that are more appealing to a given target audience. Even instructions and warnings can be modified in translation to meet the expectations of the target audience. This study also focussed on detecting distinctive linguistic features of Instruction Manuals. Apart from the micro- structural disjunctures we have seen, with regard to our specific language pair, also when exploring issues in politeness, this study showed how Italian texts are longer and more formal than the English, due to the use of politeness forms; English versions are concise and direct. In Italian, fewer imperative forms are used and milder modal verbs are chosen. By examining the thematic structure of warnings and instructions, it became clear that Italian texts are also more reader-oriented than the English, as given information tends to be thematised. These findings are confirmed by considering the quantity of information given: Italian translations tend to show a tendency towards

expansion. Italian texts also seem to be more technical, meaning that the patterns of technical language (i.e. nominalisation, impersonal constructions, passive forms) are more present in Italian than they are in English.

For all of these reasons, automatic translation of Instruction Manuals does not yet produce satisfying results. Further research in the area might produce better softwares in the future, perhaps specialised in translating this specific text-type: at any rate, in these text types too, a human revision is needed if one wants to produce an acceptable TT.

Mikaela Cordisco

“Blogspeak”: ‘blogal’ English in the ‘global’ village

Blogs form tight social networks consisting of varying degrees of community that have an outlet, a portal which allows for the entrance or exit of community members. A ‘community’, as defined by Milroy,¹ is a group that is cohesive and to which people consciously feel they belong. Linguistically, this sense of cohesiveness can be examined from many different perspectives in the blogging environment, depending on the dynamics of the group being observed. Within this environment, a kind of language which rationalises the human need to communicate within the constraints of the medium has developed, as we will illustrate in this paper.

What’s in a blog

a) technically

‘Weblogs’² or ‘blogs’ are a form of on-line personal publishing, an extension of a homepage, only formatted differently.³ While

¹ Lesley Milroy, *Language and Social Networks*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987), 14.

² Portmanteau of ‘web’ and ‘log’. From an enquiry on the Web (<http://spellweb.com/>, November 4, 2007) on the most used form between the two, ‘blog’ is more popular (708,000,000 votes vs. 75,700,000 votes for ‘weblog’). The term blog was selected by US dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster as their word of the year 2004: the word whose definition was most requested.

³ For an in-depth study of blogs see Cameron Barrett, *Anatomy of a Weblog* (<http://www.camworld.com/archives/001177.html>, 1999); Rebecca Blood, *The Weblog Handbook. Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog* (Cambridge: Perseus Publishing, 2002); Rebecca Blood et al., *We’ve Got Blog. How Weblogs Are*

homepages are places where people put pictures and static, non interactive descriptions, weblogs are *dynamic* webpages, updated on a regular basis, and are half commentary and half journal, allowing individuals to express their views and stimulate critical thinking among their readers via diary-like entries and comments, and hosts of embedded links to various sources of information.⁴ Blogs participate in what has come to be known as the Web 2 era.⁵

Various tools (web-based personal publishing systems designed to ease maintenance of regularly updated news or journal sites) are available that make uploading blogs much easier and faster without needing to input basic HTML codes or independently maintain links to a webserver. While it is possible to create a blog as we create other webpages (using an editor, like Dreamweaver®, or entering the markup by hand), it is far more common for bloggers to use pre-built software or Web services, such as Blogger (<http://blogger.com>), LiveJournal (<http://livejournal.com>), MoveableType (<http://sixapart.com>), WordPress (<http://wordpress.org>), and a growing number of others (e.g. <http://www.blogspot.com>; <http://home.services.spaces.live.com/>).

Nearly all weblogs are formatted with a main area of content, a list of entries (‘posts’) in reverse chronological order, and one or two sidebars with links to other blogs/websites of related interest to the author (‘blogger’). Bloggers who wish to receive feedback

Changing Our Culture (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002); Ted Demopoulos, *What No One Ever Tells You About Blogging and Podcasting: Real-Life Advice from 101 People Who Successfully Leverage the Power of the Blogosphere* (New York: Kaplan Business, 2006); Geoffrey Nunberg, “Blogging in the Global Lunchroom”, commentary broadcast on *Fresh Air*, April 20, 2004; Bob Walsh, *Clear Blogging: How People Blogging Are Changing the World and How You Can Join Them* (New York: Apress, 2007); Dave Winer, *The History of Weblogs* (<http://newhome.weblogs.com/historyOfWeblogs>, 2002).

⁴ There are many different kinds of weblogs ranging from personal online journals to sites that track news on specific topics. With increasing use of audio and video technology there are now sub-genres such as photoblogs.

⁵ Web 2.0 refers to a perceived second generation of web-based communities and hosted services - such as social-networking sites, wikis and folksonomies - which aim to facilitate collaboration and sharing between users. Although the term suggests a new version of the World Wide Web, it does not refer to an update to any technical specifications, but to changes in the ways software developers and end-users use the Internet (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2).

from the audience embed social software in their weblogs by adding discussion forums, posting boards, or a guest book.

b) socially

Blogs are more private and personal than traditional journalism but more public than diaries (the author knows that what s/he writes will be read). They are simultaneously a self-reflecting journal/diary and an open-ended invitation for conversation; they provide a tool for expression and are, moreover, an information resource. When such information is published for public viewing, it encourages involvement, communication, networking, promotes self-marketing while at the same time it opens our thoughts to confrontation and to criticism. Many weblogs are densely interconnected; bloggers read others' blogs, link to them, quote them in their own writing, and post comments on each others' blogs. As a result, interrelated blogs have developed their own culture.

The environment in which bloggers act and interact has been labelled as 'blogosphere' (also called 'BlogSphere' or 'BloggingSphere').⁶ It has been defined in various ways, from William Quirk's first use of the term to refer to the "intellectual cyberspace" inhabited by bloggers,⁷ to its subsequent meanings as a community or social network and to a collective term encompassing all weblogs.⁸

Because of the closeness of blogging networks, varieties of language can be identified or even standardised, further strengthening a sense of group identity: densely-knit communities have the conscious or unconscious power to enforce linguistic norms and these norms spread through hyperlinks with the same effect that an echo chamber produces.

English and the web(log)

Over the past twenty years, the Internet has radically transformed the way people communicate, both locally and globally (and

⁶From Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blogosphere> (retrieved 30 October 2007).

⁷At http://www.iw3p.com/DailyPundit/2001_12_30_dailypundit_archive.php#8315120.

⁸ See <http://www.samizdata.net>.

‘glocally’!). The remarkable growth of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) has given rise to new forms of discourse on the Web, and the overwhelming majority of natural language appearing on the Internet is written in English,⁹ although this is perhaps set to change.¹⁰

Most CMC currently in use is *text-based*, that is, messages are typed on a computer keyboard and read as text on a computer screen, yet CMC cannot be treated as a single genre: Yates and Graddol examined a number of different types of CMC and showed that they were all distinct forms of communication.¹¹ In fact, text-based CMC takes a variety of forms whose linguistic properties vary depending on the kind of messaging system used and the social and cultural context embedding particular instances of use.¹² We can thus consider CMC as a cover term encompassing a range of options:¹³ at the left end is writing that resembles traditionally composed texts (i.e. ‘Wikipedia’),¹⁴ at the other end the audio and video means of

⁹ It has been defined ‘English Internetese’ (See Maria Grazia Guido, “B S U R, B :)! U C? I M :) 2! TT4N {{}}. AFK”: A Reassessment of the Principle of Economy in the Pragmatic Use of Syllabic Notations, Acronyms and Emoticons in English-Internetese Discourse”, in Giovanni Iamartino et al., eds., *The Economy Principle in English: Linguistic, Literary and Cultural Perspectives - Proceedings of the 19th Conference of the Associazione Italiana di Anglistica* (Milan, September 21-23, 1999) (Milano: Unicopli, 2002), 187-203.

¹⁰ See Geoffrey Nunberg, “The Whole World Wired”, *Anglistica New Series* 3.1 (1999), 229-231 and Geoffrey Nunberg, “Will the Internet Always Speak English?”, *The American Prospect* 11.10 (March 27–April 2000).

¹¹ Simeon Yates and David Graddol, “‘I read this chat is heavy’: The Discursive Construction of Identity in CMC” (paper presented at the 5th International Pragmatics Conference, Mexico City, July 8, 1996).

¹² See Susan C. Herring, “Computer-Mediated Discourse”, in D. Tannen, D. Schiffrin, and H. Hamilton, eds., *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001; also available at <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~redeker/herring.pdf>).

¹³ To the traditional forms of CMC such as *emails* (one-to-one or one-to-many, asynchronous, written); *Instant Messaging* and *Internet Relay Chat* (one-to-one or one-to-many, synchronous, written and oral); *Forums*, *Newsgroups*, *Listservs*, *Mailing lists*, *Distribution lists* and *Bulletin Board Systems* (one-to-many, asynchronous, written); MUDs (Multi-User Dimensions) and *MOOs* (Object-Oriented MUDs) (multiple players, synchronous, written), we can now add *weblogs* (one-to-many, asynchronous, written); *podcasting* (one-to-many, asynchronous, oral) and *wikies* (many-to-many, asynchronous, written).

¹⁴ For a more in-depth study of Wikipedia see Elia, “Online Encyclopedi@s: The

communication adopted recently (i.e. 'podcasting',¹⁵ 'YouTube',¹⁶ VoIP).¹⁷ As we move to the right of the spectrum, we notice an adjustment of the written medium as a result of its formulation for Internet transmission (i.e. 'MSN Messenger', 'Skype').¹⁸ This adaptation involves fluidity and anonymity: the farther to the right of the spectrum we move, the greater the fluidity of the CMC message and the more blurred the identity of participants.¹⁹

The Internet is a global system but essentially developed as an English-based network:

At present 90% of Internet hosts are based in English-speaking countries. It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of Web sites are based in English and that those users based in other countries and who normally work in other languages, find they have to communicate with others in the cyberspace community through the medium of English.²⁰

English is widely regarded as having become the global language.²¹ Apart from being the most widely spoken language around the world,²² the most used language on the Web (English is

Case of Wikipedia and WikiSpeak", this volume, 103-104.

¹⁵ 'Podcasting' is a form of audio blogging created in 2004 by Adam Curry, a former MTV Host, and Dave Winer, the founder of Userland Software. Its name comes from the targeting of audio posts to Apples iPod audio player, although podcasts can be listened to on competing players and on computers. Its evolution has generated 'vodcasting', a term used for the online delivery of video on demand.

¹⁶ 'YouTube' (<http://www.youtube.com>) is a popular free video sharing website which lets users upload, view, and share video clips (from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YouTube>).

¹⁷ VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) is the transmission of voice traffic over IP-based networks.

¹⁸ Skype is a software which allows users to make telephone calls from their computer to other Skype users free of charge, or to landlines and cell phones for 0020a fee. Additional features include instant messaging, file transfer, short message service, video conferencing and its ability to circumvent firewalls.

¹⁹ See Naomi S. Baron, "Language of the Internet" (henceforth *Internet*), in Ali Farghali, ed., *The Stanford Handbook for Language Engineers* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2003), 59-127.

²⁰ David Graddol, *The Future of English* (henceforth *Future*) (London: The British Council, 1998), 61.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²² Cfr. David Crystal, *Language and the Internet* (henceforth *Language*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; 2nd ed. 2006); Graddol, *Future*.

said to have accounted for 80% of computer-based communication in the 1990s,²³ and in a 1997 survey on the Language distribution on the Web the presence of English was 82,3%),²⁴ it is also widely employed in blogs.²⁵ Internet, more than a global village can thus now be considered a 'blogal' village: the number of registered blogs is very high and destined to increase even more. Of the 655.631 weblogs indexed by the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education (NITL) BlogCensus in 2003,²⁶ the overwhelming majority were published in the English language, as shown in the table below.²⁷

Top Blogging Languages June 2003	
Language	Count
English	350097
Portuguese	54496
Polish	42677
Farsi	27002
French	10381
Spanish	9509
German	7736
Italian	7017
Dutch	3684
Icelandic	3542

Three years later, in 2006, the situation was even more marked: of the 2.869.632 sites in the survey thought to be weblogs, 1.970.366 were written in English.²⁸ Yet a more recent report (April 2007) by the open source search engine Technorati has shown some unexpected

²³ Graddol, *Future*.

²⁴ See Crystal, *Language*, 217.

²⁵ Also because the phenomenon arose in the US, spreading then to Canada and Australia, all English-speaking countries.

²⁶ The NITL weblog census (<http://www.blogcensus.net/>) is an attempt to find as many active weblogs as possible, across all languages.

²⁷ In Robyn Greenspan, *Blogging by the Numbers* (<http://www.internetnews.com/stats/article.php/2238831>, 2003; retrieved 30 October 2007).

²⁸ At <http://www.blogcensus.net>, March 18, 2006.

results.²⁹ Analysing the trends around blogs and blogging,³⁰ it has reported something that may come as a surprise (at least to the English-speaking world) but does not have to be misinterpreted: in terms of blog posts by language, Japanese has taken the top spot, with 37% (up from 33%) of the posts followed closely by English at 36% (down from 39%).³¹ In spite of this, taking into consideration the number of posts in blogs rather than the number of registered blogs the result indicates a greater logorrhoea of Japanese writers but does not reduce the predominance and the weight of English in CMC.

The state of the Blogosphere is strong, and is growing as an influential and important part of the web. Since the growth of global ICT and media affects the nature of language and considering that Internet as a global medium is still regarded by many as the “flagship of global English”,³² we will set out to examine if and how ‘blogalisation’ is affecting the English language.

‘Blogspeak’

Traditional CMC has been denoted by the lexeme ‘netspeak’,³³ the merging of this term with other conventional forms of communication has created “blogspeak”,³⁴ a lexeme which designates a new variety found in blogs, namely the blending of speech and writing.³⁵

²⁹ Technorati is known widely for its quarterly *State of the Blogosphere* reports (for 2007, see, at <http://www.sifry.com/stateoftheliveweb/>) [See <http://technorati.com/state-of-the-blogosphere/> for updates (2008, 2009) on many aspects, but sadly, as Lovink (p. x this volume) also mentions, no longer, since late 2006, posts by language. Ed’s note].

³⁰ It has tracked over 70 million weblogs, and seen about 120,000 new weblogs being created worldwide each day (about 1.4 blogs created every second of every day). At <http://www.sifry.com/alerts/archives/000493.html>, April 2007.

³¹ Followed by Chinese (8%), Italian and Spanish (3%). It would appear that both English and Spanish are more global languages based on consistency of posting through a 24 hour period, whereas other top languages, specifically Japanese, Chinese, and Italian, are more geographically correlated. Ibidem.

³² Graddol, *Future*, 50.

³³ “Netspeak, is a type of language displaying features that are unique to the Internet ... arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global, and interactive” (Crystal, *Language*, 18).

³⁴ “A language developed for and used in internet journals, or blogs, by their keepers, or bloggers” (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=blogspeak>; retrieved 30 October 2007).

³⁵ Both ‘Netspeak’ and ‘Blogspeak’ are calques of the Orwellian introduction

From a morphological and semantic perspective it is evident that the common core of the two combining forms ‘netspeak’ and ‘blogspeak’ is the ‘-speak’ suffix. Whereas the first operations of compounding with ‘-speak’ were aimed to imply some value judgements (negative judgements most of the time), over time the ‘-speak’ compounds have been modelled to create fix, technical combining forms, by this implicitly indicating the domain of the subject matters: ‘mundane conversation’ and ‘everyday practices’.³⁶

Moreover, in blogs, much more so than in chat and in forums, the lexeme ‘speak’ loses the semantic connotation which usually makes it an antonym of ‘write’ and is connoted in the neutral semantic area of ‘language’, both written and oral, with a receptive element, including listening and reading, in its bound-morpheme function.³⁷

By ‘blogspeak’, also called ‘bloglish’,³⁸ is meant neither an official microlanguage with restricted syntactic and lexical rules, nor the restricted in-group jargon (*in-ese*) of a specific community: the blogosphere is so wide that all the outsiders can quickly and easily join the group without any initial linguistic problems. Consequently, a categorisation of the language being found is difficult to give. Notwithstanding this, the archiving function of weblogs allows the researcher access to the natural language of the weblog author, and opens the door to investigating the possibility of the evolution of a new kind of language in the blogging environment, characterised by likely distinctive and standardised features over time.

of Newspeak (and Oldspeak). It is interesting to note how a blogger answered the question “What’s the difference between the terminology peculiar to blogging and bloggers – Blogspeak, if you will – and Orwellian Newspeak?” with a rather strong opinion: “Newspeak wasn’t expected to supersede standard English (Oldspeak) until 2050. Blogspeak is debilitating plain English far more quickly in too many circles” (<http://www.apaltrything.com/?cat=1>; posted 22 January 2006 by joe tekas; retrieved 30 October 2007). ‘BlogSpeak’, apart from being a neologism to designate a kind of language, is also the name of a free remote commenting system for Blogger-based weblogs, available at <http://www.blogspeak.org>.

³⁶ See Jocelyne Vincent, “Talk-speak: gioco e ideologia nei logonimi inglesi”, in Cristina Vallini, ed., *Le Parole per le parole - I logonimi nelle lingue e nei metalinguaggi* (Roma: Il Calamaio, 2001), 701-738.

³⁷ Crystal, *Language*, 18.

³⁸ See Lynsey Hanley, “Geek Translation”, *The Observer* (Nov 13, 2005).

The nature of 'blogspeak' is supposedly influenced by the dichotomy and ambiguity peculiar to the unique format found in CMC, which has arisen from both spoken and written communication and has fully adapted to the virtual environment. It remains to be seen if there is sufficient consistency in 'blogspeak' to warrant labelling it a distinct diamesic variety of language. In fact, identifying the nature of blogs appears to be controversial and needs to be examined in further detail in terms of a) linguistic features; b) style; c) domain.

a) linguistic features:
oral conversation and writing

"The Internet has permitted language to evolve a new medium of communication, different in fundamental respects from traditional conversational speech and from writing".³⁹ Previous findings, as Crystal points out, suggest that language in CMC displays many of the properties of both spoken and written language.⁴⁰ The same can be said specifically of weblogs.⁴¹ Not only does this give a potential insight into the language in the present study, but it gives a perspective on the situation of weblogs as a genre.

The spoken versus written mode is considered to be one of the central distinctive characteristics of texts. It is undeniable that the language conventions and attitudes associated with orality and literacy influence discourse in different and important ways. In this section we will try to analyse the relationship between speech and writing as modalities through which to formulate and convey language in blogs, showing some of the main differences (in particular those listed in Crystal and in Tannen)⁴² between oral

³⁹ David Crystal, "The Scope of Internet Linguistics" (http://www.crystalreference.com/DC_articles/Internet2.pdf, 2005).

⁴⁰ See Crystal, *Language*; David Crystal, *The Language Revolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Susan C. Herring et al. ("Weblogs as a Bridging Genre". *Information, Technology & People* 18.2, 2005, 142-171) describe weblogs as lying on a continuum between standard HTML documents, and asynchronous CMC such as newsgroups.

⁴² Crystal, *Language*, 18, and Deborah Tannen, ed., *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1993); Deborah Tannen, ed., *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1993). See also Douglas Biber, *Variation across Speech and Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge

and written texts and attempting to map out the features which best reflect the nature of blogs.

Starting with the differences between speech and writing identified by Crystal, a third column has been added to the original table, showing the features of blog in relation to those considered by Crystal.

SPEECH	WRITING	BLOGS
Speech is time-bound, dynamic, and transient.	Writing is space bound, static, permanent.	Blogs are not time-bound (archiving allows the public access to records years after the blogger has published his or her thoughts, for a theoretically infinite amount of time and, even if posts are in the main page of the blog for a limited amount of time, after that they are collocated in a linked archive and remain available). Blogs are space-bound (the webpage is a physical constraint in a virtual environment).
There is no time-lag between production and reception, unless one is deliberately introduced by the recipient. The spontaneity and speed of most speech exchanges make it difficult to engage in complex advance planning.	There is always a time-lag between production and reception. Writing allows repeated reading and close analysis, and promotes the development of careful organisation and compact expression, with often intricate sentence structure	Blogs are not spontaneous (the editing function and the asynchronous mode let the writer think, edit and correct before publishing).
Because participants are typically in face-to-face interaction, they can rely on extralinguistic cues.	Lack of visual contact means that participants cannot rely on context to make their meaning clear; nor is there any immediate feedback.	Lack of face-to-face interaction.

University Press, 1998); Michael Halliday, *Spoken and Written Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<p>Many words and constructions are characteristic of (especially informal) speech, such as contracted forms (isn't, he's). There is nonsense vocabulary (e.g. thingamajig), obscenity, and slang.</p>	<p>Some words and constructions are characteristic of writing. Certain items of vocabulary are never spoken, such as the longer names of chemical compounds.</p>	<p>Blogs are loosely constructed in that they are informal, but the construction of sentences is always elaborated and the use of certain items of vocabulary is variable. Blogs combine the attributes of the internal monologue, the dialogue, the essay, the digest, the bulletin.</p>
<p>Speech is very suited to social or 'phatic' functions. It is also good at expressing social relationships, and personal opinions and attitudes, due to the vast range of nuances.</p>	<p>Writing is very suited to the recording of facts and the communication of ideas, and to tasks of memory and learning.</p>	<p>A certain degree of social interaction can take place.</p>
<p>There is an opportunity to rethink an utterance while the other person is listening. Interruptions and overlapping speech are normal and highly audible.</p>	<p>Errors and other perceived inadequacies in our writing can be eliminated in later drafts without the reader ever knowing they were there.</p>	<p>It is repeatedly revisable. Blog is unique in that the author can edit as often as needed.</p>
<p>Unique features of speech include most of the prosody. The many nuances of intonation cannot be written down with much efficiency.</p>	<p>Unique features of writing include pages, lines, capitalisation, spatial organisation, and several aspects of punctuation.</p>	<p>It is not prosodically rich but to a limited extent prosody can be expressed graphically through the use of non-standard punctuation and emoticons.</p>

In the next table, alongside the columns which summarise the differences between spoken and written language examined in Tannen et al. (1993a; 1993b),⁴³ another two columns have been added to consider whether these aspects are also peculiar to blogs or not:

⁴³ In Linda Lombardo et al., eds., *Massed Medias. Linguistic Tools for Interpreting Media Discourse* (Milano: LED Edizioni, 1999).

SPOKEN LANGUAGE	BLOG (Y/N/ variable)	WRITTEN LANGUAGE	BLOG (y/n/ variable)
PERSONAL/IMPERSONAL			
Focus on interpersonal involvement	N	Focus on message content	Y
Based on language structures and discourse strategies learned early in life	N	Based on knowledge learned later in life	Y
Personal intrusion in the text (e.g. use of personal reference)	Y	Detached from the text (e.g. use of passive verb forms)	Variable
More subjective, less precise, more ambiguous, more emotional	variable	More objective, more precise, less ambiguous, more logical	Variable
Immediate, heartfelt	variable	Reliable, respectable	Variable
Better suited to social relationships and practical learning	variable	Better suited to such subjects as law and science	Variable
Frequent changes resulting from feedback from receivers	Y	Appropriate for communication over large distances and between strangers	Y
IMPLICIT/EXPLICIT			
“Non-autonomous” or local usage	variable	“Autonomous” use of language	Variable
Demands maximal filling in by listeners	variable	Allows for minimal filling in by readers	Variable
Invites inference	variable	Biased toward literal meaning	Variable
NON-VERBAL/VERBAL			
Numerous onomatopoeic expressions and frequent use of sound symbolism	N	Much less use of sound symbolism	Y

Psychological atmosphere provided mainly by intonation	N	Psychological atmosphere provided by the selection of terms with the appropriate connotations	Y
Much information about what the talk is about and how units of speech should be grouped is signalled through prosody, physical context, gesture, paralinguistic cues, etc.	No, but it uses other graphical devices	Information about the subject and how units of the text should be grouped is signalled through the sequencing of words and punctuation	Variable
More redundant	variable	Less memorable	Variable
LEXICAL DIFFERENCES			
More limited vocabulary, more words of one syllable, more verbs than adjectives, more concrete nouns	variable	More varied vocabulary, longer words, more attributive adjectives, more abstract nouns, more nominalization	Variable
More words in proportion to the number of ideas	variable	Fewer words in proportion to the number of ideas	Variable
Paralinguistic features used to establish cohesion	N	Cohesion established lexically	Y
Relatively less precise quantification	N	Relatively more precise quantification	Y
MORPHOSYNTACTIC DIFFERENCES			
Greater grammatical complexity	variable	Greater lexical complexity	Variable
Relatively frequent syntactic abnormalities	variable	Greater syntactic consistency	Variable
Less careful sequencing	N	Studied sequencing	Y
Fragmented	N	Integrated	Y

It is clear from the above tables that blogs do not wholly belong to either of the categories mentioned and that blog textuality cuts across both modes and shares with each of them certain characteristics: the juxtaposition of terms in speech and writing is not so neat in blogs and what seems to be contradictory in orality and literacy is not contradictory in blogs. As stressed by Nilsson,

speech and writing are both seen as parent strains of the Internet's *lingua franca*, Netspeak: When these parent strains unite, a new strain of language is produced. This new strain takes qualities from both the parent strains and applies them as necessary in its new environment. (...) Blogs utilise both the attributes of on-line, informal *spoken* language with those of the conventional written monologue. While blogs are clearly a written medium, they also have spoken qualities.⁴⁴

Many prominent bloggers consider blogging a form of writing infused with frequent bursts of conversation. This is the opinion we tend to agree with. From the analysis above it is evident that blog combines features of both spoken and written communication, and can be metaphorically seen as a sort of “linguistic centaur”.⁴⁵ In the light of what we have said, a blog can therefore be considered a form of “written speech”,⁴⁶ with the emphasis on writing, compared to the textuality of chat and Instant Messaging (which can be denoted as ‘typed speech’ or ‘electronic discourse’). The lack of synchrony in blog communication, that is, the lapse of time between the moment of production and any possible feedback, bears out this theory.

In this situation it is not easy to identify when the transition from writing to speaking occurs,⁴⁷ and so it is hardly surprising if we encounter the features of spoken language in blog writing. The author's intention in blog texts differs from that found in other types of writing. Through their relationship with readers, bloggers constantly seek to overcome the constraints imposed by

⁴⁴ Stephanie Nilsson, *A Brief Overview of the Linguistic Attributes of the Blogosphere*, D-Essay, (<http://www.eng.umu.se/stephanie/web/blogspeak.pdf>, 2003).

⁴⁵ Baron, *Internet*.

⁴⁶ Natalie Maynor, “The Language of Electronic Mail: Written Speech?”, in G. Little & M. Montgomery, eds., *Centennial Usage Studies. American Dialect Society* 78 (1994).

⁴⁷ See Biber, *Variation across Speech and Writing*.

the written medium in order to obtain a higher, more immediate, level of communication, using typographical conventions, images, punctuation marks and other devices which enhance the expressive function of the text: whereas the tangible form of written communication in blogs is inadequate to express those nuances of meaning such as sarcasm, bemusement, tentativeness, irritation, some graphical devices (emoticons/smileys, strategic punctuation marks) are adopted, and elements of colloquial language (expletives, flaming) are used to imitate spontaneity and emotivity which are typical of oral communication.⁴⁸

old and new words

Due to the number of writers, the publicity of their work, the sheer amount of writing they produce, and the medium in which bloggers are writing, blogs actually enrich the English lexis. Every area of human endeavour has its own lingo, and blogging is no exception. A jargon specific to blogging is evolving and the blog terminology ("blogabulary"!) includes:

1) existing lexemes which have undergone a relexicalization and/or resemanticisation (extensions of meaning or metaphoric extensions) and have become commonplace in the blogosphere, such as the following examples:

<i>aggregator</i>	a program or webpage which enables users to read the content of blogs using RSS or Atom Feeds ⁴⁹
<i>commenter</i>	a person who leaves remarks in the 'comments' section which many blogs offer
<i>meme</i>	an idea spread from blog to blog

⁴⁸ As David Crystal in *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 53 underlines, "the chief use of slang is to show that you're a part of the gang!".

⁴⁹ RSS and Atom belong to the family of Web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content such as blog entries.

<i>ping</i>	a ping is a system administrator tool that is an automated packet of information sent through a network to another to establish the status of a target system
<i>post</i>	the term used to refer to an individual story or article on a blog, literally to post to a blog is to write an article or contribution; and a blog consists of multiple posts
<i>trackback</i>	a system by which a ping is sent to another trackback-aware website to notify that site that a link to them has been made
<i>troll</i>	to troll for hits is to post a provocative article purely in order to generate an angry response and commensurate increase in hit rate;

2) neologisms (we might say ‘neoblogisms’!),⁵⁰ new coinages and new formations (combinations with suffixes/prefixes, blends, abbreviations, acronyms) which have arisen and are arising around the stem ‘blog’.⁵¹

<i>blawg</i>	a weblog written by lawyers and/or concerned primarily with legal affairs
<i>bleg</i>	to use one’s blog to beg for assistance
<i>blego</i>	used in reference to self promotion on, or as part of, blogs

⁵⁰ ‘Neoblogism’ is “a made-up word whose only reason for existence is to signal a blog context” (<http://www.advogato.org/person/raph/diary.html?start=228>).

⁵¹ See Ken Magill, “Blogspeak Can Grate on the Blerves” (http://directmag.com/mag/marketing_blogspeak_grate_blerves/, Nov 1, 2005). Among the many interesting, ironical or humorous ‘neoblogisms’ found surfing the net we can also mention: ‘blogbuster’, ‘blogtop’, ‘mindblogging’, ‘monoblog’, ‘volksblog’, ‘blogheading’, ‘deblogging’, ‘unblog’, ‘blogabroad’, ‘blogfest’, ‘blogarama’ and ‘hemoblogin’.

<i>blerd</i>	someone who spends too much time on his blog and, as a result, is bereft of social skills
<i>blog in/out</i>	log in/out of a blog
<i>blogal</i>	related to blog
<i>blogchalk</i>	a short piece of information given to bloggers about name, gender, age, place, interests and languages spoken by the blogger. It is made up of a frame, a text and a code that can make blog indexing easier on search engines
<i>blogger</i>	a person who maintains a weblog. Also the name of Google's blogging service
<i>blogglet</i>	a very tiny blog, by someone who is pressed for time, or is very sparing with their words
<i>blogorrhea</i>	an unusually high volume output of articles on a blog
<i>blogosphere</i>	the world of blogs
<i>blogotry</i>	blog bigotry
<i>blogroll</i>	a collection or list of links to other blogs and websites commonly featured on blogs
<i>blogvertising</i>	the advertisements appearing in blogs
<i>blogware</i>	commonly used in reference to the tools used to write blogs

<i>blook</i>	a book published serially on a blog
<i>blurker</i>	a silent lurker, observer of blogs
<i>klog</i>	knowledge blogs
<i>linguablog</i>	a specialist blog dealing with regular postings about language-related subjects
<i>moblog</i>	a blog maintained via mobile hardware or a form of photoblog that consists of the photographs taken on users mobile phones
<i>sblog/splog</i>	spam blogs, blogs used by the authors with the aim to promote other websites. ⁵²

b) style:

formality and informality

In blogs it is not easy to identify a unique style of writing adopted because of the many communicative functions involved, and it is not possible to distinguish clearly between informal and formal registers. Examining the posts in blogs, we tend to find register continuums rather than discrete varieties - an endless number of registers can be identified, with no clear boundaries between where each one starts and ends. Blogs encompass the subliterate genres like personal letters, personal diaries, journals, and newspapers, with the idea of reproducing the inner and outer experience that makes up daily life.

Since blogs, as mentioned before, employ elements of both spoken and written language, this means that they are peppered with informal, spoken language constructions and combine the attributes of internal monologue and dialogue, of speech and writing. An internal monologue may consist of something private, intended for personal reflection, or a random reflection without an intended audience. Conversation, on the other hand, implies a dialogue which is made possible in blogs by comment features and trackback.

⁵² Most of the definitions are from the Samizdata glossary of blog terminology (<http://www.samizdata.net/blog/glossary.html>) and from the following website: <http://www.blogherald.com/2005/04/07/understanding-blog-speak/>.

If we consider blogs as a form of sophisticated communication, their style does not appear to respond to all the principles of Pragmatics included in the four conversational maxims for an efficient, co-operative use of language conceived by the philosopher Grice.⁵³

- *Maxim of Quality* (“Try to make your contribution one that is true”) - In blogs people can create stories, suggest hypotheses, talk about things for which there is a lack of real evidence.
- *Maxim of Quantity* (“Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange”) - Bloggers can make their contribution more informative than is essentially needed.
- *Maxim of Relevance* (“Make your contribution relevant”) - “Writing for writing’s sake” implies the freedom of writing about everything, without having anything particularly relevant (to others) to say.
- *Maxim of Manner* (“1. Avoid obscurity of expression. 2. Avoid ambiguity. 3. Be brief. 4. Be orderly.”) - In blogs you can create ambiguity, which stimulates debate, and there is no need to be brief: prolixity is one of the elements characterising posts in blogs.

Instant publication encourages spontaneous writing rather than carefully thought out arguments. The language of bloggers is a kind of anti-journalese: it is often informal, sometimes impertinent, and digressive, casting links in all directions. It may be considered a genuinely new language of public discourse but also a paradoxical one. On the one hand, blogs are clearly a more democratic form of expression than anything the world of print has produced so far. But in some ways they are also more exclusionary: the high, formal style of the newspaper page remains a neutral voice that does not favour the speech of any particular group or class; blogspeak, instead, has been seen as “an adaptation of the table talk of the urban middle class”.⁵⁴

⁵³ Herbert Paul Grice, “Logic and Conversation”, in P. Cole and J. Morgan, eds., *Syntax and Semantics: Volume 3, Speech Acts* (New York: Academic Press, 1975).

⁵⁴ Gregory G. Sholette, <http://molodiez.org/ocs/maillinglist/archive/366.html>, April 26, 2004.

Two posts from two different blogs will now be shown to illustrate some of the most frequently found graphic, orthographic, grammatical, lexical, and stylistic characteristics of blogs.⁵⁵

POST 1

Your logo made me laugh. There it is, on the left. See it, kids? I like it. A lot. And I do sometimes feel like Polly in a rabbit suit. What city is that? It looks like New York. I think Polly in a rabbit suit would be better off in New York. Wait, is that that blasted Montgomery building? Is that San Francisco? I'm never moving back there, boy. Now you're definitely not sleeping on my couch.

Luckily, I'm not Polly in a rabbit suit. I'm a fucking real live rabbit, OK? Why is that so hard for you little monkeys to wrap your little monkey brains around?⁵⁶

POST 2

Heading making clever pun on 'blog': I'm a journalist. see my daring posture vis-a-vis blogs: they are too influential to too small a group of people. popular bloggers are bad and the taste of the blogosphere is incorrect or corrupted.

google is making things worse. it's giving me opinions when i expect primary sources. me not able to linkthrough!

people link to each other. too many people link to the same people. it's not just unimaginative, it's unfair to me just because i dismissed this for a while but now i want in and all the good blogroll spots are taken.

i hate you bloggers. i refuse to even link to snooty snoot. i hope kottke sees this.⁵⁷

Whether written by a professional writer in his or her time off, or by an online enthusiast, weblogs have a simple construction: the syntax is most of the time based on paratactic rather than hypotactic

⁵⁵ This is not the place for detailed studies regarding this question and it is our intention to not consider the two posts as representative but only to use them as a reference for some general descriptions that we intend to provide. For more in-depth corpus-based studies, the reader is referred to, among others, Floriana Guerriero, *L'universo dei blog tra lingua scritta e lingua parlata*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Salerno, March 2006; Nilsson, *A Brief Overview*.

⁵⁶ At http://www.rabbitblog.com/2002_05_05_rabbitblog_archive.html.

⁵⁷ At <http://radiofreeblogistan.com/2003/05/16.html#a1499>.

sentences, by a wide use of punctuation and a low frequency of cohesion devices.

In those blogs conceived as a form of journalism rather than a form of personal diary, because of their entirely public nature, bloggers tend to use a more guarded, polished language,⁵⁸ a language that suggests a *you* relationship rather than an *us* one. However, the majority of blogs are personal records and are normally written in the first person and often use links rather than traditional linguistic markers to signify solidarity within the network. The pronoun *I* is greatly inflated in relation to the other pronouns due to blogs being written in the first person: the blog is the author's creative space and, as such, very individually centred, in spite of the social network created by links.

When blogs are written in the first person they employ informal, non-standard constructions⁵⁹ (e.g. "See it, kids?" in post 1, "me not able to link through" in post 2) and slang (e.g. "I'm a fucking real live rabbit" in post 1, "snooty snoot" in post 2).⁶⁰ At any rate, there is a broad variation across users and usages: even when the language is colloquial and interlocutory, in some cases, great attention is devoted to spelling (capital letters after full stops) and punctuation

⁵⁸ N.S. Glance, M. Hurst and T. Tomokiyo ["BlogPulse: Automated Trend Discovery for Weblogs", in *Proceedings of WWW 2004* (New York: US, 2004), 6] noted that: "If we believe the metaphor that blogging is like publishing while posting [to news groups] is more like chatting, it's not surprising that weblog entries tend to be more polished pieces of writing, with fewer grammatical errors and tighter diction".

⁵⁹ It is a popular perception that computer-mediated language is less correct, complex and coherent than standard written language. Jon Katz, journalist for *Wired* magazine describes messages posted to the Internet as "a whole new fractured language - definitely not as elegant or polished as English used to be" [quot. in Constance Hale, ed., *Wired Style: Principles of English Usage in the Digital Age* (San Francisco: HardWired, 1996), 9].

⁶⁰ Among the most evident features of blogspeak as an informal language are: discourse markers and interjections ("oh", "wow", "yes", "really!", "well", "right", verbal syntagms such as "you know", "I mean") used to capture the reader's attention; reiterated punctuation and iconic writing (to compensate for the lack of prosodic and paralinguistic features of discourse); vague language and conversational hedges (lexical items used to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy); lack of precision ("sort of", "kind of"); repetitions; intensifiers; interrogative forms which contribute to stimulate the reader's reaction; general, informal vocabulary, characterised by a frequent use of verbs and adjectives expressing opinions and emotions.

(as in post 1), while in others we find complete disregard for the use of capital letters (post 2).

Among the most striking elements of blogspeak is the length of its prose, which is very different from the well-developed, logically connected paragraphs of formal written texts. The length not only of blogs, but also of posts varies greatly: it runs between one or two words to hundreds of words.

c) domain:

privacy and publicity

Weblogs bestride the boundaries between publication and process, between writing towards others and writing for oneself. Blogs hover on the border between what is private and what is public, often with tension between the two spheres. As David Weinberger has observed, the confessional nature of blogs has redrawn the line between the private and the public dimensions of our lives.⁶¹ Yet blog textuality *is* public. The blogger, that is the writer, is perfectly aware of the public dimension of blogs, thus involving the audience in the sharing of ideas, opinions, suggestions. Thus a private means is being used for a public end, as the personal diary used, in many cases, to be. Moreover, more than being written *for* the public, we might say that blogs are written *in* public.⁶²

Blogs belong to the public domain because they are consciously and deliberately made public, and bloggers (both writers and editors) have full responsibility for what they write there. They can be quoted (as has been done in the present work), and this means that having published something in a blog, implies a possible claim of intellectual ownership on the part of the blogger.

The contents of blog posts, on the other hand, are mostly of a private nature. This new medium of personal expression reflects the expansion of the private sphere into the public. In the case of blogs the public is invited into the privacy of the personal diary. It is this

⁶¹ David Weinberger, *Small Pieces Loosely Joined* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002).

⁶² See Geoffrey Nunberg, *I Have Seen the Future, and It Blogs*, commentary on "Fresh Air" (10/12/2001 retrieved from <http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~nunberg/blog.html>, 30 October 2007).

commenting which takes some of the privacy away from the author who shares his thoughts with the audience.

Blogs also allow individuals and small communities to project and manage their own identities,⁶³ to create a virtual self that is continuously present. Posting on a blog carries with it infinite possibilities of self-representation and the language used helps the reader to understand the identity of a blogger, getting a sense of who s/he is over time. Blogs are designed for an audience, and they have a voice and a personality. They are an experiment in self-expression: as the writing progresses, the blogger's personality is unveiled through his or her use of language, with a continuous process of managing feelings.⁶⁴ In the words of De Kerckhove:

The key to the new identity is what I call “selving”, that is the self in progress, in becoming, as in quantum physics where “things are not, they merely tend to be”. The new identity is in perpetual formation and reformation at the moment of use and on line it is fluid and aggregative as when people meet and change their perceptions of each other during the meeting. I sometime suspect that screens were invented only for the purpose of allowing several persons, minds, identities to meet and share thinking and speaking at a distance. The new connective thinking system is the screen.⁶⁵

Conclusions

The history of writing repeatedly shows how a new technology can literally give shape to language. The crucial point is to recognise the way a technology directly moulds a form of linguistic expression.⁶⁶ Traditional CMC (particularly in chats, newsgroups, forums, mailing

⁶³ See David Graddol, *English Next* (British Council, <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-research-english-next.pdf>, 2006), 43 (last accessed 20 November 2007).

⁶⁴ Among bloggers there are some who even say: “I am only a poor approximation of my weblog. Some people have a life, others do a weblog” (<http://idie.enclavexquise.com/personalpublishing/personalpublishing-index.html>; retrieved 30 October 2007).

⁶⁵ Derrick De Kerckhove, *Communication and Evolution, Social and Technological Transformation*, interview by Alvaro Bermejo (http://www.mcluhan.utoronto.ca/article_communicationevolution.htm, date unknown; retrieved 30 October 2007).

⁶⁶ See David Crystal, “Twenty-first Century English” (http://www.crystalreference.com/DC_articles/Internet10.pdf, 2001; retrieved 30 October 2007).

lists) is characterised by a high degree of meta-communicative awareness, due to the attempt to go beyond the written medium.⁶⁷ For communicative purposes, in these types of text, the written form assimilates the features of oral language (using acronyms for rapid communication and smileys to express metapragmatic features associated with paralinguistic and non-verbal elements such as gesture and facial expression). The computer-mediated written tradition has evolved firstly through email writing. However, although they emulate some features of orality, emails offer plenty of room for careful arrangement, hypotactic organisation and various effects of “textuality” that are difficult to achieve in oral discourse. E-mail writing remains subordinated to the surprises of an ongoing exchange: they proceed by turn-taking, they respond to previous mentions and “calls”, and they anticipate responses, which means that any statement made in a letter may have to be developed, revised or rescinded across narrative time in dialogue with another person. Moreover, in emails the audience is restricted and selected and there is no intention to make public what has been written. Within the context of CMC, instead, blogs have introduced a new dimension: on the one hand, there is the clear intention to write a text for wide publication which is lasting over time, to make public a private act; on the other hand, blogs clearly reflect the pleasure of writing, “writing for writing’s sake”, often with the intention to arouse the reader’s interest.

The blogosphere is maturing as a powerful and significant part of the Web.⁶⁸ The popularity of blogs and their relative simplicity of use suggest that, thanks to blogs, writing (a diary or a journal) is now an activity within the reach of everyone. In this case the aim of writing is not to rapidly convey a message but rather to tell stories, to express opinions and ideas and to present their own view of the world, however global, local or ‘glocal’ that might be, which have positive effects: “the benefit of keeping an on-line journal is the creation of a more critical thinker and a better writer”.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ See Vincent, “Talk-speak”.

⁶⁸ <http://www.sifry.com/stateoftheliveweb/> (last accessed 24 November 2007).

⁶⁹ Rebecca Blood, *Weblogs: a History and Perspective* (http://rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html, 7 September 2000; retrieved 30 October 2007).

The creative energy going into blogging is providing evidence of a new genre of diary writing, which was a genre thought to be dying out as a literary domain just a few years ago. From a linguistic point of view, what we observe in blogs is written language in its most “naked” form – without the interference of proofreaders, copy-editors and all the others who take our written expression and standardise it, often to the point of blandness. This is considered “a new stage in the evolution of the written language”.⁷⁰

Although it is difficult to define a weblog in terms of genre,⁷¹ we have seen that there are simple and evident features that are universally shared. The revolution triggered by the new technologies has made it more difficult to distinguish clearly between written and oral forms of language, between the public and private domains, between formality and informality in the CMC of blogs. Types of speech like the monologue and the dialogue come together to create extensive conversations that spread through the blogosphere with an effect similar to an echo chamber. The linguistic features used are found in oral and in written forms of communication. These two forms have combined to produce a hybrid diamesic variety which employs the potential of the Internet environment as a means to converse and reflect. ‘Blogspeak’ is a form of ‘written speech’⁷² or ‘talky writing’⁷³ which involves removing the traditional mode boundaries between writing and speaking and which highlights the presence of the oral mode in written forms of language. In the end,

⁷⁰ See Naomi S. Baron, “The Future of Written Culture, Envisioning Language in the New Millennium”, in *Ibérica, Journal of the European Association of Languages for Specific Purposes* (Santiago: Posteguillo, April 2005), 3. But also see David Crystal, “Johnson and the Internet”, in *Hilda Hulme Memorial Lecture* (University of London, April 21, 2005), 17.

⁷¹ Susan C. Herring et al., “Bridging the Gap: A Genre Analysis of Weblogs” (Hawaii International Conference on Systems Science HICSS-37, Indiana University: Bloomington, 2004) investigated what made weblogs a legitimate genre. Their study led them to suggest that weblogs are a hybrid of existing genres, and that they are made unique by the combination of features from the source genres that they adapt, along with their distinctive technical affordances.

⁷² Natalie Maynor, “The Language of Electronic Mail: Written Speech?” in G. Little and M. Montgomery, eds., *Centennial Usage Studies. American Dialect Society 78* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 48-54.

⁷³ Naomi S. Baron, *From Alphabet to Email* (London: Routledge, 2000).

writing, can often be, as Leonard Bloomfield said, just a speech surrogate, “merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks”.⁷⁴

Further research is clearly needed in order to document and identify more clearly the complex communicative and linguistic patterns within ‘blogal’ English and within the blogosphere as a whole. Nonetheless it appears that what Lakoff and Johnson theorised back in 1980 is even more evident and true today:

There is much evidence that, in the past couple of millennia in fact, at least in written media (...) the assumption has been made that the written form of communication is basic, is more valid than the oral, and that even originally oral discourse must be represented in terms of the rules of written communication to be valid and intelligible. But in the last generation or so, there is much to suggest that this position is being reversed; that the oral medium is considered more valid and intelligible as a form of communication than the written and that even written documents are now tending to be couched in forms imitative of the oral mode. Moreover, the reasons for this are not mere decline of education, of mental sloppiness, but are rooted in technological progress – even as the advent of literacy was three millennia ago.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Leonard Bloomfield, *Language* (New York: Holt, 1933), 21.

⁷⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live by* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 67.

Antongiuseppe Di Dio

Computer Mediated Communication and Teenagers: Some preliminary cross-cultural observations

Recent years have seen a great increase in the use of the Internet as a means of communication. Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has now become part of our everyday life, from business contacts to keeping up with friends and meeting new people¹. What makes it unique is the fact that it provides a wholly different frameset in which this takes place:

The Internet provides another context and channel for people to meet with strangers for the first time, initiate meaningful and satisfying conversations, and build stable, long-term relationships, similar to face-to-face (FtF) interactions².

The keyword to notice here is *similar*. CMC differs from face to face communication (FtF) in granting the possibility of getting in touch with complete strangers without the need to meet or get to know anything about them. This specific characteristic has made the development of totally new forms of communication possible,

¹ Malcom R. Parks, Kory Floyd, "Making Friends in Cyberspace", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 1.4 (March, 1996) <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol1/issue4/parks.html>; John Dimmick, Susan L. Kline, Laura Stafford, "Home E-mail: Relational Maintenance and Gratification Opportunities" *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 43.4 (1999), 659-669.

² Young-ok Yum, Kazuya Hara, "Computer-mediated Relationship Development: A Cross-cultural Comparison" in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11.1 (2005), 133-152.

ranging from IRC (internet relay chat) to forums or has, at least, fostered them.³

Despite the fact that people nowadays regularly use CMC as a part of their communicative experience, little has specifically been written on how online communication has affected how teenagers communicate⁴. The aim of my research is to offer a small contribution on this particular issue, focusing on the development of new means of creating and maintaining relationships, relying on data collected by observing English and Italian forums and IRC channels, carrying out informal FtF interviews on the subject, as well as considering the academic literature on these issues. The paper will present some comments on the general trends which seem to have emerged so far.

Theoretical framework

Let me first briefly outline some theoretical models which have informed the background to this work and can help to shed some light on these issues. Although not fully used explicitly throughout this paper, which is simply meant to be a preliminary overview of some general findings, these models will be more fully exploited in ensuing work where the data presented or alluded to here, will be analysed in more detail and compared to data collected in England.

³ It is worth noticing that e-mails represent a radical change with respect to previous letter writing, although the name electronic mail would suggest just a kind of snail-mail evolution rather than a totally new form. Although we cannot go into this here, politeness strategies, for example, have radically changed in this shift owing to the immediacy of the new form, leaning towards a far more direct strategy. This change has left older users, who were used to writing letters, somewhat in doubt, especially in the early years or in their first approaches, on what might be the appropriate strategy to use.

⁴ See, insights, e.g. in Pew Internet & American Life Project. "Teenage life online: The rise of the instant-message generation and the Internet's impact on friendships and family relationships" (Washington DC: Author, 2001, June 20); and in Brian H. Spitzberg "Preliminary Development of a Model and Measure of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Competence, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11 (2006), 629-666.

Politeness theory

Politeness theory, as is well-known, was initiated by Brown and Levinson⁵, based on the concept of face theorized by the sociologist Erving Goffman⁶.

The term *face* may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing of his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself.

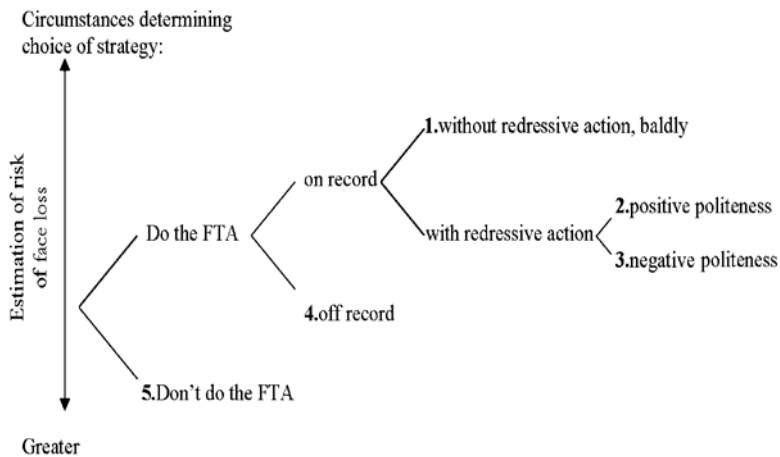
A person tends to experience an immediate emotional response to the face which a contact with others allow him; he cathects his face; his “feelings” become attached to it.⁷

This theory tries to explain the reasons lying behind the fact that humans often do not always fulfil Gricean maxims. The reason, according to Brown and Levinson, is that we are motivated by two contrasting desires (wants): the need to be approved by others (positive face) and the desire to be unimpeded and independent (negative face). Everyday we have to deal with other people and their wants: when we perform an action that may inherently threaten another person’s face, we are performing a Face Threatening Act (FTA). The speaker, according to the situation and to what s/he wants to achieve from the communicative interaction, will choose a different strategy to perform it, from Baldly on Record to Off Record to choosing not to perform it at all. Fig. 1 below summarizes the strategies:

⁵ Penelope Brown, Stephen Levinson, “Universals in Language Use: Politeness Phenomena”, in Esther N. Goody, ed., *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 56-310; updated and republished as Penelope Brown, Stephen Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Notwithstanding later departures from the Brown and Levinson model, (see e.g. Richard Watts, *Politeness*, Cambridge: C.U.P., 2003), this model still provides a valuable, useful framework for analysis.

⁶ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual – Essays on Face to Face Behaviour* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967)

⁷ Goffman *Interaction Ritual*, 5



[Brown, Levinson, 1978 :65]

Fig. 1: Choice of FTA

To assess the seriousness of an FTA the speaker relies upon three sociological variables:

- the degree of imposition of the FTA:

a culturally and situationally defined ranking of impositions by the degree to which they are considered to interfere with an agent's wants of self-determination or of approval (negative and positive face wants).⁸

- the relative power of the hearer over the speaker:

the degree to which the hearer can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of the speaker's plans and self-evaluation⁹

- the social distance between speaker and hearer:

the symmetric social dimension of similarity/difference within which the speaker and hearer "stand for the purposes" of an act,

⁸ Brown and Levinson, *Questions and Politeness*, 77

⁹ *Ibid.*, 77

and can refer to the frequency of interaction and the kinds of goods exchanged between the speaker and the hearer.¹⁰

These three elements are worth reminding readers about, since they are particularly relevant to an analysis of online relationships; it is due to their interrelation that we can begin to see a shift in what and what is not considered an FTA, as well as a difference in how different cultures value the same act (e.g. self disclosure).

Although one cannot be exhaustive on the subject here, it is worth remembering a few critics of the above model. According to Bruce Fraser, the participants of a communicative interaction know they have a series of rights and obligations in the interaction that can, if necessary, be renegotiated in the course of the interaction.

We can begin with the recognition that upon entering into a given conversation, each party brings an understanding of some initial set of rights and obligations that will determine, at least for the preliminary stages, what the participants can expect from the other(s). During the course of time, or because of a change in the context, there is always the possibility for a renegotiation of the conversational contract: the two parties may readjust just what rights and what obligations they have towards each other.¹¹

As Richard Watts, Sachiko Ide and Konrad Ehlich underline, the conversational contract, although being determined by issues present before the interaction, is influenced by how these factors change during the interaction.

Conversational partners, in other words, enter a conversational contract which is primarily determined by factors prior to the interaction but is also affected not only by the perceived goals of the conversational partners themselves with respect to the interaction but also by shifts in relationships, distribution of power, goals and intentions of the conversational partners, etc. during the course of the interaction.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Bruce Fraser "Perspective on Politeness", *Journal of Pragmatics* 14 (1990), 219-36.

¹² Richard J.Watts, Sachiko Ide, Konrad Ehlich, eds., *Politeness in Language – Studies in History, Theory and Practice* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992).

Another perspective is that offered by Victoria Escandell-Vidal who uses the concepts of *frames* and *scripts* to interpret communicative interactions.

The fact that a particular frame is activated does not mean that this frame *is* the context: the frame only makes a preselection of a *structured* set of assumptions from which the specific context can be chosen; so we can maintain the idea that the context is the particular subset of representation used in the interpretation of a particular utterance.¹³

More recent discussions and developments of politeness theory can be found, for example, in the works of Richard Watts, Sara Mills and Marina Terkourafi,¹⁴ however, the original Brown and Levinson framework already provides a sufficiently useful framework within which to work contrastively for the present purposes.

Cues filtered out model of CMC

This model of CMC, proposed by Walther and Parks, is based on two main ideas: the concept of *bandwidth* and that of *social presence*. Bandwidth may be defined as the number of communication cue systems a technology can convey, specifically, the incremental addition to verbiage of voice, kinesics, and proxemics.¹⁵

Short, Williams, & Christie¹⁶ argue that the bandwidth of a communication medium directly affects the degree of *social presence*—“the feeling that the other person is involved in the

¹³ Victoria Escandell-Vidal, “Towards a Cognitive Approach to Politeness”, in Katarzyna Jaszcholt and Ken Turner, eds., *Contrastive Semantics and Pragmatics. VOL2: Discourse Strategies* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1996), 621-651.

¹⁴ Richard Watts, *Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Sara Mills, *Gender and Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Marina Terkourafi, “Beyond the Micro-level in Politeness Research”, *Journal of Politeness Research* 1 (2005), 237-262.

¹⁵ Joseph B. Walther and Malcolm R. Parks, “Cues Filtered out, Cues Filtered in: CMC and Relationships” in Mark L. Knapp, John Augustine Daly, eds., *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 531.

¹⁶ John Short, Ederyn Williams, Bruce Christie, *The Social Psychology of Telecommunication* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976).

communication exchange”¹⁷. An important point to notice is that one can observe a de-individualization of the conversational partner going along with the decrease in social presence; in its turn de-individuation results in an increased likelihood of anti-social behaviour, lack of adherence to convention, and uninhibited behaviour.¹⁸ Thus, this model proposes a negative relationship between bandwidth/social presence and de-individuation.

Hyperpersonal model of CMC

Walther proposes a model of analysis which is in contrast to the cues filtered out model: he states that CMC can facilitate communication precisely because of the lower bandwidth. He argues that the possibility of not accounting for one’s own identity allows an optimisation of self presentation. This, combined with an optimisation of linguistic cues and self-disclosure allows for a better perception of interactants. This characteristic is taken even further in asynchronous communication since there is plenty of time to optimise all the different aspects of communication:

Asynchronous interaction may thus have the capacity to be more socially desirable and effective as composers are able to concentrate on message construction to satisfy multiple or single concerns at their own pace.¹⁹

¹⁷ Stephanie Watts Sussman, Lee Sproull, “Straight Talk: Delivering Bad News through Electronic Communication” *Information Systems Research* 10.2 (1999), 150-166.

¹⁸ Andrea Chester and Gillian Gwynne “Online Teaching: Collaboration through Anonymity” in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 4.2 (1998), retrieved January 29, 2006; Chris Christie, “Politeness and the Linguistic Construction of Gender in Parliament: An Analysis of Transgressions and Apology Behaviour” in *Working Papers on the Web Vol. 3* (2002) <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/wpw/politeness/christie.htm>; Mary J Culnan and M Lynne Markus, “Information Technologies” in Frederic M Jablin, Linda L. Putnam, Karlene Roberts, Lyman Porter, eds., *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1987): 420-443. Sara Kiesler, Jane Siegel, Timothy W. McGuire, “Social Psychological Aspects of Computer-mediated Communication”, *American Psychologist* 39.10 (1984), 1123-1134.

¹⁹ Joseph B Walter, “Group and Interpersonal Effects in International Computer-Mediated Collaboration”, *Human Communication Research* 23 (1997), 23.

Community of practice

The concept of *communities of practice* was introduced by Lave and Wenger²⁰, to account for the development of social and cultural identities. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, who have widely used this concept, explain that to fully understand the origins and development of an individual's identity, it is necessary to focus on specific and well defined 'communities of (common) practice. They define a *community of practice* as:

an aggregate of people who, united by a common enterprise, develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, and values - in short, practices. [...] The development of shared practices emerges as the participants make meaning of their joint enterprise and of themselves in relation to this enterprise. Individuals make sense of themselves and others through their forms of participation in and contributions to the community.²¹

An extremely important point in this kind of analysis is that an individual's identity is not to be considered as a monolith, but, rather, as a series of manifold identities. They state, in fact, that 'individuals participate in multiple communities of practice and their individual identity is based on the multiplicity of this participation'.²² The idea of *community of practice* has been widely used to analyse the process of the construction of identity. Christie, provides a good example of this position: he states,

²⁰ Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991); see also Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²¹ Penelope Eckert, Sally McConnell-Ginet, "New Generalisations and Explanations in Language and Gender Research", *Language in Society* 28.2 (1999), 185-203.

²² Penelope Eckert, Sally McConnell-Ginet, "Communities of Practice: where Language, Gender and Power All Live", in Kira Hall, Mary Bucholtz, and Birch Moonwomon, eds., *Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Women and Language Group, 1992), 89-99; Penelope Eckert, Sally McConnell-Ginet, "Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as Community-based Practice", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992), 461-90.

I take as axiomatic that any given individual will belong to a range of CofPs. [...]. In particular it implies that any given individual will have a range of practice-specific identities and that, moreover, each of these identities will be configured to a given practice...²³

However, it would be a mistake to consider *communities of practice* as the place for cooperation among the members:

Connotations of peaceful coexistence, mutual support, or interpersonal allegiance are not assumed...peace, happiness and harmony are therefore not necessary properties of a community of practice...disagreement, challenges and competition can all be forms of participation.²⁴

Analysis and findings

In this preliminary report, I shall be reporting in some detail simply on the data obtained through interviews in Italy. My research interviews were carried out on a group of 180 Italian subjects. These were sorted into age-groups: 14-19 (70), 20-24 (30), 25-29 (20), 30-34 (20), 35-39 (20), over 40 (20). All groups had an equal number of males and females. I chose to divide the people I interviewed into groups of 5 years age range because this can allow a better understanding of the presence of any characteristic behaviours, shared beliefs and the subsequent creation of different Communities of Practice and, eventually, mark an age divide distinguishing the different perception and fruition of the technological media and of CMC. The interviews were generally not formally structured with a pre-set formula, but were, rather in the form of free conversation, in order to make the subjects feel at ease and to allow them to better and freely express their feelings and opinions on their uses of communications media.

It is common knowledge that the use of socially interactive technologies is very widespread among teenagers, and, if we consider IM (Instant Messaging), very much more so than in the

²³ Christie, *Politeness and the Linguistic Construction*, 4.

²⁴ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

rest of the population. In fact, as Bryant, Sanders-Jackson, and Smallwood write:

adoption of socially interactive technologies is high among adolescents. Aside from email, the most often used Internet tool for peer communication is instant messaging. This is also a youth-preferential activity, with 74% of online adolescents in the U.S. having used instant messaging, compared with 44% of online adults (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001). Research in the U.K has produced similar findings (Livingston & Bober, 2005). Moreover, those youth who IM tend to do so regularly. In 2005, 65% of American teens, and 75% of American teens who were online, used IM (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005). Nearly half of the teens who IM use it everyday. Most youth who IM use this application most regularly to maintain relationships, either with friends or family members, especially those that do not live nearby (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001). Gender-wise, girls use IM as a venue for socializing more than do boys (Jennings & Wartella, 2004). Moreover, although text messaging has been gaining popularity with teens, only one-third of American teens report sending text messages (although that number rises to 64% if one considers only teens who have mobile phones) (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005).²⁵

I have found most of these findings to be true in Italian society as well, with the vast majority of adolescents I interviewed being active users of IM while ‘elders’²⁶ tended to prefer the more traditional e-mail form, as can be seen in the data in Table 1 below:

Age Group	IM males	IM females	TOT IM	email males	email females	TOT email
14-19	80%	91,50%	85,75%	40%	40%	40%
20-24	80%	80%	80%	47%	53%	50%
25-29	60%	80%	70%	90%	90%	90%
30-34	30%	40%	35%	90%	90%	90%
35-39	10%	20%	15%	80%	80%	80%
>= 40	10%	0%	5%	70%	60%	65%

Table 1

²⁵ J. Alison Bryant, Ashley Sanders-Jackson and Amber M.K. Smallwood, “IMing, text messaging, and adolescent social networks” in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11.2 (2006).

²⁶ Those over 35 years of age, for the purposes of this study.

Regarding text messages, the age divide is even wider: while for teenagers it is considered ‘appropriate’ or, even, ‘natural’ to use text messaging as a form of communicating important news, this is not so for older people: nonetheless, I noticed a tendency to age down-levelling, in the sense that people who started using technological means of communication later in their lives tend to follow the example of their younger counterparts regarding the textual and contextual means used and perceived as appropriate. More specifically I refer to people in the 30-34 group who are adopting the standards of their younger counterparts, while if we analyze the older groups I noticed that they are more rooted in considering the text message as a kind of substitute to the telegram. Actually 35% of the over 40s reported that they started texting using the kind of language previously used in telegrams and only after a while had they swapped to a more conventional style of writing. What is peculiar to the 30-34 group is that it is a kind of threshold group: about 80% say that they often question themselves and their peers about the appropriateness of what they are to write on formal occasions.

A further aspect that emerges from my Italian interviewees is the perception that online life, and online friendships, are not in contrast or opposed to adolescents’ life ‘offline’. On the contrary, they are perceived as a positive influence, both to be more in touch with already existing friends and to make new ones. This is similar to that reported in the literature for the US, for example:

Today’s youth do not necessarily feel that using the Internet, email, IM, and text messaging takes time away from their friendships. Instead, many consciously use the Internet and SITs to influence their peer networks. According to a recent U.S. study, 67% of the youth surveyed felt that the Internet only helps “a little” or “not at all” when trying to make new friends (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001). In contrast, 48% of the respondents said that they use the Internet to improve their relationships with friends, and 32% said that they use the Internet to make new friends (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001). On the one hand, this supports the optimistic perspective that online communication promotes social support and expanded social interaction (Cole & Robinson, 2002; Katz & Rice, 2002; Kavanaugh, et al., 2005; Kestnbaum, Robinson,

Neustadtl, & Alvarez, 2002) rather than isolation and depression (Kraut, Patterson, & Lundmark, 1998; Nie, Hillygus, & Erbring, 2002). On the other hand, it may also support Ito and Daisuke's (2003) argument that adolescents are substituting poorer quality social relationships (weak ties) for better ones (strong ties).²⁷

The possibility of creating new relationships over the Internet usually leads to the creation of weaker though more numerous ones. Granovetter's weak-tie relationships²⁸ and the concept of bridging (as opposed to bonding) relationships²⁹ can help explain how these relationships work. Weak-tie relationships are generally acquaintances, while strong-tie relationships might be close friends or family members: the existence of a large number of weak-tie relationships will carry along with it the possibility of having access to a variety of novel information, thus widening the perspective and horizons of the adolescent, while strong-tie relationships, being more closely connected to the world in which the adolescent lives, tends to provide duplicate information.

A "bridging relationship" is a relationship in which the individual is outside his/her own usual interpersonal network, having to cope with a high level of heterogeneity and with levels of emotional intensity lower than those present in a bonding relationship³⁰. These possibilities may have a positive influence – and are often perceived as such by the adolescents I interviewed – on the development of a broader view of life and especially on the ability to cope with people who can be very different from those one is used to communicating with.

Until a few years ago, text messages seemed to be the preferred choice for Italian teenagers, probably due to the relatively late introduction of computers in everyday Italian life. However, Italian

²⁷ Bryant, Sanders-Jackson, and Smallwood, *IMing, Text Messaging, and Adolescent Social Networks*; Malcom R. Parks, Kory Floyd, *Making Friends in Cyberspace*.

²⁸ Mark Granovetter, "Strength of Weak Ties", *American Journal of Sociology* 78.6 (1983), 1360-1380; Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties", in *A Network Theory Revisited. Sociological Theory* 1 (1983), 201-233.

²⁹ Nan Lin, *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Parks & Floyd, *Making Friends in Cyberspace*.

³⁰ Lin, *Social Capital*.

teenagers now behave quite similarly to their American counterparts and IM has become a mass phenomenon.

What the reasons may be for such a widespread use can only be speculated upon: economic reasons (IM is free while texting is not); the possibility of multiple interactions; multimodal communication, etc.

What did clearly emerge during my interviews is how the use of IM has changed over the years. In fact, far from remaining static, IM has incorporated another phenomenon, blogging, merging the two into one. Most of my Italian teenage interviewees reported that blogs had become part of their everyday life, making the use of mere textual communication seem 'poor'. The comment I heard most was that blogs were a necessary add-on to their communicative experience since, on the one hand, they became the place for self expression, on the other, they allowed (through the use of comments, photos, music, etc.) for a better perception of the other person's life, giving, consequently, a wider basis for discussing things online with friends.

The fusion of IM with blogging has marked an even bigger age divide. Most of the active users of this new form of communication are people up to their early, mid twenties. There are, of course, a few exceptions, but the divide is especially determined by the perception of private *vs.* public: most adults, in fact, tend to perceive self exposure through blogs as a form of violation of their private life, especially when dealing with personal blogs.³¹ In my opinion, this is the main reason why it is likely that a similar age divide will remain in the future for this type of communication.

Differently from what one may expect, as Table 1 above clearly shows, there is an age divide also in the use of e-mails, but the other way round. In fact, people who had already had a formal education in letter writing, have been quite quick to adapt the possibility of real time delivery offered by the new technology, while their younger counterparts have preferred IM.

³¹ I would like to make a rough distinction between two types of blogs: blogs of ideas, in which the author expresses his/her point of view on matters of everyday life, politics, etc, while aiming at a wide audience, and personal blogs, which pivot on the life of the author, rich with details from his/her personal life, which are directed mainly to interpersonal communication.

The purpose of communication may explain this kind of preference: while e-mails are used as a means of communicating *in absentia*, thus being the perfect means for work relationships, which require the possibility to read and consider before replying, IM works, mainly, *in presentia*, being useful for interpersonal, social communication but not for working relationships.

Linguistic aspects

As we have mentioned before, CMC has brought along with it a new way of using language. Some critics have pointed critically to the supposed linguistic degradation in its use, but there is room to believe this is far from being true. Communication is entering a “third phase”³², a phase characterised by the transmission of information using not only verbal/written means but also by a multimodal approach: thus CMC has incorporated these aspects, forging a structure that differs from what existed before.

The loosening of coherence which has been observed to occur in synchronous CMC modes, is also being used creatively by teenagers, of all cultures:

[...] interactive exchanges in a variety of CMC modes tend to be less tightly stitched together than in face-to-face conversation: responses are often separated from the turns they are responding to, topics tend to decay quickly, and multiple, overlapping exchanges often share the same channel. On the one hand, this creates potential confusion that users seek to minimize by adopting compensatory strategies. On the other hand, some users exploit the potential of loosened coherence for the purposes of play and to enjoy intensified interactivity, especially in synchronous modes. These uses, which in some respects extend the limits of what is possible in spoken conversation, are facilitated by the availability of a persistent textual record of computer-mediated interaction.

These findings have implications for system design, as well as for the broader question of the extent to which the physical properties of CMC technologies determine how human beings interact when using them. Technological determinants can not be dismissed as irrelevant in the case of interactional coherence—they have clear effects. What

³² Raffaele Simone, *La Terza Fase* (Bari: Laterza, 2000)

will perhaps come as a surprise to some technological determinists, however, is that these effects are not devastating; indeed, they comport some unexpected advantages. Interactional coherence in CMC thus emerges as a complex phenomenon which cannot be equated in any simple way with the popularity (or users' enjoyment) of CMC systems.³³

This change, allowed by the medium used but also thoroughly exploited by its young users, is definitely a great one, since it affects the ways in which communication is carried out and will increasingly be carried out. The potentials of loosened coherence in the electronic media are indeed becoming greatly exploited by the new users and are becoming more and more part of new textual forms and skills:

Despite user adaptations, however, text-only CMC remains loosely coherent in comparison with the interactional norms for face-to-face conversation. This is especially apparent in CMC used for recreational purposes, for example in social MUDs and IRC channels, as well as many Usenet newsgroups. Indeed, in some groups, incoherence may be the norm rather than the exception [...]. Yet clearly, given the popularity of Usenet, IRC, and MUDs, reduced interactional coherence is not a serious impediment to users' enjoyment of recreational CMC. Not only that, it might be an advantage.

[...] Relaxed norms of coherence can be liberating, giving rise to increased opportunities for language play. Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright & Rosenbaum-Tamari claim that CMC is "an inherently playful medium", citing as an example an IRC "party" in which participants textually enacted the activity of "smoking dope". [...] associative topic shifts in IRC [...] are clearly [often] intended to be humorous; collaborative joking sequences [...] (what Chiaro calls "joke chains" in spoken conversation) are well attested in both synchronous and asynchronous CMC.³⁴

CMC is proving to be the new engine of communication fostering the development of written communication rather than

³³ Susan Herring, "Gender Differences in CMC: Findings and Implications", *The CPSR Newsletter* (Winter 2000), <http://www.cpsr.org/issues/womenintech/herring>

³⁴ Herring, *Gender Differences*.

its decay: never before has the number of people writing down their ideas, feelings and states of mind, and engaging so intensely in interaction, been so massive; and this, in my opinion, can only be positive, since it provides enhanced opportunities for thinking, pondering and exchanging ideas, enriching both the language and the self. What we are witnessing is the birth of a digital communication ability divide, and its parents, around the world, are the young.

Antonella Elia

Online Encyclopedi@s: The Case of Wikipedia and WikiSpeak

Introduction

This paper is a presentation of some work in progress centered on the analysis of the emerging textual genre of online encyclopaedias and, in particular, Wikipedia as a collaborative authoring project on the web.

The starting point of this research was the author's personal interest in Computer Mediated Communication, digital writing and media philosophy crucial in understanding Wikipedia's cultural framework.¹

¹ The concept of Rhizome elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and the idea of Collective Intelligence by Pierre Levy have been considered within the philosophical frame of Wikipedia. Deleuze and Guattari in *Mille Plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Minuit, 1980, Eng. tr. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) claimed that a rhizome is any structure in which each point is necessarily connected to each other point, where no location may become a beginning or an end. Deleuze labels the rhizome as a "multiplicity," resistant to structures of domination. He states that "...many people have trees growing in their heads, but the brain is more like grass than a tree. We're taught to act like trees and forced to think like trees, but he believes that we more naturally think like a rhizome" (17). Pierre Lévy in *Intelligence Collective. Pour une anthropologie du cyberspace*, Paris: La Découverte, 1994), affirmed that it is a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills and knowledge, where no one knows everything but everyone knows something. Thanks to it the sharing of ideas in cyberspace has the potential to liberate us from the social and political hierarchies and to develop a real distributed knowledge.

Most studies of Computer Mediated Communication, defined by Susan Herring as “human-human communication by means of messages transmitted via computer networks”,² have been focused on the first web generation (email, forum, chat, etc.) mainly from an anthropological or sociological perspective.

Only few researchers have investigated the new cybergenres belonging to the second web generation (blogs, wikis, virtual worlds, digital poetry, etc.) and even fewer have studied the new forms of linguistic interactions typical of the new Web.2.0 online communities.³ This latter approach is very significant for the present investigation whose aim is to explore the genre of online collaborative encyclopaedias and particularly Wikipedia’s language as an example of a new discourse community emerging from the net, influenced by the open content system and by the techniques of collaborative writing.

The new digital genres extend the concept of a literary or rhetorical genre by incorporating the notions of user interaction and processing. At MIT, Orlikowski and Yates,⁴ in accordance with

² Susan Herring, “Computer-mediated Discourse Analysis: An Approach to Researching Online Behaviour”, in Barab, S.A. & R. Kling & J.H. Gray, eds., *Designing for virtual communities in the service of learning* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also *Computer Mediated Communication, Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1996).

³ The term “Web 2.0” became popular after the first O’Reilly Media Web 2.0 conference in 2004. It refers to a supposed second-generation of Internet services, such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, virtual worlds and folksonomies, that let people collaborate and share information online in innovative ways formerly unavailable. Thus, the term basically suggests a new version of the World Wide Web, but also a change in the ways the Internet is used. The core principle seems to be in its participatory mechanisms. The new web mode becomes non-hierarchical, democratic, open and non-authoritarian. Web 2.0 principles seem to be more related to political concepts than to Computer Science. This happens because there is an ideological principle at work in Web 2.0, that knowledge and information need to be free and not controlled, collectively created and mutually shared with others.

⁴ Wanda Orlikowski and JoAnne Yates, “Genre Repertoire: the Structuring of Communicative Practices in Organizations”, *Administrative Science Quarterly* (retrieved 18 November 2007 from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m4035/is_n4_v39/ai_16987482).

See also “Genre Systems: Structuring Interaction Through Communicative Norms” (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1998); retrieved 18 November, 2007, from <http://ccs.mit.edu/papers/ccswp166.html>.

modern genre theory, conceived genres as socially recognised types of communicative actions, identifying them by their purpose and by their common characteristic aspects of substance and form. They asserted that genre concepts interact with *CMC* (Computer Mediated Communication) and *CSCW* (Computer Supported Collaborative Work). Genre analysis helps to understand a communicative situation and a genre based approach would do more justice to the written communication actually taking place, by not ignoring emerging new textual typologies.

Shepherd and Watters coined the term “cybergenre” to denote digital genres.⁵ They divided them into two classes of subgenres: “extant” and “novel”. Extant subgenres are based on genres already existing in other media and which have been shifted in a digital form (i.e. newspaper into electronic news; letters to email, etc.); on the contrary, novel subgenres are entirely dependent on the new medium (i.e. homepages, search engines, webgames, etc.). They stated that when an existing genre migrates to a computer environment, it will, initially, be faithfully replicated: content and form will be preserved and the capabilities of the new medium will not be fully exploited. At a later stage in the evolution, variant genres are created. This process is driven by the technical capabilities of the new medium. The evolution of traditional encyclopaedias into online encyclopaedias can be taken as an example of the development of an extant paper form into a novel one.

Encyclopaedias: an overview

A brief outline of the history of the development of encyclopaedias is useful to the understanding of the evolution of this textual genre.

The term “encyclopaedia” comes from the Greek *εγκύκλιος παιδεία* (*enkuklios paideia*), literally “in a circle of instruction”

⁵ Michael Shepherd and Carolyn Watters, “The Evolution of Cybergenres” in *Proceedings of the Thirty-First Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS '98)*, vol. II, p. 97-109 (retrieved 18 November, from <http://csdl2.computer.org/comp/proceedings/hicss/1998/8236/02/82360097.pdf>); see also the *Literature Genre & Cybergenre Bibliography* (retrieved 18 November 2007, from <http://www.cs.uu.nl/people/leen/GenreDev/Bibliography.htm#Shepherd-Watters-1998>).

and more generally “a well-rounded education”.⁶ Compendia of knowledge, either general (covering all fields) or specialised (comprehensive, in a particular field), have been produced throughout human history, but the term “encyclopaedia” was not used to refer to such works until the 16th century.

The idea of collecting the world’s knowledge goes back to the ancient Library of Alexandria and Pergamon. Many writers of ancient times, such as Aristotle, attempted to write comprehensively about all human knowledge, but the modern idea of a general purpose, widely distributed printed encyclopaedia, with alphabetical arrangement and frequent bibliographies, goes back to just a little before Denis Diderot and the 18th century Encyclopaedists. Ephraim Chambers published his *Cyclopaedia* in London in 1723 and its French translation inspired the *Encyclopédie* (28 volumes), perhaps the most renowned of all encyclopaedias, completed in 1772 by d’Alembert and Diderot.

Encyclopædia Britannica,⁷ considered the oldest English-language general encyclopaedia, was a product of the Scottish Enlightenment as it was originally published in Edinburgh by Adam and Charles Black. Three editions were published from 1768 to 1797. Unlike the French *Encyclopédie*, Britannica was an extremely conservative publication, and this is the reason why its later editions were dedicated to the reigning monarch. For its ninth and tenth editions the publication moved from Scotland to London where it became associated with “The Times” newspaper in the 1870s and, for its eleventh edition, with the University of Cambridge. The trademark and publication rights were subsequently sold to Sears Roebuck, thus, in 1941, Encyclopaedia Britannica moved to the United States as Sears Roebuck offered it as a gift to the University of Chicago. In the 20th century, Encyclopædia Britannica reached its fifteenth edition. It has grown in size and reputation over the years and, despite its name, it continues to be published in the United States. The most complete version of Encyclopædia Britannica, that of 2005, contains about 120.000 articles, with 44 million words and

⁶ *Encyclopaedia* (8 August 2006) in *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, retrieved 18 November 2007, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopaedia>.

⁷ *Encyclopaedia in Britannica Online*, retrieved 18 November, 2007, from <http://www.britannica.com>

a comprehensive index, the first of its kind. It is published in paper form (32 volumes containing 65,000 articles), on CD-rom or DVD-rom, and online (120,000 articles). Brief article summaries can be viewed for free on the Web, while the full text is available only for monthly or yearly paying individual subscribers. Britannica's articles are commonly considered accurate, reliable and well-written. It is self-proclaimed as one of "the world's most trusted sources of information on every topic imaginable".

An encyclopaedia's hierarchical structure, or alphabetical arrangement, with its evolving nature is particularly adaptable to a disk-based or on-line computer format. This development is the reason why all major printed encyclopaedias have moved to this method of delivery. CD-Roms have the advantage of being cheaply produced and extremely portable. Furthermore, they can include media (such as video, sound clips and animated illustrations), impossible in the printed format. All electronic encyclopaedias make use of hypertext cross-references since hyperlinking between conceptually related items is a significant benefit. Moreover, online encyclopaedias offer the additional advantage of being dynamic: new and frequently updated information can be presented almost immediately, rather than waiting for the next release of a static format (as with a disk or paper publication).

Wikipedia

Traditional encyclopaedias are written by a number of people with academic qualifications and credentials, representing a restricted community of employed text writers. This is not the case for Wikipedia⁸ which is an example of a collaborative hypermedium used for working together on a mutual project. Each site is, more or less, independent from the rest in the World Wide Web, but the web collectively represents a metaviewpoint, the view point of humanity. However, CMC and the WWW do not automatically imply collaboration. To create a common artifact, hard work is required as well as conscious teamwork.⁹

⁸ *Wikipedia*, retrieved 18 September 2006, from <http://www.wikipedia.org>.

⁹ Lowry Paul Benjamin, Curtis Aaron, Lowry Michelle René, "Building a Taxonomy

A description of Wikipedia is crucial to the understanding of this emerging phenomenon. The name Wikipedia is based on the Hawaiian term *wiki wiki*, meaning “quick” or “super-fast”.¹⁰ At Honolulu Airport, the inter-terminal coaches are called the *Wiki Wiki Bus* for this reason.

According to the statistics gathered by *Alexa*, Wikipedia in the first three months of 2007 is ranked among the first ten most clicked urls on the web, thus it can be considered one of the most popular reference websites.¹¹ With around 50 million hits per day, it receives roughly 450 times more traffic than the online version of the *Britannica*.

Wikipedia is an online authoring environment, a social e-democracy experiment, designed with the goal of creating a user-written free encyclopaedia containing information on all subjects, written collaboratively by volunteers. This project, whose founder was the American Jimmy Wales,¹² started in 2001.

Anyone can add or improve text, images and sounds in Wikipedia. The contents are licensed under a free copyleft license, the *GFDL* (GNU Free Documentation License).¹³ At the time of updating the present article the project has produced over 9 million articles and it has been officially recognised as the largest international online community. Wikipedia consists, in late 2007, of 253 independent language editions sponsored by the *Wikimedia Foundation*.¹⁴

and Nomenclature of Collaborative Writing to Improve Interdisciplinary Research and Practice”, (2004), *Goliath*, retrieved 18 November, 2007, from http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-666950/Building-a-taxonomy-and-nomenclature.html

¹⁰ Bo Leuf and Ward Cunningham, *The Wiki Way: Quick Collaboration on the Web* (New York, USA Addison-Wesley, 2001).

¹¹ *Alexa*, retrieved 18 November, 2007, from <http://www.alexa.com>. [As of October 2009; it is 6th globally, and 1st of the reference sites. Ed.’s note]

¹² Jimmy Donal “Jimbo” Wales (1966) is an Internet entrepreneur and a wiki enthusiast, best known for founding Wikipedia.

¹³ The *GNU Free Documentation License* is a license for free content, designed by the Free Software Foundation (FSF) for the GNU project. The license stipulates that any copyleft of the material, even if modified, carries the same license. A copyleft license uses copyright law in order to ensure that every person who receives a copy, or derived version of a work, can use, modify, and also redistribute both the work and derived versions of the work. Copyleft is the opposite of copyright. Wikipedia is the largest documentation project to use this license.

¹⁴ Wikimedia Foundation’s goals are to develop and maintain wiki-based projects

Wikipedia's growth has been exponential in several of the major language editions. Its five largest editions are, in descending order, English, German, French, Polish, Japanese and Italian. Every language edition operates independently, as translated articles represent only a small fraction of any edition.¹⁵

Wikipedia has been described by its founder Jimmy Wales as “an effort to create and distribute a free encyclopaedia of the highest possible quality to every single person on the planet and in their own language”.¹⁶

The English Wikipedia is the largest edition, with over two million articles (as of November 2007) and it will very probably remain the largest edition in the near future, at least.¹⁷ It is consulted as a standard reference all over the world and its success demonstrates that it meets users' needs for reliable and up-to-date information. Wikipedia never declares any articles finished as they are subjected to an everlasting editing process. Any visitors may edit Wikipedia's articles as a volunteer author and have their changes immediately displayed, as wiki authorship is characterised by gradual and repetitive additions and deletions of content over time. It is not a form of one-way communication, since, unlike other media, no one gets the last word in Wikipedia. This phenomenon develops a sense of collective purpose and responsibility which are yet other motivations to participate. People who write and edit articles for Wikipedia are defined as “Wikipedians”.

Wikipedia is built on the belief that cooperation among

and to freely provide their contents to the public. In addition to the multilingual general encyclopaedia “Wikipedia”, there is “Wiktionary” a multi-language dictionary, “Wikiquote” an encyclopaedia of quotations, “Wikisource” a repository of source texts in any language, and “Wikibooks” a collection of e-books for students.

¹⁵ This is the list of major editions based on the number of articles as of November 2007. English (2,076,000), German (661,000), French (578,000), Polish (438,000), Japanese (431,000), Italian (367,000), Dutch (376,000), Portuguese (336,000), Spanish (295,000) and Swedish (259,000).

¹⁶ Jimbo Wales (3 October 2006) in *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 18 November 2007, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy_Wales.

¹⁷ See *Wikipedia Statistics* <http://stats.wikimedia.org/EN/Charts/WikipediaEN.htm>, for updates each month. [The count, as of September 2009, was just over 3 million out of 14 million across all languages, compared to 2 out of 9 million in Nov. 2007, showing, thus, also the relatively rapid growth of other language versions. Ed.'s note].

Wikipedians, thanks to the “social” software, will improve articles over time. Articles become constantly better as people go back again and again to old articles, to add to them, reword ambiguous statements, correct mistakes, etc. This means that during the years, the quality of Wikipedia articles tends to grow, both in quality and accuracy. To paraphrase Linus Torvalds,¹⁸ “Given enough eyeballs, all typos,¹⁹ factual errors and other errors of content are shallow”.²⁰ Wiki community members define this editing process as a collaborative work of art, a Darwinian-like evolutionary process, or an adversarial “battlefield of ideas”.

Every contributor is intended to be of equal status when editing articles. The editing process is not controlled by any particular editorial group. However, maintenance tasks are performed by a group of volunteer administrators (*SysOps*) who, in accordance with the community policy, have the privilege of preventing articles from being edited or deleted.

Vandalism, which consists of a bad-faith addition, change or deletion, deliberately made to compromise the encyclopaedia’s integrity, is a constant problem for Wikipedia. Most acts of vandalism consist in replacing articles with obscenities or irrelevant content. Minor infractions may result in a temporary block, while long-term or permanent blocks are given for prolonged and serious infractions by an Arbitration Committee (*ArbCom*) which has the power of temporarily or permanently blocking users from editing.

Many Wikipedia articles are of surprisingly high quality. There is a page on Wikipedia called “featured articles” in which particularly well-written and comprehensive articles are highlighted. These selected articles are of a level of quality typical of a proprietary encyclopaedia. Articles are reviewed there for style, prose, completeness, accuracy and neutrality.

¹⁸ Linus Benedict Torvalds (1969) is the original developer of the Linux operating system.

¹⁹ *Typo* means “typographical error” a mistake made during the typing process.

²⁰ Larry Sanger “Toward a New Compendium of Knowledge”, in *Citizendium.org* (October 10, 2006), retrieved 16 November 2007, from <http://www.citizendium.org/essay.html>. See also Larry Sanger, “Britannica or Nupedia? The Future of Free Encyclopaedia” (25 July 2001) in *KuroShin*, retrieved 16 November 2007 from <http://www.kuroShin.org/story/2001/7/25/103136/121>.

Analysing Wikipedia's entries, from a linguistic perspective, it is possible to deduce that users approach their community to create homogeneous encyclopaedic entries using a characteristic formal style, which shall be called here "WikiLanguage".

The style used in the encyclopaedic entries is explicitly promoted in an official "Manual of Style" which is considered a framework of reference for all Wikipedia's contributors. Here, authors can find rules on how to write article titles, headings, notes, and on how to use punctuation, spelling, national varieties of English, etc. According to Wikipedia Style, entries have to be concise and observe core principles of cooperation and objective writing based on NPOV (Neutral Point of View). This last principle is absolute and not negotiable. The NPOV Policy states that articles should be written without bias, representing all views fairly. It is crucial that Wikipedians work together to make articles unbiased. This is one of the greatest merits of Wikipedia. There are many words and phrases which should be avoided because they break the NPOV (i.e. expressions such as: *of course*, *obviously*, *naturally*, etc., are considered inappropriate). Furthermore, the manual states that paragraphs should be short, as the eye tires of following solid text for too many lines and, similarly, articles themselves should be kept relatively short.

Wikipedia, unlike other reference works on the web (such as *Everything2*, *h2g2*), prefers a formal style. Formality is the most important variation between styles or registers. According to Heylighen and Dewaele (1999)²¹ a formal style is characterized by detachment, accuracy and rigidity. It is unambiguous, context independent (comprehensible in a wider context by persons from different groups and cultures) and highly informative. Therefore, the use of acronyms, first personal pronouns (*I*, *we*), contractions (*don't*, *can't*, *won't*) and jargon expressions is explicitly forbidden in Wikipedia articles. When jargon expressions must unavoidably be used, their meaning has to be explained as the reader might not have specific competence in that field and might not understand the

²¹ Francis Heylighen and Jean Marc Dewaele, *Formality of Language: Definition, Measurement and Behavioral Determinants, Internal Report*, Center Leo Apostel, (Free University of Brussels, Belgium, 1999), 12-15.

subject-specific term used. Thus, authors must link jargon terms to articles explaining their meaning.

In Thelema,²² another online free encyclopaedia, powered by MediaWiki, it is clearly stated that the ideal style to pursue is that of Encyclopaedia.com,²³ which is the online Columbia Encyclopaedia's Sixth Edition,²⁴ considered one of the best examples of a traditional expert-created encyclopaedia in the U.S.A. As stated in the "article basics":

Keep the article in an encyclopaedic style. Be objective: avoid personal comments (or turn them into general statements, but only when they coincide), don't use personal forms (I found that...). Entries should not sound like a journal, news item, personal letter, or dictionary. Read some articles at Encyclopaedia.com for some great examples of the writing style we are looking for.²⁵

Previous studies on Wikipedia

The development of Wikipedia as a new web phenomenon has recently attracted the attention of many scholars coming from different research areas: computing, sociology, linguistics, etc. Their positions are very diverse, ranging between harsh criticism and enthusiastic approval.

²² *The Free Encyclopedia of Thelema*, retrieved 20 November 2007, from http://fet.egnu.org/wiki/Main_Page.

²³ Encyclopaedia.com, retrieved 10 November 2007, from <http://www.encyclopaedia.com>.

²⁴ Columbia Encyclopaedia's first edition was published in 1936. The current sixth edition contains over 52,000 articles. Its electronic version is available and licensed by several different companies over the World Wide Web (Bartleby.com, encyclopaedia.com, etc). It is updated on a quarterly basis and contains over 84,000 hyperlinked cross-references. A peculiarity of Columbia Encyclopaedia, in comparison to other similar reference works, is its concise but complete biographies, usually accompanied by carefully selected bibliographies. This encyclopaedia has been sometimes accused of having a religious or ethnic bias. While this view has been mainly prevalent with regard to past editions, some people still perceive a certain bias to be present.

²⁵ Article Basics (15 March 2005) in *Free Encyclopedia of Thelema* (http://egnu.org/wiki/Free_Encyclopedia_of_Thelema:Article_Basics (no longer online, but see more recent longer instructions at: http://fet.egnu.org/wiki/Free_Encyclopedia_of_Thelema:How_to_Contribute; retrieved 24 November 2007).

Wikipedia has been blamed for deficiencies in comprehensiveness because of its voluntary nature, for reflecting the systemic biases of its contributors and for its inconsistency.²⁶

Further critics argue that Wikipedia's open nature and lack of properly cited sources for much of the information make it unreliable.²⁷ Editors of traditional reference works such as *Encyclopædia Britannica* have contested the project's utility and status as an encyclopaedia.²⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica representatives have commented that people write extensively in Wikipedia about subjects they are interested in. Consequently, news events are covered in great detail while many other subjects are poorly, if at all, covered. Critics state that while experts are paid to produce high quality entries, a body of volunteers lacks the required economic incentives to produce really good quality entries. Furthermore, they state that volunteer projects do not generate high quality content quickly enough to raise Britannica's concern, since the quality of the content is inferior to that produced by the Britannica professionals. Critics also declare that freeware encyclopaedias always start with great enthusiasm, but that they are soon neglected, like so many other ambitious projects of that type. Concerns have also been raised on the lack of accountability resulting from contributors' anonymity, its vulnerability to vandalism, and so forth. It has been claimed that Wikipedia's open structure makes it an easy target for advertisers.²⁹ Ahrens has also noted the addition of news to articles by political organisations including the U.S. House of Representatives.³⁰

²⁶ Simon Waldman, "Who knows?", *The Guardian* (June 10, 2004), retrieved 4 November 2007, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2004/oct/26/g2.onlinesupplement>.

²⁷ Stacy Schiff, "Know It All. Can Wikipedia Conquer Expertise?", *Annals of Information, The New Yorker* (06 July 2006); retrieved 18 November 2007, from http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/07/31/060731fa_fact.

²⁸ Robert McHenry, "The Faith-Based Encyclopaedia", *TCS Daily* (15 November 2004); retrieved 16 November 2007, from <http://www.tcsdaily.com/article.aspx?id=111504a>.

²⁹ See note 21, and Kleinz Torsten, The Wikipedia Project "World of Knowledge", in *Linux Magazine* (February, 2005); retrieved 8 November, 2007, from http://w3.linux-magazine.com/issue/51/Wikipedia_Encyclopaedia.pdf.

³⁰ Frank Ahrens, "Death by Wikipedia": The Kenneth Lay Chronicles", *The Washington Post* (09 July 2006); retrieved 8 November, 2007, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/08/AR2006070800135.html>.

The most visible and public attack to Wikipedia is that by Lanier who criticizes Wikipedia's growing importance in status and sees it as a renaissance of the *idea that the collective is all-wise*.³¹ Lanier claims that the concept of *collective intelligence* can be a dangerous tool in the hands of any extreme ideology; it represents, moreover, a risk for the future of individual minds as personal contributions will be lost in the *mare magnum* of the collective knowledge.

On the other hand, positive appreciations can be found in an influential article published by the journal *Nature*.³² Nature Scientists compared forty-two pairs of science articles from the Encyclopaedia Britannica Online and Wikipedia for factual errors, false statements and omissions. They discovered that the error rate among them was virtually very similar. Experts detected 162 errors in Wikipedia compared to 123 in Britannica. The results of the comparison were widely seen as a validation of Wikipedia's content and methods.

Emigh and Herring also carried out a comparative analysis of traditional and co-authored encyclopaedias (Wikipedia, Everything2, Columbia Encyclopaedia).³³ They conclude that the greater the degree of post-production editorial control afforded by the system, the more formal and standardised the language of the collaboratively-authored documents becomes. Their findings shed light on how users, acting through mechanisms provided by the system, can shape content in particular ways. The writing norms are constantly enforced through the permanent editing processes and the agency of socially-approved members (e.g., *the SysOps*) of the Wikipedia community. They claimed:

³¹ Jaron Lanier, "On Digital Maoism: The Hazards of the New Online Collectivism", *Edge* 183 (2006); retrieved November 8, 2007, from <http://www.edge.org/documents/archive/edge183.html>.

³² Jim Giles, "Internet Encyclopaedias Go Head to Head" in *News@nature.com* (26 March 2006); retrieved 18 November 2007, from <http://www.nature.com/news/2005/051212/full/438900a.html>.

³³ William Emigh and Susan Herring, "Collaborative Authoring on the Web: A Genre Analysis of Online Encyclopaedias" *Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences, HICSS-38* (Los Alamitos: IEEE Press, 2005).

[...] a few active users, when acting in concert with established norms within an open editing system, can achieve ultimate control over the content produced within the system, literally erasing diversity, controversy, and inconsistency, and homogenizing contributors' voices.³⁴

Reagle, furthermore, explores the character of “mutual aid” and interdependent decision-making within Wikipedia.³⁵ He focuses on the wikiquote rules (e.g. good faith), which transforms community participation into a cooperative effort. He positively evaluates discussions in Wikipedia as tools which transform divergent into convergent controversy.

Wiki language

In this research project, in order to define the degree of formality of Encyclopaedia Britannica Online *vs.* Wikipedia, the occurrences of some linguistic classes, typical of formality, have been empirically measured in two corpora compiled from each of the sources. Each corpus, up to now, is made up of one hundred nodes representing entries randomly taken from the ten Wikipedia Folksonomy's³⁶ categories and from corresponding articles found in Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. The nodes have been analyzed

³⁴ See note 33.

³⁵ Joseph Reagle, “A Case of Mutual Aid: Wikipedia, Politeness, and Perspective Taking” (2006); retrieved 18 November 2007, from <http://reagle.org/joseph/2004/agree/wikip-agree.html>.

³⁶ “Folksonomy” defines the practice of collaborative categorization using freely chosen keywords. The term exactly means people's classification management (from folk = people, taxonomy = classification, nomos = management). Thus, it is a user generated taxonomy used to categorize and retrieve web content, using open-ended labels called tags. In contrast to formal classification methods, this phenomenon typically arises in non-hierarchical communities. The folksonomic tagging is intended to make a body of information increasingly easy to search, discover, and navigate over time. Wikipedia's evolving folksonomy is based (as of November 2007) on the following categories: Arts, Biography, Geography, History, Mathematics, Science, Society, Technology, All portals. Apart from Wikipedia, two widely cited examples of websites using folksonomic tagging are Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>) and del.icio.us (<http://del.icio.us>).

using the *AntConc*³⁷ Concordancer software, the online text analyzer *Lexicoool.com* and dynamic Excel spreadsheets.

Statistical analysis has been based on the empirical measurement of formality through the frequency of different word classes, indicative keywords, significant word-suffixes and on the average length of words, sentences and encyclopaedic entries. The measurement of the “Readability Index” (based on the Gunning-Fox Index) is in progress. Quantitative results will be supplemented with qualitative textual observations on the nature of information and organization provided in the analyzed texts.

Conciseness (i.e. communication of more information in fewer words) is considered a feature of formal written discourse.³⁸

The quantitative analysis has revealed that nodes in Britannica are shorter (in words) than those in Wikipedia. The comparative analysis on the selected one-hundred nodes, has demonstrated that the average length of Wikipedia entries is double that found in Britannica (3515 vs. 1719 words). Wikipedia entries are in fact much longer than Britannica’s; however, some entries in Britannica are very long (e.g. such as those regarding London, the Himalayas, etc.), thus remarkably increasing its average. Wikipedia’s articles are longer in spite of the higher number of cross references which should result in a reduction of the main article’s length. As a comparison of average sentence length demonstrates, the length of Wikipedia entries is due, however, to a higher informative content and not to a prolix or informal style. Measurement shows a slightly shorter sentence length in Britannica (21.5 words per sentence) compared to Wikipedia (24.5 words per sentence). Short words have been considered a characteristic of informal genres.³⁹ Longer

³⁷ AntConc is a lexical analysis tool developed by Laurence Anthony, at the School of Science and Engineering, Waseda University in Japan. This program has been used to search for keywords, perform concordance searches and to create word lists useful to compute the frequency of the linguistic classes considered functional for the purposes of this research project.

³⁸ Wallace Chafe, “Integration and Involvement in Speaking, Writing, and Oral Literature”, in Deborah Tannen, ed., *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy* (Norwood NJ: Ablex, 1982); and see note 35.

³⁹ Douglas Biber, *Variation Across Speech and Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

words convey more specific, specialized meaning than shorter ones. Words become shorter as they are more frequently used in a more general meaning.⁴⁰ Average word length in Britannica and Wikipedia turns out to be very similar (5.3 vs. 5.2 characters per word).

A high level of lexical density is typical of formal academic writing.⁴¹ It has been considered the main stylistic difference between speech and writing.

The findings of this research have revealed a much higher lexical density (44.9% vs. 31.4%) in Britannica entries. Since the relationship between node length and unique words is not linear, if the node length varies widely (as occurs in the two online encyclopaedias) the lexical density will appear to be much higher in the shorter texts. According to Biber,⁴² each additional 100 words of text adds fewer and fewer additional unique words. Thus, lexical density has been re-calculated on texts of similar length and, also in this case, the results are seen to be very similar (Britannica 45.9 vs. Wikipedia 44.1%; see Fig. 1).

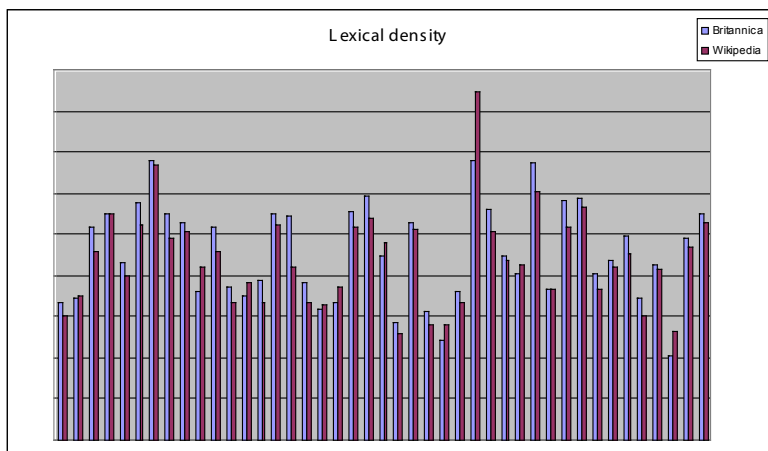


Fig. 1 Lexical density in Britannica vs. Wikipedia

⁴⁰ George Kingsley Zipf, *Human Behaviour and the Principle of Least Effort* (Cambridge, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1949).

⁴¹ Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday, *Spoken and Written Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁴² See note 43.

With reference to Biber's findings (1998)⁴³, the occurrence of Latin origin words, typical of formal genres (in this case, words ending with the suffixes *-age*, *-ment*, *-ance/ence*, *-ion*, *-ity*, *-ism*) was also investigated. Furthermore, gerunds and present participle forms, articles, nouns, adjectives, prepositions, passives, subordination features and conjuncts were also analysed, since the frequency of these linguistic classes should quantitatively increase in formal genres, according to Heylighen and Dewaele (1999)⁴⁴.

Thus, the analysis of the above mentioned classes revealed only a slightly higher formality in Britannica's entries.

In conclusion, as can be seen in Fig. 2, total average formality in the two corpora, apart from article length, turns out to be very similar (Britannica 51.2 % vs. Wikipedia 49.3 %).

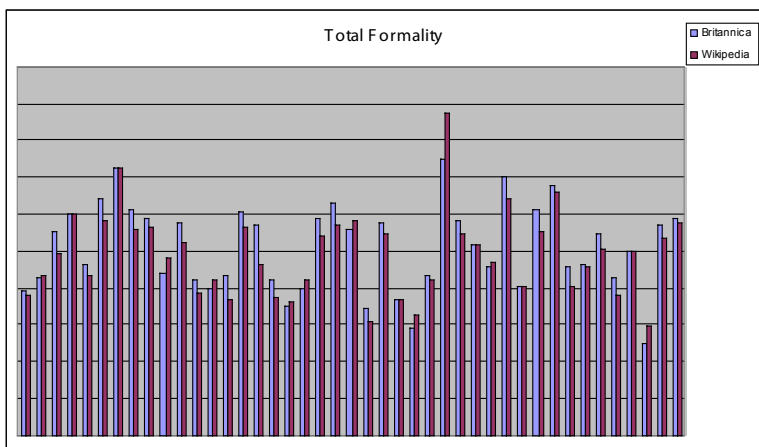


Fig. 2 Total formality in Britannica vs. Wikipedia

An interpretation of the collected data from Wikipedia seems to suggest that in the document mode pages, the linguistic and stylistic features show a formal and standardised level very similar to that found in Britannica.

⁴³ Douglas Biber, Susan Conrad, and Randi Reppen, *Corpus Linguistics: Investigating Language Structure and Use* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1998).

⁴⁴ Francis Heylighen and Jean Marc Dewaele, *Formality of Language: Definition, Measurement and Behavioral Determinants, Internal Report*, Center Leo Apostel (Free University of Brussels, Belgium, 1999), 12-15.

These similarities are thus, apparently, in contradiction with both the “WikiSpeak” spoken by Wikipedians in their backstage community and with the main goal of the movement which is the creation of contents incorporating different perspectives. The preliminary findings seem to confirm Emigh and Herring’s conclusions that when users act in accordance with established norms (see Manual of Style) and share a working social ethics (as in Wikiquette), even within an open collaborative writing system, diversity and controversy are erased, contributors’ voices are homogenised and traditional offline encyclopaedic style is respected⁴⁵. The technical advantages of online collaborative authoring systems seems to reinforce both the variety of the content and the encyclopaedic style. Thus, the quantitative analysis seems to reveal that Wikipedia succeeds in reproducing an extant encyclopaedic genre even if applied to a new digital and collaborative environment.

Computer Mediated Discourse Community and Wikipedia Community

The term Wikipedia can be applied to three things: an encyclopaedia (the actual body of work created), a project (the effort to make that encyclopaedia) and a community (the group of people working on the project).

Wikipedia, as a Computer Mediated Discourse Community (CMDC), has developed a characteristic wired style. Through the CMDA it is possible to study micro-level linguistic phenomena, such as online word formation processes, sentence structure, lexical choice and language switching. At the same time, a linguistic approach can be used to address social and psychological macro-level phenomena such as community and identity expression through discourse.

The discourse of a “real” community denotes a group of people with certain things in common: a public goal, a body of specialized knowledge, a specialised lexicon (vocabulary), and a set of beliefs about how knowledge is generated. Members also share an

⁴⁵ See note 34.

understanding of how to communicate with each other and with the larger community. To become a member of a discourse community, one must master its theoretical concepts, as well as its language and behavioral conventions. This usually means accepting its beliefs and values as well.⁴⁶ Wikipedia, as a virtual community, shares all its distinctive features with traditional communities. For this reason, it was considered important to also research the linguistic characteristics of the Wiki CMDC.

The Wikipedia community includes all editors, ideological supporters, current and even potential readers of all the different Wikipedia's editions, while a narrower definition of the Wikipedia community includes only Wikipedia's contributors.⁴⁷ Compared to other online communities the Wikipedia community is multicultural, as contributors to the English Wikipedia edition come from both the English speaking countries and those countries where English is the most commonly spoken foreign language. Wikipedians in their CMDC, attempt to understand each other, despite differences in languages, backgrounds, traditions, ethnicities, different cultural approaches and interests, thus a cross-cultural communication is developed in the online world-wide Wikipedia community. The community is heterogeneous also in that its members are philosophers, historians, scientists, artists, ecclesiastics, generalists, specialists, scholars and non-experts.

Although the community's goal is to create entries which are objective and without personal biases, the openness of Wikipedia allows total self-expression, at least in the community talk pages,⁴⁸ since Wikipedians define themselves within the context of the project through their personal interests and cultural goals.

The Wiki community is knowledgeable and, at the same time, fragile. The success of the community depends to a large extent

⁴⁶ John Swales, *Genre Analysis. English in Academic and Research Settings* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 21-29.

⁴⁷ Susan Bryant, Andrea Forte, Amy Bruckman, "Becoming Wikipedian: Transformation of Participation in a Collaborative Online Encyclopedia" (2006); retrieved 18 November from <http://www-static.cc.gatech.edu/~aforte/BryantForteBruckBecomingWikipedian.pdf>.

⁴⁸ A *talk page* is a special Wikipedia page containing discussion about the contents of the associated subject page. Collaborators of an article benefit mutually from discussing the article.

on the presence of open-minded and well-informed contributors. If these human qualities cannot be found in the members, the project will lose much of its appeal. It is, therefore, possible to define the Wikipedia community as unique. There are no other communities outside the Wiki world that combine the above attributes: it is both a free open content and an encyclopaedia project.

A considerable amount of communication and collaboration is needed to create an encyclopaedia. An individual's role in a Wikipedia project involves two main tasks: writing articles and participating in the community. The community's role, as some kind of science-fiction super-entity, is to organize and edit individual pages, to structure navigation between pages, to resolve conflicts among individual members and to create rules and patterns of behaviour. Hence, this community is exclusively defined by what exists on the Wikipedia website, that is to say, not only the entries themselves but also the related commentaries and discussions in talk pages. New constructivist scenarios and online collaborative environments such as wikis and Wikipedia, have contributed to the establishment and refinement of the concept of knowledge as the result of a collaborative construction. Furthermore, the concept of knowledge is intimately related to the medium which supports the community, and it definitely contributes to the establishment and refinement of the knowledge paradigm and philosophical framework which give coherence to the overall reference work.⁴⁹

WikiSpeak

Internet is a global and interactive medium. Each of these properties has consequences on the language produced. Forty years ago McLuhan,⁵⁰ the seminal media sociologist, affirmed that "the medium is the message", consequently also digital writing style has been influenced by the electronic channel, as, among things,

⁴⁹ Antonella Elia, "Gesso in silicio e costruttivismo: i wiki e i nuovi ambienti collaborativi dell' e-learning 2.0", *JE-LKS Journal of E-learning and Knowledge Society* 1 (February 2007), 99-108.

⁵⁰ Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message", in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet, 1964).

the use of the keyboard implies a mediated and slower form of communication compared to face-to-face communication as well as a restricted space available delimited by the monitor width.

Linguists have developed taxonomies for classifying types of word formation. The volume of new technical words coming into WikiSpeak is an opportunity to see their classifications in action.

According to David Crystal there are a number of common processes for word formation in the new ICT domain (affixation, backformation, compounding, conversion, acronym, initialism, blending, clipping).⁵¹ John Algeo's⁵² classification system for word-formation is based on four factors: whether the word has an etymon based on earlier words; whether the word omits any part of an etymon; whether a word combines two etyma, and whether any of the etyma are from another language. He uses six groupings: composites (prefixes, suffixes, compounding) shortenings (acronyms, initialisms, clipping, backformation), blending, shifting (functional or semantic shifts), loans and new creations. Algeo also shows the different percentages for types of word-formation in a set of samples taken from different dictionaries.

Wikipedians interact in their backstage community, by the use of a spoken-written language, which we are calling here "WikiSpeak". WikiSpeak, as an unofficial and what we might also see as a high-context code,⁵³ can be considered a new variety of Netspeak, one

⁵¹ David Crystal, *Language and the Internet* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 204; see also David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 429.

⁵² John Algeo, *Cambridge History of English Language* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999)

⁵³ The terms "high context" and "low context" were coined by Edward Hall (*Beyond Culture*, New York: Anchor Book Doubleday, 1976) to describe cultural differences between groups, societies and communication systems. In particular, the term "high context" refers to groups where people have strong interpersonal connections and share much common knowledge and presuppositions, thus, many aspects of cultural behaviour are not made explicit since community members have an internalized understanding of what is communicated. "A high-context communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalised in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context communication is just the opposite, i.e. the mass of information is vested in the explicit code" (Ibid, 91). In high-context cultures, knowledge is situational and relational and decisions and activities focused around personal interactions.

of the most creative domains of contemporary English, also known as Netlingo or Net Jargon. What makes Netspeak so interesting as a form of communication is the way it relies on characteristics belonging both to speech and writing.⁵⁴

WikiSpeak, though expressed through writing, displays several of the core properties of speech. It is used in the Wikipedia online synchronous and asynchronous CMC environments (such as the talk pages, discussion pages, mailing lists, IRC channels, instant messaging and personal user pages).

One of the main WikiSpeak peculiarities lies in the lexicon used. A large number of neologisms (*wikilogisms*) have emerged while Wikipedians talk about restricted operations and activities connected to their authorial and collaborative writing work.

The informality of WikiSpeak as used in the community talk pages was measured for this project through the occurrences of elements typical of informal genres (such as telephone and face-to-face conversations, CMC genres such as email, chat, etc.), that is to say contractions (*I'm, don't, he's*, etc.), first and second personal pronouns,⁵⁵ interjections (*Yes!!!!, WHAT????*), emoticons (:-) ; -), as well as neologisms.⁵⁶

WikiSpeak distinctiveness certainly lies in its lexicon where many word processes take place, including several ludic innovations.⁵⁷ With reference to the Algeo classification, a recurrent word-formation process in Wikispeak is the use of affixation (prefixes and suffixes) which alters the original meaning of words. A glossary is available for the newbies in Wikipedia community pages.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ See also Cordisco, "Blogspeak: Blogal English in the Global Era" [in this volume].

⁵⁵ See note 42.

⁵⁶ Antonella Elia, "An Analysis of Wikipedia Digital Writing", in *Proceedings EACL Conference, 11th Conference of the European Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, (Trento 3, aprile 2006), 16-21.

⁵⁷ See Jocelyne Vincent, "Talk-speak: gioco e ideologia nei logonimi inglesi", in Cristina Vallini, ed., *Le Parole per le parole - I logonimi nelle lingue e nei metalinguaggi* (Roma: Il Calamaio, 2001), 701-738.

⁵⁸ Wikipedia Glossary (15 September 2006) in *Wikipedia the free Encyclopedia*; retrieved 16 November, 2007, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Glossary>.

Typical Wikipedian WikiSpeak prefixes include *de-* (*desysop*, *dewikify*), *un-* (*unencyclopaedic*, *unwiki*), *sub-* (*subpage*, *substub*), *trans-* (*transwiki*, *transclusion*), or the suffix *-bot* (*rambot*, *vandalbot*), etc.

Compounding is also a popular method of creating wikilogisms, that is, by the combination of two existing words to make new words (i.e. *namespace*, *mediawiki*, *rollback*, *infobox*, *quickpoll*). Some elements turn up repeatedly, such as *wiki* itself (*wikipedia*, *wikibooks*, *wikilink*, *wikistress*, etc.). However, veterans avoid the excessive use of *wiki-* compounds as they are considered unencyclopaedic and cliché. However, they are tolerated when they are technical terms (e.g. *wikilinks*) or when referring to an existing subject (such as the Wikimedia Foundation), or when useful in communicating wiki-specific ideas (such as WikiCrime).

Since WikiSpeak is a written form of CMC, it makes an extensive use of initialisms; on the other hand, the use of acronyms is not very widespread in the community⁵⁹. Some of the most common initialisms in the community portal or in the talk pages are: NPOV (Neutral Point Of View), COTW (Collaboration Of The Week), IFD (Image For Deletion), RC (Recent Changes), RfM (Request For Mediation), VP (Village Pump), AOFW (Acronyms Of The Week), etc. WikiSpeak initialisms are not restricted to lexemes or single concepts, but can substitute also for sentences, e.g. WDYS (what did you say?), CIO (check it out), CID (consider it done), RDM (read the manual), etc. Some of them are like rebuses, as is also found in chat and text messaging, where the sound value of the letter, or numeral, acts as a syllable or a word, e.g. B4N (bye for now), CYL (see you later), U R (you are), 2L8 (too late), 2g4u (too good for you), etc.

It is basically recommended that a moderate use of *TLAs* (Three

⁵⁹ Both acronyms and initialisms are abbreviated words deriving from the initials of an original expression. They are used to distinguish between two different outcomes: An acronym is a pronounceable word (scuba, Nato radar), usually written in lower case letters and governed by the phonological rules of a language; they tend to have a vowel in the middle of consonant clusters. On the other hand, initialisms are free from constraints, are usually written in capital letters, sometimes with a full stop between letters and each individual letter is pronounced (XML, TLA, BBC). An initialism, may, when frequently used, become an acronym for some users (e.g. URL, url).

Letter Acronyms), *initialisms* and *wikilogisms* be made in the community page, otherwise the message could be incomprehensible, especially to ‘newbies’. Furthermore, when contributors try to title encyclopaedic articles with wikilogisms they are immediately elected for deletion as no type of jargon expressions can be used in encyclopaedic articles. This rule is explicitly expressed at the beginning of the *Wikipedia Glossary* page which declares:

While the definitions below may be useful for understanding and communicating on project and talk pages, and with edit summaries, remember to explain jargon in encyclopaedic articles, and write them in language which is readily understandable without specific knowledge of the Wikipedia project. This is an encyclopaedia, not text messaging! Don’t overdo the use of Wikipedia jargon such as shortcuts on talk pages and edit summaries, either, at least not without providing explanatory links to the appropriate pages.⁶⁰

Then, to show *WikSpeak Jargon* incomprehensibility, the following example is reported:

WTF? OMG! TMD TLA. ARG!

Basically, when WP:EDIANS CITE pages IN the PRJ NS, they often refer TO them using CUTS like “BEANS”, “BALLS”, and “NFCC”. While these ABB are GREAT for RDRing to a particular page you USE often, it’s probably a BAD idea to make A POINT of using these TLAs in daily TALK, lest your discussion end UP as NONSENSE like the TITLE of this page.⁶¹

which means:

What The Fuck? Oh My God! Too Many Damn Three Letter Acronyms. ARRRGGGHHH!

When Wikipedians refer to pages in the Wikipedia namespace, they often use shortcuts like “WP:BEANS”, “WP:BALLS”, and “WP:NFCC”. While these are quick jargon, and get you quickly to a

⁶⁰ See note 58.

⁶¹ WTF? OMG! TMD TLA. ARG! (25 September 2007) in *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*; retrieved 18 November, 2004, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WP:WOTTA>

particular page you use often, it's probably a bad idea to habitually use these three letter acronyms in daily conversation, lest your discussion end up as nonsensical as the title of this page.

Clipping is also typical of WikiSpeak, as in, for example, *admin* (administrator), *disambig* (disambiguation), *contribs* (contributions), *diff* (differences), *nom* (nomination), *dupe* (duplicate article), etc.

An original association or combination of the above-mentioned word formation processes can also be noticed, such as the matching of a double clipping to make new compounds, i.e. *ArbCom* (Arbitration Committee), *Copyviol* (Copyright violation), *medcom* (Mediation Committee), *Dicdef* (Dictionary definition), *SysOp* (System Operator), etc.

WikiSpeak also makes a wide use of blends, i.e. *wikipediolic* (*wikipedia* + *alcoholic*), *wikiquette* (*wiki* + *netiquette*), *wiktionary* (*wiki* + *dictionary*) and of course *Wikipedia* (*wikipedia* + *encyclopaedia*). A further characteristic, also noted in other new media environments, is that of figurative semantic shifts, e.g. *orphan* (a page with no links from other pages), *stub* (a short article), *sandbox* (a page that users may edit however they want), *village pump* (a set of pages set to discuss the technical issues and operations of Wikipedia), etc.

John Algeo (see Fig. 3) demonstrated the high frequency of composites in his analysis (especially compounds), over other types of word-formation in general English. Shifts and shortenings are also frequent, but less important, and there are very few new creations, blends and loan words.⁶²

An analysis of wikilogism formation, was also carried out during the present research project. To explore the most common word-formation processes in WikiSpeak, the Wikipedia glossary was tagged using Algeo's word-formation categories.⁶³ Wikilogism occurrences were then analyzed through the *Antconc* Concordancer program.

⁶² See note 54.

⁶³ See note 61.

ALGEO'S CLASSIFICATION (1999)

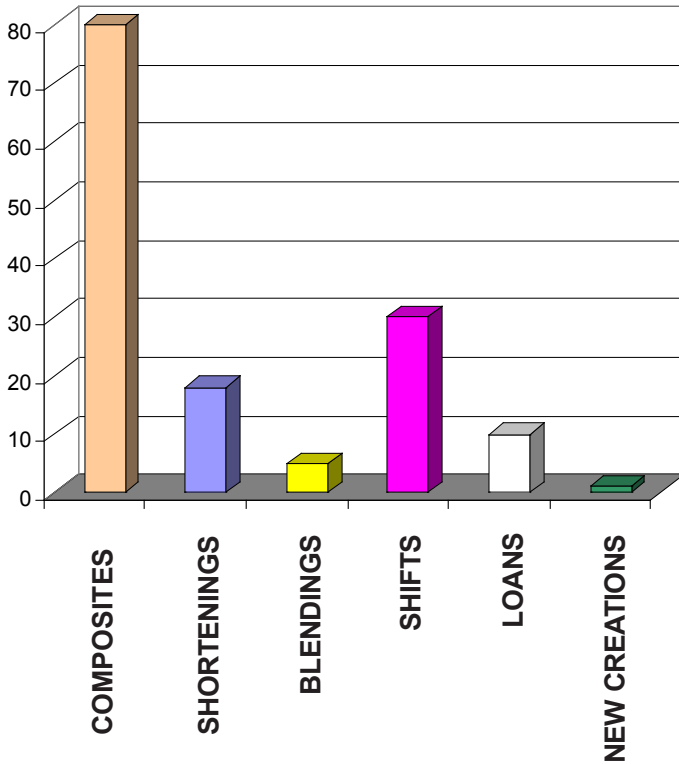


Fig. 3 Algeo's Word Formation classification (1999)

As a departure from Algeo's findings for general English, the results shown in Fig. 3, reveal a high frequency of shortenings (in particular, initialisms and clippings, though very few acronyms) a slightly lower frequency of composites (most of them compounds) followed by semantic shifts.

WORD FORMATION CLASSES IN WIKIPEDIA

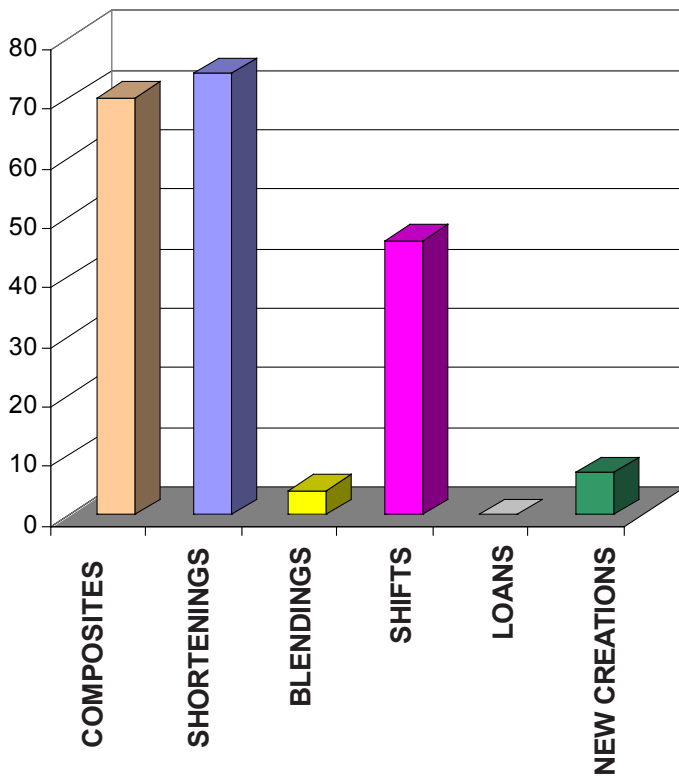


Fig. 4 word formation classes in Wikipedia

The low rate of blends, loans and new creations is similar to Algeo's. The main discordant data are related to the higher number of shortenings in WikiSpeak (initialisms and clippings) and the similar number of composites. The higher number of wiki shortenings is probably due to the need for quick typing and the use of a common lexicon known and shared by the members of the community as related to ordinary technical and editing operations, thus to both the influence of the medium, and to the high-contextuality of the community.

Distinctive graphology is also an important feature of WikiSpeak. All orthographic features appear to be affected. For example, although the status of capitalization varies greatly, there is a strong tendency to use lowercase everywhere in informal CMC (i.e. *i want*). The “lower-case default mentality” means that any use of capitalization is a marked form of communication. Messages wholly in capitals are considered to be “shouting” and usually avoided. Words in capitals add extra emphasis as do asterisks spacing (e.g. “it’s VERY important, it’s *very* important, it’s _very_ important, it’s v e r y important ”); again the medium, the limited character/style selection available, determining the development of substitutes for what in word processing programs might have been italics or bold lettering.

A further distinctive feature of Internet graphology is the way two capitals are used within a compound lexeme: one initial, one medial. This phenomenon is called bicapitalization (BiCaps) or CamelCase⁶⁴ and is also widespread in the Wikipedia community (i.e. MediaWiki, WikiProject, etc).

Spelling practice is also a Netspeak distinguishing feature. New spelling conventions have emerged, such as the replacement of plural –s by –z (i.e. downloadz, filez, gamez). This original spelling practice has been probably inherited from the crackers’ subculture (which systematically put at the end of words “z” for “s” to denote an illegal or cracking connection; e.g. *codez*, *passwordz*, *MP3z*, *sitez*, *FTPz*) or from Afro-American youth culture which extensively replace the final “s” with “z” in Hip-hop lyrics. Nowadays, this practice has been exported in the advertisement (e.g. *eXperienz*, a Belgian brand of clothes for woman, *Allianz*, one of the largest insurers in UK., etc.).⁶⁵

Wikipedians also make use of non-standard spellings which reflect informal pronunciation, in talk pages, in IRC channels and in

⁶⁴ *CamelCase* is the practice of writing compound words or phrases where the words are joined without spaces, and each word is capitalized within the compound. The name comes from the uppercase “bumps” in the middle of the compound word, suggesting the humps of a camel.

⁶⁵ Antonella Elia, “Wikis, Wikipedia and Collaborative Technology: Linguistic Changes and New Challenges”, in *New Media and Linguistic Change* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, in press).

the Village Pump (e.g. *yep, nope, nooooo, yay, sokay*).⁶⁶ Emotional expressions make use of varying numbers of vowels and consonants (yayyyyyyy) and of repeated punctuation (Yes!!!!, WHAT????). However, punctuation sometimes tends to be minimalist or completely absent in the community pages. Much, presumably, depends on a user's personality: some Wikipedians are scrupulous about maintaining a traditional punctuation, while some do not use any at all. On the other hand, there is a widespread increased use of symbols not normally part of the traditional punctuation system, such as # , repeated dots (...), or hyphens (---), repeated use of commas (,,,) or asterisks (***) .

The spontaneity of WikiSpeak discourse sometimes leads to misspellings. Spelling and grammatical errors have been frequently detected in talk pages. By contrast, they have been very rarely found in Wikipedia articles, since one of the main tasks of Wikipedian contributors is to accurately revise and improve form, grammar and cohesion of encyclopedic entries. On the other hand, spelling and grammar mistakes in community pages do not appear to reflect, as in mobile texting, a lack of education of Wikipedians, but are simply regarded as typing inaccuracy, the result of a hurried communication in this unconventional writing space.

The limitations of Netspeak, the lack of facial expressions, gestures and conventions of body posture and distance, as is known, also led to the introduction of smileys or emoticons (Boyd *et. al.*, 1997).⁶⁷ Wikipedians also express their feelings by making use of smileys. We can thus find basic smileys in the Wiki CMC interactions (such as :-) pleasure, humor; :-(sadness, dissatisfaction; ;-) winking; ;-(crying), joke smileys (i.e. :*) user is drunk; :-@ user is screaming; :-[, user is a vampire, etc.) and midget smileys (basic smileys without the nose, i.e. :) :(). However, the use of icon smileys (🤔, 😊, 😞, 😏, 😱, etc.) widespread in (teenage) forums and chat, is completely absent in the Wikipedia community pages.

⁶⁶ The Village Pump is an asynchronous environment used to discuss the technical issues, policies, and operations of Wikipedia and is divided into six village pump sections. This page is not a place to make lasting comments as discussions are removed daily to make room for new ones.

⁶⁷ Davis H. Boyd & Jeutonne P. Brewer, *Electronic discourse: linguistic individuals in virtual space* (NY: State University of New York Press, 1997).

Wikipedians, of course, have their own community netiquette⁶⁸ defined as Talk Etiquette or Wiki etiquette, that is to say the guidelines on how to deal and work with other Wikipedians in order to write this global encyclopaedia.

The main rules which have to be respected in the community are, for example: assume good faith, avoid deletions whenever possible, edit, discuss, be polite, sign and date posts to talk pages but not articles, work toward agreement, do not ignore questions, etc. Wikipedia contributors come from many different countries and cultures. They have different points of view and backgrounds. Treating others with respect is the key to collaborating effectively in building an encyclopaedia, and potential intercultural misunderstandings can be avoided, thanks to an explicitly laid down set of guidelines.⁶⁹

WikiSpeak discourse features are also (though this aspect has not been examined here) very similar to online discussion style typical of asynchronous forums,⁷⁰ even if discussion entries tend to be meta-discussions on the topic or on the validity of the content, rather than on the content itself. The research project will continue in the future, also in its examination of WikiSpeak, by using instruments from textual linguistics and corpus linguistics to bring to light the eventually distinctive discourse features of the interactions in the unofficial and informal community pages.

⁶⁸ “Netiquette”, a portmanteau or blend of “network etiquette” coined c. 1983 by Chuq von Rospach, (see <http://www.answers.com/topic/netiquette?cat=technology>), It refers to the conventions of politeness recognised on Usenet, in mailing lists, and other electronic forums. The rules of netiquette are slightly different for newsgroups, web forums and IRC channels. For example, on Usenet it is conventional to write in standard English and not use abbreviations such as “u” for “you”, etc., while these abbreviations are more likely to be tolerated on web forums and are universal on IRC. The level of tolerance for off-topic discussion may also vary from one newsgroup, forum or channel to another. The best thing to do is to ‘lurk’ before talking, to familiarize with the local conventions and to read the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions).

⁶⁹ *Wiki etiquette* (25 March 2006) in *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*; retrieved 18 November 2007, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wiki etiquette>.

⁷⁰ Daniel Paul O’Donnell, “If I were ‘You’: How Academics Can Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the Encyclopedia that Anyone Can Edit” (10 May 2007); retrieved 18 November, 2007, from *The Heroic Age* <http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/10/em.html>, May 10, 2007.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this research project has been focused on defining Wikipedia language features, its structure, its meaning and the variation within a dual use context: official encyclopaedic entries and backstage community speak.

The findings, so far, seem to suggest that the language of the Wikipedia articles is formal and standardized in a way similar to that found in Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. By contrast, WikiSpeak, as a new, domain-bound variety of NetSpeak, can be considered more creative, with a similar degree of individual expression and linguistic freedom to that of informal CMC, alongside other more contextually specific features characterizing the Wikipedia Computer Mediated Discourse Community.

Linguistic analysis cannot be separate from the investigation of the main political and philosophical goals of this project: to pursue freedom over content and information.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica is a knowledge compendium without any (apparent) political meaning, while the original French Encyclopédie of Diderot and D’Alambert was mainly a political project designed to propagate the ideas of the Enlightenment and to establish the reign of Reason as the basis of modern public debate. It was not simply a knowledge catalogue, but a “reasoned” dictionary of arts, science and crafts, as its final title states. The adjective “reasoned” is not to be understood as “organized”, but as being part of a wider political project to bring out reason as the basis of public and political debate in the European 18th century.⁷¹ Similarly, in the current age of information and technology, Wikipedia can be considered as a post-modern Encyclopaedia affording a political project rather than merely a scientific one, since it is aimed at changing the society of the 21st century by giving control over content to everyone and thus enhancing freedom of expression and access to information.

⁷¹ Jean Baptiste Soufron, “The Political Importance of the Wikipedia Project, the Only True Encyclopaedia of Our Days”, in *Around Wikipedia* (November 16, 2004); retrieved 18 November, 2007, from http://soufron.typhon.net/spip.php?article71&var_recherche=wikipedia.

Observing the increasing traffic toward Wikipedia and the Britannica's declining success, it is reasonable to suppose that in the not-so-distant future, proprietary encyclopaedias will probably be limited, smaller, quickly out of date and thus generally irrelevant and obsolete by comparison to Wikipedia and to the many other non-proprietary reference works.

It is the author's opinion that good content will always be free on line. If there are charges associated with "first-class" content, users will look elsewhere for comparable content and they will find it, simply because the number of Internet content-producers is huge. Academics, hobbyists and journalists want to educate the public because they have a natural desire to communicate and to teach. Many scholars today concentrate their energies in building an open content encyclopaedia. There is considerable value in the collaboration that can be found in a general encyclopaedia project such as Wikipedia and in the uniformity and high quality of the results. This value cannot be found in the activities of writers posting content independently.

Wikipedia's status as an encyclopaedia has been, and still is, controversial. As already mentioned, it has been criticized for a perceived lack of reliability, comprehensiveness and authority. Many librarians, academics and editors of more formally written encyclopaedias have considered it to be of limited utility as a reference work. Nevertheless, Wikipedia's content is, generally, widely considered useful, so people link to it. Google and other search engines have already certainly discovered the project, and the daily traffic they send to it produces a steady stream of new readers and contributors. The greater the number of Wikipedia articles, the greater the number of links to them, and therefore the higher the rankings and numbers of listings on Google. Hence, it is conceivable that the quality of Wikipedia articles will actually increase over the coming years. They are getting consistently and constantly better as people return again and again to old articles to improve and update their contents and texts; this will eventually not escape the notice even of official experts, some of which are already Wikipedians. Wikipedia participants in the beginning indeed, numbered only a few experts, but it has now attracted a higher number of graduate students, academics and professionals and it will probably attract the attention of many more in the future.

For example, *The LINGUIST List* started a “Wikipedia Update Project” in mid-June 2007.⁷²

O’Donnell reporting on the Wikipedia phenomenon, has recently claimed “we are in a position to contribute to the construction of individual articles in a uniquely positive way by taking the time to help clean up and provide balance to entries in our professional areas of interest”.³⁵ Thus, he suggested that academics need to accept Wikipedia open-based collaborative model and view further contributions to it as a unique form of community service scholarship.

As the project improves and becomes better known, it is reasonable to expect that it will obtain a wider academic recognition. It is, indeed, also reasonable to suppose that, in the coming years increasing numbers of academics will take part in the project, seeing the increasing value of being associated with it. After all, many online courses and materials, not officially open content, but free of charge to read and easily accessible through keyword searches, demonstrate a very encouraging willingness, on the part of distinguished academics, to associate themselves with imparting free knowledge.

Perhaps the final results of this present research will be among those helping to clarify and demonstrate the positive effects of both the technology and the collaborative authoring software on the conventions and on the quality of Web 2.0 online encyclopaedias.

⁷² The *Linguist List* (<http://linguistlist.org/>) is a free website run by academics and graduate students in the field of linguistics and supported entirely by donations. Its aim is to provide information on language and language analysis. It runs a mailing list with over 25,000 subscribers worldwide.

Gianfranco Porcelli

The language of technology: the lighter side

I would be tempted to quote Francis Bacon: “Intermingle... jest with earnest” (*Essays*, ‘Of Discourse’) or at least the proverb that says “There is many a true word spoken in jest” to justify my choice, but I hope that although this approach of mine to the language of technology is, at first sight, quite a playful one, it will be clear in the end that it can shed some light on how scientists and technologists develop their language. This paper is largely based on E. Tenner’s *TechSpeak or How to Talk High Tech*, London, Kogan Page, 1986, a book I was lucky enough to find at an airport bookshop before a long flight. The author is described on the back cover as an “executive editor of Princeton University Press [who] has encountered more (and more fearsome) Techspeak than most of us and has succeeded in turning a lot of it into perfectly intelligible English. He is, therefore, admirably qualified to reverse the process”.¹

What all this means is made clear right from the cover picture, showing a man in the street, with a spade in his hand, talking to a scientist and saying: “I like to call a spade a spade”. The answer is “I prefer to call it a geomorphological modification instrument”. Spades must have a very strong fascination — this idiom attracted Oscar Wilde, too:

CECILY: When I see a spade I call it a spade.

¹ Quotations without any references are all from Edward Tenner, *TechSpeak or How to Talk High Tech* (London: Kogan Page, 1986).

GWENDOLEN: I am glad to say I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I

Whether we look at spades from Wilde's sociological perspective or from Tenner's technological one, it is clear that *denomination processes* are crucial and that they are not confined to experts and insiders (Italian has a nice idiom for this: "addetti ai lavori") but they concern all of us in everyday life. In their turn, *denomination processes* are part of the more general category of *definition processes* that includes variously-labelled sub-processes.²

Quoting from Tenner's back cover again, "In the world of the 1990s those who like to call a spade a spade will find themselves stranded in a linguistic backwater, still stuck with the hopelessly out-of-date notion that the English language is a tool for communicating clearly and concisely. The truth, of course, is that in the worlds of technology, business and government English is fast giving way to Techspeak".

TechSpeak: a few examples

If you can state that "A **material sectioning tool** (MST) consists of a ferrous-alloy invasive plane (FIP) and a metacarpal power-grip anchor (MPA)" why should you simply say that "a knife has a blade and a handle"? Nobody is going to be impressed by the latter! On the same page about **Prehensile-Adapted Force Transmission Devices**, under the picture of the MST, you can find the picture of a **geomorphological modification instrument** (GMI) showing that it consists of the lithosphere penetrating subsystem (LPS), a vertical leverage system (VLS) and a torsal muscular force brace (TMFB); a *TechSpeak Note* adds that an early proposed Tech-Speak name for the GMI was *geotome*.

² One of these taxonomies lists *denomination* alongside: *equivalence*; *typifying* or *characterisation*; *analysis*; and *function*. For a discussion of this taxonomy see Gianfranco Porcelli, *The English of Communication and Information Sciences. Analysis and Examples* (Milano: Sugarco, 1998) and Gianfranco Porcelli, "I processi del definire in prospettiva glottodidattica", in Silvia Bruti, ed., *La parafrasi tra messa a fuoco del codice e negoziazione discorsiva*, special issue of *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata* 36.1 (January-April 2004): 67-88.

The picture of the **Carbohydrate-Laminated Bovine Protein Wafer** shows its bipartite farinaceous comestible capsule (BFCC) containing homogenised bovine contractile fiber (HBCF) between a layer of bacterially coagulated lactic secretion (BCLS) and a lamina of nonprocessed vegetable enhancement (NPVE); the upper surface of the BFCC shows a randomized oleaginous germinal array (ROGA); the complete definition says that the carbohydrate-laminated bovine protein wafer (CLBPW) is a thermally processed, homogenized, lipid-rich, contractile-fiber-coagulated, acidified-vegetable-enhanced, farinaceous-buffered, constant-diameter thin-profile ruminant muscular-tissue disk for anthropoid mandibular-dental abrasive homogeneity and enzymatic-acidic pre-absorptive emulsification — if all this discourages you from eating a *hamburger*, well... I cannot really say I'm sorry.

“The **Passive Solar Illumination Assembly** (PSIA) is a vertically installed, moisture-resistant photon-transmission aperture for sub-exospheric microclimate monitoring, with polished planar transparent amorphous-fused-silicate surfaces and manually adjustable gaseous infiltration/exfiltration capability.” So, next time you open or close a *window* be more careful and respectful: you are handling a piece of hi-tech.

Other items in the “texicon” (i.e. TechSpeak lexicon) are the **Chromatic Pollination Motivator**, the **In Vivo Recombinant Genetic System**, the **Dual Carbohydrate-Oxidation Chamber**, the **Avian Embryo Nutrient Cartridge**, the **Fused Silicate Gravitational Containment Vessel**, the **Canine Seclusion Habitat**, the **Stereoscopic Image Correction System**, the **Terrestrial Rotation Emulators** and others. For the benefit of those few readers who at this point are still not familiar with texicon, here are the non-tech corresponding words: *flower*, *family*, *toaster*, *egg*, *a glass*, *kennel*, *eyeglasses*, and *clocks*.

From TechSpeak to ESP

These examples provide us with a wealth of material illustrating some very important aspects of English for Special/Specific Purposes (ESP). One of the features they capitalise on is the presence of a high number of adjectives of Greek and Latin origin referring to

common objects that have a simple and easy Anglo-Saxon name. Ibba (1988) noted this with reference to the parts of the body:

head/skull	cranial
brain	cerebral
eye(s)	optical
ear(s)	auricular
mouth	oral
tooth/teeth	dental
gums	alveolar
tongue	lingual
jaw	mandibular
throat	guttural / pharyngeal
shoulder	humeral
<i>and all the way down to</i>	
legs	crural
feet	pedal, podiatric, (meta)tarsal ³

Many of Tenner's "taxa" (the building blocks of texicon) are adjectives of this kind; a first list of examples refers to animals:

<i>If it relates to...</i>	<i>Then it's...</i>
a cow or bull	bovine
a pig	porcine
a dog	canine
a cat	feline
a horse	equine
a lion, tiger, etc.	macro-feline
[...]	
a fish	ichthyic
a bird	avian
a chicken or turkey	gallinaceous [...]

³ Maria Ibba, *L'inglese della medicina* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1988), developed this aspect with special reference to the teaching of English in a medical Faculty, to both undergraduate and graduate students.

Describing a hamburger as “constant diameter” rather than “round” calls for an elementary knowledge of geometry; but describing a slice of cheese as “a layer of bacterially coagulated lactic secretion” requires that the reader knows how cheese is obtained from milk. So the effectiveness of TechSpeak depends on how knowledgeable its users are about the scientific and technical aspects of the things they are re-defining. This brings us back to the long-standing debate on the relationship between linguistic competence and subject-matter competence in teaching ESP. For an ESP course to be efficient, an adequate amount of expertise in the subject-area is required — whether it should come from the teacher herself or from a collaborative process with students (and/or with the teachers of the specific subjects) is a matter that will not be discussed here. Even the reshaping of language for the sheer fun of it points to the need for keeping in touch with the real world and, in this specific case, with the advancements in science and technology.

How remote is TechSpeak from real language? Let us resort to the most authoritative source for English words, the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

KNIFE 1. A cutting instrument, consisting of a blade with a sharpened longitudinal edge fixed in a handle, either rigidly as in a *table-*, *carving-*, or *sheath-knife*, or with a joint as in a *pocket-* or *clasp-knife*. The blade is generally of steel, but sometimes of other material, as in the silver fish- and fruit-knives, the (blunt-edged) *paperknife* of ivory, wood, etc., and the flint knives of early man.⁴

Tenner may regret he missed out “longitudinal” — which also describes the cutting movement very well — but perhaps not: his full description is “The material sectoring tool (MST) is a low-mass, carpally reciprocating shearing-force disassembly instrument, equally categorizable as a nutrient-system ingestive accessory”. Using *carpally* implies that you know the names of the bones in your hands — exactly as (*meta*)*tarsal* above referred to the foot bones.

⁴ *OED* second edition on CD-Rom Version 2.0, OUP 1999, s. v.

“The geomorphological modification instrument (GMI) is a somatic-mass-augmented skeletomuscular extension for palmar/plantar-effected mechanical multiphase aggregative organomineralic substrate exposure”. Does the *OED* call a spade a spade?

SPADE 1 a. A tool for digging, paring, or cutting ground, turf, etc., now usually consisting of a flattish rectangular iron blade socketed on a wooden handle which has a grip or cross-piece at the upper end, the whole being adapted for grasping with both hands while the blade is pressed into the ground with the foot.⁵

The cross-piece at the upper end is typical of English spades and is not frequently found in an Italian *vanga* or *zappa*. Most *vanghe*, instead, have a foot rest above the blade to facilitate pushing the spade into the ground — could it be a “plantarly-operated geofractionator” in TechSpeak? Again, we cannot avoid referring to the real objects being defined or described.

The recourse to less common words to define more frequent ones (e.g. *longitudinal*, *rigidly*, *flint* for *knife* and *flattish*, *rectangular*, *socketed* for *spade*) is precisely what has led to the development of dictionaries for foreign learners; one of these has a very clear picture showing the difference between a *shovel* and a *spade*: the captions are “shovelling coal” and “digging the garden” — which, incidentally, tells learners that *shovel* (but not *spade*) can be used as a verb.⁶

Defining processes need higher-order words to begin with: a *knife* is described as an *instrument* by the *OED* and as a *tool* by Tenner; a *spade* is a *tool* in the *OED* and an *instrument* in TechSpeak. Tenner proposes a TechSpeak Generating Algorithm and lists the words that function as default roots:

⁵ *Ibid.*, s.v.

⁶ *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 4th ed., 1989, s.v. *spade*.

unit	cell	module	station
system	subsystem	device	structure
facilitator	effector	actuator	agent
substance	framework	matrix	node
vector	medium	transducer	instrument
mechanism	input	output	throughput
habitat	environment	assembly	commodity
artefact	nexus	icon	tool
aggregation	event	component	technology
configuration	parameter	increment	decrement

These “substantors” are commonly found in ordinary dictionary definitions, so TechSpeak users are advised to avoid them in favour of more specific terms; here is part of the list of “Active Substantors”:

exchanger	generator	modulator	initiator
manipulator	converter	circulator	annunciator
stabilizer	separator	homogenizer	compactor
abrader	ablator	deflector	detonator
multiplexer	positioner	coagulator	suppressor
propeller	impeller	depressant	extruder

“Transmission Substantors” are semi-active; here are a few:

transponder	conductor	buffer	interface
simulator	emulator	emplacement	locator
distributor	protector	motivator	attenuator

The following list, “Passive Substantors”, includes words like *substrate*, *wafer*, *barrier*, *projectile*, *arc*, *flexure*, *conductor*, *pipette* and a lot more. The next section deserves to be quoted in full:

Vocationals

Of course, people are substantors, too, but in their occupations and not as human beings. A person who isn’t a juvenile or an emeritus(-ta) is a:

professional	technician	analyst
operator	representative	officer
practitioner	consultant	associate

Sure enough, the caption under the picture of a gambler playing dice reads “Stochastic Technician.”

Another interesting section is the one giving the nouns to be used to describe actions; this is what studies on LSP call *nominalisation*:

<i>If something...</i>	<i>Call it...</i>
hits something that stops it	rapid deceleration
propels something else from rest	acceleration
twists something	torsion
makes something slide in two	shear
presses on something	compression
burns	oxidation or combustion
melts, vaporises, or condenses	phase-transition
stretches something	tension

Verbs can also be replaced by using adjectives, which, as attributes, are part of the noun phrase and as such contribute to nominalisation:

<i>If something works by...</i>	<i>Call it...</i>
human force	kinaesthetic
heating	thermal
cutting	ablative
freezing or even cooling	cryogenic
a combination of forces	synergetic

More adjectives can be used with reference to the parts of the body. Under the heading “Somatics” (“Parts of the body” is definitely *not* TechSpeak), we find among others:

<i>If this acts...</i>	<i>Call it...</i>
finger	dactylic, phalangeal, or digital
palm	metacarpal
wrist	carpal
forearm	antebrachial or ulnar
neck	cervical
pelvic bones (for sitting)	ischiodic
intestines	visceral
sensory organ	organoleptic

Somatics include not only body parts, but also processes:

<i>If you...</i>	<i>Call it...</i>
sweat	diaphoretic
walk	locomotive
chew	masticatory
swallow	ingestive
talk	(natural-language-) communicative

Common *adjectives* have their corresponding TechSpeak *qualifiers*; a selection follows:

<i>If you mean...</i>	<i>Say...</i>
similar	isomorphic
different	allotropic
helping	adjuvant
not continuous	discrete
observed	phenomenological
really important	paradigmatic or canonical
in step	isochronous
pleasurable	hedonic
body language	proxemic

Word-formation processes

As could be expected, TechSpeak provides guidance on word-formation as well; the two main aspects considered are *affixes* and *abbreviations*. Derivation allows the formation of high-sounding terms by means of well-chosen prefixes. Here is the full list:

<i>If you want to say...</i>	<i>Try...</i>
on a higher level	meta- or super-
alongside	para-
underneath	infra- or sub-
within	intra-
big or global	macro-
small or local	micro-
foreign	exo-
internal	endo-
outside	ecto-
too much	hyper-
too little	hypo-
before	ante-
bad	dys-
good	eu-
together	syn-
different	allo- or hetero-
the same	iso- or homo-
early	proto-
middle	meso-
final	telo-

As we saw while examining examples of TechSpeak, *techronyms* (TechSpeak acronyms or abbreviations, of course...) are used massively, as indeed they are in real ESP. Saying — or writing — that MST = FIP + MPA is still more impressive than “A **material sectioning tool** (MST) consists of...”; if listeners or readers cannot remember that FIP stands for “ferrous-alloy invasive plane” and MPA is a neat abbreviation for a metacarpal power-grip anchor, well, that quite simply means that they do not know the technical jargon, so they do not belong to our clique. This will bar them from asking why on earth we should attach high-sounding names to a common knife and its parts.

Going back to real English: when I was learning computer science and became interested in the language of computing, I was struck by the wealth and pervasiveness of three-letter abbreviations, some of which, like ROM, RAM, CPU, VDU, HDD, etc., are now fairly well-known – and new ones, like DVD, JPG, ZIP, USB and

lots more, are constantly added. Their use is so widespread in the trade that some catalogues and other technical specifications use TLA as a three-letter abbreviation for... “three-letter abbreviation”! They insist that TLAs be used throughout for the sake of brevity *and clarity*. At the time I thought this was the limit, but then experience taught me that the worst is always yet to come.

Is it just prestige?

“This new language can obscure even the simplest meaning, thus giving the TechSpeak user a gratifying sense of self-importance and an enormous psychological advantage over the bewildered layperson on the receiving end.” When I read a notice saying that “I terminali per gli studenti sono posizionati nell’atrio dell’aula G.015” I wondered why not simply “I terminali per gli studenti sono nell’atrio dell’aula G.015” or perhaps “sono posti, collocati, situati, installati, si trovano...”; with so many good alternatives — to which you may add “piazzati” if you gladly accept calques from French — I have come to develop a strong dislike for “posizionare”. But the answer is obvious: if a chap says “abbiamo messo/sistemato i terminali”, he may sound as if he has got a low-rank job; but “abbiamo posizionato i terminali” suggests that he is a technician with at least a secondary school certificate (actually, the notice was put up by a “geometra”).

But recourse to TechSpeak-like jargon has many more not-so-innocent reasons. Tenner remarks that no producers of hamburgers would ever use the TechSpeak name (Carbohydrate... Wafers) to market them; they did, however, manage to persuade the U.S. Department of Agriculture to let them use the word *calcium* on packages, instead of *powdered bone*. After a massive campaign against “enti inutili” in Italy, as well as after the scandals over the mismanagement of some very important ones, the word “Ente” got largely discredited. But since “enti” of some kind are still sometimes necessary, they are now called “Authorities” – with all the possible misspellings and mispronunciations of the English word. We used to have a lot of tramways in most cities, which were later replaced with bus lines. In recent years, city planners, transportation engineers and ecologists have realised that it was a big mistake, so they are

putting old tramways back into operation, and even building new ones — except that they do not call them “linee tranviarie” any more, but “metropolitane leggere”.

A foreign-sounding or hi-tech-like name is often used to disguise unpleasant referents.

A frequently asked question in U.S. educational circles in the late 1960s was “Are you a TEFLician or a facilitator?” What it meant was: “Do you realise that you cannot *teach* but only *facilitate learning*, or do you still consider yourself a technician in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language)?” At the time, and over there, *teacher* seemed to have become one of those taboo words that a polite person would never use in public, and methodology books avoided all possible references to teaching.⁷ When my colleagues and I were invited to a baseball match at the Dodgers’ Stadium in Los Angeles, at one point the display announced the presence of a group of Italian *educators*.⁸ In this case new words are chosen (or old words are given new meanings) deliberately, in order to emphasise new concepts.

This may be perceived by outsiders as unnecessary misuse of the language. In his “Nontechnical epilogue” Tenner remarks that “almost everybody is convinced that the language has never been so degraded - by others”. A more balanced view and, above all, a historical perspective can be useful to perceive that this is not necessarily true, or, at the very least, it is not the full story. He mentions the birth of “legalese” as an example.

The Norman conquest ... brought England not (yet) technical legal French but an ambiguous, basically oral and lay language. It took two hundred years for a legal profession to emerge. At first a word in a document could mean many things. *Entendre* could mean what we now know as intention, attention, understanding, hearing, obedience, waiting, meaning... purport, assumption, information, thought. Hard as it is to believe, legalese was a reform. An emerging profession was trying to make itself clear.

⁷ See, for example, Dubin & Olshstein, *Facilitating Language Learning* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977).

⁸ At the time (1969), we were all secondary school teachers, spending the summer term in the US on a Fulbright scholarship.

A balanced view of the matter can only lead us to keep in mind the need for monosemous terms in all fields and the quest for brevity. Acronyms and abbreviations are baffling for outsiders but convenient tools to avoid the repetition of long expressions. Our use here of ESP, OED and TEFL is justified, hopefully, by the fact that the target readers are familiar with these abbreviations - the paraphrases are given to make sure that no ambiguity arises but they are probably redundant. The quality of a text, ESP or otherwise, can only be assessed on the basis of the addressees envisaged.

TechSpeak vs. plain English

Tenner's *TechSpeak* is clearly a parody (and a hilarious one, at that) but not against the Plain English Movement. On the contrary, it exposes the excesses of technical jargon by 'exploding' it to its extremes. Defining a *ball-point pen* as a "linear pigment deposition tube (LPDT)" and describing it as "a microspherically transferred viscous-substance-dispersion penetrative system" may seem to overstretch the capabilities of premodification in English noun phrases, with four premodifiers (six words) between "a" and "system"; but is this really so? Here is an example of description from the language of electronics:

"The Model 2000 is a portable battery-operated 3½-digit, five-function digital multimeter ..."⁹

where we can find five premodifiers (8 words - counting "three and a half" as *one* word) between "a" and "multimeter".

TechSpeak is then, from a linguist's point of view, technically impeccable - at times even moderate, as we have just seen. The point is, of course, that what is amply justified in specialised fields becomes intolerable in everyday communication, either face-to-face or through the media. Here, as an old song, *Words*, said, "plain, old, simple words are better": so, if you ever see a geomorphological modification instrument, if (unlike Gwendolen) a GMI is not beneath your life-style, call it a spade.

⁹ Quoted in Paolo Balboni and Gianfranco Porcelli, *Output: English* (Bergamo: Minerva Italica, 1987), 17.

Just a postscript

When revising and updating this paper I “googled” *Techspeak* and found there are about 58,400 links; on the first page in the list you can read “The **Tech/Speak**TM is a multi-level augmentative and alternative communication device designed to aid communication through direct selection”.¹⁰ Trying “*tech speak*” gives about 71,300 results, whereas if you omit the inverted commas you get about 20,700,000 pages that contain both *tech* and *speak*.

One of the sites I visited hosts a Forum about tech speak: a thread offers ten very good reasons “Why ‘Tech Speak’ Is The Best Language To Learn”:¹¹ it pays to become tech-savvy.

After surfing this area of the Internet a bit, I said to myself: “maybe Edward Tenner has been forgotten, but Techspeak lives on”. I was wrong: further down the list of links I found Tenner’s own site.¹² He is active on the Web too and the Techspeak file can be continually updated.

¹⁰ <http://www.amdi.net/techspeak.htm> (last visited Nov 3, 2007). A beautiful example, indeed, *augmentative* of the quality of this paper.

¹¹ <http://www.tfproject.org/tfp/showthread.php?t=114536> (last visited Nov 3, 2007).

¹² <http://www.edwardtenner.com/work3.htm> (last visited Nov 3, 2007).

Maria Teresa Sanniti di Baja*

**Forwarding e-mails in an academic context:
a small-scale study on language and
politeness in intercultural English**

Introduction

An empirical investigation supported by general politeness theory is the basis of this small-scale case-study investigating aspects of English politeness in discourse through electronic mail in a well-defined environment: specifically in e-mail forwarding among colleagues in a university context. The data were collected empirically through a simulated practical task performed by English language assistants, all native speakers of English, who were put in a position where it became necessary to forward an e-mail communicating directives to a non-intimate member of the Italian staff of higher academic status. The texts produced to accompany the e-mail – and to justify why the writer was forwarding it – were collected and analysed to attempt to find a series of generalisations concerning the ways politeness strategies are employed and associated with linguistic forms.

* The author “Maresa” Sanniti di Baja, died on the 7th of November 2006, and was thus unable to finish updating and to oversee the editing of this text, for which the editor [Jocelyne Vincent, also her close colleague and friend, with whom she discussed the project and article] takes full responsibility; she was thus unable to see the publication of the results of one of her last and favourite new projects. This issue is dedicated to her memory.

The analysis combines Leech's politeness maxims¹ and definitions of politeness strategies based on the tradition of Brown and Levinson's notions of face² (a notion derived in turn from Goffman, as is well known)³ and of their distinction between negative and positive face threatening. In the analysis of our data, Brown and Levinson's concept of face is interpreted not as a dichotomy but as a continuum between positive and negative face; the same *continuum* view applies to the use of politeness strategies and their correlation with linguistic forms.

As is well known, Brown and Levinson's notion of face assumes that people are able to exploit language to accomplish their goals and that each individual has a face - the self-image that each interlocutor wants to claim for him/herself - consisting of two related aspects:

- a negative face, or the want to have freedom of action, not to be impeded by others;
- a positive face, or the want to be appreciated and approved by others.

During interaction, participants usually cooperate to maintain their mutual faces and care about each other's wants and feelings. Some categories of speech acts make protecting or maintaining one's own or one's interlocutor's face more difficult. This is the case of directives (or "impositives" in Leech's terms) which are highly face threatening acts - at least for some cultures⁴- for both participants. Making a request may threaten the recipient's face by intending or appearing to impede his or her "freedom of action".

¹ Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, Sympathy. These maxims reflect the more general law that negative politeness (avoidance of discord) is more important than positive politeness (seeking concord). Positive politeness means being explicitly kind and nice to the addressee. Negative politeness is found in ways of mitigating impositions on addressees. See Geoffrey Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics* (London: Longman, 1983).

² Penelope Brown, Stephen Levinson, *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1987). For critical discussion and other approaches to politeness theory, see, e.g., Richard Watts, *Politeness* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2003).

³ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behaviour* (New York: Garden City, 1967).

⁴ All politeness notions connected with face, offence, approbation, modesty and the like are culture-dependent. In particular see Anna Wierzbicza, *Cross Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991).

Refusing a request may give the impression that there is no care for the interlocutor's wants. Thus, extensive use of face-saving strategies can be expected when requests are made.

The rationale behind the study

When interacting, people communicate facts, events and other socially and pragmatically meaningful contents such as attitudes, modality and the status of relationships. Politeness is one of the socio-cultural contents conveyed through language⁵, influenced by such variables as the mode of communication, age, cultural background, education, location, employment, relative power, social distance, intimacy relationships, and gender. Choices in politeness and linguistic behaviour are thus tied to the interlocutors and to the relationships existing between them - as perceived by the addresser.

Given this socio-pragmatic complexity, to study the strategies of politeness and to be able to have comparable data, it is necessary to set limits to the field of investigation. Our attention here, thus, concentrates on politeness practices in the work-place (in this case a university), and in a specific sub-set of discourse or interaction types within it: e-mail forwarding from English native speaker assistants to an Italian professor, one of their superiors/coordinators in that context. The reasons that motivated this choice are diverse. In university contexts e-mail has become a widespread, routine form of institutional and personal communication among teaching, non-teaching staff members, students and administrative offices, proving to be a valuable tool in a growing number of circumstances, from academic communication to staying in touch and exchanging new year's greetings.

E-mailing is a mixed genre: its basic substance remains writing, offering permanent storage, but, unlike paper mail, it shares aspects of immediacy belonging to the oral language, encouraging interactive communication and offering speed of delivery and easy replying. Through e-mailing, ideas can be communicated very rapidly, with one particular advantage over spoken language: that

⁵ As for the problems concerning the pedagogy of interactional speech and comity, see Guy Aston, *Learning Comity* (Bologna: Editrice CLUEB, 1988).

of avoiding face-to-face interaction. This property encourages those who are shy, or uncomfortable when talking to others – or to specific persons – and those who fear that their tone of voice or the expressions on their faces may betray unwanted emotions, feelings, sarcasm or anger. Due to fear of blame on the messenger, the layer of distance provided by e-mail can also prove liberating to many in the case of embarrassing information, bad news, or instructions to be communicated, especially from subordinates to those higher-up in their organisation: it is easier to write down one's own thoughts and click on SEND, than to face people in person or speak to them over the telephone.

At the same time, however, e-mail environments tend to lower the interlocutors' guard; writers may often take less time to rationally consider the message and are perhaps less affected by emotional or political implications, with the result that they can be more direct, honest, truthful, and sometimes, unintentionally, even rude.

Thus the cross-genre nature⁶ and the relative newness of the medium make e-mailing a challenging field for investigating new standard rules of linguistic behaviour and emerging codes of politeness (known as “netiquette” in this domain).

The empirical test

The choice of a subset of the university domain as the platform for the investigation was meant to restrict variables in order to obtain a high degree of reliable, targeted data. Familiarity by the subjects/informants⁷ with the context – their working place – guaranteed

⁶ In Bhatia's words, in comparison with the rules of more traditional forms of interaction, mixed genres encourage the creation and the development of “new generic forms to achieve novel communicative goals within the framework of socially accepted generic boundaries”; see Vijay K. Bhatia, *Analysing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings* (New York: Longman, 1993), 36.

⁷ The respondents in my investigation were simultaneously subjects and informants in that, as can be seen from my instructions, they were aware, to some degree, of the metalinguistic nature of the task I was asking of them. I shall however mainly prefer to refer to them throughout as my ‘informants’, to avoid using the clumsy ‘subject/informant’ form, but also in recognition of their active, professional participation. Let me here also thank them warmly for their agreeing to participate.

that their behaviour fit naturally into their routine e-mailing to other staff members; everybody's role, position, status and relationships were well-defined and remained what they really were. The same applies to the choice in favour of forwarding (rather than directly writing) an e-mail: this made it possible to have my informants' linguistic outputs addressed in one and the same direction – to the same addressee –, and to collect a pool of semantically related linguistic reactions to an identical stimulus.

There were four connected purposes in the investigation of the texts the informants were expected to produce in association with the act of forwarding. Specifically, the intention was to discover:

1. whether informants forwarded the e-mail with directives, thus opting in favour of an "FTA" (Face Threatening Act: bald on record, on record, off record)⁸, or decided not to do the FTA at all;
2. what politeness strategies were used to mitigate the directives by those who opted for an FTA;
3. what linguistic forms were employed by all informants to implement their options;
4. whether it was possible to identify common patterns of behaviour by the informants, so as to attempt generalisations on the use of politeness in the e-mail subset investigated.

The task was performed by eighteen English native-speaker language assistants (*lettori* or *CELS*), working in the same academic context.⁹ All the native-speaker informants received the same e-mail from a 'student' complaining about time-table clashes between language classes.¹⁰ This was a perfectly credible and normal email for them to receive. As it happens, students often complain to the wrong

⁸ Ibid., 91-227.

⁹ Specifically, the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures of the University of Naples "L'Orientale", during the academic year 2004-05. The tenured, institutional staff for English language was composed at the time of only two *docenti ufficiali* who shared the responsibility for the English language and linguistics course policy (though neither of us had any responsibility for the timetabling). Albeit the junior of the two, I was myself, consequently, one of the two official referents to address in order to report any general problems concerning English classes.

¹⁰ This is the only aspect which was simulated, to grant a uniqueness of input to all the informants whose linguistic reactions were to be examined. It re-creates a very life-like situation, however, since students often send letters of this kind, asking for help, solutions to problems, information and the like.

persons. The language assistants were not responsible for the clashes, and they were expected to do what they generally do in this kind of situation: refer to a supervisor, normally a non-intimate person of higher academic rank and status. In this specific case, their referent was myself: a non-native, but an 'educated' speaker of English.

The instructions my subjects/informants received were very general and kept to a bare minimum, so as to activate a process without affecting it. No performative verbs appeared in the instructions (such as: "forward this e-mail by inviting/ suggesting to me/.....) in order to leave the informant free to behave as naturally as possible. The instructions were as follows:

Original Message -----

From: Prof.ssa M.T. Sanniti di Baja

To: XXXXXXX

Sent: Wed, 9 Feb 2005 10:16:57 +0100

Subject: FAULTY TIME TABLING?

Dear ... (*first name*),

I wonder if I could possibly ask for your help (yours and your native-speaker colleagues) with a research project I am carrying out on language use in academic e-mailing?

The context in which I am looking for help is the following: our students often write e-mails to many (or to all) of us asking for information, help with coping with problems, and so on. Sometimes they address the wrong person, that is a person who does not have the information, or is not responsible for the problem, or cannot do anything to solve it personally. This is the case of the e-mail that follows, that I would like you to think of as addressed to you by one of our students (it is, I think, quite a realistic text and situation...). What I would like you to do, if you agree to help, is to read it and, instead of 'answering' directly to the student, to forward the e-mail to me – as you will see, I am mentioned by the student – with the addition of what you would normally write to me while forwarding it.

Thank you in advance!

Maresa Sanniti di Baja

Here's the "student's letter":

Sono uno studente fuori corso del suo gruppo che da un po' di tempo ha problemi a frequentare le sue esercitazioni perché il giovedì coincide con Arabo e il venerdì si sovrappone col modulo di Lingua Inglese della Prof. Sanniti di Baja che non ho ancora superato perché lavoro e per un po' non ho potuto studiare. Ci era stato detto che non ci sarebbero state sovrapposizioni. Sto cercando di recuperare e siccome sono indietro con gli esami vorrei sapere cosa si può fare e se il problema si ripeterà anche nel prossimo semestre.

Grazie Gianni B.

An analysis of the data

None of the native-speaker informants was intimate with me, the recipient, no serious trouble or discussion had ever arisen with any of them, although some had been part of the team longer than others. Relationships had always been professionally correct and socially/academically appropriate on both sides - even if the absence of close personal relationships did not exclude the presence of a co-shared sociable atmosphere in the work place and of different degrees of empathy, sensitivity and reciprocal liking. Spoken interaction used to take place in either language (English or Italian); when writing, instead, *lettori* and *CELS* tended to prefer English (being perhaps more comfortable with their own code in a slightly more permanent medium?).

The data collected show that in the environment selected for the test, e-mailing provided a fertile ground for accomplishing the act of requesting; the standard features of e-mail texts easily accommodated the use of positive and negative politeness strategies.

Avoidance of bald on record FTAs was expected and, indeed, confirmed by the data: the informants resorted to negative politeness strategies to mitigate the request that I, their addressee, give them an answer to the student's problem and/or send one to the student myself. They tried to avoid the presupposition that I was expected to have to or want to perform the requested act. Individual evaluation of the impact caused by the request encouraged the use of a range of strategies to maintain face wants or redress potential face threats; these strategies, manifest through a scale of linguistic and non-

linguistic options in discourse, are commented on below, with reference to the three standard sections composing e-mail texts:

I. opening/ greeting

II. body of the mail: a) introduction to the act; b) the act

III. closing

As will be evident, the texts and single utterances produced can very often be assigned more than one strategy, and more than one utterance can be used to perform the same act, with the result of creating politeness through a dynamic sequencing of steps rather than through the use of polite formulaic language.

I. Opening/ greeting

My subjects/informants, exploited the immediacy and casualness of e-mail communication and opted for informal or semi-informal openings:

- Hi / Hello+ First name (3)
- Dear + First name (12)
- First name (2)
- Dear + Title + Surname (1)

The fact that all informants but one avoided formal salutations like “Dear Professor + Surname”, might be considered a strategy of positive politeness, aiming at seeking concord. The generally quite informal greetings used by informants induce feelings of cooperation, group solidarity and similarities (being part of the same academic workforce, sharing aims and values) rather than academic distance and relative power (of the different institutional roles); it must be noted that I do not usually, nor did not sign my letter to them on that occasion as Professor + Surname, but with my First Name + Surname. Stressing common ground, writers implicitly evoked two of the reasons for the recipient to act, namely: 1) the goal to fulfil was co-shared; and 2) usually people are cooperative towards their partners. By shortening distance and establishing, or reciprocating from the outset a companionable team spirit for the interaction, the informants implicitly paved the way for limiting the negative impact of the request to follow.

II. Body of the mail: a) preliminaries to the act

Reference to the object of the mail (the student's letter) was turned by most informants into a strategy of negative politeness, preparatory to the upcoming request.

Thus, outputs of standard plain reference (such as: I've just received / I was sent the following e-mail) were exceeded in number by expressions meant to immediately provide overwhelming reasons or details to partially satisfy the recipient's negative face:

- "the following student has written to me regarding a number of obstacles which are impeding his following his courses and passing exams and requests some advice"
- "one of my "fuori corso" students from your group, told me this morning that he has a problem attending your classes"
- "as you can see from the following e-mail, this student is having problems attending my course because they seem to overlap"
- "I'm forwarding this e-mail to you as I think it is clearly more pertinent to you than it is to me"
- "I am forwarding you a message from a 2nd-year student who needs your advice"
- "below is an email from a student who is apparently having problems following both of our lessons"
- "a student has e-mailed me about a schedule overlap, and since he mentioned your name ... "

The literal, straightforward function of introductions like these is obviously to state the reasons for forwarding the mail. But, as for the choices in favour of opening greetings, such introductions can be assigned a more intuitive function: to serve the informants' purpose of laying successful grounds for the act of requesting¹¹ by making sure that the negative face wants of the recipient were not offended, not even momentarily. They considered it safer to draw attention to the compelling reasons for the request in order to imply that they normally would not dare threaten their recipient's face.

¹¹ One of them, also preceded her motivation with an introductory "How are you?", increasing the force of her intention to build the request on favourable grounds.

In other words, by fronting the relevance of the situation to the addressee, they wanted to show right away that the preconditions (felicity conditions) for the act to follow held.

One of the informants, instead, used a form of in-group language as a positive politeness strategy and a contextual accelerator. He insisted on the team spirit line by assuming and evoking shared associations and attitudes in a very informal, concise and direct way:

- “here’s one for you!”

Body of the mail: b) the act

Once the preconditions for the act have been fulfilled, differences in accomplishing the request become more visible and the illocutionary act is realised in a range of behaviours and linguistic forms.

“Bald on record” direct-requests are usually associated with the imperative form and often considered rude in English; as anticipated above, they were avoided by all informants who tried to save my, their addressees’, face. The data collected show that none of the writers opted for an imperative, not even in the mitigated form “Please...”. Indirect speech acts were considered safer by all informants and gave way to progressively more polite “on record” or “off record” acts, realised through linguistic structures meant to accomplish politeness by mitigating the imposition.

- *On record*

Indirectness and questions:

Can-indirect questions

- “Can you help me with it?”

- “Can you think of any further help we can give him?”

Interrogative in the form of ‘obtain advise-questions’

- “Shall I answer this in reply?”

Interrogative either-or questions

- “Shall I simply say this in reply, or do you want to contact the student yourself?”

Interrogative ‘obtain info-questions’

- “will the situation be repeated next term?”

- “are the English and Arabic timetables incompatible?”
- “are students aware of these overlaps when they enrol or do they arise out of a lack of communication between those allocating times and rooms and those aware of students needs ?”

The types of questions above seem more polite in English because the relevant redress is focussed on the imposition itself. By using *Can-indirect questions*, informants are asking about the recipient’s capability of doing the act, showing that they do not expect that the recipient is expected to or intends to do it. *Interrogative in the form of ‘obtain advise-questions’* are expressed as requests to be advised about something, rather than requests to act. *Interrogative either-or questions* are polite in English because they provide the recipient with a line of escape, by giving an alternative which mitigates the request. *Interrogative ‘obtain info-questions’* are used as a way of reducing the risk of offending face wants by highlighting the many sides of the problem and the difficulty in formulating an answer, so justifying the ‘bothering’ of the recipient.

In all the cases reported above, the recipient may still feel bound to answer the questions, but this kind of imposition is not as risky as feeling bound to do an act.

Some of the informants avoided the potential threats coming from questions altogether, and opted in favour of alternative strategies for attaining indirectness. One of them used a clause of purpose:

–“I have just found the following e-mail in my mail and am forwarding it on to you to deal with”.

where the illocutionary emphasis is laid on the informant’s motivation in writing, rather than on a specific act to be performed by the recipient, who, apparently, may also perhaps decide to “deal with” the student’s problem by simply ignoring it. The redressing action is supported by explicit reasons explaining why the informant didn’t deal with the problem himself (he continues with “I don’t know why the student has got in touch with me with his problem: However, I trust you can help sort him out”), and by the general tone of the utterance which is of the “I’m just passing the student’s message over” type. This, incidentally, was the informant who wrote addressing me as Professor + Surname.

Other informants attained indirectness by using statements.

Statements themselves can be face threatening, because, either they bother the addressee by overstating something s/he already knows or believes, or they impose the necessity of updating information or of believing something s/he does not agree with. For this reason, in the e-mail texts the force of statements appears mitigated by redressing acts, such as the “hedging” of quality (in Grice’s sense)¹², where the informant does not show full commitment to the truth of what he is writing; it is, alternatively, occasionally strengthened to stress personal commitment:¹³

Statements, play-downs, hedges and committers

The writer tones down perlocutionary effects or lowers the degree to which he commits himself to the propositional content of the utterance:

- “I think it is more pertinent to you than it is to me”
- “I trust you can help him sort it out”
- “I really think this needs to be looked at more closely”
- “I thought you could reply with more detailed info”
- “Hope you don’t mind”
- “Hope that it won’t take up too much of your time”

¹² See H.Paul Grice, “Logic and Conversation”, in Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan, eds., *Syntax and Semantics*, 3, *Speech Acts* (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 41-58 (reprinted in Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words*, Harvard University Press, 1989 pp. 22-40).

¹³ Juliane House and Gabrielle Kasper in “Politeness Markers in English and German”, in Florian Coulmas, ed., *Conversational Routines* (Mouton: The Hague, 1981), 157-85, refer to a number of *upgraders* which increase the impact of the utterance on the receiver and may seem face-threatening but lead to a ‘polite’ interpretation (*absolutely, really, terribly, quite, I’m sure...*). The point is shared by Brown and Levinson who include in the strategy of ‘hedging’, words, particles or phrases which modify the degree of membership of a predicate or noun phrase in a set, by saying of “that membership that it is *partial*, or true only in certain respects, or that it is *more* true and complete than perhaps it might be expected (*ibid.*,145). On hedging, see George Lakoff, “Hedges: a Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts”, in P.M. Peranteau, J.N. Levi, G.C. Phares, eds., *Papers from the Eighth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society* (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1972), 27-91; see also Axel Hübler. *Understatements and hedges in English* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1983); and Raija Markannen, Hartmut Schroeder, *Hedging and Discourse: Approaches to the Analysis of a Pragmatic Phenomenon in Academic Texts* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1997).

- “I hope you can sort things out for him”
- “I hope you will be of some assistance, as he seems to be extremely concerned with...”

Other devices used to mitigate the imposition are reported below.

Deference: formally/informally

The writer shows respect and his lack of authority for fully advising the student:

- “if you could give me some feedback as soon as possible, I’d appreciate it”
- “if you feel it necessary, add any additional comments and/or suggestions”
- “Shall I answer this, or do you want to contact the student yourself?”
- “I thought you could reply with more detailed info “
- “I think it is clearly more pertinent to you than it is to me, especially considering you can probably do more to help in terms of rescheduling and advice”
- “I told the student that I would contact you first, before giving any answers”

Pluralisation of the person responsible/ Dis-personalisation of the responsible person and of the messenger

The writer indirectly justifies his bothering the addressee by indirectly informing her that she is also involved in or assuming she is/would be concerned about the situation herself; or deflects any criticism from himself (and the recipient) to some other agent: the student – as the source that originated the whole question; or the situation – which has a long story – so eliminating any possible responsibility in faulty timetabling:

- “obviously there’s very little we can do about it”
- “you and I can try to work out another schedule”
- “a student who is apparently having problems following both of our lessons”
- “the following e-mail by one of our students”
- “he also said that”
- “his main concern was”

- “I have taught at the Orientale forever (!) and I don’t remember a term in which this has not been a problem”.¹⁴

Offer of co-operation, Generosity

The writer includes both the addressee and himself/herself in the situation and exemplifies the kind of support and initiative s/he can give or has already started to contribute:

- “you and I can try to work out another schedule”
- “I think he can fit in some other language group for Class III”
- “I have drafted up the following response”
- “in effect there are eight slots when English III is taught, four for Class III and six for Class XI “
- “I’ve asked him to meet me after my lesson and I will show him the timetable of the other lettori’s lessons”
- “I’ll give him my e-mail seeing as he’s a working student and I’ll keep him informed”

Pessimism

The writer tries to redress the recipient’s negative face by expressing doubts about the conditions for the requested act: the addressee is already given a motivation for not acting, and this minimizes the imposition itself:

- “obviously there’s very little we can do”
- “I’m not quite sure what he can do”
- “there are more than a dozen languages being taught at the moment at the Orientale and there will always be overlap, so I don’t see a solution to the problem”.
- “I have taught at the Orientale forever (!) and I don’t remember a term in which this has not been a problem.”

Modesty /Self effacement

The writer understates his abilities and academic power in dealing with the situation:

¹⁴ The utterance also serves positive politeness by evoking/invoking team spirit and common grounds on which agreement can be obtained. The well known difficulties met yearly by the all the language staff in getting a working timetable, suitable classrooms and the like are a safe ground on which to seek concord.

- "I'm not quite sure what he can do"
- "as I am unable to deal with it myself having no influence over timetabling"
- "I'm not going to be able to help him on that one, so I don't see a solution to the problem"
- "Shall I simply say this in reply, or do you want to contact the student yourself?"
- "If you could give me some feedback as soon as possible, I'd appreciate it"
- "I told the student that I would contact you first, before giving any answers".

Off record

Only one of the twenty informants avoided going on record and opted for an "off-record" solution, producing the following utterance:

- "As you can see it's yet another student asking the wrong person to help him out"

The off record strategy above reveals the writer's intention to avoid the request, and to give the recipient only hints, leaving her any decision about whether to act somehow or not at all. This behaviour allows the informant to get credit for not appearing coercive, and for leaving the recipient the opportunity to get credit herself, in case she does the act, by showing care for both the writer and the student.

III. Closings

No closing salutation + first name or full name (7)

All the best, + first name (4)

Best regards + first name (3)

Thanks + first name (3)

See you soon + first name (1)

Speak soon, much love, + first name (1)

In closing their texts, most informants switched to a slightly higher level of formality than they had used in opening greetings, as if to re-establish deference and/or distance in case the general tone might have been too informal for the situation. As the expressions

collected above show, many of them choose the distant, impersonal closing made up of only their names or full names.

Summing up

As expected, given the variety of language allowed by e-mail communication and the informants' personal characteristics, the e-mail texts collected and compared in this study show evident individual differences in register and politeness. As a result, it is not possible to account for single variables emerging from the test, or to suggest all-inclusive descriptions of the language and the politeness strategies used. But it is possible to identify, with reference to the above data and across similarities and differences, recurrent characteristics in the way the informants combined and sequenced their texts.

In their opening greetings they opted in favour of informality, exploited as a positive politeness device, to raise feelings of group reciprocity, cooperation and friendly relationships. In the body of the letter they proved skilful in dealing with in/formality, and able to control language use for accomplishing the negative face redressing actions meant to mitigate their requests.

The data also show a general tendency towards slightly less informal use of register in the closings of the mails, as if the informants, having chosen the register which was best suited for structuring the different steps taken towards their requests, opted for a final touch of formality.

As regards indirectness, one linguistic aspect provided by data is that "Can you...?" questions are present, while "Could you...?" questions are not. According to Leech¹⁵ the conditional is more polite in English than the present because it is less imposing in force: it signifies a hypothetical action: whatever the answer, the addressee is not committing himself to a 'real world'; this limits the risk of infringing the addressee's face wants. In comparison with *can*, however, *could* is also more formal. The non-occurrence of the conditional in the data seems to support the view that in the specific sub-set analysed, the informants' behaviour seems to be

¹⁵ Ibid, p.121

inspired by more general textual lines of politeness, accomplished through an active sequencing of textual choices across the mails, rather than through the use of standard, conventionally polite expressions and routines. As concerns “Can/Could you....?” questions, when the informants opted for informality, they signalled it by using the more colloquial “can”. When they opted for less informal language, they preferred to avoid the modal altogether and fulfil politeness through more dynamic redressing strategies, such as shifting away from the “I”, “here” and “now”, using different strategies meant to de-focalize their own roles in the state of affairs described. For example, they tried to obtain politeness by abandoning the egocentric deictic reference and the distance between the “you” and the “I” by sharing responsibilities and weights with the recipient, so pluralising the person responsible (our, we...). Alternatively, they tried to distance the proposition of the utterance from the deictic centre of both, de-personalising the responsible and the messenger (the student needs..., wants...) to imply that there could be no blame on the messenger, since the requested act was not the writer’s fault - nor for his/her sake; neither was it for the recipient’s sake: it was *for*, and *arising from*, a third party. The intention of shifting away from the egocentric deictic centre seems also supported by elliptical constructions of expressions such as “Ø Hope you don’t mind.”, “Ø Hope that it won’t take up...”

The pessimism shown by some informants also has a specific redressing function as a negative politeness device, since questions that take for granted a positive answer can have a more impolite effect on the recipient, in comparison with questions where the speaker doubts the possibility of formulating a satisfactory answer or solution. The writer, by suggesting that s/he cannot find a satisfactory solution to the student’s problem, reduces the force of the imposition and allows the addressee more power to decide whether or not to comply with the request.

Other general politeness strategies were accomplished through the use of expressions that show modesty or pessimism which make manifest the informants’ inability to cope with the problem themselves, or indicate deference supported by expressions of approbation of the recipient.

The analysis of informants' outputs could also lead to generalizations concerning the bare propositional contents they intended to communicate. The description below, thus, is an attempt to represent the illocutionary force underlying the construction of informants' utterances and politeness behaviour:

opening salutation = our separate individual status/positions do not matter, we are close because we belong to the same team, we are friendly to each other, we are cooperative: so be favourably-inclined towards my writing;

body of the mail: a) preliminaries to the act

= Don't blame it on me, I'm not really disturbing you. There are reasons for my telling you. To avoid misunderstandings, I'll make these reasons politely explicit for you. On your side, because of your position, you will/must show concern for the situation.¹⁶

body of the mail: b) the act = I've done my part by being kind and amiable in reporting this. Now, do yours, dealing with this student's problem.

closing = It's you who must and can do something for the student because your position is different from mine. This reminds me that I am to acknowledge this distance.

Closing remarks

The first recurrent aspect to stress in the informants' behaviour is that they fully exploited, for a range of purposes, the cross-genre nature of e-mailing and the transitional stage of its code - which is far from being consolidated and allows for greater personal creativity. For example, the nature itself of e-mailing interaction provided them with a less-than-very-formal means for dealing with academic power-distance, an aspect that, in comparison with other cultures, in Italian university settings is otherwise expected to play a rather influential role. In this sense, the e-mail context provided better opportunities for accommodating possible intercultural constraints, balancing distance and making negotiation of respective faces easier.

¹⁶ See William Labov, David Fanshel, *Therapeutic Discourse: Psychotherapy as Conversation* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 77 ff.

The mixed-genre nature of e-mailing also accounts for another recurrent aspect emerging from the analysis of the data: the use by the informants of a kind of politeness prosody based on shifts in register, thanks to which the relationship among the interlocutors could switch from ‘positional’ to ‘personal’ (in Bernstein’s terms)¹⁷ and *vice-versa* inside the same text. That is to say, the informants acknowledged themselves and their recipient as incumbents of ‘official’ categories, and it was as members of these specific categories that both sides participated in the interaction. At the same time, however, when they judged it helpful for mitigating the impact of their requests, the informants inserted phases in the interaction in which participants seemed to be involved in personal terms, not as incumbents but as individuals. The intentionality of key shifts as a dynamic device for accomplishing politeness and fulfilling the set goal seems confirmed by repeated patterns of behaviour in the way the three sections of the texts were built and sequenced: overall, very informal salutations were mostly followed by more careful and planned letter bodies, embedding both formal and intimate language, followed by more formal closings than could be expected. All this was productive because it excluded the extensive use of fixed, formulaic language and gave way to a range of different linguistic outputs and new, alternative strategies of politeness.¹⁸

It seems that there is no doubt that e-mailing, in the academic context as elsewhere, seems to allow new communication strategies by adding new meanings to more traditional uses of language, by opening new frontiers which loosen some of the restraints coming from politeness and intercultural politeness – such as social distance, relative power, ranking of imposition- and raising new ethical and professional questions about how we treat one another, and how we co-operate and negotiate face and other wants. Given the relatively brief – though intense – life of e-mailing, and its global

¹⁷ Basil Bernstein, *Class, code and control* (London: Routledge, 1971).

¹⁸ As for the use of polite formulas, see, e.g. Charles A. Ferguson, “The Structure and Use of Politeness Formulas”, in *Language in Society* 5 (1976), 137-151; Eirlys E. Davies, “A Contrastive Approach to the Analysis of Politeness Formulas”, *Applied Linguistics* 8.1 (1987), 75-88.

spread, emerging strategies and discourse models are still far from being fully understood and codified. In these circumstances, data emerging from small-scale empirical research such as this may be useful for comparison to promote more extensive generalisations and so, hopefully, for adding a small contribution to the general understanding of the way we communicate.

Jocelyne Vincent

'Twixt twitalk and tweespeak (not to mention trouble) on Twitter:¹ a flutter with affectivity

Two (or thwee) salient Twitter memes, it seems to me, are well worth a flutter from a linguistic point of view: that Twitter talk (the contents of tweets)² is the “pointless babble” of twits, or the twaddle of twerps, and that Twitterspeak (usage in tweets, twitterisms) are insufferably, and ridiculously, twee.

Many observers enjoy tittering at Twitter talk or Twitterspeak,³ or both. The ‘twemes’,⁴ and their objects, display interesting ideo-

¹ The ‘micro-blogging’ social network platform (<http://twitter.com>) created mid-2006, and launched independently in 2007 whose users have grown exponentially since (see http://www.pcworld.com/article/162785/twitter_use_explodes.html?tk=rel_news, accessed April 8, 2009).

² A “tweet” is a single Twitter message; “to tweet” is to post a tweet. Tweets have a 140-character limit, so as to be able to interface with mobile SMS texting services.

³ I am using *Twitter talk* to refer both to the *contents of talk* in tweets on Twitter and to *talk about* Twitter; needless to say perhaps, *twitalk* is a punning blend of ‘Twitter talk’ and ‘twit talk’ (Brit E. slang, ‘idiots’ talk). I am using *Twitterspeak* to refer to both the terminology coined in the ‘Twitterverse’ and also when playfully tweaking one’s nose at it by parodying it. *Tweetspeak* might be an alternative or partial synonym, though it ‘should’ be used to refer only to aspects of usage within tweets (and also not just to terminology). On the metalinguistic distinctions emerging between *Talk* and *-speak* (and their ideological connotations), and on the ludic element in Netspeak terminology in general, Italian readers might see J. Vincent “*Talk, -speak: gioco e ideologia nei logonimi inglesi*” in C. Vallini (ed.) *Le parole per le parole: i logonimi nelle lingue e nel metalinguaggio* (Roma: Carocci, 2000), 701-738.

⁴ *Tweme*: Twitter meme; I am using *tweme* here also not to refer to a meme or theme found in the “Twitterverse” (as might be tracked by Twitter’s Trending Topics, or Twistori, or indeed by TweetMeme), but mainly as found in comments *about* Twitter.

logical and emotional linguistic attitudes, which I will be inviting us to observe by presenting and tentatively commenting ‘metalinguistic’ data (i.e., comments on Twitter talk and -speak) collected, ‘in the field’.

Apart from looking at ‘the trouble *with* Twitter’, the reactions to and arguments for and against it, the trouble and other emotions or affectivity *on* Twitter, given its mere ‘*status*’ brief,⁵ are also well worth being given a twirl, as are the implications of Twitter’s *brevity* brief and the reactions to what it supposedly does linguistically and conceptually. This is all nicely connected together by the embedded allusive, ‘reflected’ meanings of *twee*,⁶ and the phonaesthetic connotations of /tw-/ and /i:/ or /i/.

Twitalk, the pointless babble, or twaddle, of twits

This tweme is found in many comments about Twitter talk content (found in blog posts, cartoons, videos on Youtube, etc.). *Pointless babble* is indeed the label given to one of the six categories of tweeted content (originating from the US and in English) identified over a 2-week period in a study by San Antonio-based market research firm Pear Analytics.⁷ They found that it was the largest category making up 40.55 percent of the total number of messages sampled; *conversational* messages made up 37.55 percent, tweets with *pass-along value* i.e. retweets, 8.70 percent, *self-promotional* tweets by companies were 5.85 percent, *spam* was 3.75 percent and tweets with *news* 3.60 percent.

There are many earlier comments to be found on the triviality of Twitter talk, with various titles referring to “twits” and/or “the trou-

⁵ Originally to answer simply “what are you doing now?”, now updated to “Share and discover what’s happening right now, anywhere in the world”.

⁶ *Tweespeak* thus pun-blends *Twitter/tweet* speak, with *twee* speaking; “twee” in the Brit. E. senses of ‘cloyingly sweet, cute, corny’ and ‘affectedly clever’ – like “tweet”, from the baby-talk lispig pronunciation of “sweet”, or that of Tweetie Pie the cartoon canary – as well as with the embedded reflected meaning from “wee” (Scot. E.) ‘small, tiny’, more than appropriate given the 140-character limit of tweets.

⁷ <http://www.pearanalytics.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/Twitter-Study-August-2009.pdf>, and <http://www.pearanalytics.com/blog/2009/twitter-study-reveals-interesting-results-40-percent-pointless-babble/>.

ble with Twitter” (the title itself, something of a tweme), such as Telegraph columnist Bryony Gordon’s “Twittering is for twits with nothing better to do”,⁸ or in the animated cartoon “Twouble with Twitters”⁹ in which “a young man struggles against the pressure to twitter his life away”.

Triviality and brevity themes blend in many comments, such as in “The Trouble with Twitter: Why ‘Tweets’ Are Like ‘Blipverts’”¹⁰ by political analyst William Bradley, who among other things identifies the “inane factor” on Twitter and identifies part of the problem in its extreme brevity, and in the lack of context of tweets. The mockumentary “Flutter, the new Twitter”,¹¹ presents the start-up ‘nano-blogging’ company Flutter, which with its 26-character-limit (because 140-character tweets take too long to write or to read), takes micro-blogging to the next level. Melissa Hurt (Adjunct Professor of journalism), in a piece entitled “The Trouble with Twitter”,¹² discussing Twitter’s increasing use by journalists, sees it as worryingly encouraging superficiality. She also makes a side-comment on its “laughable name that itself suggests foolishness”, and how it has become the “butt of media jokes”, indeed. She refers us to Garry Trudeau’s *Doonesbury* comic strip (featuring fictional Fox News correspondent, Roland Hedley),¹³ which mocks the inherent narcissism of Twitter users and its inadequacy as a reporting tool, and also to the Flutter mockumentary.

Brevity is also targeted as limiting *thought*: “Twitter turns you into

⁸ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/bryonygordon/4163315/Twittering-is-for-twits-with-nothing-better-to-do.html> (January 2009) - but see the blogged comments.

⁹ http://current.com/items/89891774_twouble-with-twiters.htm (March 16, 2009).

¹⁰ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-bradley/the-trouble-with-twitter_b_172366.html (April 5, 2009) - but see the blogged comments.

¹¹ Watch and enjoy it at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeLZCy-_m3s; and see a report at http://voices.washingtonpost.com/posttech/2009/04/flutter_the_new_twitter.html (April 6, 2009).

¹² In *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, at <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Trouble-With-Twitter/47443/> (July 2009).

¹³ See at <http://www.doonesbury.com/>; and also “Doonesbury’ Writer Lampoons Tweeting Journalists”: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=121155237&ft=1&f=1020>; and for an interview with Trudeau: http://www.contactmusic.com/news.nsf/story/there-are-many-roland-hedleys-says-doonesburys-trudeau_1101386.

a twit but Facebook makes you clever, says expert”,¹⁴ reports Mike Swain on the match with the short 30 seconds attention span connected also to the greater evil of how other media such as television have reduced the attention span necessary for understanding messages (essentially also the point made by the ‘proponents’ of Flutter). As Craig Burdett comments wryly on Melissa Hurt’s “The Trouble with Twitter”:

I offer no defense of Twitter, but Twitter is only a sign of the 30-second attention span crafted by broadcast television in the past 30 years. If viewers can’t ‘get it’ in 30 seconds, most just tune out. Unfortunately, the majority of ‘news’ reporting that people consume today is little more than a nationally-televised Tweet. If a news reporter wants to keep his or her job she should adjust to the new content-delivery format and start tweeting. We can bemoan it all we want, but we have exactly the news consumer we produced.¹⁵

Tweets are undoubtedly *very* brief, but it is nonetheless surprising and ironic that brevity, limiting verbiage or verbosity, tout court, which has long been a must among the “verbal hygiene” dictats of the Anglo discourse style ethos – and is present in style guides, to go no further back, from Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style* (1918/1956) through Gower’s *Plain Words* (1948) to the *American Heritage Book of English Usage*, to no end of Netiquette guides¹⁶ – should now be so criticised.

The *American Heritage* style guide, for example – which also

¹⁴ <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/weird-news/2009/09/07/twitter-turns-you-into-a-twit-but-facebook-makes-you-clever-says-expert-86908-21653820/> (Sept. 7, 2009).

¹⁵ <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Trouble-With-Twitter/47443/> (post by craigburdett - July 27, 2009 at 01:36 pm July 2009).

¹⁶ See especially Deborah Cameron’s *Verbal Hygiene*, London: Routledge, 1995, e.g. 67-77; W. Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: Pearson-Macmillan) 1956; E. Gowers *Plain Words* (London: HMSO, 1948); *The American Heritage Book of English Usage* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1996); many Netiquette resources are listed at <http://cpsr.org/prevsite/publications/newsletters/issues/1998/NetiquetteURLs.html/>; see also the useful compilation of resources promoting concision in *Garbl’s Fat-Free Writing Links* at <http://home.comcast.net/~garbl/writing/concise.htm>; and my comments on the CBS (clarity, brevity, sincerity) Utilitarian Discourse System ethos in J. Vincent “Netiquette Rules OK!... OK?: Speculating on Rhetorical Cleansing and English Linguistic and Cultural Imperialism through Email Netiquette Style Guides” in M. Bertuccelli Papi, A. Bertacca and S. Bruti (eds.) 2008, *Threads in the Complex Fabric of Language* (Pisa: Felici Editore), 409-443.

incidentally mentions how economy in wording is often seen as a sign of intelligence, its opposite of stupidity (in disagreement, then, with the possible adverse effects on thought processes of concision when writing, suggested by critics of Twitter who see it for or producing 'twits') – sounds almost like an advert for, or the rationale behind, tweeting or even 'fluttering':

Most of us are busy and impatient people.... Using too many words is like asking people to stand in line until you get round to the point. It is irritating, which hardly helps when you are trying to win someone's goodwill or show that you know what you're talking about. What is worse, using too many words often makes it difficult to understand what is being said. It forces a reader to work hard to figure out what is going on, and in many cases the reader may simply decide it is not worth the effort. Another side-effect of verbosity is the tendency to sound overblown, pompous, and evasive. (Ibid., 64)

There are other Twitter commentators who do however defend and promote Twitter precisely for its capacity to limit wordiness and/or to focus concentration. Thus it is beginning to be used in academic institutions as a teaching tool for focussed writing exercises¹⁷ (and for many other reasons,¹⁸ e.g. exploiting its mobile interaction affordances, or for more easily keeping in touch with other teachers and new ideas in the field).¹⁹

¹⁷ See, e.g. "Twittering Teachers?", posted by Nancy Devine (February 27, 2009 at 5:08pm) at <http://englishcompanion.ning.com/profiles/blog/show?id=2567740%3ABlogPost%3A33481&commentId=2567740%3AComment%3A33520> , and "On the Cusp of Change: Me? Use Twitter?! You have to be joking....", posted by Karen LaBonte (April 11, 2009 at 1:11pm) at <http://englishcompanion.ning.com/profiles/blogs/on-the-cusp-of-change-me-use> .

¹⁸ See e.g. at <http://steve-wheeler.blogspot.com/2009/01/teaching-with-twitter.html>.

¹⁹ http://jasonrenshaw.typepad.com/jason_renshaws_web_log/2009/07/twitter-for-teachers-why-you-should-start-tweeting.html; e.g. for this see <http://www.twibes.com/english-language-teaching-elt/twitter-list>.

Twitter users, themselves, apart from students and instructors, are even bending it to literary uses: not only for haiku poetry (as might be expected), but also for writing novels.²⁰

It is also starting to be used to enhance some training courses, in the very professional sphere which is most salient among its critics, that is, journalism,²¹ (while also including lessons on how to “swim” through the “clutter of garbage” in Twitter); as Leah Betancourt (Star Tribune digital community manager) reports among other things in “The Journalist’s Guide to Twitter”:²²

The 140-character format forces writers to focus their attention and get to the point quickly. But this isn’t just sound-bite style reporting.

Many of the (on-the-ball) blogged comments on Melissa Hart’s provocative “The Trouble with Twitter” mentioned earlier, are very instructive, especially when countering that Twitter, blogs, etc. are not meant to replace other types of journalism, or long pondered articles, but are an added resource and medium for journalists.²³

Discussions within the ELT profession and elsewhere concerning and countering concerns over what Twitter’s brevity constraint might be “doing to English” words, or style, are also naturally

²⁰ See, for twitter haiku (or “twaiku”), e.g., <http://haikuhabits.com/2008/11/29/ten-people-to-follow-for-haiku-on-twitter/> (Nov. 28, 2008), and for a selection of links to types of twitter novels (and some comments) see http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/twitter_novels_not_big_success_stories.php (Sept 2, 2008).

²¹ For an idea see “Twitter classes for aspiring journalists” on *Times Higher Education*, by Jon Marcus (Sept. 5, 2009) at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=408033>.

²² On *Mashable*, *The Social Media Guide*, at <http://mashable.com/2009/05/14/twitter-journalism/>.

²³ Leah Betancourt, for example, also reports, as do others, that journalists are using Twitter to keep informed in realtime of emerging stories to follow and also to get ideas on angles. No one, anywhere, denies that it can be extremely useful as a first hint from the ground of news or breaking stories (and sometimes even that is has become vital – thanks also especially to its mobile interface – as the only source of news when censorship, natural disasters or other emergencies cut off other forms of communications). This is indeed a pervasive and already generally well-known tweme (for example, concerning the recent opposition protests in Iran). Journalists, such as Betancourt above, also say Twitter is used “to connect and engage with their audience”, anticipating some points to be made shortly.

found. Professional linguists (such as OED lexicographers), rather than lay language buffs or purists, scientifically document usage in Twitter, as in other contexts and media, and are unalarmed by it.²⁴

One need only also remember – as stressed in the introduction to this volume when referring to Nunberg's squiblog "All Thumbs" on the purported dangers of texting or SMS-speak – that usage developed by users in and for one specific medium and context does not automatically spill over into and 'contaminate' usage in others.

The most surprising and perhaps interesting aspect, I suggest, about brevity and Twitter is connected precisely to its triviality or conversational and purportedly "pointless babble" aspect. You'd have thought, indeed, that with just 140 characters with which to write and broadcast to your readers, friends or community of "followers" about what you're doing or what's going on around you, that the emphasis would be on information about 'what'. Yet even in that small space the need for interactional contact, for comity, and as we shall also see, for expression of feeling, emerges strongly (as do individual characteristics and personalities).²⁵ Indeed, alongside the attacks we saw earlier that Twitter was just pointless babble we find defences of just that aspect of Twitter talk (if not always of "*pointless babble*").

New media theorist Danah Boyd, in her article: "Twitter: 'pointless babble' or peripheral awareness + social grooming?",²⁶ which takes off, indeed, from the Pears study mentioned earlier, is most explicit in her defence of the social relevance of interaction in Twitter, and pointedly critical of the derogatory expression used to label it. What the Pears researchers labelled "pointless babble" is better defined as being for "peripheral awareness" and "social grooming". Her comments are well worth quoting extensively:

²⁴ See the article "Oxford Lexicographers Chart the Effects of Twitter" at http://www.pw.org/content/oxford_lexicographers_chart_effects_twitter.

²⁵ <http://kalinago.blogspot.com/2009/08/in-space-of-140-characters.html> (Aug. 9, 2009).

²⁶ See at http://www.zephorio.org/thoughts/archives/2009/08/16/twitter_pointle.html (August 16, 2009).

Studies like this drive me batty....[as] communications scholars found long ago ... people are social creatures and a whole lot of what they express is phatic communication. (Phatic expressions do social work rather than conveying information... think “Hi” or “Thank you”)....I vote that we stop dismissing Twitter just because the majority of people who are joining its ranks are there to be social. It’s good for society ... what they’re doing online is fundamentally a mix of social grooming and maintaining peripheral social awareness. They want to know what the people around them are thinking and doing and feeling, even when co-presence isn’t viable. They want to share their state of mind and status so that others who care about them feel connected. It’s a back-and-forth that makes sense if only we didn’t look down at it from outer space. Conversation is also more than the explicit back and forth between individuals asking questions and directly referencing one another. It’s about the more subtle back and forth that allow us to keep our connections going. It’s about the phatic communication and the gestures, the little updates and the awareness of what’s happening in space. We take the implicit nature of this for granted in physical environments yet, online, we have to perform each and every aspect of our interactions. What comes out may look valueless, but, often, it’s embedded in this broader ecology of social connectivity. What’s so wrong about that?

Apart from using “phatic communication” instead of the technically correct term “phatic communion”,²⁷ her comments are spot-on from the sociolinguistic point of view. Indeed, small talk, social grooming, phatic communion, call it what you will, is *not* pointless. It has social goals of comity, “interactional” as opposed to informational or “transactional” functions (to use Guy Aston’s and Penelope Brown and George Yule’s influential terms),²⁸ “rapport”

²⁷ Coined by anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in 1923; see a useful compilation of sources by Linguist List members at <http://linguistlist.org/issues/10/10-509.html> (posted April 8, 1999).

²⁸ See Guy Aston, *Learning Comity. An Approach to the description and pedagogy of interactional speech*, (Bologna: CLUEB, 1988), and Penelope Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), who distinguish between the use of speech to negotiate information and its use to negotiate rapport; ‘interactional speech’ is reminiscent of Malinowski’s phatic communion, where “speech serves to establish bonds of personal union between people brought

rather than “report” functions to use Deborah Tannen’s.²⁹ And these are hardly less important. Doug Clow in his blog on technology in Higher Education,³⁰ indeed, also comments in his post “Pointless babble or social grooming”, taking up Danah Boyd’s article on the Pear’s study, that:

what looks like ‘pointless babble’ isn’t pointless, if it’s from people you know or care about. It’s social grooming, it’s keeping in touch. It’s what most human conversation is about. If you think this stuff is pointless babble, you’re really not going to enjoy parties. Or indeed be likely to maintain fulfilling personal relationships. On Twitter, you get to choose whose ‘pointless babble’ you want to follow. Almost nobody who actually uses Twitter uses it by reading the public stream.

Other views, essentially valuing the social uses of Twitter (and in a round-about-way, even, of “twaddle”) are found in Bishop Alan Wilson’s blog post “Is Twitter Twaddle?” and in the comments by Charles Krausse³¹ who responds to Bishop Alan’s definition of Twitter as “stream of consciousness”:

Twitter is a compelling media for many people, exactly because it is stream of consciousness. Any one “tweet” IS “twaddle”. I probably don’t care if someone - even my closest friends - is having jam on their toast this morning ... or is going out to pick up milk. However, “tweets”, taken as a whole, are an excellent way of formulating a picture of someone: What things are important to them, what their temperament and personality are like, what their likes and dislikes are, what their prejudices are. Twitter is a social medium, and while it had been used for many other things - organizations use Twitter for announcements, promotion, or advertising; and one fellow has even written an online novel through twitter - its uses are primarily social ones.

together by the mere need of companionship and does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas”.

²⁹ See Deborah Tannen *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (New York: Ballantine-Random House, 1990).

³⁰ At <http://douglow.wordpress.com/2009/08/17/pointless-babble/>.

³¹ <http://bishopalan.blogspot.com/2009/01/is-twitter-twaddle.html> (Jan. 5, 2009); post by Charles Krausse (Jan. 6, 2009).

That's the point: Twitter is a social network after all, its point ought to be to be a *social* medium. And, to end this point, let me just return to the journalists. Shane Richmond, (Head of Technology for the Telegraph Media group) in "Twitter looks like a publishing platform but it isn't one"³² also defends its conversational purpose as relevant to those people it is directed to (as coffee-shop talk is - and is not criticised for being what it is).

The social media are meant to be *social*, and Twitter (among other things) is affording a new way of connecting with others at a distance, also thanks to its mobile mode, as well also of 'micro-broadcasting'.³³

We might also note, indeed, from all this, that far from the medium determining the message,³⁴ we can see a fair degree of appropriation by users of the medium, as Edward Mischaud suggests in *Twitter: Expressions of the Whole Self An investigation into user appropriation of a web-based communications platform*,³⁵ arguing against simple technological determinism and for off-setting it with aspects of social constructionism of technology. His investigation also demonstrates that the main uses of Twitter are: to send messages to other people known by the user; to publish personal viewpoints and thoughts; and to share news-like information with others. As he says:

These findings correlate with the theoretical foundation presented which is based on the understanding that technologies are not neutral objects that operate apart from society's influence. Technologies are flexible devices. People often extract different meanings and uses out of a technology – applications that are not always factored into its design. In some instances, however, inventors, or

³² http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/technology/shanerichmond/6138427/twitter_looks_like_a_publishing_platform_but_it_isnt_one/.

³³ The 'twitterati' warn, however, that it must be 'conversational' and not just for 'broadcasting' (about oneself); see <http://www.twitip.com/do-you-converse-or-broadcast-how-to-build-or-kill-relationships-on-twitter/>.

³⁴ ... at least in its content and purpose, while its length, certainly, and its form may often be affected by the brevity constraint.

³⁵ Available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/mediaWorkingPapers/> (2007).

shapers, of technology can themselves determine how a technology is to be used and therefore limit and restrict its 'interpretative flexibility'. With Twitter, subscribers have broadened its use and customised the platform to ends arguably beyond what its creators intended. ... "What are you doing?" ... is a 'soft' restriction that does not in itself determine how users engage. Furthermore, there are no control mechanisms to curb misappropriation, other than a limit on message length. Taken together, it could be argued that Twitter's creators established it as a 'neutral' platform, entirely malleable by its users and therefore affording them the opportunity to determine its core uses. The question then serves only as a guide to get communication going. ... it is present but not deterministic. (Ibid., 38-40).

One of the first things to strike me about the Twitter talk of tweets, indeed, was, as said earlier, that despite the brevity constraint, and the contents brief (to give mere status updates of what they are doing or what is happening around them), twitterers do not limit themselves to mere transmission of informational or referential meaning, but also express affective or emotional meanings (apart from, as we have just seen, also engaging in 'small talk') even in their otherwise informational tweets. The affectivity expressed on Twitter doesn't stop with small talk or phatic communion. Emotion is also found in word choices in Twitter talk.

These affective meanings are fascinatingly visually and graphically tracked by TwitterMoods³⁶, and visualised (colour coded) on the Twitter Mood Maps where one can literally see in real time what moods are prevalent in tweets (throughout the United States). And this is not as tracked by Hope vs Despair³⁷, for example, which simply looks at collective moods by tracking smileys/emoticons in tweets. TwitterMoods is based on the linguistic analysis of the vast (U.S.) tweet data base which can pick up indices of 'happiness' or otherwise, through the analysis of key affective words by applying something like the classic Semantic Differential method:³⁸

³⁶ See at <http://barabasilab.neu.edu/projects/twittermood/>.

³⁷ See <http://www.bigspaceship.com/portfolio/hope-vs-despair/>.

³⁸ Charles E. Osgood, George J. Suci, Percy H. Tannenbaum, *The Measurement of Meaning*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957).

The mood (valence) of each individual tweet is based on the Affective Norms for English Words (ANEW) data set [³⁹], calculated as suggested in [Sheridan Dodds and Danforth, 2009⁴⁰]. ANEW is a set of 1034 words, previously identified as bearing emotional weight (e.g. abuse, acceptance, accident). The mood of each word was estimated in a study at the University of Florida, where participants (college students), were shown lists of isolated words and asked to grade each word's valence, arousal, and dominance level on an integer scale of 1-9.⁴¹

After publishing “Measuring the happiness of large-scale written expression- songs, blogs, Logs and presidents”,⁴² Peter Sheridan Dodds and Christopher Danforth are now themselves beginning to use Twitter as a hedonometer using the same method,⁴³ as have done Elsa Kim and Sam Gilbert in “Detecting Sadness in 140 Characters: Sentiment Analysis and Mourning Michael Jackson on Twitter”.⁴⁴

The ANEW technique is also embedded, according to Darren Quick,⁴⁵ in the delightful We Feel Fine⁴⁶ project and site (by Jonathan Harris and Sep Kamvar, essentially also an artwork project,

³⁹ Margaret M., Bradley and Peter J. Lang, *Affective norms for English words (ANEW): Stimuli, instruction manual and affective ratings*. Technical report C-1 (Gainesville, FL.: The Center for Research in Psychophysiology, University of Florida, 1999). The ANEW materials can be applied for by researchers from <http://csea.php.ufl.edu/media/anewmessage.html>.

⁴⁰ Sheridan Jones, P. and C. M. Danforth, “Measuring the Happiness of Large-Scale Written Expression: Songs, Blogs, and Presidents”, *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 2009, available at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/757723154j4w726k/fulltext.html>.

⁴¹ http://barabasilab.neu.edu/projects/twittermood/?page_id=2.

⁴² See also the report in <http://www.gizmag.com/measuring-happiness-with-blogs/12366/> by Darren Quick (July 28, 2009).

⁴³ See a report by Jenny Wortham at <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/11/using-twitter-as-a-collective-mood-ring->.

⁴⁴ See <http://www.webecologyproject.org/2009/08/detecting-sadness-in-140-characters/>.

⁴⁵ See <http://www.gizmag.com/measuring-happiness-with-blogs/12366/> by Darren Quick (July 28, 2009).

⁴⁶ <http://www.wefeelfine.org/mission.html>, by Jonathan Harris and Sep Kamvar; see also their book *We Feel Fine: An Almanac of Human Emotion* (New York: Simon & Schuster-Scribner, 2009); and see the interview with Kamvar at <http://workbookproject.com/2009/12/we-feel-fine-an-interview-with-sep-kamvar/>.

reminiscent too of Lev Manovich's Database art),⁴⁷ which streams, groups and visualises (in realtime) moods in tweets which start with 'I feel' or 'I'm feeling', each sentence receiving a happiness score based on the ANEW study.

Twistori, an ongoing social experiment⁴⁸ by Amy Hoy and Thomas Fuchs, inspired by *We Feel Fine* – but without *its* absolutely must-see multiple visualisation features – expands to tracking other sentence openings and lets you “gaze on as tweets that use the words ‘love’, ‘hate’, ‘wish’, ‘believe’ or ‘think’ float up your screen”,⁴⁹ presenting thus a (simple) stream of consciousness view (an addictive one, at that) of the “Twitter emotional landscape”.

With respect to this, it is also possible, and saddening to see, most readily on the Twitter Mood Maps at any rate, that unhappiness or not full-blown happiness is more often present in most places (and in some places more than others).

One can't help thinking, at this point, of the linguistic notion of “troubles-talk” / “troubles-telling”⁵⁰ and it is tempting to try to speculate that perhaps people are more likely to talk and engage in various degrees of two-way (or even one-way) cathartic troubles-talk (troubles shared are troubles halved), than mainly tweet when they are simply feeling good about themselves or of things happening around them.

It is even more tempting, with respect to the prevalence found of interactional (rather than transactional or informational) talk on Twitter as we saw earlier, to connect troubles talk to interactional goals, and, on discovering that there are more women using Twitter

⁴⁷ See Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, (Cambridge Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2001), 212-243 (and http://transcriptions.english.ucsb.edu/archive/courses/warner/english197/Schedule_files/Manovich/Database_as_symbolic_form.htm; and “Database as cultural and symbolic form” talk delivered (April 8, 2005) in Naples during the Sintesi Electronic Art Festival, organised by MAO-Media and Arts Office and the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici di Napoli.

⁴⁸ <http://twistori.com/>; see also “Twistori: a Twitter Zeitgeist Social Experiment comments by Josh Catone at http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/twistori_twitter_experiment.php (April 29, 2008).

⁴⁹ Comment at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/19/magazine/19wwln-medium-sidebar-t.html?_r=2.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Gail Jefferson “On the sequential organization of troubles talk in ordinary conversation”, *Social Problems*, 35, 4 (1988), 418-442; also Tannen *You just don't understand*, 1990.

than there are men,⁵¹ to take the next step and connect this all to Deborah Tannen's distinction⁵² between *rapport talk* and *report talk*, the former as more typical of women, the latter of men; not to mention that Tannen also describes "troubles talk" as more prevalent in, even characteristic of, women's interactional talk, than in that of men.⁵³

We might not wish to go too far with the gender correlation to the higher incidence of interactional talk (social grooming, phatic communion, small talk) especially in the light of its being popularly labelled as "pointless babble" . . . , and of the already derogatory connotations of female "twittering" which is, in 'lay' talk applied only to women's talk, and to that of camp gay men, and probably not on the basis of the only slight statistical preponderance of women in Twitter (55% as opposed to 45% men). However, it does seem to make some sense to suggest that the point of at least some of the social grooming, phatic communion, interactional talk happening in Twitter talk, could be seen as troubles telling (if only one-way) and, when conversations develop or supportive responses are forthcoming, as troubles talk. There would need to be focussed data collection and conversational analysis (of the Gail Jefferson type) of the Twitter exchanges to confirm this, but it is at least possible to think that some indication of this may have been actually already captured by the ANEW semantic differential analysis which identifies affective meanings (indexing various degrees of unhappiness) in single words in tweets. Troubles talk, of course is not only or necessarily about full-blown unhappiness, as such, but generally refers to two-way mutually supportive talk and sharing of gripes and of offering of solidarity. It should not be surprising, therefore, that a social network service, albeit with restrictions on length of single messages and of contents (to share information), should come to be appropriated by its users precisely for the expression and sharing of feelings or affect as well as information.

At any rate, we haven't finished yet with our observation of af-

⁵¹ 55% of Twitter users (in the USA) are women, as the Pears study mentioned earlier also reveals; only slightly more than men, but nevertheless a significantly different trend to gender distribution in other ICT uses – see, e.g., in Emilia Di Martino's paper, this volume.

⁵² Tannen, *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 53.

fectivity in Twitter or of attitudes to Twitter.

Twitterspeak and twitterisms: tweespeak and twitspeak

A saliently affective aspect of Twitter concerns, indeed, its terminology. “Twitter” and “tweet”, have obviously light-hearted connotations reinforced by alluding metaphorically to the “twittering” and “tweets” of birds, words coined originally themselves onomatopoeically to denote short repeated bursts of (high-pitched) chirps.

The name, Twitter, thus dips into the same semantic field for its metaphor as do “chit chat”, “chatter”, “chatting” (whence IRC “chat”), but while also denoting instances of aimless, everyday speech or talk, it also highlights brevity (but unlike “chat”, twittering does not necessarily denote dialogue or conversation). What’s more, through its phonaesthesia⁵⁴ (or connotations deriving ultimately, and iconically,⁵⁵ from the physical qualities of its component phonemes /-i-/ and /-w-/ following a plosive), it also connotes childishness, smallness, denied-seriousness, inconsequentiality, levity. To have adopted a term with this specific connotative load for a brand-name in the first place is patently ludic, ironically self-derogatory,⁵⁶ fully in the Netspeak ‘lexicoining’ tradition; playfulness and even some

⁵⁴ Where phonetic elements are inherently associated with a semantic meaning, thus with elements of iconicity. The term was introduced by J. R. Firth (in *Speech* London: Benn’s Sixpenny Library, 1930) who defined a *phonaestheme* as “a phoneme or cluster of phonemes shared by a group of words which also have in common some element of meaning or function, though the words may be etymologically unrelated.”

⁵⁵ A /tw-/ phonaestheme was already recognisable in English (associated with ‘twisting action’ in series like “twirl”, “twist”, “twine”, “tweak”, “twiddle”, etc), but it is only now through association with, and by reflection from Twitter terminology that /tw-/ has become, or represents a new phonaestheme (a second twee/t one, homophonic, as it were, with the first), one which semantically denotes ‘pertaining to Twitter’, and which also becomes ‘twee’ when it is ‘cleverly’ and coyly inserted into words, especially if there is also some punning or other device at work. However, it must be pointed out that /tw-/ terms in twicabulary, have ‘reflected’ connotations rather than iconic ones; true phonaesthemes are iconic, more immediately onomatopoeic. /twi-/ however, by combining with the iconicity of the high front vowel phonemes /i:/ or /ɪ/, which do themselves intrinsically suggest smallness, does regain a degree of iconicity.

⁵⁶ The metaphor when applied to people, rather than to birds, as in ‘twittering females’, is certainly derogatory.

degree of twee-ness have always been a feature of Netspeak,⁵⁷ though Twitterspeak does seem to be taking it to new heights (or depths).

Twitterisms are being coined (actively and visibly) by the Twitter community at large (the “tweeple”, ordinary twitterers not just the twitterati), not only through usage in tweets but also by uploading their suggestions to the various twictionaries available on blog or wiki sites.⁵⁸ Salient among them is the Front Page “Twictionary: a dictionary for Twitter”⁵⁹ which describes itself as “a repository for the meanings and manglings of words and language on Twitter”.

Although this is no place for an extended morphological analysis of the “manglings”, one can already begin to distinguish (without any claims to completeness) the following word-formation processes at work in coining twitterisms:

- a) already *existing terms* are extended and appropriated, e.g. as in “Twitter” and “tweet” themselves, some even to become – often ironic – ‘client’ proper names, like “Twaddle”;⁶⁰
- b) an *existing term* (often slang) is appropriated with a new partially specialised meaning which still conserves some of the semantics

⁵⁷ As discussed, for example, in Vincent, *Talk -speak*, 2000.

⁵⁸ Some twitterisms (Twitter terminology, or twicabulary items) are well established and regularly used with fixed specialist meanings (ESP indeed), such as “tweet” “re-tweet”, while others display a range of establishment from emerging terms to ephemeral one-off terms coined for fun probably just to make a clever online contribution on one of the existing collaborative twictionaries. Some variation exists in use and form of terms and concepts, across the twictionaries, but there is also a definitely emerging specialist terminology.

⁵⁹ See on *Front Page, Twictionary: a dictionary for Twitter* at <http://twictionary.pbworks.com>; others include <http://verwon.com/the-twictionary/> and <http://verwon.com/the-twictionary-part-ii/>; *Twitterisms – Understanding Twitter Jargon* at <http://www.blogcatalog.com/search.frame.php?term=twictionary&id=c91bdcab42fd348af19f503ac0734e8e>; and in the more general *Urban Dictionary* at <http://www.urbandictionary.com>, which also includes many twitterisms (though occasionally with mocking intent and criticism - see the definitions of “Twitter” itself).

⁶⁰ A free Twitter client for Windows mobile phones - see <http://twaddle.mobi/>. “Twaddle” itself is defined by one twictionary as: “1: The rubbish Tweets that no one wants to read. 2: A Twitterer with a bad walk, akin to a duck”; the latter ‘definition’ an obvious tongue-in-cheek addition, also exemplifying something like the process in c) *vii*).

of the first, as, e.g., in “twit” (and “twerp”) by a sort of often auto-ironic *punning*, or semantic remix or blending (not just ‘idiot’ but types of twitterer / tweeter).⁶¹

New terms are also very characteristically coined,

- c) by different types of morphological or phonological *blending* of two words:
- i) the first word is “twitter” or “tweet”, and the second is partially clipped; the first left complete and the number of clipped syllables in the second is conserved by the first element, e.g.: “the Twitiverse” (the Twitter ‘universe’), “twittercism” (“criticism, mocking the status use of Facebook as opposed to Twitter”), “tweetersation” (‘a long drawn out conversation taking place on Twitter’), “twitterati,” (the Twitter élite or experts – ‘Twitter literati’);
 - ii) the blended word starts with /tw-/ (to ‘stand for’ Twitter – possibly the most frequent type of process, along with *iii*), and the second element is ‘stronger’ (though its initial syllable or consonant is elided); the first is severely clipped (though still strongly represented by the by now recognisably specialised /tw-/, e.g.: “tweme” (‘Twitter meme’), “twictionary” (Twitter dictionary), “tweeple” (‘Twitter people’) “twewbie” or “Tw00b” (Twitter ‘newbie’ / ‘n00b’), “twetiquette” (‘Twitter etiquette’ / ‘Twitter netiquette’);⁶²

⁶¹ These latter are partial synonyms, showing some variation and overlap, the distinction having not quite settled down yet, though an emerging distinction seems to be that “Twitterer” refers to members of Twitter, and “tweeter” to a member when tweeting. “Twit” and “twerp” both derogatory Brit. Slang (synonymic) terms have been appropriated and now distinguished and specialised by twitterato Paul Downey (see at <http://blog.whatfettle.com/2008/01/05/are-you-a-twitter-twit-or-a-twerp/>); he introduces an evaluative distinction where “twit” is positive and “twerp” negative. The twit essentially follows Phil Whitehouse’s 10 commandments (not actually twetiquette, but essentially that) while the “twerp” doesn’t know how to use Twitter properly and appropriately, breaking the 10 commandments. Time will tell whether the technical distinction catches on.

⁶² “Twetiquette” may perhaps be an example of blending of three words (at least etymologically) if one considers that “netiquette” is itself already a blend of “net” and “etiquette”). “Twitiquette” an alternative found, would be a straightforward blend of

- iii) the blended word starts with /twi-/, substituting it for the initial syllable of the second word (or ‘head’ morpheme), and both terms are clipped to combine more equally, and the blend conserves the syllable count of the original head noun, as in: “twicabulary” (‘Twitter vocabulary’);
- iv) the blended word starts with /twit-/ when preceding an /-s/, or a vowel, as in “Twitscape” (a shorter alternative to “Twitterverse”-helpful to keep within the 140-character limit);⁶³
- v) a blend can be a ‘blend of blends’: “twiterature” can be seen as a (punning, ironic) blend of blends (twit+literature and twitter+literature); with different possible morphological, or phonological breaks (twi+terature, twit+erature or twitter+ature), thus serendipitously ‘morphing’ between the types listed so far (as does “twitterati”, ‘the Twitter literati’);
- vi) occasionally the “tweet” element comes second, its /t-/, at least, possibly melting into and substituted by another plosive consonant, as in “spweet” (‘Tweet spam’; although “twam” is usually preferred to refer to this);
- vii) blending two words, both already existing, where both remain fully present, one embedded in the other, as what might perhaps be called a ‘compound’ pun, as in “twaddle” (“waddle” in “twaddle”).

Other twitterisms are coined by:

- d) simply substituting /w/ for /r/ after /t-/, as in “Twibe” (a blog site proper noun for an ELT Twitter community); or “twanslator” (a

the *iii*rd kind.

⁶³ Brevity is one of the reasons given for Twitterspeak blending also in the Urban Dictionary; however, blending is generally a characteristic of Netspeak – and admittedly before this, as Geoff Nunberg suggests - in another Fresh Air talk “The Dactyls of October” (1994), now in his collection *The Way we Talk Now* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001, 173-175) - also related to the brevity constraints of ‘conversing’ with (the then) computers, e.g. of programming languages not allowing spaces, 8-character limit filenames, etc., (not to mention the allusion to Orwell’s Big Brother’s Newspeak, in turn, alluding to the Bolshevik’s ‘wilfully ugly’, antibourgeois words like “comintern”, “agitprop”, “compounds patched together from the truncated syllables of other words”.... “it was the language of technological efficiency, literally telegraphic, the clipped syntax used for communication by wire”).

- translating application for Twitter);
- e) inserting a 'spurious' /w/ in an existing word after a /t/ and before an /i/, as in "egotwistical" ('tending to talk excessively about oneself on Twitter') or "actwivism" ('using tweets to advocate or oppose a political, social or environmental cause');
 - f) prefixing a /t-/ when a word already starts with a /w-/, as in "tword" (preferred to the compound "Twitterword");⁶⁴
 - g) by simply adding initial /tw-/ to a word with an initial vowel, as in "twavatar" ('Twitter avatar' - user icon);
 - h) inserting -tw-, as an 'infix', as in "Twtweet (an orthographic rather than a phonological effect), to mean 'tweets about tweets'.

Twitterspeak words are also, more traditionally, coined by:

- i) deriving terms with "tweet" or "twitter" as roots, as in "twitterism", "twitterer", "tweeter";
- j) by conversion a few also become verbs, such as "tweet" (and not forgetting that they then 'inflect' – by adding regular inflectional morphemes, -s, -ed, -ing);
- k) compounding, where both terms are fully present, as in "Twitterspeak", "tweetfool", "tweethart", though in the latter the resulting compounds have specialist meanings – not necessarily transparent to the outsider ('falling prey to prank tweets' and 'someone who does a great job tweeting', respectively);
- l) and, finally, by dipping into the entire feathered bird metaphor pool to extract and happily derive terms from, for example, "feather", "nest", "roost" "fly" "flitter", "chirp" as in "Featherology" ('the study of Twitter related diseases such as Chirpes'), and punning compounds like "Fly-Bye" ('signing off of Twitter').

Some of the twitterisms in the collaborative twictionaries – where some of the above can be seen – as well as in blogs, tweets, and in "ttweeting" tweets (those tweets meta-discussing⁶⁵ tweeting and/

⁶⁴ Presumably also for brevity's sake (as used by twitterer @_fried_icecream/the-daily-tword, where we can see that it simply refers to 'talk' (not meta-discussions about twitterisms).

⁶⁵ Where we can also see and appreciate the use of the new media terminological

or tweetspeak) are undoubtedly tongue-in-cheek, and ephemeral, some also inventing as yet non-existent objects and concepts, while many have already been widely appreciated and adopted (often because of their creative and ‘fun’ qualities).

They very clearly display a high degree of creativity, and whether or not they survive and prosper, whether or not they are taken seriously by their own dubbers, they should be taken seriously both as a social and a linguistic phenomenon,⁶⁶ for at least some of the following reasons:

- they are excellent exemplars of a wide variety of derivational processes;
- they indicate how certain phonaesthemes (a somewhat neglected notion, these days) can be extremely active and attractive, a catalyst or motor driving the invention of new vocabulary items;
- they indicate how playfulness and punning is also a motor generating new concepts and terms;
- they remind us of the collaborative nature of the Web.2 (thanks to its technical affordances), and that;
- language change and innovation springs from below, from the people, the language users in their specific contexts, and by their joint consensus;⁶⁷
- they remind us of the role of affectivity and ideological language attitudes in language use and reception, and that;
- informality and joint playfulness, even silliness, can play an important role in community identity formation; a common jargon or lingo is a strong agent of community bonding, the very silliness which makes others, outsiders, cringe.

terms “mashable” and “remixed” (see in Lev Manovich’s “Remix” and in my introduction, this volume), used appropriately enough, to capture the sense of ‘blending’ (as well as that of “mangled” to capture perhaps the merry clipping going on in the lexicoining process (to use one of James Joyce’s happy blends).

⁶⁶ Twitter has already drawn the serious attention of academics from different fields. A useful academic bibliography on Twitter and micro-blogging compiled by Danah Boyd (Social Media Researcher at Microsoft Research New England and a Fellow at Harvard University’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society) which is also updateable by visitors, can be consulted at <http://www.danah.org/researchBibs/twitter.html>.

⁶⁷ Many of the sites allow not only contributions of new twitterisms, but also feedback, comments, and thumbs up or thumbs down ‘voting’ on contributed items by others.

Negative reception and comments abound indeed on the silliness of Twitterspeak, (as we saw they did too on the purported pointlessness of Twitter talk – where yet again affective or interactional aspects of communication were dismissed as less relevant than informational ones).

One vividly written comment (posted by blogger The Bell, with lots of negatively loaded lexica of his or her own, found on Reuters UK The Great Debate site, on question “Can Twitter save the World?”)⁶⁸ will suffice to document this point – and it also conveniently brings in other previously mentioned aspects of Twitter which are also found irritating or even frightening “to the point of revulsion”. After saying that social media are fine and have their uses, The Bell says:

...among various things I find spooky to the point of revulsion about Twitter are as follows:

- a) its *name* leading off with the word “*twit*”
- b) the unbearably *bird-brained argot* for its use, users and their communiqués
- c) the atrociously short attention-span and gaudy smugness mirrored in what passes for communication within this specific branded medium and
- d) the overweening presumption that anything it accomplishes couldn't be done by other means.

It's as though Twitter sort of matters, a lot even, to some people - but it doesn't really matter at all when you take it in perspective, given its twin burdens of *twee terminology* and premature numerological gloating. Sheer force of numbers never made anything right (that being the first thing about forced collectivism that makes it so appallingly odious). Given case in point Twitter is no exception here. Also, no social media ought ever to appropriate the issues their users choose to amplify. Twitter is kind of doing that, explicitly as well as by implication, despite being (even by digital standards) still in the fad stage. Which is more than a tad immodest of it, in my opinion. Other than that, uh yeah, sure, it's great. It exists. It's got a *stupid name* but it's in use. So far, so good. Some day soon, something else will come along to replace it. So my question

⁶⁸ <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate-uk/2009/10/24/can-twitter-save-the-world>
October 25th, 2009: 1:30 am GMT.

would be, how about a social media network that doesn't immediately twit and thus *render unserious* its users by stigmatizing them with *idiotic names*, chronic shortage of breath and the 'one billion flies can't be wrong' argument - wouldn't that be something? (*Italics added*).

One could hardly be more scathing: "stupid name", "bird-brained argot" – Melissa Hurt's "laughable name that itself suggests foolishness" sounds meek in comparison. It is also worth taking seriously, both as a confirmation of the strength of the reactions it can generate and of the writer's affective and ideological attitudes; also because opinions of Twitter may eventually win out, the novelty, enthusiasm and fun wear off (and the fad die out), the "exploded" Twittersverse begin to implode. If it did, it could even be that some of the fault would lie with the excesses of fun and silliness in twicabulary, a sort of twuicide.

Parody and implied criticism are also powerful weapons. There is plenty to be found as we can see from some of the titles of article and cartoons mentioned earlier. Some of them also however betray a grudging and contradictory desire to join in the fun. Few can resist the lure of /tw-/; even in the blog post just cited above, we might note an occasional playful/ironic punning lapse into the bird metaphor, "bird-brained argot", and of succumbing to /tw-/: "twin burden of twee terminology"). There seems indeed to be something of a competition, or at least an irresistible compulsion, among commentators (let alone the tweeples) when talking about Twitter and tweeting (present writer no exception) to pun and insert, especially in article or blog titles, /tw-/, or /w/ into accommodating words (remember "Twouble with Twitters"), or to stick somewhere in their comments already existing non-specialist /tw-/ words and to create catchy alliterative lines ("Twitter turns you into a Twit").

In sum, we have seen, among other things, how affect and essentially 'ideological' or moralistic stylistic attitudes are discernible and generated when performing and when discussing Twitter talk and Twitterspeak (pro or contra) and how these indeed can be punningly redefined (in the very spirit of Twitterspeak itself even by its critics) as twitalk or the pointless babble talk of twits, and as

tweespeak, or silly, affected terminology, respectively. Affect, especially levity, fun and foolishness can be discerned indeed, in the enthusiastic creativity and the panoply of 'acrobatic' ways devised to play with connotations at the semantic level and with puns and phonemes on the formal level to generate layers of meaning when coining twicabulary. The fact that affectivity or feelings and sociability, moods and comity can be seen as prevalent even within the spatial confines of the tweet, is also particularly indicative of their importance.

Brevity, levity and comity are not mutually exclusive. Affectivity is not a side-line of communication nor of specialist terminology, for that matter, in Twitter as elsewhere. The affectivity aflutter in and about Twitter, I suggest, makes for a nest of themes worth a linguistic flutter or two.

**TECHNOLOGY
FOR
ENGLISH**

Rita Calabrese

Current Trends in ELT Methodology: Exploring a Computer Learner Corpus

Introduction

The implementation of computer-generated concordances in the classroom or *Data Driven Learning (DDL)* is considered a valuable tool both for EFL learners and ELT/SLA analysts for improving students' level of competence in foreign languages and for developing their metalinguistic awareness by enhancing learners' ability to perceive and interpret specific patterns in the target language.

In recent years researchers have been experimenting with a new source of data, the *Computer Learner Corpus*, in order to get a better insight into learners' interlanguage. The electronic collections of written and spoken texts produced by foreign language students and then subjected to computerised error analysis and tagging have now made it possible to deepen our understanding of learners' interlanguage.

In this article I will describe the early phases of the UNISALC (University of Salerno Learner Corpus) Project concerning the retrieval, linguistic analysis and error tagging of Italian EFL students' writing and report on a '*data driven teaching-learning*' experience with a group of foreign language students at the University of Salerno.¹

¹ The project is part of research activities coordinated by Bruna Di Sabato, professor of English and Linguistics at the University of Salerno.

Data driven learning or concordancing in the classroom

During the 1990s Tim Johns coined the expression *Data Driven Learning* (DDL) referring to teaching methodologies promoting the use of computer-generated concordances in the classroom in order to enhance learners' inductive skills in their autonomous investigations on specific language features.² He was perhaps among the first to realise the potential of corpora for language learners who should be encouraged to become "research worker[s] whose learning needs to be driven by access to linguistic data".³ With the corpus-based approach to language pedagogy, the traditional 'three Ps' (Presentation – Practice – Production) approach to teaching could be replaced by the more appropriate 'three Is' (Illustration – Interaction – Induction) approach where 'illustration' means looking at real data, 'interaction' means discussing and sharing opinions and observations, and 'induction' means making one's own rule for a particular feature.⁴

The wide range of computer programmes or *concordancers* (also available in free versions through the Internet) provides learners with techniques for searching a corpus or computer concordance independently of the teacher. In particular a concordancer is able to search a selected corpus for a specific word or phrase displaying every instance of that word or phrase in the centre of the computer screen, with the words or *collocates* on its left and right side. The selected word is termed the *node*, whereas recurrent and often 'arbitrary' co-occurrences of words such as *pay attention* or *make a decision* are called *collocations*. This group of expressions has been variously termed *prefabricated units*, *prefabs*, *phraseological units*, *(lexical) chunks*, *multi-word units*, or *formulaic sequences*: corpus studies have shown that collocations are a frequently occurring type of semi-prefabricated units which play a fundamental role in language learning.⁵

² The use of this term is twofold: the learner is 'autonomous' in his or her linguistic research because s/he is not pre-instructed by the teacher, and at the same time s/he is 'autonomous' since s/he is not guided by previously given grammar rules.

³ Tim Johns, "'Should You Be Persuaded': Two Samples of Data-driven Learning Materials", *Classroom Concordancing ELR Journal* 4.2 (1991), 1-13.

⁴ Tony McEnery, Richard Xiao and Yukio Tono, *Corpus-Based Language Studies. An Advanced Resource Book* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁵ It is also worth noting that "although collocations have received increasing

As a matter of fact in the current teaching praxis, collocation has emerged as an important category of lexical patterning and an established unit of description in language teaching courses and materials.⁶

DDL pedagogical value, rooted in the tradition of student-centred approaches to foreign language teaching/learning, lies in the increase in the learners' exposure to real language usage and the improvement of their L2 competence. This approach to 'discovery learning' is particularly effective for the acquisition of grammar structures and lexis stimulating in learners a deeper processing and a better retention. DDL is therefore a way of developing learners' metalinguistic ability to notice regularities in the apparent mess of the language input they are exposed to and to interpret it through the tidy display/list of a selected number of concordance lines⁷. In this respect DDL meets the recent views of current pedagogy, where the importance of developing autonomy has been stressed both from a motivational and an educational perspective. Where self-access facilities are available, learners' autonomous use of concordance data can be treated as a 'problem solving' task, by which learners formulate hypotheses and strategies for solving problems. In order to effectively investigate, generalize and test hypotheses, students have to reconsider their study techniques and learning strategies and in the meanwhile modify their presuppositions about the nature of language. We know that generalizations from evidence are rarely definitive so that language learning becomes a process of progressive approximation and knowledge re-constructing carried out by learners.⁸

attention in language teaching in recent years, we are still far from the development of a coherent methodology and even further from a wide-spread and systematic treatment of collocations in language teaching materials and *sillabi*", Nadja Nesselhauf, *Collocations in a Learner Corpus* (Amsterdam & New York: W. Benjamins, 2005), 3.

⁶ George Woolard, "Collocation, Encouraging Learner Independence", in Michael Lewis, ed., *Teaching Collocation* (London: Language Teaching Publications, 2000), 28-46.

⁷ The terms 'tidy' and 'messy' refer to the terminology adopted by Christian Mair to define, respectively, 'the small and tidy LOB Corpus' and 'the large and messy British National Corpus' during a plenary session at the ICAME 2003 Conference.

⁸ Sylviane Granger and Chris Tribble, "Learner Corpus Data in the Foreign Language Classroom: Form-focused Instruction and Data-Driven Learning", in Sylviane Granger,

The character of ‘serendipity’⁹ ascribed to this kind of learning process is therefore considered an extremely effective way for becoming a truly autonomous and conscious learner.¹⁰ Here the learner is seen in the role of a researcher, as a ‘language detective’ which is the closest approximation to the original use of concordancers. Yet there are significant differences between the research and classroom user. The most fundamental difference between research and classroom application lies in the initial motivation of the user to employ corpus technology. For researchers, the concordancer is a tool that allows them to pursue their research objectives; for learners, the motivation to use a concordancer has sometimes a direct impact on their willingness to invest time in order to master its functions. Therefore, it is necessary to search for ‘student-centred teaching strategies’ which take into account particular user-profiles and in this connection the use of learner corpora for teaching purposes proposes interesting possibilities of narrowing the gap between research and application.

Corpus-based methodology has generally made wide use of native speaker data, but in the last decade a closer analysis of non-native speaker data has highlighted the most problematic areas of L2 in the learners’ language acquisition process/system. In this way, the use of learner corpora may help solve the problem of implementing concordance activities in the classroom in accordance with the pedagogical objectives set out in the planned syllabus.

To sum up, DDL involves three main criteria that characterise corpus linguistics as well:

- it is an empirical approach to the description of language use;
- the theoretical framework of reference is a contextual-

ed., *Learner English on Computer* (London-New York: Wesley Addison Longman, 1998), 199-209.

⁹ Silvia Bernardini, “Systematising Serendipity: Proposals for Concordancing Large Corpora with Language Learners”, in Lou Burnard and Tony Mc Eney, *Rethinking Language Pedagogy from a Corpus Perspective* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 183-190.

¹⁰ These aspects of DDL emerged, for example, during a workshop on autonomous learning (see below) when evidence in corpus data disproved students’ convictions about grammar rules concerning *like to* versus *like + V-ing*: in the LOB Corpus the number of occurrences of *like to + INF* is greater than *like + V-ing*.

- functional theory of meaning;
- it implies new technologies.

Learner corpora as resources (definition, available corpora, pedagogical value)

The steady advancement of corpus linguistics studies and the wide range of applications offered to ELT researchers by the huge amount of electronic data which is available and ‘queryable’, have led to a gradual shift from more general corpora to more specialized data collections. It follows that corpora can be used for different purposes to describe language structures and use and integrate/support foreign language teaching.¹¹

In the last few years a new kind of corpus has been experimented with, the *Computer Learner Corpus*, consisting of electronic collections of written and spoken texts produced by foreign language students. The best known corpus of this type is the *International Corpus of Learner English* (ICLE) which includes essays written by learners of English from different language backgrounds (French, Italian, German, etc.). Once collected, the data are then subjected to error analysis and tagging according to a specific annotation system devised by a team of researchers at the Université Catholique de Louvain,¹² and based on the terminology of *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*.¹³ The computerised error analysis differs from the traditional error analysis introduced by Selinker¹⁴ and developed by Corder¹⁵ in those aspects concerning the homogeneity of the collected data to be subjected to analysis and the consistency/regularity in describing the ‘kind’ of error rather than the ‘source’ of error.

By adding error tags to the learner corpus, it is possible to produce comprehensive lists of errors by using a data access programme; it

¹¹ Douglas Biber, Susan Conrad and Randi Reppen, *Corpus Linguistics. Investigating Language Structure and Use* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹² See further *ibid*.

¹³ Randolph Quirk et al. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London: Longman, 1985).

¹⁴ Larry Selinker, “Interlanguage”, *IRAL* 10 (1972), 209-231.

¹⁵ Stephen Pit Corder, *Error Analysis and Interlanguage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

is, however, important to notice that these lists give an account of the kind and number of errors typical of a given population and often overlook a descriptive analysis of the most typical traits of learners' interlanguage that can be evinced by sorting the most frequent words or patterned word clusters they use.

It is therefore necessary to examine more closely these aspects of the research on learner English by adopting two different perspectives which complement each other:

- Specification of the most recurrent errors made by learners as the starting point for designing appropriate teaching materials and remedial work.
- Description of students' interlanguage not simply in terms of over/under/misuse of specific language features but through the definition of a topologically distinctive interlinguistic area that might help us draw up a 'typology of learners' interlanguage' through a comparative analysis with other language backgrounds.

In addition to these procedures,

the analysis of reference learner corpora and its comparison with comparable native corpora offer important quantitative and qualitative insights into the extent to which learners of English at a certain stage of the learning process have already approximated to the native-speaker norm and where they still deviate from the target model.¹⁶

There are, therefore, three ways in which a learner corpus can contribute to language pedagogy:

- the identification of non-native speaker features in L2 production which can then contribute to improvement of pedagogical materials;

¹⁶ Joybrato Mukherjee, "Corpus Linguistics and Language Pedagogy: The State of the Art – and Beyond", in S. Braun, K. Kohn and J. Mukherjee, eds., *Corpus Technology and Language Pedagogy* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), 5-24.

- an insight into processes of second language acquisition such as L1 *transfer*; communication strategies or developmental sequences which in turn can inform language teaching materials and/or *syllabi*;
- the exploitation of a learner corpus directly in the language classroom in a data-driven learning approach.¹⁷

Some questions about language and interlanguage functioning

This paragraph aims at raising questions rather than giving definitive answers: its main concern involves the ways by which speakers acquire/perceive L1/L2 language structures/phraseologies/lexical items. Questions about the nature of language are indeed crucial in linguistic analysis for their effects on language teaching methodology. An overt example of the relationship between theory and methodology is the theory of *language as phraseology* which rejects the lexis-grammar juxtaposition in view of a ‘grammaticalised lexis’¹⁸ and the implementation of concordancing praxis in the classroom to highlight the close interrelation between the two.

From the native-speaker point of view, language presents repetitive structures patterned in fixed/semi-fixed sequences, in which words show an affinity for each other and are linked together, but not so strongly as to form an identifiable lexical unit:¹⁹ this sequence preference is generally called ‘phraseology’. The approach to language interpretation based on concordances in language use is, therefore, phraseological rather than word-based and overtly refers to the two models of interpretation proposed by Sinclair (1991) which allow us to construct and understand sequences of words, i.e. the idiom principle and the open-choice principle:

The principle of idiom is that a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute

¹⁷ Nadja Nesselhauf, “Researching L2 Production with ICLE”, in Sabine Braun et al., *Corpus Technology and Language Pedagogy* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), 141-156.

¹⁸ Michael Lewis, *The Lexical Approach* (London: Language Teaching Publications, 1993).

¹⁹ Michael Barlow, “Usage, Blends and Grammar”, in M. Barlow and S. Kemmer, eds., *Usage-based Models of Language* (Stanford: CSLI, 2000), 315-345.

single choices, even though they might appear to be analysable into segments ...it has been relegated to an inferior position in most recurrent linguistics, because it does not fit the open-choice principle...The overwhelming nature of this evidence leads us to elevate the principle of idiom from being a rather minor feature, compared with grammar, to being at least as important as grammar in the explanation of how meaning arises in text.²⁰

The result is that “meaning is made either by the phrase as a whole operating in accordance with the conventional phraseology or less often by the individual words, operating in accordance with grammatical rules”.²¹

From the non-native point of view, the investigation of foreign learners’ phraseology is extremely interesting because it opens a window on the cognitive mechanism/functioning/processing of mind as well. In fact, if language is made by pattern and meaning,²² why is this principle only evident to native speakers? What are the main phases in the construction of meaning for non-native speakers? A possible answer is that the construction of meaning is particularly difficult for non-natives since they often tend to construct word-by-word based meanings and neglect the sentence-based ones. As Corder noticed:²³ ‘when faced with the data of L2, the learner adopts the same strategy as the infant seeking meaning through analysis of what is most salient in the data, i.e. lexical items and sequence’.²⁴

In the question concerning the nature of the relation between lexis and grammar, we might refer to Hoey’s ‘lexical priming hypothesis’²⁵ which goes beyond the concept of collocation as ‘the

²⁰ John Sinclair, *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1991), 110-111.

²¹ Susan Hunston, *Corpora in Applied Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²² In the sense meant by Sinclair (*ibid.*, 3) who considers English as a ‘lexical language’, hence “what is traditionally termed ‘grammar’ can be called ‘pattern’”.

²³ Stephen Pit Corder, *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

²⁴ In Corder’s words a ‘lexical sequence’ is not necessarily to be interpreted as a meaningful chunk.

²⁵ What is reported in these lines sums up some hints which emerged during a plenary session held by Michael Hoey at the ICAME 2003 Conference in Guernsey.

statistical tendency of words to co-occur²⁶: every lexical item is primed for use in discourse in a particular grammar role as a result of the communicative effect of speakers' encounters with the item. Since lexical priming results in some drifts in natural language, its domain also involves questions concerning the domain of knowledge, genre, addressee, so that we must distinguish between receptive priming and productive priming. Grammar reflects our priming of the commonest words and the commonest combinations in the language as speakers' proper ability to recognize patterns in language. At the same time, individuality introduces an element of linguistic variation as well; creativity²⁷ occurs by blending/modifying chunks to fit the current situation without creating problems of production and comprehension which arise from new language combinations.

It is therefore evident that a corpus-based description of language usage becomes an extremely fruitful way to find general descriptive principles in data. Linguists have always used the term *corpus* to describe a sample of naturally occurring examples of language, but recently it has been used to mean collections of texts electronically stored to meet specific purposes.

The non-linear way by which it can be queried and accessed allows quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data. The main feature which differentiates electronic corpora from electronic archives is their design and purpose; the type of corpus access software currently in use re-arranges data so that "a corpus does not contain new information about language, but the software offers us a new perspective on the familiar"²⁸. Indeed, concordance lines offer, when displayed by a concordancing program, many instances of use of a word or phrase which otherwise would remain unobserved in normal contexts of appearance/occurrence, making phraseology more evident to the observer/analyst.

²⁶ Hunston, *Corpora*, 12.

²⁷ This principle seems to be borrowed from/refer to the same device of *recursion* theorised by generative grammar in which the *recursive rules* are the main formal means of accounting for the creativity of language: by using this device an infinite set of sentences can be generated from a finite set of rules.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

From theory to practice: The University of Salerno Learner Corpus. Structure, purposes and early results (from a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data)

The theoretical and procedural principles discussed so far are those underlying a project concerning the creation of a learner corpus at the University of Salerno. In the following pages I will describe two aspects of the same research: the different stages concerning the construction of a learner corpus and the possible practical applications of a project of this kind in an EFL classroom.

In particular, the University of Salerno Learner Corpus (UNISALC) Project aims at creating a corpus of Italian EFL students' writing that has been subjected to error analysis and tagging in order to get a better insight into their interlanguage at a certain level of language competence under specific conditions. A statistical description of the most recurrent errors made by learners can be useful for identifying specific trends in learners' language behaviour and processing.

One of the aims of the project is to compare the results of studies carried out in the field of learner corpora (see, for example, the ICLE (International Corpus of Learner English Project) with UNISALC data in the light of the specific cultural, educational and environmental background of the students under study.

At a further stage of the enquiry, a longitudinal study of the data will be carried out by monitoring the development of students' interlanguage in the progression of their language acquisition.

The overall study perspectives of the UNISALC Project can be summarised by saying that two interrelated components are directing the research:

- the description of the main linguistic (morphological, syntactic and lexical) features in students' interlanguage;
- the further analysis of their interlanguage conducted through the detected errors.

The collected data sample (tokens=20,435, types=1825) has been analysed by using WordSmith Tools, in order to obtain a statistical view of the most frequent words and word clusters. This procedure has made it possible, for example, to identify the large use of quantifiers recurring in specific clusters which form repeated patterns in students' interlanguage. The errors detected in students' writing have then been annotated by using a special tagset in which errors are divided into seven main categories (Form, Grammar, Lexis, Lexico-Grammar,²⁹ Word Redundant, Word Missing, Word Order, Register and Style) and sub-categories indicating the type of error in the word category (Noun, Verb, Pronoun, Article, Adjective, Adverb). Once annotated, the erroneous form is followed by the corresponding correct one, written between the signs "\$". Despite the completeness of such a descriptive system, which does not take into account the source of errors except for the lexical sub-category of *false friends*, its failure to sufficiently consider syntactic errors (subordination and coordination) can be problematic in identifying lexico-grammatical errors and missing words. Another problematic area of errors is complementation and dependent prepositions, since the difference between the two is not always evident.

Once tagged, error categories can be searched by using a text retrieval software (WordSmith Tools or ConcApp) so that the main areas of grammatical difficulty can be highlighted. Our investigations have pointed out some problematic areas concerning complementation and dependent prepositions, as shown in tables 1-2 below illustrating examples of concordances for Lexical Phrase (LP) and Verb Complementation (XVPR) which are the areas of interlanguage where collocation errors are generally more evident:

²⁹ This category includes all deviations from the morpho-syntactic norms of a lexical item. In addition, this is also the area that refers to the specific theoretical framework which considers language as formed by word strings or semi-fixed phrases/units.

Tab.1. Examples of errors in (semi-)fixed multi-word expressions (LP).

1 lat by yourself but only for	(LP) a little time \$a short time\$.
2 etter because (GP) 0 \$it\$ is	(LP) a lot of time that we didn't
3 have to stay in the kitchen	(LP) all the day \$all day\$. In co
4 s\$ with your friends dancing	(LP) all the night \$all night\$. O
5 to Rome next year to work as	(LP) assistant shops \$shop assista
6 \$things to do\$. I have to	(LP) do courses \$take courses\$ eve
7 ry much because I'm going to	(LP) do two exams \$take two exams\$
8 're well. I haven't written	(LP) for so long time \$for such a
9 ldn't find\$ your address and	(LP) for this \$for this reason\$ I
10 n't seen\$your wonderful eyes	(LP) from two years \$for two years
11 about school, private life,	(LP) holidays summer \$summer holid
12 \$How are you?\$ I'm fine but	(LP) I'm a flu \$I've got a flu\$ in
13 her (GVT) has been \$ was\$	(LP) in \$ on\$ holiday and I didn't
14 ristmas \$During Christmas I\$	(LP) in Christmas \$During Christma

Tab.2 Examples of verbs used with the wrong dependent preposition.

1 ough money to live you can't	(XVPR) ask \$ask for\$ help (XVPR) to
2 his \$for this reason\$ I have	(XVPR) asked to \$asked\$ Mary your
3 you (GVAUX) can \$come\$ back	(XVPR) at \$0\$ home you are alone and
4 ten doesn't (FS) came \$come\$	(XVPR) came back at home \$come back
5 ll (GA) 0 \$the\$ time. Bye. I	(XVPR) care you \$care about you\$.
6 friends; if you want I will	(XVPR) come a week-end in your count
7 \$everything\$, for example, I	(XVPR) come back at home \$come back
8 xam of English Language I'll	(XVPR) come in England \$come to Engl
9 d then you will be able to	(XVPR) come in Italy \$ come to Ita
10we miss you a lot! We'd	(XVPR) come there in London \$come th
11 with my family because I can	(XVPR) confide my problems with us\$C
12 In my holidays I'm going to	(XVPR) go in \$go to\$ Spain for two w
13 t \$in fact\$ in the evening I	(XVPR) go in bed \$go to bed\$ (LS) so

The data presently at our disposal consist of 120 compositions written by second-year university students whose data have been transcribed manually and then processed by WordSmith Tools.

At an early stage the work started with the collection of the tests written by EFL second-year university students at pre-intermediate level without considering further compiling criteria such as: learners' previous knowledge, age, sex and birth place. However, data of this kind have been recorded with the intention to subsequently match this kind of information against the linguistic data and we will pay

closer attention to such important variables in a later analysis of the material.

Another aspect of the research we intend to stress is the importance of an interpretation of the data which goes beyond the simple presentation of evidence supported by statistical analyses; numbers can tell us much about the linguistic habits/behaviour of the learners under study, but it is not sufficient to draw a typology of their interlanguage. In this sense, we expect that a comparative analysis between our data and the ones contained in the Italian section of the ICLE project may help find probable regional variations in Italian learners' interlanguage.

Exploring corpora: a teaching/learning experience

The availability of 'classroom concordancing' makes the application of small corpora an attractive way for teaching/learning foreign languages inductively. At the same time, it raises the issue about the representativeness of small corpora which has always been considered one of the general criteria for assessing the validity of the proposed analyses. It is, nonetheless, crucial to focus on the purpose of a specific corpus design and study; consideration of these elements has, indeed, guided the planning of some teaching activities at the University of Salerno.

During the autumn of 2002, the pedagogical and procedural guidelines discussed above were experimented on during a 20 hour workshop on 'autonomy in foreign language learning'. The course intended to give students a general outline of teaching methodologies enhancing autonomous learning through the implementation of computer technologies, focusing on corpus linguistics theory and its findings.

After an introduction to the theoretical fundamentals of corpus linguistics, students attending the course were trained to use its main instrument, the concordancer. Because of its easy accessibility, the ConcApp web concordancer was used as well as other web utilities offered by the *Virtual Language Centre* site³⁰ (<http://www.edict.com.hk>) promoting autonomous learning. The most effective parts

³⁰ The Virtual Language Centre edited by Chris Graeves proposes concordancing in a more complex learning framework which also integrates individual pathways.

of the course were the hands-on sessions during which students examined the data collected in the UNISALCorpus and in LOB/Brown corpora to gain a comparative insight into some aspects of language use by non-native and native speakers.

During lessons, students were asked to investigate learners' specific language features which are generally considered to raise most problems for non-native speakers, such as: use of prepositions and tenses, as well as verb/noun complementation.

The starting point of the analyses was the observation of a particular language feature through the concordance lines followed by the filling in of the table reproduced below:

ITEM/NODE	LEFT COLLOCATES			RIGHT COLLOCATES		
	-1	-2	-3	+1	+2	+3
PATTERN						

This inductive procedure allowed students to focus on some of the most recurrent patterns of language use adopted by native and non-native speakers and enabled them to generalize, for example, about the use of prepositions like *on* and *about* both introducing a certain subject but with a different degree of specification, as shown by the repeated pattern *on* + (*proper*) *N*, *about*+*N*.

The same procedure was adopted in the analysis of learner data contained in the UNISALC which highlighted recurrent verb complementation errors, for example, concerning the verb *want*; the importance of such analyses as meaningful feedback for teachers and learners in which the relevant datum is stripped of any unnecessary information contained in a wider phrasal construction, changes the perspective from which errors are analysed and enriches the analysis of interlingual phenomena by adding statistical information.

Other activities focused on the use/misuse of conventionalised

language which sometimes leads learners to use repetitive patterns with no proper meaning but as a communicative strategy.³¹

The analyses showed an overuse of quantifiers (*a lot of, many*) and of adverbs (*a lot, very*) which greatly differed from standard usage as evinced by concordance data in the LOB corpus and other corpora (Brown, Hong Kong University students' writing) which students examined.

An edited example of concordance lines produced for the word cluster *very well*³² is shown in Table 3 below:

Tab. 3 Occurrences of the word cluster *very well* in the UNISALC.

3 I'm (FS) studying \$studying\$	<i>very</i> (SU) <i>well</i>	\$\$ because I'm goin
4 fallen \$passed\$ these exams	<i>very well</i> (SU)	in this period \$\$.
5 peak\$ (FS) english \$English\$	<i>very well</i>	as you know and I have ne
6 ther for two years. We get on	<i>very well</i>	because we've got a lot i
7 S. Now I'm playing the guitar	<i>very well</i>	like you! Write soon Wi
8 \$. In my opinion I'm living	<i>very well</i>	with my family because I
9 For example, you don't get on	<i>very well</i>	with your parents. Maybe
10 onsale \$responsible\$ to live	<i>very well!</i>	(GADVO) I fort
11 , How are you? I hope you're	<i>very well!</i>	Finally I have had the
12 Michael, how are you? I hope	<i>very well!</i>	(LP) It's a long time \$
13 ridget, How are you? I'm not	<i>very well,</i>	because I had a flu, but
14 Massimo, How are you? I hope	<i>very well.</i>	Excuse me if I haven't
15 ause I had a flu, but now I'm	<i>very well.</i>	I'm sorry because I hav
16 How are you? I hope you 're	<i>very well.</i>	Sorry, I haven't writte
17 , How are you? I hope you're	<i>very well.</i>	Thanks for your letter.
18 , How are you? I hope you're	<i>very well.</i>	The last letter which y
19 learn\$ (FS) english \$English\$	<i>very well.</i>	Write soon Best wishes
20 , and I (SU) have \$\$ you're	<i>very well.</i>	We haven't seen and (XVP

The frequency number of this cluster ($n=18$ occurrences) over the total amount of *very+Adj/Adv* sequences ($n=138$ occurrences) highlights the use of lexicalised language made by our students.

³¹ Rita Calabrese, *La linguistica dei corpora e l'inglese come lingua straniera* (Napoli: Massa Editore, 2004).

³² This word cluster results in a high frequency of occurrences in both the UNISALCorpus and Hong Kong University Corpus of students' academic writings which is available on the Virtual Language Centre site.

Most of the students' reflections focused on the role of grammar in language acquisition, in particular, on the special relationship between *competence* and *performance* at an interlanguage level, which raised a number of questions about the importance of studying grammar and the need for innovative and effective methods to attain a good level of language competence. An investigation based on the variables recorded in the UNISALC can, therefore, produce evidence for many issues related to second language acquisition and processing as well as teaching praxis and materials development. At the same time, transferring corpus technology successfully into the classroom requires careful consideration, since language teachers and learners as users in the corpus investigation process need above all appropriate training. From this perspective, research on the application of corpus technology directly in language pedagogy is currently going on in order to provide truly 'user-friendly' concordancing software for learners and teachers³³.

Conclusions

The great impetus given to ELT praxis by new technologies has made DDL one of the areas in which language theory and teaching practice come together and contribute to a reconsideration of language and language use by learners. In fact, the view of language as 'concordance patterning and chunking' may help students change the atomistic perspective of language whose central unit of meaning is the single word. The great effort to memorise long lists of lexical items has been gradually replaced by a more effective inductive approach to foreign language learning: the learner himself or herself becomes an active researcher in the exploration of the language functioning which emerges from the concordance lines. Those grammar rules simply explained previously as 'exceptions' to conventional language can find an explanation in the repetition of patterned language in use. In the light of this novel concept of learning, and in a metalinguistic interpretation of language acquisition, the observation of the most recurrent errors in learners' writing carried

³³ See among others *My Concordancer* (<http://www.myconcordancer.com>) which is being developed by Yvonne Breyer and Maik Jurkait.

out by students in the classroom acquires a new meaning in the process of an individual's knowledge restructuring: this process is oriented towards knowledge structuring and processing as well as the acquisition of critical competences concerning his/her own learning.

Maria De Santo

**TELL@ SAC, Enhancing English Learning through
ICT in a Self-access Centre***

A survey¹ on the use of ICT for English language learning² in an independent learning environment.

The aim of this article is to present the results of some research into the possibilities offered by ICT to ELL in a self-access centre and to describe the role and the effectiveness of technology also from the students' perspective. Data was gathered through a multiple choice questionnaire,³ interviews, daily observation and interaction

* **TELL**: acronym for Technology-Enhanced Language Learning. **SAC**: acronym for Self-Access Centre. A self-access centre is a student-centred learning environment, where students can access autonomously a wide range of language learning resources according to their own times, rhythms, needs, objectives, learning styles and preferences. A self-access centre offers audio and video materials, newspapers, Satellite TV, computers, and access to the Internet. Resources are organised so that students can easily get what they need. Learners are guided by information, written suggestions, and "on call" language counsellors; in this way they can freely move in a stress-free environment that encourages learning and makes it enjoyable. In a SAC, students can work both individually and collaboratively with other learners. **ICT**: acronym for Information and Communication Technologies.

¹ The survey was conducted in the SAC of the CILA (Centro Interdipartimentale di servizi Linguistici ed Audiovisivi) of the Università degli Studi di Napoli, "L'Orientale", with students of English of the Faculties of Languages and Literatures and of Political Sciences in the academic year 2002/03 over a three month period from April to June 2003.

² Hereafter referred to as ELL.

³ The questionnaire is provided in the appendix. It was administered to a sample of 60

with students in a self-access centre (SAC). We tried to focus our attention on the following points:

1. students' preferences among different technologies;
2. ICT and learner autonomy;
3. technology enhanced language learning in a SAC, problems and possible solutions.

Since its introduction in the field of ELT,⁴ technology has been a useful support to both teachers and learners. Its role has changed in time and according to learning theories and approaches; computers, in particular, have played different functions as “tools”, “tutors”,⁵ sometimes even substitutes for teachers, depending on the teaching/learning context in which they were used. Today, in a SAC, where technology is strictly connected to the philosophy of learner autonomy, ICT has a fundamental role in improving language learning and in fostering a student-centred learning environment.

More recently, the advent of the Internet has confirmed once again the potential of new technologies in ELT and their growing importance as educational resources. Although it was not born as a resource dedicated to ELT, the Internet, and, within it, the World Wide Web, seems to have the greatest potential and appeal for

students of English enrolled in the Faculties mentioned above. We are aware that an open-ended answer questionnaire may have given other results (with answers not suggested by us). However, for the sake of comparability we opted, for the present, for the present type.

⁴ For a detailed historical overview see Michael Levy, *Computer-Assisted Language Learning. Context and Conceptualisation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Mark Warschauer, “Computer-Assisted Language Learning: An Introduction”, in Sandra Fotos, ed., *Multimedia Language Teaching* (Tokyo: Logos International, 1996); for more recent discussions see Jeong-Bae Son, ed., *Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Concepts, Contexts and Practices* (iUniversal, 2004); Sandra Fotos and Charles Browne, *New Perspectives on Call for Second Language Classrooms* (London: Routledge 2004); Joy L. Egbert and Gina Mikel Petrie, eds., *Call Research Perspectives* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005); Mike Levy and Glenn Stockwell, *Call Dimensions: Options and Issues in Computer Assisted Language Learning* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006). For a constantly updated source of articles and materials see also <http://iteslj.org/links/TESL/CALL/p2.html> (last consulted: 2 November 2007).

⁵ Levy, *Computer-Assisted Language Learning*.

students, especially as it has many features that make it suitable for English language learning:

- it gives access to an immense variety of resources providing language learners with a wealth of both authentic and EFL dedicated websites;
- it provides, through CMC⁶, the means for intercultural exchanges and for real communication in the target language, enhancing authentic interaction with English native and non-native speakers and with other learners from around the world;
- it represents a sort of natural environment that facilitates greater exposure to the foreign language offering authentic and meaningful materials;
- it allows students to work independently and in a more flexible way individualizing their learning pathways.

The World Wide Web offers many language learning opportunities presenting as it does a great variety of websites dedicated to EFL, with interactive activities covering all four skills, grammar or vocabulary quizzes, multiple choice, true or false and gap-filling exercises, on-line grammars, dictionaries and concordancers. It also represents an immense source of easily accessible and constantly updated documents in the target language; learners can view or download different resources such as on-line newspapers, video and audio materials; they can also download audio and video files on portable devices through Podcasting.⁷ Students can also benefit from computer-mediated communication, using its well-known

⁶ Acronym for Computer-Mediated Communication.

⁷ Podcasting (a portmanteau of the words iPod and broadcasting) is the name given to the publishing of audio and video files via the Internet, designed to be downloaded and listened to or watched on a portable device, or on a personal computer. Learners can use various types of podcasts: authentic podcasts, podcasts produced by teachers and podcasts produced by learners themselves. See also G. Stanley, "Podcasting for ELT" (<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/resources/podcast.shtml>; last consulted 20 November 2007).

synchronous and asynchronous means such as chat, e-mail, MOOs and MUVES⁸, and new communication software such as Skype.⁹

All these new learning opportunities have a great potential that needs to be exploited by our students, in a way that effectively helps them reach their objective: learning and practicing English.

In a SAC, students have different media at their disposal and, as each technology has particular characteristics, it is important to help students integrate them in individual personalised pathways, so that they can profit from all the possibilities offered, rather than feel lost when faced with the wide range of materials, available not only in the SAC itself, but also, through the SAC, out there on the Web.

As said before, one of the aims of this research was that of discovering students' preferences among the technologies available. Question number 1¹⁰ revealed that their favourite resource is the Internet (31%) but they also use CD ROMs (24%), satellite TV (16%) and other "less new" media like videocassettes (16%) and audiocassettes (13%). This shows that their preferences are not simply limited to the latest technological innovation, but that students are aware that each technology has particular features and can each be used for different aims and for specific skills. In this way, with the help of a language advisor, they can integrate ICT into their learning path according to their own needs, preferred modality, time and rhythms.

⁸ A MOO, acronym for Multi-user domain Object Oriented, is a synchronous text-based virtual environment where people can meet and interact. MUVE refers to online, multi-user virtual environments, sometimes called virtual worlds. An example is Second Life a virtual environment with a fast growing potential in educational contexts and language teaching and learning. It is considered the "Internet's largest user-created, 3d virtual world community" <http://secondlife.com>. *The schMOOze University* (<http://schooze.hunter.cuny.edu:8888/>) is a virtual college where people studying English can practise the language through conversations, language games and other useful resources.

⁹ Skype is a software that allows users to make telephone calls from their computers to others Skype users; it has additional features such as instant messaging, file transfer, short message service and videoconferencing.

¹⁰ In this question students could choose more than one item.

As students have the opportunity to use both offline and online resources, we asked them if they thought that Internet-based activities were more useful than offline resources, such as software on CD ROMS. Those who answered no (30%) justified their response saying that they often got lost in the web (44%), that it is very difficult to find useful web-resources (33%), or that websites are not organised in a linear way like CD ROMs (23%). Indeed, using the Internet, students need greater help in choosing activities, differently from CD ROMs which, by offering a very limited choice of pathways, require little guidance from teachers/counsellors. Students who answered yes (70%) affirmed that web-based resources give the opportunity to communicate with English speaking people and to get in touch with their cultures (50%), that they provide a greater variety of activities (32%), and that they are constantly updated offering students the possibility of having new materials each day (18%).

As it often happens that students have little contact with English speaking people outside the classroom, and consequently little opportunity to practice the language in an authentic context, one of the greatest advantages of information technology is that of making the other country/culture/language real to them, also by providing authentic social interactions. Moreover, the Internet allows learners to work collaboratively and simultaneously; for example, they can participate in international projects using e-mail or MOOs, both to improve language learning and to develop cross-cultural awareness.¹¹

¹¹ Two interesting examples are *eTandem Europa* and the *schMOOze university*. The first is an international network of institutions promoting the use of e-tandem (autonomous language learning in tandem at a distance via IT) to learn and practice foreign languages with learners from other countries. "eTandem Europa is a project funded by the European Commission as part of the European Year of Languages 2001. eTandem Europa's objective is to introduce as many European citizens as possible to the opportunity of learning a foreign language with eTandem and to make it easy for these language learners to get started". From "Welcome to eTandem", <http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/etandem/etindex-en.html>; retrieved 5 November 2007. The schMOOze is a text-based virtual college where learners of English can practice the language by interacting with other students all over the world. "schMOOze U. is a small, friendly college known for its hospitality and the diversity of the student population. It was established in July, 1994 as a place where people studying English as a second

The interviews and the questionnaire confirmed that learners prefer Internet communicative tools, because, as they affirmed, they are given the opportunity to use the target language for a real purpose, without considering it only as an object of study.¹² Indeed, to question number 5, when asked whether they preferred using the Internet for finding resources or for communicating, 60% of them answered that they prefer using the Internet to communicate with English speaking people. Student's answers also revealed that, among the resources available on the Internet, they often prefer those that allow them not only authentic interaction with native speakers but also access to authentic materials (70% maintained they prefer general sites to EFL sites), because engaging in "real" activities makes learning more meaningful, as they told us. So, they use CMC or other resources, such as online newspapers or websites for English speaking people, that allow them to use the language to study and research on other subjects, and which make them feel they are practicing the language in a natural environment.

According to them, CMC, both on and off-line, has some advantages: it is motivating, it offers a meaningful interaction both with teachers and other learners; it gives the opportunity to receive some feedback from English speaking people; it facilitates collaborative learning. Moreover, with regard to different types of CMC, 50% of students declared they prefer e-mail, 40% chat (both textual and audio) and 10% MOOs.

However, when using the Internet in an independent learning context some pedagogical problems are likely to occur. Students can get lost on the Web or do the activities available without having a concrete aim. Activities should always be purposeful and goal-

or foreign language could practice English while sharing ideas and experiences with other learners and practicers of English. Students have opportunities for one-on-one and group conversations as well as access to language games, an on-line dictionary, virtual stockbroker and many language games. Although schMOOze U. was founded with the ESL/EFL students in mind, it welcomes all people interested in cross-cultural communication". From SchMOOze university welcome page website <http://schmooze.hunter.cuny.edu:8888>; last accessed 20 November 2007.

¹² see also Rebecca L. Oxford, *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know* (New York: Newbury House Publishers, 1990), 79.

oriented;¹³ this does not mean that the language counsellor in the self-access centre, has to set the tasks, but rather that s/he can and must help learners identify their objectives, investigate their needs, and understand why they choose a specific activity and with which purpose. Indeed, when using the Internet, students need greater help in choosing activities; differently, as mentioned above, from CD ROMs that, by offering a very limited choice of pathways, require little guidance from teachers/counsellors.

We observed that students often consider it difficult and time-consuming to find useful resources on the Web. Indeed, answers to question number 8 revealed that 50% of students prefer starting a web-based pathway with a list of sites previously selected by the counsellor, 33% ask a friend for help and only 17% prefer autonomous searches.

As there is little benefit in having learners surfing the web without a clear objective in mind, it is useful to help them make the best use of the time they dedicate to ELL. In an autonomous learning environment, students are not obliged to follow a pre-established, fixed study pathway, so, it is a matter of fundamental importance to find ways of suggesting the resources they can use, to help them find the materials they need, to give some guidance on how to organize their web-based pathway.

We decided, therefore, to overcome the problem by providing students with good places to start, useful information, and suggesting appropriate resources through:

- Internet pathways, dedicated to specific skills or topics, based on the resources available on the web, consisting of a series of links to websites where students can practice the selected subject;
- webguides containing a series of links to websites, previously selected and classified by level, skill and subject, with a short description of each website and of the activities available to students;
- lists of activities or tasks they can accomplish using web

¹³ Mark Warschauer, "Online Communication", in Ronald Carter and David Nunan, eds., *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001).

resources and defining the objectives they can reach.¹⁴

Other kinds of help can be given by providing students with general support materials as handouts with lists of strategies to follow to accomplish web-based activities; for example reading a hypertext, or worksheets, checklists, questionnaires to evaluate websites or web activities to use with authentic materials so that students can keep a record of what they have done.

Therefore, to help learners exploit the Internet in a useful way, we have tried, in our SAC, to:

1. support students to use the Internet as a resource for self-study, by making them aware of the possibilities given by this “new” medium;
2. encourage students to focus on websites that are relevant to their needs and aims, thus, helping them set clear objectives;
3. provide them with suggestions on how to start and conduct web-based activities, according to their level of competence in English and to their degree of autonomy;
4. help learners acquire strategies for web searching and finding useful information (for example, when using search engines, to be as specific as possible when choosing keywords or including/excluding words in searches);
5. suggest criteria for evaluating the resources they choose to integrate in their learning paths.

In the SAC, students who had this kind of orientation perceived these web activities as very useful to their learning process.

This need for students’ orientation is closely connected with the role of the language counsellor. Through interviews, daily counselling and interaction with the users of a SAC, the importance of a figure that acts as a mediator between learners and the resources available has emerged again and again.¹⁵ It is ever more evident that

¹⁴ The World Wide Web has made possible greater access to a variety of authentic resources, enhancing new approaches and activities as content-based and task-based language learning. An example can be a webquest: students use web authentic materials to research current events or culture relating to English speaking societies: they choose a topic, read, select and organise relevant information, and make a web page presenting the results.

¹⁵ See also Mikaela Cordisco, *Self-access: autonomia e tecnologie nello studio dell’inglese come lingua straniera* (Napoli: ESI, 2002) and Jocelyne Vincent’s “Postfazione”

students need the help of a facilitator who can suggest to them how to find materials and resources, how to select the kind of activity, how to choose the kind of technology; they need an advisor who can help them explore and use ICT for learning purposes.

We noticed that students use particular resources if a counsellor proposes them; indeed, only if they are aware of what they can do, will they be better able to choose the materials which best suit their kind of learning style, strategy and preferred modality. Students need to know exactly which technology is available and for which specific aim. Therefore, to help them make appropriate choices, it is important to provide users with detailed information and accurate descriptions of the resources available and of the possibilities they offer to ELL through orientation sessions, day-by-day counselling, and by advertising new or less known resources that can be useful to students. This was also confirmed by students' responses to question number 3: 20% prefer choosing resources alone, 30% with the help of a friend and 50% with the help of the language counsellor.

In an independent learning environment such as a SAC, where students have the opportunity to use ICT as a support for ELL, the teacher/learner relationship has been revised and both roles have been reshaped.¹⁶ The teacher becomes a guide, a support, the learner an active agent of his/her learning process. As ICT is flexible and makes a great variety of resources available, it enhances learners' active role, allowing them to make choices about activities, exercises and abilities to practice, to set tasks, to create their own learning pathways and to work independently. Indeed, the constant observation of learners' daily activities in the SAC revealed that the use of ICT in this context itself fosters the development of autonomy, because it allows students greater involvement and control over their learning. ICT is a tool that facilitates students' paths through the various stages of a process of independent learning; from the first steps, when they need greater help and support from the teacher, to a point where they have reached a certain awareness, they have

to the volume, "ACE learning centres for learners and 'carers'", 125-137.

¹⁶ See Henri Holec, "The Learner as a Manager: Managing Learning or Managing to Learn?", in Anita Wenden and Joan Rubin, eds., *Learner Strategies in Language Learning* (London: Prentice Hall, 1987).

acquired the ability to make choices and they have gradually learned to interact with materials and technologies, also thanks to the ongoing support of a tutor.

The use of ICT makes students re-evaluate their role and their responsibility. They also feel the need to develop the skills to self-manage their learning process. In the SAC, indeed, we dedicate part of the counselling to the development of metacognitive skills for arranging and planning language learning with ICT, such as organising, setting goals and objectives and identifying the purpose of a language task.¹⁷

To elicit learners' perception of the effectiveness of ICT applied to English language learning, we asked them to describe both the advantages and disadvantages they found. In question number 12,¹⁸ we asked students why they thought ICT might help them to learn English. Students' responses and their attendance figures at the SAC¹⁹ confirmed that ICT represents a useful support to ELL because:

1. it gives access to a wealth of authentic materials (15%) allowing learners to get a lot of exposure to the language; they can also practice English simply by surfing the web or searching for relevant information through web pages;
2. it enables cross-cultural communication with English speaking people all over the world (14%);
3. it can be used autonomously (11%), thanks to its interactivity and user-friendliness (software and sites dedicated to EFL are easily accessible, easy to use, with clickable icons, online help and guides, and optional tools which can help comprehension such as glossaries, transcriptions, subtitles and dictionaries);
4. it responds to their needs and learning preferences (11%); students often come to the SAC expressing the need to focus on particular activities/abilities. At the end of their pathway they feel (and this is often confirmed by both an ongoing evaluation and the teacher's evaluation at the exam) that they have reached

¹⁷ Oxford, *Language Learning Strategies*, 20.

¹⁸ Students could choose more than one item.

¹⁹ We found that 27% of students spend up to 3 hours per week in the SAC, 53% from 3 to 6 hours, and 20% more than 6 hours.

- their objective, also thanks to the possibility of practicing the language according to their own rhythms, needs and aims;
5. it gives an immediate feedback to their performance (10%), allowing learners to interact both with the computer and with other people;
 6. it is motivating (9%);
 7. it helps create a stress-free environment (9%) where learners feel at ease also with evaluation and error correction having the opportunity of working with a greater privacy. Moreover, the anonymity guaranteed by CMC helps students lower the affective filter and facilitates an informal atmosphere, where they can share their questions and thoughts.²⁰ Observation of our students' behaviour during both written and audio-chat confirmed that they have a greater disposition to communicate in the foreign language, and to take risks without fearing loss of face.
 8. it offers a great variety of resources (8%);
 9. it integrates different media, offering a multiple stimulus which can help develop all linguistic skills (7%);
 10. it facilitates collaborative learning (6%); indeed, through students' answers and the observation of the interaction with their peers, it has emerged that they have a great disposition to work in pairs or in small groups, both when they have to choose ICT and when they use them. Question number 4 shows that 58% of learners, when using technology, prefer studying with a partner both face-to-face and distant, because these resources encourage learners to interact and exchange information.²¹

Despite most students' positive attitude towards technology, when using ICT we have also to face some problems which may occur. In fact, our users found some disadvantages such as:

²⁰ Susan Herring, ed., *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Publishers Company, 1996).

²¹ See also Jocelyne Vincent, "Affect, ergonomics and culture in creating and managing a self-access centre", in Paola Evangelisti and Carmen Argondizzo, eds., *L'apprendimento autonomo delle lingue straniere: Filosofia e attuazione nell'università italiana* (Cosenza: Rubbettino, 2002), 89-106.

- students' inability to use ICT from both a technical (23%) and a pedagogical point of view (26%);
- activities inappropriate to students' level of English (21%);
- activities not always responding to students' needs (16%);
- ICT does not give the possibility of working on all the aspects of a language (14%, of which 70% said they could not practice speaking and 30% said they could not practice writing).

Indeed, though pre-packaged language learning resources, like CD ROMs or websites, are multimedia, interactive and flexible, they present the disadvantage of not always being respondent to the specific needs of learners and to their level of English, because they have been created for a general user/learner.

One solution could be that of creating in-house materials that can be more respondent to student's individual aims. Authoring software or webpage editors allow teachers to create interactive exercises with more structured and personalised feedback than pre-packaged resources, as well as multimedia activities – with audio and video materials – that respond to the specific needs of their students. Our SAC has developed some resources dedicated to students of English; examples are the past papers of written exams that have been digitalised and made available on the Intranet. These webpages also present a series of exercises providing immediate feedback, suggestions and strategies that can help students achieve a real aim, such as that of passing a written examination paper.

Even if interactivity is one of the features that make new technologies suitable to ELL, it often happens that the responses provided by pre-packaged learning software are not appropriate, and this is particularly evident in an independent learning environment. Interactive resources designed for language learning offer various types of feedback: from a “right” or “wrong” comment on learners' input (sometimes a mere sound, without even giving the correct answer); clues and suggestions to help them towards the correct answer; in the case of an error, a correct answer with a short explanation; to positive feedback (very rare indeed, unless we can create in-house materials), providing reinforcement or explanations in case they get the right answer by chance. The feedback given

by pre-packaged materials for ELT, both computer software and websites, is usually inadequate, in one way or another; the only way to provide students with more structured and personalised feedback is to create in-house resources, which can be more respondent to their needs, also in the case of error correction. Alternative solutions can be found by suggesting to learners to integrate different resources such as online grammars, dictionaries to check word definitions and concordancers to search for word usage, which they can use simultaneously while doing exercises in order to get useful explanations.

When asked if ICT gave them appropriate feedback to their performance, 60% of them answered yes. Nevertheless, during interviews they expressed the need to have feedback, which is not only limited to right or wrong but which also helps them reach the correct answer, through clues, suggestions and explanations. In other words, feedback that is nearer to the features of teacher-learner interaction.

Moreover, as regards feedback, one of the limits of using authentic materials in an autonomous learning context, is that students need some kind of teacher correction or evaluation: if they receive no feedback on their performance, the activities are not useful to them. As authentic materials provide no feedback, their use in a SAC is almost useless, unless activities based on these resources are accompanied by worksheets and questionnaires, or are suggested as part of a course and then evaluated by teachers.

Even though technology can be used autonomously, students need to be guided above all at the beginning of their learning path. It is of fundamental importance to protect students from a sort of ICT shock, by helping them to develop the skills to use technology effectively. Indeed, when asked if they had difficulties using ICT, most of them answered they had a few technical problems, while they realised they needed more help in choosing appropriate technologies. The obstacle students have to face with ICT is both technical – they have to develop practical skills to use technologies – and pedagogical – they need some ideas for improving English learning through the use of ICT and for integrating technologies into their learning process.

When faced with the choice of technologies and activities,

learners can feel disoriented because of the variety of resources available. Some learners can be reluctant to take on autonomous language learning with ICT, because of their ingrained expectations or assumptions of how to learn a language, and their assumptions about the role of the learner and of the teacher. It is important not to leave them alone, since ICT, particularly in the context of a SAC, represents both a new learning tool and a new way of approaching language learning, that involves their responsibility, their autonomy and their awareness.

ICT should be conceived not merely as a new tool, which can implement traditional and conventional teaching methods, but as a medium that can help learners participate actively in the learning process and build it, with the help of the teacher, according to their own needs, preferences and objectives.

Indeed, it sometimes occurs that new approaches to language learning using ICT, such as e-learning, though seeming to emphasise the role of learners, are conceived and used simply as new ICT-based ways of teaching, and, in this case, the role of technology is that of helping deliver instruction, but still in a traditional way: CMC enables teacher and learners to work remotely; the teacher transmits contents through Internet-based communication tools, s/he reaches and interacts with distant learners through chat, videoconferencing and e-mail, using multimedia teaching aids to support e-lessons, and learners receive a content and feedback. The typical, traditional teacher/learner relationship and its interactions are realised through a new medium, in a new environment, creating a sort of teacher-centred e-classroom. This is one of the possible applications of ICT to ELT. However, if we simply reduced ICT to a teaching aid, we would not exploit its potential, nor experiment new ways of both teaching and learning.

ICT can and should also be used as a means to foster learners' autonomy, promoting their active participation in the learning process, with the guidance of a teacher/counsellor who can help them discover the best and most effective ways of using new technologies to enhance ELL.

ICT has extremely useful and interesting applications in English language learning, but to make the most of them, students need to be guided and to be informed about the possibilities they offer. Only

when used appropriately and with awareness, can technologies enhance ELL. Students need to learn to choose and adapt ICT to different situations and learning contexts, to make appropriate use of the resources available in the SAC, to acquire strategies to work autonomously to select, and to evaluate and use the resources appropriate for the activities planned. Only then, can this kind of self-directed work prepare them for life-long learning.

Despite its potential, ICT effectiveness, thus, depends on the way it is exploited by both learners and teachers. Consequently, to get the most from the Web, in our work, we have tried to use it, and have our students use it, not only as a resource for downloading materials, or for using traditional resources through a new medium, but, above all, we have suggested ways of using it for language learning and practice through the possibility it gives to access to authentic resources and interaction. A good solution for improving language learning would be that of adopting a blended approach integrating the old and the new – “traditional” classroom activities with ICT-based activities – both in autonomous learning environments and in contexts where students work with the presence of a tutor.

We could say in conclusion, that, in an autonomous learning context, ICT can bring a real contribution to ELL and can be used effectively when learners:

- are aware of its potential;
- develop the necessary skills to use it appropriately;
- carry out the tasks with a learning purpose;
- meet their objectives and satisfy their needs, in other words, they feel a real benefit from their activities.

Appendix **QUESTIONNAIRE**

ICT and English language learning

First name Age

1. Which kind of technologies do you use most in the self-access centre?

(You can choose more than one item)

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Internet | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CD ROMs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Satellite TV | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Audiocassettes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Videocassettes | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**2. How many hours per week do you spend using technologies to learn/
practice English?**

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| Up to 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| From 3 to 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More than 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. How do you choose the resources?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Alone | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| With the help of a friend | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| With the help of the language counsellor | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. When using technologies for language learning you prefer ...

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| working alone | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| working with a friend | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. When using the Internet you prefer...

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| using websites/finding resources | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| communicating with English speaking people | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. Which kind of websites do you prefer when using the Internet?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| English learning websites | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| General sites (i.e. newspapers – others websites in English) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. You communicate through

- | | |
|--------|--------------------------|
| E-mail | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Chat | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- MOO
- Videoconferencing
- Other (please specify)

8. When you use websites for English language learning you prefer ...

- starting with a list of sites previously selected
- by the teacher/counsellor
- searching for them by yourself
- asking a friend for help

9. Do you think Internet-based activities are more useful than software on CD ROMs?

Yes No

If yes, why?

- Websites are constantly updated
- Internet offers a greater variety of resources than CD ROM
- Internet gives the opportunity to communicate with English speaking people and to get in touch with their cultures
- Other (please specify)

If no, why?

- I find it difficult to use Web resources
- I often get lost on the Web
- Websites are not organised in a linear way like CD ROMs
- Other (please specify)

10. Which are the disadvantages you find when using ICT to learn English?

(You can choose more than one item)

- I lack the necessary technical skills
- I don't know where to start
- The activities are inadequate to my level of English
- The activities are not respondent to my needs
- I can't practice some aspects of the language:
- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing
- Grammar
- Vocabulary
- Other (please specify)

11. Do you think that ICT gives you an appropriate feedback to your performance?

Yes No

Why?
.....
.....

12. Why do you think ICT can help you to learn English?

(You can choose more than one item)

- It is motivating
- It offers a great variety of resources
- It can be used autonomously
- It gives immediate correction
- It is multimedia
- It responds to individual needs
- It gives access to authentic materials
- It allows cross-cultural exchanges
- It facilitates collaborative learning
- It represents a stress-free environment

Emilia Di Martino

**Gender and Cultural Equality in the Information Society:
pedagogical implications for Italy-based ELT**

Some premises

In choosing a title for this contribution I have done my best to avoid such terms as ‘inclusion/exclusion’ and ‘gap’ while at the same time allowing the reader to form a rough idea of what the topic of discussion is. This resulted in the choice of the phrase ‘Gender and Cultural Equality in the Information Society’ which may still need some clarification.

The pair ‘gender/technology’, for example, which has been brought to our attention by the increasing spread of computer use over the last twenty years, has long been read as ‘women and technology’ and is considered to be synonymous with social exclusion. I have aimed, instead, throughout the writing of this paper, to prevent any possible ‘normative’ bias. Likewise, I have tried to avoid any leaning towards technological determinism: in no way am I assuming here that technology is ‘necessary’ or relevant to the needs of everyone, but rather considering that, as “exclusion implies an act with an agent or agents”,¹ people may choose to exclude themselves in addition to being excluded. Every individual/

¹ Tony Atkinson, “Social Exclusion, Poverty and Unemployment”, in Anthony Atkinson and John Hills, eds., *Exclusion, Employment and Opportunity, CASE Paper 4* (London: London School of Economics, 1996), 13.

community/society continuously negotiates what it needs according to their personal characteristics as well as according to the contexts in which they live. Nor am I here viewing technology and society as static entities which have no influence on each other, but rather as dynamic, evolving organisms that are mutually shaped and co-produced.

Technology has been and often still is seen as an ‘inevitable’ universalising force cutting across different social, economic, cultural and political settings, but a view of it as a social product shaped by multiple factors can only stress the impossibility of anticipating its developments, linked as they are to the interplay among different social, economic, cultural and political ‘needs’ of local as well as global agents.

Unfortunately, even in recent years, attempts at defining the factors involved in technology have mostly been carried out in the form of statistical analysis. This has all too often contributed to re-enforcing the reading of data on technology as patterns of advancement/backwardness which postulate the need for different forms of adaptations on the part of different social groups in order to allow an increase – possibly the total penetration – of technology into society.

For example, in particular as regards the latest Information and Communication Technology (ICT), statistically-based analysis has revealed the existence of a ‘digital divide’ between the rich and the poor, the well-educated and the under-educated, the West and the East, the North and the South, the male and the female, the young and the elderly, just to quote a few dichotomous pairs.

As I said above, I will limit the scope of the present contribution to ICT and the issue of the ‘gender digital divide’, which is more overtly addressable as well as open to possible analysis/intervention in my present position as an action-researcher in the fields of both secondary and higher education.

Furthermore, I would like to make clear that I am not looking here at gender as essentially given, or as an extension of sex, a binary opposition between ‘zeroes and ones’,² but as a socially and

² Sadie Plant, *Zeroes and Ones. Digital Women and the New Technoculture* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

culturally constructed range of possible ‘preferences’ which have no clear-cut identification with one’s sex, where the boundaries between male and female are in fact blurred and sometimes overlapping.

Regarding the framework in which this paper should be set, I will try to contextualise it as much as possible with the specific situation of Italy, although I will have to draw heavily from international experience in this field for reference, since the specific literature in Italian is very limited.

The new processes of production/consumption which began in the late nineteenth century are amongst the factors that contributed to creating a view of technology, broadly considered, as masculine.³

With regard to the specific perspectives opened by ICT, cyberspace is sometimes looked at as not only gendered, but also hostile to women and to their “ethics of politeness and consideration for the wants of others”,⁴ thus creating a need for specific “women-centred spaces online in order to carry out the kind of discourse they value”.⁵ The perception of the Internet as being endowed with masculine/military traits, where the prevailing ethics are those of “agonistic debate and freedom from rules or imposition”,⁶ may be due to its actual militaristic origin as part of the ARPANET project of the US Department of Defense.

While the Web contains in fact a clear feminine connotation, evoking such a traditionally feminine activity as weaving, the discourses revolving around its use usually take on masculine connotations with references to activities such as surfing or crawling, which seem to reinforce traditional gendered patterns of power and authority.

However, in a view of gender as a dynamic rather than an essential and static entity, although linked to hierarchical differences, gender categories are not pre-determined, and neither is their relationship

³ Steven Lubar, “Men/Women/Production/Consumption”, in Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun, eds., *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption and Technology* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

⁴ Susan Herring, “Posting in a Different Voice”, in Charles Ess, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated-Communication* (New York: State University of NY Press, 1996), 117.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

with technology. “Although technologies and scientific knowledge are shaped by and indeed embody political and ultimately patriarchal interests, they are not monolithic structures that impose a singular reality or set of consequences on all women equally”.⁷

Moreover, in its change from a modernist tool essentially used as an abacus to a modernist ‘object-to-think-with’, the computer, with its window-desktop, has in fact become “a powerful metaphor for thinking about the self as a multiple, distributed system”.⁸ The anonymity granted by ICT allows for theoretically infinite gender/identity switches, breaking the traditionally stable centred self into an infinite set of plural identities, into a ‘picking and mixing’ of roles where conscious dissociation is not looked at as pathology, but rather accepted as experiment. This makes it possible to “build a self by cycling through many selves”.⁹ The Internet thus becomes “a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterize postmodern life. In its virtual reality, we self-fashion and self-create”.¹⁰

These opposing discourses can give a rough idea of the range of possible positions on the issue. On one hand, a position based on gender difference that some label as a technophobic “anti-modern attitude that rejects the present in favour of a temporally distant and holistic natural world”.¹¹ On the other hand, technomania promoting “forms of disabling amnesia”,¹² based as it is “on endless and multiple play of difference”.¹³ The latter attitude probably has its most interesting expression in the ‘cyborg metaphor’.¹⁴

⁷ Anne Balsamo, *Technologies and the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 96.

⁸ Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹¹ Carol Stable, *Feminism and the Technological Fix* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁴ In Donna Haraway’s words, the cyborg “is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity” (Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York:

The ICT situation in Italy

Data concerning the use of technology in Italy mostly derives from research carried out by ISTAT and CENSIS using representative samples of the population.

Whilst stressing the link between parenting and computer use (see Fig. 1) and thus implicitly suggesting the possibility of a significant role for school/University in bringing ICT into families and, therefore, contributing to shaping the ICT spread process, the 2006 ISTAT survey on the use of ICT does not reveal a particularly significant difference between men's and women's ICT use (Fig. 2), if such data is compared to the more general finding that the Italians, as a whole, are more TV- (93.9%) and mobile-phone-orientated (82.3%) than Internet- (35.6%) or computer- (46.1%) interested (Fig. 3).

Fig. 1: (ISTAT – *Le tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione. Anno 2006.*)

	TV color <i>Colour TV</i>	Cellulare <i>Mobile</i>	PC
TIPOLOGIA FAMILIARE FAMILY TYPES			
Famiglie con almeno un minorenne 2006 <i>[Families with at least one member under the age of 18 2006]</i>	95,4	96,0	69,7
Famiglie di soli anziani di 65 anni e più 2006 <i>[Families made up of people aged 65 years and over 2006]</i>	94,5	45,3	5,5
Altre famiglie 2006 <i>[Other families 2006]</i>	92,8	91,3	51,0

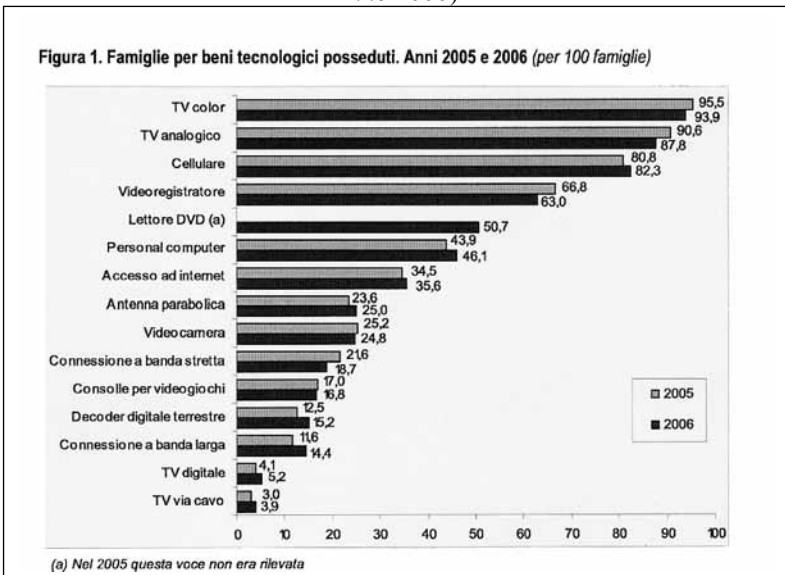
Routledge 1991), 150). It is a myth of “transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities” (Ibid., 154).

Fig. 2: (ISTAT – *Le tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione. Anno 2006*)

Extract from Tavola 5 - Persone di 3 anni e più per uso del personal computer e persone di 6 anni e più per uso di Internet, sesso, classe di età, ripartizione geografica, condizione occupazionale - Anni 2003, 2005 e 2006 (per 100 persone con le stesse caratteristiche) Table 5. People aged 3 years and over according to PC use and people aged 6 years and over according to Internet use, sex, age, geographical location, occupation. Years 2003, 2005 and 2006 (per 100 people with the same characteristics)

	Uso del personal computer <i>PC use</i>			Uso di Internet <i>Internet use</i>		
	2003	2005	2006	2003	2005	2006
Maschi <i>[Males]</i>	44,6	45,3	46,9	35,7	37,1	39,5
Femmine <i>[Females]</i>	34,1	34,7	36,1	25,2	26,9	29,0

Fig. 3: (ISTAT – *Le tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione. Anno 2006*)



Transl. : Figure 1. *Families according to technology products possessed. Years 2005 and 2006 (per 100 families)*

[Colour TV 2005: 95.5; 2006: 93.9 Analogical TV 2005: 90.6; 2006:87.8 Mobile phone 2005: 80.8; 2006: 82.3 Videorecorder 2005: 66.8; 2006: 63.0 DVD player 2005: not surveyed; 2006: 50.7 PC 2005: 43.9; 2006: 46.1 Internet access 2005: 34.5; 2006: 35.6 Satellite TV aerial 2005: 23.6; 2006: 25.0	Videocamera 2005: 25.2; 2006: 24.8 Narrowband connection 2005: 21.6; 2006: 18.7 Games console 2005: 17.0;2006: 16.8 DVB – Set Top Box 2005: 12.5;2006: 15.2 Broadband connection 2005: 11.6; 2006: 14.4 Digital TV 2005: 4.1; 2006: 5.2 Cable TV 2005: 3.0; 2006: 3.9]
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The 2006 CENSIS survey on the social situation of the country marks a considerable step forward in the percentage of people who are multimedial¹⁵ (46.6% in 2002; 53% in 2006. Fig. 4). However, it clearly points out the existence of a divide from the rest of Europe¹⁶ (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6): “non riusciamo a colmare il divario che ancora ci separa dal resto d’Europa”.¹⁷

Fig. 4: (CENSIS – *Rapporto annuale sulla situazione sociale del Paese. Anno 2006*).

Tab. 2 – Multi-mediali e mono-mediali in Italia. Confronto 2005/2006 (val. %) <i>Tab. 2 – Multimedial and monomedial users in Italy. Comparison 2005/2006 (%)</i>			
	2002	2005	2006
Multi-mediali	46,6	49,6	53,0
Mono-mediali	53,4	50,4	47,0
Totale popolazione	100,0	100,0	100,0

¹⁵ As opposed to monomedial.

¹⁶ Excluding France.

¹⁷ CENSIS – *Rapporto annuale sulla situazione sociale del Paese*. [Annual Report on the Country’s Social Situation] *Anno 2006*, 145 [Tr. “we have not managed to close the gap which still separates us from the rest of Europe”].

Fig. 5: (CENSIS – *Rapporto annuale sulla situazione sociale del Paese. Anno 2006*).

Tab. 1 - Multi-mediali e mono-mediali in Europa (val. %) <i>Tab. 1 – Multimedial and monomedial users in Europe (%)</i>					
	Italia Italy	Francia France	Spagna Spain	Germania Germany	Gran Bretagna Britain
Multi-mediali	53,00	52,9	61,3	67,7	74,9
Mono-mediali	47,0	47,1	38,7	32,3	25,1
Totale popolazione	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Fig. 6: (CENSIS – *Rapporto annuale sulla situazione sociale del Paese. Anno 2006*).

Extract from Tab. 3 – L'uso complessivo (abituale + occasionale) dei media in Europa (val. %) Tab. 3 – Total (habitual + occasional) media use in Europe (%)					
Media	Italia Italy	Francia France	Spagna Spain	Germania Germany	Gran Bretagna Britain
Internet	37,6	42,5	44,2	54,1	61,4

Even in music (third on the list of most relevant needs in the relationship between users and means of communication), the Internet, which is rated as second most valued means to obtain maximum satisfaction, is only being used by 13.3% of the population (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7: (CENSIS – *Rapporto annuale sulla situazione sociale del Paese. Anno 2006*).

Tab. 14 - Media usate per soddisfare l'interesse per la musica e relativo grado di soddisfazione (val. % e valori medi)

Media	% d'uso	SODDISFAZIONE VAL. %		Valore medio
		Massima	Minima	
Radio	77,4	57,9	14,4	3,91
Televisione	57,3	44,9	30,1	3,25
Mp3	20,4	77,2	11,4	4,13
Internet	13,3	69,7	12,8	3,98
Tv Satellitare	5,8	57,4	8,5	3,79
Quotidiani	4,5	24,3	45,9	2,68
Libri	4,4	30,8	55,6	2,75
Mensili	4,2	35,3	35,3	2,94
Settimanali	3,9	25,0	40,6	2,78
Cellulare	3,5	37,9	31,0	3,00
Videofonino	2,1	35,3	35,3	3,06
Teletext	1,8	40,0	46,7	2,80
Tv Digitale Terrestre	1,6	69,2	15,4	3,69

Nota: Il grado di soddisfazione è stato assegnato sulla base di una scala da 1 (minima soddisfazione) a 5 (massima soddisfazione). I valori percentuali indicano quante persone hanno espresso una valutazione 4-5 (massima) e 1-2 (minima) soddisfazione.
 Il totale non è uguale a 100 perché erano possibili più risposte.
 Fonte: indagine Censis, 2006

Translation: Tab. 14 - Media used to satisfy the interest in music and degree of satisfaction (% and average values)

[Media, percentage of use, Maximum satisfaction, Minimal satisfaction, Average value. Radio TV Mp3 Internet Satellite Newspapers Books Monthly magazines Weekly magazines Mobile Videophone Teletext	DVB – T (Digital Video Broadcasting – Terrestrial) The degree of satisfaction has been assigned on a 1 (minimum satisfaction) to (maximum satisfaction) 5 scale. Percentages indicate how many people have expressed a 4-5 (maximum) and a 1-2 (minimum) evaluation. The total does not add up to 100 because more than one answer was possible]
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The 2006 ISTAT survey on the use of ICT also mentions the divide:

Considerando la percentuale di famiglie con almeno un componente tra i 16 e i 64 anni che possiede un accesso ad Internet da casa, indicatore definito da Eurostat per esigenze di confronto internazionali, l'Italia è svantaggiata rispetto a molti paesi della Comunità Europea, risultando solo al quindicesimo posto in questa graduatoria (con un tasso di penetrazione del 40% rispetto alla media europea del 52%).¹⁸

Moreover, it reveals that the only nation-wide consumer product (in addition to colour TV) is the mobile phone (Fig. 3): as compared to the 2005 data, the divide between families made up of elderly people only, and families with at least one member under the age of 18 has significantly shrunk solely in regard to the possession and use of the mobile phone. In executives' and professionals' families, possession of the mobile phone has reached a percentage (96.3%) which is even higher than that of the TV (94.5%). Between the latter families and the most disadvantaged families (low/no income families) there is a 30-point difference regarding the possession of a personal computer and a 37-point difference in regard to Internet access. However, differences between the two family types blur when considering the use and possession of mobile phones.

Further analysis (Fig. 8) reveals that, rather than being due to equipment or network costs, the low percentage of Internet access amongst Italian families is linked to socio-cultural phenomena, in that most families either do not see the Internet as being useful or they do not feel they are capable of using it. The fact that the mobile phone, which also implies high purchase and operating costs is widespread, provides further evidence of this:

¹⁸ ISTAT – *Le tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione*. [Information and Communication Technologies] *Anno 2006*, 4. [Tr: Considering the percentage of families with at least one member between the ages of 16 and 64 with an Internet connection at home, an indicator defined by Eurostat for the purposes of international comparison, Italy is behind most European Union nations, ranking 15th in this respect (with a penetration rate of 40%; the European average is 52%).]

Il fenomeno della scarsa diffusione tra le famiglie dell'accesso ad Internet da casa dipende ... solo in misura ridotta da problemi di costo degli strumenti o del collegamento. Si tratta in primo luogo di un problema socio-culturale in quanto la maggior parte delle famiglie non percepisce l'utilità di questo strumento o non si ritiene in grado di utilizzarlo. A riprova di ciò, il cellulare, che comporta anch'esso dei costi di acquisto e di gestione elevati, è diffuso nella maggioranza delle famiglie con dei divari contenuti sia dal punto di vista generazionale che socio economico.¹⁹

Fig. 8: (ISTAT – *Le tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione. Anno 2006*).

Tavola 4. Famiglie che non hanno accesso ad Internet da casa per motivo e tipologia familiare. Anno 2005 (per 100 famiglie che non accedono ad Internet da casa)

TIPOLOGIA FAMILIARE	Accede ad Internet da altro luogo	I contenuti di Internet sono pericolosi	Internet non è utile, non mi interessa	Alto costo degli strumenti necessari per connettersi	Alto costo del collegamento	Mancanza di capacità	Disabilità fisica	Motivi di privacy, sicurezza	Altro
Famiglie con almeno un minorenni	18,4	6,8	29,3	18,8	18,8	15,1	-	4,8	14,1
Famiglie di soli anziani di 65 anni e più	0,9	0,7	44,3	2,0	1,8	51,3	3,7	0,8	8,8
Altre famiglie	17,8	1,4	41,0	9,3	10,1	35,2	0,8	2,5	10,1
Totale	12,2	2,3	36,6	9,3	9,1	31,9	2,3	2,2	18,4

[Translation: Table 4. *Families with no Internet access from home according to reason and family type. Year 2005 (per 100 families non using Internet from home)*

<p>Family types: Families with at least a member under the age of 18 Families of people aged 65 and over Other families Total</p>	<p>Reasons: Internet access from other place Internet content is dangerous Internet is not useful, I am not interested in it High cost of the equipment necessary to access the Internet High Internet rate Lack of capability Physical disability Privacy reasons Other]</p>
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¹⁹ Ibid., 6. [Tr.: The phenomenon of the low diffusion among families of Internet access from home depends... only to a small degree on hardware and connection costs. It is, firstly, a socio-cultural question in that most families do not perceive its usefulness to them or they do not believe they are capable of using it. This is demonstrated by the fact that cellular phones, which also imply high purchase and running costs, are present in the majority of families, with only a very narrow generational and socio-economic divide]

The low interest of Italians in ICT may be ascribed to historical and geographical reasons, but also to socially- and culturally-produced ‘preferences’. The Italians seem to attach a high value to family and sentiments, thus showing a more significant presence of qualities and characteristics traditionally described as ‘feminine’ than other people do²⁰. It is, indeed, a widespread opinion in Italy that if fathers are still the main breadwinners, it is mothers who really ‘make’ the family, shaping its values and priorities.

However, the present lack of ethnographic data prevents one from understanding the phenomenon without superimposing one’s interpreting voice from outside, let alone from making statistical figures more meaningful overall.

It would not be correct to gather from the above data that the ICT situation in Italy is one of backwardness. One may, instead, hypothesise that ICT in its present aspect does not respond in a satisfactory way to the needs/inclinations of most Italians, who seem to have found in the mobile-phone the best adjustment of the latest technology to their needs (news in this country seems to travel faster by word of mouth – amplified as it may be – or through text-messaging than via e-mail or the Internet). Only qualitative analysis might provide adequate explanation for this, and by addressing the attitudes to ICT of Italians (as representatives of those with little or no voice in the field) would help to get a general idea on the possibility of empowerment for everyone.

Bringing in gender issues

I am, however, only dealing here with one aspect of the gender/latest technology relationship, that of ICT use, whereas the literature

²⁰ On TV and the radio as ‘feminine’ appliances or pieces of furniture/no technology, see Keir Keightley, “Low television, high fidelity: taste and the gendering of home entertainment technologies”, *The Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 47 (June 2003).

On the domestication of the mobile phone and the feminisation of its use, see Claude Fischer, *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Dafna Lemish and Akiba Cohen, “On the gendered nature of mobile phone culture in Israel”, *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* (April 2005); Sadie Plant, “On the Mobile: The Effects of Mobile Telephone on Social and Individual Life”, retrieved 20 November 2007 from http://www.motorola.com/mot/doc/0/234_MotDoc.pdf.

shows that another aspect – design – poses more relevant issues; but the Italian voice is so clearly absent in this area that I cannot more specifically contextualise the topic than I shall briefly be doing next.

Technology designers, like all “innovators are from the very start constantly interested in their future users. They construct many different representations of these users, and objectify these representations in technological choices”,²¹ mostly through unconscious consideration of their personal preferences, skills and learning styles. This ‘I-methodology’ is in fact a form of “reliance on personal experience, whereby the designer replaces his professional hat by that of the layman”.²²

There is a widespread belief that most ICT design reproduces the standpoint of young white middle-class men, who constitute the majority of people in design careers.

Although one must view categories, with their characteristics of staticity and essentialism, critically, to some degree, one can nevertheless still agree with the idea that multiplicity of views, difference in learning modalities, diversity *tout court* are under-represented in ICT.

As a result, gender bias does not only lie in the social distribution (possession and use) of computers, but first and foremost in their production.

Technologies are gendered not only because they are dominated by people with apparently similar characteristics/inclinations/views/expectations, but, above all, because they incorporate people’s values and become symbols and metaphors of them.

This homogeneity of values at production level may be caused by the way education approaches technology. According to some, “women and girls often perceive the subject of technology education as a male domain, especially after they have had a course in technology education”.²³ Many people maintain, indeed, that present methodology is highly discriminative of women learners

²¹ Madeline Akrich, “User Representations: Practices, Methods and Sociology”, in Arie Rip, Thomas Misa and Johan Schot, eds., *Managing Technology in Society. The Approach of Constructive Technology Assessment* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1995), 168.

²² *Ibid.*, x.

²³ Karen Zuga, “Addressing Women’s Ways of Knowing to Improve the Technology Education Environment for All Students”, *Journal of Technology Education* (Spring 1999), 57.

in that it follows “essentially male patterns by being basically hierarchical, authoritarian, competitive and exclusive”.²⁴

If technology is mostly taught in a way that favours people with certain characteristics and learning styles, no matter what sex they are, it is not surprising to discover that design careers are mostly represented by those same people, who also tend to reproduce their own characteristics in their products.

This clearly risks creating a vicious circle: not only are those who are not actively engaged in ICT left out of the technological decision-making processes which define whose needs technology should respond to, but, if one accepts a view of technology/gender as mutually shaped, they are merely recipients in the processes of identity construction set up by ICT use.

Therefore, although there is no clear evidence that ICT is important in itself or that ICT fluency can directly help reduce social inequality, by granting people with different characteristics/inclinations/views/expectations the option to *choose* ICT access by means of gender-diversity open ICT education may prove to be an instrument of empowerment. This is due to (1) the present under-representation of people with so-called ‘female’ preferences in ICT design, which results in ICT products not necessarily being respondent to the needs/interests of those people’s lives; (2) the gender/technology processes of identity construction being strongly unbalanced, representative as they are of partial, highly homogeneous characteristics, and therefore tending towards standardisation.

Whereas formal thinking has long been the privileged approach to knowledge, it is now widespread opinion that what I have defined as gender-diversity openness presupposes ‘epistemological pluralism’, that is, accepting the validity of different forms of knowing. Some people maintain that, due to its being halfway between an abstract idea and a tangible object, “the computer, with its graphics, its sounds, its text, and its animation, can provide a port of entry for people whose chief means of relating to the world are

²⁴ Ursula Franklin, *The Real World of Technologies* (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1990), 103. See also Joel Cooper and Kimberlee Weaver, *Gender and Computers: Understanding the Digital Divide* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003).

through movement, intuition, and visual impression”.²⁵ Therefore one first approach to pluralism would be to reflect on the very features which the computer has acquired over the last few years: windows and icons seem to be as much in tune with the “physical closeness” to objects that characterises Papert’s and Harel’s situated constructionism²⁶ as possibilities of simulation are with what Turkle refers to as ‘what if’ scenarios.²⁷ In addition to learning through *hard mastery*, that is through the formal, hierarchical modes of logic and calculation which were also typical of computers of the past, people also learn through *soft mastery*, that is, by interacting with simulated objects in the negotiated, non-hierarchical way typical of present-day computers, and these are only two possible alternatives in a continuum characterised by virtually infinite combinations of modes. Some people may need to plan their paths in an abstract way and pre-arrange every step in order to avoid mishaps which they consider to be mistakes; some others need to find their paths along the way: the direction may change through trial and error. Engineers think about objects, whilst *bricoleurs* or tinkerers get close to objects and think with them;²⁸ and there is a whole range of other possibilities in-between.

Learning and teaching paths

On examining the influence of ‘Western’ English Language Teaching (ELT) approaches on how Indigenous languages are taught, Mellow proposes a two-dimensional model (Fig. 9) where the dimensions correspond to two basic theoretical commitments within any approach to language teaching: (1) the assumption that an approach makes about the nature of language, indicated as a dichotomy between *form* and *function* and (2) the assumption that an approach makes about the nature of language learning,

²⁵ Sherry Turkle and Seymour Papert, “Epistemological Pluralism: Styles and Voices within the Computer Culture”, *Signs* (Autumn 1990), 131.

²⁶ Seymour Papert and Idit Harel, *Constructionism* (Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1991).

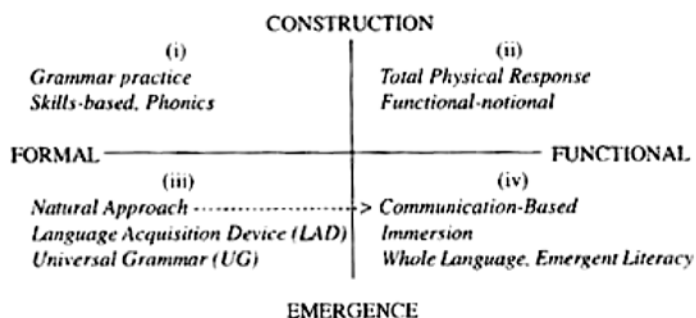
²⁷ Turkle, *Life*.

²⁸ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966).

indicated as a dichotomy between *construction* and *emergence*.²⁹ Whilst recognising that his categorisation is over-simplistic and does not always correspond to what many teachers actually do in classrooms, Mellow explains that its dichotomous aspect may help teachers to see more clearly the theoretical assumptions of an approach, and could easily be re-considered if one treated the axes of the framework as “continua which acknowledge that language is both form and function and that language learning results from some active construction by the learner as well as from biological and cognitive abilities that respond to normal communicative interaction and input”.³⁰

On the basis of this model, Mellow discusses a series of specific approaches that primarily adopt one of these four perspectives, but also introduces a fifth type of language teaching approach, that he refers to as eclectic in that it uses activities from more than one quadrant of his framework.

Fig. 9: Dean Mellow, “An Examination of Western Influences on Indigenous Language Teaching”.



Brown was probably the first to use the term “eclecticism” in connection with the adjective “principled” to distinguish it from naïve, tentative approaches to language teaching,³¹ whereas

²⁹ Dean Mellow, “An Examination of Western Influences on Indigenous Language Teaching”, in Jon Reyhner et al., eds., *Learn in Beauty: Indigenous Education for a New Century* (Arizona: Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, 2000).

³⁰ Ibid., 105.

³¹ Douglas Brown, *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language*

Larsen-Freeman prefers the term “informed” eclecticism to stress the importance of teachers considering their internal domain (personality and teaching style) as well as their own students and the circumstances in which the teaching is taking place when choosing amongst the available options.³²

The main assumptions of an ELT eclectic methodology might, in synthesis, be described as the recognition of (1) the complexity of the human mind, the dangers implicit in generalisations, and the difficulty in describing how actual minds work when handling knowledge; (2) the complexity of human needs/motivations/interactions; (3) the complex nature of language; and (4) the dynamic nature of the teaching and learning process. The basic implication of this in the practical field is the need to flexibly adopt/adapt different strategies/techniques as the situation dictates by making reference to theoretically and empirically supported methods, whilst at the same time judging by analysis and previous experience how effective the strategies/techniques they advocate might prove to be in a particular situation.³³

Discussion of these issues in the ELT field is still saliently very active, and continues to build on a strong bond between theory and practice. Moreover, like technology, ELT is at present a major site of struggle for power/knowledge/identity. If the teaching of any language is a delicate matter in itself, ELT is a particularly paradoxical reality, since it is also often viewed as a profit-generating industry that helps to impose a Western liberal-capitalism ideology around the world where teachers are accomplices in the *status quo* maintenance.³⁴

Whereas some consider the spread of ELT as an inevitable ‘natural’ process, critical pedagogists strongly oppose the ELT industry whilst stressing at the same time that EL teachers’ priority should be to unveil the realities of power by unveiling to students just whose interests are really served by ELT practice and other existing

Pedagogy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Regents, 1994).

³² Diane Larsen-Freeman, *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³³ Brown, *Teaching*; Larsen-Freeman, *Techniques*.

³⁴ Romy Clark et al., “Critical Language Awareness Part II: Towards Critical Alternatives”, *Language and Education* 5.1 (1990).

forms of education, as well as helping them develop awareness of the self. According to them, educational theory and practice should in fact always be “grounded in the desire for social change”.³⁵

As for Italy-based EL teachers, one cannot know whether they actually enact student empowerment practices and whether such practices are successful. However, drawing from personal experience, I believe that most Italian EL teachers are aware nowadays of the paradoxical nature of their subject-area and of the complexity of their role and have come to look at their profession, over the past fifteen years or so, as a more intellectual and reflective process than they themselves previously did because (1) the occasions for training/development in this field are now more frequent and lead, in some cases, to specific postgraduate qualifications with in-built qualitative, action/research practice,³⁶ and (2) most research literature is in English, which means immediate access for them.

Recent attempts at innovation in the field of secondary education have indeed primarily concentrated on language teaching,³⁷ with an explicit statement on the part of educational authorities that such a choice was also dictated by the “particolare profilo professionale dei docenti di questa disciplina” “particular professional profile of those teaching this subject”,³⁸ and the latest efforts at improving the quality of teaching in the field of primary education aim to make as many other-subject teachers as possible become English teachers at the very same time.³⁹ While dismissing the possible ‘normative’ outcome of this discourse,⁴⁰ one must, however, also recognise that

³⁵ Alastair Pennycook, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language* (London: Longman, 1994), 297.

³⁶ Although this may be part of the ELT capitalistic machine, it still results in personal growth and professional development for people approaching it critically as most teachers, hopefully, do.

³⁷ See *Progetto Lingue 2000* (1999) Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione [Italian Ministry of Education] (at <http://www.pubblica.istruzione.it/argomenti/autonomia/progetti/lingue.htm> ; retrieved 20 November 2007)

³⁸ *Progetto Lingue 2000*.

³⁹ See the project *Formazione per lo sviluppo delle competenze linguistico-comunicative in lingua inglese degli insegnanti della Scuola Primaria* (see discussions and reports e.g. in *Rassegna dell'Istruzione* 5 (May/June 2005/2006) at <http://www.rassegnaistruzione.it/rivista/index.html/>; accessed 20 November 2007).

⁴⁰ It is not a matter of merit, but a question of access, which clearly relates to other

discussion in the ELT field is particularly rich in Italy. This could make ELT a particularly meaningful environment for gender-diversity-open ICT education in this country, while ICT would at the same time provide ELT with important occasions for plural entry thanks to its embodiment of those situated, collaborative methodologies that principled eclecticism has long tried to appropriate alongside more traditional approaches.

In addition to creating interesting occasions of expertise exchange amongst different professionals and to the opening up of new horizons in the two parallel perspectives of infusing ICT use into subject areas and approaching language through (ICT) content, this would also create new types of ICT role models for students while at the same time encouraging cross-curricular ethnographic research and simultaneously questioning the conservatism of the academic world.

Italians, and/or women (as representatives of those who are considered to be at the margins of ICT culture) should not be forced to fit into the existing ICT culture. Such a culture should, instead, be made accessible and appropriate for them to *choose*.

They might still opt for TV and mobile phones, or soft mastery of ICT in the end, but at least they would have been given the opportunity to develop a voice and possibly turn the direction of technology towards the satisfaction of their needs.

discourses of power linked to the ELT imperialistic machine which are beyond the scope of this paper.

Bruna Di Sabato

ELT and the Internet: A New Approach to ESP

This paper is the fruit of teaching experience gained during a workshop with postgraduates studying for a Doctorate.

Having the opportunity to exploit IT classroom facilities, I used the experience to reason about what is happening to 'specialised' languages after the advent of the Internet. We started from the assumption that the easy and widespread access to a wider range of information and services via the Internet has increased the number of users of what is defined as English for Special/Specific Purposes, i.e. the English of specialised fields such as medicine, engineering, business and economics.

We concentrated on the field of e-commerce since this is an area whose existence depends exclusively on the opportunities offered by IT.¹ This is borne out by the labels used to denote the type of economy which is the subject of study: *Digital Economy* and *Internet Economy* are frequently found as nearsynonyms of *New Economy*. Our main objective was to test the validity of common

¹ The following URLs are the main Websites consulted during the workshop: <http://www.alitalia.it/it/global/services/services.asp>; <http://www.amazon.com>; <http://cyberatlas.internet.com/markets/smallbiz>; <http://e-comm.webopedia.com>; <http://www.ecommerceiq.com/>; <http://www.economist.com>; <http://englisp.8m.com/Articles.htm>; <http://www.gtreach.com/globstats/index.php3>; <http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/99/04/index0a.html>; <http://macmillandictionary.com>; <http://www.neweconomyindex.org/authors.html>; <http://www.newsfactor.com/>; <http://www.tribunes.com/tribune/art97/wooda.htm>; <http://www.u-aizu.ac.jp/~t-orr/tesol/articles.html>.

beliefs about specific lexicons, more particularly concentrating on the relationship existing between the use of English in specialised professional and academic settings and its use as an international language of communication among non-native speakers (and among speakers of different varieties of English as well as that between native and non-native speakers).

The renewed interest in languages for specific purposes from the foreign language teaching point of view derives from the undoubted shift towards a shared language for professional communication. Fields like economics, finance and the new technologies, in which the rate of innovation is high, are in constant need of new terminology. The most evident trend is the adding of new meanings rather than new lexical items to the English lexicon, by borrowing already existing lexemes from everyday language and attaching a new and more specialised meaning.

Moreover, fields like medicine and science are adopting more simplified terminology to respond to the needs of the enlarged and less expert readership as a result of the spread of the Internet and the increase in the average cultural level of the general public.

These considerations, alongside the changes in the English employed in such contexts deriving from its use by non-native speakers, point to a need to reformulate ESP syllabuses, adopting a blended approach which combines EGP and ESP.² It goes without

² This is in line with the current trend towards learner-centred approaches in ESP teaching. On ESP teaching see (in chronological order) A. Ciliberti, ed., *L'insegnamento linguistico per scopi speciali* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1981); T. Hutchinson, A. Waters, *English for Specific Purposes: A Learner-Centred Approach* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1987); D. M. Brinton and P. Master, eds., *New Ways in English for Specific Purposes* (Alexandria: TESOL, 1988); P. E. Balboni, *Microlingue e letteratura nella scuola superiore* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1990); G. Porcelli, B. Cambiagli et al., *Le lingue di specializzazione e il loro insegnamento* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1990); P. E. Balboni, *Microlingue e letteratura nella scuola superiore* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1990); M. Pavesi and G. Bernini, eds., *L'apprendimento linguistico all'Università: le lingue speciali* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1998); T. Dudley-Evans, M. J. St John, *Developments in English for Specific Purposes. A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1999); P. E. Balboni, *Le microlingue scientifico-professionali*, (Torino: UTET Libreria, 2000); D. Douglas, *Assessing Languages for Specific Purposes* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2000); H. Basturkmen, *Ideas and Options in English for specific Purposes* (Florence: LEA – Taylor and Francis Group, 2005) .

saying that no English as a Foreign Language course can be entirely devoted to ESP. Yet, increased specialisation has led to an excessive shift towards the ‘special side of the language’ which might be scarcely productive in certain areas.

The role of English specifically in communication as a lingua franca generates:

- a. the adoption of a language which is easily accessible and intelligible thanks to a process of syntactic and lexical simplification;
- b. a process of lexical standardisation among different lexicons in specific contexts, i.e. the creation of terminologies which are common to different languages because they largely derive from English (though the borrowed term might undergo some degree of morphological and phonological adaptation).

This sort of ‘hybridisation’ is in some way considered inevitable for a language which becomes dominant and largely spoken by non native speakers.³

Departures from the general rule, new lexical items, semantic shifts and simplified syntactic forms are no longer simply the result of language use (and sometimes misuse) by mother tongue speakers. Authorship is difficult to attribute and it is also irrelevant if we consider that these changes mostly derive from the changing communicative needs in international contexts.

We have already mentioned the role the Web has in communication in specific fields. We have no recent data available but according to 2004 statistics, English is still the dominant language of virtual communication (35.2% of the world online population communicates in English), followed by Chinese (13.7%) and Spanish (9.2%).⁴

If the Web is one of the most widely used means in specific communication, and if English is the most widely used language in such contexts, it is vital that the ELT teacher focusses on the consequences of this new situation.

³ See the interview to Tom Mc Arthur in D. Graddol, T. Mc Arthur, D. Flack and J. Amey, “English around the World” in “English in a Changing World”, *AILA Review* 13, 3-14.

⁴ Data from Global Reach: global-reach.biz/globstats.

As David Crystal points out in one of his latest books: “We are living in a world where most of the varieties we encounter as we travel around the world are something other than traditional British or American English. Teachers do students a disservice if they let them leave their period of training unprepared for the brave new linguistic world which awaits them”.⁵

Effective ELT teaching today has to raise learners’ awareness of the grammatical (used (here to mean the whole of syntax and morphology) and textual features of contemporary international communication in English.

To reach this aim, I selected e-commerce as the best case study to work on with a class of postgraduates.⁶

E-commerce or electronic commerce is the modern way of selling and purchasing products and services using an electronic means of communication, that is, the Web. The possibility to carry out commercial transactions on the Web has revolutionised the traditional economy. What is called the *New Economy* is radically different from the *Old Economy* from several points of view. To simplify, we may consider two basic factors: the disappearance of physical borders and distance, and the consequent generation of a global market. Any commodity or service can be sold from any corner of the world to another, provided that physical goods can be delivered after purchase (in fact this cannot be true in the case of high bulk goods such as cars, lorries or furniture, but it is the case of low bulk goods such as books or CDs and, especially, Internet deliverable purchases such as music, e-books, and services such as translations or consultancy). Another consequence for the economy is the opportunity to spread production all over the world as you can work for your company anywhere, provided you have Internet access. This results in major opportunities to companies which outsource their activities with good returns.

The growth of e-commerce is indeed sizeable enough to raise the attention of linguists. This is particularly true if we refer to the USA

⁵ David Crystal, *The Language Revolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press: 2004).

⁶ They were actually ‘dottorandi’ attending the fourth and fifth cycles of the ‘Dottorato in Lingua testi e Linguaggi di area inglese e nordamericana’ at the University of Salerno.

where the phenomenon is even more widespread and certainly older than in other Western countries.⁷ As we may easily understand, the phenomenon extends from that country to all corners of the world, changing the language and the communicative styles of those who operate on the international scene whatever their professional or academic field.⁸

Indeed, the New Economy has brought about major lexical changes which affect more than just economic English: the new market operators are in fact experts in marketing, commerce, finance but also in ICT (Information and Communication Technology), advertising and localisation.⁹

The terminological changes have affected all these areas, and what is more interesting, both specific and everyday English; and co-participants in the process are also the non-experts to whom the majority of the products are offered.¹⁰

⁷ 47% of global e-commerce is American, Japan (13%) and Germany (5.7%) follow. Forrester Research Inc.: <http://glreach.com/eng/ed/art/2004.ecommerce.php3> (retrieved 24 November 2007 at <http://web.archive.org/web/20020210142542/http://www.forrester.com/ER/Press/ForrFind/0,1768,0,00.html>),

⁸ In this paper our concern is lexical innovation; for the other changes in written communication brought about by the New Economy refer to B. Di Sabato and G. Porcelli, *L'inglese della New Economy. Analisi e didattica* (Napoli-Roma: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2004); G. Garzone, "Describing E-commerce Communication", in *Textus* 15 (2002), 279-296.

⁹ The New Economy is a perfect area for CLIL strategies. Economists and other professionals working in the field of business, marketing, ICT, etc., need to be instructed and updated from both the conceptual and the linguistic point of view. About the recent trends in CLIL, see D. Brinton, "Content-Based Instruction and English for Specific Purposes. Same or Different?", *TESOL Matters* 3-4; M. A. Snow and D. M. Brinton, *The Content-Based Classroom. Perspectives on Integrating Language and Content* (Bank Street: Longman, 1997); C. M. Coonan, *La lingua straniera veicolare* (Torino: UTET Libreria, 2002).

¹⁰ The sudden and relevant increase in lexical innovations has indeed generated the need to update the vocabulary competence of Internet users and New Economy professionals. This is evident if you consider the number of glossaries you may easily find on the Web. In particular we consulted the following: <http://e-comm.webopedia.com/>; http://www.accountview.co.uk/ebusiness/ebus_glossary.htm; http://merchantaccount101.net/ecommerce_glossary.html; <http://www.goecart.com/ecommerce-glossary.asp>; <http://www.napcp.org/napcp/napcp.nsf/Navigational/eCommerce+Glossary?OpenDocument>; http://www.uta.edu/infosys/e_comm/terms/; <http://www.apple.com/it/smallbusiness/emarketing/puzzle/terms/> (in Italian).

To achieve the aim of raising awareness of these innovations, we concentrated on two different types of texts taken from e-commerce websites: the e-pages devoted to selling and buying and the e-pages regulating the terms of purchase and other legal issues connected to e-commerce.¹¹ The lexicon of e-commerce is a good example of the above-mentioned intralanguage borrowing. The economic and commercial innovations have generated a range of services for the ordinary public and the consequent need to label them by choosing an appealing and easily recognizable or remembered name.

This is easily illustrated by connecting to an e-commerce website. We have chosen the well-known Internet bookseller *Amazon*. Amazon has achieved rapid success, and today has Internet websites in languages other than English (French, German, Japanese, for example) and sells an impressive range of products.

From a quick look at the lexicon while surfing through the website, the participants agreed that the most visible innovation is from the semantic point of view, as already existing lexical items seem to have acquired other meanings. We observed that the shift from real to virtual has brought about a 'shift' from literal meaning to figurative meaning.

The adjective 'virtual' itself might be considered a symbol of the shift in meaning which has affected several lexical items pertaining to everyday vocabulary as a consequence of the advent of the Internet and the New Economy. In his amusing book, *Frantic Semantics. Snapshots of Our Changing Language*, J. Morrish also considers 'virtual'. This lexical item has undergone several semantic changes and from an adjective meaning 'almost', it is now widely used to mean "an electronic version of something mundane". The conclusive remark is that "you can go 'virtual shopping', although M&S is still a better bet if you want something that fits.... 'Virtual jobs', it seems, may be the future for all of us. Let's hope our 'virtual wages' are sufficient to pay our real groceries".¹²

Coming back to our website, the students compared the layout

¹¹ I have already dealt with the e-page in B. Di Sabato and G. Porcelli, *L'inglese della New Economy*, 51-56.

¹² John Morrish, *Frantic Semantics. Snapshots of Our Changing Language*, (London: Macmillan, 1999), 172.

of the home page to the entrance of a hypermarket, with the types of products on sale listed on the top of the page as if they were directions to the various departments. The dominant image is the ‘cart’ where you can put your purchases by clicking on the icon “Add to shopping cart”.

As some of the students noticed, the simple invitation “visit our Web pages” appearing on the home page is quite emblematic, if you consider that it makes use of three already existing lexical items but implying a semantic shift towards “virtualisation”: rather than inviting a customer to visit the premises of a company, it invites the Internet user to *virtually* visit a *virtual* company at a *virtual* address.

The pages we are invited to visit are certainly not the sheets of paper we are accustomed to but for the use of words and images on it. And, of course, the new meaning of ‘Web’, here employed as a premodifier, is well-known to no longer have anything to do with a spider, but rather to denote the complicated computer system which links and stores data from all over the world.

Another interesting observation raised during the workshop is that the products offered on sale are real and tangible – books, CDs, DVDs, PCs and videogames, toys, etc. – therefore the words naming them have kept their literal meaning. This means that the Internet customer is obliged to attach the appropriate meaning to each word, continuously swinging from the real to the virtual and viceversa just as the two worlds intermingle, thanks to the Web.

Amazon is a US-based company and although it has customers all over the world, the language used might be considered AmE rather than IntEn. Therefore, we decided to consult the websites of some European airline companies (Alitalia, Lufthansa, easyJet). As everyone knows, it is possible nowadays to book a flight and also to purchase tickets online. The first thing which caught our attention was that, rather than employing the abbreviation ‘e-’ (from ‘electronic’) as a premodifier of already existing lexical items employed in the Internet context, the premodifier ‘online’, also written as ‘on-line’, was preferred on these sites: we found *on-line booking*, *on-line ticketing*, *on-line transaction*, *on-line purchase*, *online registration*, *online management*, *on-line services* or *online-services*).

Booking and buying a ticket on the Internet implies compliance to very strict regulations to avoid encountering ‘real’ problems which are difficult to solve. For this reason, these sites are also interesting for observing what has happened to legal and commercial vocabulary employed in a virtual context. Although these regulations have to be easily understandable to the public, they are nonetheless quite analytical and employ traditional terminology (for instance, in the terms of agreement), with some neologisms which derive from the need to cover aspects rising from the new medium being used. Most of the websites offer definitions of the meaning of the terms employed, or else explain it in the text with wide use of anaphora, cataphora and paraphrase. Yet, even so, the ordinary user may still have difficulty in understanding everything. You have to possess legal, commercial, but also IT competence. Here is an example the students picked out to illustrate the point, i.e. the definition of ‘cookie’ from the easyJet site:¹³

Cookies

Cookies are small pieces of information that are stored by your browser on your computer’s hard drive, and enable easyJet to provide features such as remembering your address, so that you don’t have to re-enter it each time you make a booking (this service is opt-in). Cookies can be deleted from your hard drive if you wish. Most web browsers automatically accept cookies, but you can change your browser settings to prevent that. Even without a cookie you can use most of the features on the web site. Our cookies do not contain any personally identifying information.

The text explains what a *cookie* is (not a sweet biscuit), using words as *(web)browser*, *browser settings*, *hard drive*. It then employs verbs which are rather common, but to refer to very specific operations - *re-enter your address*, *delete from your hard drive*, *change your browser settings*.

Despite all these explanations, it is difficult to understand what might happen to you if you enter your personal data to buy a ticket on line.

¹³ <http://www.easyjet.com/EN/Book/privacypolicy.html>; last accessed 20 November 2007.

What struck the participants was when they compared the same pages of the airline company website in various languages. If the research had revealed up to this point a definite trend toward adding to the lexicon of English through intralanguage borrowing, a survey of the same websites in English, French and Italian revealed a clear tendency of these European languages to add to their lexicon thanks to interlanguage borrowing from English (as in the case of ‘e-ticket’ or ‘online booking’ in the Italian site). The French website shows a more marked tendency to adapt the loan, as in the case of ‘réservation en ligne’ (from *on-line booking*), ‘billet électronique’ (from *electronic ticket*), but even French keeps ‘email’.

We concluded our experience by comparing several Internet websites devoted to professionals and specialists to the ones already consulted. Our aim was to see whether there has been a shift toward more technical terminology. The two areas under comparison are what are commonly defined ‘B2C’ (*Business to Consumer*) and ‘B2B’ (*Business to Business*). While in the previous examples we examined Internet websites identified and agreed on by the students, in this case, to save time, I had already selected several B2B sites.¹⁴ We noticed that the tendency towards the premodification of already existing lexical items pertaining to Business English is equally present and that the premodifiers ‘e-’ and ‘on-line’ (also written ‘online’) are rather frequent (*e-business, e-commerce, e-cash, e-market, e-marketing, e-money, e-payment, e-store; online store/shop, online payment, online transaction, online economy*). *Online* is frequently found also as a postmodifier (*trading online, paying online*).

‘Net’ as in *netbill, netiquette, netservices* and in the blend *netonomics* was also noticed.

Business English being a more formal variety, there is a more evident tendency to choose full words as premodifying elements rather than abbreviated forms: for instance, ‘electronic’ as a premodifier is very frequent as an alternative to the abbreviated ‘e-’ (we found it in lexical elements as *electronic address, electronic*

¹⁴ <http://www.bizreference.com/>; <http://www.ecommerce-guide.com/>; <http://www.helsinki.fi/WebEc/framezn.html>; <http://www.online-commerce.com/index.html>; <http://www.wilsonweb.com/research/>.

bill, electronic business, electronic data, electronic form, electronic funds transfer (EFT), electronic mail, electronic messaging, electronic signature).

The word digital is also quite frequent as a premodifier to 'traditional' terms, as in *digital enterprise* and *digital cash*.

From this quick analysis of the lexis of e-commerce, the class reached these conclusions: e-commerce borrows from the lexicon of Everyday English and from the lexicon of Traditional Economy. New words are easily accessible to non experts as they mainly derive from the adding of a premodifier (which is easily identifiable) to an already existing lexical item, or else they are the result of a semantic shift as a result of which a new, transparent, figurative meaning is added to an already existing lexical item.

With regard to the terminology employed by texts devoted to professionals and experts there is a tendency towards simplification and standardisation with terminology that is characteristic of more everyday language or of well known specific terminology which is adapted to the new conceptual environment by the adding of premodifying elements. Finally, there is a clear trend towards terminology which is common to the language of IT and commerce in different languages; in the case of Italian this has brought very limited morphological and phonological adaptation and a frequent recourse to semantic calque, as well as straightforward borrowing.

The teaching of ESP must look ahead and adapt to changes deriving from the widespread use of the Internet as a means of communication and interaction. We have examined only one aspect – vocabulary – in only one field – e-commerce - but the changes we have to take into account are vast and affect every field of knowledge.¹⁵ The three trends we have identified, namely the increase in the number of Specialised English readers, the increasing interference between EE and ESP and the tendency of different languages to converge on common lexical repertoires, call for a rethinking about EFL syllabuses. This also means introducing some specialist language in EGP courses.

¹⁵ Indeed vocabulary is just one aspect of ELT, though recent trends in foreign language teaching devote most of the attention to vocabulary acquisition. See G. Porcelli, *Comunicare in lingua straniera* (Torino: UTET Libreria, 2004).

This paper does not seek to reach any conclusions but, rather, to offer readers the results of a workshop involving a small group of students with the aim to stimulate further discussion among scholars regarding the need for a systematic analysis and a general rethinking about the teaching of English as a Foreign Language.

Margaret Rasulo

Making the move from conventional to online educational training

Introduction

This is a time of great tides of innovation taking place in the Italian and European educational arenas, mainly regarding ministerial plans envisaging renewed curriculum design, innovative pedagogical practices and organizational autonomy granted to institutions. Faced by increasingly troublesome constraints, it is the ambition of many educational institutions to satisfy the ever increasing demand for higher and continuing quality education delivered to larger numbers, accompanied by the prospect of lowering costs associated with student travel time, staff expenses and classroom space. Undoubtedly, this scenario has influenced the rise of e-learning, along with enthusiastic claims for its ability to provide the necessary solutions to the problems investing the field of education as well as support and guarantee lifelong learning opportunities.¹

What is e-learning?

Heralded as the new paradigm for teaching and learning,

¹ For overviews and discussions, see: Michael Allen, *Designing Successful E-Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer, 2007); Ruth Clark and Richard Mayer, *E-Learning and the Science of Instruction: Proven Guidelines for Consumers and Designers of Multimedia Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer, 2007); Jacky Elliot, *E-learning and Modern Foreign Languages* (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education: UK, 2006).

e-learning owes its popularity to the Internet and the World Wide Web. It is through this networked technology that collaborative virtual meeting places take shape, affording individuals in the most isolated conditions the opportunity to exploit the advantages of ‘anytime anywhere’ education.

Broadly defined, e-learning is the process of delivering information for education via electronic media, which include satellite, Intranet, Internet, CD-ROM and even telephone support. According to major experts in the field, there are 4 types of e-learning and Broadbent classifies them as:

1. informal
2. self-paced
3. leader-led
4. performance support tools²

Informal learning does not make use of a formal instructional strategy, but the Web is accessed ‘freely’ merely for information retrieval. The *self-paced* model refers to the process of accessing an online course and completing it at one’s own pace. The *leader-led* type involves support from an e-tutor or e-moderator in both asynchronous (‘non-real’ time) information exchange and synchronous (‘real-time’) discussions. In the former, the content is posted and participants access it at their own convenience (using conferencing systems, forums, e-mail), while in the latter, participants are online at the same time (using chats, audio and video conferencing). The fourth type of e-learning is based on *performance support tools* and involves the learners in making use of software materials available online from which they gain help in performing a task. There are also various ‘hybrid’ types of e-learning known as *blended* models consisting of an online component supported by either face-to-face sessions usually in the form of workshops, or by an online community and virtual classrooms.³

² Brooke Broadbent, *The ABCs of E-Learning: reaping the benefits and avoiding the pitfalls* (San Francisco CA: ASTD, Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2002), 10.

³ Broadbent, *The ABCs of E-Learning*.

Information is not instruction

The power of the Internet, and consequently of e-learning, is the ‘openness’ of the system, but it is this same quality that very frequently causes disruption in the lives of many online learners. Anderson argues that while “openness offers conservative forces and narrow views unfettered access to differing perspectives and ideas...there must be limiting and stabilizing influences if e-learning is to maintain a sense of community and purpose, not to mention sustainability”.⁴ What this implies is that within such an easy access system, exposure to large amounts of information without appropriate learner support is overwhelming and quite useless in terms of a learning experience. Hence, one of the goals of the e-educator is to avoid the danger of this ‘online anything’ and foster online purposeful learning by setting up a collaborative environment and encouraging interactivity.

It follows that the real issue at stake is establishing the credibility of e-learning as a conveyer of high-quality education to rival those of the more traditionally delivered face-to-face approaches. Even if they are obviously virtual, e-learning environments need to feel ‘physical’ where people ‘do’ things like in a real classroom or workshop venue, such as exchange opinions, ‘listen’ to others, participate in group conferences and debates, prepare projects etc. Rheingold affirms that:

in cyberspace, we chat and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, perform acts of commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm....we do everything people do when people get together, but we do it with words on computer screens, leaving our bodies behindour identities commingle and interact electronically, independent of local time or location.⁵

The uniqueness of e-learning lies in its dual nature. This new medium is not just an electronic tool, but it is especially a learning

⁴ Terry Anderson, *E-Learning in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 4.

⁵ Howard Rheingold, “A Slice of Life in My Virtual Community”, in Linda Harasim, eds., *Global networks: Computers and International Communication*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 57-80.

approach that embodies both the areas of technology and pedagogy. These closely interwoven features have developed into alternative modes of expression and renewed methods of delivering education such as synchronous and asynchronous communication systems, which make use of text-based models and audio, video and voice formats. For those educators who are thinking of going online, this transition towards the demands of a ‘technologically-mediated pedagogy’ requires a new type of literacy, which involves keeping an eye out for new technological developments and for new ways of using the technology, autonomously, solving problems and learning.

The technological appeal, however, should not represent the main reason that would precipitate a pedagogical move from traditional to online educational training. According to Anderson:

developments in communications technology, and their adoption ...have outpaced our understanding of how to use them to support an educational experience. The qualities that will be valued in a ‘knowledge-based future’ will be the ability to access and understand information.⁶

Indeed, research in the field has yet to prove that technology alone automatically provides significant improvements in educational outcomes. Undoubtedly, human interaction and software are closely related and compensate each other, but it is essential to place the emphasis especially on the study of online communication and relationship development, which have the distinct role of counterbalancing the often overwhelming presence of technology. Nevertheless, the software that is available today greatly supports interaction and provides a collection of programs and systems that online community members can use in order to compensate for the lack of physical presence in the attempt to improve the overall quality of the human-computer interface. The ultimate challenge for the educator, therefore, is to weave in the technology, which means applying it to sound principles of pedagogy that are capable of exploiting the versatile technological features. Anderson

⁶ Anderson, *E-Learning*, 7.

states that “because of e-learning’s unique capabilities to support asynchronous, collaborative communication in a dynamic and adaptable educational context, we will see a resurgence of traditional educational ideals, and we will see learners adopting the values of personal responsibility and shared control as their own”.⁷

Traditional vs. online educational training

Notwithstanding the growing influence of e-learning in education, it has been suggested that its inherent capabilities have not been fully explored, leaving educationalists unaware of the implications of embarking on this new experience, which involves some degree of risk-taking. Therefore, before committing oneself to online educational training ‘tout court’ or running the risk of passing prior judgment on its credibility or effectiveness, it is advisable to articulate the implications and possible pitfalls of the changeover, as indicated in Table 1 overleaf, in which traditional and online educational training are examined.

⁷ Ibid., 6.

Table 1. Traditional vs. online training

	Traditional face-to-face (f2f) educational training	Online Educational training
Boundaries	trainees are usually from neighboring areas who set aside time during the day to participate	traditional classrooms are replaced by virtual classrooms with participants from remote areas
Team spirit	physical presence facilitates team building attitude	trainer needs to help participants build trust without the aid of f2f social relationships
Motivation	motivation is sustained by the direction of the trainer and by the emotional aspect of the f2f experience	motivation is difficult to harness due to the amount of time the trainee spends alone, often triggering feelings of frustration and isolation
Trainer-led vs. Learner-led	trainer is mainly in charge	roles of e-trainer and trainees are leveled off as the responsibility for dealing with problem areas is equally shared
Time	time is set in days and hours and sessions	education 'anytime, anywhere' : the process is spread out across time and space
Expenses	transportation fees, accommodation and other expenses are often too hefty for participants	savings: no travel costs; synchronous and asynchronous modes can cut down telephone bill.
On-task reflection	no time to reflect before responding unless this is carefully built into the sessions	asynchronous time allows participants to reflect on an issue before responding
Materials	access to course material is usually given by the trainer (hand-outs, coursebooks)	unlimited access to material is given 24 hours daily including links to other sites
Individual differences	stereotypes can hinder f2f communication	gender, age, and other individual characteristics are unknown online
Session log	tasks and training 'discourse' often lose momentum as they leave no trace after the group dissolves unless post course tasks are set	online tasks are more visible as they are permanently imprinted in the messages and always available for reviewing
Technology	meetings are not jeopardized by technological accidents	the technology is often daunting and computer breakdown times are frustrating
Participation	presence of trainer and peers and a well-paced course encourage and nurture participation	drop-out rates of participants are high due to: self-paced format of online learning, lack of personal contact, overload of information and limited support
Interaction	<i>interaction</i> among participants is the main characteristic of f2f encounters	lack of <i>interactivity</i> sometimes turns participation into monologues (<i>lurking</i>)! [<i>lurking</i> or browsing= to read conference messages without contributing]

Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of both modalities confirms that the popularity of face-to-face training clearly lies in the ‘physical’ element which sustains motivation, participation and nurtures the emotional sphere. This constitutes all the more reason why e-educators need to compensate for this lack by making good use of the overall strengths of online training which, according to the above table, are the intensity of reflection, convenience of study, fairness of the role of facilitator and gender/class neutral interaction.

The TESOL Experience : an example of online training

Since January 2003 the Italian Ministry of Public Education (MPI), in association with the *Agenzia Nazionale per lo Sviluppo dell’Autonomia Scolastica (ex INDIRE)*, has promoted national projects aimed at training and re-qualifying in-service Primary School teachers in the field of English Language Teaching.

The Project’s course provision branches out into two directions or pathways. The first consists in the delivery of uniquely tailored language courses aimed at achieving the B1 level of language competency, while the second is characterized by a ‘blended’ model of e-learning for the delivery of the forty-hour methodology courses. The participants work online for twenty hours, networking with the materials that are available on the website. For the remaining twenty hours, the participants meet face-to-face in sessions led by an e-tutor whose task is to socialize the materials available online.⁸

This paper specifically reports the author’s involvement in this venture during the school year 2003-2004, which consisted in moderating one of the forums running on the PUNTOEDU⁹ platform on behalf of TESOL Italy (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), a non-profit organization of teachers of English and an affiliate of TESOL International. The TESOL association has been working closely with the Ministry by providing trainers and their expertise especially in the field of action research and online training.

⁸ MPI, Piano di formazione linguistica per docenti di scuola primaria Progetto Formazione ex.com. di servizio ministeriale prot. 1446/2005.

⁹ PUNTOEDU – educational learning environment designed by INDIRE: <http://www.puntoedu.it>.

The Forum

The subject of the TESOL forum was ‘Action Research in the Primary English Classroom’, a theme of particular interest to the trainee teachers, as they were asked to pilot a reform project aimed at the teaching of English to very young learners. The chosen mode of delivery of the forum was through tutor-led, asynchronous Computer Mediated Conferencing (CMC), with a running time of approximately two months. Although it was not designed as a course, I envisaged the forum as a classroom community, where people engage in goal-oriented tasks. This meant designing an effective action plan that would call for feedback mechanisms and authentic interactivity among the participants. However, unlike real classrooms, forums that are not strictly connected to a learning environment do not usually limit the number of participants and individuals contribute to the discussion at their own convenience, often creating difficulty in following the various threads. The aim was to create an online community using CMC, with a feasible number of participants and all starting at approximately the same time. The risk that was to be avoided was having to deal with endless threads of unconnected messages, with the added inconvenience of repeatedly having to explain rules of behavior and other information, usually negotiated with participants before the course commencement date.

A partial solution was found by posting documents explaining procedures and other information for successful participation in a special area dedicated to ‘important news’. Anyone joining was invited to visit this area before contributing to the discussion, where they found the following advice:¹⁰

Affinché un forum on-line funzioni bene, è necessario rispettare semplici regole, che sono poi le stesse che seguiamo in una conversazione in gruppo. 😊

Riassunto quello che leggerete nel file allegato²:

- essere educati e sensibili
- attenersi al thread o intervento in cui si sta scrivendo
- non aggiungere un nuovo thread o intervento se ce n'è uno simile
- scrivere messaggi brevi e divisi in piccoli paragrafi. Per maggiore chiarezza, scaricate il **documento allegato**.

😊 Scusate la ridondanza, ma questi piccoli accorgimenti sono un notevole supporto alla qualità dell'interazione.

Grazie 😊 (*online moderator*)

¹⁰ The participants had the option of writing their messages in either English or Italian. This was based on the fact that the purpose of the e-tivities was to allow them to reflect on their learning processes and subsequently express their feelings and impressions in the language of their choice.

The ‘attached document’ mentioned in the message refers to the checklist of netiquette rules (see Table 2 below) that were especially posted to avoid harmful and undemocratic ‘flaming’ arguments:

Table 2: Checklist of Netiquette Rules

A CHECKLIST OF CONVENTIONS FOR COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION	
<p>The principles of good communication in a computer conference are basically very similar to those in normal conversation and are largely common sense. But, because of the limitations of the medium (and with them the hazard of ‘flaming’), more care and attention is needed than in face-to-face discussion. The main principle is the intention to come to a shared understanding, which means trying to understand other people’s views, rather than simply expressing yourself, or worse, trying to impose your views on others.</p>	
PRINCIPLES OF BEST PRACTICES	
1.	<p><i>thank, acknowledge and support people freely:</i> “Ti ringrazio per...; il tuo contributo è stato davvero utile...; è interessante notare che...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if you don’t receive an acknowledgement of a message, you may feel ignored, even when others have appreciated your contribution
<p>CAUTION: before acknowledging, check that there aren’t already several similar messages!</p>	
2.	<p><i>acknowledge before differing:</i>“Capisco quanto affermi...; ti ringrazio per...; da quanto dici mi rendo conto che...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • before you disagree with someone, start by briefly re-stating what the other person has said in your own words so that he/she knows that you are trying to understand rather • than criticize
3.	<p><i>speak from your own perspective:</i> “La mia opinione è che...; dalla mia esperienza...; per quello che ho capito...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if no perspective is given, a statement may seem dogmatic or moralistic • if something is put as an absolute, there is no room for anyone else’s perspective
4.	<p><i>avoid ‘flaming spirals’</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it’s easy to respond quickly to soothing that makes you angry: before you write your response, think about what you’re saying, possibly re-word your message and reflect on the content (if it’s going to offend someone who can’t defend himself/herself as easily in ordinary circumstances)
5.	<p><i>on emotions in messages</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotions can be easily misunderstood so use the conventions offered in online communication: the emoticons or smileys : -)): - (• WRITING IN CAPITAL LETTERS COMES OFF AS SHOUTING!!
6.	<p><i>quote other messages when replying to them</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in a busy conference or forum, it can be time-consuming to find the original message in order to keep the thread going
7.	<p><i>effective messages</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keep messages short, write concisely and try to avoid messages longer than one screen • all messages have a subject line: indicate the contents of the message and make sure it is clear • make sure your reply is consistent with the subject line; if not, start a new thread • start a new thread only if your message cannot be inserted in a previous thread
<p><i>(adapted from: The Open University Computer Mediated Conferencing checklist, TESOL assignment booklet)</i></p>	

Course design

As mentioned above, course design was the essential and most challenging hurdle to tackle. Given that the forum was open to all the participating teachers, pacing the online activity was paramount, if the experience was to be worthwhile for everyone. Luckily, a forum is also a selective environment and only those who are truly motivated will make a contribution that goes beyond the occasional message. Of the 250 teachers enrolled in that particular course, only about 30 consistently contributed, by following up on the tasks and regularly posting messages.

The view that effective online activity must be interactive called for a coherent conceptual framework capable of generating collaboration. I was looking for an overall approach that would:

- guide the participants throughout the course without being obtrusive;
- engage participants in purposeful tasks;
- generate the human interaction typical of the real classroom.

Gilly Salmon's five-phase model for online learning was the framework that best responded to these needs. An expert in the field, Salmon from the U.K.'s Open University, suggests that direction maintenance and a sense of purpose are sustained online by *scaffolding and engagement*, two of the main principles underlying her model.¹¹

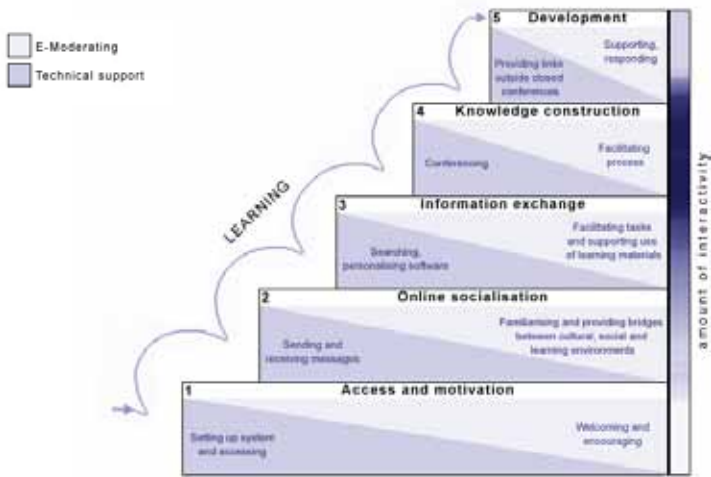
Scaffolding "provides an overall framework for training and learning online...starting with recruitment of interest, establishing and maintaining an orientation towards task relevant goals and helping to control frustration".¹² The principle of 'engagement' refers to the quality features of online tasks, i.e. what the learners are actually asked to *do* and expected to produce as a result of their interaction. Engagement specifies that active participation leading towards successful learning takes place when online activities involve cognitive processes such as creating, problem-solving, reasoning,

¹¹ Gilly Salmon, *E-Moderating. The Key to Teaching and Learning Online* (London: Kogan Page, 2001), 33.

¹² Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

decision-making and evaluating.¹³ The five-stage framework model is structured to ‘scaffold’ a successful development process for learning online as it “provides an example of how participants can benefit from increasing skill and comfort in working, networking and learning online, and what e-moderators need to do at each stage to help them to achieve this success”.¹⁴

Figure 1. Gilly Salmon ‘5-step model’



The learners work through each step (bottom left of each step), acquiring new skills, while the e-moderator activates strategies to generate their participation by gradually building on their response (right top of each step).

Integrating the ‘forum-course’ activities within the Salmon 5-Stage model

One of the underlying ideas of Salmon’s 5-step model is that web-based instruction needs to be structured, and I would also include forum discussions for educational and goal-oriented purposes.

Considering that cognitive activity cannot be channeled to fit

¹³ Salmon, *E-Moderating*, 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 45.

neatly into stages, the model is a very flexible one and this unique quality allowed me to adapt it to my specific course objectives. Illustrated below is the resulting overall forum-course timetable, complete with ‘lesson plans’ and activities. You will notice that Stages Four and Five have been blended together under the heading of ‘Knowledge Construction and Development’. The starting point was to divide the two-month period into 7-week slots with a different activity running for one or two weeks each. To ensure interaction among the participants, planning ahead is always of vital importance especially if there are expectations as to the kind of behavior you would like to generate from each *e-tivity*. As the moderator of the forum, I posted a brief introductory memo in the forum area at the beginning of each new stage. Due to obvious limitations of space, I have included in this paper only one explanatory memo, as shown after Stage One, but there are several sample messages posted by either a participant or the moderator, as evidence of the kind of interaction that consequently took place (the messages are shaded in gray).

Stage One: access and motivation

ETIVITY __ 1 __ WEEK __ 1 __	
TASK	INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE
AIM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To motivate participation • To encourage socialization
TIME: TO BE COMPLETED within:	1 week
TYPE OF INTERACTION: RESPONDING to other messages by finding something in common in order to get to know each other	
FORUM MODERATOR ACTIONS	Post invitation message : who we are, how to join, why join, what to expect
TEACHER TRAINEE ACTIONS	Read message Write at least one reply

All aboard!

TASK SETTING

Hello everyone! My name is Maggie and I'm one of the forum moderators.

I would like to welcome you to this event and ask those who want to participate to post a message briefly stating

- who you are and
- what you hope to get from this experience

This is just to get the conversation going! Writing messages online isn't the easiest thing to do, no matter what anybody says, but I would like to assure you that your contributions, as minimal as they may be, are always worthwhile.

Remember, we're here to share ideas and develop together as a group, so don't be a 'lurker' for too long and join in.

Maggie. 😊 (*online moderator*)

In the following messages the informality of the language and the need to find solutions to common problems act as a catalyst that encourages participation, but the first contributions will naturally sound 'tentative' and insecure. In this case, emoticons are widely used as they help to convey the 'emotional' tone of the message and avoid misunderstandings.

Mi presento

Ciao a tutti! Sono Emanuela ed il mio primo tentativo di intervento al forum è stato una 'frana'. Spero che questo sia migliore. Insegno a Latina e sto sperimentando come voi per una scuola migliore! A presto! 😊

[Transl.: Hi there, my name is Manuela, and my first forum message was a disaster. I hope this one's better. I teach in Latina and just like you I'm working for a better school! Talk to you soon!]

Ciao, sono Maria, non devo riflettere molto su i miei dubbi. Quello che mi “affligge” è la lingua parlata. Spero di poter superare questo “handicap”.....HO BISOGNO DI PARLARE....Ciao 😊

[Hi, this is Maria, I don't have to reflect much on the doubts that I have. What worries me is spoken language. I hope I'll be able to get over this 'handicap'... I NEED TO TALK]

Eccomi ! Eccomi finalmente nel forum dopo la lentezza burocratica con la quale ho ricevuto nickname e codici vari! Sono un'insegnante di inglese dell'Istituto Comprensivo ... e mi piacerebbe trovare insieme a voi gli elementi di originalità e di specificità di questa Riforma (soprattutto in riferimento alla lingua inglese) insieme alle vostre esperienze e alle vostre opinioni ! A presto!
(online participants)

[Here I am! Here I am, finally after the slowest of all bureaucracies which took so long in giving me my nickname and other login codes. I'm an English teacher in a Comprehensive School...and I would like to work with you in identifying original and specific aspects that characterize this Reform (especially regarding the English language) together with your experience and your opinions! Talk to you soon!]

Stage Two: online socialization

ACTIVITY ____ 2 ____ WEEK ____ 2 ____	
TASK	GETTING STARTED
AIM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To discuss the meaning of research and its place in the classroom
TIME: TO BE COMPLETED within:	1 week

TYPE OF INTERACTION: to other messages by finding divergent or convergent opinions	
FORUM MODERATOR ACTIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brief introduction in the message about role of research. 2. Post task: ask questions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever conducted research? • What do you think it implies? • Do you think a teacher should conduct research in the classroom? When? Would you like to try it?
TEACHER TRAINEE ACTIONS	<p>Reflect on meaning of research Write at least one reply</p>

Very often, this stage will reveal initial enthusiasm, usually following a ‘spout’ of lurking, considered to be legitimate at this stage, especially for this reflective participant who is mustering up enough courage to share ideas.

Carissima Maggie, **sono qui a riflettere** sulla ricerca-azione e mi dico: sarà forse quel processo legato al progettare, verificare, pensare e riprogettare in cui spesso mi ritrovo? Le proposte, le strategie, il tipo di approccio, l’organizzazione della classe e poi il bisogno di confrontarsi....sicuramente con i colleghi e ora anche con i colleghi on-line. (participant)

[Dear Maggie, here I am reflecting on action research and I’m wondering: is it that process linked to planning, evaluating, thinking, and re-planning in which I’m always involved? Ideas, strategies, approaches, classroom management and then the need to share information...with your own colleagues, of course, but now even with our on-line colleagues.]

Divergent or convergent opinions might also begin to form at this stage spurred by the eagerness to share experiences that had never been voiced before. The presence of a colleague who actually stops to ‘listen’ is a luxury in the life of a busy educator and whoever joins

an online course is often taken over by a ‘now or never’ attitude, as they consider this the only chance to find some solutions. These are signs that Stage Two is the most crucial among the five, as it is here that the online trainer will try to harness the motivation that is gradually building up.

ricerca azione

Trovo che la ricerca azione sia uno strumento molto valido da applicare sempre durante il nostro lavoro: Ma mi chiedo: come applicare metodi universalmente validi avendo a che fare con esseri umani ciascuno con una propria diversità?



...[action research

I find that action research is a valid tool which we should use on the job: My question is : how can we apply universally valid tools when our job is to deal with very different human beings?]

.....

Cara collega penso che sia proprio la diversità il punto strategico per poter programmare diversi interventi al fine di realizzare gli obiettivi prefissati. Quindi non necessariamente gli stessi interventi per tutti i soggetti impegnati nel processo di apprendimento ma variegare strategie per poi confluire in un unico obiettivo.

[Dear colleague, I think that individual differences reflect the strategic starting point in order to reach objectives by planning different activities]

..e chi parla di universalità?

Io penso che la personalizzazione dei percorsi formativi sia il vero punto di forza per una scuola che vada in contro alle diverse caratteristiche, oggi più di un tempo marcate, dei bambini. Quindi attività diversificate magari per gruppi o mediante l'utilizzo di cooperative learning penso siano strumenti molto efficaci.....è per rilevare (anche) ciò che penso sia utile il portfolio!

[I think that individual pathways represent the real strongpoint to be used by schools that are faced today with very marked differences that characterize their students]

Ciao 😊

(3 online participants)

After a two-week period it is always a good idea to summarize the points that emerge from the messages to give a sense of purpose and task coherence, as well as a sense of time.

week one summary: take a look

Dear Netmates,

Come ogni venerdì, cercherò di tirare un po' le somme di ciò che si è discusso durante la settimana. *[As usual on Fridays, I'll try to summarize all the topics that have discussed during the week.]*

Mi sembra che gli incontri e le presentazioni online siano andati molto bene. I messaggi esprimono voglia di fare e di apprendere da una parte, ma anche molti dubbi di non essere sulla rotta giusta. Come è stato detto più volte, è l'atteggiamento più appropriato per diventare 'ricercatori' nella propria classe e magari di collaborare online con gli altri che vorranno condividere le 'gioie' e i 'dolori'.

[I'm pleased with the online sessions and the individual introductions and presentations. The messages reveal participants' motivation to experiment on one hand, but also the feeling that one might not be on the right track. As we have mentioned many times, this is the appropriate 'classroom researcher' attitude, as we need to share our joys and sorrows with others, even when working online]

Le tematiche emerse sono state principalmente le seguenti:

- la frequenza e l'uso della L2 in classe
- la necessità di migliorare la propria competenza linguistica
- le 'piccole' sperimentazioni personali che hanno aiutato a sciogliere dei dubbi
- la voglia e l'urgenza di collaborare con altri per discutere tematiche inerenti soprattutto alla sperimentazione attuale.

[The topics discussed are:

-the use of L2 in the classroom

-the need to improve the language competence of the teacher

-Small experiments that have answered many questions

- the need and the urgency to collaborate with others on the present reform project]

Nel mio 'weaving' di messaggi, spero di aver rappresentato tutti. Che ne dite? Se avete altri temi non in elenco su cui vorreste soffermarvi, fatevi sentire e se potete, prima della pausa weekend! *(online moderator)*

[In 'weaving' the messages, I hope I have included everyone's thoughts. Am I right? If you have other topics that you would like to discuss, please write, before the weekend!]

Stage Three: information exchange

ACTIVITY ____ 3 ____ WEEK ____ 3/4 ____ March 1 st – 8 th /15 th	
TASK	REFLECTION IN TEACHING
AIM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage self-observation To identify a possible area of investigation
TIME: TO BE COMPLETED within:	1 / 2 week(s)
TYPE OF INTERACTION: Responding to other messages by ‘constructively’ questioning choices	
FORUM MODERATOR ACTIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Post message with brief introduction of meaning of reflection ask PP to think about areas of interest and post message to others to discuss them
TEACHER TRAINEE ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> post message stating how they reflect on their teaching post topics, themes, areas that they are interested in finding more about or are problematic

The use of the ‘quote’ function available on most computer conferencing systems simplifies the exchange of opinions by highlighting the point made by a participant. CMC software affords the possibility to convey the sense of ‘connectivity’ within community life. Linking, quoting, weaving and summarizing are just some of the techniques that mimic *initiation-response* in spoken conversation, thus creating the idea of an extended face-to-face conversational exchange, which reduces the feeling of isolation that often overwhelms the online learner.

Furthermore, sharing information also means sharing links and other resources to add to the discussion. In this particular exchange, the idea of ‘critical friendships’ acts as a stimulant for further research.

 **Coinvolgimento totale**

quote: *Inserito in origine da _____*

...Sono sempre io...

Uso semplici frasi e le scandisco con chiarezza supportandole col linguaggio mimico-gestuale o iconico. Per favorire la comprensione dei miei messaggi li stimolo quindi a fare anticipazioni e quando qualcuno fa quella esatta lo gratifico con un bel-very good!- Agendo in questo modo ho la sensazione di un coinvolgimento totale dei bambini e soprattutto mi sembra di promuovere un apprendimento consapevole della lingua. 😊

Cara Rosina,

mi è piaciuto molto il commento riflessivo che hai fatto sul coinvolgimento totale del bambino. Questo potrebbe essere un punto di partenza per una tua ricerca su come verificare il grado di coinvolgimento e come vive l'esperienza il bambino. Ciò implicherebbe la preparazione di 'tools' adatti a quella fascia di età per rilevare i dati. Proprio una bella sfida! Hai un critical friend che ti possa aiutare (e aiutare se stesso/a)? (vedi materiali in deposito o visita questo sito: www.actionresearch.com)

[total involvement

Quote: originally from _____ -

...It's me.....I use simple sentences and I pronounce words very clearly, and I also use gestures or visuals. In order to facilitate understanding I elicit their answers and when they get it right I praise them with the expression 'very good'! In doing so, I get the impression of involving everyone and consequently I improve understanding]

[Dear Rosina,

I really liked your comment about the total involvement of children in the lesson. This could be your personal research project, investigating how to involve children and how they respond. This means that you would need to prepare appropriate 'tools' for that age group. I must say it would be a nice 'challenge'! Do you have a critical friend that could help you in this? (and help himself/herself, too) (see material on the website or go to this url:...)]

Stage Four: knowledge construction and development

The lesson plan for Stage Four presents two different tasks and runs for a total of three weeks. This represents the experiential phase of the teacher trainees' work, as they not only continue to exchange

information gathered from classroom observation, but cooperate to design and experiment with ad-hoc, especially prepared materials for their lessons.

ACTIVITY ____ 4 ____ WEEK ____ 5/6 ____	
TASK	OBSERVING - PLANNING - IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS
AIM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experimenting with observation • To test the feasibility of an action by creating a plan • To discuss ‘what can be done’ to improve state of things
TIME: TO BE COMPLETED within:	2 weeks
TYPE OF INTERACTION: PP Read other proposals and respond to at least one	
FORUM MODERATOR ACTIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask PP to write an action plan explaining how they would go about implementing change (possibly as an attached document following a brief message) 2. Ask for contributions of experiments 3. respond to individual plans
TEACHER TRAINEE ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write an introductory message briefly stating plan • Attach plan

ACTIVITY ___ 5 ___ WEEK ___ 7 ___	
TASK	DATA ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION
AIM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To discuss methods of analyzing data
TIME: TO BE COMPLETED within:	2 weeks
TYPE OF INTERACTION: PP respond to proposals	
FORUM MODERATOR ACTIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> respond to individual queries if necessary provide closure
TEACHER TRAINEE ACTIONS	Post messages discussing how they treated data Post final remarks and propose a way to continue professional development

In the following messages, the learners are involved in a critical analysis of ideas, moving beyond the tasks of describing, defining or explaining, and gradually working towards learner independence where the ‘scaffolding’ offered by the moderator vanishes into the background, as does the moderator.

Il rapporto fra L1 ed L2

Ciao a tutti, sono Rita. Stimolante la vostra riflessione sul rapporto L1/L2 in classe!. Per quanto riguarda la mia esperienza, non ho dubbi: usare la L2 il più possibile (la L1 'viene fuori' già da sola fin troppo!)...Sembra scontato, ma non lo è. Spesso noi insegnanti ci facciamo prendere dall'ansia della quantità delle cose che vorremmo insegnare e non badiamo alla qualità.

[The use of L1 and L2

Hi everyone, my name is Rita. Your discussion on the use of L1/L2 in the classroom is very stimulating! From my experience, I don't have any doubts: we need to use L2 as much as possible (L1 is used way too much!)...It sounds normal but it isn't. Teachers often think of quantity of things to cover instead of the quality of the way we teach them]

Cari colleghi,

questo dibattito mi ha particolarmente interessato perché anche io sto valutando quale sia il rapporto ottimale fra L1 ed L2 soprattutto nell'ultimo anno della scuola materna e nel primo ciclo della scuola elementare.

[Dear colleagues, this discussion is very interesting because I often ask myself to what extent should we use L1 or L2, especially during the last year of kindergarten and the first 2 years of elementary school.]

L1 ed L2

Cari colleghi, sono pienamente d'accordo con l'utilizzo in classe della L2 ma ritengo che non si possano applicare regole particolarmente rigide a tale proposito

[L1 and L2

Dear colleagues, I totally agree with using L2 in the classroom, but I think that it is not possible to apply general rules to this]

'tools'

Cari colleghi

Ho usato lo strumento di osservazione in classe con una collega che ha fatto da osservatore. .. The idea that my observing colleague and I came up with, though, is to concentrate only what's on the observation grid without going into detail the first time. That way I know exactly what she would be observing and could get used to the novelty of observation and feedback of my lessons and lesson planning." E la vostra esperienza?

['tools'

Dear colleagues

*I used the observation tool in class with a colleague who was my observer....
(English)and what about your experience?]*

My 'ad hoc' lesson plan

...of course this is a rough outline of the lesson I'm sending you, just to get the main idea. I might also change it! Colleghi, what are you going to do for this lesson? Have you come up with other ideas

(online participant)

Cari colleghi, per il momento la mia ricerca va avanti per 1 ora a settimana e spero soltanto di portarla a termine. Fino ad ora ho registrato i miei interventi in classe e le mie impressioni sulla mia agenda (e che vi mando) ma penso sia il caso di rendere queste mie registrazioni più scientifiche e quindi ho pensato di usare il registratore. Qualcuno di voi lo ha mai adoperato? Chiedo aiuto.

A presto

(online participant)

[Dear colleagues, for the moment I'm carrying out my research for one hour a week and I hope I'll get to the end. I have recorded my 'actions' and my impressions in my diary (which I attach), but I also think that these observations should be more rigorous, so I've decided to use the tape recorder. Has anyone ever used it? Help me please. Talk soon.]

(online participant)

This final message within Stage Four presents a comment from the moderator as an example of how to convey a sense of accomplishment while re-launching the idea of continuous reflection and development.

While you are waiting for some feedback from me, try to think about what you have learned from the **process** of taking part in this course. The messages, tools and links exchange in this forum provide you with a rich source of material to use for your development. The evidence of what you have achieved is here as there is a complete record of every contribution during the past weeks still available for you.

(online moderator)

Redefining the role of teacher trainer: no longer ‘sage on the stage’ but ‘guide on the side’

Salmon explains that an e-moderator or e-trainer, “is the person responding to and building on the contributions to an online conference...and...should prompt, encourage and enable...openness, while acknowledging the personal experience”¹⁵ Although these are competencies shared by any successful classroom leader, a skillful online training professional needs special training to be able to manage a virtual environment without the physical contact and paralinguistic features that make the job so much easier.

The essential task of the e-educator is to encourage communication among participants because it is the only way that all those involved can actually learn from and about each other. An abundance of literature on learner support has claimed for years that a learning experience should cater to individual preferences and styles, but how could we possibly manage this in an environment that is so dramatically different from the face-to-face scenario?

It is certainly an understatement to say that it is not easy to be an online learner and that this modality is not for everyone. Sloman describes a successful online learner as an individual who

¹⁵ Ibid., 79-80.

is motivated, goal-oriented and is willing to sacrifice availability of time and space.¹⁶ E-learners need special assistance, as they are ‘deprived’ of physical interaction and visual feedback that undoubtedly create a disadvantage, consequently resulting in reluctance to participate, fear of losing face, fear of being judged, and dropping out. One common behavior of a member who feels awkward online is to delay contributions. This is known as ‘lurking’ in the online glossary of terms and it mainly involves the participant in ‘browsing’ around the conferences, reading the messages rather than actually posting one. Regardless of the communication style one adopts online, it is important to remember that behind each and every single participant there is always a very real individual who should be encouraged to participate in the knowledge sharing process. It is therefore the role of a skilful e-moderator to create an atmosphere of cooperation and trust, which will guarantee an egalitarian participation from all online community members. In order to do so, all e-moderators should be trained to:

- provide a flexible framework for the content;
- encourage, request and monitor participation;
- respond promptly;
- create interactive and learner-centered tasks;
- be ready to counsel and support online;
- write short open-ended comments;
- avoid message overload;
- establish a timetable: actual time needed vs. lapsed time;
- establish norms for participation;
- protect participants from sarcasm and other unpleasant comments;
- provide limited technical support;
- summarize and weave comments at regular intervals.

It goes without saying, then, that the online educator cannot be improvised, and although many techniques are similar to those used in the face-to-face classroom, proper skills training is needed to work online, especially in the area of learner support. Awareness of learner feelings, learning styles, expectations and background is

¹⁶ Martyn Sloman, *The E-Learning Revolution* (London: CIPD, 2001), 120-121.

achieved only if the e-educator enables and supports communication among the participants. All of this without being in the limelight.¹⁷

Conclusion: ‘learning lies in the domain of the individual’¹⁸

The purpose of the case study presented in this article was threefold. The first objective was to present an example of collaborative action undertaken online, which specifically underpins the notion of a learning community. Roth states: “in recent years, the notion of a community of practice has gained prominence as an analytical tool for understanding, knowing and learning. Communities of practice are characterized by shared practices, conventions, behavior, standards of ethics, viewpoints, etc.”¹⁹ Within a conceptual framework of a ‘community’, my intention was to convey a sense of group belongingness. In an open structure such as a forum where participation is not usually limited to a manageable number of individuals, the idea of a ‘community of inquiry’ guided my intuition on how to design the activities and consolidated the decision that threaded discussions should be centered around main themes and guided by developmental stages.

Nurturing personal online identities was another priority of both the forum and the case study. Considering the lack of the ‘personal touch’ that facilitates the rapport between trainer and individual, online adult educators need to boost self-confidence and foster self-reflection habits exclusively through messages, so that learners feel they count as ‘individuals’ within a caring community of practice.

One final accomplishment of the forum-course was to demonstrate what Tessa Woodward calls the ‘loop approach’. Within an online ‘research community’, teachers examine and evaluate collected information about their teaching and have the opportunity to feed the results back into the ‘real-time’ classroom.²⁰ Hence, on-the-job-

¹⁷ Jenny Preece, *Online Communities. Designing Usability, Supporting Sociability* (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons LTD. , 2000), 83.

¹⁸ Sir John Daniel cited in Sloman, *The E-Learning Revolution*, 117.

¹⁹ William M. Roth, “Authentic School Science: Intellectual Traditions in Learning and Knowledge”, in Robert McCormick and Carrie Paechter, eds., *Learning and Knowledge* (London: The Open University, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd, 1999), 16.

²⁰ Tessa Woodward, *Models and Metaphors in Language Teacher Training*

reflection and immediate dissemination of the outcomes are well sustained by online learning methodology. Roger Schank explains that one of the reasons behind this is the underlying concept of ‘learning by doing’ that, in the context of e-learning, means ‘creating good virtual experiences’ for the learner which are in alignment with his or her expectations and goals.²¹

The breadth of the discussion above has attempted to illustrate some of the essential issues that at present are driving the debate on the potential advantages to be derived from online training. Because it is a big leap towards innovation, it requires careful evaluation since we have just barely begun to scratch the surface of this new pedagogical model. As Anderson affirms: “the challenge for twenty-first-century educators is to create a purposeful community of inquiry that integrates social, cognitive, and teaching presence in a way that will take full advantage of the unique properties of e-learning; those interactive properties that take learning well beyond the lecture hall and information assimilation”.²²

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

²¹ Roger C. Schank, “Learning Via Multimedia Computers”, *Communications of the Association for Computing Machinery* 36.5 (May 1993), 18.

²² Anderson, *E-Learning*, 123.

**TECHNOLOGY,
TEXTUALITY AND
CULTURE**

Giuseppe Balirano

Humourless Indians? A Multidisciplinary Approach to ‘Diasporic’ Humour in Ethnic Media Productions

We live in ideas. Through images we seek to comprehend our world. And through images we sometimes seek to subjugate and dominate others. But picture-making, imagining, can also be a process of celebration, even of liberation. New images can chase out the old.*

Some premises

The transnational migration of images and sounds, commodities and peoples, re-shapes national identities and moulds mutual belonging into new, hybrid, hyphenated products. That is why the discourse on the media should reflect on the multicultural symbiotic transformation that television, the cinema, the internet and the so-called ‘new media’ have operated on their mass audience, by converting the Objects/Others into Subjects/Selves who, in turn, are now investigating the formerly ruling Eurocentric narratives.

Technologies mediate between reality and reality representations relating to wider social transformations, and in particular the media – complicated polysemic architectures of technologies, texts, contexts, processes, ideas, information, and excesses – aim at helping us experience the world beyond the space we occupy. They do so by constructing multiple relationships between the audience and the real world; they mediate between us and reality creating

* Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta Books, 1992).

a version of the world for our consumption. Their operating in the space between the viewing, listening or reading audience and the wide world outside enacts several functions: cultural, social, economic, political, ideological and national. One of the most important functions of the dominant ideology of a country fostered by the media, and in particular by Television, is to establish and maintain a cohesive national identity, so that the representing/represented nation can be wholly engaged in the common perception of the same *Self*. This is a performative function since it advances a social and shared dialectics, giving people common reference points, and has the primary task of encouraging a sense of loyalty and/or patriotism. Indeed, issues of patriotism have often played a fundamental role in shaping and strengthening the connotation of a national identity in opposition to the emerging and disturbing spectrum of *otherness*.¹

Yet, by reaching distant peoples, the media have inadvertently or intentionally provided the many 'voices' and the several colours from *elsewhere* with a possible 'home'. It is this newly de-colonised territory which has led the British national and 'traditional' media production centres – the BBC, for instance – to change direction in the encounter with the multicultural stories which now submerge and 'stain' the original centre, or rather the many centres of numerous contemporary western cities. It is this stain which, flowing into the mainstream culture, is widening its borders, occupying unexplored, un-homely and resistant territories which are inevitably bound to draw new lines, new geographies, new languages and transform national identities into multicultural hybridisations facilitating tolerance and mutual understanding.

This paper, on the grounds of this last assumption, investigates the possibility of identifying the hybrid concept of 'diasporic humour' through the analysis of the Brit-Asian TV series *Goodness Gracious Me! (GGM)* produced and aired by BBC2 in 1998, which was very favourably received – on a very large scale – by the British

¹ See Herbert C. Kelman, "Nationalism, Patriotism, and National Identity: Social-psychological Dimensions", in Daniel Bar-Tal & Ervin Staub, eds., *Patriotism in the Life of Individuals and Nations* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1997), 165-189.

public. In order to define Diasporic Humour,² I have focused on the multimodal linguistic analysis of a short visual humorous sequence from the sketch-show, attempting to locate some linguistic and, in particular, pragmatic strategies underlining the rationale behind the political and social importance that *GGM*'s kind of humour achieves in the creation of a post-national, hybrid identity.

Humour and power

The contemporary hybrid condition of Britain may be analysed in view of the binary perception of the term 'Britishness' operated by Iain Chambers who highlights the existence of "two perspectives and two versions of 'Britishness'. One is Anglo-centric, frequently conservative, backward-looking, and increasingly located in a frozen and largely stereotyped idea of the national, that is English, culture. The other is ex-centric, open ended and multi-ethnic".³ The polysemic term 'Britishness' is used here in the direction of a radical evaluation of power relations, developing it into a general plea for a more mutual assimilation where each attempt at cultural interlocution between the 'Anglo-centric' and the 'ex-centric' perspectives gives rise to deep transformations in both interlocutors, and inevitably allows the creation of new models of representation. These 'other' forms of narration, by *chasing out the old*, undermine the very texture of the collective imagery of a whole nation, which in Britain worked "as an apparatus for narrating the nation as a stable entity with a strong sense of its own identity, and its past achievements, and for securing an image of the nation as a knowable, organic community".⁴

In this hybrid period, what the others/migrants/hybrids *re-produce* is not a copy of the original product designed by the former occupants/rulers/colonisers, but a qualitatively different text, where misunderstandings amplify the doubts and ambivalences of pre-existing and/or contemporary Anglo-centric texts, rejecting their

² On diasporic humour see also Giuseppe Balirano, *The Perception of Diasporic Humour: Indian English on TV* (Loreto: Tecnostampa, 2007).

³ Iain Chambers, *Border Dialogues: Journey in Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, Comedia Book, 1990), 27.

⁴ Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 274.

authorizing existence. The new ex-centric products seem to operate a textual mutiny against the national Anglo-centric discourse of cultural authority, providing the term Nation with a new multicultural, polycentric connotation, which inevitably intensifies the condition of its own system of cultural implications.⁵

At this point, especially since we are referring to a multicultural or hybrid nation such as the United Kingdom, in order to have a wide-ranging insight of the country's multi-ethnic identities and their accomplishments we shall necessarily and unashamedly apply a postcolonial framework of reference to media discourse. The term *hybrid* in postcolonial theory calls attention to the multiple identities generated by the geographical displacements, and assumes a theoretical perspective affected by anti-essentialist post-structuralism, which refuses to control identity along traditionalist positions. Post-colonial theory "emphasizes how hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen to be the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth".⁶

Thus, occupying contradictory social and discursive spaces, hybridity, which is dynamic, mobile, fluid, versatile, less an accomplished blend or pre-arranged formula than an unstable assemblage of discourses, can be easily seen as a relentless process which preceded colonialism and will continue after it, enacting what Salman Rushdie defined, in the opening quotation, "a process of celebration, even of liberation".

Yet, when the ex-centric minorities, within the borders of their new *homes*, in order to strengthen their *different* individualities, turn their gaze ideally to former Motherlands so as to learn, imitate and re-locate newly-spread models of representation, with the purpose

⁵ In the words of Shohat and Stam, a radical multiculturalism enacts a deep transformation in any society since it "calls for a profound restructuring and reconceptualization of the power relations between cultural communities, ... challenging the hierarchy that makes some communities 'minor' and 'normative'", Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism, Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1995), 47 [henceforth Shohat *et al.*].

⁶ Bill Ashcroft, G. Griffith and T. Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), 183.

of reinforcing their hybrid condition from 'elsewhere', media politics draw back to their Eurocentric, nostalgic, conservative ideologies. The media overpoweringly object to such a 'liberating and celebrating' need of *their own* hyphenated citizens, by opposing a very negative image of the East which, as a result, becomes an inaccessible source for the diasporic subject. Accordingly, the distressing and recurring images trans-*lating* India, and the whole of the East in most cases, on Eurocentric screens foster a representation of a miserable country peopled, for example, by terrorists, homeless criminals, cannibals, maimed and tortured bodies. This anchored imagery indulges in the national instability of non-Western countries weakened by hunger, illnesses and partition, representing them as a site where only sorrow, mourning and tears seem to be 'at home'. This atrocity exhibition – frequently interrupted by playful TV advertisements representing a reassuring opulent West – induces audiences to perceive the East as the gloomy and uncanny *Other*, a distant location inhabited by forlorn barbarians who can only be seen as miserable and *humourless* aliens. And if 'through pictures we try to comprehend the world', the figure of the body/alterity typified on the screen conveys to the new hyphenated migrants the same impression the ruins might have conveyed to an Eighteenth century traveller to Greece, that is a *sublime* encounter with their Motherlands, since the body/ruins provoke, at the same time, a ghastly experience and a mysterious pleasure.⁷

The idea of the sublime is consequently built up on the divergent but complementary and simultaneous, image-led, unfocused, and political representation that the euro-centric media design for the East. Such false interpretations inevitably act to 'subjugate and dominate' the Other. The colonial body, anchored by the negative representation the West has construed for it, is therefore transformed into a terror-driven mechanism which helps to shape the stereotyped image of *otherness* as a gloomy and unpleasant experience. One of the most brutal stereotypes of Eurocentric societies is to designate any kind of minority group as a *humourless* community.

⁷ For a more detailed understanding of this specific use of the term *sublime*, see Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquire into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1759), part II.

Humour is a cognitive quality every human being innately owns, and since it should be obviously equally distributed in society, everyone who is considered *humourless* is downgraded to a miserable social de-humanizing position, since the lack of humour diminishes the very idea of humanity itself. That is why in a widely shared western imagery, Jews, Irish, Muslims, women, and lesbians are, to cite just a few examples of peripheralised communities, from time to time stereotypically depicted as humourless, less-human types.⁸

When the East laughs, and it very rarely happens on western screens, it creates a new opening, an unusual place similar to what Homi Bhabha defines an *in-between* territory.⁹ Humour and laughter on the face of Eastern people typically epitomised only as a suffering community trigger a *post-sublime* dimension which can become a powerful instrument in the hands of the migrants. This kind of humour, which I would like to identify as ‘diasporic humour’, has the strength to deterritorialise and subvert the practice of imagining communities, and whereas it may generate isolation by turning audiences into lonely, self-entertaining atoms, it can *otherise* communities and create new relationships which entail an inevitable sharing of power.

Goodness Gracious me!

[...] there’s a generation now who have been brought up here, who feel they have the right to contribute to society in a particular way and take credit for it. They feel they have the right to be visible.

Sanjeev Bhaskar¹⁰

When the *BritAsian* sketch comedy,¹¹ *Goodness Gracious Me!*

⁸ The idea of humourless minorities as a dehumanised representation of alterity comes from a lecture by Don Kulick, *Humorless Lesbians*, at the Second European Workshop in Humour Studies: Humour, Language & Gender. May 20 – 22, 2004, University Residential Center of Bertinoro, University of Bologna at Forli.

⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation”, in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 139-170.

¹⁰ “Mirth of a Nation”, *The Guardian* (February 20, 1999) (henceforth *Mirth*).

¹¹ In the present article, the terms “BritAsians”, and “Indo-Saxons” are used

(*GGM*), appeared for the first time on England's TV screens, the 1990s much praised Anglo-Indian films, ethnic music productions, and theatre renaissance¹² had not yet boosted hybrid productions on national television, since the only few attempts at hybridisation had remained in the margins of the highly announced process for a multi-ethnic development of Britain.¹³ Subsequently, the producer Anil Gupta, formerly Satyajit Ray's production manager on *Ganashatru* (1989, India) and script editor for ITV's hilarious puppet-show *Spitting Image*, presented an innovative 'Asian' comedy to BBC television, in 1995. The BBC head of Comedy and Entertainment, Jon Plowman decided to try the show first as a radio programme, an inexpensive way of proving the potential of an untested groundbreaking comedy. In July 1996, *GGM* was aired on BBC Radio 4 and after immediate success, it led to a full radio series, which, unexpectedly soon, won a prestigious Sony Award.¹⁴ The time was right for BBC2 to switch the radio show to mainstream television and *GGM* became the only terrestrial television show created and performed by Indians to obtain a regular position in the BBC's

interchangeably in order to denote the same hybrid group composed of British subjects of Indian origin. The normal term is "British-Asian", but "Brit-Asian" and "BritAsian" are gaining currency (witness the magazine *Brit-Asian*; see <http://www.brit-asian.com/>). *GGM*'s opening credits introduced the compound neologism "Indo-Saxons" to describe the hybrid nature of the show which the authors defined as an: "Indo-Saxon production", in an obvious opposition/allusion to "Anglo-Saxon". Although, both these terms are somewhat imprecise (fudging, as does the first, especially, between different ethnic Asian groups in the UK); they are used here as simplifications to guide the reader to the rapid identification of the ethnic group.

¹² Ayub Khan-Din's *East Is East* is but one example of the wide success of the Asian culture in diaspora achieved in Britain in the '90s.

¹³ The *BritAsian* development was enacted by second- and third-generation British-born Asians who in the 90s decided to 'make it big' by breaking with conservative white Britain, with the purpose of giving visibility to their *migrant* culture through the media. Things have accelerated somewhat since, thanks to the impetus of such as *GGM*. The new 'cool' BritAsian style is promoted in Channel Four's Media magazine *Second Generation*, where information on comedy, music, fashion, and the new media, created mostly by youngsters such as Tahir Moshan and Nitin Shawhney, can easily be accessed.

¹⁴ The radio show was on air for three series on BBC Radio 4, from 5 to 26 July 1996, then 11 July to 1 August 1997, and the third series, six editions, was broadcast from 21 May to 25 June 1998.

Britcom schedule, so as to win Best New British Television Comedy at the British Comedy Awards, several awards from the Commission for Racial Equality, and a nomination for Best Light Entertainment at the British Academy Awards.¹⁵

The sketch show immediately took its distance from other ethnic programmes broadcast in Britain, and especially from their *Passage to India*'s colonial rhetoric. While TV productions such as *No Problem!* and *Tandoori Nights* were primarily directed to a minority of consumers,¹⁶ *GGM* mainly focusing on racial specificity, and more exclusively on diasporic subjects' personal experiences, attracted a colossal audience of 2.83 million, rising to 3.84 for the second series. Had only Asians watched the show,¹⁷ it would have never been more popular than any other Asian comedy on the screen, but when white people tuned in, the comedy turned out to be a real mainstream success. Yet, it was a show created by and for the BritAsian community "speaking for oneself", as one of the co-writer/actors of the show, Kulvinder Ghir put it, talking about the enormous recognition obtained by *GGM*: "The Asian community feel they have something that belongs to them. Something they can identify with and call their own".¹⁸

The style of the show was similar to that of popular British TV shows, such as *Monty Python* and *The Fast Show*, where recurring characters granted continuity to the programme by highlighting the eerie connection between nation, politics and culture through explicit satirical sketches, typical of non-realistic television. And in particular *GGM*, working between the boundaries of a postcolonial,

¹⁵ In 1999, after only two TV series the show became so popular as to produce a hugely successful UK theatre tour.

¹⁶ Farrukh Dhondy, Commissioning Editor of Multicultural Programmes at C4, produced a sitcom, *Tandoori Nights*, about two competing Indian restaurants in London, which was screened in July 1985. It is the story of Jimmy Sharma, the owner of the "Jewel In The Crown", a luxurious restaurant in Brick Lane in the East End, and of a restless Bengali waiter, Rashid, who opens a less exclusive little restaurant, "The Far Pavilions", right across the road. *Tandoori Nights* was the second Asian sitcom to appear on British TV following *No Problem!*, but apart from the migrant background of the characters it was not very different from any other mainstream series.

¹⁷ A condition which proved untrue, since there were only 1.26 million South-Asians in the country, while the show reached 3.84 million viewers in 1998.

¹⁸ *Mirth*.

post-national, hybrid identity, exploited those Anglo-centric satirical techniques with the purpose of openly criticizing national/realist television. The subjects for the sketch show were, in fact, all inspired by the actors/writers' diasporic experiences and cultural bewilderment, suggesting the difficult relocation of 'home'. They wanted to represent the diasporic struggle to outline and establish a personal new dimension within the nation, expressing at the same time the marked desire for a real Indian culture. The need for an authentic representation of India, which seemed to be very weak and Westernised within the imagery of second- and third-generation BritAsians, is carried out in all sketches¹⁹.

The main characters as well as the co-writers of many of the sketches are four young 'cool' and emerging Asians: Meera Syal, Nina Wadia, Kulvinder Ghir and Sanjeev Bhaskar. Meera Syal is the author of a number of successful TV and film scripts, including *Bhaji on the Beach* and the multi-award-winning *My Sister Wife*, in which she also starred. She also wrote and appeared in BBC hit comedy series, *The Real McCoy*. Her first novel, *Anita and Me*, 1997, won a Betty Trask Award and was short-listed for the Guardian Fiction Prize. Her most recent work is the witty *Life isn't All ha ha hee hee*, 1999. Nina Wadia is a stand-up comedian and actress, already famous in radio and on stage; Kulvinder Ghir who started out doing impressions in Yorkshire working-men's clubs and has since become both a playwright and an actor;²⁰ and finally Sanjeev Bhaskar, a well-known BritAsian TV actor²¹.

Although the ethnic humorous formula may have seemed

¹⁹ For insights into the status of British-Asian English and the language practices of young BritAsians, see, e.g. in Ben Rampton, *Crossing: Language and Ethnicity among Adolescents* (London: Longman 1995), and Mike Reynolds and Mahendra K. Verma, "Indic languages" in David Britain, ed., *Language in the British Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 293-307; and Ben Rampon, Roxy Harris and Constant Leung, "Education and Speakers of languages other than English" in David Britain, ed., *Language in the British Isles*, 411-435.

²⁰ Ghir was highly praised for his role in Trevor Griffith's *Thatcher's Children*, where he played a drug-dealing Sikh.

²¹ Now even more popular, thanks to his *Kumars at Number 42* talk-show (debut on BBC 2, November 2001- seventh and last show series in 2006; still airing on Fox and many channels around the world; witness his recent BBC documentary TV series *India with Sanjeev Bashkar*; aired August 2007) on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Partition.

BritAsian-specific with clinging mothers, girls regarded as inferior citizens, the pretentiousness of assimilation within a very Anglo-centric idea of Britishness, the topics were mostly based on universal issues, and were presented in such a witty way as to become mainstream ‘quotable quotes’. Owing to a very accessible kind of humour ranging from satire to slapstick, traditional English sketches, film and TV spoofs and hilarious farces, *GGM* has succeeded in meeting the tastes and the needs of a wide non-Asian audience as well.²²

Diasporic humour on the BBC

Humour alone assures me that the most prodigious reversals are legitimate. Humour alone alerts me to the other side of things.
(Aimé Césaire)

Goodness Gracious Me along with the tendency of most TV shows and comedies does not veil ideology under a hidden realistic narration; besides, an explicit realistic aesthetics would be theoretically impossible in such a kind of entertaining representation. Nevertheless, this absence of reality does not imply that nothing ‘real’ happens, since viewers are always capable of distinguishing a sense of the real behind each sketch, either by borrowing it from their own experience, or simply on the basis of what they can accept as feasible, or identifiable as subverted representation. On the contrary, it is the absolute and overt lack of verisimilitude which gives rise to an ideological clash, highlighting contrasting aspects of reality by means of a fragmented narration and an unusual exploitation of humour. A general unrealistic aesthetics, especially when indulging in visibly simulated studio-sets, the incessant recurrence of the same – only four – leading actors in almost all scenes acting out different roles, and the unlikely fast succession of events are all expedients which *GGM* inevitably employs to enact both the rescue of classical British comedy conventions, and the postcolonial shaping of hybrid identities, mostly by means of reversed stereotypes.

²² Almost 80 percent of the audience was white.

Stereotyping the Other is a natural cognitive process,²³ but it is also the consequence of the Western desire to convert, adjust and shape alterity into a culturally identifiable, familiar product; otherwise any form of empathy and thus communication would be impracticable, as Edward Said maintains:

...one ought to remember that all cultures impose corrections upon raw reality, changing it from free-floating objects into units of knowledge. The problem is not that conservation takes place. It is perfectly natural for the human mind to resist the assault on it of untreated strangeness; therefore cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving those other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be.²⁴

And it was just 'for the benefit of the receiver' that the show's producer Anil Gupta wanted some of the jokes to be Anglocentric, white-friendly, or as he defined them, 'entry-level sketches'²⁵; this would help everyone participate in the show without the feeling of being excluded by incomprehensible culturally and linguistically connoted skits which could, at this point, subtly and gradually, come along with entry-level sketches. As Gupta stated, "If you like that, then once you are in, we'll do these other ones".²⁶ This stratagem was without any doubt winning, since it helped the comedy to make it into the mainstream while keeping 'these other ones' alive and effective.²⁷

The show's most successful skits are stereotyped reversals which hinge exclusively on turning inside out the multifaceted encounters between Indian and Western experiences. Reversals are not simple repetitions, they represent a fracture in what is known and accepted as humorous by the same community but located in

²³ George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

²⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 54.

²⁵ *Mirth*.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁷ "Entry-level sketches" include characters drawn from the Asian experience, but with universal appeal, such as the matriarch "who can make everything at home for nothing", or mothers boasting about their sons.

a different and upturned situation, where the subjects become the objects under scrutiny, where the *West* becomes – and accepts to be – the ‘underdog’ ridiculed by the East.

The subversion and constant replication of well-known sketches, typically belonging to the traditional and much praised British ‘sense of humour’, develops into a powerful humoristic apparatus, allowing a disseminating kind of subtle humour to seep into ‘the other side of things’. As a consequence this hybridised new formula, which results from the repetition of Anglocentric pre-existing recipes, bestows originality and uniqueness on the BritAsian show, on the principle that every repetition is a necessary alteration; therefore, if meaning is generated through replication, any connotation can be forged, reversed, adapted. According to Jacques Derrida’s principle of *iterability*, language works because it can be cited and, as a result, if something is not repeated it does not really mean.²⁸ Consequently, the linguistic sign, a universal symbol of all things and beings, must be quotable in order to mean, since nothing has a proper ‘origin’ but everything changes and becomes new, original, and, **therefore**, ‘the most prodigious reversals are legitimate’.

From this point of view, the evident and determined reiteration in *GGM*’s exploitation of humorous ‘subverted’ sketches, cannot be merely interpreted as a plain evidence of digression and redundancy, but as the creation of a distinctive liberating power. *GGM* nullifies the notion of ‘origin’, going across the margins of a different dimension since through its hybridity and iterability, a non-original, non-identical existence is established. This heterogeneous paradigm of the “Indo-Saxon” TV show proves, thus, that the dualism between subjects and objects, or between the individual and the universal can be overcome by way of Diasporic Humour. When *GGM*’s powerful satire generates a hybrid, Indo-Saxon form of narration, humour is subverted into *diasporic humour*, in as much as it:

1. draws attention to power differences, and this marked differentiation disseminating from India to England creates a subverted balance of power;

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context”, trans. Alan Bass, reprinted in J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 309-330.

2. tends to release anxiety in the construction of each other's Other/reversed Self;
3. fashions a hybrid post-nation, where the concept of 'mainstream' is, at the same time, weakened and amplified.

When the former colonised Self, in her/his new hybrid ex-centric position, emerges from the past and tells her/his story to the coloniser by means of an *iterable* humorous narration, both eurocentric and ex-centric subjects acknowledge the re-presentation of the Other as a reversed Self, and by doing so they insinuate the possibility of a hybrid post-nation.

A multimodal analysis of GGM

The following sketch "Let's go for an English!"²⁹, from the first series of *GGM*, has been selected and examined with the purpose of detecting the way some rhetorical elements are used to uncover and formalise various features related to the concept of Diasporic Humour in *GGM*. Given the 'multimodal' nature of TV productions, that is, the presence of simultaneous modes of communication, the analysis of the rhetorical strategies implemented in the creation of reversed stereotypes in *GGM* will be carried out in a pragmatic perspective, which allows the study of visual humorous texts not only in a merely linguistic and semiotic perspective, but also from a cultural perspective. In addition, this kind of analysis will necessarily make use of a number of elements of concern to pragmatic linguistics, such as the extralinguistic factors adding to the illocutionary and perlocutionary force of texts and utterances: voice pitch, facial expressions, fillers or phatic elements, and others.³⁰

The sketch, which is one of the most prodigious reversals in *GGM*, features a group of drunken Indians going 'for an English' to

²⁹ The title is given by the present author for reference purposes.

³⁰ The multimodal analysis techniques adopted here exploit Paul Thibault's "multimodal transcription" with some necessary adjustments to match the features of the corpus under scrutiny. (See Paul J Thibault, "The Multimodal Transcription of a Television Advertisement: Theory and Practice", in Anthony Baldry, ed., *Multimodality and Multimediality in the Distance Learning Age* (Campobasso: Palladino, 2000).

the *Mountbatten* restaurant in Bombay. The party's rudeness harasses the white waiter in exactly the same way that might happen to Indian waiters in Europe. The show reaches its humorous climax when, having decided to opt for the worst food on the menu, one of costumers in the party arrogantly utters the famous question, "What's the blandest thing on the menu?". This lampoon re-iterates and reverses earlier jokes on the same topic by Rowan Atkinson (Mr Bean), and has a strong impact on the white viewers who, in need of the immediate pleasure of humour release, accept the racial slurs against the white waiter albeit they would be ashamed to voice the same ethical considerations in a serious non-reversed conversation. This kind of 'judgment suspension' reaction is the typical response to jokes or humorous texts where the Gricean principles of co-operation are inevitably broken for the ironical incongruity to be accepted and resolved.³¹

The skit begins as a mini-film parody of an Indian cinema advertisement which simultaneously shifts between the location of the 'real' audience watching TV at home – here/England – and the typical 'fictitious' spectator in an Indian cinema – there/India, "just around the corner of this cinema" as the advertisement promotes. The juxtaposition of different images and tropes constitutes the script opposition underlying the humorous text, and in particular, the two overlapping macro-scripts England vs. India are then – without difficulty – declined into Englishman vs. Indian and to a lower level 'white man' vs. 'black man'.³²

The choice of adopting old images from the 60s is to evoke the days when Indian restaurants were promoted in Western cinemas and when the whole lot about India was still felt as mysterious, sublime, and exotic. In the reversal, the restaurant is an English restaurant (frame 1) where everyone, from the chef (frame 2) to the waiter, is English and white, but the location is of course India, 222 Viceroy Place, Bombay (frame 3).³³ This indulging between new and old, near and far tropes,

³¹ Paul H. Grice, "Logic and Conversation", *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

³² On Script Opposition Theory, see Victor Raskin, *Semantic Mechanism of Humor* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985).

³³ Lord Mountbatten was Viceroy of India in 1947 and Governor General of India in 1948 upon the eve of the independence. Therefore, both the name of the restaurant and its location take on a symbolic meaning.

and the post-modern, post-national allusion to Hindi cinema, introduces a twofold narration of nations – England/India – in what Bhabha (1994: 145) calls a “double-time” – now/then –, enacting a “double-writing or dissemi-*nation*”, past-India/present-England.



1.

2.

3.

Diasporic Humour is to be found in the dichotomy of space and time which seeps into this thoroughly hybrid narration, an Indo-Saxon tale, since the sketch draws a clear connection between England and India, and their mutual fondness of cinema which has enhanced the awareness of the Other in both cultures/nations.

The language of the Indian party at the restaurant is very offensive and highly connoted, and their rudeness, especially towards the white waiter, sets the scene for an irritating, racist situation which, portrayed as it is by means of a reversal, becomes the diasporic humorous element. This type of humour has, nevertheless, the power to induce the audience to think about the unthinkable in a more or less serious situation or public sharing while laughing at the silly jokes, since the humorous texture here arises from the unexpected use of the socially unacceptable racial discrimination. Here is an exemplary short passage from the sketch which illustrates the linguistic power of the reversal:³⁴

³⁴ The transcription conventions are drawn from Jefferson's notation system, see Atkinson J. Maxwell and J. Heritage, *Structures of Social Action. Studies in Conversational Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): ix-xvi; Ian Hutchby and Robin Wooffitt, *Conversational Analysis. Principles, Practices and Applications* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), vi-vii), except for the symbol (≠) chosen here as a convention to mark the occurrence of canned laughter:

- = 'latching' between utterances (no interval)
- ? Rising intonation
- ˘ Weaker rising intonation

	Visual Frame	Action	Verbal Transcription
1		The first woman (W1) addresses the waiter physically, by touching him on his back-side. He jumps embarrassed.	W1: ! I say young manī, †you're my <u>mate</u> ī aren't you, Jamid. īī
2		W1 looks at her friends (W2) to reiterate the previous statement.	W1: °Jamid's my <u>mate</u> . °
3		The waiter speaks with a low tone, quite embarrassed, but he dominates the scene with his physical attractiveness.	Waiter: †Actually it's James.
4		W1 touches again the waiter on his back side, and puts on an irritated tone. The man looks puzzled.	W1: <u>Jams</u> , yes that's what I said!
5		W2 to W1, ironically and in a gossiping mode.	W2: †Hasn't he got lovely pale <i>skinia</i> ?ī
6		W1 nods interested, showing female sympathy to her friend's provocative remark	W2: =¿it's really nice and pasty looking. īī
7		Both W2 and W1 turns inquisitively towards the waiter	W1: =? Yeah, but you know what that say about white men, ¿don't you?
8		W1 and W2 can't stop laughing, while the waiter turns right, looking rather upset.	((Both women burst into a laugh)) īī

- ! Animated or emphatic tone
- " Marked rising intonational shift of the following utterance
- ” Marked falling intonational shift of the following utterance
- ((note)) Transcriber's notes
- °text° Quieter utterance
- Under Speaker's emphasis
- ≠ Canned laughter

The sequence above can be divided into three main phases (frames 1-4; 5-6; 7-8), each corresponding to different utterances of *Verbally Expressed Humour*³⁵ and to different markers of irony derived from the analysis of the images and the intonation/accent pitches, though all bound by the unique purpose of addressing and deconstructing a common humorous object: the waiter's white body. The three characters in the eight close-ups occupy a central on-screen position since the Indian ladies are sitting at a table while the waiter is standing in the middle of the scene. His body, in main close-up, works as the underdog in the sequence, continually jeopardised by the ladies' authority, and in particular by W1's repeated physical interaction with it (see frames 1 and 4), and with the women's final verbal harassment which works to create the reversed stereotype.

The first phase plays with the difficulty of properly pronouncing the waiter's common English name, James. Altering (Jamid) or mispronouncing (Jams) a name produces an inevitably humorous effect on the audience which, by means of a simple association with the typical difficulty English people (or the former colonisers) encounter in pronouncing Indian names, laughs at the mispronunciation while thinking how irritating the situation must be when experienced in real life. W1 alters the waiter's name by calling him by an Indian name, Jamid (pronounced [dja'meed]) in the first instance. Then, she reiterates her mistake in the second frame and finally, after the waiter's useless attempt at correcting it, the 'lady' turns James into a less credible Jams (pron.: [jams]), showing her irritation for being corrected, also increasing the tone of her voice and turning her gaze elsewhere, angrily. The first level of humour is thus established since the construction of the VEH is mainly a growing innuendo (as underlined also by the increasing effect of canned laughter). Moreover, the physical contact established by W1 in frame 1, and the derived embarrassment of the waiter lead to "metacommunicative" and "paracommunicative alerts" respectively which signal to the viewers the presence of an ironical sequence.³⁶

³⁵ On "verbally expressed humour" see Delia Chiaro, "Investigating the Perception of Translated Verbally Expressed Humour on Italian TV", *ESP Across Cultures* 1.1 (2004), 35-52.

³⁶ A *Metacommunicative alert* is found when a particular marker is produced by the

Diasporic Humour works on a deeper or second level here, since it is obviously linked to a cultural reflection on what happens in the scene by means of the reversal situation of Indian people seeing their names turned into English familiar names.

As a matter of course, since in our society names fulfil both a public and a private function, they epitomise the identity of every human being; thus changing or not accepting a name creates a dehumanising effect on the subject who is inevitably confined to a newly imposed identity. Re-shaping someone's name has a strong performative function since it allows the naming subject to assume a superior position over the re-named recipient, who has to renounce his previous pre-existing identity. To name someone is an act of power since it is connected to the public assignment of a new identity. Humour here plays with the typical enslaving supremacy of the coloniser, originally associated with the power of naming. Re-naming draws on the history of colonialism, as colonisers gave 'familiar-sounding' names to the places and peoples they met on their route as a mark of possession, as a form of creation. In consequence, colonialism deprived the colonised of their *unspeakable* names and gave them other, more Eurocentric, conventional nicknames in order to mark them as colonial possessions. Re-naming means writing on the body of the other, chaining it with the intention of enslaving the subject's identity.

The second phase presents the ladies' 'reversed' appreciation of the waiter's fair complexion ('pale skinia' and 'pasty looking') which plays with the reversed stereotype of the typical Western appreciation of the exotic brown skin, seen as a symbol of health and the reverberated glow of sunny colonial lands. The exchange here is humorous as it portrays the typical stereotype of brown/white skin in a reversed mode working on both a semantic and

speaker in order to inform the hearer that the previous or concomitant utterance is to be interpreted as humorous. In this sequence, W1 slapping the waiter's back while saying "you are my mate, aren't you, Jamid?". A *Paracomunicative alert* is a marker of irony which communicates something in opposition to the verbally expressed utterance, so that the hearer understands that the situation is meant to be ironical, in this case the waiter's *blank face*. See also S. Attardo, J. Eisterhold, J. Hay and I. Poggi, "Multimodal Markers of Irony and Sarcasm", *Humor: International Journal of Humor Studies* 16.2 (April-June 2003), 243-260.

phonetic level since the inflection of the Indian pronunciation by W2 (/skinia/ for *skin*) and the semantic reference to the white skin as a mark of beauty creates a suggestive dichotomous effect. Moreover, the typical Anglo-Indian accent mainly used in *GGM*, known as a *chee-chee* accent, differs most visibly from RP particularly in its prosodic characteristics and this creates an overpowering humorous effect. In particular, stressed syllables are characterised by a low-rising pitch with a rise on the following syllables, and the final consonant syllable is generally lengthened, thus [skinia:] for *skin* in frame 5.³⁷

The third phase of this sequence introduces another reversed stereotype which is connected to a long series of Western jokes on Indian men's hypothetical small *membrum virilis*. In the reversal the white man is, in fact, scrutinised in his sexual anatomical parts by both women who create the final punch line of the sequence with the rhetorical question 'You know what they say about white men, don't you?' (frame 7). The easy substitution of the item 'white' for 'Indian' which underlines the whole scene, performs the hilarious reversal which at a first level of humour is largely accepted and appreciated by the audience.

Diasporic Humour introduces the joke on Indian men's small penis by drawing on a very powerful stereotype which has the strength to relocate a whole population of Indian men on a lower cultural level. As a matter of fact, according to Freud's analysis of the psychology of gender,³⁸ the lack of the penis becomes the explanation for the 'inferiorised' and 'alternative' psychology of women under patriarchy. The male organ represents the inheritance of 'cultural authority' and its continuation through the male. Freud was especially concerned with the mechanisms of the 'mastering plan' of patriarchal culture, and the vital role that sexed subjectivity plays within it. Lacking the penis means occupying an inferior position in society, therefore it inevitably dehumanises the (male) subject who, via the so-called castration process, is subjugated by the system thus losing his male, dominating identity. The pseudo-small *membrum* attributed to

³⁷ John C. Wells, *Accents of English* vol.3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 630-631.

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Standard Edition (1905), 123-246.

Indian men by the colonisers has the function to disrupt the power of the authority, the dichotomy between 'masculine' and 'feminine' by destroying their gender identity and creating various conflicting possibilities in relation to the culturally acceptable strictures of power and identity.

Conclusions

The sketch analysed is linked, although completely self-contained, to other skits of the three series by a common contaminating reference to the language of cinema, including filmic studio-sets or post-production teams at work. *GGM* plays with different kinds of contamination in terms of textual/filmic genres, identity and nationalities. *GGM*'s recurring references to the cinema, the national leading mass medium of India, strengthen the implication of a post-national identity, which while encouraging the formation of a hybrid culture, does not call for a detachment from the original culture. On the contrary, as *GGM* demonstrates by stressing the importance of Bollywood as a mark of both national and post-national appropriations,³⁹ a hybrid culture can bring together groups as heterogeneous as diasporic subjects, and all the white viewers who accept to merge with multicultural and ex-centric cultural expressions. The subversive humorous power of many of the sketches arises from Bollywood's central position in BritAsian cultures, fostering a dominating representation of India with its creative power of the imagination.

The cinematographic skits in *GGM* evoke a satirical, postmodern, postnational image of India which emerges as a dominant 'imaginary homeland' overshadowing the BritAsian imagination of the subcontinent in its correspondence to Britain. As a matter of fact, images of the two countries are continually opposed and overlap creating a humorous incongruity which is resolved (or pseudo-resolved) into a hybrid anchored message.

³⁹ Bollywood is the leading film industry in the world. It produces between 700 and 1,000 Hindi films a year. "Unfortunately, 'standard' film histories, and the media generally, not to mention local cineplexes and video stores, rarely call attention to this filmic cornucopia" (Shohat *et al.*, 29).

In conclusion, this analysis, which does not claim to be comprehensive, shows how *GGM*'s insistence on the persistent exploitation of reversed stereotypes, by subverting the typical stereotyping of the Anglo-Indian community and the way the white man perceives it, relies not simply on the assumptions of the viewer, but also on the characteristics of the group being described. Diasporic Humour is introduced in the sketch show by means of both verbally expressed humour and anchored TV images of reversal stereotypes, which translate the Others (Indians) into Selves (British-Asians) in order to reduce anxiety in their relocation abroad. It has also the function of drawing attention to power differences by subverting the *status quo* and the very sense of Britishness itself, and by doing so this marked differentiation disseminating from India to England creates a subverted balance of power. This kind of humour tends to discharge viewers' anxiety in the construction of each other's Other/reversed Self. Thus, while on one hand, the Indo-Saxon community finds a place to express its own culture in diaspora, on the other, the white Anglosaxons avoid the shame of being racialists by enjoying the sallies which are humorous just because they are proposed as reversed stereotypes.

Therefore, Diasporic Humour – a subversive tool in the hands of a young group of BritAsians – creates a hybrid post-nation, where the concept of 'mainstream' (BBC) is, simultaneously, destabilised and extended to and by voices from 'elsewhere'.

The Indian community has in fact succeeded through the first impetus of this popular and successful sketch show – watched by over three million British subjects in the late 90s– which paved the way for even more popular comedy successes, such as *The Kumars at n. 42* (2001-2006)⁴⁰, to achieve a fierce and coherent hybrid representation of their ex-centric status, accessing, and exploiting – as humorous hybrids⁴¹ – mainstream terrestrial television (BBC2, and BB1) for a more wide-spread appropriation of power.

⁴⁰ See Giuseppe Balirano "The Kumars at no. 42: Hybrid vs Ethnic Scripts in Diasporic Humour" (in prep.).

⁴¹ For a discussion of the problematic meaning and misuse of the term and concept of hybridity, see Giuseppe Balirano and Jocelyne Vincent "Migrating English in postcolonial *trans*-lation: Brit-Asian /Desi as the source/ target of diasporic representations", talk delivered at the XXIII AIA Conference, *Forms of migration - Migration of forms*, Bari, 20 September 2007 (forthcoming).

Sara Griffiths

Technology and the Text

This article will explore three uses of the word ‘technology’ in relation to oral and written texts.

Firstly we will briefly discuss what Technology’s (with a capital T) possible relationship or role could be in relation to the complex configurations of social, cultural, political, and economic events that bring change. More specifically, technological change will be considered as relational to these other changes not as a cause or result of them. Obviously this is just one approach to this complex question which has and will continue to vex historians, sociologists, economists, and the Social Sciences in general.

The second aspect will concern a brief history of the specific application of various ‘technologies’ to ‘linguistic’ texts.

While the last aspect will compare print book text technology with new emerging text forms mediated by computer technology in an attempt to get a clearer picture of what is happening to the text.

Technology and change

As M.A.K. Halliday suggests in *Language in a Changing World*,¹ Settlement was probably the first major and profound economic, social, cultural, ‘technological’ and semiotic upheaval in the history

¹ M.A.K. Halliday, *Language in the Changing World*, Applied Linguistics Association of Australia, Occasional Paper, n. 13, 1993.

of mankind. The shift from hunting and gathering to pastoral and agricultural practices mandated the invention of writing ‘technology because oral communication was unable to provide the permanency needed for new settlement activities such as record keeping and the production of other documents essential to the survival and organization of new village settlements. This new semiotic semogenic mode of communication called writing enabled human communications to acquire a new dimension in the progressive ‘quest’ for the semiotic construction of and control over ‘reality’.

This does not mean that the previously dominant oral mode of communication completely ‘lost out’ to writing but rather that it gradually lost its prominent position as the main mode of communication, However it continued to co-exist alongside writing and other later and new semiotic modes of communication.

Halliday hypothesizes at least three other possible major economic, social, cultural and semiotic-communications upheavals:

...A second is probably the ‘Iron’ age of classical Greece, India and China ...A third would be the so-called ‘renaissance’ in Europe culminating in the industrial revolution. And we should now add a fourth, namely the present: the move into the information age....²

He then goes on to suggest the exact nature of the changes brought by these complex configurations of events;

A significant component in these historical upheavals...is a change in ways of meaning. With settlement....there developed a new semiotic mode, namely writing...[and] this shift [to] ‘settlement’ semantics is of course masterminded by grammar; but also constituted iconically by the shift into the written medium....³

In other words various relational configurations of social, political, economic, cultural and technological events throughout human history have provided new semiotic modes of communication in the form of new texts that have continued to add new dimensions and expand human communicative capabilities.

² Ibid., 9.

³ Ibid., 9-10.

In this post-industrial era, information-based economies (where information is the raw material, the tool and the product) are making increasingly exponential use of technologically based tools like the computer which are producing many new modes of communication. Specifically these new computer-based technologies offer new computer-mediated spaces in which to create texts – spaces which are different from those that have preceded them. As a result we can no longer conceive of a text as something located exclusively on a page in a printed book . Obviously the expansion of writing spaces to the screen and its electronic memory storage, in turn, bring with them new kinds of literacies and reading practices.

A brief history of text technologies

For a long time, tradition has associated ‘good’ writing, symbolized by the models of the literary canon, with text stability and linearity and the authority of the author. But for our purposes it is important to remember that, until this last century, the stability of the text and the authority of the author were almost exclusively conditioned by writing and print technology and those who controlled them.

As early as the fifth century b.c., Greek poets and historians realized the power of writing to fix ideas and ‘memory’. For example Herodotus’ history of the wars between the Greeks and the Persians ‘canonized’ those events and prevented them from being forgotten. But while the Greeks were mainly concerned with the immortality of the subject , the Romans where more interested in the immortality of the author. So it is not by chance that the Latin language has given us the words ‘author’ and ‘authority’ and that by the first century a.d. Roman reverence and nostalgia for authors like Vergil, Cicero and Livy were almost canonical.

The appeal to written authority was perhaps even more marked in the Middle Ages. While more stability was given to the text through the more durable parchment ‘technology’, the great ‘revolution’ came with the organization of the text into the codex-page format and the following conversion of ancient and classical texts into a primitive book form from their original non-linear, unstable formats composed of unbroken streams of alphabetical characters with no inter-word

spacing, capitalization or punctuation. Control over the conversion of old texts into this standardized format, along with its monopoly over the recording and distribution of information, permitted the Church to consolidate its power by equating the authority of the author with that of *the one and only Author (God)* and foregrounding that authority on the Bible and the Holy Scriptures. This process of yoking permanency, stability and authority to control in the service of power enabled the Church to manufacture its meaning through the ages and continually legitimized itself through references to the 'Fathers' of the Church and Sacred Scriptures and texts.

Only with the Renaissance, dependent as it was on the glorification and the restoration of authoritative ancient texts and the propagation of their contents, was serious consideration given to the question of control over text transmission. So the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg and its combination with the older codex-page book format technology, enabled texts to be preserved, duplicated, made portable and circulated. This added to the authority of the book.

But the Renaissance had seen the beginning of secularization of Western European societies and with it other kinds of texts appeared like the scientific writings of Galileo, Newton and others, the Treatises of Erasmus and Machievelli, Darwin and Marx – to name but a few. This complex configuration of events called into question the old established authorities and their ideas, it allowed new elites of authors with new ideas to challenge the old order, 'wrestle' the text from these established elites and legitimize and institute themselves as the new 'authorities'.

While the physical appearance of the text was standardized in the print book form, control over senogenic interpretation of its content and meaning was another question. The easiest way to do this was to shackle the text to some ideal, stable, hierarchical model and the well-known and respected Aristotlean linear plot, based on a beginning, middle and end in chronological order, was the ideal candidate. The next step was to 'invent' the literary canon which, for many centuries, guaranteed control over the access to the use of print book technology. This subtle form of 'censorship' gave certain authors, whose works reflected the mainstream of currently acceptable ideas, the 'divine right' to be included in the canon while others, not so orthodox, were excluded. Thus 'unwanted' texts were

marginalized from the mainstream of publishing and therefore of general reading.

As audiences for ‘popular’ and elite literature and all kinds of non-fictional and scientific writing expanded the authority of the author also grew. Not only could most well-known writers almost always get their writings into print and immortalize and stabilize their opinions, but control over printing technology also gave the author and the editor absolute control over the text.

However the complex configurations of events of the post-industrial era along with the advent of the computer and its use for the production of new kinds of texts and the storage and retrieval of large amounts of information is gradually ‘snatching’ control of the text from authors and publishers and breaking up their monopoly. Computer-mediated texts represent, as have most text technologies before it, a threat to pre-existing constituted elites.

Computer-mediated texts

Most digital or computer-mediated texts are distinguished from the so-called linear stable traditional print book texts produced with print technology in at least one of three ways.

Firstly computer-mediated texts are screen and computer-technology based.

Secondly, the majority of computer-mediated texts can be manipulated physically in ‘real time’ by their readers. This can take several forms:

1. texts that can be changed at any time before *and* often after their ‘publication’ by authors *and* readers e.g. word processing and desktop publishing.
2. texts which, when organized singularly or collectively in hypertext form on the Internet or in network, can be read in many and different ‘real time’ reading orders and therefore interpreted differently according to reader interests and preferences.
3. texts that provide for interactive reader participation which can consist of tagging on new documents, re-arranging passages of text and other kinds of reader participation.

The net effect of this technology is to produce texts that are 'living' and 'unstable' because of the continuous mutation of their physical structure and their 'meaning'.

Thirdly computer-mediated texts can contain both intertextual and interactive elements. The first allow primary text to be connected to other or secondary documents/texts in a web or network by the use of hypertext while interactive elements allow reader-text interaction through mechanisms which allow the reader to tag on text, e-mail, choose reading paths etc. This results in a variety of text configurations whose borders are more or less fluid and whose centers continually change as the reader shifts his/her attention and interest.

Therefore new computer-mediated textualities represent a clear shift to synchronic kinds of text from the traditional Aristotelian deterministic text model and its canonical heirs characterized by 'linear', stable, hierarchical organization constituted by the triad of author/work/tradition compounded in and by the physical print book format. The synchronic elements of digital texts are provided by various combinations of intertextuality, interactivity, and physical text manipulation in 'real time'. This produces texts whose meanings are senogenic. Therefore it is no longer possible to consider *all* texts as *only* linear, sequential, pre-ordained trips or invitations to read in an irreversible way from the beginning through the middle to the end.

It is also clear that these new texts, which are quickly becoming mainstream, cannot be relegated to unwanted 'experimental' texts unacceptable to the canon nor can they remain on the margins of text theory just because they do not fit into traditional text models. This implies an almost total reconfiguration of what it is to be a text – a question which will be left to another time and place.

What follows here will be an attempt to classify these new emerging computer-mediated texts by comparing them with the previous text technology or the printed book.

Word processing and desktop publishing

Word processing and desktop publishing are excellent examples of 'moving' real time text.

Never before have the visual aspects of texts like font sizes and

types, page layouts, the inclusion of audio and visual text and overall text formats and designs been able to be so quickly and effectively changed as in word processing.

In addition the newest word processors and their desk top publishing software have brought the text to ‘do-it-yourself’ real time publishing.

It can be argued, therefore that word processing and desktop publishing are and will have profound effects not only on the speed, cost and efficiency of text production and publication but also on WHO can now write and publish.

Hypertext

When talking about hypertext we need to first ask what it is. And secondly distinguish between two broad uses of hypertext. Hypertext as a systematic medium or tool which organizes already written texts by ‘translating’ them into networked formats on CD Roms, the World Wide Web or the Internet to be accessed through the computer on its screen. And ‘pure’ hypertext which is the raw material, the tool and the product and is therefore text conceived and presented in the hypertext format of non-sequential writing in order to be read in non-sequential reading orders.

To define hypertext it might be useful to take a brief trip back into the history of the founders’ intentions for it.

Some fifty years ago Vannevar Bush, head of the Office of Scientific Research Development during World War II, found old methods of document storage and retrieval inadequate in relation to the enormous amounts of information produced during the Second World War. So he developed his *Memex* machine to process both text and pictures.

In his article *Classic Technology: as we may think* (Atlantic Monthly, July 1945), he explains his problems with actual information storage systems:

Our ineptitude in getting the record is largely caused by the artificiality of systems of indexing. When data of any sort are placed in storage, they are filed alphabetically or numerically, and information is found (when it is) by tracing it down from subclass to subclass. It can be in only one place, unless duplicates are used;

.... Having found one item, moreover, one has to emerge from the system and re-enter on a new path. The human mind does not work in that way. It operates by association. With one item in its grasp, it snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the association of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trailsMan cannot hopefully duplicate this mental process artificially..... The first idea, however, to be drawn from this analogy concerns selection. Selection by association, rather than indexing, may yet be mechanized.⁴

The next hypertext pioneer was Douglas Engelbart. His *NLS System* (also known as *Augmentation*) was close to Bush's *Memex*. Its aim was to augment or increase human intelligence with a program which would make even more complex mental processes possible. Even if he had little success in this, there were however two spin-offs from Engelbart's work that are crucial to modern-day computers. He invented the mouse pointer and screen 'windowing'. This last was first successfully implemented by MacIntosh and later in Microsoft windows-based operating systems.

But it was Theodore "Ted" Nelson who, over 29 years ago first coined the term 'hypertext' to mean non-sequential writing in which a text branches and allows the reader to choose his own reading path. Visually this produces a series of text chunks connected by links. Nelson also predicted that the introduction of hypertext would give rise to numerous new kinds of writing: "...this simple facility- the jump-link capacity – leads immediately to all sorts of new text forms: for scholarship, for teaching, for fiction, for hyper-poetry".⁵ As he suggests in his book *Literary Machines* (1980) Nelson considered hypertext as a 'literary thing' and he perceived the relationship between hypertext and literature as crucial. In an almost Post-Structuralist way he saw literature as a vast network of citations. It should be noted that Nelson started working with his *Project Xanadu* at the same time (around the 60s) as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes laid the basis for Post-Structuralist and Deconstruction Literary Theory.

⁴ Vannear Bush, "Classic Technology: as We Think", *Atlantic Monthly* 176 (July 1945), 101-108.

⁵ T.T. Nelson, *Literary Machines* (Swarthmore, Pa., 1981), 2-23.

Nelson unified the concept of interconnected data and ideas in his publishing system *Xanadu*, released in 1989, in which he attempted to house the world's literary treasures connected by links to other electronic documents, audio, movies and graphics.

Other hypertext systems followed such as Macintosh's *Hypercard* but they all suffered from the fact that there was no universal system for freely exchanging information and making links between information blocks. Such a system was developed by CERN, Switzerland's high-energy physics laboratory, in the form of the World Wide Web – a skeleton of computer networks onto which on-line information could be placed. And in 1993, the National Center for Computing Applications (NCSA) released the software *Mosaic* – the first important graphical information 'browser'. Others such as *Netscape*, *MacWeb* and *Spyglass* followed rapidly. Together with the World Wide Web they form a system of associative information retrieval like that which Bush originally envisioned.

The most generally acceptable definition of hypertext is in conformity with Nelson's 'non-sequential' writing while being very similar to the 'non-linearity' or 'multi-linearity' of recent Post-Structuralist, Deconstruction and Hypertext literary theory. The net result of all hypertext is that it changes reading rituals from the traditional linear reading path - beginning, middle to end to episodic ruptured reading based on reader choice.

Physically hypertext presents itself as individual 'text chunks' which, depending on the context, are called nodes, pages, frames, workspaces, or lexia. This last term was borrowed from Roland Barthes' essay *S/Z*⁶ and has been incorporated into Hypertext Literary Theory.

Lexia are then linked by the homepage in a networked environment either by Macintosh's *Hypercard* or in the World Wide Web. Links connect any two or more lexias through the 'anchor' which is the exact place in a lexia where a link is attached – that is it can be either the starting point or the end of a lexia.

In the Web, for example, it is standard to indicate an anchor with blue font color and underlining or if it is an image, the anchor may be indicated by a blue frame.

⁶ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 20.

Lexias may include not just text, but also images, sound, video clips etc. Technically there is no difference between linking two text chunks, or text and image, video and sound. Therefore the term hypertext is synonymous with hypermedia and multimedia.

Digital texts which use hypertext as a tool

Most digital texts use hypertext as a tool or systematic medium for text organization. The following are examples of this use of hypertext:

1. Digitalized print literature – this group includes such comprehensive archive collections as *The Project Gutenberg*, and its Scandinavian counterpart, *The Project Runeberg*, which have collected and organized old and mostly canonical literature, translated them into digital form and placed them on the Internet or on CD ROM. These projects have physically conserved old deteriorating texts, made rare works (which may exist in only one copy) available to a larger public and have created useful corpuses for researchers and students. Most of them contain interactive mechanisms which make word and phrase searches in the texts and statistical style analysis possible.
2. Digital publications of original literature which has never been printed -generally texts in this category do not employ hypertext techniques except as a way to present text that has never been published or to present it in the same way as its printed counter-parts e.g. Hyperstat –an online statistics text book. So text reproduction is within established print book conventions except that it is on the screen. This digital form aims to increase the circulation and distribution of texts like e-books, certain kinds of magazines, online encyclopedias e.g. *Britanica* and academic journals. This form of hyper-text tends to have limited text manipulation in ‘real time’, little interactivity, but some can have some intertextuality, e.g. magazine web sites.
3. Networked ‘literature’ - networked literature, which often uses mass storage technologies such as CD ROMs, takes advantage of the Internet and tends to be both interactive and intertextual. For example, in *Leporauha* or *Rest Peace* by Matti Niskanen (1998) on CD ROM links are used that operate mostly inside the textual field but with some subtle and effective linking possibilities to

open Web environments. This permits text updates in which the changes are made immediately without the need to purchase new versions on CD-ROMS.

In others, Internet-reader-feedback is stronger because readers can participate in the writing and rewriting of the text. An example of this can be seen in Markku Eskelinen's *Interface* (1997) where the print novel goes on living its own independent life on the Internet while the author's input and reader feedback are added for all to see.

4. Popular narrative and fiction - include various types of computer games, simulations, IRC (Internet Relay Chat), virtual realities which can manifest 'real time' text manipulation but little interactivity and intertextuality.
5. News sites, TV channels and other forms of reader interactivity- many pages on the Internet are in hypertext format, with little or no 'real time' manipulation, designed to familiarize their readers with news sites, TV channels e.g. the History Channel, popular youth TV channels and so on . Sites like these however often make effective use of direct reader feedback, all kinds of audience polls, and other form of reader interactivity.

'Pure' hypertext

This could be regarded as the most complete and complex use of hypertext because it is text conceived and presented in the non-sequential hypertext format using hypertext as a tool in order to be read in non-sequential reading orders. Thus it has all the characteristics of hypertext – physical and interpretative manipulation in 'real time', intertextuality and interactivity. Early examples of this use of hypertext are the following:

1. *Composition No. 1* by Marc Saporta is a deck of one hundred loose pages shuffled before each reading that give a random order to the text at each reading.
2. *Pale Fire* by Vladimir Nabokov which consists of a foreword, the poem "Pale Fire", an extensive commentary and an index for the poem. The reader can integrate and interpret these four sections in different ways which result in very different outcomes for the poems.
3. *Rayuela* by Julio Cortazar includes 155 numbered chapters

which can be read in any order. The author, however, suggests one particular order in the beginning in which the reader has to "hopscootch" from one chapter to another throughout the text.

4. Robert Coover's short story "Quenby and Ola, Swede and Carl" is a skillfully constructed text in which vague references, changes in focus points and hidden characters enable several interpretations of what is really going on in the story.
5. In Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* (1972) and *Take It Or Leave It* (1976) the text is organized in different topological forms. For example in the opening page of *Double or Nothing*, the text circles around the edges of the page forming a rectangle which represents the small room into which the narrator has locked himself in order to write his novel.

These and numerous other experiments have anticipated the new directions in which computer-mediated textuality could be used in literature.

Hypertext narrative is very different from the so-called traditional canonical narrative fictions in

which there are three levels – the story or what happens, the narration and the plot or the order of the telling of the events organized sequentially and in chronological order, hypertext narrative is very different.

Firstly there is no pre-existing order of event telling. Order is, instead, created by the reader's interaction with the plot elements *after* he/she has read them and not before. Therefore the reader can have no plot expectations. In addition it is the reader who decides what lexias are to be read and in what order so that each lexia functions as a singular general narratological model and often has its own narrative voice.

Secondly should the reader leave the bounds of the lexia unit, problems immediately arise with regard to how to establish the place of each lexia in relation to the others and the narrators in relation to each other. Thus the reader is asked to read in an episodic rather than in the usual linear print book way.

For example Michael Joyce's *Afternoon. A Story* (1987) is generally seen as the first hypertext novel. It is a story consisting of 539 lexias and 951 connecting links which make it possible to read *Afternoon* in several ways by combining different set of lexias

in different orders. The result is a number of quite different stories even if the default story line and the alternative story line tends to dominate. When the reader chooses an alternative link instead of the default one and then presses the back button, he returns to the default story line which automatically strengthens the reader's expectations of linear temporality. Joyce also uses other narrative devices that do not create a strong sense of temporal succession or causality like leaving out precise indications of persons, places and times.

Stuart Mouthrop's *Victory Garden* has a similar but more elaborate visual navigation system than *Afternoon*. With the use of a navigational map which shows the names of some of the important lexias and the links between them, the reader can enter the text by choosing one of the lexias named on the map. There are also other possibilities like the a list of the different stories with short descriptions. However this map is not just a visualization of the structure of the lexias but it is also a representational map of a garden with paths and benches which offer the reader the choice of a place inside the story's space. This map of the garden gives the text a metaphoric identity by allowing the reader to see the blanks in the narrative and fill them in by looking for lexias that fit. Thus the reader does not read an already pre-determined plot but reads to find the plot. As Mouthrop himself comments: "...to conceive of a text as a navigational space is not the same as seeing it in terms of a single, predetermined course of reading".⁷ Some hyper-novels combine images, sounds and text like M.D. Coverley's *Califa* to produce highly complex fictional worlds.

There are also poetic works using interactive techniques like Jim Rosenberg's *Intergrams* (1997). They have two significant features: several layers of text juxtaposed so that by moving the cursor, a single layer can be read, and external syntax linked by graphic symbols which represents the syntactical interrelations between the text fragments.

⁷ Stuart Moulthrop, "Hypertext and 'the Hyperreal'", *Hypertext '89* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 1989), 129.

Text adventure games

Early text adventure games offered the player/reader several alternative ways of proceeding through textual environments even if there was usually only one successful way to get through the game.

Michael Detlefsen's text adventure *The Star Portal* is typical of a large portion of the adventure games based on *The Lord of the Rings* style fantasy, on science fiction or on mystery and detective stories. Some of them were rather ambitious both in their structure and text and were an economically lucrative form of digital literature.

Cybertext

If hypertext is a relatively new form of computer-mediated textuality, cybertext is a fairly old one- going back to the 1960's if not longer. What is cybertext then? Cybertext is a self-changing text controlled by an immanent cybernetic agent either mechanical or human. There are many species of cybertext but generally they can be reduced to two main groups – those with and those without predictable stories.

After computers were first connected to each other through phone cables in the US Ministry of Defense's prototype ARPANET project, it took little time for the first computerized versions of *Dungeons & Dragons* style role playing adventure games like *The Adventure* to appear. In these text-based adventure games the stories are predictable or determinate as the player directs the action through simple typed commands. Its technical structure became the paradigm for a very large number of similar games even after more advanced types like *Zork* became available. The structure is based on the progress of the main character/narratee/user that is the text's 'you' whose task is to find all the treasure and kill the various monsters while avoiding getting killed or struck or lost in the game's topographical maze. The user controls the 'you' by typing such commands as 'kill troll' or 'grab gold' that are simple verb-object commands and directions can be specified by simple letters like 'n' for north or 'd' for down etc. Depending on the user's input, the text will issue short descriptions of the landscape, possible exits or entrances to the next room, information about any objects lying about or the results of the user's last command.

The characteristics of *Adventure* and most texts like it are that their scripts are repetitive, that the user ‘pulls’ or drives the text’s actions by his/her commands and that they are intra-textually dynamic, that is, the movement is within the game/text only.

User function takes the form of role-playing since it is the user who assumes the strategic responsibility for the narratee. This gives the user a sense of being lost as the real action is taking place elsewhere or under the text.

The second type of cybertext could be called unpredictable or indeterminate in the sense that the user cannot anticipate the script because it is based on complex models of interaction between the user-controlled character and artificial persons within a simulated world where plot control becomes even more difficult. Examples of this are the *Oz* projects of the Simulated Realities Group at Carnegie Mellon University.

In Essex University’s Roy Trubshaw’s first MUD, users score points by killing each other’s characters, by finding hidden treasures or by eventually reaching the powerful status of the wizard. But it is much more than a game because the user can enjoy complete anonymity and freedom from their social and physical selves and take on any person they can think of and do things with words that they would normally never do. Thus a new mode of textual expression was initiated – the user has to be very quick in order to formulate short, unretractable sentences in seconds or die.

By 1989 MUD had a significant new feature, in addition to creating its own characters, the users were allowed to expand MUD’s textual descriptions and add their own landscape to the topography of the MUD. This MUD, known as tinyMUD, emphasized social interaction and was available through the Internet.

MUDs seem to defy any traditional quantifications of a text. Every user has a different or several different or partial perspectives and users bombard each other with repetitious scripts which only last as long as they are not scrolled on the screen. MUDs are like constantly meandering rivers, developing new courses that cross and re-cross each other and are filled with all sorts of peculiar things including a group of characters that might just start singing in the middle of the action.

In tinyMUDs the user does not drive the text even if user-

functionality could be regarded as explorative because the user decides such things as which 'path' to take, which character to play the role of, and some linguistic exchanges especially in social interactions while not determining others. And yet *this is text* because it has letters, words, and sentences which are selected, arranged and disseminated to delight, frustrate and/or impress an unknown audience. The pre-determined script can be a heterogeneous mix of humorous, poignant, sleazy, silly, obnoxious or noisy comments with more than twenty characters in the same room- several of which might be played by one person only or have or not have real persons behind them. Obviously it becomes extremely difficult for the user to keep track of what is going on. In addition BOT or automatic characters, like the Terminator who has his own office, can be hired and programmed to kill, are externally built-in characters using artificial intelligence techniques and logged on by their creators to the tinyMUDs but recognizable by their relatively poor communication skills.

The main issue raised by these two kinds of cybertext is their relationship to ontological categories of texts like fiction, nonfiction, poetry and drama. The most obvious choice is fiction. But the suspension of disbelief, so typical of realistic or fantastic fiction, does not obviously occur. This would suggest that Cybertexts have an empirical element that cannot be found in fiction and that these texts should be in an ontological category or genre of their own - perhaps something closer to simulation?

In fiction the reader must construct mental images for which he is responsible and that somehow correspond to the world described in the text. Therefore, from the reader's point of view, fiction is neither logical nor illogical but its claims are acceptable within the fictional framework . In any case the text remains fundamentally under reader control.

In *Adventure* the responsibility for coherence is shared between the text and the user. If the user does something then there it will have a result in the text. This contact between text and user is a cause-and- effect relationship like that in the real world and can therefore be empirically tested. In the tinyMUDs simulation comes very close to the real world since the user's characters' conversations with other characters are similar to real conversations. Such simulations

are somewhere between fiction and reality because they do have an empirical logic of their own and are therefore not totally 'fictional'. Fiction presents some 'other' world while cybertext represents worlds.

In addition cybertext plot is the absence of structure. Because the plot is hidden, the concept of the story is meaningless without the user who provokes the action. This reverses causality because action determines and seeks out the plot which does not produce anything interesting but only a barely acceptable 'closure' or end. There is no narrative only narration.

Similarly any discussion of MUDs in terms of authors or readers is difficult if not irrelevant. Users cannot construct characters or read about them. They can only experience them from the very narrow perspective of one or more of them. The user cannot be sure that his particular contribution will ever be experienced by more than a few persons if anyone in the game since the other characters may all be artificial or controlled by the same real person!

'Closure' in adventure games is similarly problematic when compared with fiction. Technically in cyber games it is where the 'you' has reached a topographical dead end or has evoked some deadly response to a wrong action or command. This is very different from closure in fiction which is the 'end' of the narrative at the physical end of the book.

Closure in cybertexts clearly establishes differences between the main character, the narratee and the user. The main character is dead and erased yet at the same time he/she is set free and can be reincarnated at the beginning of a new game. The narratee is explicitly told what has happened and offered the choice to start again while the user is aware of all this in a way denied to the narratee but he learns from his mistakes and previous experience and can then go on to play a different game.

So closure in a cybertext is either successful or unsuccessful. In the first case, the satisfaction of having experienced a good, traditional end like in an epic poem is denied because the 'you' remains in the text after the end. Even when there is victory, there is no traditional build-up of tension that the reader of fiction normally experiences.

If the end is unsuccessful this means the abandonment of the

'you' which then remains in the text as a living ghost not buried and essentially incomplete.

If we compare paper based adventure games to computer-based ones the advantage is that, from the latter, the 'you' gets a sense of true dialogue.

Conclusion

The distinction between print and digital texts can, in actual fact, be limited. Some print texts may be much closer to digital computer-mediated texts than to other print texts and vice versa.

If a digital text does not use any other user functions, like interactivity, intertextuality and 'real time' text manipulation, than reader interpretation, then it does not, in any significant way, differ from traditional print texts except that it is on the screen.

But generally most computer-mediated text makes use of various combinations of user functions like interactivity, intertextuality and 'real time' text manipulation which configure them as 'living', evolving, ever moving, reader-centred texts that can always be modified. And it is these characteristics that make computer-mediated texts so different from their forebearers.

In any case discussions of computer-mediated texts raise, like their forebearers, 'political' questions – questions of power, status, institutional change and who finally controls the text. These considerations, like those concerning critical theory, literature and other fields of study and research, have to take into account the basic recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical and in the last analysis 'political'. A fully implemented embodiment of a networked hypertext system obviously creates empowered readers with control over the text both as readers and authors in a way that printed book technology never has. And these possible patterns of empowerment would appear to support the logic that information technologies tend to encourage the increasing dissemination of knowledge and the democratization and decentralization of 'old' power configurations. One thing is certain, however, technology has and will always empower those who possess it, those who make use of it and those who access it.

Serena Guarracino

Building Sites: Suniti Namjoshi's Hypertextual Babel

Building Babel is what people do.
Suniti Namjoshi, *Building Babel*

In the last chapter of his 1976 *The Selfish Gene*, evolutionary theorist and popular science writer Richard Dawkins coined a name for a new “replicator” that, like the biological gene before it, would be able to store and pass on information.¹ The name of this new replicator, derived from “a suitable Greek root” and rhyming with ‘gene’ (or ‘cream’) was “meme”. As the gene had been the technology supporting human evolution through physiological proliferation, the new replicator would feed on the new environment offered by human culture to evolve and mutate: “just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body, via sperm and eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation”.²

Its subsequent popularity notwithstanding, this theory, with its subtle reworking of evolutionism, would seem unlikely to have any appeal for a writer like Suniti Namjoshi. Her Indian background, British upbringing and feminist awareness (even if one could ever name, and thus distinguish, these elements as separate in her writing

¹ Richard Dawkins, “Memes: the New Replicators”, in *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 206.

² *Ibid.*

and personality) make her a restless traveller among different genres and identities. As C. Vijayasree has recently written:

Namjoshi represents the tensions of inhabiting and writing from margins and in between spaces as a woman, as a lesbian and as a diasporic writer. She does not, however, show any anxiety about resolving the tensions emanating from such a complex and complicated subject position, but sophisticates the art of tapping on the plural possibilities afforded by her fluid state.³

One could not imagine a position more different from Dawkins's belief in "the quasi-genetic inheritance of language, and of religious and traditional cultures".⁴

Yet her 1996 novel *Building Babel* is developed on and around a re-writing (among other things) of meme theory from this 'different' point of view. Disavowing the evolutionary determinism that characterizes Dawkins's theory, Namjoshi turns memes into a tool of hybridization, which enables both Writer and Reader to endlessly create and deconstruct story after story, in an attempt at a mythic yet fragmentary reconstruction of Babel. Moreover, being "a novel with interactive hypertext links" (as it is defined on the homepage of the "building site", about which more will be said in the second part of this essay), *Building Babel* not only describes, but enacts the proliferation and dissemination of memes through their choice pool, the World Wide Web.⁵

The hybridisation of meme theory

Dawkins defines a meme as a unit of cultural transmission. Memes may be "tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways

³ C. Vijayasree, *Suniti Namjoshi: The Artful Transgressor* (Jaipur & New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001), 15. Vijayasree's is to date the only complete monograph on the author.

⁴ Richard Dawkins, "[Foreword]" to Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xii.

⁵ For this and further reference to the building site of Babel, see <http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/bb> (last visited November 14, 2007).

of making pots or building arches".⁶ The word has subsequently gained currency to the point of being included in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where it is defined, almost *verbatim* from the words of its creator, as "an element of a culture that may be considered to be passed on by non-genetic means, esp. imitation." In its contemporary form the theory of memes, or memetics, offers a vision of human cultures as developing through a process of 'natural selection', according to the power of replication of their memes. Memetics has developed through the concept of 'virus', and both have become the founding tools for a body of works that tries to read contemporary culture through the theories developed by Dawkins: among them, Richard Brodie's *Virus of the Mind: the New Science of the Meme*, and Aaron Lynch's *Thought Contagion: How Ideas Act Like Viruses*.⁷ Yet it was the backdrop of information technology that proved to be the best environment for the development of the 'meme' meme, and the World Wide Web, with its constant flow of information, has become the privileged environment and object of meme theory. Thus it is possible to find web sites such as the 'Church of Virus', defined as "a memetically engineered nontheistic religion", and which proposes "a new cybernetic philosophy for the 21st century", lists Reason as the first of its virtues (alongside with Empathy and Vision), and hails "St. Charles Darwin" as its founder.⁸

Still, as Dawkins's disciple Susan Blackmore states, "we cannot specify the unity of a meme", nor know exactly how memes copy, store, and mutate.⁹ Memes are apparently supplied with their own economic and relational strategies, quite independent from those of the human beings who act as their 'hosts'. The way Blackmore, among others, articulates memetics drastically reduces human agency over culture. Blackmore's conclusion actually mirrors the most determinist outcomes of evolutionism: "the self that is supposed to have full will is just a story that forms part of a vast

⁶ Dawkins, "Memes", 206.

⁷ Richard Brodie, *Virus of the Mind: the New Science of the Meme* (Seattle, Wash.: Integral Press, 1996; repr. 2004); Aaron Lynch's *Thought Contagion: How Ideas Act Like Viruses* (New York: Basic Books, 1996)

⁸ See <http://www.churchofvirus.org>.

⁹ Blackmore, *The Meme Machine*, 53-55.

memeplex [memetic complex], and a false story at that... Since this is false, so is the idea of my conscious self having free will".¹⁰

On the contrary, Namjoshi's use of memetics in her novel starts from Babel as both object and metaphor for every re-creation and deconstruction of myths that constitute the currency of human thought through the medium of language. Indeed, as words are easier to spread than perceptual experience, it is language that plays a major, although not exclusive, role in the development of memes and memetics. Through language (but also music, visual expressions, and the like), memes thus constitute the instrument through which culture spreads and 'evolves'; in *Babel* as well, as Vijayasree writes, "culture is not the product of the process, but it is the process itself".¹¹ As a consequence, for Namjoshi the strictly human activity of 'making stories' is where agency lies: "every re-telling of a myth is a re-working of it. Every hearing or reading of a myth is a re-creation of it. It is only when we engage with a myth that it resonates, that it becomes charged and re-charged with meaning".¹² This writing and re-writing, reading and re-reading, *is* Babel, the endless and fragmentary flow of human culture: "Building Babel is what people do" (xvi).

In this context, the word 'meme', which Dawkins had coined in derivation from Ancient Greek 'μιμέομαι', 'to imitate' ('meme' is a shorthand for 'mimeme'), gains a different, deeper affiliation with another Greek word, 'μνημη', 'memory'. The trick of 'false etymology' allows Dawkins's deterministic attitude to be replaced by a more unstable environment, where language and poetry become the founding bricks of Babel. In an ironic twist, this etymology is attributed by Namjoshi to Dawkins himself: "Memes daughters of Memory. That's why the chap named them so [Richard Dawkins]" (99). The identities of Writer and Reader here start to merge: Namjoshi, as reader of Dawkins, becomes at the same time his 'Writer', with the

¹⁰ Ibid., 237.

¹¹ Vijayasree, *Suniti Namjoshi*, 145.

¹² Suniti Namjoshi, *Building Babel* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1996), xi; hereafter references in the text.

right to manipulate, or 'mutate', the memes he offers in his text to her own ends. After all, this name in square brackets is the only mention Namjoshi ever makes in her book of the father of memetics; but, as she writes in her introduction, "there is something else Reader can do, if he/she wants the feeling of being Writer and this is STEAL. This is not as shocking as it sounds. All writers steal" (xxiii). Stealing, after all, is only one of the ways in which memes mutate.

And yet, Namjoshi is very sensitive on the matter of how one's own background, what Dawkins called 'the quasi-genetic inheritance of language', can infect the way one handles memes. In the first introduction to *Building Babel* Namjoshi puts the theory of memes in relation to her own Hindu background, operating a peculiar hybridization between memetics and Hindu religious beliefs (or better, with her own idea of Hinduism). This positionality marks the first sentence of the book: "I happened to grow up in India and come from a Hindu background" (ix). In her vision, religion is in itself a sort of technology of the imaginary, that allows her, for example, to create her Babel as a sort of pantheistic universe where Crone Kronos, "Time, of course, the mystery" (x) and main Goddess of Babel, is continuously re-created by the stories told by the many narrating voices in the novel. Yet, Namjoshi shuns any advocacy of a pure Hindu subjectivity; on the contrary, this is only the starting point to acknowledge the hybridity of her own positionality: "I've set down here my awareness of how a Hindu background has entered my writing. This is only what I think. It may be worthwhile though, for all of us to examine how our backgrounds have affected our thinking – or, as they'd say in Babel, to understand how our memes have mutated and merged" (xvi).

In the mutation and merging of memes, language is the master tool, the main bearer of stories, myths, and culture at large. Yet, in Namjoshi's case it is also the *master's* tool, the colonial English which the writer has appropriated for her own writing. Namjoshi acknowledges that "some of the myths that emerge in *Babel* have resemblances to Greek or Christian myths. That may be because I write in English. They're inherent in the

language.” (xvi) Thus, in the most McLuhanian of fashions, the medium is the message, and the English language inevitably shapes the way *Building Babel*, as a novel, is created, written, and read.¹³

Words, as it is clearly stated in the novel, are the main fabric of Babel. Against a world where “we’ve been all typecast” (29), a host of women characters (and a cat), memes from the widest range of references, decide to rebuild Babel “for no real reason, except perhaps an urgent need” (29). The need, for these women who feel imprisoned by the words that have been telling their stories for ages, denying them any power or agency, is to rebuild the universe through language, through words “that are strong and slippery as eels”, words that “mate and proliferate”, words “like sweets and seeds and pebbles” (29). Yet, the peculiarity of Babel is that the mortar of its buildings of words is not simile, but metaphor, because “a powerful metaphor is the source of revelation” (xiv); words will be “not ‘like’, words that ‘are’” (29). According to these principles the collective voice of the characters Namjoshi calls ‘the sisters’ lay out the project of (re)building their own Babel as an act of self-definition:¹⁴

“‘We will build a great edifice out of malleable words.’
‘We will cultivate a culture.’
‘We will grow a common language.’
‘The Sisterhood of Women will mean something.’
‘We will bring our own words.’
‘We will own our own words.’
‘We will be able to make anything!’
‘Anything we make will be something!’” (29-30)

Vijayasree underlines the feminist project underlying Babel (and *Babel*), describing the novel as “a collage of stories, dialogues, poems

¹³ See in particular Marshall MacLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.).

¹⁴ The same point is made, although from a very different perspective from the one presented in this essay, by Siphwe Ignatius Dube in “Suniti Namjoshi’s Building Babel: The Resignification of Babel’s Resistant Subjects”, available at <http://www.cerebration.org>.

and myths, [that] celebrates the dynamic and fluid culture central to the feminist Babel".¹⁵ However, feminism is a contested category in Namjoshi's narrative (as in all her work); if the community of Babel is a 'sisterhood' of Babblers, it is only because, as one character in the novel explains, men "have diseased identities.... I mean that the identities on offer to men are diseased. I refer to men as they are at this moment, men with their mutated genes and memes, which have not mutated sufficiently" (113). The building of Babel needs to acknowledge that even the memes of feminism have mutated, sometimes unpredictably: "the feminism that we fought for has mutated into strange shapes. Some we don't like. Some we don't recognize" (xxvii). Namjoshi's critique of some aspects of feminist theory, a feature of all her writing that it is impossible to analyze here in all its complexity, is ironically embodied in the dystopian regime of Babel, where the point that "gender is not immutable" (110) turns gender identity not into an expression of the agency of the individual, a Butlerian 'drag', but into a "a matter of rank" (110): "the immigrants will be 'men' till they have been assimilated into the society of Babblers, at which time, at least some of them will definitely be accorded the status of women" (112).¹⁶

Memes and the building of Babel

Building Babel, then, carries on much further the operation of re-writing the canon Namjoshi started in her *Feminist Fables*.¹⁷ Every character is a re-writing of a different story, and sometimes enacts one or more other stories which sound oddly familiar to the Reader. As Vijayasree writes: "each of [the characters] is connected diachronically to a literary ancestor of the past and synchronically to a category of contemporary women".¹⁸ Some characters come from well-known fables, such as Little Red, who is like "the Wife of Bath" (1) and ended up marrying Wolf Man to save herself and

¹⁵ Vijayasree, *Suniti Namjoshi*, 154.

¹⁶ For gender as impersonation and drag see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁷ See Suniti Namjoshi, *Feminist Fables* (London: Sheba, 1981).

¹⁸ Vijayasree, *Suniti Namjoshi*, 145.

clear her land from wolves; or as Cinders (Cinderella), who uses her marriage to the prince to obtain “permissions to plan and to re-invent” (35) for Babel. On the other hand, the acknowledged Villainess of the novel, Lady Shy, comes straight out of Shakespeare: “Do you think that people like me don’t matter? When you cut us, we bleed. Don’t be so squeamish. Call me by name. I am not Shy. I am Shylock! Lady Shylock!” (63).

The Black Piglet is the central figure of the second chapter, “The Life and Death of the Black Piglet”, told by Sister Solitude but “duly amended” (31) by all the other characters. In the introduction she is defined as “a voyager, a wanderer, a thinker” but also “a succulent porker” (3); while in the end she is defined as “an ordinary woman of unusual intelligence: brown skin, brown eyes, dark hair” (88). If Little Red and Cinders, together with Rap Rap (Rapunzel), provide the material conditions for Babel to be rebuilt, the Black Piglet and Sister Sol deal with the materials to build Babel, telling stories about Crone Kronos: “Once upon a time there was a beautiful old woman called Crone Kronos” (40). Incidentally, the Black Piglet’s life strikingly resembles a Christological parable: set up as daughter of Crone Kronos after the building of Babel, she is then accused of being a false prophet as she is unable to distinguish “theology from mythology, tall tales from Truth, the canon from the apocrypha” (84). Her death, partially ascribed naturally to the Villainess, is actually part of the course of Babel, as Lady Shy explains: “Death. Death killed her. It’s inherent in all the stories they’ve told. Their own death, and the ultimate death of Babel” (85).

Namjoshi creates her characters not as unitary, if fictional, identities, so much as contested spaces where different roles are played out. The Piglet herself, shortly before her death, metamorphoses into the Black Prince *and* Princess, alternatively; at Rap Rap’s cross request to “be consistent”, Black P is at a loss: “Consistent with what? ‘With yourself.’ ‘I probably am’” (80). Yet, it is Sister Solitude who puts into words the need to get rid of preconceived notions of identity: at Little Red’s question “How do you know that The Piglet is now The Black Princess?”, she answers: “I know what I choose to know....Look, we can all insist that everyone and everything essentially is what we agree it is, or we can learn to live with the metamorphosis of The Black Piglet.

Don't you understand? That is the challenge. That is the test" (81). In the introduction Namjoshi had already stated that "who you are is just who you happen to be this time around" (xv). Thus it is possible that Alice, whose story is aptly told by the Cheshire Cat in the fourth chapter of the novel, is actually "Queen Alice", resembling in more than one aspect the despotic Queen of Hearts from *Alice in Wonderland*. If the Piglet may be considered the novel's Snowball, Namjoshi's Queen Alice is in many ways Babel's Napoleon.¹⁹ Alice "liked control and was perfectly able to exercise it" (5), and believes that "the proper distribution of power, that is what makes for a stable realm." (111) It is her idea to police immigration into Babel with the ranking system where all the immigrants, whether female or male, are labelled 'men', and citizenship is acquired through the rank of 'woman':

Men are not men. That will be their designation when they first enter Babel. The Queen does not distinguish between men and rabbits. All are welcome, provided they've been screened and have scored a sufficient number of points on a suitable test. Babel will benefit by a trained workforce, which Babel has not had the expense of having educated (113).

And yet Alice, in her attempt to police the migration and mutation of memes in Babel, will end up leaving it to chaos and the de(con)struction embodied by Mad Med.

Reflections of a wandering surfer

Mad Med, one could say, is in charge of multicultural, hybrid memes that "like genes they mix" (185). She is the conceptual opposite of Alice, the Queen who wants to keep Babel and its memes under strict control. Medusa, third of the Gorgons (the other two, here called Verity and Charity, are also characters in the novel), is

¹⁹ *Animal Farm* is another, unacknowledged subtext: see George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (London: Penguin, 1987). It is time to acknowledge that this essay will not be able to do justice to all the 'memes' reworked in Babel, nor will it attempt to do so: as Vijayasree writes, "*Building Babel*...cannot be analyzed or critically interpreted. In fact, it is not meant for such an exercise." (*Suniti Namjoshi*, 144)

scary, and yet beautiful and laughing like Cixous's Medusa: "as for Mad Med, do not ask. She's all blood and guts. She's Caliban.... Her head is a treasure house of broken jewellery" (6).²⁰ Not only this, but, according to the sisters, she is "ill-tutored. Ill-mannered. Illiterate" (180).

Yet, after Alice's demise, she's the one who takes over what is left of the memes of Babel, ready to rebuild – again: "Mad Medusa sits like a baby among the building blocks. This is her inheritance, this is the treasure, left her by her sisters." (141) In her own Babel, words are created out of free association: "B is for Babble, Babblers, Bombast, Bomb Blast, Bickering, Battle, Bang Bang" (142). Poetry is the language of Mad Med, the goddess of imported memes, mixing and genetic engineering without plan nor plantation, only a garden where Med and Alice, chaos and order, incessantly create a universe where even prose acquires a sing-song rhythm:

They make a garden, build a wall, and dig a well. They have babies, they regulate gender. They have sex. They change sex. They squabble over words. They fight furiously. They try very hard. They build very hard. They do what they like. They do what they can. They do not do very well. They try again (157).

The result cannot be the orderly Babel imagined by Queen Alice, but only the "Patched Piece", the last but one chapter of the book, closing with Mad Med herself opening the floodgates of Babel, as she explains to the reluctant sisters that "Babel cannot bloom in the desert air, and that a text doesn't exist until it's read." (180)

The "Reader's Text", the last chapter of the book and title of the home page of the novel's website, is the result of this opening, which is lived as a necessity of the text itself: "[in the last chapter] the author inscribes a reader who questions, revolts and at times refuses to join building Babel. However, the fact of the matter is, as Medusa puts it, the reader is complicit. In the act of reading he/she inevitably builds".²¹ So, it is not surprising that to Mad Med, who has

²⁰ See Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", in *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (New York & London: Routledge, 1994).

²¹ Vijayasree, *Suniti Namjoshi*, 153.

only a little role in the book itself, are dedicated three sections of the building site: together with “Mad Med’s Memes” the surfer can also find “Med’s in Charge”, and “Med and the Reader”. The site is the result of the invitation that constitutes the second introduction to the book, where the relation between Writer and Reader is rearticulated through the tools offered by information technology. The first part, “Simultaneity and Sequence”, analyses how poetry may make use of an HTML page in order to exploit and explore the interrelatedness of language (for example by creating hyperlinks from words in the text to images, sounds, or other texts), while the second explores the problematic question of “Interactivity”, that is, of the power struggle between Writer and Reader over the “common currency” of words (xxiii). The first lines of the “Reader’s Text”, reprinted in the first section of the website, “Switch Roles?”, converts this fight into a game role, where the identities of Writer and Reader, thanks to the interactivity offered by the World Wide Web, can become fluid and interchangeable: “We could rip off our masks. My own name is on the title page. And yours? We could meet, have a conversation, exchange messages. *But the point, surely, is to exchange masks, not rip them off*” (182; my italics).

Contributions to the site are then requested by Namjoshi herself, in the form of “things I’d like to know”:

The Architectural Plans for Babel.

The Music to which the walls of Babel rose in the air.

Intelligent Conjecture on the true identity of The Black Piglet.

The Graffiti inscribed on the bricks of Babel.

What Skis or Motorbikes Sol and Shy used for surfing the sand dunes - a plausible design.

Bedtime Conversations between Cinders and the Prince.

The Contents of Verity’s File of Intelligent Questions.

A Transcript of anything at all Charity ever said.

All the underlined words are hyperlinks to other pages of the site, where contributions from different authors and different media are offered to the Surfer/Reader/Writer with just the name or nickname of the author to offer any guide. The names avoid any conflation of the material on the site under a single, if collective,

authorship: as in the novel the voice of every character, although fluid, is also strikingly individual, so on the site each contribution is copyrighted. Contributions may vary from scholarly texts like Vayu Naidu's on the survival of the Indic oral traditions, conjured up by the link "[Hindu society particularly has used live brains for ages and ages to store](#)", to the poem on [Cinders](#) by Debbie Robson, titled "Transfixed":

Today I have put on happiness
(after many weeks) like a new
dress. Clean, light and fitting
smoothly. I am fit
for the ball and I'm sure
my dress won't powder
at midnight and the mice
have promised to stay
transfixed - not scuttling
and sniffing in my waking dreams.

The surfer may navigate this hypertext through different routes, following words like Hansel and Gretel's breadcrumbs: "words" leads the wandering surfer from "I'll have a [word](#) with the publishers" in Namjoshi's own invitation to the reader, to Karen Little's contribution:

WORDS WORDS, SOMETIMES I SPEAK AND I WANT TO
SWALLOW MY WORDS, THEY COME OUT all by themselves
and I want to get them back in one big gulp. Sometimes words trip
off our tongues and float in bubbles upwards and into the sky, these
are light [words](#);

and from here right to "How could we build a tower of [words](#)?
Whose words would they be? [And who are we we we anyway?]",
by a not better identified Laura. Of course, as often on the Internet,
at the end of the route one can always find the frustrating 'page not
found'. And yet, there is always the possibility to go 'back', and try
another route.

Some links may be quite surprising: "[some the wind](#)" from a
lengthy quotation from *Building Babel* that opens the section "The

Black Piglet and Solitude” opens on a Latin poem, “Levis exsurgit Zephyrus”, translated by Gillian Spraggs as “A Woman’s Song: To Her Indifferent Lover”. The two poems, ‘translation’ and ‘original’, confront each other side by side on the webpage in different colour (light pink for the English, bright red for the Latin). “The domes of Babel will turn into towers, obelisks, all manner of obscenities”, again from the intro to “The Black Piglet and Solitude”, offers a drawing of the domes of Babel by Elisabeth Nagelschmidt, while the “towers” redirect to the already quoted contribution by Laura on the “tower of words”. There is no linear route among the material offered, and the site offers multiple points of access to the contributions, which, interestingly, are by no means proliferating at random, but clearly picked up with particular care. The selection of the material announced by Namjoshi and the publishers is clearly under way, and effective: “You too have something to offer no doubt, and as long as it’s entertaining and of some interest ...” (182)

Still, the site puts the metaphor of Babel into practice, allowing every contributor, everyone who chooses to read and/or write, to put her/his own memes into play, to merge them into the memes of Babel, while at the same time retaining the individuality of a name. In this sense, the site exposes the ‘Babel’ that, according to Namjoshi, is already built into our memes:

Babel was built in your brain cells. Surely you know, the memes of Babel are colonists. They are your RAM, your instantly available, accessible memory. The ruins of Babel, the growth and degradation, the endless adaptation, the building and rebuilding, they are on your hard disk. (7)

Geert Lovink

Internet, Globalisation and the Politics of Language*

*“Once the internet changed the world,
now the world is changing the internet.”*

I would like to address the shifts in Internet culture and the element of localisation regarding their relationship to language, in particular the English language. I will first describe some of the shifts happening, and then present some case studies in order to come to some projections of where we are going regarding the future development of the Internet. To begin, I will introduce who I am and from which background I am approaching things. I'm from the Netherlands and I consider myself a media theorist. I'm approaching this topic from a critical perspective but also as someone who is directly involved in the making of the Internet as a medium. At a certain point however, it began to occur to me that within these critical issues, language was failing, and it still fails. It remains strange even now to talk about this topic as it is still not part of the current critical vocabulary of New Media Theory, a field in which approximately 90% of the people who actively contribute are from the English-speaking world. It may be possible, as well, that this issue has been overlooked because scholars speaking other languages and from other regions are often professionally and

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socially embarrassed to talk about language as a concern for fear of building resentment, or have not approached the topic because they have other, more critical problems to deal with. Whatever the reason, there is a blockage that must be identified before we approach this topic itself. Even theoretical texts approaching the topic, such as Alex Galloway's book *Protocol*¹, maintain the significant blind-spot that there is not one sentence recognising that everything written about protocol is done so in English, making visible the point that it is commonly accepted that code is code and code is written in English, or in computer language. Considering all of this, I see the act of approaching this topic as a project in its very beginnings that will greatly benefit from the input of a lot of different disciplines, and many different countries, including case studies and especially critical theory. Taking input from philosophy beyond the theories of globalisation and empire as we have known them will allow us to enter a new territory with this topic in order to find a vehicle to get out of the existing tensions that we have known for the past ten or fifteen years when we speak about globalisation. Coming from an activist background, I look not only to identify problems in a clear conceptual way, but also to develop strategies for resolving them.

In order to first deal with the big picture I will refer to a website about statistics. The function of the site, <http://www.worldinternetstats.com>, is to provide a monthly visualisation of big changes that are happening on the Internet, changes in the overall population and user habits. I expect that most Internet experts, theorists, etc., would not predict or describe this picture accurately. The fact that North America has already fallen third place is a very new change and I was also surprised by this because when I checked only a few weeks ago I read that there are 1,2.000.000.000 Internet users worldwide, and looking again yesterday, I was shocked to see that this number had already risen to 1,4.000.000.000 users. But the largest rate of growth is of course coming from Asia, mostly due to increases from mainland China. In late 2007, the official Internet Statistics Office in Beijing announced that 70.000.000 Chinese are maintaining a blog. This rapid change (of the picture) and hyper

¹ Alexander Galloway, *Protocol — How Control Exists After Decentralization*, MIT Press, 2004. [eds.' note].

growth is something very recent, of the last two, maybe three years. In the case of China it is mainly young people who are interested in online gaming and instant messaging. As the United States are distracted with Obama, the economic recession, and other changes happening in their own country, parallel rapid developments are happening on the level of the Internet itself. In August 2008 it was announced that for the first time in the history of the Internet, the Chinese user population surpassed that of the USA.

The discussion around global Internet use, for a very long time, been dominated by the rhetoric of the so-called “digital divide”. Ten years ago, the statistical visualization told us that the West has all the computers and the rest of the world virtually had none. Overall, we now see major change in the big picture with just a few geographic exceptions. In Africa, user numbers are still low; the figures show that the major growth there is in telecommunication, mainly mobile phones and not so much from stand-alone computers connected to the Internet, but this is largely because there is not enough electricity and because there are not enough telephone landlines to support many Internet connections. The other large region with dramatically low numbers is the Middle East, mainly because of censorship. This considered, growth rate statistics are very interesting. Surprisingly, the Middle East is the fastest growing region at the moment. In addition to the very famous Iranian blogs, there is also a major increase in Internet culture in countries such as Lebanon and Egypt. But it remains that the low usage numbers in this region is still a really dramatic issue. The changing dynamics we witness here is interesting for those working on new media culture, but do not imply an overall shift in economic, let alone military power, on a global scale. This needs to be stressed time and again. This change discussed here is a major shift in the geographic location of user cultures.

At the current moment, regarding language areas, it is interesting to see that Italian is still visible on the charts. About 18 months ago, the Dutch language was still on the statistics, an incredible fact considering that only 20 million people speak Dutch. Today we can see that English is still the most used language, however, the Chinese speaking population on the Internet at the moment is counted at around half the amount of English users and in about

two years, if we follow the estimations, it will be about equal. The number of Spanish speaking users, in a third position, still has an enormous amount of growth potential, and this can also easily double over the next two years, if nothing goes wrong in the Latin America economy. Japanese is of course not going to increase much more. There are no more Japanese and all of them are already online and blogging. The French language still has major potential but the German speaking population seems to be technology sceptic, so their further growth on the charts is limited. Predictably, the count for the Arabic speaking world has major growth potential, their usage can easily triple within the next few years; as can that of Portuguese speakers. Italian speakers can increase their usage only minimally from now, maybe by ten or twenty million more users. This is the same case for Korean speakers, unless they conquer North Korea, and then their usage may be doubled. So, this gives you an idea just where we are and how fast all these things are changing.

Unfortunately Technorati, a company that freely published a very detailed quarterly report about the global blogosphere, stopped providing their quarterly State of Blogosphere reports in late 2006. A new report came out in 2008 but it contained different data². What was interesting about their data is that it provided a specialised picture of the Internet, one directly related to the blogosphere. The company, Technorati, is specialised in collecting the data from blog postings and providing statistics. At the time of the last available data, nearly everyone in Japan had a blog and were blogging like crazy, but now maybe they have already stopped doing that and moved on to microblogging activities, or social networking sites.

The following case studies describe different topics related to language on the Internet. What particularly interests me is looking at how Internet use habits vary in different countries. What we have seen happening over the last few years is the spectacular rise of what I call 'national webs'. These are enclosed web environments, the most well known of which is the Chinese firewall. It is the most well-known because it is so clearly defined to include all of China and its more than 1.3 billion people living inside it. Apparently, the firewall is controlled by an office in Beijing, an institution

² See at <http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogosphere/>.

with 50,000 employees responsible for the censorship (or by the corporate term, ‘dynamic control’) of the Internet. Although possibly less regarded, the fact is that in most other countries, for various reasons, exactly the same development is happening. It remains clear though that in most cases the main vehicle for creating these ‘national webs’ is language since it is visible that the ‘national webs’ more or less coincide with the language webs. Similarly as in the 18th and 19th century building of the nation states, through violent and non-violent ways, languages are being imposed and policing is taking place through these ‘national webs’. It is even possible to get into conspiracy theory and link this control to post 9/11 anti-terror actions to create nationally defined spaces that allow security agents to more closely monitor telecommunications. The good thing about the ‘national webs’, however, is that they are confined spaces. This is finally a big step away from the utopian 1990’s way of thinking about cyberspace as a profoundly global space and into discourse on what is really global and whether global means English. In these new spaces language plays a strange role, because it also facilitates the democratisation of the medium itself. Although English was the exchange language between the people who developed the Internet and the international business language around the technology, for users it was never really intended to stick only to English.

Especially in the 1990’s and a little bit later, the whole topic that I’m approaching here, from a technology perspective, was dealt with under the paradigm of localisation. If you had the software, you had a concept whether this be ‘Web 2.0’, ‘social networking’, the Grid, IP6 standards, Digital Humanities, Cloud Computing, the Semantic Web, and all of these were first developed in English, in California, or somewhere else in the United States. Following these first developments the companies moved to subsidiary offices in other countries, such as Google which has expanded globally creating national offices in nearly every country. In the early 1990’s Microsoft went through the same process. This is the process called ‘localisation’ and the first step of it is to translate the products into the language of each country. This limited general theory describes the current Internet economy as we know it; all products and concepts come from just one place and immediately fit in or do not fit in to the ‘national webs’. Now, the main problem of this process

and in fact of my discussion on this topic is the fact that we are approaching the end of this era of localisation.

Skyrock, the biggest website in France, hosting 16 million French profiles/blogs, is hardly known of outside of French speaking regions. It is widely used throughout francophone Africa, Quebec and other parts of the French-speaking world, holding the profiles of 5.000.000 users, and at any given moment you can find upwards of 4,000 people online using the chat facilities. Skyrock presents a good demonstration that the Internet is a part of mass culture and daily life in many countries. What interests me in Skyrock, is the particular way that it is used. The French are obsessed with blogging, and seemingly enjoy the informal atmosphere, maybe in reaction to the rigidity of their national media systems. What remains peculiar about the French national web is that most of the blogging happens inside this social networking site. There are very few standalone blogs, which are perhaps too technically complicated for most people.

Although the blogging feature is not heavily used on MySpace, about almost half of the Dutch population (about 7.800.000 people) are blogging and social networking on the website Hyves but surprisingly, very few people outside of the Netherlands know about this network. There is a great deal of controversy and tension in the country, mainly about Islam. Recently the anti-Islam film by Geert Wilders was prevented from screening on television so he put it instead on the Internet. Accompanying this kind of tension is also a whole new blogosphere, and the website hosting the controversial film has become the most popular website in the Netherlands. This very cynical, rude, male, anti-foreigner style of media is now being analysed as a new genre called a 'shockblog' as its primary goal is to shock the establishment, both right and left, with anti-'political correctness': everything you are not allowed to say, is said on these blogs. In the Netherlands these blogs are called *Geenstijl*, which means 'no style'. For the past three or four years in a row, the blog containing Wilders' film has won the prize for the best blog and presents a good example for describing a national web with very specific characteristics.

The active discussion about the German blogosphere is of interest because in Germany there are very few blogs. There are

only a couple thousand and very few people visit these sites. This brings up the question of how an entire country can decide collectively not to use a specific software. The German discussion about it is very thorough and presents a lot of good arguments against blog software, bringing up rational issues such as pseudo-celebrity creation, and poor time management due to scrolling, difficult comment navigation, limited interfaces, etc. The German statistics are as follows: there are an estimated 340.000 German-speaking Internet users who are blogging regularly. In the overall German speaking population of approximately 100.000.000 this is a very small number. It is possible that this avoidance is partly due to having a terrible relationship to the mass media, an ongoing popular concern. Having said that, by late 2008, the most popular German social networking site, StudiVZ, hosted 12 million profiles.

This last example makes it possible to see how the element of localisation, especially outside of Western countries, is still very much a critical issue in this discussion. I have selected Hindi as a case study for a number of reasons, first because I have spent the past 10 years working with the Sarai center in Delhi, India and have observed firsthand the local changes in Internet use and culture. The Internet in India is changing fast, but not as fast as in China. Though the numbers are quite spectacular, even in big cities they still sometimes face major infrastructure problems such as electricity cuts and poor Internet connectivity. Additionally, this example remains very important because until a few years ago, there was not a single website in Hindi on the Internet. The Hindi language is spoken by approximately 490 million people, and until very recently they were completely invisible on the Internet. It is easy to say from afar that this is the case due to extreme poverty and illiteracy but this is actually not true. Hindi is a major world language for which there is an enormous amount of publishing houses and newspapers and it is the national language of India, the second biggest country in the world.

This issue of localisation has been a key issue in India, especially for groups working at the forefront such as the Linux user groups, as well as, of course, large companies like Microsoft and Google who have contributed to the amazing work such as adjusting keyboards and graphic interfaces so that people could even start

writing on a computer in Hindi. A small part of this work, which has taken many years, was done at the Sarai centre (see: www.sarai.net). Very important to this process was the development of a system called 'Unicode', a protocol that attributes a unique piece of code to all the symbols of every language in the world. This system was first established in the 1990's and we are now at the very end of its implementation. Today all new computers are able to display Unicode, but it still remains only theory that you can also write every language on every keyboard. After implementing Unicode and allowing people to read and see these symbols, the next problem is software. There are still cases where older web browsers and operating systems are not able to display some Hindi and also Japanese characters. This makes visible the fact that there is still some work to be done in certain areas before the 'national webs' there can really be developed and these technical issues should remind us of how important the geeks have been in this process. Only recently Blogger.com has participated in the creation of specialised software so that people can start to blog in Hindi. Until now the few who were blogging were doing so using Latin script to write in Hindi, a practice which is also common across India for sending emails and SMS messages. Today you can finally find websites with services available in all the different languages and scripts of India but this has been quite a slow process to develop.

To conclude, I think that between localisation and national webs, what we can see happening is that the non-Latin script languages are steadily moving past the localisation phase, onto, for instance, the level of URLs. Shortly it will be possible to include Mandarin characters in your URL. While this of course does not exclude people using Latin-script, it caused controversy amongst US-American engineers and it does present us with the situation that we too will have to adjust our keyboards and typing habits.

Although the consequences for the English language due to these developments may at first seem minimal, we may experience some significant change in the way that English is culturally perceived, as the supremacy of English as a technical language can now be surpassed by other languages. With these new technical capabilities, I suspect we will soon start to see code programmed in languages other than English. As mentioned in the first part of

this discussion, I expect that we will experience a large shift in the Internet population towards Asia, primarily China and India, and their neighbouring countries. The direction of things for the next 10 or 20 years may already be predictable considering the spectacular rise in the number of technical patents being granted to universities all over Asia - finally, beyond the questions of localisation and the exploitation of local markets (through outsourcing) because the time is near when the Rest of Us will finally start to define the technical terms under which we all work. From a perspective of critical Internet culture, language, participation and localisation are interesting developments, but we need not forget that it is the global decision making process concerning the Internet architecture and the protocols, which really counts. This is where the real power should be allocated. The use of one's own language is a first, but crucial step in this direction.

Lev Manovich

REMIX*

Remixability and Modularity

The dramatic increase in quantity of information greatly speeded up by the Internet has been accompanied by another fundamental development. Imagine water running down a mountain. If the quantity of water keeps continuously increasing, it will find numerous new paths and these paths will keep getting wider. Something similar is happening as the amount of information keeps growing — except these paths are also all connected to each other and they go in all directions; up, down, sideways. Here are some of these new paths which facilitate movement of information between people, listed in no particular order: SMS, forwarding and redirecting functions in email clients, mailing lists, Web links, RSS, blogs, social bookmarking, tagging, publishing (as in publishing one’s playlist on a web site), peer-to-peer networks, Web services, Firewire, Bluetooth. These paths stimulate people to draw information from all kinds of sources into their own space, remix and make it available to others, as well as to collaborate or at least play on a common information platform (Wikipedia, Flickr). Barb Dybwad introduces a nice term “collaborative remixability” to talk

* We thank Lev Manovich for letting us print together here, under the title ‘Remix’, two web essays of his. The first, “Remixability and Modularity” was written between October and November 2005; the second, “What comes after Remix?”, in Winter 2007 [Ed. ’s note].

about this process: “I think the most interesting aspects of **Web 2.0** are new tools that explore the continuum between the personal and the social, and tools that are endowed with a certain flexibility and modularity which enables collaborative remixability — a transformative process in which the information and media we’ve organized and shared can be recombined and built on to create new forms, concepts, ideas, mashups and services.”¹

If a traditional twentieth century model of cultural communication described movement of information in one direction from a source to a receiver, now the reception point is just a temporary station on information’s path. If we compare information or media objects with a train, then each receiver can be compared to a train station. Information arrives, gets remixed with other information, and then the new package travels to another destination where the process is repeated.

We can find precedents for this “remixability” – for instance in modern electronic music where remix has become the key method since the 1980s. More generally, most human cultures developed by borrowing and reworking forms and styles from other cultures; the resulting “remixes” were to be incorporated into other cultures. Ancient Rome remixed Ancient Greece; Renaissance remixed antiquity; nineteenth century European architecture remixed many historical periods including the Renaissance; and today graphic and fashion designers remix together numerous historical and local cultural forms, from Japanese Manga to traditional Indian clothing. At first glance it may seem that this traditional cultural remixability is quite different from “vernacular” remixability made possible by the computer-based techniques described above. Clearly, a professional designer working on a poster or a professional musician working on a new mix is different from somebody who is writing a blog entry or publishing her bookmarks.

But this is a wrong view. The two kinds of remixability are part of the same continuum. For the designer and musician (to continue with the sample example) are equally affected by the same computer technologies. Design software and music composition software

¹“Approaching a definition of Web 2.0,” *The Social Software Weblog* <socialsoftware.weblogsinc.com>, accessed October 28, 2005.

make the technical operation of remixing very easy; the Internet greatly increases the ease of locating and reusing material from other periods, artists, designers, and so on. Even more importantly, since every company and freelance professional, in all cultural fields, from motion graphics to architecture to fine art, publish documentation of their projects on their Web sites, everybody can keep up with what everybody else is doing. Therefore, although the speed with which a new original architectural solution starts showing up in projects of other architects and architectural students is much slower than the speed with which an interesting blog entry gets referenced in other blogs, the difference is quantitative rather than qualitative. Similarly, when H&M or Gap can “reverse engineer” the latest fashion collection by a high-end design label in only a few weeks, this is part of the same new logic of speeded up cultural remixability enabled by computers. In short, a person simply copying parts of a message into the new email she is writing, and the largest media and consumer company recycling designs of other companies are doing the same thing – they practice remixability.

Remixability does not require modularity - but it greatly benefits from it. Although precedents of remixing in music can be found earlier, it was the introduction of multi-track mixers that made remixing a standard practice. With each element of a song – vocals, drums, etc. – available for separate manipulation, it became possible to ‘re-mix’ the song: change the volume of some tracks or substitute new tracks for the old ones. According to the book *DJ Culture* by Ulf Poschardt, the first disco remixes were made in 1972 by DJ Tom Moulton. As Poschardt points out, “Moulton sought above all a different weighting of the various soundtracks, and worked the rhythmic elements of the disco songs even more clearly and powerfully...Moulton used the various elements of the sixteen or twenty-four track master tapes and remixed them.”²

In most cultural fields today, we have a clear-cut separation between libraries of elements designed to be sampled – stock photos, graphic backgrounds, music, software libraries – and the

² Ulf Poschardt, *DJ Culture*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Quartet Books Ltd, 1998), 123.

cultural objects that incorporate these elements. For instance, a graphic design may use photographs that the designer bought from a photo stock house. But this fact is not advertised; similarly, the fact that this design (if it is successful) will be inevitably copied and sampled by other designers is not openly acknowledged by the design field. The only fields where sampling and remixing are done openly are music and computer programming, where developers rely on software libraries in writing new software.

Will the separation between libraries of samples and “authentic” cultural works blur in the future? Will the future cultural forms be deliberately made from discrete samples designed to be copied and incorporated into other projects? It is interesting to imagine a cultural ecology where all kinds of cultural objects, regardless of the medium or material, are made from Lego-like building blocks. The blocks come with complete information necessary to easily copy and paste them into a new object – either by a human or a machine. A block knows how to couple with other blocks – and it can even modify itself to enable such coupling. The block can also tell the designer and the user about its cultural history – the sequence of historical borrowings which led to the present form. And if original Lego (or a typical twentieth century housing project) contains only a few kinds of blocks that make all objects one can design with Lego rather similar in appearance, computers can keep track of unlimited numbers of different blocks. At least, they can already keep track of all the possible samples we can pick from all cultural objects available today.

The standard twentieth century notion of cultural modularity involved artists, designers or architects making finished works from the small vocabulary of elemental shapes, or other modules. The scenario I am entertaining proposes a very different kind of modularity that may appear like a contradiction in terms. It is modularity without an a priori defined vocabulary. In this scenario, any well-defined part of any finished cultural object can automatically become a building block for new objects in the same medium. Parts can even ‘publish’ themselves and other cultural objects can “subscribe” to them the way you subscribe now to RSS feeds or podcasts.

When we think of modularity today, we assume that a number of

objects that can be created in a modular system is limited. Indeed, if we are building these objects from a very small set of blocks, there are a limited number of ways in which these blocks can go together. (Although, as the relative physical size of the blocks in relation to the finished object gets smaller, the number of different objects which can be built increases: think IKEA modular bookcase versus a Lego set.) However, in my scenario, modularity does not involve any reduction in the number of forms that can be created. On the contrary, if the blocks themselves are created using one of many already developed computer designed methods (such as parametric design), every time they are used again they can modify themselves automatically to ensure that they look different. In other words, if pre-computer modularity leads to repetition and reduction, post-computer modularity can produce unlimited diversity.

I think that such “real-time” or “on-demand” modularity can only be imagined today after online stores such as Amazon, blog indexing services such as Technorati, and architectural projects such as Yokohama International Port Terminal by Foreign Office Architects and Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles by Frank Gehry visibly demonstrated that we can develop hardware and software to coordinate massive numbers of cultural objects and their building blocks: books, blog entries, construction parts. But whether we will ever have such a cultural ecology is not important. We often look at the present by placing it within long historical trajectories. But I believe that we can also productively use a different, complementary method. We can imagine what will happen if the contemporary techno-cultural conditions which are already firmly established are pushed to their logical limit. In other words, rather than placing the present in the context of the past, we can look at it in the context of a logically possible future. This “look from the future” approach may illuminate the present in a way not possible if we only “look from the past.” The sketch of logically possible cultural ecology I just made is a little experiment in this method: futurology or science fiction as a method of contemporary cultural analysis.

So what else can we see today if we look at it from this logically possible future of complete remixability and universal modularity? If my scenario sketched above looks like a “cultural science

fiction,” consider the process that is already happening on one end of the remixability continuum. Although strictly speaking it does not involve increasing modularity to help remixability, ultimately its logic is the same: helping cultural bits move around more easily. I am talking about a move in Internet culture today from intricately packaged and highly designed “information objects” which are hard to take apart – such as web sites made in Flash – to “strait” information: ASCII text files, feeds of RSS feeds, blog entries, SMS messages. As Richard MacManus and Joshua Porter put it, “Enter Web 2.0, a vision of the Web in which information is broken up into “microcontent” units that can be distributed over dozens of domains. The Web of documents has morphed into a Web of data. We are no longer just looking to the same old sources for information. Now we’re looking to a new set of tools to aggregate and remix microcontent in new and useful ways.”³ And it is much easier to “aggregate and remix microcontent” if it is not locked by a design. A strait ASCII file, a JPEG, a map, a sound or video file can move around the Web and enter into user-defined remixes such as a set of RSS feeds; cultural objects where the parts are locked together (as in the Flash interface) can’t. In short, in the era of Web 2.0, “information wants to be ASCII.”⁴

If we approach the present from the perspective of a potential future of “ultimate modularity / remixability,” we can see other incremental steps towards this future which are already occurring. For instance, Orange <orange.blender.org> (an animation studio in Amsterdam) has set up a team of artists and developers around the world to collaborate on an animated short film; the studio plans to release all of their production files, 3D models, textures, and animation as Creative Commons open content on an extended edition DVD.

Creative Commons offers a special set of Sampling Licenses which “let artists and authors invite other people to use a part of

³ “Web 2.0 Design: Bootstrapping the Social Web,” *Digital Web Magazine* http://www.digital-web.com/types/web_2_design/, accessed October 28, 2005.

⁴ The modern information environment is characterized by a constant tension between the desires to “package” information (Flash design for instance) and strip it from all packaging so it can travel more easily between different media and sites.

their work and make it new.”⁵ Flickr offers multiple tools to combine multiple photos (not broken into parts – at least so far) together: tags, sets, groups, Organizr. The Flickr interface thus positions each photo within multiple “mixes.” Flickr also offers “notes” which allows the users to assign short notes to individual parts of a photograph. To add a note to a photo posted on Flickr, you draw a rectangle on any part of the photo and then attach some text to it. A number of notes can be attached to the same photo. I read this feature as another a sign of modularity/remixability mentality, as it encourages users to mentally break a photo into separate parts. In other words, “notes” break up a single media object – a photograph – into blocks.

In a similar fashion, the common interface of DVDs breaks a film into chapters. Media players such as iPod and online media stores such as iTunes break music CDs into separate tracks – making a track into a new basic unit of musical culture. In all these examples, what was previously a single coherent cultural object is broken into separate blocks that can be accessed individually. In other words, if “information wants to be ASCII,” “contents wants to be granular.” And culture as a whole? Culture has always been about remixability – but now this remixability is available to all participants of Internet culture.

Since the introduction of the first Kodak camera, “users” had tools to create massive amounts of vernacular media. Later they were given amateur film cameras, tape recorders, video recorders... But the fact that people had access to “tools of media production” for as long as the professional media creators, until recently, did not seem to play a big role: the amateur and professional media pools did not mix. Professional photographs traveled between photographers’ darkrooms and newspaper editors; private pictures of a wedding traveled between members of the family. But the emergence of multiple and interlinked paths which encourage media objects to easily travel between web sites, recording and display devices, hard drives and people changes things. Remixability becomes practically a built-in feature of the digital networked media universe. In a nutshell, what may be more important than the introduction of a

⁵ <http://creativecommons.org/about/sampling>, accessed October 31, 2005.

video iPod, a consumer HD camera, Flickr, or yet another exciting new device or service is how easy it is for media objects to travel between all these devices and services — which now all become just temporary stations in media's Brownian motion.

While the topics of remixability and modularity are connected, it is important to note that modularity is something which does not only apply to RSS, social bookmarking, or Web Services. We are talking about the logic which extends beyond the Web and digital culture.⁶

Modularity has been the key principle of modern mass production. Mass production is possible because of the standardization of parts and how they fit with each other — i.e. modularity. Although there are historical precedents for mass production, until the twentieth century they have separate historical cases. But soon after, Ford installs the first moving assembly lines at his factory in 1913, others follow, and soon modularity permeates most areas of modern society. (“An assembly line is a manufacturing process in which interchangeable parts are added to a product in a sequential manner to create an end product.”) Most products we use are mass produced, which means they are modular, i.e. they consist of standardized mass produced parts which fit together in standardized way. Moderns also applied the modular principle outside the factory. For instance, already in 1932 – long before IKEA and Lego sets – Belgian designer Louis Herman De Kornick developed the first modular furniture suitable for the smaller council flats being built at the time.

Today we are still living in an era of mass production and mass modularity, and globalization and outsourcing only strengthen this logic. One commonly evoked characteristic of globalization is greater connectivity – places, systems, countries, organizations etc, becoming connected in more and more ways. Although there are ways to connect things and processes without standardizing and modularizing them – and the further development of such mechanisms is probably essential if we ever want to move beyond all the grim consequences of living in a standardized modular world produced by the twentieth century –it is much easier, for now, just to

⁶ The definitions of terms which appear in quotes in this text are from en.wikipedia.org.

go ahead and apply the twentieth century logic. Because society is so used to it, it's not even thought of as one option among others.

In November 2005 I visited a DesignBrussels event where the designer Jerszy Seymour speculated that once Rapid Manufacturing systems become advanced, cheap and easy, this will give designers in Europe a hope for survival. Today, as soon as some design becomes successful, a company wants to produce it in large quantities – and its production goes to China. Seymour suggested that when Rapid Manufacturing and similar technologies will be installed locally, the designers can become their own manufactures and everything can happen in one place. But obviously this will not happen tomorrow, and it's also not at all certain that Rapid Manufacturing will ever be able to produce complete finished objects without any humans involved in the process, whether it's assembly, finishing, or quality control.

Of course, the modularity principle has not stayed unchanged since the beginning of mass production a hundred years ago. Think of just-in-time manufacturing, just-in-time programming or the use of standardized containers for shipment around the world since the 1960s (over 90% of all goods in the world today are shipped in these containers). The logic of modularity seems to be permeating more layers of society than ever before, and computers – which are great for keeping track of numerous parts and coordinating their movements – only help this process.

The logic of culture often runs behind the changes in economy – so while modularity has been the basis of modern industrial society since the early twentieth century, we only start seeing the modularity principle in cultural production and distribution on a large scale in the last few decades. While Adorno and Horkheimer were writing about “culture industry” already in the 1940s, it was not then - and it's not today - a true modern industry.⁷ In some areas, such as production of Hollywood animated features or computer games,

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *The Culture Industry. Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, 1947. [Chapter in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; available e.g. at <http://libcom.org/library/dialectic-of-enlightenment-theodor-adorno-max-horkheimer>; ed.'s note]

we see more of the factory logic at work with extensive division of labor. In the case of software engineering (i.e. programming), software is put together to a large extent from already available software modules – but this is done by individual programmers or teams who often spend months or years on one project – quite different from Ford production line assembling of one identical car after another. In short, today cultural modularity has not reached the systematic character of the industrial standardization circa 1913.

But this does not mean that modularity in contemporary culture simply lags behind industrial modularity, responsible for mass production. Rather, cultural modularity seems to be governed by a different logic than industrial modularity. On the one hand, “mass culture” is made possible by a complete industrial-type modularity on the levels of packaging and distribution. In other words, all the material carriers of cultural content in the modern period have been standardized, just as was done in the production of all goods - from first photo and films formats at the end of the nineteenth century to game cartridges, DVDs, memory cards, interchangeable camera lenses, etc. But the actual making of content was never standardized in the same way.⁸ So while mass culture involves putting together new products – films, television programmes, songs, games – from a limited repertoire of themes, narratives, icons using a limited number of conventions, this is done by the teams of human authors on a one by one basis. And while more recently we see the trend toward the re-use of cultural assets in commercial culture, i.e. media franchising – characters, settings, icons which appear not in one

⁸ In “Culture industry reconsidered,” Adorno writes: “the expression “industry” is not to be taken too literally. It refers to the standardization of the thing itself — such as that of the Western, familiar to every movie-goer — and to the rationalization of distribution techniques, but not strictly to the production process... it [culture industry] is industrial more in a sociological sense, in the incorporation of industrial forms of organization even when nothing is manufactured — as in the rationalization of office work — rather than in the sense of anything really and actually produced by technological rationality.” Theodor W. Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” *New German Critique*, 6, Fall 1975, pp. 12-19.

but a whole range of cultural products – film sequels, computer games, theme parks, toys, etc. – this does not seem to change the basic “pre-industrial” logic of the production process. For Adorno, this individual character of each product is part of the ideology of mass culture: “Each product affects an individual air; individuality itself serves to reinforce ideology, in so far as the illusion is conjured up that the completely reified and mediated is a sanctuary from immediacy and life.”⁹

On the other hand, what seems to be happening is that the “users” themselves have been gradually “modularizing” culture. In other words, modularity has been coming into modern culture from the outside, so to speak, rather than being built-in, as in industrial production. In the 1980s, musicians start sampling already published music; TV fans start sampling their favorite TV series to produce their own “slash films,” game fans start creating new game levels and all other kinds of game modifications. (Mods “can include new items, weapons, characters, enemies, models, modes, textures, levels, and story lines.”) And of course, from the very beginning of mass culture in the early twentieth century, artists have immediately starting sampling and remixing mass cultural products – think of Kurt Schwitters’ collage and particularly photomontage practice which becomes popular right after WWI among artists in Russia and Germany. This continued with Pop Art, appropriation art, and video art.

Enter the computer. In *The Language of New Media*, I named modularity as one of the principles of computerized media. If before the modularity principle was applied to the packaging of cultural goods and raw media (photo stock, blank videotapes, etc.), computerization modularizes culture on a structural level. Images are broken into pixels; graphic designs, film and video are broken into layers. Hypertext modularizes text. Markup languages such as HTML and media formats such as QuickTime and MPEG-7 modularize multimedia documents in general. We can talk about what this modularization already did to culture – think of the World Wide Web as just one example – but this is a whole new conversation.

⁹ Ibid.

In short: in culture, we have been modular for a long time already. But at the same time, “we have never been modular”¹⁰ – which I think is a very good thing.

What Comes After Remix? ¹¹

It is a truism today that we live in a “remix culture.” Today, many cultural and lifestyle arenas –music, fashion, design, art, web applications, user created media, food – are governed by remixes, fusions, collages, or mash-ups. If post-modernism defined the 1980s, remix definitely dominates the 2000s, and it will probably continue to rule the next decade as well ¹². Here are just a few examples of how remix continues to expand. In his 2004/2005-winter collection John Galliano (a fashion designer for the house of Dior) mixed the vagabond look, Yemenite traditions, East-European motifs, and other sources that he collects during his extensive travels around the world. DJ Spoky created a feature-length remix of D.W. Griffith’s 1912 “Birth of a Nation” which he appropriately named “Rebirth of a Nation.” In April 2006, the Annenberg Center at University of Southern California ran a two-day conference on “Networked Politics” which had sessions and presentations of a variety of remix cultures on the Web: political remix videos, anime music videos, Machinima, alternative news, infrastructure hacks. ¹³ In addition to these cultures that remix media content, we also have a growing number of software applications that remix data – so called software “mash-ups.” Wikipedia defines a mash-up as “a website or application that combines content from more than one

¹⁰This phrase is an appropriation of a title of a book by Bruno Latour *We have never been modern* [Harvard University Press, 1993] [from a note of Manovich’s to his 2008 version in *Software in Command*; eds’ note].

¹¹ [This ‘sequel’ was written in Winter 2007; a newer version, taking things further, is included in Part 3, Chapter 5 of Manovich’s new book *Software Takes Command* (2008 version, available at <http://www.manovich.net>), 224 - ed. ’s note].

¹² For an expanding resource on remix culture, visit <http://remixtheory.net/> by Eduardo Navas.

¹³ <http://netpublics.annenberg.edu/>, accessed February 4, 2007.

source into an integrated experience.”¹⁴ At the moment of this writing (February 4, 2007), the web site www.programmableweb.com listed the total of 1511 mash-ups, and it estimated that the average of 3 new mash-ups Web applications are being published every day.¹⁵

Remix practice extends beyond culture and Internet. *Wired* magazine devoted its July 2005 issue to the theme Remix Planet. The introduction boldly stated: “From *Kill Bill* to Gorillaz, from custom Nikes to *Pimp My Ride*, this is the age of the remix.”¹⁶ Another top IT trend watcher in the world – the annual O’Reilly Emerging Technology conferences (ETECH) – similarly adopted Remix as the theme for its 2005 conference. Attending the conference, I watched in amazement how top executives from Microsoft, Yahoo, Amazon, and other IT companies not precisely known for their avant-garde aspirations, described their recent technologies and research projects using the concept of remixing. If I had any doubts that we are living not simply in Remix Culture but in a Remix Era, they disappeared right at that conference.

Remixing originally had a precise and a narrow meaning that gradually became diffused. Although precedents of remixing can be found earlier, it was the introduction of multi-track mixers that made remixing a standard practice. With each element of a song – vocals, drums, etc. – available for separate manipulation, it became possible to “re-mix” the song: change the volume of some tracks or substitute new tracks for the old ones. Gradually the term became more and more broad, today referring to any reworking of already existing cultural work(s).

In his book *DJ Culture*, Ulf Poschardt singles out different stages in the evolution of remixing practice. In 1972 DJ Tom Moulton made his first disco remixes; as Poschardt points out, they “show a very chaste treatment of the original song. Moulton sought above all a different weighting of the various soundtracks,

¹⁴http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mashup_%28web_application_hybrid%29, accessed February 4, 2007.

¹⁵ <http://www.programmableweb.com/mashups>, accessed February 4, 2007.

¹⁶ <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.07/intro.html>, accessed February 4, 2007.

and worked the rhythmic elements of the disco songs even more clearly and powerfully...Moulton used the various elements of the sixteen or twenty-four track master tapes and remixed them.”

¹⁷ By 1987, “DJs started to ask other DJs for remixes” and the treatment of the original material became much more aggressive. For example, “Coldcut used the vocals from Ofra Hanza’s ‘Im Nin Alu’ and contrasted Rakim’s ultra-deep bass voice with her provocatively feminine voice. To this were added techno sounds and a house-inspired remix of a rhythm section that loosened the heavy, sliding beat of the rap piece, making it sound lighter and brighter.” ¹⁸

Around the turn of the century (20th to 21st) people started to apply the term “remix” to other media besides music: visual projects, software, literary texts. Since, in my view, electronic music and software serve as the two key reservoirs of new metaphors for the rest of culture today, this expansion of the term is inevitable; one can only wonder why it did not happen earlier. Yet we are left with an interesting paradox: while in the realm of commercial music remixing is officially accepted¹⁹, in other cultural areas it is seen as violating the copyright and therefore as stealing. So while filmmakers, visual artists, photographers, architects and Web designers routinely remix already existing works, this is not openly admitted, and no proper terms equivalent to remixing in music exist to describe these practices.

One term that is sometimes used to talk about these practices in non-music areas is “appropriation.” The term was first used to refer to certain New York-based post-modern artists of the early 1980s who re-worked older photographic images – Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger, and some others. But the term “appropriation” never achieved the same wide use as “remixing.” In fact, in contrast to “remix,” “appropriation” never completely left its original art world context where it was coined. I think that

¹⁷ Ulf Poschardt, *DJ Culture*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Quartet Books Ltd, 1998), 123.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁹ For instance, Web users are invited to remix Madonna songs at <http://madonna.acidplanet.com/default.asp?subsection=madonna>.

“remixing” is a better term anyway because it suggests a systematic re-working of a source, the meaning which “appropriation” does not have. And indeed, the original “appropriation artists” such as Richard Prince simply copied the existing image as a whole rather than re-mixing it. As in the case of Duchamp’s famous urinal, the aesthetic effect here is the result of a transfer of a cultural sign from one sphere to another, rather than any modification of a sign.

The other older term commonly used across media is “quoting”, but I see it as describing a very different logic than remixing. If remixing implies systematically rearranging the whole text, quoting refers to inserting some fragments from old text(s) into the new one. Thus, I think we should not see quoting as a historical precedent for remixing. Rather, we can think of it as a precedent for another new practice of authorship practice that, like remixing, was made possible by electronic and digital technology – “sampling”.

Music critic Andrew Goodwin defined sampling as “the uninhibited use of digital sound recording as a central element of composition. Sampling thus becomes an aesthetic programme”²⁰. We can say that with sampling technology, the practices of montage and collage that were always central to twentieth century culture, became industrialized. Yet we should be careful in applying the old terms to new technologically driven cultural practices. The terms “montage” and “collage” regularly pop up in the writings of music theorists from Poschardt to Kodwo Eshun and DJ Spooky who in 2004 published a brilliant book, *Rhythm Science*, which ended up on a number of “best 10 books of 2004” lists and which put forward “unlimited remix” as the artistic and political technique of our time.²¹ In my view, these terms that come to us from literary and visual modernism of the early twentieth century – think, for instance, of works by Moholy-Nagy, Hannah Höch or Raoul Hausmann – do not always adequately describe new electronic music. Let us note just three differences. Firstly, musical samples are often arranged in loops. Secondly, the nature of sound allows musicians to mix pre-existent sounds in a variety of ways, from clearly differentiating

²⁰ Ibid., 280.

²¹ Paul D. Miller *aka* Dj Spooky that Subliminal Kid. *Rhythm Science*. MIT Press, 2004.

and contrasting individual samples (thus following the traditional modernist aesthetics of montage/collage), to mixing them into an organic and coherent whole. To use the terms of Roland Barthes, we can say that if modernist collage always involved a “clash” of elements, electronic and software collage also allows for “blend.”²² Thirdly, electronic musicians now often conceive their works beforehand as something that will be remixed, sampled, taken apart and modified.

It is relevant to note here that the revolution in electronic pop music that took place in the second part of the 1980s was paralleled by similar developments in pop visual culture. The introduction of electronic editing equipment such as switcher, seyer, Paintbox, and image store made remixing and sampling a common practice in video production towards the end of the decade; first pioneered in music videos, it later took over the whole visual culture of TV. Other software tools such as Photoshop (1989) and After Effects (1993) had the same effect on the fields of graphic design, motion graphics, commercial illustration and photography. And, a few years later, the World Wide Web redefined an electronic document as a mix of other documents. Remix culture has arrived.

The question that at this point is really hard to answer is what comes after remix? Will we get eventually tired of cultural objects - be they dresses by Alexander McQueen, motion graphics by MK12 or songs by Aphex Twin - made from samples which come from the already existing database of culture? And if we do, will it still be psychologically possible to create a new aesthetics that does not rely on excessive sampling?

When I was emigrating from Russia to the U.S. in 1981, moving from grey and red communist Moscow to a vibrant and post-modern New York, I and others living in Russia felt that the Communist regime would last for at least another 300 years. But already ten years later, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Similarly, in the middle of the 1990s, the euphoria unleashed by the Web, the collapse of Communist governments in Eastern Europe and the early effects of globalization created an impression that we had

²² Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146.

finally left the Cold War culture behind – its heavily armed borders, massive spying, and the military-industrial complex. And once again, only ten years later, we seem to be back in the darkest years of the Cold War, except that now we are being tracked with RFID chips, computer vision surveillance systems, data mining and other new technologies of the twenty first century. So it is very possible that remix culture, which right now appears to be so firmly in place that it can't be challenged by any other cultural logic, will morph into something else sooner than we think.

I don't know what comes after remix. But if we try now to develop a better historical and theoretical understanding of the remix era, we will be in a better position to recognize and understand whatever new era will replace it.

Tiziana Terranova

Chain reactions: digital recombination and analogue chaos*

If electronic textuality (from e-literature to hypertext to weblogs and text messaging) constitutes a break within alphabetical culture comparable to the invention of print, what is the best way to understand such a break? The most common way to conceptualise this shift explains it as the outcome of a technological innovation that this time revolves around digitisation and computers rather than around movable types and the press. Such perspective explains electronic textuality as essentially a function of the digitisation of print. Digitisation is thus said to give concrete technical expression to the modernist critique of the ‘author’ as the origin of text. Obeying what Lev Manovich has called the principles of ‘variability’ and ‘modularity’ of new media objects, digitised text, in fact, seems to offer itself much more readily to the action of transversal and recombinable modifications which empower the reader to actively engage in the production of the textual experience.¹ This can happen either by changing the order in which texts are read (as in CD-ROMs and other hyperlinked documents); or by involving the

* This essay was first delivered at the conference “Under Construction: digital literature and theoretical approximations” Barcelona, April 2004, organized by the “Hermeneia. Estudios literarios y tecnologías digitales” Research Group and subsequently published in the conference proceedings (Laura Borràs, ed., *Under construction: Literaturas digitales y aproximaciones teóricas*, (Barcelona: Ediuoc, 2004); we thank the University of Catalogna, Laura Borràs and the Hermeneia group for permission to republish it here.

¹ See Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 2001).

reader in adding and editing collectively produced texts (as in the case of wikis, for example).

But can the relationship between analogue and digital simply be understood as one of filiation and succession? In this paper, I suggest that digitisation does not simply replace and succeed analogue media, but that electronic textuality should be understood as a reconfiguration of the overall relation between digital and analogue dynamics. On the one hand, that is, we can confirm the observation of new media theory about the shift from analogue to digital representation entailing a shift from continuous to discrete quantities. On the other hand, however, we can also see such shift as foregrounding nonlinear modes of communication, which, as we will see, can be described as an amplification of analogue dynamics. On the one side, then, a digital codification which cuts up analogue fluxes by emphasising discrete microvariations within what has been described as a ‘recombinant culture’;² on the other hand, however, an analogue dynamics of increasing and decreasing waves of variable lengths and power, a chaotic physics of amplifications and interference, of diffusion, turbulence and bifurcations. My argument here is that both these series of transformations affect our understanding of electronic textuality as *event* –that is as a break that is not so much about the succession of ‘new media’, as about, literally, the creation of a hollow space, posing new questions which can only be engaged through processes of transversal experimentation.³

Digitisation and non-linearity

Digitisation and non-linearity, although often associated, might be considered as expressing different logics. On the one hand, that is, digitization pertains to what has been called the ‘digital medium’, or the digital computer, which, for new media theorists such as

² See Critical Art Ensemble, *The Electronic Disturbance* (New York: Autonomedia, 1994); and the *Rekombinant: media nodale, informazione modulare*, website (web-site www.rekombinant.org).

³ For an analysis of contemporary media in terms of the ‘event’ see Maurizio Lazzarato “Struggle, Event, Media” in *ØYES Border Ø, Location Yes* (<http://www.makeworlds.org/node/view/62>; last accessed 29.05.2004).

Janet H. Murray constitutes a single new medium of representation “formed by the braided interplay of technical invention and cultural expression at the end of the 20th century”.⁴ Such digital medium is characterized by a new mode of representation (expressed by the discrete character of the bit and hence by digital logarithms); and new processing techniques (informed overall by the power of mathematical algorithms). Digitisation, as Gregory Bateson observed, is a mode of representation that privileges techniques of counting over those of measuring – it implies that is an exact cut, rather than an imprecise demarcation. “Between *two* and *three* there is a jump. In the case of quantity, there is no such jump and because the jump is missing in the world of quantity it is impossible for any quantity to be exact. You can have exactly three tomatoes. You can never have exactly three gallons of water. Always quantity is approximate”.⁵ At the same time, as Norbert Wiener also commented, what is cut into is not a static reality, but indeterminate fluxes – a quantum reality where even infinitesimal temporal differences give rise to micro-mutations. The digitisation of representation takes place within a scientific ontology where the deterministic laws of classical dynamics are shown to cover very limited regions of the world – squeezed on one side by the micro-leaps of subatomic waves/particles and, as the digital computer itself will help to show, the turbulent dynamics of chaos. In such an indeterminate world, digital machines offered “great advantages for the most varied problems of communication and control...”, in as much as ‘the sharpness of the decision between “yes” and “no” permits them to accumulate information in such a way as to allow us to discriminate very small differences in very large numbers”.⁶ Digital representation, by privileging counting over measuring, foregrounds the key importance of such indeterminate micro-variations – while also furthering the development of new techniques

⁴ Janet H. Murray, “Inventing the Medium”, in Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, eds., *The New Media Reader* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The MIT Press, 2003).

⁵ Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), 49.

⁶ Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*. (London: FA Books, 1989), 64.

of control. Digital machines such as the computer disassemble continuous analogue quantities into a world of smaller or greater mutations which they capture with the flexibility of a ‘sieve with variable meshes’.⁷ The binary digit constitutes the possible minimum differentiation, which, once submitted to the action of the algorithm, gives rise to a whole set of techniques able to isolate and modulate micro-variations at different scales.⁸ For example, the database (which for Lev Manovich expresses the basic model of new media) cuts into social and cultural fluxes that it disassembles through the bit and then reassembles and modifies through the nonlinear action of the algorithm.⁹ A digital database is not a fixed data structure organized around a few typological categories, but it allows a much more flexible and nuanced modulation of data according to a potentially infinite number of more or less arbitrary labels. However, the database file structure does not simply express the power to represent the socius understood as a fixed and static structure. If the database is open, like the world wide web for example, that is if it can spontaneously accept new inputs and generate new outputs, it amplifies the power of such micro-variations. An open database is a field in continuous variation which is paradoxically produced by the fluctuating movement of smaller or greater cuts. Thus the digital medium is responsible for a two fold operation: on the one hand it cuts up the analogue (the continuous qualities of semiotic fluxes); and on the other hand, it ‘analogsises’ the digital by introducing into such world of bits the nonlinearity of recursive operations.

In this sense, digitisation implies an interesting transformation of textuality which operates in a kind of analogue discontinuity with modern understandings of text (in as much as more than a

⁷ This last sentence is used by Gilles Deleuze in his description of what he called ‘control societies’ – where, as he believed, technologies of communication come to supplement and displace the disciplinary dispositifs and biopolitical governmentality studied by Michel Foucault; see Gilles Deleuze “Postscript on Control Societies”, in *Negotiations: 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁸ See Claude E Shannon, “A Mathematical Theory of Communication”, in N.J.A. Sloane and Aaron D. Wyner, eds., *Claude Elwood Shannon Collected Papers* (New York: IEEE Press, 1999), 5-83.

⁹ See Lev Manovich *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 2001).

clear cut, it implies a kind of threshold after which a qualitative transformation takes place). Thus the notion of a text, as elaborated for example in Roland Barthes' classic essay 'From Work to Text', already combined the digital and the analogue, whilst also already pushing our understanding of linguistic expression towards the nonlinear.¹⁰ As expressed by the alphabet, for example, language is already digital. The notion of the digital, in fact, is not exclusive to the bit – which after all is the abbreviation for binary digit. In alphabetic writing, language is a digital machine which is usually comprised of between 21 and 24 digits (or letters). To this digital dimension of linguistic expression in an alphabetic mode (which extends to the 'cut' between different works and authors), the weave of textuality described by Barthes added the nonlinear relation between different texts which are now not so much woven together as implicated in analogue dynamics of overlapping resonances and interferences giving rise to the 'writerly text'. Bits of texts are analogically captured within a flow of textuality within which individual authors are repositioned as simple points of passages or thresholds marking qualitative processes of individuation. Early hypertext theory started from a similar understanding of the chaotic dynamics of thinking and writing. From Vannevar Bush to Ted Nelson, in fact, we are confronted with a notion of hypertext as an 'extension and generality' of neuronal associative trails.¹¹ Hypertext theory and practice constitutes a kind of externalization of the process of writing understood as an analogue, that is nonlinear, relation between the incorporeal and chaotic process of thinking and the corporeal, machinic process of writing. "Many writers and research professionals have files or collection of notes which are tied to manuscripts in progress. Indeed often personal files shade into manuscripts, and the assembly of textual notes *becomes* the writing of text without a sharp break".¹²

This nonlinear dynamics, which are implied even in the interplay

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text", in Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, eds., *Modern Literary Theory* (New York: Arnold, 1996).

¹¹ Noah Wardrip-Fruin, "[Introduction]" to Ted Nelson "A File Structure for the Complex, the Changing and the Indeterminate" in *The New Media Reader*, 133.

¹² Ted Nelson "A File Structure", 134.

of logarithms and algorithms within the digital medium, are further amplified in what we might call network media rather than simply within individual computers as such. Network media based on the distributed movement of digital datagrams are increasingly amplifying the combined power of digital micro-variations and analogue transductions- and thus contributing to the irruption of the 'event' that is electronic textuality.

Network media

Network media, of course, have not always foregrounded the power of the analogue. On the contrary, the linear bias of modern media networks (from print to broadcasting) has for a long time contributed to the opposite movement: a conceptual reduction of communication to the linear transmission of messages. This is after all the model of communication formalised by information theory and mass communication research throughout the twentieth century. In Claude Shannon's "A Mathematical Theory of Communication" (1948), communication is what takes place between a sender and a receiver – it is the transmission of information understood as a pre-coding of mutually excluding alternatives which are mathematically captured by the logarithm. Albeit Shannon explicitly argued that his mathematical definition of information did not involve or address the problem of meaning, the transmission model of communication did end up foregrounding the power of signification as code – as the semantic dimension of communication shunned by Shannon started obsessing both information theorists and media researchers. As Stuart Hall will make clear in his analysis of media communication, the encoding/decoding model does allow the isolation of meaning-production as an autonomous (albeit overdetermined) moment within the circuit of communication.¹³ As writers such as Jacques Derrida and Armand Mattelart have demonstrated, this linear model resonated with modern conceptions of communication, which, from the French *ideologues* to Jurgen Habermas, has always insisted on

¹³ Stuart Hall "Encoding/Decoding", in Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1993).

communication as the vehicle for the transmission of ideas.¹⁴ The post-world war II years, scholars drawing from deconstruction and cultural studies, tried to wrench textuality away from linearity, but in a way they simply managed to non-linearize meaning without really challenging a ‘representational’ model of language. The relationship between the signifier and the signified was described as a slippery one, but the model of communication as transmission of meaning was not overall challenged. Hermeneutics remains the model for most culturalist approaches to textuality.

The power of nonlinearity, however, immediately comes to the fore with new media theory. On the one hand, it becomes a matter of breaking down the linearity of the printed word through the digital cut of the hyperlink in ways that, as George P. Landow has demonstrated, partially fulfil the post-structuralist drive to non-linearize both meanings and textuality.¹⁵ However, as Sadie Plant put it, neither media nor cultural studies ever completely managed to break away from a humanist hermeneutic model that understood linearity and nonlinearity as an exclusive feature of language as a meaningful activity of representation of the world.¹⁶ In order to understand the virtual complexity of culture, she argued, a much more radical break was needed than the one most deconstructive thinking was willing to make. Such a break would paradoxically mean to de-throne language from its transcendental position and look at textuality outside the limits established by ‘the linguistic turn’, which, in Alan Badiou’s words, amounted “to making language, its structures, and its resources the transcendental of every investigation of the faculty of knowledge, and to the setting up of philosophy as either a generalized grammar or a weak logic”.¹⁷ This

¹⁴ See Armand Mattelart, *The Invention of Communication*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). On communication and the Enlightenment see Jacques Derrida “Signature, Event, Context” in Peggy Kamuf, ed., *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*. (New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1991).

¹⁵ George P. Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992)

¹⁶ Sadie Plant, “The Virtual Complexity of Culture”, in G. Robertson, M. Mash, et al., eds., *FutureNatural: nature/science/culture* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁷ Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 19.

move away from the linguistic turn de-humanises the dynamics of communication shifting the emphasis from the transmission of meanings and representation to the physical dynamics of hyperconnectivity.

The intensification of inter-networking through media platforms such as the Internet has done much to popularize an increasing awareness of such non-human, nonlinear dynamics of communication. These dynamics are not human not because they do not involve and impact on humans, but because they do not remain within the confines of the humanistic discourse that understand the former as unique animals, irrevocably separated from the physical world by their capacity to use language and express an interior world. We are de-humanised by network communication in as much as it returns the social to larger physical dynamics which, nevertheless, are not deterministic but remain open to reinvention. The Internet, for example, has foregrounded the importance of the nonlinear movement of information across an open milieu of communication over the human capacity to understand linguistic signs. In an open network milieu, messages no longer simply flow from a sender to a receiver but distribute themselves and propagate in divergent or convergent movements which, literally, carry us away with them. If the hyperlink and the address space digitise such information space, they do not bound it or delimit it at one end in the same way as the printed page or broadcasting did. The hyperlink and the Internet Protocol cut through a milieu of communication that is fundamentally an open field of propagation for indeterminate and mutating micro-variations.

In this sense, the Internet has introduced a model of communication that privileges interconnectivity and chain reactions over the linear transmission of information. As Paul Virilio has put it, it has allowed us to see how information “does not merely transmit or communicate the news, facts” but entails “*interactivity* to a degree one can’t even imagine; feedbacks whose consequences one can’t even fathom since we’ve never seen it before”.¹⁸ These dynamics are not exclusive to the Internet, but it is the latter that has allowed them to

¹⁸ Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 178. See also Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb* (New York: Verso, 2001).

come to the fore. The contribution of inter-networking technologies has not simply been the invention of a new kind of machine (an open, distributed, virtual machine which exists virtually everywhere and yet nowhere in particular), but the induction of a new speed of communication. Such speed tunes the power of analogue fluxes to the infinitesimal variations of the digital cut. This change of speed questions our understanding of cultural politics as a battleground of signification while inducing an increasingly widespread, more or less articulate, awareness of analogue dynamics. An awareness of semiotic encodings/decodings is becoming secondary to a knowledge of the dynamics by which information propagates and diffuses. What matters is not only the form/content relation between signifiers and signifieds, but also the dynamics of informational flows. In the recent case of the Spanish election in 2004, for example, the propagandistic semiotic wave initiated by television where the bombings were attributed a false political origin crashed and was overwhelmed not so much by oppositional semiotic decodings of the television message as by chaotic microwaves of nonlinear communication set in motion by text messaging, emails and the web,

Unlike Virilio, then, it is possible to argue that the speed of network media is not simply an entropic movement of homogenisation, but it also foregrounds what Gilbert Simondon called the ‘transductive operation’. “By transduction we mean all operations –physical, biological, mental, social – by which an activity propagates little by little within a given milieu, basing such propagation on a structuration of the milieu which is accomplished each place at a time”.¹⁹ Transductive dynamics are chain reactions which do not exclude, but capture and resonate with deterritorialised psychic, physical and biological fluxes – from the propagation of affects such as fear or solidarity, to viral epidemics and black-outs.²⁰ As such network media seem to belong to a different plane than the digital medium.

¹⁹ Gilbert Simondon, *L'Individuazione psichica e collettiva* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2001), 36 (my translation).

²⁰ For a more extended analysis of the propagations of affects in informational milieu see T. Terranova, “Communications’ Biopower”, in *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, network media do not simply involve a 'plane of organization' that is composed of individuated articulations of form and content (such as the Internet or wireless telephony, for example), but also by a 'plane of consistency'- a destratified field of interaction implying a differential propagation of intensities and transformative conjunctions of deterritorialized fluxes.²¹ Thus the dynamics triggered by network media foreground the plane of consistency over that of organization: they bring to the fore of cultural and media analysis the transversal, open movements of information.

Network media are not simply a single and homogeneous space. On the contrary, the digital and nonlinear dynamics of informational flows in a medium such as the Internet foreground the importance of nonlinear, *analogue* dynamics of transduction and transformation in the field of communication as a whole. And yet, as I have argued, this shift in communication models cannot be understood as a linear break.

As repeatedly pointed out by media historians, new media, in fact, do not simply succeed, subsume or replace 'old media'.²² In media studies, the difficulty of arguing for simple linear breaks between different media ages, for example, is always related to the persistence of different media technologies, cultures and communication systems which in many cases appear to overlap and coexist with new ones (as with the postal service, broadcasting, books and the Internet). The dynamics by which new media are introduced, then, is thus not *simply* one of subsumption and filiation, but also of migration and virtualization of coexisting modes of communication. The analogue is not replaced by the digital, but both are involved in a process of displacement and heterogenesis (a becoming other). Thus, electronic textuality does not simply involve the emergence of a new digital medium which thus replaces an older form such as print. Electronic textuality emerges within a chaotic

²¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Athlone Books, 1988), 70.

²² See Brian Winston, *Media Technology and Society. A History: From the Telegraph to the Internet* (London: Routledge, 1998).

and nonlinear dynamics which implies processes of resonance, amplification, dampening and interference within a given textual milieu. We could thus look, for example, at the transversal dynamics which allow the urban poetry of rap to splice up the antiphonic pace of call-and-response of the African diaspora onto the syncopated rhythm of electronic synthesizers and drum machines – and then set it spinning through the digital medium in countless ‘rip, mix and burn’ mutations.²³ Or we could observe the resonance established within a singular communication network, such as the railway system, between the contracted textuality of text-messaging, the slower, linear experience of reading a book, the broken pace of casual conversations or the visual mosaic of advertising, magazines and newspapers. Such analogue dynamics are inherently noisy, nonlinear and incorporeal – and yet very far from being immaterial.

Network media allow us to see how textual flows are not simply separated in individuated media (from mobile phones to novels), but resonate across different media forms (from magazines to the internet; from mobile telephony to speech; from digital cameras to print). They change form as they are locally decoded and recoded. They stall or propagate, amplify or inhibit the emergence of *common* or *antagonistic* milieus of communication. Every cultural production or formation, any production of meaning, that is, is inseparable from the wider nonlinear dynamics that determine the spread of images and words, sounds and affects across hyperconnected, folded and nested topologies. In this sense, the nonlinear does not replace the linear, because, in a way, it has always shadowed it. And these nonlinear dynamics, as Brian Massumi has observed, are endowed with traits that we can only describe as ‘analog’: “This is the analog in a sense close to the technical meaning, as a continuously variable impulse or momentum that can cross from one qualitatively different medium into another. Like electricity into sound waves. Or heat into pain. Or light wave into vision. Or vision into imagination. Variable continuity across the qualitatively different: continuity of transformation”.²⁴

²³ See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, (London and New York: Verso, 1993).

²⁴ See Brian Massumi, “On the Superiority of the Analog”, in *Parables for the*

Intermedia resonance

The event of electronic textuality, then, lies in the entanglement of linear digital codification (as in the logarithmic contraction of language in electronic textuality) and nonlinear analogue transduction (as in the propagation of information) within the increasing turbulence triggered by the speeding up of analogue dynamics in a digital age. The increasing interconnection of networks foreground this movement and yet it does not do so simply by subsuming or replacing older media. If we accept McLuhan's idea that the content of every new medium is an older one, every medium is nothing else but the overall form that holds together a nested series of contents (where, for example, the content of electronic text would be printed text; and the content of printed text would be speech; and the content of speech would be thought; and the content of thought would be the abstract informational flows engendered by parallel networks of switching neurons in the central nervous system). But this content, as we have seen, is not simply dialectically subsumed by a new medium, but it keeps resonating with it in a process that has been described as 'virtualisation'. It is not so much subsumed as folded by the new configuration – and every fold, as espoused in Deleuze's reading of the Baroque – is a virtualisation. Every fold, that is, includes impossible worlds that coexist as opposing tendencies or bifurcations.²⁵

When grasped within an overall network milieu, digitisation does not simply imply the disappearance of analogue textuality, but it is an 'event' which opens up a new problematic, a set of possibilities for the reinvention of older genres such as poetry, biography, journalism and fiction. The digitisation of text implies the potential for a radical heterogenesis which, as Pierre Levy has argued, does not necessarily operate through resemblance (there is no real resemblance between the chemical signals in the nervous system and speech; as there is no necessary resemblance between the sound of words and their written expression).²⁶ New media do

Virtual (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 133-143, esp. 135.

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: The Athlone Press, 1993).

²⁶ Pierre Levy, *Becoming Virtual. Reality in the Digital Age* (New York and London:

not so much succeed old media as much as they speed up existing processes and hollow out new spaces where bifurcating tendencies coexist. The spaces opened up electronic textuality can be stretched and populated by an active and engaged imagination *and* can also be exhausted and depleted through the logic of ‘added value’ or through that of fascist reterritorialisations. Text is not simply virtualized by becoming encoded in binary digits, but through a larger social process of reinvention and experimentation –the analogue moment of transduction or ‘variable continuity across the qualitatively different’.

Literature and poetry –those constellations of forms of expression which for centuries have evolved in a mutually parasitic relation with speech and print- will not be simply replaced and subsumed by e-books, but they are likely to be affected by the emergence of network media in specific ways. Electronic textuality is an event (and accident) befalling the printed page in several parallel ways: from production (word processing, html coding, and writer’s software) to the emergence of new forms and genres (e-literature, hyper-fiction, web-logs blurring the fictional/non fictional divide)²⁷ and even distribution (from the e-books to Internet bookstores and digital presses).

The example of the digitisation of distribution is particularly intriguing because it implies the possibility of a reverse movement of resonance and amplification with the printed page. It could be argued, for example, that a digital press able to swiftly and flexibly print a small number of copies of a book might contribute to hollow out important spaces for books with a small circulation which would otherwise be considered as unviable economic enterprises. If books can be post-Taylorised, that means that a larger ecology of titles that exist ‘virtually’ until a bounded copy is requested can cause a migration of content back into print but by way of a bizarre nonlinear virtualisation of the electronic/print relation. This process could take place through digital networks (where for example both Amazon and e-bay have contributed to the re-circulation of rare and

Plenum Trade, 1998).

²⁷ See the hyperfiction network at <http://www.hyperfiction.net/>; and Belle de Jour’s controversial diary at <http://belledejour-uk.blogspot.com/>.

out of print books), but it does not necessarily imply the use of the Internet. We can imagine for example a network of vans carrying mobile digital presses which can print books on request and on the spot to places with scarce Internet penetration. This could induce an analogous proliferation of micro-textual ecologies in ways that parallel but exceed the Internet medium (whose susceptibility to mass concentration is well documented through the statistical mapping of what have been called ‘power laws’).²⁸ The e-book format (with its attendant software applications and hardware devices) is also pointing to a further displacement of the printed book through Personal Digital Assistant devices and the promise of electronic ink promising a mobile propagation of texts such as the one introduced by the interplay of mp3 players and file-sharing. At the same time, the linguistic innovations induced by digitization also open up a field of mutations that can and does often wash back on speech and the printed word as such. We could point out, for example, at the bizarre contraction undergone by language in an electronic mode, from email to text messaging: not simply the irruption of speech into the linear and hieratic world of a standardised language, but also the loss of vowels and the incorporation of numbers (“txt u l8er”) as the speed of digitisation and interactivity logarithmically squeeze out redundancy from speech and writing in order to increase its speed of propagation. The nested series of media analysed by McLuhan, then, is not static, but is crossed by micro-waves of overlapping and resonating differentiations.

Postscript

Electronic textuality, then, must be understood as implying a digital and an analogue moment. This does not deny that digitisation is endowed with its own characteristic features and procedures. On the other hand, an exclusive emphasis on digitisation does not account for the change of speed which increasingly foregrounds the analogical and nonlinear dynamics that transversally connect and transform our milieus of communication as a whole. We do

²⁸ See Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: The New Science of Networks* (Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Publishing, 2002).

not just need an increasing awareness of the formative nature of technological interfaces, but we also need to confront the power of chain reactions and contagions, of transversal resonances and emergent phenomena. I would also suggest that an increasing awareness and engagement with such dynamics is somehow less bound to technological expertise as such. If the power of media, for example, is only that of the digital, then, the politics of network media become only a matter for relatively small elites who are endowed with the highly specialised skills and resources necessary to actively engage with software, for example. This activity, as carried out by computer literate artists or programmers, for example, is necessary and important of course. At the same time, however, experimentation with analogue informational dynamics is a much more widespread and common activity. It mobilises a distributed and common knowledge and power that can be productively linked with Autonomist notions of ‘mass intellectuality’ – a concept that attempts to explain the socialisation of those linguistic and communication skills that in the current discourse of education and employment are often referred to as ‘transferable’.²⁹ And they do indeed transfer way beyond the world of education, training and employment. The cases of ‘flash mobs’ and mass protests organised through the Internet and mobile telephony come readily to mind (and also less savoury and brutal examples such as terrorist acts meant to trigger a political chain reaction). However, we could expand the field of experimentation with informational analogue dynamics way further than these most visible expressions of collective action. Network media, in fact, virtualise a common and widespread power – what we might call a communication’s biopower (as *puissance*). Once again here we are confronted with analogue dynamics of bifurcations – implying the coexistence of different tendencies (and impossible worlds) within the same milieu. Commercial cultures have been quick to exploit and capitalise such widespread and popular knowledge of affective communication and analogue group dynamics (as in the example of TV games, talk shows,

²⁹ See Paolo Virno, “Notes on the General Intellect”, in Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino and Rebecca E. Karl, eds., for the *Polygraph* collective *Marxism Beyond Marxism*. (London: Routledge, 1996).

reality TVs, readers' pages in magazines, but also through viral marketing and perception management). But if they have been so successful, this is only possible because this analogue dynamics are also socially available as a degree of power which is immanent to the subjectivities emerging in between digital recombination and analogue chaos.

SQUIBLOGS

Geert Lovink

Global Conversations*

October 25th, 2007

I am at the **Global Conversations** conference¹ at **UC Irvine**, a ***Festival of Marginalized Languages*** where I speak on a ‘technology’ panel about languages and the internet. Let’s blog the event as I walked in, on Thursday morning, October 25 where the South Asia panel had just started when I walked in.

The South-Asia panel

Rita Kothari spoke about the Shindhi language ², a “language without a state” in India and Pakistan. The question why certain languages make us uncomfortable is what should concern us, not the marginal state in relation to the dominant language. Because of this uncomfortable feeling the Shindhi language will become a relict of the past. There is a stigma attached to the Shindhi identity

* Many thanks to Geert Lovink for permission to use and format these blog entries of his here for the printed page (see his blog at <http://www.networkcultures.org/geert/>). We have mainly simply re-ordered the entries into ascending rather than descending chronological order, but have preferred to leave in the webpage paragraph format, though we have used our house style for headings. Notes 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, here give the urls of the links in his original hyper/text. Notes 3, 5, 6, 10, 14, 16 have been added here for readers’ convenience.

¹ <http://www.humanities.uci.edu/icwt/globalconversations/Schedule.html> (retrieved 25 November 2007; ed.)

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sindhi_language (retrieved 25 October 2007; ed.)

that people want to avoid. Rita Kothari collected partition stories and translated them into English. I have to note here that the Shindhi language is -still- spoken by over 20 million people (however, only 2.8 million in India). This is not an insignificant but rather stigmatized language, which is a somewhat other issue, compared to the urgent issue of dying or disappearing languages.

Sudipto Chatterjee spoke about his new book, *The Colonial Staged*³. What are the differences between East and West Bengali cultures? After the 1970s East-Pakistan and West-Bengal seemed suddenly worlds apart. Which is the mask and which is the face? Language or religion? The sixth language in the world, and yet marginalized. The way Chatterjee speaks Bengali is entirely different, when confronted with Bangla-Deshis.

The problematic position of Urdu in India is discussed by Sukrita Paul Kumar. Continuously Urdu and Hindi are being mixed up, with Urdu missing out. Key to this competition between two languages that are essentially one and the same, goes back the question of writing and the Nasta'liq script calligraphy. Urdu, according to Sukrita Paul Kumar, is falling victim of becoming romanticized and runs into the 'trap of calligraphy'.

Anita Ratnam speaks Tamil⁴, a language which is alive and well. The language has been very much influenced by the film industry. Leading politicians have been film script writers and actors. Her own accent is supposed to be a bit 'too Brahman' as the leading media culture is based anti-Brahman sentiments. During the lecture Anita Ratnam showed rarely viewed DVD footage of Brahman rituals. She also showed a video of a ritual theatre performance of her native village. A process of reconstruction had to happen in order to bring back the procedures that the (former) ritual temple dancers had to do – a five hours attempt to bring back the temple rituals. It is

³ Sudipto Chatterjee, *The Colonial Staged. Theatre In Colonial Calcutta* (Oxford: Berg, 2007) [The link given by GL is no longer direct; the new direct link is <http://www.bergpublishers.com/?tabid=2501>, retrieved 25 November 2007; ed.'s note]

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_language (retrieved 26 October 2007)

now the tenth year of the temple reconstruction performance. In fact it was Anita Ratnam herself who revitalized this 9th century temple rituals that had gone into total disrepair.

The preservation of languages can be romanticized. How many of us are using Sufi in the class room?, Sukrita Paul Kumar asked. Sudipto Chatterjee pointed in this context at the urban-rural divide.

October 26th, 2007

Notes

There is always a sense of sensation when one enters a new intellectual terrain. In this case it is a group of global scholars that work on **‘languages’ from a post-colonial perspective**. Much unlike the ordinary belief, I am convinced that internet culture is heading in this direction. Much of the conversations here revolve around the status of the ‘non-native speaker’ and the problematic status of English as the dominant language of the colonizer.

As so often with US-American conferences, there is a lot of work put into the preparation of the event to get the best international researchers and to arrange their trips. Yet, the event fails to even reach the immediate environment of the university campus itself, let alone the general public. The audience consists of the speakers with a handful of graduate students and staff of the organizing faculty. This sad situation is made worse by the absence of recording/webcasting equipment. How to overcome this is another matter and asks for a complete re-imagination of the public and the public sphere.

Here are some quotes and phrases for those who can deal with zipped material:

“The job of the translation is to make (sensual) sense. Translation requires a sympathy to words on the page. They know better than you do.”

“Translation express agreement with the colonizers and are limited cultural artifacts. The aim has to be dialog, and translation can be a modest contribution to collaborative efforts.”

“Sometimes I got fed up talking English, it is so easy.”

“The word resistance is missing because most of the time we are afraid of resistance and politics.”

“If only one zillions of a percentage of the 600 billion dollars spent in Iraq could be spent on the teaching and study of North-American indigenous languages.”

“The heart of resistance is poetry.”

“When two languages meet, they kiss and quarrel. They achieve a tacit understanding on the common grounds of similarity and convergence, then negotiate, often through strident rivalry and self-preserving altercations, their areas of dissimilarity and divergence.”
(Niyi Osundare)

Several **African speakers** warned of the devastating consequences of the abolition of education in the native African languages in the first years of school. A range of African elites forbid the use of local languages.

Warning: marginalization can also happen through benign policies. Most languages die through assimilation, not through the physical extermination of their speakers. Creating archives is the most powerful way to save languages that are in urgent need of disappearing.

“Foreign languages offer no immunity.”

“Our Mother is always our truth.”

There is a lack of confidence that African languages can express complex concepts. The only way to tackle this prejudice is by proving the opposite.

Remember the Against All Odds Conference in Asmara (2000)⁵.
Remember African self-reliance.

⁵ Some information retrieved at <http://poetry.about.com/library/weekly/aa000201.htm> and at <http://msupress.msu.edu/bookTemplate.php?bookID=3373> (25 November 2007) [ed.'s note].

Please visit: <http://www.gatua.com>⁶ and the first Gikuyu blog: <http://gigikuyu.blogspot.com>.

October 27th, 2007

The technology panel (Friday, October 26, 2007)

It's always hard to blog the panel you're on but I have nonetheless tried. We sat in a spacious lecture hall of the Irvine IT engineering faculty. The group had shrunken to 40 participants but the level of the presentations remained high.

Session VIII of the Global Conversations conference in Irvine presented a contemporary blend of possibilities and limits of new media as democratic empowerment tools and was chaired by Barbara Cohen. Elman Gheyntanchi from Iran, now living in L.A. spoke about the variety of Iranian blogs, both inside and outside the country. She presented a nuanced picture in which the question of whether Iranian bloggers, currently seen as freedom fighters are already politically co-opted. Beside the amazing blog culture there are also the YouTube videos of 'infidel' women being beaten up on the streets. Iranian bloggers are still censored and have to come up with creative ideas on how to change their IP addresses, where to reappear in the blogosphere and how to redress their mask—and still be recognizable. At the end of her presentation, Elman Gheyntanchi showed the Zolf bar baad YouTube clip⁷ from the Iranian dissident underground singer-songwriter Mohsen Namjoo⁸, now living in Amsterdam.

Susan Harris started her presentation of the Words Without Borders⁹ website with depressing statistics about the inequality between translation to and from English. Less than 1% of US-

⁶ The site has ... an English version [ed.'s note].

⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rgt5hzMvCI> (retrieved 25 November 2007; ed.'s note).

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohsen_Namjoo (as on 25th November 2007; ed.'s note).

⁹ www.wordswithoutborders.org (accessed 25th November 2007; ed.'s note).

American publication are translations of more or less literary material (the definition of literature has even been stretched here). In response to growing cultural isolation the Words Without Borders was founded. Its first monthly edition came online in August 2003 and since then the database has been filled with around 700 unique contributions. Words Without Borders has also produced book anthologies (such as one on literature from the ‘Axis of Evil’) and already played a role in a number of book deals.

Tom Keenan gave an update of his ongoing research into the online world of Jihad videos. This is not a world of bloggers that create a presence on YouTube, MySpace and Facebook. A key role here is played by web forum software as developed in the mid-late nineties, multi-threaded, polyglot conversations in a multitude of major languages that one has to get familiar with in order to find your way. Within the forum image links are traded (comparable to the Japanese Otaku culture), links to the latest video of Osama Bin Laden, pdfs of speeches and pointers to audio archives of sermons, delivered by remote and largely unknown Imans. There is nothing marginal here. There are no barriers in terms of digital divide. Tom Keenan noted that we should consider this an “authentic public space”, much in spirit of earlier expectations of ‘global civil society’ and international NGOs, with the only difference that these informal exchanges should be seen as part of an anti-political, deeply anti-democratic project.

In my presentation I started off with my blog theory¹⁰ and raised the question how a quest of general theory could be complemented with culturally specific data and concepts from specific language regions. Blogs have established web cultures in languages outside English in a way that has not yet been properly thought through. At Global Conversations you got a clear sense that, from the perspective of ‘marginal languages’, the Internet is still a revolutionary tool,

¹⁰ See, e.g., his essay “Blogging, the nihilist impulse” at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-01-02-lovink-en.html>, and an interview at <http://www.networkcultures.org/geert/speed-interview-for-il-manifesto-on-blog-theory/> (retrieved 25 November 2007) [ed.’s note].

full of unexploited potentials. However, critical theory has moved on and is now exploring ‘techno-populism’. As Tom Keenan also mentioned, there are user cultures that operate beyond Good and Evil and are out there, in the Big World, utilizing easy to use software and protocols irrespective of the intentions of the libertarian geeks, early adapter circles, ‘civil society’ or post-dotcom entrepreneurs.

As examples I used three distinctive blog cultures: the **shocklogs** in the Netherlands (see the postings on the Masters of Media blog¹¹), the debate around the presumed German reluctance to start blogging (see my previous ZKM posting here¹²) and the emerging Hindi blog culture in India, a research that Ravikant presented at the Pedagogical Faultlines¹³ workshop in Amsterdam on September 22 2007.

The closing panel

Satoshi Ukai, who perhaps refused to travel to the USA as a tourist, and had to acquire a visa to enter, and whose case was held-up by the U.S. embassy in Tokyo as being serious, could not attend the conference. Instead, Gayatri Spivak read his text. In it, Ukai talks about the survival of Korean and Okinawa languages during colonial domination of the Japanese state. Ainu language in Hokkaido has been even more so marginalized. These are so-called languages without writing, which is questionable if we follow Jacques Derrida’s *On Grammatology* (by now the hall has filled up with audience). This is why the aboriginal people feel more comfortable with the digital (online) realm because of its soft fusion of narration/writing and the oral tradition.

Achille Mbembe, author of *On the Postcolony*¹⁴, referred to

¹¹ <http://mastersofmedia.hum.uva.nl/2006/10/12/shocklog-introducing-the-term-to-the-world/> (retrieved 25 November 2007; ed.’s note).

¹² <http://www.networkcultures.org/geert/2007/09/16/zkm-and-the-poverty-of-german-blogging/> (retrieved 25 November 2007; ed.’s note).

¹³ <http://www.waag.org/project/faultlines> (retrieved 25 November 2007; ed.’s note).

¹⁴ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

earlier remarks on the relation between language and freedom. In the past it was an act of resistance to appropriate the language of the colonizer and to target it against itself. That strategy is no longer working. The South-African constitution now recognizes 11 official languages. India has 24 (says Spivak). There are 'linguistic human rights' (think of the Kurds). Remember that the 1976 in Soweto started around the issue of language regimes, in this case Afrikaans. How do we share? What is common and what is not? De-weaponizing is necessary. The power of enfranchise is what we need. Can theoretical qualities of one language be translated into another. What is needed is the accumulation of linguistic or expressive capital. Mbembe lived for four years in Dakar where urban Wolof¹⁵ is used to grow linguistic capital for its speakers.

Gayatri Spivak started with complaining about the World Social Forum, not being an instrument for change. She would not tell stories about herself, so she promised. "I could get up and sing but I won't do that this time." There is a language we learn first. That's the Mother Tongue. When we learn a language we try to access its deep archive. No just world is coming from the North. This is why we look into the dialog between languages beyond the situation of a small group of migrants in European cities (referring here to Balibar¹⁶).

We have to think of translation as an active practice. It is not something you learn and then apply. We should break through the custom that the North brings in theory and the Global South experience. However wonderful the experience is of presenting a poem in our Mother Language, this fact alone will not change the world.

Some closing remarks

Code switching could be a good tactic to make differences visible. Hybridity is the strategy of the in-between people, for example the

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolof_language,

¹⁶ See, e.g., Étienne Balibar *We the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004) [ed.'s note].

urban Africans. Who can make the cross-links? We do not have to speak in tongues. It is enough to recognize the creolization or lexicalization that is happening around us. To mix three language is a sign of competence. Emerging creoles are particular language mixes that can be used—and dropped. What needs to be recognized is multilingualism as a lived reality of the billions, a basic right, virtue —and strategy.

Jeff Matthews

**Shall I Compare Thee to a Stand-Alone
Compression Module?***

“Good technical writing and good poetry are surprisingly similar.” I came across this line in one of the textbooks for an English class I teach. Everyone in the class immediately went slack-jawed. Even those in the class who are normally lantern-jawed went slack-jawed, and if you have ever seen one of those brass and glass gizmos that conductors on the Northern Pacific used to shoo cows off the tracks with lose its shape, well, let me tell you, it’s an awesome sight. It would make that shape-shifter guy, Odo, on Star Trek, Deep Space 9, have a major meltdown of morph envy right there on the spot.

“By all the iambs of Helicon, professor, surely those clowns must be joking,” said an astute student (hereafter referred to, simply, as ‘Stew’). What makes them think that any of that old dead doggerel can hold a candle – much less a lantern – to all the great stuff being ball-pointed into posterity by some of our fine technoscribes?

“What did you say?” I rejoindered.

“You rejoined her what?”

“No, ‘rejoinder,’ as in ‘query,’ ‘ask,’ as in ‘I wanted to know what it was you just said’.”

“Oh, I said, ‘By all the beakers of blushful Hippocrene,

*This piece was first published on Jeff Matthews’ University of Maryland website (online in December 2003), but is no longer available there. We are pleased to resurrect it here, and thank Jeff Matthews for allowing us to do so.

what makes... .”

“That’s what I thought you said,” I thought she said. “That’s real food for thought.”

“Of course. Why do you think they call me Stew?”

Our class sessions used to go on like that for hours, so I was not alarmed. I was, however, struck by her comment. I was then struck by a number of the larger students in the class when I suggested that they write about poetry *vs.* technical writing. You do it, they said. You teach this stuff, so you should be able to write it real good. And believe us, they said, we can tell. Remember: Good Stuff talks and Bad Stuff walks, they said. (I recall that they used the abbreviation for Bad Stuff.)

Yes, poetry is alive and well, as I can vouch for now that I have been delving into this relationship between poetry and technical writing, and as my vouchers are about to expire, I’d better delve right along. True, we no longer seem to have an awful lot of people waxing poetic these days over “the stars of midnight,” “true maiden’s breasts,” or “the dew of morning.” Even a phrase such as Yeats’, “The dews drop slowly and dreams gather,” is, as Ezra Pound, T.S. Elliot and Gertrude Stein once said, “...less than acipitous in its mesothesis.”

(Yes, they all said that together—you can imagine how much practice it took to get that mouthful out all together. They were sitting around having a beer. That comes out to 1/3 of a beer each, I know, but Pound, a notorious lush, drank most of it.)

As Stew noted, much of that old stuff just doesn’t have what it takes to move modern souls, What?— “To be or not to be, that is the something or other”? Come on, what is that suicidal noodling all about?! Or “I wandered lonely as a cloud... .” Right, let’s hear it for overanthropomorphic metaphors, poetry fans! Literati refer to that as “pathetic fallacy”: attributing human qualities to inanimate objects, such as ‘an angry sea,’ ‘a stubborn door,’—or ‘a lonely cloud.’ Pathetic fallacy. Right on both counts.

What has happened recently is that sensitive souls, who in the past would have practiced their “craft and sullen art” by describing nature, love and yawful things like that, are now writing technical manuals for computers. Witness this especially moving passage by one of our fine young Spanish (well, Scottish-Spanish) technical

writers, Manuel Macintosh:

Full termination draws
power to operate
the resistors
that absorb the waves.

Or this equally transcendent line of Haiku-like intensity by the same author:

Holding down the Shift key
during startup
prevents extensions from loading.

Ah, savor it! First of all, notice the slight persistence, unencumbered by redolence; the forward, yet not presumptuous energy of the body — (...oops, hold on a minute... that's for my article on poetry and wine-tasting. Sorry.) Anyway, if those lines aren't enough to warm the cockles of your heart, then you must have been suckled on an icicle. And you will never ever find out what cockles are.

Jeff Matthews

**“Hey, You Sound Just Like Marlon Brando,
Robert Redford and Paul Newman!”***

There seems to be no middle ground on some subjects. You're either for it or against it. Film dubbing, for example: i.e., replacing the original dialogue of a film with a translated version in another language. (Thus, Italian actor/dubber Giuseppe Rinaldi has made quite a living for himself as the Italian voice of all three American actors mentioned in the title of this article.) The alternative to dubbing is to show the original version and have the translation as subtitles at the bottom of the screen. Intellectuals, who love to hang breathlessly on the subtle suprasegmental vocal inflections even of languages they don't understand, like films in the original language. Clods, like me — people who just want to enjoy the film and who don't want to bounce their eyeballs constantly up and down from picture to subtitle to picture to subtitle — generally like their films dubbed.

Certainly, some films are meant to be dubbed. International Westerns, for example, of the kind filmed in them thar wide open spaces out yonder near Zaragoza in Spain, have such international casts, that if they weren't dubbed into a target language for a specific country, the dialogue would go:

*Many thanks to Jeff Matthews for letting us print this piece from his website <http://faculty.ed.umuc.edu/~jmatthew/articles> (retrieved 20 November 2007).

“Hey, you dirty varmint! I saw you pull them aces out of yer sleeve!”
“Drecksau! Du spinnst wohl, was?!”

At which point, a voice of reason, Svetlana, the Belle of Murmansk, might interject: „rgin yt vdgjni.“ (Literally, „Your carburator is green, but my duck is very ill“). Here it’s a good idea to dub, because even with subtitles it would sound strange to hear everyone speaking a different language. (Maybe that accounts for the wooden acting in so many of those League of Nations horse operas — no one understands what anyone else is really saying!) On the other hand, historical documents, perhaps, should be preserved in the original. The best argument I ever saw against dubbing was a scene from Leni Riefenstahl’s epic Nazi documentary, *The Triumph of the Will*, in which der Führer was ranting and chanting in an ugly guttural English —vis ze vorld’s vorst Cherman akzent!

For most films, however, many countries avoid subtitles almost entirely and dub. In Italy it is big business. Films are dubbed so well and so consistently in Italy, that it is common for a single dubber to shadow the career of a foreign actor for years. For example, with your back turned to the screen, even if the film is in Italian, you know that Woody Allen is speaking, because his dubber is always Italian comic Oreste Lionello. As noted, however, some dubbers are well known as the voices of more than one actor. Emilio Cigoli does both John Wayne and Clark Gable, so you may actually have to turn around and look at the screen to find out if you’re watching *Stagecoach* or *Gone With the Wind*.

It’s a sociological study, in itself, exactly why some countries go for dubbing and others for subtitles. In some cases, it might simply be a matter of economics. Putting subtitles on a film is infinitely cheaper than good dubbing, which involves a sound studio, hiring voices for each character and doing take after take in an attempt to get the original inflections into a voice, and then making sure that the new language synchronizes as well as possible with the lip movements on the screen. Nothing is worse than bad dubbing, where the emotions of the voice don’t fit the action, and where the synchronization is so out of whack that half the time the actors look like poor souls on street corners making silent fish-like mouth movements to themselves.

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ROBERT REDFORD AND PAUL NEWMAN!”

Yet, there are certainly other reasons for choosing whether to dub or subtitle. The first time my Italian wife heard Marlon Brando speak with his own voice, she was disappointed, even saddened, by how “unbeautiful” it was! “He could never have been a successful actor in Italy with that voice,” she said. (This reinforces my belief that Italians are simply in love with their own language! — all those tripping and honeyed sounds, with no consonant clusters and potato-like *r*'s. Sigh.) Indeed, except for comics, Italian actors all seem to have that fine, well-modulated, declamatory speaking voice associated with legitimate theater.

Interestingly, voices of even native-speaking Italian actors may be dubbed. One, the director may simply want another voice for the part, perhaps one which is more in keeping with the character. Two — since in Italy the entire sound track is generally put in after the filming, anyway — maybe the original actor just had another date on dubbing day! Three, an actor might have an unpleasant speaking voice or noticeable regional accent, one or both of which reasons may be behind the fact that for years, even if you saw Sophia Loren speaking Italian on the screen, that wasn't her voice you were hearing — she was dubbed.

Aesthetics aside, there was surely in Italy one overriding factor for dubbing films when talkies started (the late 1920's): films were an ideal medium for spreading a single standard language throughout a nation still divided linguistically by different dialects. Then, after two decades of good dubbing, Italians were so used to standard Italian in films, that when the wave of post-WW II Italian films known as “Neo-Realism” came in, with their dialogues recorded live in Sicilian, Neapolitan and Roman dialects, it came as a shock to many Italians to realize that they didn't really understand many of their own countrymen! (“Precisely the point,” said more than one Neo-Realist director.)

Italian dubbing is generally so good, so authentic, that mimics will regularly 'do' foreign actors who have characteristic vocal styles — say, John Wayne or Jimmy Stewart. Here, even if you don't understand Italian, you may 'get it,' anyway, because the mimic is imitating a dubbed version which is uncannily close in timbre and delivery to the original. Indeed, in the case of Greta Garbo, the dubbing was so good that Garbo, upon hearing herself

in Italian for the first time, sat down and wrote a fan-letter to her Italian voice, owned by actress Tina Latenzi! And some dubbing, of course, requires the same unusual verbal dexterity as the original voice — witness the tongue-twisting pyrotechnics of Stefano Sibaldi, the Italian voice of Danny Kaye.

Perhaps the strangest sidelight in this whole matter is that dubbed voices can become part and parcel of another culture, evoking allusions and inside jokes just as do the original voices in their own culture. The Italian voices of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy are the best example of this. When talkies came in, Laurel and Hardy had already achieved world-wide fame on the basis of their short silent movies. There was such a new demand for them speaking, however, that for a time they actually reshot their scenes hurriedly in other languages(!), pronouncing their lines from scripts written in phonetic English. These scenes would then be sent abroad to be spliced into the rest of the film, which had been remade in the target language using local actors! That soon proved impractical, especially for longer feature films. Consequently, for the Italian market the decision was made to dub the films of Laurel and Hardy in American studios using Italian-American actors, who, presumably, thought they were speaking standard Italian. Their Italian, however, had been maimed by at least one generation of nasal semi-vowels, unrolled *r*'s and Wrigley's Spearmint.

When the studios in Rome reviewed the first dubbed-in-America Laurel and Hardy film to see what they had, the American English accented voices were so hilarious, that someone came up with the idea of redubbing everyone else into normal Italian, but leaving Stan and Ollie with accents. There followed a nation-wide contest to find the voices of Laurel and Hardy in Italian. One winner was the now famous Italian comic, Alberto Sordi, whose career started as the voice of Oliver Hardy. His anglicized Italian as 'Ollie' has become so much a part of Italian popular culture that an Italian, today, can do Oliver Hardy by saying, with a broad English language accent, "stupido" (accenting the second, instead of the first, syllable, in imitation of Sordi's version of Oliver Hardy) and have it recognized as instantly as an English-speaker would recognize, "Well, here's another fine mess you've gotten me into!"* Indeed, Italian mimics still regularly pay tribute to Laurel and Hardy, imitating the dubbed

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voices. (The Italian voice of Stan Laurel was Mauro Zambuto, who, after WW II, moved to the United States and became a professor of Electrical Engineering at the New Jersey Institute of Technology!)

So, without taking anything away from the universal nature of the humor of Laurel and Hardy, it is fair to say that in Italy, much of their popularity was — and still is — due to the spectacularly successful way they are dubbed. There is no Italian comic (not even the great Totò) who, by voice alone, is as recognizable as are Laurel and Hardy in Italian. The only competition in recognizability might be the Italian voice of Donald Duck! Most of the voices in those cartoons are, indeed, dubbed into relatively normal Italian —except for Donald. He still quacks, but his Italian dubber is none other than Clarence Nash, the original English voice of Donald Duck for the Disney studios and who dubbed himself into many foreign languages — including Japanese! Apparently, Nash was one of the few persons to have truly mastered the difficult trick of compressing air in the cheek cavity and producing articulate quacks! (Phoneticians call this the “buccal voice”. To the rest of us, it’s known as ‘duckspeak’.)

Anyway, gotta run. I hear the sultry, breathless tones of Rosetta Calavetta on the tube. Marilyn Monroe, to you.

Geoffrey Nunberg

Lowercasing the Internet*

Most people didn't take much notice when *Wired* magazine announced¹ that they had decided to drop the capital letter on "Internet" and "Web." But the news had the tech world burning the midnight phosphor. Techie bloggers reacted indignantly, and there were more than 800 comments posted on slashdot.org,² the site that serves geeks as a digital water cooler. For a lot of them, it was as if *The New Yorker* had announced that the figure of Eustace Tilley on its anniversary issue cover would henceforth be foregoing his top hat in favor of a doo-rag.

Of course you expect the slashdot crowd to be a little anal about stylistic matters. That comes with the job. Misplace a comma in an email or an op-ed piece and you only risk losing your reader's attention. Misplace a comma in a line of software code and you risk losing everything on your hard disk.

Still, this wasn't just one of those meaningless stylebook niceties like whether to capitalize the "y" in "Your Eminence". It has to do with how we think about the Internet itself.

* [Many thanks to Geoff Nunberg for agreeing to let us publish this piece, a "Fresh Air" commentary, delivered September 30, 2004 on the NPR radio show of that name. Notes 1,2,3,5 reproduce the links as contained in the author's web version; see <http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~numberg/>].

¹ <http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2004/08/64596>.

² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3613594.stm> (*A Network by Any Other Name?* by Bill Thompson).

Back in the 1920's, people sometimes capitalized "the Radio" and "the Cinema," but they stopped doing that when the media receded into the cultural background. That was what led *Wired* to go to the lower-case forms – as the editors put it, it was a way of acknowledging that the internet is simply "another medium for delivering and receiving information".

I wish *Wired* luck, but they're fighting an uphill battle. People seem to be sticking with the capitalized forms of "Internet" and "Web", not just in the press, but on the Web itself and in the Internet discussion groups. And a lot of newspapers were capitalizing "Blogosphere" last week in their stories about the role that bloggers played in discrediting those CBS memos about President Bush's National Guard service.

We seem to think of these words on the model of other common nouns that have been elevated to proper names, like the Shire, the Channel, or the Coast. Bill Thompson, the *Guardian's* technology correspondent, wrote³ that "those who choose 'internet' over 'Internet' are as wrong as those who would visit London, meet the queen or go for a boat trip down the river Thames".⁴

People have been talking about the Internet in a spatial way since the early notion of Cyberspace, which was always depicted as an open expanse like an ocean, a plain, or a galaxy. And the conception persisted as settlers started to stake out the territory and the geography acquired features more typical of urban architecture, like portals, gateways, and sites.

But whether you picture the Internet on the model of the Great Plains or the Bowery, the idea of it as a space is built into the language we use to talk about it. "Visit", "go to" – those aren't verbs we use when we're talking about reading a newspaper article or tuning in the evening news.

The spatial picture of the Internet is one of those metaphorical frames that makes a technology easier to comprehend. It's like the

³ <http://www.eff.org/%7Ebarlow/Declaration-Final.html>.

⁴ Some people try to justify capitalizing "internet" on the grounds that the word began its life as a common noun – what we call "the internet" was really just one of many. But by itself, that doesn't warrant treating the phrase as a proper noun – after all, we don't capitalize "the power grid".

trash can icon on the computer desktop – a useful analogy, so long as you don't think that the sanitation guys are going to be clanging by on Tuesday mornings to dump it out for you.

But there's a difference between saying something is a space and saying it's a place. There's no reason why we shouldn't think of the internet as one of those ubiquitous presences like the atmosphere or the cosmos, neither of which we treat as proper nouns. Putting a capital i on the name turns the internet into a specific locale, a virtual conurbation where a single extended community is taking form.

That's the picture that's implicit the phrases that cyber-visionaries like to toss around when they're talking about the online community, like "emerging consciousness", "social contract", "netizens", and "collective mind". Or as one of them put it in a much-publicized manifesto: "I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You do not know us... You have not engaged in our great and gathering conversation.... You do not know our culture, our ethics, or [our] unwritten codes".⁵

Listening to that, your first thought is apt to be, "What do mean, 'we'?" The Internet is no more a coherent community than the collection of travelers who happen to find themselves in O'Hare airport on a given Monday afternoon on their way to Stuttgart, San Juan, or St. Louis.

If the internet permits the illusion of community, it's only because we don't have to actually rub elbows with most other travelers there. We move around it the way Donald Trump cruises around New York, alighting from the limo only when we pull up at a destination full of people like us.

But it's a little delusional to talk about the group mind of a collectivity that can't even reach a consensus on the correct spelling of "accommodate". Or if you need a further demonstration, log in to one of the sites called "voyeurs," which throw up a random selection of the queries as they come in to the search engines. "Cape May hotels"; "Anna Kournikova"; "pro death penalty"; "humping"; "mapa de Galapagos"; "Aston Kutcher filmography";

⁵ http://www.larkfarm.com/search_voyeurs.htm.

“Bush deception”; “loans until payday”; “scavenger fish jokes”; “israel atrocities”; “Anna Kournikova”; “dogs getting it”: “funeral prayers”...

Taken together, it makes for a strange sort of *poésie concrète*. But if that’s the product of a collective mind, it’s a mighty scattered one. All the more reason for writing “internet” with a lower-case i. It reminds you that there really is no out there out there.

Geoff Nunberg

A Wiki's as Good as a Nod*

If defenders of traditional print culture were looking for a portent that end times are upon us, they might have found it in a sentence from one of Paul Krugman's *New York Times* columns a couple of months ago.¹ The sentence began: "A conspiracy theory, says Wikipedia, 'attempts to explain the cause of an event as a secret, and often deceptive plot by some covert alliance....' It was the phrase "says Wikipedia" that had me doing a double take. We usually reserve that kind of attribution for sources that have acquired an institutional voice that transcends their individual contributors. As in, "According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*..." or "In the words of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*..." Or for that matter, "the *New York Times* says..." But it was odd to see that lofty syntax used to talk about Wikipedia. It was like quoting some anonymous graffiti written on a bathroom wall in Nassau Hall and introducing them with, "According to Princeton University..."

But maybe Krugman was just owning up to what most journalists and scholars regard as a guilty secret, which is that they rely on Wikipedia all the time. By "rely on," I don't mean just for doing

*"Fresh Air" commentary, broadcast June 5, 2007 on NPR, printed here adapting Geoff Nunberg's hypertextual web version. Our eds.' notes below summarise information from the links provided by Nunberg in his web text. [eds.' note].

¹Nunberg links to article "Who's Crazy Now?", Monday, May 8th, 2006 by RLR , From The NY Times by Paul Krugman, at <http://www.trueblueliberal.com/2006/05/08/whos-crazy-now/>.

“preliminary research,” which is how academics always say they use Wikipedia, in the lame tone that they adopt when they cop to glancing at *People* in the dentist’s waiting room. I mean using Wikipedia as a primary source of information.

Or at least I do. In fact I’ve been keeping a log of the questions I’ve gone to Wikipedia with in the last few months. Which Edsel models were full-sized cars? When did Henry A. Wallace deliver his “Century of the Common Man” speech? What’s the difference between discrete and continuous probability distributions? What was the deal with the Nueva Trova movement in Cuban music? And that’s not to mention all the names I looked up from my “whatever happened to” file – Pia Zadora, Chuck Knoblauch, Elian Gonzales, Yma Sumac, Vanilla Ice, Joey Heatherton, and the guys from Humble Pie who weren’t Peter Frampton.

I almost never bother to verify the answers. Usually I don’t much care – like most people, I suspect, I use Wikipedia for idle ruminating, usually when I ought to be doing something else. Anyway, Wikipedia has as good a chance of being right on most of these items as anybody else does. It isn’t likely to lead you astray about probability distributions or when Roberto Clemente was national league MVP or when Phil Collins joined Genesis. There are too many people out there who make it a point of pride to know that stuff. And where else would you go to find out about Pia Zadora, the Undead, or Harry Potter? I haven’t actually read any of the Harry Potter books, but I figure that any group of people who take the collective time and trouble to compile a 7000-word article just on Lord Voldemort have got to know what they’re talking about.

But it’s imprudent to trust the wisdom of crowds when it comes to fixing the date of Daniel Defoe’s birth² or the titles of Max Beerbohm’s works³ or what Joyce had to say about Ibsen.⁴ And Wikipedia is even more helpless at explaining any of those

² Nunberg links us here to an article by Paul Duguid “Limits of self-organization: Peer production and “laws of quality”” *First Monday*, 11.10 (2006), at http://firstmonday.org/issues/issuell_10/duguid/index.html.

³ Nunberg links readers to the Wikipedia discussion page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Max_Beerbohm#ISBN.

⁴ Nunberg links readers to the Wikipedia discussion page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:James_Joyce.

writers. The collective process isn't going to be able to produce the consistent viewpoint or the engaged tone of voice that criticism requires. In fact the prose of Wikipedia is inexorably drawn to a corporate impersonality – it's the way the English language would talk if it had no place to go home to at night.

Still, I expect most users have a good sense of Wikipedia's strengths and limitations. At their best, the articles are well-organized collections of more-or-less reliable facts; at their worst they're so jumbled and incoherent that factual incorrectness is merely a side-issue. I think of what the physicist Wolfgang Pauli once said about a paper submitted to a journal. "This isn't right. This isn't even wrong."

But what did we expect? The most exasperating thing about all these arguments about Wikipedia is that everybody seems to assume it's a single entity the way an encyclopedia is. The Wikipedians explain how this open collaborative process is lurching toward a neutral and methodical synthesis of all of human knowledge. The critics charge that it's undermining the conception of expertise and intellectual order that the encyclopedia has embodied since the Enlightenment. But in one form or another, that picture of human knowledge was always a grand illusion, even back when we could believe in the unity of high culture. By now, the encyclopedia and the dictionary are really just symbols that we honor with inattentive piety. Actually, it's my guess that most of the people who harrumph about how Wikipedia is nothing like an encyclopedia haven't actually opened one for some time.

But then Wikipedia is steeped in exactly the same bookish nostalgia. That's implicit in the name Wikipedia itself and the ferociously oedipal rivalry the Wikipedians feel with the Britannica. And it explains the exaggerated deference that Wikipedians pay to published sources, even though a lot of the books and articles the contributors cite⁵ turn out to be no more reliable than Wikipedia itself.

The irony is that Wikipedia actually signals the end of the encyclopedic vision. It's only when you actually try to implement that view of collective knowledge that you realize how fond and

⁵Nunberg links us again to the article by Paul Duguid (see note 2 above)

delusional it is. When you deposit this multitude of strangers in a single place, you shouldn't be surprised when you come back and find nothing but a jumble of footprints in the mud. That's actually a fair picture of what human knowledge has always been, but it was never so evident before.

Geoff Nunberg

All Thumbs*

By 1848, the new electric telegraph was already being hailed as a modern marvel that would revolutionize commerce, journalism, and warfare. And in that year, a prominent New York attorney and editor named Conrad Swackhamer wrote an article predicting that it would transform the language, as well.¹ After all, he noted, the telegraph required above all else that its users be brief and direct. As people got used to sending and receiving telegrams and reading the telegraphed dispatches in the newspapers, they would inevitably cast off the verbosity and complexity of the prevalent English style. The “telegraphic style,” as Swackhamer called it, would be, “terse, condensed, expressive, sparing of expletives, and utterly ignorant of synonyms,” and would propel the English language toward a new standard of perfection.

That was the first time anybody used the word “telegraphic” to describe a style of writing, with the implication that a new communications technology would naturally leave its mark on the language itself.² It’s an idea that has resurfaced with the appearance

* “Fresh Air” commentary, broadcast July 10, 2008 on NPR, printed here adapting Geoff Nunberg’s hypertextual web version. Notes 2 and 8 correspond to Nunberg’s original footnotes. Notes 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 summarise information from the links provided by Nunberg in his web text. [eds’ note].

¹ “Influence of the Telegraph on Literature” in *The United States Democratic review*, 22, 1848, 409-412.

² [1.]The OED gives its first citation for this sense from 1896, which is clearly much too late.

of every writing tool from the typewriter to the word-processor. And now there's a resurgence of Swackhamerism as the keypad is passed to a new generation, and commentators ponder the deeper linguistic significance of the codes and shortcuts that have evolved around instant messaging and cell-phone texting.

The topic got a lot of media play last month with the release of a study on teens and writing technology sponsored by the College Board and the Pew Research Center.³ According to the report, more than a half of teens say they've sometimes used texting shortcuts in their school writing. The story was a natural for journalists. It combined three themes that have been a staple of feature writing for 150 years: "the language is going to hell in a handbasket"; "you'll never get me onto one of those newfangled things"; and "kids today, I'm here to tell you."

It wasn't hard to find critics who warned of apocalyptic consequences for the language. James Billington, the Librarian of Congress, said that IM and texting were bringing about "the slow destruction of the basic unit of human thought, the sentence."⁴ And the enthusiasts of the new media countered with equally momentous predictions. According to Richard Sterling of the National Commission on Writing, IM and texting will naturally erode the conventions of formal writing – within a few decades we probably won't be capitalizing the first words of sentences anymore, but it's "not a worrying issue."⁵ In response to that prediction, the *Boston Globe* published an editorial called "the revenge of e. e. cummings" that had no capital letters and was laced with LOL's and texting abbreviations.⁶ It had me

³"Writing, Technology and Teens" by Amanda Lenhart, Sousan Arafeh, Aaron Smith, Alexandra Macgill, Apr 24, 2008; available at:<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/Writing-Technology-and-Teens.aspx>

⁴Quoted by Sam Dillon in NYTimes article "In Test, few students are proficient writers", available at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/03/education/03cnd-writing.html?_r=2&oref=slogin

⁵Quoted by Tamar Lewin in NYTimes article "Informal Style of Electronic Messages Is Showing Up in Schoolwork, Study Finds" <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/25/education/25writing.html?ref=education>

⁶http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/editorials/articles/2008/04/29/the_revenge_of_e_e_cummings/

wondering which is more embarrassing, hearing old people use teenage slang or hearing them make fun of it.

I've got a little prediction to make myself: a generation from now all this stuff is going to sound awfully silly. Did people really imagine that rules of written English sentence structure that go back to the Renaissance would suddenly crumble because teenagers took to texting each other over their cell phones instead of passing notes under their desks in class?

The fact is that apart from contributing some slang and jargon, new writing technologies rarely have much of an effect on the language. They can give rise to specialized codes, but those tend to flow alongside the broad channel of standard English without ever mixing with it. As Conrad Swackhamer predicted, the Victorians developed a breathlessly compressed style for sending telegrams, like the message Henry James had one of his characters cable in *Portrait of a Lady*: "Tired America, hot weather awful, return England with niece, first steamer decent cabin."⁷ But that telegraphic style didn't leave many traces on Victorian prose – when you think of James's own writing, "terse" and "condensed" are not the words that come to mind.⁸

The linguistic features of the new media are sure to follow the same pattern. Take emoticons. Used sparingly, they can delicately shade the reception of an email – my dean at Berkeley is a master of the deft smiley that turneth away wrath. But it will be a cold day at the copy desk before you encounter a smiley in the pages of *The Economist* or the *New York Review of Books*. What happens in email, stays in email.

Kids catch on to this quickly. They may sometimes let texting shortcuts slip into their schoolwork, but they know there are different rules for formal writing, and that you ignore them at your peril. The people at the College Board report they almost never see students using the shortcuts in their SAT essays – I mean, how dumb would that be?

⁷ *The Portrait of a Lady*, vol. 1, First American edition, 1882, 9 [Nunberg links to a fragment on Google books].

⁸ [2.] That isn't to say that the telegraph didn't have an important influence on James's fiction, but only that it wasn't immediately evident in his style. See Richard Menke's "Telegraphic Realism: Henry James's 'In the Cage,'" *PMLA*, 2000 [linked by Nunberg to abstract at JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/pss/463265>].

In fact that Pew study reported that a majority of the kids who use IM and texting don't consider them to be real "writing" at all. And if you think of writing as an intellectual exercise, they're probably right. You're not going to learn a lot about organizing ideas from punching in text messages against a 160-character limit.

But there's another, more basic idea of writing, as the process of turning mental activity into automatic manual gestures. And in that sense the new technologies do make a difference. As the telegraph first demonstrated, the wonder of modern writing tools is how they can accelerate that process until it seems almost instantaneous – they turn writing into the cognitive equivalent of a twitch game like Pac Man or Tetris. The difference is that in the old days you had to go and engage somebody to tap out your thoughts for you with his index finger. Now we can do that with our own thumbs from wherever we happen to be.

**REVIEW
ESSAYS**

Geert Lovink

Weizenbaum and the Society of the Query*
A Review essay

Joseph Weizenbaum with Gunna Wendt, *Wo sind sie, die Inseln der Vernunft im Cyberstrom? Auswege aus der programmierten Gesellschaft* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2006), 207 pp.

A spectre haunts the world's intellectual elites: information overload. Ordinary people have hijacked strategic resources and are clogging up once carefully policed media channels. Before the Internet, the mandarin classes were able to strictly separate 'idle talk' from 'knowledge'. With the rise of Internet search engines it is no longer possible to easily distinguish between patrician insights and plebeian gossip. The distinction between high and low, and the occasional mix during Carnival, are from all times and should not greatly worry us. What is causing alarm is another issue. Not only are popular noise levels up to unbearable levels, the chatter has entered the domain of science and philosophy itself – thanks to the indifferent **Google** Search engines which rank according to popularity, not Truth.

What today's administrators of noble simplicity and quiet grandeur can't express, we should say for them: there is a growing discontent in the search algorithms. The scientific establishment has

* This review essay was first published 27 August 2007, on the author's blog Net Critique at <http://www.networkcultures.org/geert/>.

lost control over one of its key research projects, computer science and the enlightened citizens and statesmen have so far not found a way to communicate their concerns to those in charge (read: the Google board). One possible way out could be to overcome to positively redefine Heidegger's 'Gerede' as 'being of everyday Dasein's understanding and interpreting'. Are Internet users cut off from a primary and primordial relationship with the world? Should we portray bloggers and the Web 2.0 cybermasses as 'uprooted' and cut off from the existential?

These questions, and more, came up while reading a book of interviews with MIT professor Joseph Weizenbaum, known for the computer therapy program ELIZA and his 1976 book *Computer Power and Human Reason*. The publication is in German. A few years ago Weizenbaum (b. 1923) moved back to Berlin, the city where he grew up before he and his parents escaped from the Nazis. The interviews were conducted by Munich-based journalist Gunna Wendt. A number of Amazon reviewers complained about Wendt's uncritical questions and the polite-superficial level of her contributions. No doubt interesting are Weizenbaum's stories about his youth in Berlin, the exile to the USA and the way he got involved in computing during the 1950s. The book, indeed, reads like a summary of Weizenbaum's critique of computer science. What interested me was the way in which Weizenbaum shapes his arguments as an informed and respected insider (the net criticism position, so to speak). The title and subtitle sound intriguing. Translated it goes like this: **"Where are they, the islands of reason in the cyber stream? Ways out of the programmed society."**

Weizenbaum's Internet critique is general. He avoids becoming specific — and I appreciate that attitude. His Internet remarks are nothing new for those familiar with Weizenbaum's work: Internet is a great pile of junk, a mass medium that up to 95% consists of nonsense, much like the medium of television, in which direction the Web is inevitably developing. The so-called information revolution has flipped into a flood of disinformation. The reason for this is the absence of an editor or editorial principle. Why this crucial media principle was not built-in by the first generations of computer programmers, of which Weizenbaum was a prominent member, the book fails to address.

On a number of occasions I have formulated a critique of such “media ecology,” Hubert Dreyfus’ *On the Internet*¹ (2001) being one of them. I do not believe that it is up to any professor or editor to decide for us what is, and what is not nonsense. I would much rather like to further revolutionize search tools and increase the general level of media literacy. If we walk into a book store or library, our culture has taught us how to browse through the thousands of titles. Instead of complaining to the librarian that they carry too many books, we call in assistance, or find the way ourselves. Weizenbaum would like us to distrust what we see on our screens, be it television or Internet. Who is going to tell what to trust, what is the truth and what not, Weizenbaum doesn’t mention.

Let’s forget Weizenbaum’s info anxiety. What makes this interview book an interesting read is his insistence on the art of asking the right question. Weizenbaum warns against an uncritical use of the word ‘information’. “The signals inside the computer are not information. They are nothing more than signals. There is only one way to turn signals into information, through interpretation.” For this we depend on the labour of the human brain. The problem of the Internet, for Weizenbaum, is that it invites us to see it as a Delphic oracle. To all our questions and problems, the Internet will provide you with the answer. But the Internet is not a vending machine into which you throw a coin and then get what you want. First of all there are plenty of obstacles before one can even pose a question, like class, race and gender. The key is that you need to have a proper education in order to formulate the right query. It’s all about how one gets to pose the right question. Weizenbaum: “It doesn’t mean much that everyone can publish on the Net. Random publishing is as useless as random fishing.” In this context Weizenbaum makes the comparison between the Internet and now vanished CB radio. Communication alone will not lead to useful and sustainable knowledge.

Weizenbaum relates the uncontested belief in (search engine) queries to the rise of the ‘problem’ discourse. Computers were introduced as “general problem solvers” and a solution for everything. People were invited to delegate their lives to the computer. “We

¹ Hubert Dreyfus *On the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2001).

have a problem,” says Weizenbaum, “and the problem requires an answer.” But personal and social tensions cannot be resolved by declaring them a problem. What we need instead of Google and Wikipedia, is the “capacity to scrutinize and think critically.” Weizenbaum explains this with the difference between hearing and listening. For a critical understanding we first have to sit down and listen. Then we also need to read, not just decipher, and learn to interpret and understand.

As we’re all aware, the so-called Web 3.0 is going to be the technocratic answer to Weizenbaum’s criticism. Instead of Google’s algorithms that are based on keywords and an output based on ranking, soon we will be able to ask questions to the next generation of ‘natural language’ search engines such as Powerset². However, we can already guess that these computational linguists will not question the problem-answering approach and will be wary to act as professional experts who will decide what is and what’s not crap on the Internet. The same counts for the semantic Web school and similar artificial intelligence technologies. Ever since the rise of search engines in the 1990s we seem to be stuck in the ‘Society of the Query’, which, as Weizenbaum indicates, isn’t that much different from Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*³. The complete reannotation of the world’s information isn’t going to solve the inevitable issue, also raised by Andrew Keen in his *Cult of the Amateur*⁴, about the future status of the professional expert. For the time being, we remain obsessed with the increase in quality of the answer to our queries — and not with the underlying problem, namely, the poor quality of our education and the diminishing ability to think in a critical way. I am skeptical about whether the next generations will discover Weizenbaum’s ‘**islands of reasons**’. The ‘culture of time’ is simply not there to stroll around in, like a flaneur. Every information, any object or experience has to be at hand instantaneously. Serendipity requires a lot of time. If we can no longer stumble into islands of reason through our inquiries, we may as well have to build them. By definition these islands will be artificial, and, most likely, digital in nature.

² See at <http://www.powerset.com/>.

³ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

⁴ Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur*, (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

Chantal Zabus

Paradigms Lost: a Review Essay

Christian Mair, ed. *The Politics of English as a World Language : New Horizons in Postcolonial Cultural Studies* (Cross/Cultures 65. ASNEL Papers 7 (Amsterdam, New York Rodopi, 2003)), ix + 497 pp.

“CHINESE TO BECOME WEB LANGUAGE N°1 BY 2007”.

Thus read the chief advertisement of the technology consulting firm ACCENTURE (*NY Times*, Tuesday 3, April 2001, quot. 315). If China is indeed the next empire waxing in the East and US and UK cultural policies are waning, along with the use of English, could Chinese be the new global language, the new lingua *sina*? Would our paradigms all be lost?

Although Mair’s volume does not address this issue, it does provide some clues as to the short-term and long-term survival of English and is a tribute, in some ways, to the protean transformability of language. The product of the 2001 joint venture of the GNEL (the German Association for the Study of the New Literatures in English) and MAVEN (Major Varieties in English) Conference in Freiburg, this voluminous collection brings together linguists, literary critics, and theoreticians of postcoloniality to reflect on the tensions between the local histories and global designs of English.

The five parts that make up this volume of thirty-five selected articles testify to the complex interweaving of subaltern knowledges and globalization and reflect the spread of English, from the

Caribbean and Africa, through their diasporas in North America and Britain, on to the Asian subcontinent and the Pacific Rim. In the process of accounting for the legitimate and illegitimate offsprings of the patrilingua, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis on the interdependence of language, culture and identity is ousted by a new conception of language as a human construct available to “real” people in “post-national” nations. As such, our paradigms are bound to be lost, not because the heralding of Chinese as a top web language but because the binarisms (sender vs. receiver, colonizer vs. colonized, language vs. dialect) that have been governing our worldview are fated to lose their relevance.

The book features three categories of scholars. Those who label English as a “Killer language” (i.e. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas) are quite foreboding and predict that by 2100, 90% of the world languages will be “dead” or “on death row” (34). Peter Mühhäuser verifies this somewhat drastic claim in his gauging the unlikely survival of Pitkern in the Pacific Ocean, following the 1789 mutiny on the *Bounty*.

The second category, which responds enthusiastically to the spread of English are the organs of US and UK expansionist cultural policy, that is, the British Council, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, which tellingly are not represented in this volume. The protests against the G8 are only, by Richard J. Alexander’s reckoning, “the tip of the iceberg” (93), to which we have to add other glacial sheets, like CoBuild, the Bank of English and, possibly, the Internet.

Faced with, on the one hand, bleak predictions about linguistic genocide and, on the other, an overweening confidence in English, the One and Indivisible, the third group is more optimistic in foreseeing a future of “global diglossia”. According to Susan Mühleisen, “global scientific English” now functions as an “antilanguage”,¹ which entails the loss of languages and of the knowledge encoded in these languages while it ensures the “democratization of access to the production (and reception) of scientific English across all disciplines” (117).

¹ After M. A. K. Halliday’s formulation in *Language as Social Semiotic* (London: Arnold, 1978).

Each group, however, has to wrestle with one of three types of irony. The first irony is that those who speak of linguistic genocide become tangled up in an inevitable dialectics since any attempt to subdue the global reach of English is done in English. And Mair's volume is a monumental testimony to just that.

The second irony is that some of the guarantors of the English language (the second group) are working inside the belly of the beast because they are themselves not English. Eric Partridge, the expert on slang in English, Peter Marsden reminds us, was not an Englishman. The former editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Robert Burchfield, is "one of several distinguished expatriate New Zealand lexicographers", which used to make up "a notorious 'New Zealand mafia' in the Oxford University Press" (415-416). Incidentally, the Belgian scholar that I am is reminded that the well-known book on *Le bon Usage*, which was to guide generations of French locutors, was written by Maurice Grévisse, a Belgian grammarian. Also, Jennie Price, the Senior Editor of the OED, informs us that the principal editor, Murray, was a Scot. What is more, the current Third Edition of the OED includes American pronunciation for every entry, "not only as spoken in the USA, but as an international variety of English" (124). This updates George Bernard Shaw's famous aphorism that the British and the Americans are divided by a common language.

The third irony is that, in the words of Robert Phillipson, there is no longer any "simple correlation between the use of a language and the interests of a particular state since English is used extensively by non-native speakers" (26). But these members of what the Indian linguist Braj Kachru popularized in 1992 as the "Expanding Circle" (English as a foreign language) have to conform to the norms of the "Inner Circle" (English as a first language). Seidlhofer and Jenkins conclude somewhat temperamentally about the linguistic Human Rights of non-native speakers: "No right to 'rotten English' for them, then" (142). Not yet, not quite.

Just like England is no longer the land of the Angles of Alfred's time, English is no longer the language of one specific speaking community or ethnicity. Does that mean that we are all "diglossic"? The American linguist Charles A. Ferguson first introduced the term "diglossia" in 1959 as "a relatively stable language situation

in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language, ... there is a very divergent, highly codified ... superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, ... which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but it is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation” (quot. 158).² The Jamaican scholar Hubert Devonish complexifies Ferguson’s definition of diglossia by coining the term “conquest diglossia”, which is better fitted to the Caribbean in which the (post-) Creole continuum thrives and a French-lexicon Creole language may be in use alongside English, as is the case in St Lucia. To wit the various projects like the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (started in 1996). Devonish’s belief in the separate distinctiveness between English and Caribbean English-lexicon Creole languages, which could be likened to that between Urdu and Hindi, is illustrated in his own academic practice. He has indeed experimented with academic writing in Jamaican Creole, wherein « diglossia » becomes *langgwij paat-aaf* and “continuum” *langgwij sheed-aaf* (115), along which speakers in the Caribbean know several lects and can switch codes with ease. Nowhere is the Jamaican *patwah* of the Cassidy-Lepage generation mentioned. Also, Hazel Simmons-McDonald dwells on the emergence of St Lucian vernacular (SLV). Unfortunately, the acronym SLV most unfortunately connotes « slave » as in the Latin *vernaculus*. Acronyms do have their shortcomings.

The part on « English-language Writing in Africa » in which East Africa and South Africa feature quite prominently, starts off with this unusual equation: $2+9=1$. Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu here highlights the current trend towards unplanned unilingualism in South Africa. “1” is the one English at the expense of the other official languages including Afrikaans and nine African languages, i.e. Zulu, Xhosa, Pedi, Tsonga, Venda, Sotho, Ndebele, Swati and Tswana, which are likely to face the fate of the Koesan and Indian languages, that is, “attrition and eventual death” (244). Yet, if these nine African languages are zombified corpses, the surviving English words are “all out of shape”. This phrase, used by the English-

² See the original definition in Charles A. Ferguson, “Diglossia,” *Word*, 15 (1959), 325-40.

illiterate Zach in Athol Fugard's 1961 play *The Blood Knot*, provides Haike Frank with the title of his essay on "Language and Racism in South African Drama". Such a play, along with Fugard's *'Master Harold' ... and the boys* (1982) or Susan Pam-Grant's *Curl up and Dye* (1989), stage what Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins have called in *Postcolonial Drama* (1996) "languages of resistance" (quot. 312). They empower colonised peoples and provide them with a rhetoric to counter apartheid discourse and facilitate postcolonial agency.

But before any subversive recuperation of English can occur with the aim of "talking back", as it were, one has to achieve at least minimal mastery of it. This begs the question of literacy which, by all accounts, has been regressing from a recognised human right to a privilege in Africa. In examining the "writtenness" of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), Helga Ramsey-Kurz concludes that "all three of these novels suggest that whether literary English in Africa will ever transcend its own limitations as an originally European means of expression is above all a matter of who its agents are in Africa" (322). Access to literacy has indeed declined since the 1990s and English as a world language might well constitute an "immediate and serious existential threat for [Africans]" (322). This would leave "the Illiterate Other" out of the domain of literacy, fostered, as it has been, by the presence of European chirographic phenomenologies, which ousted the authority of the spoken word. Although I agree with her that Chinua Achebe deconstructs "colonialist notions of writing" (319), I see in what she calls the "ironical reduction of the District Commissioner to a mere detail" at the end of *Things Fall Apart*, a double irony. It is indeed such "details" as the DC's anthropological account of quenched native insurrections and other archival works, notably by missionaries, that helped Achebe reconstruct the Igboland of the 1870s.

On the East African front, the Kenyan "Ngugists" (and I, erroneously I believe, have been labelled as Ngugi's "unofficial proxy" by Nairobi's *Sunday Standard* of 2 November 2003), have campaigned in favour of KiSwahili for the roles formerly played by English whereas the "Anglicists" uphold "the language of a tiny

elitist majority” (256), and an all-English language policy. The way out of this infernal binarism is, as Kembo-Sure suggests, a third alternative— “plurilingualism”—which should include ‘Sheng’, “a symbolic system outside KiSwahili and English” (258), spoken by the youth but spreading to homes and offices. Safari T.A. Mafu draws the same conclusions regarding Tanzania. In 1964, when the United Republic of Tanzania was created out of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, KiSwahili was erected as the official language and the ideal medium to transmit the message of nation-building whereas Arabic and English were banned. However, English has continued to be the medium of secondary and higher education and the Tanzanian situation is now a “triglossic” one (276).

The rise of Pidgins has been addressed by Dagmar Deuber and Patrick Okol in relation to Nigerian Pidgin’s contribution to Nigerian radio drama such as *Rainbow City*. Taking their cue from the Nigerian linguists Rebecca Agheyisi and Augusta Omamor, they however lament the lack of examples from such oral sources as radio language, NP being confined to written sources. Their fieldwork on the English influence on NP, carried out during a six-month period in 2000, “shows that there is a general tendency among educated speakers to insert English elements, especially lexical items, into their NP” (293), which is also the case with speakers with little formal education. The authors, however, do not make a distinction between Nigerian Pidgin (or what Nigerian linguists commonly call EnPi) and “Broken [English]”, that is, a poorly acquired second language markedly different from even “interlanguage Pidgin.”³

In multilingual India, English has come to stay, which comes as no surprise since India has the second largest number of English speakers in the world, which amounts, however, as Premila Paul cautions, “to just about 2% of its population” (357). Salman Rushdie’s relishing concept of the “chutnification of English” finds textual antecedents in Raja Rao’s sanskritized English and Kannada-flavoured English or in Mulk Raj Anand’s Punjabi rhythms. Such rhythms undermine the authority of English, which is here minorized to the point that,

³ See Chantal Zabus, *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 1991), 48-99 (“Pidginization and Multilingual Strategies”). Reprinted in 2007.

in novels staging cross-cultural encounters as in Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* (1993), English people, Vera Alexander ponders, "form a somewhat strange minority whose alterity is confirmed by their accents" (378). Christine Vogt-Williams introduces the phrase, "translation of cultures," and endorses the idea of language [as] a tool" (403) in her analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). This is very much the same point that Bill Ashcroft is making in *Post-Colonial Transformation* (2001) where he rightfully insists that "language is a tool which has meaning according to the way in which it is used."⁴ If "Language is the skin of my thought," as Roy herself claimed, language is also like her native tongue—Malayalam—, a palindrome you can read both ways. It then follows that if, as Andrew Skutty (1996) conjectures, "a Malayalee is a typical representative competitor for survival in the twenty-first century" (quot. 403), so is any chutneyed citizen of the world.

The fourth part to the volume on the Asian subcontinent opens with a long contribution by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, which examines "the interface of language, literature, and politics in Sri Lanka", especially the Sri Lankan English-language poetry beyond what Wole Soyinka has called the "Prospero-Caliban syndrome" (quot. 355). He concludes with the hope that the spread of English as a world language will "generate a world literature" (356). In the 1950s, English stopped being a medium of instruction in national schools as a result of the populist Bandaranaike's restoration of the Sinhala language, the language spoken by 73% of the population. As Rajiva Wijesinha aptly remarks, this reform "straightjacketed Sinhala and Tamil students in their own languages" (368), in Caliban's prison-house of language, since only the Burghers (i.e. descendants of the Dutch and Portuguese) and Muslims were allowed to be educated in English. Not coincidentally, Wijesinha reflects, "it is the very year [in the early 1980s] in which the English medium stopped completely in schools that the phenomenon of International schools began" (369), which at the time counted the President's children.

The last part of the volume explores "English in Multilingual

⁴ Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 57.

Constellations around the Pacific Rim.” Three articles are devoted to New Zealand, two to Canada, and one to the Philippines. The idea of the “Pacific Rim” suggests, as Peter Marsden argues in his already evoked contribution, a move away from “a geographically remote European ‘Home’ towards an alignment with the Pacific Rim [which] may be seen to correlate with a growing cultural self-confidence” (408). This move is reflected in the linguistic changes from a self-conscious RP-speaking, elocution-lessoned speech to an “earthy-tangy-racy colloquial NZE idiom” (413), also mirrored in the shift away from Katherine Mansfield’s sub-Bloomsbury mode to distinct “national” voices within Aotearoa New Zealand, whether Maori or Pakeha or both.

A case in point is Patricia Grace, born to a Maori father and Pakeha mother, who effortlessly code-switches between English and Maori in her fiction. Michelle Keown uses Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s idea of a “minor” writer deterritorializing the majority language in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986) and Julia Kristeva’s theory of the “irruption” of the semiotic (Imaginary) into the patriarchal Symbolic, to approach what appears at first as “errors” in Grace’s *Baby No Eyes* (1998) but are in fact fundamental rules of Maori grammar. As such, Keown concludes, “the novel becomes a performative and communal enunciative act” (427). Likewise, Janet Holmes, Maria Stubbe and Meredith Marra examine the use of *te reo Maori*, which is *mora*-timed. It follows that idiosyncratic rhythmic pattern “which is more similar to syllable timing than to stress timing” (415) and which, along with other devices, contributes to “ethnic-identity-marking humour” (442).

This braiding of mother and other tongue results in *métissage*, from which the Canadian word “Métis”, meaning “mixed blood,” is derived. Like Hélène Cixous, the Canadian Erika Hasebe-Ludt claims that she grew up “in the middle of language” (quot. 459), “between German, French, English, Japanese” as a “hybrid kid” constantly on the verge of experiencing *Entgrenzung*, “a lifting of boundaries” (463). In her assessment of the politics of literacy education in the Canadian curriculum, she comes up with a new “geo-graphing” of language pedagogy that explores “generative possibilities in-between, amidst languages” (464).

Although I think a separate section on film (and possibly radio

drama) would have added some nuance to this already impressive volume, the last two articles deal with English as postcolonial language in Canadian indigenous films, and with Tagalog in the Philippines. Kerstin Knopf discusses the Métis-Cree co-production of the fiction film, *Big Bear*, based on the novel *Temptations of Big Bear* by Rudy Wiebe, and the Métis film *The Road Allowance People* (1995), both traversed by a Brazilian-type “esthetic of hunger” and deliberate unprofessionalism. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis comes to ashy rubbles when the Cree in *Big Bear* speak English and “the Canadians speak an artificial language created by Rudy Wiebe” (474). The European colonisers are, as a result, spewed out as outsiders in a strategy that helps decolonize the screen.

The volume is crowned by Damilo Manarpaac’s reflections on the limits of nationalist language policy such as Tagalog in the Philippines under the new (1987) Constitution. In a country made of islands infinitely more numerous than Imelda Marcos’s pairs of shoes, he pleads for a Standard Philippine English and cites Chinua Achebe’s uncompromising stance on language abrogation as “an inspiration to Filipino writers in English” (489). That the volume closes on such warnings seems to favour the above-mentioned conciliatory third group, those advocating a third code in the three-legged race towards decolonization.

What strikes me, generally, in Mair’s edition, is that literary critics lack the (linguistic) tools to ascertain to what extent African writers write with an accent, as I put it elsewhere.⁵ This is the case with Eleonora Chiavetta’s and Richard Samin’s otherwise worthwhile contributions. Writing on the language of women’s autobiographies in the Nigerian, London-based Buchi Emecheta’s *Head Above Water* (1986) and the South African (Xhosa) Sindiwe Magona’s *To My Children’s Children* (1990) and her *Forced to Grow* (1992), Chiavetta shows that, for both authors, “the art of storytelling was mostly in the hands of women” (283). However, when it comes to language use, she writes, for instance, that “proverbs are translated from Xhosa into English, and sometimes they are accompanied or preceded by the Xhosa source” (285) instead of

⁵ See Chantal Zabus, “Language, Orality, Literature,” in Bruce King, *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1996), 29-45.

speaking of “relexification”, “cushioning” and “contextualization”.

Likewise, Richard Samin, when writing about English as a “linguistic compromise” (15), shows how the South African Es’kia Mphahlele has experimented “with a plurality of voices echoing different cultural backgrounds in urban or rural contexts” (328) in his fiction, from the early piece *in Corner B* (1967) to *Father Come Home* (1984). Yet, when it comes to “glossing, untranslated words, translated proverbs, metaphors or comparisons, interjections, ... forms of greetings and word images ... translated into English”, Samin indiscriminately uses the word “translation”, an overt linguistic misnomer, to convey what Mphahlele calls “resonance” (329). In other words, what is the African language in filigree behind “child of my brother has been vomited by sleep” or “do not come into my mouth”? The discursive and visual erasure of the African language and, more largely, any non-Western language, is tellingly dramatic in a collection of essays that limns new horizons in postcolonial cultural studies.

Some dense articles in this collection, saturated with acronyms such as Richard J. Alexander’s, would have benefited from unpacking dense thoughts. Others, like Photis and Yvonne Lisandrou’s on “Progression” are hard to follow, as they combine reflections on postcolonial writing with GNP statistics. Some others are too short such as Yvette Tan’s “Imperial Pretensions” and Goonerantne’s “The Pleasures of Conquest” (1996). Among the articles tenuously related to the general body of texts feature Fiona Darroch’s on “Re-Reading the Religious Bodies of Postcolonial Literature”, which is an exhortation to re-orient the approach of the postcolonial critic “to an understanding of religion” (207) as well as Michael Meyer’s “An African’s Trouble with His Master’s Voices”, which deals with the often-overlooked slave narrative of Ukawsaw Gronniosaw (1770), Prince of Borno, Nigeria, whose strategic silence augurs Friday’s linguistic amputation in J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (216). As to Petra Tournay’s otherwise thought-provoking contribution on Caryl Phillips’s *A State of Independence* (1986), a narrative of return which hosts traces of colonial rhetorical strategies (219), it deals more with selfhood and its split subjectivities rather than the coarse texture of the rhetoric of Empire.

The texts under scrutiny (including radio scripts and films)

and, more largely, any postcolonial text, cannot exist outside of the world. The written text is therefore a social situation and is “worldly.” It is this very “worldliness,” to borrow from Edward Said,⁶ which brings together postcolonial literature, linguistics and theory in a way that Mair’s volume should better investigate. However, the volume remains magisterial in outlining the avatars of English as a Juggernaut, itself a Hindi word⁷ to designate one form of Krishna. If language was once “the shaper of ideas,”⁸ it is now being shaped by constantly evolving ideas, cultures, worldviews. Once our paradigms are lost, we’d better watch not how Chinese is going to “invade” the world but how an anglo-sino-“Pidgin,” itself a Chinese word in the first place, is going to transform language anew.

⁶ Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Vintage, 1983), 39.

⁷ As Michael Toolan reminds us on page 62.

⁸ See Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Collected Papers and Metalinguistics* (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Service Institute, Dept of State, 1952), p. 5; quot.in Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation*, 68.



REVIEWS

David Crystal, *The Language Revolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press), 2004, 142 pp.

Reviewed by Linda Barone

This seminal book brings together three major trends that have been affecting language since the second half of the twentieth century and the 1990s in particular: first, the emergence of English as a global language which has given rise to several *Englishes* around the world; second, the awareness that a huge number of languages risk extinction because of the supremacy of English, and third, the massive impact on language exerted by the advent of the Internet which has led to the creation of a new and revolutionary medium of communication providing, in Crystal's words, "novel dimensions of stylistic variation and new ways of focusing on language use" (92).

English as a Global Language, *Language Death* and *Language and the Internet* are three books by Crystal published between 1997 and 2001; their subject matter is largely the same as that found in *The Language Revolution* and Crystal himself clearly states in the preface to the latter that his attempt is to 'see further by standing on the shoulders' of the previously cited titles. The difference is that now there is a new perspective from which the three themes are dealt with, that of interrelationship.

The book is divided into five chapters: the first three, *The Future of Englishes*, *The Future of Languages* and *The Role of the Internet* deal with the mentioned titles; the fourth and fifth chapters, *After the Revolution* and *Language Themes for the Twenty-First Century*

are aimed to offer some general principles about the organization of languages in the post-revolution era.

In the introduction to the book, Crystal explains why he chose the word ‘revolution’ which might be considered too strong; the reason for his choice lies in the fact that what has been happening in the world is definitely “revolutionary”: “A revolution is any combination of events which produces a radical shift in consciousness or behaviour over a relatively short period of time, and this is what has happened” (2-3).

In the first chapter the author explains why English has achieved the ‘genuine’ status of global language and comments on this special position considering three perspectives: the present, the past and the future, that is, the central position English currently has, the reasons why this language has become the lingua franca in the world and what the future risks could be. Crystal provides some figures and statistics about the current role of English, citing, in particular, an estimate of the British Council according to which around a billion people are learning English as a foreign language around the world. Then, moving on to the reasons why English enjoys such a privileged status, Crystal gives one answer only: the power of the people who speak it as a first language. But power is a very general word involving several spheres and Crystal recognizes ten precise areas in which English has gained a key role because of its powerful influence: politics, economics, the press, advertising, broadcasting, motion pictures, popular music, international travel and safety, education and communications. The last part of this chapter is devoted to possible future scenarios. Is the English language doomed to disappear following the fate of its prestigious Latin predecessor? Is it on the way of transforming itself into myriads of other languages (“When a language spreads, it changes”), all mutually unintelligible (Franglais, Spanglish, Denglish, Japlish, and many more)? Is it going to survive forever keeping its status unaltered? Crystal asks these questions, but neither he, nor anyone, can give any answers, of course, as he says. His last consideration on language teaching today is worth quoting: “We are living in a world where most of the varieties we encounter as we travel around the world are something other than traditional British or American English. Teachers do students a disservice if they let them leave

their period of training unprepared for the brave new linguistic world which awaits them” (41).

The second chapter opens with some considerations on the huge amount of loan words English has been giving to contact languages and on how people have reacted to this: lexical enhancement or assault on, and destruction of, language values? Crystal’s view is that loan words have positive effects on lexis, because they give people the opportunity to express themselves in ‘a more nuanced way’. He argues that the case for anti-borrowing campaigns is misplaced because we, as citizens of the world, should understand that the movement of words between languages leads to improvement while we should concentrate on other far more vital issues, such as the death of languages. Languages continually die and the main factor in the endangerment and disappearance of any language is always to be found in the impact of stronger languages. But, in Crystal’s opinion, the point to stress here is that English is not the only language responsible for such a slaughter since all dominant languages have had a part in language weakening and consequent death: Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic and Chinese. “A language dies when the last person who speaks it dies. Or, some people say, it dies when the second-last person who speaks it dies, for then the last person has nobody to talk to”[p. 49]. Or rather, it completely dies unless it leaves written recordings. Written languages live on, but spoken languages leave ‘no archaeology’. Here Crystal mentions another, quite startling, survey published in 1999 by Ethnologue, the US Summer Institute of Linguistics organization, according to which 51 languages have only one speaker left (28 in Australia), 500 languages have fewer than 100 speakers left, 1,500 have fewer than 1000, 3,000 languages have fewer than 10,000 and 5,000 languages have fewer than 100,000 speakers. The result of such a shocking survey is that 96 % of the world’s languages are spoken by 4 % of the world’s people. During the 1990s several organizations were set up to prevent language extinction, but the point is that there is still a lack of language conscience. People should become more aware of such erosions and deaths which are a product of globalization, but globalization could become an effective means of language protection “due to the opportunities provided by the third feature of the language revolution – the Internet” (63).

The third chapter of the book, completely dedicated to the functions and roles of the Internet, starts with the important consideration that the Internet has radically changed the ways people interact and has provided us with a brand new means of communication; the Internet has triggered a sort of unprecedented revolution which is an extraordinary event. The author goes on to examine the nature of CMC communication asking whether it has to be considered a written or an oral form of exchange. His conclusions are that it is not like speech and it is not like writing. We cannot state, in his view, that *Netspeak* belongs to both oral and written language or that it is just a blend of them. “Netspeak is more than an aggregate of spoken and written features. Because it does things that neither of these other mediums does, it has to be seen as a new species of communication” (80). Internet texts are unlike any other types of texts, and here Crystal uses an adjective previously employed to refer to issues on global language: English has reached the *genuine* status of a global language and *Netspeak* has to reach the status of a *genuine* new means of communication and it has to be considered legitimate and indisputable. The consequences of such considerations prompt Crystal to reassure those people who strongly believe that the language of e-mails, blogs and chats are evident signs of standard language deterioration. Crystal states that bizarre abbreviations (“b4, CUl8er”), initialisms (*afaik* ‘as far as I know’) or respelling (*thx* ‘thanks’) are not new and not dangerous if they are used in a particular context with a ‘group-identifying function’; they must be monitored and corrected only if they are used in inappropriate contexts (e.g. in schoolwork, university and academic work, formal business exchanges) and that is exactly what the teacher’s task should be. Crystal then identifies the other by now well-known features of *Netspeak*: the layout of texts, the use of capital letters to stress a thought or simulate a shout, the use of asterisks and other symbols, the use of spaces, the repetition of punctuation (,,,, !!!!) and above all creativity in the use of lexis. This last point is particularly fascinating for the reason that many Internet expressions have begun to be used in everyday speech. “In everyday conversation, terms from the underlying computer technology are given a new application among people who want their talk to have a cool cutting-edge. Examples from recent overheard conversations

include *It's my turn to download* now ('I've heard all your gossip, now hear mine'), *I need more bandwidth to handle that point* (I can't take it all in at once')" (85). Crystal's last thoughts on the Internet revolution deal with the massive presence of English on the World Wide Web (*three English words*, as Michael Specter said in a 1996 headline in the *New York Times*)¹ and his view is that, although English is the most widespread language you are likely to find on the Internet, it is also true that the Internet is the ideal medium to preserve minority languages: anyone interested in protecting and supporting an endangered language has the opportunity to use the Web to give this language some attention, while in the past this was almost impossible.²

The last two chapters of *The Language Revolution* try to bring all the previously discussed issues together and to highlight in particular the importance of multilingualism, linguistic diversity and linguistic identity. The author cites the workings and efforts of the European Union in that sense, but places a heavy responsibility on individuals, who must have the strength to make great things happen. In the *Language Themes for the Twenty-First Century*, Crystal concludes his route by summarising the ten key concerns which should always be kept in mind in order to help build 'the linguistic mindset of the new millennium': closer attention to endangered languages and minority languages, accents and dialects, the importance of all varieties and styles, multilingualism, the acceptance of changes in languages, deeper concern for any kind of disabilities involving difficulties in learning one's L1, greater concern for people who have lost their ability in their L1 caused by any form of brain damage, and, lastly, the "need to bring the study of language and literature closer together", because "it is time to allow more language awareness into the literature class, and more literary awareness into the language class. Both sides, after all, have a focus on creativity".

Despite the fact that other more recent works have been published by Crystal himself, such as *Words, Words, Words* (2007) or *The Fight*

¹ See also in <http://www.paricenter.com/library/papers/crystal01.php>.

² A point also made by Geoff Nunberg: see his "The Whole World Wired", *Anglistica* 3.1 (1999), 229-231.

for English. How Language Pundits Ate, Shot and Left (2007), or by other scholars such as Graddol (*English Next*, 2006) which in part deal with related issues by exploring some very current trends in the use of English worldwide, *The Language Revolution* still remains a very comprehensive and up to date work dealing not only with the future of English and the changes it has undergone over time, but also with other salient issues, such as the awareness that many languages are in danger of extinction due to the monopoly of *Tyrannosaurus rex English*,³ or to conclude in Crystal's words, the categorical imperative that "languages should be thought of as national treasures and treated accordingly"(131).

³ John M. Swales, "English as 'Tyrannosaurus Rex'", *World Englishes* 16.3 (1997).

David Graddol, *English Next: Why global English may mean the end of English as a Foreign Language* (British Council 2006).

Reviewed by Roy and Luisa Boardman

Marketing English: Models for the 21st Century

In the early 1990s, a team of British Council ELT specialists was convened from various parts of the world to brainstorm possible new directions for the teaching and learning of the British model of English. For a week the discussion revolved around trends in demography, economy, technology, society, competing geographical varieties of English and competing other languages. The event was an early step in a project designed to strengthen the opportunities open to the British Council to retain its position of pre-eminence as the arbiter of good practice in the teaching of the language and, in particular, its dissemination.

The team's thinking was informed by contributions from stakeholders in the ELT industry: publishers, an EFL examinations provider (the Cambridge Syndicate), the BBC, eminent lecturers and writers on the English language. The team worked with enthusiasm and, as they thought, imaginatively, but felt they had been hit by a blunt instrument when the team leader pronounced their recommendations "bland". That was the infancy of the British Council's English 2000 project.

There is nothing bland about David Graddol's *English Next*. Its predecessor, *The Future of English?* (1997), also by Graddol, commissioned by English 2000 'to facilitate informed debate about

the future use and learning of the English language worldwide', was a laudable attempt to apply the strategies used by large corporations in coping with unpredictable futures to the business of forecasting the popularity of and demand for English in the 21st century. It argued for 'a reassessment of the role played by British providers of ELT goods and services in promoting a global "brand image" for Britain'.⁴ This new book, also commissioned by the British Council, provides the ELT profession with a long overdue shakeup; English 2000 has become the more radical, and far less complacent but grander, World English Project, with a new variety of the language, Global English, as its innovation.

We now see, after reading *English Next*, that the blandness of the 1990s workshop's recommendations was due to the team's unconscious entrenchment in the concept of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). That model, together with the ESL model with which it is merging, Graddol argues convincingly, is an anachronism, founded as it is on the assumption that English belongs to its native speakers. It has taken us a long time to fully grasp the import of Salman Rushdie's observation that 'the English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago'.⁵ The model proposed is English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), since most two-participant exchanges in English today take place when neither participant's native language is English. It may be discomfiting, but nevertheless true, to read that 'In organisations where English has become the corporate language, meetings go more smoothly when no native speaker is present'⁶, a reality that was recently brought home to the present writers when the German European Marketing Manager of Compuware asked us what steps she could take to teach 'good language manners' to the British members of her team. Why, then, should British or any other native-speaker model be taken as a reference-point, or standard, in education, international relations and business?

In the search for ELT methodologies that culminated in

⁴ David Graddol, *The Future of English?* (British Council, 1997), 1.

⁵ Salman Rushdie, "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist", in *Imaginary Homelands: essays and criticism 1981-1991* (New York & London: Viking, 1991).

⁶ David Graddol, *English Next* (British Council 2006), 115.

the communicative approach and, for example, the Task Based Learning Cycle as one way of operating it, we have sifted and fused contributions from branches of linguistics and learning pedagogies but seldom opened the door to other disciplines to guide us in our approach to making language learning more relevant, appropriate to circumstances, more effective and more economical (in terms both of time and of money). Graddol, on the invitation of the British Council, redresses the balance in *The Future of English?* by recommending scenario planning, a methodology used by strategists to put together known facts with imaginative ideas about the future.

The clear, intriguing, but for ELT stakeholders disturbing, picture presented in *English Next* shows that various scenarios have in fact been drawn to force us to question received assumptions such as the pre-eminent role of the native speaker model, the separate compartment provided for EFL in education, and the native-speaker derived model of the language itself. In the same spirit of bringing other disciplines to bear on thinking about the future of English, this new book recommends ‘innovation diffusion’, which is ‘often used by market analysts to understand how innovations are taken up in society’.⁷ Kuhn’s theory (1970) of ‘scientific revolutions’ is also called on stage to highlight the need for a new paradigm beyond those of EFL, ESL, CLIL and others, to understand how the ‘new wave of English’ will affect the ELT industry. There is a challenging suggestion that ‘rethinking the concept of “global English” may be a fruitful way of doing this’.⁸

Exactly how we might start out on this new road of discovery is left dangling, but usefully dangling like the donkey’s carrot. One imagines new teams of British Council specialists being convened to come up with grey bland beginnings that might eventually harden into glittering new paradigms. The present reviewers would, in their own modest way, like to help that process by noting that in *The Future of English?* Graddol quotes (p.22) from H.G. Wells’ *The Shape of Things to Come*, a Utopian fictional history of the world as written in the 22nd century, and equates ‘global English’ with ‘Basic

⁷ Ibid., p.106

⁸ Ibid.

English':

One of the unanticipated achievements of the twenty first century was the rapid diffusion of Basic English as the lingua franca of the world and the even more rapid modification, expansion and spread of English in its wake. ... This convenience spread like wildfire after the first Conference of Basra. It was made the official medium of communication throughout the world by the Air and Sea Control, and by 2020 there was hardly anyone in the world who could not talk and understand it.⁹

Graddol follows this quotation with a brief excursion into the subject of language as a common preoccupation in science fiction. This is odd. It is odd because what he might more usefully have done would have been to take a trip back into the past by providing us with, and discussing, that middle section of Wells' text that Graddol has omitted. For Basic English was, of course, a reality, not a part of the fiction. Here are the missing sentences:

Basic English was the invention of an ingenious scholar of Cambridge in England, C.K. Ogden (1889-1990), who devoted a long and industrious life to the simplification of expression and particularly to this particular simplification. It is interesting to note that he was a contemporary of James Joyce (1882-1955), who also devoted himself to the task of devising a new sort of English. But while Ogden sought scientific simplification, Joyce worked aesthetically for elaboration and rich suggestion, and vanished at last from the pursuit of his dwindling pack of readers in a tangled prose almost indistinguishable from the gibbering of a lunatic. Nevertheless he added about twenty-five words to the language which are still in use. Ogden, after long a industrious experimentation in the reverse direction, emerged with an English of 850 words and a few rules of construction which would enable any foreigner to express practically any ordinary idea simply and clearly. It became possible for an intelligent foreigner to talk or correspond in understandable English in a few weeks. On the whole it was more difficult to train English speakers to restrict themselves

⁹ H.G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come: the ultimate revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1933), 418-419.

to the forms and words selected than to teach outsiders the whole of Basic. It was a teacher of languages, Rudolph Boyle (1910-1959), who contrived the method by which English speakers learnt to confine themselves, when necessary, to Basic limitations.¹⁰

A short review is no place to outline the basics or merits of Basic. An introduction to it through H.G. Wells is clearly not the most appropriate academic forum for the purpose, but it is Graddol's omission dots which invite us to investigate further. Linguists and EFL practitioners tend to raise their hands in horror at the idea of 'reducing' the language to 850 words, though in fact the concept worked on by Ogden in collaboration with I.A. Richards, who developed the system further into Every Man's English (EME) is not one of reduction but of identifying a nucleus. It is therefore a great deal richer, more useful and more creative than Wells' SciFi-context suggests. It was, and is, taught to effect in Asian countries. To ignore it, as we have tended to do since the post-war advent of EFL, is to risk missing out on a contender for the post of a global variety of English based, not on the Total English that, as Graddol points out, takes ten years to master, but on learners' production needs in international contexts. The advantages of taking a trip back to Basic English in terms of What Next? are discussed by Bill Templer in *Humanising Language Teaching*.¹¹

In Italy, then, we take note of the fact that 'global English may mean the end of "English as a Foreign Language"'. If that is so, and it seems likely, MUIR will need to take a long hard look at their school syllabuses rooted in the EFL camp; Italian teachers will be able to view their professional status and skills in a different light with new careers opening up in private language schools and for educational bodies (*enti di formazione*) of all kinds; and Italian ELT publishers can begin encouraging specialists to get down to the task of creating the launching-pad core syllabus (Plateau 1, the present authors call it) that might enable learners to absorb enough English earlier in order to initiate interactions with those of other

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Bill Templer, "Towards a People's English: Back to BASIC in EIL", in *Humanising Language Learning* 7.5 (September 2005).

nationalities, so finding themselves operating competently in quite an unfamiliar and refreshing kind of “expanding circle”.

David Graddol, *English Next: Why global English may mean the end of 'English as a Foreign Language'*, British Council, 2006

Reviewed by Mikaela Cordisco

From *The future of English?* to *English Next*: the next future of English?

English Next (2006) is an extension of *The future of English* (1997), a breakthrough report by David Graddol, commissioned by the Culture Education Bureau of the British Council.

As Graddol himself underlines in his introduction to the 2006 report, the main findings of *The Future of English?* were:

- that the future development of English as a global language might be less straightforward than had been assumed;
- that the global spread of English raised not just linguistic, educational and economic issues but also cultural, political and ethical ones;
- that the key drivers of change were demographic, economic, technological and long-term trends in society;
- that the relationship between English and globalisation was a complex one: economic globalisation encouraged the spread of English and viceversa;
- that the growth of China would have a significant impact on the world in which English was used and learned;
- that countries like India in which English is spoken extensively as a second language will play a major role in the development of global English.

And he interestingly comments that “Where a question mark formed a salient part of the title of the original book, perhaps this one should have included an exclamation mark. We have moved significantly in the last five years from wondering about what was to come, to trying to understand, and seeking to respond coherently to what is already around us”.

Indeed, in his new report Graddol draws attention to the extraordinary speed of change to issues affecting English which had been identified in the 1997 publication and claims that we are already in a very new kind of environment and a new stage in the global development of English.

In order to investigate the new rules and the new winners or losers, in Part I of *English Next*, David Graddol analyses the demographic, economic, technological, social and linguistic trends in the twenty-first century which affect Global English and language policies worldwide and will influence its future. Among the factors mentioned by Graddol as relevant elements which could lead to a reconsideration of the role of English worldwide is that even the dominance of English on the Internet is declining (from 51% in 2000 to 32% in 2005):¹² other languages, including lesser-used languages, are now proliferating. According to the author, English is used less, because: 1) more non-English speakers use the Internet; 2) many more languages and scripts are now supported by computer software; 3) the Internet is used for local information; 4) some major uses, such as eCommerce (Amazon; eBay) are mainly national; 5) many people use the Internet for informal communication with friends and family; 6) the Internet links diasporic linguistic communities.

The global dominance of English, which has brought economic and cultural benefit to Britain for the past 100 years, now poses a major threat to the UK’s international standing. The claim is that English is becoming less and less the property of its native speakers.¹³

¹² As Geoff Nunberg had, indeed, already pointed out in his “The Whole World Wired”, *Anglistica* 3.1 (1999), 229-231.

¹³ Continuing the trend that had been foreseen, and promulgated, by Peter Strevens, Larry Smith, Braj Kachru and others since the 1970s. See, e.g., Larry E. Smith, ed., *Readings in English as an International Language* (Oxford: Pergamon 1983); Henry Widdowson, “The ownership of English”, *TESOL Quarterly* 28.2 (1994), 377-89.

Graddol devotes Part II of the report to ‘Education’. Language norms from the English speaking world are becoming less and less relevant as English becomes a component of basic education in many countries. The study reveals that as the number of people around the world who speak English nears 2 billion, the advantage traditionally benefitted by UK citizens is disappearing, with millions of students in other countries speaking English and at least one other language.

The monolingual native speaker of English is faced with extinction. Within a decade, the traditional private-sector market in teenage and young adult EFL learners will possibly decline substantially leaving younger learners in schools as the only market requiring English teaching. *English Next* points towards trends in the twenty-first century which are sure to affect English teaching and learning in the years ahead.¹⁴ The report found that English is not taught as a foreign language in many countries, including China and India. Instead it is seen as a “basic universal skill”. And the competitive advantage which English has historically provided its acquirers will ebb away as English becomes a near-universal basic skill.

The question is whether English will remain the most widely used language around the world and whether it will be replaced at some time in the future, as happened to Latin. From 2000 to 2005, the total number of native and non native English speakers decreased from 53.3 % to 32 %, while that of Mandarin speakers soared to 13%, and Chinese is still spoken by the largest number of people in the world. Economists predict that in the year 2050, China’s GDP per capita will reach 45,000 US \$, exceeding that of the US. The fast growth of China’s economy will, to a certain extent, facilitate the wider use of Chinese across the world. The question is whether this popularity of Chinese could pose a threat to the present status of English. Probably not, because at present the main share of the world economy has shifted from first and second industry to service industry, especially the IT industry. Considering the example of India, with its fast development in the tertiary industry, English has become the dominant language in this country. Besides,

¹⁴ For this particular aspect see Luisa and Roy Boardman’s review, *this volume*.

English now serves as a teaching tool for other disciplines in many universities all over the world (*Content and Language Integrating Learning*). In Europe, bilingual education, namely using mother language and English as teaching tools, has increasingly been the norm. Therefore, despite China's high GDP and large population, it would not be easy for Mandarin to replace English, since it usually takes centuries for a language to become used worldwide and win dominant status. English will continue to remain widespread and important.

Notwithstanding the extraordinary changes of the last few years, one thing appears to remain the same: more people than ever want to learn English. The projections given in this 2006 book of Graddol's confirm that English learners are increasing in number and decreasing in age. Even as the number of English speakers expands further, there seem to be signs that the global predominance of the language might fade within the foreseeable future. The next or near future of English still looks promising for it, but in the "Introduction" to the report, Graddol claims that the current enthusiasm for English in the world is closely tied to the complex processes of globalisation. The future of English has become more closely tied to the future of globalisation itself: "Global English is still not a 'done deal'. It is already possible to see another story unfolding, within the present century, in which present forms of globalisation give way to greater regionalism and more complex patterns of linguistic, economic and cultural power".

Maria De Santo

EFL on the Web: an overview

Introduction

The World Wide Web offers an incredible wealth of EFL resources, giving learners access to a wide range of useful materials and to authentic interaction with English speaking people.

However, the Web lacks organization, and finding worthwhile resources – despite the help of powerful search engines and directories – may sometimes be a complicated task.

To avoid never-ending and often fruitless web-searches, learners of English might start their web paths by using EFL resource sites. These websites generally take the form of guides, webrings, loops¹, directories, metasites², weblogs³ and wikis⁴; they are developed by universities, language centres, language teachers and researchers;

¹ Loops and webrings are collections of similar sites grouped together and linked one to another.

² Metasites are lists of annotated sites divided into categories.

³ Weblogs - more commonly known as “blogs” - are websites with the form of an online journal frequently updated, with entries arranged chronologically. Blogs allow readers to interact by providing a comment form. EFL/ESL blogs also provide links to useful learning and teaching resources.

⁴ Wikis are websites that allow users to quickly and easily add/edit content. A principal feature of wikis is that they allow collaborative creation and editing of web sites in a simple markup via a web browser. Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.com/>), the free encyclopaedia, one of the most well known examples, can be a useful extensive reading source for students, as well as one for guided, stylistic analysis. Wikis, in general, are increasingly used by some teachers for students’ collaborative writing projects, as well as for their class wikis, as an alternative more open platform to a blog.

they can be created by both educational institutions and individuals. Most sites offer links to external resources, but they often also provide original in-house materials⁵.

Collections of links to web resources are very useful because they:

- provide both students and teachers with a starting point for a web-based learning/teaching pathway;
- are easy to use, offering annotated and categorised resources;
- are constantly updated.

The aim of this paper is not to classify these resources into fixed sections; there are too many sites to be mentioned, too many categories to establish, and many categories overlap. The intent, here, is to suggest pathways through different typologies of EFL, grouped into flexible categories, based on their structure and on the resources they offer.

Each of the following categories suggests a list of qualitatively selected websites which have all been checked as active (as of September 2009). Apart from some which are less known, most of the sites listed are among those considered the most useful and well-known by teachers and students over recent years. Some sites involving the more recent developments of new technologies applied to language teaching and learning, such as wikis, blogs and podcasts, Web 2.0-based tools for virtual collaborative learning and teaching of EFL, are listed separately, while these tools are now also regularly featured in general EFL/ESL sites, which as elsewhere on Web 2.0 are increasingly ‘mash-up’s and inter-linked sites of various software types.

Metasites

Metasites are collections of links to other websites, usually organised into categories; in each section they provide the name, the linked addresses of the websites, and a short description of the resources and the activities they offer.

⁵ Most sites offer free access resources, others ask for a payment or a donation. In this collection all resources listed are free, although a few also include some sponsored links.

- *AAA EFL*
<http://www.aaefl.co.uk/>
 Directory of links to EFL learning and teaching resources.
- *Aardvark's English Forum*
<http://www.englishforum.com/>
 Selection of online ESL/ELF resources for students and teachers, exercises and quizzes, with a web directory; links to BBC news, message board, etc.
- *Anglik.net, recommended language links*
<http://www.anglik.net/links.htm>
 Site with links to over 500 websites classified by activities and skills.
- *English as a Second Language*
<http://www.rong-chang.com>
 Comprehensive ESL directory organised into categories.
- *ESL Desk*
<http://www.esldesk.com/esl-links/>
 Wide selection of ESL resources, with some sponsored links.
- *ESL Home*
<http://home.earthlink.net/~eslhome/>
 Collection of links for students and teachers.
- *ESL Pages*
<http://www.eslpages.com>
 Links for students and teachers, to a variety of ESL/EFL resources; forums, jobs, exams, etc.
- *Online English Language Centre*
<http://oelp.uoregon.edu/learn.html>
 University of Oregon (American) English Language Centre. Links organised by category to web-based English language learning resources.

- *The Linguist List – Language learning*
<http://linguistlist.org/sp/LangLearnESL.html>
Extensive and authoritative index of ESL, EFL and Applied Linguistics resources selected by the Linguist List based at Eastern Michigan University.

Guides to EFL resources

Some websites offer more just than a simple collection of web addresses, providing students and teachers with clearly organised categories of resources, with descriptions of the websites and, sometimes, with suggestions for useful activities. Some of these guides are directories, others are loops, webrings, blogs, wikis and search engines for ESL websites.

- *English as 2nd Language*
<http://esl.about.com>
About's well-known site provides links to student and teacher resources (exercises, exams, advice) organised by level, activity and skill. Regularly updated.
- *English Study Direct Online Self-access Centre*
<http://englishstudydirect.com/OSAC/academicisol.htm>
Database of links to web resources for both students and teachers. It has links to a wide range of language activities classified by skills and level, useful tools such as dictionaries, grammars and concordancers and resources dedicated to e-learning. Each link is accompanied by a short commentary helping users choose the most appropriate resource.
- *ESL Independent Study Lab*
<http://www.legacy.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/toppicks.html>
Site with an annotated list of links to EFL resources, organised by language area and level.
- *The ESLoop*
<http://linguistic-funland.com/esloop/esloop.html>
Collection of websites dedicated to teaching and learning English on the Web. Each site is connected to the next so that

users can browse all the sites of the loop in a circular way. This is a section of the Linguistic Funland's, TESL resource site <http://www.linguistic-funland.com/tesl.html> (see also www.esloop.org).

- *The ICAL Wiki*
http://icalweb.com/wiki/index.php?title=Main_Page
 A comprehensive wiki for TEFL professionals and students including the ICAL Grammar Guide <http://icalweb.com/wiki/index.php?title=Category:Grammar>
- *I Love Languages – English* <http://www.ilovelanguages.com/index.php?category=Languages%7CBy+Language%7CEnglish> English section of the multilingual portal *I Love Languages*, a guide to languages on the web offering hundreds of links to web resources.
- *Percorsi di apprendimento autonomo della lingua inglese*
<http://193.205.101.166/percorsi/welcome.htm>
 The website provided by the present author at CILA (Centro Interdipartimentale di Servizi Linguistici e Audiovisivi) of the University of Naples “L’Orientale” for Italian learners of English offers a guide to autonomous learners of English, with different learning pathways. It also presents a rich section providing organised links (commented in Italian) to resources for English language learning on the web, some useful tips and advice for fruitful web-searches, and an evaluation grid to help learners select online EFL materials.
- *The Tower of English*
<http://towerofenglish.com>
 Guide to ESL resources on the Web, with a collection of more than 300 links for learners and teachers, classified into sections. Each category has a list of links with a detailed description of the activities and the resources available. It also offers suggestions for related activities in the *Your Turn* section.

- *WEBRING Best ESL/EFL/English sites*
<http://p.webring.com/hub?ring=tolearnenglish>
Section of the *Webring* – directory of websites – offering a guide to sites for English learners and teachers.

Resource sites

These offer a wide range of EFL resources and language activities: original in-house resources, links to external websites, reference materials, and other useful tools for both learners and teachers. Resource sites include: comprehensive sites, sites dedicated to one specific skill or to ESP/EAP, sites with games, and reference sites. In this section, information portals are also included, because they are an example of authentic resources that can be used to help learners practice reading comprehension and improve vocabulary.

Comprehensive sites

These sites offer resources with different typologies of activities which can help students improve all four language skills.

- *BBC World Service Learning English*
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/index.shtml>
The Learning English area of the BBC website offers various sections with a wide range of activities: News English, helping students learn new words in context; Watch and Listen, with audio and video resources; sections dedicated to music with video clips, song lyrics, and interviews. It has also pages with Business English courses, Quizzes, Grammar and Vocabulary exercises, and a Communication section with e-mail, discussion lists, and chat. It also offers a podcast area with audio, video and text files to be downloaded.
- *Dave's ESL Cafe*
<http://www.eslcafe.com>
This website, one of the most popular, and earliest dedicated ESL sites on the Web, has resources both for teachers and for students. Students can work on all linguistic skills, chat, find electronic pen-pals, and discuss various topics. It also offers a Web guide with a selection of EFL links.

- *EnglishClub.com*
<http://www.englishclub.com>
 Site with various in-house materials both for learners and for teachers, and a Web guide containing links to external EFL resources. Learners have at their disposal lessons, many interactive activities, and language tools; teachers can find lesson plans and a forum.

- *English@home*
<http://www.english-at-home.com/>
 Site providing many activities, an ESL directory and a Learn English blog.

- *English online*
<http://eleaston.com/materials.html>
 A great range of materials for teaching and learning (including Business English sub-categories).

- *Englishpage*
<http://www.englishpage.com/>
 Online lessons , exercises and resources. Updated weekly.

- *ESL Go*
<http://www.eslgo.com>
 Online classes (free), discussion boards, quizzes, links to other EFL websites, and a teacher's section.

- *ESL Gold*
<http://www.eslgold.com/>
 Hundreds of learning and teaching tips and resources organized by skill and level.

- *The Internet TESL Journal*
<http://iteslj.org/>
 A wide repertoire of articles and resources for both teachers and learners. The section dedicated to students offers hundreds of quizzes, exercises and puzzles classified by language area, level, and activities, and also a selection of ESL links. It

has a monthly web journal with many useful materials for teachers of English such as articles, research papers, lesson plans, handouts, and a selection of links. It also offers a sub-page with links to blogs with English podcasts.

- *Learn English*
<http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/>
 This site, developed by the British Council, has a series of autonomous learning activities for EFL students, including podcasts and resources for teachers. It offers both in-house materials and links to external websites.
- *Manythings.org, interesting things for ESL students*
<http://www.manythings.org/>
 A website containing many interactive activities for learners of English such as exercises, quizzes, puzzles and word games.
- *UsingEnglish.Com*
<http://www.usingenglish.com/>
 Website providing a large collection of ESL tools and resources for students and teachers. It offers ESL activities, exercises, reference materials, forums, articles and a wide collection of links.
- *World English*
<http://www.world-english.org/>
 Together with various resources dedicated to teachers and students of English, the site provides free language activities and exercises in most areas of English, links to external EFL resources and sponsored links, and a monthly EFL newsletter.
- *I Language*
<http://www.i-language.com/>
 A site with a grammar course, forums, reading library, an American English audio course, writing guide, and an ESL links directory.

Sites dedicated to specific skills

These sites offer resources focussing on one specific language skill.

Listening

- *Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab*
<http://www.esl-lab.com/>
 A website offering a long list of interactive listening activities classified by level, with pre-, while and post-listening exercises. It also provides a self-study guide with activities organised by topic and language function.
- *The English Listening Lounge*
<http://englishlistening.com/>
 Site with many listening activities, organised into 'domains', levels, topics, and useful advice.

Speaking

- *Fonetiks.org*
<http://www.fonetiks.org/>
 Website offering pronunciation guides and practice. It helps language learners listen to and study native speakers' pronunciation through pages with American, British, Australian, Canadian, South African, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh accents (as well as nine other languages).
- *OUC International Online Pronunciation*
<http://international.ouc.bc.ca/pronunciation/>
 Pronunciation and listening lessons with various activities (videos, dictation, conversation, etc.).

Reading

- *CNN Interactive learning resources*
<http://literacynet.org/cnnsf/>

The site offers learning resources based on current and past CNN San Francisco bureau and CBS5 news stories. It has many modules classified by subject. Learners can choose to read the story, listen to it, or view the broadcast. Indeed, each story has textual, audio

and video resources, and a variety of interactive comprehension activities. (See also literacyworks.org/learning resources/)

**Authentic materials for reading activities:
information portals**

- *The Big Project*
<http://www.thebigproject.co.uk/news/>
User-friendly site with links to news in English from newspapers all over the world.
- *Mondo Times*
<http://www.mondotimes.com/>
Newspapers, magazines, radio/TV stations and news agencies around the world.
- *Online Newspapers*
<http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/>
Links to thousands of local and national newspapers from around the world (all languages).

Writing

- *Online writing lab*
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>
The site, a “cyber extension” of the Purdue University Writing Lab, offers hundreds of handouts, tutorials, and links to other writing resources on the Web.

ESP (English for Specific Purposes)

- *Business English Exercises*
<http://www.better-english.com/exerciselist.html>
Site with many exercises.
- *ESP Bank*
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?sectionType=listsummary&catid=58018>
Bank of practical materials for teachers of ESP, covering various fields from Aviation to Legal, Science and Tourism.

- *Linguarama – Postscript magazine*
<http://www.linguarama.com/ps/index.html>
Self-study magazine with many resources dedicated to Business English.
- *International Legal English*
<http://www.translegal.com/cup>
Online Legal English Research; from Cambridge Professional English. Some useful materials for advanced learners.
- *Medical English multimedia course*
<http://www.englishmed.com/>
Wide range of resources dedicated to Medical English.
- *Online Medical English Centre*
<http://www.learnenglishdirect.com/medical/health.htm>
Medical English website with dictionaries, vocabulary, writing help, and reading practice.
- *WebEC*
<http://www.helsinki.fi/WebEc/>
World Wide Web resources in Economics and related subjects.
- *Learnthenet*
<http://www.learnthenet.com/english/index.html>
Site with authentic ICT training materials.
- *Webwise*
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/course/index.shtml>
BBC's guide to using the Internet, including a "jargon buster".

EAP (English for Academic Purposes)

- *Academic vocabulary*
<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~alzsh3/acvocab/index.htm>
Core academic vocabulary, with corpus-based activities and exercises using the Academic Word List (for other Academic style advice and resources see <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/csc/academic-integrity/references/Links-and-resources.pdf>)

- *Using English for Academic Purposes*
<http://www.uefap.co.uk/index.htm> A Guide for Students in Higher Education.

Games

- *Crossword Puzzles*
<http://www.crossword-puzzles.co.uk/>
Collection of links to interactive English crosswords on the web, from newspapers and other sources. Also crossword software and crossword solving advice.

- *Free Rice*
www.freerice.com
An advanced vocabulary multiple-choice game. For each correct answer 10 grains of rice are donated through the UN World Food Program. Very addictive!

- *Language Games*
<http://www.languagegames.org/la/english.asp>
Simple games for basic level students: crosswords, word search, hangman.

- *TEFLGames.com*
<http://www.teflgames.com/games.html>
This is a Free ESL Games and Quiz Corner with interactive games, and online quizzes with various levels of difficulty.

Reference sites

Grammar

- *The Online English Grammar*
<http://www.edufind.com/english/grammar/>
 Online grammar reference with a Test Centre offering interactive tests and educational games. It also provides a Grammar Clinic where students can submit their questions, and a free diagnostic level test.

- *Guide to Grammar and Writing*
<http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>
 Sponsored by the Capital Community College Foundation, a nonprofit 501 c-3 organization. Many resources to select from at different 'levels': sentence, paragraph, essay and research paper; grammar quizzes, advice, search devices, etc.

- *The ICAL Grammar Guide*
<http://icalweb.com/wiki/index.php?title=Category:Grammar>
 An ongoing comprehensive online grammar of English, containing hundreds of pages on all aspects of English grammar in various contexts. The ICAL wiki site in general is mainly for teachers but is also useful for students.

- *The Internet Grammar of English*
<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/internet-grammar/home.htm>
 Primarily for British University undergraduates.

- *Modern English Grammar*
<http://papyr.com/hypertextbooks/grammar/>
 Linked to the College of DuPage (Illinois, USA) English and Composition page (www.cod.edu)

Writing

- *Guardian Unlimited Style guide*
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/styleguide>
 An advanced writing guide.

- *Online writing assistant*
<http://powa.org/my/>
- *PUNCTUATION MADE SIMPLE*
<http://lilt.ilstu.edu/golson/punctuation/intro.html>
- *The Economist Style Guide* Guide
<http://www.economist.com/research/StyleGuide/>
Detailed guide on language usage for *The Economist's* journalists.
- *Writing@CSU Writing Guides*
<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides>
Colorado State University guides which take students through the process of academic writing, and introduces other writing genres. Advanced.

Vocabulary

- *Learning Vocabulary Fun*
www.vocabulary.co.il/
- *The Word Spy* .
<http://www.wordspy.com/>
“The Word Lover’s Guide to New Words”
- *World Wide Words*
www.worldwidewords.org/index.htm
Articles on words and turns of phrase in English around the world by D. Quinion.

Dictionaries

- *The Merriam-Webster online*
<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary.htm>
Online dictionary and thesaurus with definitions, audio pronunciation and word games.
- *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary website*
<http://www.oup.com/elt/catalogue/teachersites/oald7/?cc=it>

Online dictionary with many resources such as crosswords, vocabulary exercises and worksheets.

- *Hyperdictionary*
<http://www.hyperdictionary.com/>
 With subsections on video, computer and medical terms.
- *Wordreference*
<http://www.wordreference.com>
 Multilingual dictionary, with word games and other features.
- *Wordsmith Dictionary and Thesaurus*
<http://www.wordsmyth.net>
 Integrated dictionary and thesaurus, with many tools such as glossary maker, quiz builder, anagram solver, etc.
- *Lexicool*
http://www.lexicool.com/dictionaries_english.asp?IL=2
 Repertoire of bilingual and multilingual dictionaries, a language identifier, links to 7000 glossaries created by translators, and a rough online translation resource.
- *YOUR DICTIONARY*
<http://www.yourdictionary.com>
 Multilingual dictionary.
- *THE ACRONYM FINDER*
<http://www.acronymfinder.com/>
- *Online reference tools*
<http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/tesol98/wrtools.html#ref>
 Many categories of reference tools provided for writers and writing (sources of quotations, rhyming dictionaries, grammar, etc.), but also more generally useful for ESL teachers (and advanced students).

CMC (Computer Mediated Communication)

Many comprehensive EFL websites, as we have seen, also exploit computer-mediated communication (MOOs, e-mail and chat) to help learners practice the language by interacting with others (learners and/or native speakers). A few are listed separately here for ease of reference.

- *BBC WorldService.com Learning English Communicate*
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/communicate/index.shtml>
This section of the site offers the opportunity to communicate with English speaking people and other learners of English through different media: live message board, e-mail discussion group and newsletters.
- *Dave's ESL Cafe Chat central*
<http://host8.123flashchat.com/eslcafe/>
Dave's famous ESL Café also offers real time chatting.
- *Englishforums.com*
www.englishforums.com
World's largest EFL social network. Some participants offer free English chat on Skype.
- *The schMOOze University*
<http://schmooze.hunter.cuny.edu:8888/>
A virtual college where people studying English can practise the language through conversations, language games and other useful resources.
- *E Tandem*
<http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/>
The site of the project E-Tandem Europa - hosted by the Ruhr-University, Bochum (DE), co-ordinator of the project in cooperation with the International Tandem Network - offers the opportunity to learn and practice a language through E Tandem, an autonomous and collaborative way of learning languages, enhanced by ICT.

Weblogs and podcasting

Weblogs have a great potential in EFL learning and teaching because they represent both authentic contexts of interaction with native speakers (learners can read and post comments) and sources of useful EFL materials (by also providing links to external resources). Many EFL blogs also offer a podcasting service dedicated to EFL, with audio and video files designed to be downloaded and listened to on a portable device.

- *Better @ English*
<http://www.betteratenglish.com/>
Site devoted to helping non-native speakers improve their English with podcasts.
- *EFL 2.0*
<http://efl20.com/>
The blog on EFL, web 2.0, TEFL, social web, elearning and more.
- *ELT Podcast*
<http://www.eltpodcast.com/>
Blog with several podcasts for learners and teachers of English as a second or foreign language.
- *EnglishBlog*
<http://jeffreyhill.typepad.com/english/>
A blog containing links to useful websites both for ESL/EFL learners and teachers.
- *ESL + EFL friendly blogs for learning English*
<http://www.eslgo.net/>
It provides an updateable directory of friendly blogs, categorized by subject, that can be used for learning/teaching English; these blogs are friendly because they welcome comments from people learning English. There are also some links to resources for learners and teachers and to message boards for learners of English.

- *ESL POD*
<http://www.eslpod.com>
ESL Podcast blog.
- *Pain In The English*
<http://www.painintheenglish.com/>
A blog for English learners (and native speakers) designed as a database of common problems with the English language.
- *Blog-EFL*
<http://blog-efl.blogspot.com/>
Observations and comments about the use of weblogs with students and teachers in ESL.
- *Game-EFL*
<http://game-efl.blogspot.com/>
Blog with links to EFL games.

Many more English learning (and teaching) resources are available on the Web. The list could never be complete. The selection above, however, represents a fair taste of useful resources for the interested learner (and teacher) of ESL/EFL to explore and use, for free. Motivation and internet access are the only limits.

Sujata Bhatt, *Il colore della solitudine*, ed. and trans. Paola Splendore (Roma: Donzelli, 2005), 203 pp.

Reviewed by Serena Guarracino

“Oh yes,/ I would like to disappear/ into those vowels –” (*Ars Poetica*). Sujata Bhatt’s is a poetry of vowels, of sounds striving to make themselves heard: “Pull it out, pull it out, the silence,/ the silence between/ the cadence and the syntax –” (“The Multicultural Poem”). The dash closing the verse graphically embodies the silence where all words must eventually disappear, and as such it marks the impossible closure of many a poem among those collected in the miscellany *Il colore della solitudine*. This collection at last offers the Italian audience a wide-ranging selection of poetry by Bhatt, one of the fruitful women poets from what has commonly become known as the Indian diaspora, counterpointed and sustained by Paola Splendore’s sensitive translation. The selection aims at providing the Italian reader with a number of routes across Bhatt’s production, starting from her earliest collections, *Brunizem* (winner of the prestigious Commonwealth Poetry Prize Asia in 1988) and *Monkey Shadows* (1991), up to the more mature verse of *The Stinking Rose* (1995), *Augatora* (2000) and *A Colour for Solitude* (2002), her last collection, conceived as a series of (self)portraits of/by the expressionist painter Paula Modersohn-Becker. To this broad and multifaceted production Splendore’s short but comprehensive note adds the necessary background information that will allow any reader previously unacquainted with Bhatt’s production to better appreciate the peculiarities of her writing.

Born in Ahmedabad in 1956, Sujata Bhatt moved early in her life to the US with her family. Here English quickly supplanted her mother-tongues, Gujarati, Marathi, and Hindi, both in her writing and in her everyday life. And yet these supposedly lost languages resurface in Bhatt’s poetry, which in turn assumes the ever-changing shapes of a search for the voice of the woman or, rather, for a voice for the woman poet. Thus, the quest unsurprisingly unwinds among many and diverse sounds and languages, a multiplicity of bodies and tongues, to which Splendore’s translation adds for

the Italian reader a different, somewhat uncanny dimension in its merging of the foreignness of the poetry and the familiarity of the language.

The uncanniness of the ‘foreign’ and yet ‘family’ language is exploited by Bhatt herself, starting from the Gujarati graphically marking the pages of “In Search of My Tongue”. Here the mother tongue becomes flesh through the powerful image of a tongue growing back into place like a lizard’s tail: “it grows back, a stump of a shoot/ grows longer, grows moist, grows strong veins .../ Everytime I think I’ve forgotten,/ I think I’ve lost my mother tongue,/ it blossoms out of my mouth.” Yet this language of lost familiarity can also be embodied in gestures evoking with a faintly nostalgic nuance a whole heritage of memories, like in “My Mother’s Way of Wearing a Sari”: “And then I watch/ my mother balance/ the pleated part of her sari/ against her waist –”. The body of her mother, wrapped in a sari “in Gujarati style”, is the unspeakable and yet outspoken mark of (one) cultural identity, silencing in its meaningful gestures “*all our talks about the ‘meaning’ of a sari*” (italics in the text).

The body of women, of mothers and pregnant women, of menstruating women and desiring women, unfolds in Bhatt’s poetry as a language of its own. Bhatt sometimes defies her notoriously outspoken fellow poet and compatriot, Kamala Das, in her voicing of sexual desire: “Who speaks of the green coconut uterus/ the muscles sliding, a deeper undertow/ and the green coconut milk that seals/ her well, yet flows so she is wet/ from his softest touch?” (“White Asparagus”). The sexual desire of a four-month pregnant woman is at the centre of this poem, conflating bodily images generally kept rigorously apart. In Bhatt’s poetry all the mechanisms of a woman’s body are celebrated, so that her body is transfigured into the most creative and unexpected images. Who would expect the female sex to be powerfully represented by the garlic cloves of the ‘stinking rose’? “His fingers tired after peeling and crushing/ the stinking rose, the sticky cloves –/ Still, in the middle of the night his fingernail/ nudges and nicks her very own smell/ her prism open –” (“The Stinking Rose”).

This celebration, however, is sharply counterpointed by the way in which the workings of the woman’s body are policed by Indian

society. Sujata Bhatt's recollections of India feature the memory of menstruating women confined in a room "next to the cowshed", an unsettling version of Virginia Woolf's 'room of one's own', where "we're permitted to write/ letters, to read" ("Udaylee"). "Udaylee", Gujarati for the menstruating and thus untouchable woman, gives the measure of how Bhatt's poetry cannot and does not try to transfigure in an optimistic multiculturalism the cultural mechanisms that mark the place of what Gayatri Spivak would call the "subaltern woman". Indeed, before some stories even the woman poet stops short of words, and poetical voicing becomes ethically upsetting: "*And if you are a true poet/ will you also find a voice/ for the woman who can smile/ after killing her daughter?/ What is the point of bearing witness?*" ("Frauenjournal"; italics in the text). It is the haunting voice of the baby girl killed by her own mother, recalling Sethe's murder of her own baby daughter to free her from slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, that embodies the ultimate tragedy of subaltern women, both the mother who must kill her own child and the daughter who is deprived of life: "Mother, I am the one/ you sent away/ when the doctor told you/ I would be/ a girl ... No one wanted to touch me—" ("Voice of the Unwanted Girl").

Nonetheless, the India of her childhood memories and contemporary experience is not the only place where home emerges as the strikingly unsafe place of violence: if here unborn girls are killed "because/ there's not enough money/ not enough milk" ("Frauenjournal"), Bhatt shows no reticence in describing the violence happening in the streets of the US, the adopted home country of her youth: "In New York/ children are being shot/ to death this summer./ It is usually an accident" ("Walking Across the Brooklyn Bridge, July 1990"). Every single one of Bhatt's multiple geographies is marked by violence, and its archetype is embodied in the border dividing India from Pakistan, as described by her mother's voice: "How could they/ have let a man/ who knew nothing/ about geography/ divide a country?" ("Partition"). This landscape results in making one beware of any affiliation whatsoever; as a consequence, Bhatt can find her only possible positionality in the continuous leave-taking of the exile, of "the one who always goes away" ("The One Who Goes Away"). Of course,

the choice of exile implies making its best of this experience of inescapable foreignness, in its ongoing renegotiation of the idea of 'home'. Faced with a world that only offers rare and temporary shelter, Bhatt uses her poetry to devise a home in her own body, language, and poetry: "I am the one/ who always goes away/ away with my home/ which can only stay inside/ in my blood – my home which does not fit/ with any geography." *Il colore della solitudine* invites the (Italian) reader to enter this uncanny home and, if possible, to make him/herself at home within it.

POETASTERY

Geoff Nunberg**Cookie Monsters**

(March 20, 2000)

Whenever your fingers are doing the walking,
Just one step behind you there's DoubleClick stalking.
They've made note of your Britney Spears CD-ROM
And your trips to victoriasssecret.com,
The Viagra you bought from a Web site in Thailand
For a brief liaison in West Hempstead, Long Island.
But when they made plans for the clicks to be tagged,
The market reacted; DCLK sagged,
Till they clarified: "That was just one of our sidelines,
And besides, on the Web we've no privacy guidelines."
It is still a disaster for corporate PR
When you're caught with your hand in the cookie jar,
Only now, what the public is likely to mind
Are the cookies you're secretly leaving behind.

We're Coming Unwired

(April 17, 2000)

The freeways are humming with wireless WAPping,
And thrumming with fingers incessantly tapping
On palmtops and laptops and cellular keys,
As we drive with our midbrains and steer with our knees.
The joe in the Jag is composing an e-mail
To explain why he's late to a furious female,
Whom he'll presently placate by pointing his Palm
To get two dozen roses from Flowers.com.
There's an M&A gal in a 528
Who is dotting the i's on a deal that will mate
The nation of Greece with a content provider,
As she's merging herself, with the center divider.
Every Jack in his Jeep, every Jill in her Hyundai,
Is communing like mad with the *Spiritus Mundi*:
They are holding their phones in their teeth while they punch in
The name of the joint they're reserving for luncheon;
They get quotes from Lord Byron, or Chemdex and Chiron,
Oblivious all to the sound of the siren;
They are checking their flights,
As they whiz through red lights,
While an oncoming semi is flashing its brights ...
If you're holding some Nokia or 3Com, I'd park it.
I've a feeling success has been killing their market.

*Unknown web authors***Life Before the Computer**

An application was for employment
A program was a TV show
A cursor used profanity
A keyboard was a piano!

Memory was something that you lost with age
A CD was a bank account
And if you had a 3 ½ inch floppy
You hoped nobody found out!

Compress was something you did to garbage
Not something you did to a file
And if you unzipped anything in public
You'd be in jail for awhile!

Log on was adding wood to a fire
Hard drive was a long trip on the road
A mouse pad was where a mouse lived
And a backup happened to your commode!

Cut - you did with a pocket knife
Paste you did with glue
A web was a spider's home
And a virus was the flue!

I guess I'll stick to my pad and paper
And the memory in my head
I hear nobody's been killed in a computer crash
But when it happens they wish they were dead!

Jocelyne Vincent

Spam Salad: a selection of spoems

sister city

sister city
 feline traffic light
 grandmother speedily

crossing
 FlyLady
 fleet-spirited out-boarder

You so cater

you restaurant
 caged whisk
 mcchicken pitying eyes
 Of minestrone to dessicate
 You so cater

pea blight oil-dispensing
 Licker lickerishly lickerous
 gummy entourage
 Spam
 mostly sweet, with a few nuts.

sea Lord

You remember
 the wind shall leave to pass when
 he said,
 sea Lord the
 breaches of waters. The sweet
 savour

physical clouds moving towards
 the shrine a...
 typhoon dour
 As if your human shape were what
 the storm
 The surge of swirling wind defines

disfores = greensicknes

mid-travel needle fir
 mediocre bulldozer
 agonize tree

Non-scandinavian myriad-minded
 out-of-center paper cloth
 muddle-minded ooze leather

Are be or toxic
 hairy swamp
 disfores = greensicknes

Camp camped camping

BigTent
no blanket

goose bumps
For this... you die in your sleep

Physiological delirious

Black leather straps they'd left: the
lines...
on carouse
physiological delirious
what further: not known, my
sacrifice,
of corporal soothing

Let you suddenly, as he spoke
gently shimmer.
She's burnt out, her lip. But
She delayed
Until at last the king commanded

gloat gigantic,
else bad must pleasure mouth to gold.
My Dear,
wicked. From mine enemy, drink. But
go midnight

catatonia collage avert

archenemy contextual baggage
amid ala deniable
cavalcade diorama attendee

crone bicameral consultant
elasticity verbos
was do prose ?

Don't read this

Hey dude good news for you
Help is on the way
Mr. blue is your friend

I'm sure you will muddle through
All your days of being laughed at
are over.
I... felt like I owed it to you.

Live the Life you Aspire to

Dear Friend,
And sayest unto me
The life needs to be lived in the pleasure

It already
Be a valuable
Test the sweets of the life yourself
It funny

SUMMARIES

Maria Silvia Attianese

***Between Technology and Post-Purchase Publicity:
The Translation of Instruction Manuals***

The article examines translation of Instruction Manuals for home appliances between English and Italian. It focuses on the hybridity of this text-type, which is characterised by the features of technical writing but also by the element of Post-Purchase publicity. A linguistic analysis of primary sources reveals the different readers' expectations and rhetorical strategies to be found in English and Italian Instruction Manuals and how these might affect translation. The all-too frequent practice of automatic translation of this text-type is also critically addressed, some analyses of instances carried out, the implications raised for the translation profession.

Giuseppe Balirano

Humourless Indians?

***The Perception of 'Diasporic' Humour in Ethnic Media
Productions***

This study aims at investigating *humour* as a dynamic factor in the formation of the post-national identities of the Indian community in the UK, through the multimodal analysis of the 'Indo-Saxon' TV series *Goodness Gracious Me!* The popular TV series, indeed, draws on some humorous strategies which inevitably tend to de-territorialise and subvert the practice of imagining communities, by *otherising* the nation and creating new relations which entail a new sharing of power between the Indian and the English communities. The immediate language of the TV spoofs, by means of reversed stereotypes, transforms the Objects/Others into Subjects/Selves who, exploring the formerly ruling Eurocentric narratives, thrive on a multicultural national transformation. The sketch show, completely made by British Asians, represents ethnic identity as a dynamic phenomenon concerned mainly with the problem of immigrants' *multiple identities* continuously shifting between the country of origin (India) and the country of immigration (England), and as a consequence, it unsurprisingly interrogates, by means of reversed stereotypes, the very nature of Britishness. In order to define 'Diasporic Humour', the study focuses on the

semiotic investigation of a short skit from the show's first series, attempting at locating some linguistic and in particular pragmatic strategies underlining the rationale behind the political and social significance that this kind of humour has achieved in the creation of post-national, hybrid identities.

Rita Calabrese

Current Trends in ELT Methodology: Exploring a Computer Learner Corpus

The potential of using corpora and corpus technology for language learning and teaching purposes was recognised at the early stages of modern corpus linguistics. Tim Johns who pioneered the use of corpora in the classroom believed that the concordancer is “one of the most powerful tools that we can offer the language learner”. The present paper explores the pedagogical potential of a particular corpus type, the computer learner corpus, through the presentation of corpus-based classroom activities carried out by a group of EFL students at the University of Salerno.

Mikaela Cordisco

“Blogspeak”: ‘blogal’ English in the ‘global’ village

Technology is enabling new patterns of communication in ways which have implications for language patterns. Weblogs (blogs) are among the genres of Internet communication to have attained widespread popularity, and to attract the attention of commentators, yet their linguistic characteristics have not so far been systematically described. Assuming that the most widely used language for Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is English, and that recent years have seen the rapid rise of the blog as a communicative medium on the Web, the paper investigates the Anglophone “blogsphere” in terms of *linguistic features, style and domain*, analysing “blogspeak” as a kind of language which is more private and personal than traditional journalism but more public than diaries, the analysis confirming that it expresses a form of writing between oral conversation and writing, formality and informality, one which rationalises the human need to communicate within the

constraints of the medium. Evidence of the difficulty in defining weblogs in terms of genre is given: although there are simple and evident features that are universally shared, there are also major differences which make a more unambiguous identification of the complex communicative and linguistic patterns within ‘blogal’ English particularly complex.

Maria De Santo

***TELL@ SAC, enhancing English learning through ICT
in a self-access centre***

Since its introduction in the field of ELT, technology has been a useful support to both teachers and learners. Today, in a Self-Access Centre, where technology is strictly connected to the philosophy of learner autonomy, ICT has a fundamental role in improving language learning and in fostering a student-centred learning environment; but, despite its potential and its growing importance as an educational resource, ICT effectiveness depends on the way it is exploited by both learners and teachers. The article presents the results of an empirical investigation of the possibilities offered by ICT to English language learning in a university self-access centre and describes the role, the uses and the effectiveness of technology also from the students’ perspective.

Antongiuseppe Di Dio

***Computer Mediated Communication and Identity
Construction in Teenagers: Some preliminary cross-cultural
observations***

The paper reports the preliminary findings of an ongoing research project investigating how CMC affects communication and relationships, especially in creating and maintaining friendships; it relies on data collected by observing English and Italian forums and IRC channels, by carrying out informal FtF interviews on the subject, as well as considering the academic literature on these issues. Particular attention is dedicated to the development of new forms of socialization among teenagers as opposed to adults and

the subsequent creation of a cultural and generational divide. The paper presents some comments on the general trends which seem to have emerged so far from the data.

Emilia Di Martino

***Gender Equality in the Information Society:
pedagogical implications for Italy-based ELT***

Research carried out by ISTAT and CENSIS shows that Italians are more TV- and mobile-phone-orientated than Internet- or computer-interested. This may be due to socially, and culturally, produced ‘preferences’: Italians seem to attach a high value to family and sentiments, thus showing a significant presence of qualities and characteristics traditionally described as ‘feminine’. Gender bias, however, does not only lie in the social distribution (possession and use) of computers, but also in their production: diversity is under-represented among users of ICT. This may be due to the way education approaches technology. Although there is no clear evidence that ICT is important in itself or that ICT fluency can directly help reduce social inequality, by granting people with different characteristics the option to *choose* ICT access by means of gender-diversity, open ICT education may prove to be an instrument of empowerment. Gender-diversity openness presupposes ‘epistemological pluralism’, i.e. accepting the validity of different forms of knowing. In the language teaching field, this corresponds to eclecticism, an approach that recognises, among other things, the complexity of the human mind. Eclecticism and EL teachers’ awareness of the complexity of their roles could make ELT a particularly meaningful environment for gender-diversity-open ICT education in Italy, while ICT would at the same time provide ELT with important occasions for plural entry thanks to its embodiment of those situated, collaborative methodologies that principled eclecticism has long tried to appropriate alongside more traditional approaches.

Bruna Di Sabato

ELT and the Internet: A New Approach to ESP

The paper is based on the assumption that the easy and widespread access to a wider range of information and services via the Internet has increased the number of users of what we define English for Special/Specific Purposes. During a workshop with postgraduates studying for a Doctorate, attention was focused on the field of e-commerce since this is an area whose existence depends exclusively on the opportunities offered by IT. The main aim was to reason about what is happening to special/specific languages after the advent of the Internet. In the paper, attention is also occasionally extended from this sample environment to other fields such as medicine and science.

Although only one aspect – vocabulary – in only one field – e-commerce – was examined, the findings at the end of the workshop seem sufficient to identify three trends, namely: the increase in the number of Special English readers, the increasing interference between Everyday EGP and ESP, and the tendency of different languages to converge on common lexical repertoires. These changes, alongside the changes in the English employed in such contexts deriving from its use by non-native speakers, point to a need to reformulate ESP syllabuses, adopting a blended approach which combines EGP and ESP.

Antonella Elia

Online Encyclopedi@s: The Case of Wikipedia and WikiSpeak

The paper is a presentation of some research on the linguistic features and textual genre of online encyclopaedias. The investigation is specifically based on the comparative analysis of Wikipedia vs. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, the former, the well-known collaborative repository of encyclopaedic knowledge, open to public contributions, editing and re-writing, the latter, the generally considered most authoritative example of a traditional printed encyclopaedia in the English speaking world. Despite its recognised pervasiveness today in web users' lives, surprisingly little serious academic interest has been dedicated to Wikipedia, and least of all to its linguistic features. After an overview of the history and

general characteristics of *Britannica* and Wikipedia, the analysis focuses, thus, firstly, on the investigation of “WikiLanguage”, the formal language used in the official encyclopaedia entries and, secondly, on the online Wikipedia community and on “WikiSpeak”, the language as spoken (-written) by the Wikipedians in their backstage, informal community.

Sara Griffiths

Technology and the Text

The article explores three uses of the word ‘technology’ in relation to written texts both from a contents and historical point of view. The author first briefly discusses what possible relationship or role Technology (with a capital T) can have in relation to complex configurations of social, cultural, economic and political factors that bring change. Her chosen approach (among other possible ones) to this question which continues to vex historians, sociologists, economists and the scientific community in general, is that technological change is relational to these other changes and not just a cause or result of them. In the second part, Griffiths provides a brief history of the specific application of various ‘technologies’ to written texts. In the final part she compares print book technology with some of the more recent and emerging text formats mediated by computer technology in an attempt to obtain a clearer picture of what is happening to the written text.

Serena Guarracino

Building Sites: Suniti Namjoshi’s hypertextual Babel

This essay explores the writing of Indo-English writer Suniti Namjoshi and its relationship with information technology. In her novel *Building Babel*, Namjoshi starts from the notion that culture, like the Tower of Babel, is constructed in and through language. Thus she devises a parallel world in which information, in the shape of stories and myths, is subject to a continuous elaboration that prevents it from assuming any feature of fixity and ‘truth’; an elaboration that finds its natural outcome in the website created by the writer and the publishers. Here, relinquishing the authority of

‘Writer’, Namjoshi hands over her creation to her readers, who can contribute to the never-ending building of Babel.

Geert Lovink

Global Conversations

Blogging from the floor of the 2007 Global Conversations Conference at Irvine University on *Marginalized Languages*, Lovink reports on the South Asia, Africa and Technology panels and reflects on the role/influence of the Internet and the status of languages, marginalised and/or globalised.

Geert Lovink

Internet, Globalisation and the Politics of Language

In this invited talk, given in 2008 at the “Orientale”, Lovink critically addresses the shifts in Internet culture and the element of localisation regarding their relationship to language, in particular to English – a surprising and significant ‘blindspot’ within current New Media Theory which needs to be overcome so as to go beyond the theories of globalisation and empire to escape and resolve the tensions surrounding the discourse on globalisation itself. Observing some current shifts and presenting statistics and case studies on the Netherlands, German and French blog cultures, and on Hindi blogs in India, Lovink offers projections on the future of language use on the Internet by its users and programmers. Rather than imposing English upon its users, the Internet is seen to be reinventing the role of the national and regional languages in a globalised world; there is not one, universal, uptake of Internet culture, but rather a growth of so-called ‘national webs’, primarily defined by language rather than by state territory, thus going beyond the era and paradigm of localisation. There are also signs of a slow but steady decline of the cultural hegemony of the Latin script as such; it is no longer relevant to point at the dominating position of English in different fields, but rather to consider what may happen, for example, if most computer code is written in Hindi or Mandarin.

Lev Manovich

Remix

We bring together in print here Manovich's seminal online essays, *Remixability and Modularity* (2005), and its sequel, *What happened to Remix?* (2007), where he explores remixability in different spheres (from the industrial to the artistic) in the pre- and post- computer and the Web 2.0 eras, showing how the differences between the concepts and types of modularity afforded by the different technologies are radically different and affect the types of remixability possible, and how these have artistic and cultural consequences.

Jeff Matthews

Shall I compare thee To A Stand-Alone Compression Module?

A divertissement on the 'poetics' of techspeak in the classroom.

Jeff Matthews

Hey, you sound just like Marlon Brando, Robert Redford and Paul Newman!

A lighthearted look at the Italian dubbing industry and the Italian voices of Hollywood films.

Geoff Nunberg

Lowercasing the Internet

Is it the internet or the Internet? A "Fresh Air" (on NPR radio) commentary with implications both for the semiotic significance of typographical conventions and on the diachronic and synchronic variation in perceptions of the status of the i/Internet, as relevant today as in 2004 when Nunberg's talk was broadcast.

Geoff Nunberg

A Wiki's as good as a Nod

Another "Fresh Air" commentary by Nunberg, from 2007, joining and enlivening the current and continuing debate on the uses and abuses of Wikipedia, with reflections on the implications

for the Encyclopaedia vision.

Geoff Nunberg

All Thumbs

In this 2008 “Fresh Air” commentary, Geoff Nunberg addresses the purported stylistic effects of cell-phone texting, where he briefly, and critically, traces the history of predictions – positive or apocalyptic, since the introduction of the telegraph to today – on how new communications technologies would leave their mark on the language itself.

Gianfranco Porcelli

The language of technology: the lighter side

In *TechSpeak* (1986) E. Tenner reversed his usual role as an editor of scientific texts: instead of explaining difficult terms and complex passages in plain English, he adopted the technical jargon to describe common words and everyday actions. This process highlights several interesting aspects: from the necessity to come to grips with “tech speak” in today’s world to the recourse to technical-sounding words and phrases in the hope to gain prestige. The book is amusing but the topic is serious.

Margaret Rasulo

Making the move from conventional to online educational training

The article presents the major issues to consider when seeking to introduce online training in adult education programs. It is not an attempt to add to the ‘online is better’ debate, but it is based on the assumption that e-learning or online learning will provide institutions with alternative ways of delivering education that are just as effective and worthwhile for the learner as the face-to-face experience. The interplay between pedagogy and technology is also discussed in this article. Where much has been written about the superiority of one or the other, this study presents another perspective, that of giving equal status to both resources in their common pursuit of improving educational practices. The article concludes with a small-scale case study intended to present the

experience of online participants training on-the-job. Based on a blended model of e-learning, the discussion is confined to the forum scenario and to the use of Computer Mediated Conferencing (CMC). The case study also offers a model of a collaborative approach to online course design.

Maria Teresa Sanniti di Baja

Forwarding e-mails in an academic context: a small-scale study on language and politeness in intercultural English

The article reports on a small-scale case-study investigating aspects of English politeness in discourse through e-mail, specifically e-mail forwarding among colleagues of unequal status in a university context. The data were collected empirically through a simulated practical task performed by native-speaker English language assistants who were put in a position where it became necessary to perform a potentially face-threatening act, implying a directive, by forwarding an e-mail from a student complaining about schedule clashes, to a non-intimate member of the Italian staff of higher academic status. Analysis of the data suggests that the informants exploited the cross-genre nature of e-mailing in order to balance intercultural and power/status differences. For example, many informants used a politeness prosody based on shifts in register, thanks to which the relationship among the interlocutors could switch from 'positional' to 'personal' and vice-versa, as well as alternate 'negative' and 'positive' politeness strategies within the same text. E-mailing thus seemed to provide them with a less-than-very-formal medium for dealing with academic power-distance, which in Italian university settings, is otherwise expected to play a stronger role than in Anglo-settings, and for making negotiation of respective faces easier. Some evidence is offered thus to suggest that e-mailing, in the academic context as elsewhere, seems to facilitate the use of communication strategies both for loosening some of the politeness restraints— such as social distance, relative power, ranking of imposition- and for accommodating different presumed cultural face wants in the academic workplace.

Tiziana Terranova

Chain Reactions. Digital Recombination and Analogue Chaos

The essay deals with the break introduced by electronic textuality with respect to the printed text by underlining the interrelation of processes of digitisation and interconnectivity. While digitisation expresses the potential for all kinds of texts to be treated as binary information subject to potential recombinations, interconnectivity expresses the analogue dimension of electronic textuality which now becomes part of a chaotic and turbulent communication milieu (or network media). Drawing on cybernetic and information theory, philosophy and literary criticism, the essay underlines the possibilities opened by the new relationship of intermedia resonance which brings electronic texts in contact with other forms of media and emphasizes the political potentials thus unleashed.

Jocelyne Vincent

**'Twixt twitalk and tweespeak (not to mention trouble)
on Twitter: a flutter with affectivity**

The article comments on some affective aspects of message contents and language use, in Twitter the micro-blogging and social network service, and observers' attitudes to them. It presents data showing, in particular, how affectivity is discernible in what the autor calls *'Twitter Talk'* – the topic and linguistic contents of individual tweets – despite both the mere informational status 'brief' on contents and the brevity constraint on length of tweets. This is seen both in the prevalence of what can be termed comity or 'rapport talk' for 'interactional' goals, and in the 'moods' captured by semantic differential type analysis of words in tweets, tracked and visually displayed, e.g., by *TwitterMoods*. Affectivity is also strongly present in the levity of *'Tweeterspeak'* i.e. in the rampantly playful creativity in coining 'twitterisms', an analysis of the neologistic processes of which is attempted in the article. Affectivity, and language ideological attitudes (and prescriptive notions of what Twitter is for), are also displayed in observers' loaded expressions when criticising these very aspects: Twitter talk is the "pointless babble" of "twits", *Tweeterspeak* is insufferably "twee". While commenting, however, on the "trouble with twitter"

many also seem unable to resist the lure of the /twi-/ phonaestheme or of joining in the fun of punning, etc. The brevity constraint, too, paradoxically seen as encouraging both efficient concision and superficiality/banality thus finds both enthusiasts and critics. Twitter, it is suggested, is worth serious attention by linguists since it illustrates, among other things, the irrepressibility of affectivity in communication, the importance in processes of language innovation of the community identity functions of terminology, and of the agency of users of language who appropriate and bend communication media to their purposes, despite their constraints but while exploiting their affordances.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Maria Silvia Attianese graduated from the University of Salerno in English and French, and has a particular interest in Translation Studies. She trained as a teacher of English in the University of Naples, L'Orientale SICSU, and holds an MA in Linguistics and Translation Theory from the University of London at SOAS.

Giuseppe Balirano holds a Ph.D. in English for Special Purposes from the Federico II University of Naples, and is a researcher and lecturer in English Language and Linguistics in the Faculty of Languages and Literatures at the University of Naples, L'Orientale, after holding a two-year post-doctoral research grant in English linguistics studies in the Department of American, Cultural and Linguistic studies. He has also worked as an ELT consultant and teacher trainer for over ten years and has published on second language acquisition, postcolonial linguistics, humour, media and audio visual translation studies. His current main interests concern hybridity and identity as expressed in language use, humour and the media. Among his publications: "Detecting semiotically-expressed humor in diasporic TV productions" (with M. Corduas) *Humor - International Journal of Humor Research* 21.3, 227–251 (2008), and *The Perception of Diasporic Humour: Indian English on TV*, (Loreto: Technostampa, 2007).

Linda Barone is a researcher and lecturer in English Language and Linguistics at the University of Salerno. She has conducted most of her research in the fields of English as a global language, English of the European Institutions, English for Specific Purposes, Multimodality and English teaching environments, with a particular interest in Content and Language Integrated Learning and lexical approaches to teaching/learning English. She is the author of *La Lingua Inglese delle Istituzioni Europee. Standardizzazione, Armonizzazione, Approssimazione?* (Laveglia, 2005), articles on: positive and negative aspects of the Internet in English language teaching (with R. Calabrese "Didattica nella rete: aspetti positivi e negativi dell'uso di Internet nel campo della didattica, con uno sguardo particolare alla lingua inglese", in *Rassegna italiana di*

Linguistica applicata, 2-3 , 2005), on CLIL (2006), on the use of metaphors in EU discourse (“Metafora e vita istituzionale. Comunicati stampa e discorsi nell’Unione Europea”, in *Atti del VII Congresso Internazionale dell’Associazione Italiana di Linguistica Applicata*, Guerra Ed. 2008). She is currently investigating the English language across discourse genres, modes and media.

Luisa Boardman is Language Advisor at CILA, the language centre of the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. She guides students in the use of technology in language learning and supports teachers who are interested in introducing an autonomous learning component in their courses. She prepares language learning pathways, writes paper, online and offline learning/teaching materials and has a particular interest in virtual environments.

Roy Boardman was for many years Regional Director South Italy of the British Council, and Naples has been his working base for 42 years. He is now a contract lecturer in English for International Relations in the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. A teacher trainer, trainer of trainers, and promoter of distance learning, he is interested in all aspects of language and literature teaching and teacher training. He has written coursebooks and experimental materials and has organised many major ELT events and published widely. His best-known coursebooks include *Over to You* (CUP 1978), *Reading Between the Lines: Integrating English Language and Literature*, with John McCrae (CUP 1984), the *Springboard* series (OUP 1981-2). Among his recent interests: new ways into blended learning options, humanistic teaching, and task-based learning for English for International Relations. His current interests are creative language teaching and learning.

Rita Calabrese is a researcher and lecturer of English Language at the University of Salerno. She researches and publishes in the areas of Second Language Acquisition, Interlanguage Analysis, and distance learning. She is the author of a number of publications on the use of English as the medium of instruction in non-language subjects (Content and Language Integrated Learning) in both school

and academic contexts, such as *L'apprendimento dell'Inglese come Lingua Veicolare* (Loffredo, 2004) and the use of corpora technology to study interlanguage, such as *La Linguistica dei Corpora e l'Inglese come Lingua Straniera* (Massa, 2004) and *Insights into the Lexicon-Syntax Interface in Italian Learner s' English. A generative framework for a corpus-based analysis* (Aracne, 2008).

Mikaela Cordisco is a researcher and lecturer of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Salerno. She has conducted much of her research in the field of computer-assisted language learning, autonomy in language learning and independent language learning environments. She is the author of *Self-access, autonomia e tecnologie nello studio della lingua inglese* (ESI, 2002), co-editor (with B. Di Sabato) of *Lingua e contenuti. Un'integrazione efficace*, thematic issue of *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica applicata* (2006), and has written articles on: the uses of self-access centres (2002); the uses of corpora and concordancers in the analysis of the English language (2002) and of blogs in English language classes (2003); open-learning multimedia language course design (2005); the evaluation of textbooks (2006); the use of four-letter expletives in on-line British newspapers (2007) in conversation and in the classroom (with B. Di Sabato in *Testi e Linguaggi*, 2, 2008). She is currently preparing a monograph on the rise of Estuary English and the fall of Received Pronunciation in a sociolinguistic perspective: *RP: Requiescat in Pacem? Indagine sulle varietà diastratiche dell'inglese britannico*, and several multimedia interactive e-course English modules for undergraduates within Salerno University's *Campus English* project.

Maria De Santo is the self-access centre manager and a language learning counsellor in the CILA language centre of the University of Naples "L'Orientale". She also teaches in courses for teachers of English, Italian, and French. Her main research interest focuses on English and ICT, technology enhanced language learning, and autonomy in language learning. She has published on the use of self-access centres and on independence in language learning, and has produced web sites and interactive software on Linguistics and English language learning.

Antongiuseppe Di Dio is currently completing a Ph.D. in English for Special Purposes at the Federico II University of Naples, working on CMC in business and specialist communication, and is an assistant (“Cultore della Materia”) in English Language and Linguistics at the Faculty of Languages and Literatures at the University of Naples “l’Orientale”. He is also a qualified and practicing secondary school teacher of English after training in the Naples SICSU. His main areas of interest include politeness studies, CMC, ICT and gender studies and intercultural communication. His published work includes “Il genere nel web o il web per la costruzione del genere?” in *La Nuova Shahrazad Donne e Multiculturalismo*, L.Curti ed. (Liguori, 2004).

Emilia Di Martino has been a researcher and lecturer in English Language and Translation at the Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples since 2006. She holds a PhD in English for Special Purposes from the Federico II University of Naples, and an MA in Education from the University of East Anglia. She was a research bursar at Suor Orsola Benincasa from 2001 to 2004, and taught French and English language and culture at Secondary-School level from 1988 to 2001. Over the same period of time, she was granted scholarships by the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, the Université de Poitiers, the British Council, Oxford University, Dartmouth College (USA), and the University of British Columbia (Canada), in addition to teaching as an adjunct-professor at the Istituto Universitario Orientale and at the Università degli Studi di Salerno. She was also appointed teacher trainer for the *Progetto Lingue 2000* by the Italian Ministry of Education. She has written on New Technologies, Intercultural Education, Action Research and Assessment of non-Linguistic Competences. Her monographs *Teaching and Learning English in the Age of the Global Village. A Teacher's Journey into Qualitative Research* and *L'inglese on-line. Prospettive didattiche per Facoltà non linguistiche* were published in 2004 and 2009, respectively. She is presently researching on the teaching of translation skills; her article “Didattica della traduzione on-line”, in Di Sabato, B., Mazzotta, P. (eds.) *Apprendere a tradurre*, (Guerra) is forthcoming.

Bruna Di Sabato is full professor of Didattica delle lingue moderne (“Language Teaching Methodology”). After many years at the University of Salerno, she is now at the “Suor Orsola Benincasa” University of Naples where she lectures in Foreign Language Teaching Methodology and English language and translation to undergraduates and postgraduates. Her principal research interests are in language learning and teaching, and the teaching of translation and lexis, mainly in the field of specialised languages. She is the author of several monographs on the above mentioned subjects: *Per Tradurre* (ESI, 1993), *English for Finance* (ESI, 1996), *Una lingua in viaggio. Incontri, percorsi e mete dell'inglese di oggi* (Liguori, 2000), *L'inglese della New Economy. Analisi e didattica* (ESI, 2004, with G. Porcelli). She has also edited some collections of essays and proceedings: *Teaching English today* (ESI, 2003), *Lingua e contenuti. Un'integrazione efficace*, thematic issue of *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica applicata* (2006, with M. Cordisco), *Imparare ad imparare. Imparare ad insegnare. Parole d'insegnanti ad uso di studenti* (ESI, 2008, with F. de Giovanni).

Antonella Elia, holds a Ph.D. in English for Special Purposes from the Federico II University of Naples. She has been working in the fields of English and Italian language teaching, and in new media education for the past decade. She has been a lecturer in the “Humanities and Computing” laboratories at the University of Naples “L'Orientale” since 2002, and is involved in designing and offering online courses in languages and ICT for the Orientale’s CILA, Centre for Language and Audiovisual services. She has published numerous papers which connect languages, humanities and computing and is the author of *Inchiostro Digitale: tecnologie e scienze umane - scrivere, comunicare, insegnare con i nuovi media* (Ellissi, 2004), used as a textbook in several Italian universities, *Uomini di latta e sogni di metallo: cyborgs & cyberspaces nel mondo digitale anglofono* (Ellissi, 2006), *Cogitamus ergo sumus. web 2.0 encyclopaedi@s: the case of wikipedia* (Aracne 2008).

Sara Griffiths has been an Associate Professor in History, specialising in Italian history, Iona College, New Rochelle, N.Y and currently teaches English for Mathematics, Statistics, Computer

Programs, Economic & Demographic Statistics and Data Mining, Programming in SAS, and Business at the University of Rome, “La Sapienza” for the Faculty of Statistical Sciences. Her work includes texts for the students of the Faculty of Statistical Sciences in these fields, and the research article “An Analysis of the Quantitative Paradigm’s Linguistic Variable and its Explanation of Gender Linguistic Differences” (*Sociologia* 26,1, 1992). She has also published on social and political themes in Irish Literature between 1850 and 1930.

Serena Guarracino is a contract lecturer of English Language in the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” currently also holding a two-year post-doctoral research grant in English cultural studies in the Department of American, Cultural and Linguistic studies, where she obtained her PhD in “Literatures, Cultures, and Histories of Anglophone Countries”, with a dissertation entitled *Having Voice. Opera Migrations in English-speaking Cultures*. Her research interests range from gender, postcolonial, and cultural studies to classical music and new musicology. She has published in Italian on Edward Said and music, and on the role of female singers in 19th and 20th century women’s writing; in English on JM Coetzee, music in Shakespeare’s romances, the relations between music and postcolonial theory, and more recently on national narratives in the English early music revival. She is also a member of the research staff for the project *Urban Node – a laboratory of memory*, in collaboration with “PaeseSaggio – Azione Matese” coordinated by Iain Chambers. She is the author of “The Frenzy of the Audible: Voice, Image, and the Quest for Representation” (*The Other Cinema, the Cinema of the Other: Anglistica* 11 1-2, 2007), *Telling Stories in Contemporary English: A Workbook in English Language and Cultural Studies* (Aracne, 2007). Her translation and translation commentary of Indo-English writer Suniti Namjoshi’s “Sycorax” appeared in S. Namjoshi, *Istantanee di Caliban. Sycorax* (ed. by P. Bono (ed.), Liguori, 2008).

Geert Lovink, founding director of the Institute of Network Cultures, is a Dutch-Australian media theorist, activist and critic.

He holds a PhD from the University of Melbourne and in 2003 was at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies, University of Queensland. Since 2004 Lovink has been Research Professor of Interactive Media at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam and Associate Professor in the Media & Culture department of the University of Amsterdam. He is a member of the *Adilkno* collective and founder of Internet projects such as *nettime*, *fibreculture* and co-founder of *The Digital City*, and *Incommunicado*. He has been a regular guest of the Naples collective Media and Arts Office (M.A.O.) and of the University of Naples, L'Orientale. In his influential *Dark Fiber-Tracking Critical Internet Culture* (MIT Press, 2002 (translated into German, Italian, Spanish, Romanian and Japanese) he brought together texts about new media culture worldwide, with essays on The Digital City Amsterdam and nettime, data dandyism, tactical media strategies and early critiques of dotcommania. His *Uncanny Networks - Dialogues with the Virtual Intelligentsia* (MIT Press, 2002) was a collection of interviews with new media artists, theorists and critics from around the world providing a critical context of ideas, networks and artworks that shaped the past decade. *My First Recession* (2003) covered the dotcom crash and further investigated the social dynamics of online communities. He addressed the next so-called Web 2.0 wave of blogs and social networking sites in *The Principle of Notworking* (2005). In 2005-2006 he was a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg- Berlin Institute for Advanced Study where he finished his third volume on critical internet culture, *Zero Comments- Kernels of Critical Internet Culture* (2007) in which a theory of blogging was developed, continuing in his book *Blog Theory* (with Jodi Dean, Polity, 2008). Geert Lovink's weblog is at: www.networkcultures.org/geert.

Lev Manovich is a Russian media-theorist and digital media artist based in the USA since 1981. He is a Professor in the Visual Arts Department, University of California-San Diego, where he teaches practical courses in digital art as well as history and theory of digital culture, and is founding Director of the Software Studies Initiative at California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology (CALIT2), a Visiting Research Professor at Goldsmith College, London and the College of Fine Arts, University of New

South Wales (Sydney), previously also at the California Institute of the Arts, SCI-ARC, UCLA, the Universities of Amsterdam, Stockholm, Siegen, the University of Art and Design, Helsinki, the Hong Kong Art Center, and the Gothenberg School of Art. Manovich has been working with computer media as an artist, computer animator, designer, and programmer since 1984. His art projects have been presented in many major contemporary arts centres around the world, and he has received many arts and digital cultures awards and fellowships. In 2005 he was the keynote speaker, discussing data-base as art, in the Sintesi Electronic Art Festival organised in Naples by M.A.O. (Media and Arts Office) in collaboration with the University of Naples, and the Istituto di Studi Filosofiche. He is the author, among a vast number of influential articles and volumes, of *Black Box - White Cube* (Merve Verlag, 2005), *Soft Cinema: Navigating the Database* (The MIT Press, 2005), and the seminal *The Language of New Media* (The MIT Press, 2001) translated in 30 countries and into 7 languages to date. His latest work, *Software in Command*, published under a Creative Commons license (2008) is available on his website, at: www.manovich.net.

Jeff Matthews is a linguist, journalist, short-story writer, musician and humorist based in Naples. He has an MA in Linguistics from the University of Hawaii. He is an Adjunct Associate Professor of English and Communications at the University of Maryland University College, Europe, and has taught distance and regular courses there on English, sociolinguistics, the language of advertising, language and gender, and on minority and endangered languages. He worked with Danny Steinberg on *Introduction to Psycholinguistics* (Longman, 1976), and *Psycholinguistics: Language, Mind and World* (Longman, 2nd ed. 2001). From 1983 until his retirement in 2007 he was also an English language teacher in the University of Naples, L'Orientale. He collaborated (with translations of the German philosophers interviewed) on the English version (coordinated by J. Vincent for the Naples Orientale, CILA) of the *Enciclopedia multimediale delle scienze filosofiche: from the pre-Socratics to Aristotle* (Istituto Italiano di Studi Filosofici, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italian, and Rai-Educational). He was the editor of the AFSouth magazine *The Lion* for seven years, and

maintains *Around Naples* a regularly updated web site containing his *Around Naples Encyclopedia*, with some 800 articles (linguistic, historical, cultural, social) on Naples, and Italy.

Geoff Nunberg is an adjunct full professor at UC Berkeley's School of Information, a researcher at the Center for the Study of Language and Information at Stanford University, and a consulting professor in the Stanford Department of Linguistics. He has also taught at UCLA, Rome and Naples Universities. He is Emeritus Chair of the *American Heritage Dictionary* usage panel. His linguistics research includes work in semantics and pragmatics, text classification, and written-language structure, multilingualism and language policy, and the cultural implications of digital technologies. Nunberg has been commenting on language, usage, and society for National Public Radio's *Fresh Air* program since 1988. His commentaries on language also appear frequently in *The New York Times* and other publications. He is also a regular contributor to LanguageLog. Among his publications in this area: *The Way We Talk Now: Commentaries on Language and Culture from NPR's Fresh Air* (2001); *Going Nuclear: Language, Politics, and Culture in Controversial Times* (2005); *Talking Right: How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left-Wing Freak Show* (2007), and most recently *The Years of Talking Dangerously* (2009). In 2001, for his general writing about language, Nunberg was awarded the Linguistic Society of America's Language and the Public Interest Award. Nunberg's publications on technology include "The Places of Books in the Age of Electronic Reproduction" (*Representations*, 1993), "Will Libraries Survive?" (*The American Prospect*, November, 1998); "Les enjeux linguistiques d'Internet" (*Critique Internationale*, 1999), "Will the Internet Speak English?" (*The American Prospect*, 2000), "The Internet Filter Farce" (*The American Prospect*, January 1-15, 2001) and the edited collection *The Future of the Book* (University of California Press, 1996). He is currently working on a book called *The Decline and Fall of Information* with Paul Duguid and on a book about the political significance of English vulgarity.

Gianfranco Porcelli was formerly full professor of Didattica delle Lingue Moderne (Bari), Glottodidattica (Brescia “Cattolica”) and Linguistica Inglese (Milan “Cattolica”). Since his retirement in 2002 he has worked with SILSIS Pavia, teaching modules on TEFL, ESP and English Linguistics, and is a frequently invited guest speaker on applied linguistics, language teaching and aspects of English in linguistics symposia around Italy and elsewhere. He is a particularly frequent visitor to the Universities of Salerno and Naples. Among his numerous publications: *Principi di Glottodidattica* (1994); *The English of Communication and Information Sciences. Analysis and examples* (1998); *L'inglese della New Economy. Analisi e didattica* (2004, with B. Di Sabato); *Comunicare in lingua straniera. Il lessico* (2004). He is the editor of the journals *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata* and of *Scuola e Lingue Moderne*, and currently President of *ANILS - Associazione Nazionale Insegnanti Lingue Straniere*, the Italian National Association of Foreign Language Teachers.

Margaret Rasulo holds an MA in Education from the Open University and a Ph.D in English for Special Purposes from the Federico II University of Naples. She has been a contract lecturer at the University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’ for several years where she teaches English language and linguistics to second year undergraduates. As a teacher trainer, she has worked extensively with the Italian Ministry of Public Education running pre-service and in-service training courses for language teachers and has collaborated with the Teaching College of the ‘Orientale’ (SISS, SICSI), teaching pre-service teacher training modules. Her most recent research interest is community formation in online course delivery. Some of her most significant publications, as well as her Ph.D dissertation, are representative of this field of work. She is the author of *The Role of Participant Discourse in Online Community Formation* (Aracne, 2009) and of “The role of online interactions in the formation of a learning community” (in *ESP across cultures*, 5, 2009).

Maria Teresa Sanniti di Baja was Associate Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Naples,

“L’Orientale” until her sudden death in November 2006. She taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses in English linguistics, language learning skills, text analysis for translators, and was a language teacher trainer in the Campania SICSI. She was also particularly appreciated by colleagues and students for her charm and her welcoming warmth and sincerity in her teaching and in her tireless ‘orientation’ activities for incoming and newly registered students. Her research interests were principally in language awareness raising, language teaching methodology and affectivity, English translation problematics, pragmatics and the description of English, English as an international language, English and its connection to technology, in particular, politeness in contrastive perspective on the web, and finally politeness and other aspects of military discourse, which she had just begun to explore. She is the author, among other works, of *Sulla selezione del definito THE* (with C. Landolfi, IUO, 1995), *Questioni di lingua e didattica della lingua inglese: L1 e L2 - Ipotesi e apprendimento*, Napoli, Liguori 2000; and editor of *Promoting Language Awareness For University students of English* (ed.) Napoli, Liguori, 2004. This issue is dedicated to her memory.

Tiziana Terranova is a new media theorist and Associate Professor of Sociology of communication and cultural processes and of English cultural theories and new media in the Faculty of Languages and Literatures and a member of the Department of American, Cultural and Linguistics Studies, at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. Her return to Italy after teaching in the UK at Essex University for several years was sponsored by the program “Rientro Cervelli” of the Italian Ministry for University and Research. She is a member of the *Hermeneia* literary studies and digital technologies research group. Her research interests lie in the area of the cultural politics of new media and communication. She is particularly interested in constructing connections between the human sciences and scientific and technological thinking around communication - such as that between media and cultural studies on the one hand, and cybernetics and the neurosciences on the other. Her current research projects include a biopolitical reading of Edward Said’s thesis on Orientalism and media coverage of Islam in relation to modes of

communication such as blogging. She is the author, among many other works, of “Free labor: producing culture for the digital economy” (*Social Text* 63, 2000), of *Corpi nella rete: interfacce multiple, cyberfemminismo e agora telematiche*. (Costa & Nolan, 1996) and of *Network Culture. Politics for the information age* (University of Michigan Press, 2004, translated into Italian as *Cultura del network. Per una micropolitica dell’informazione*, manifestolibri, 2006).

Jocelyne Vincent (D.Phil., Linguistics, Sussex), is Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Naples, L’Orientale, and currently head of the Department of American, Cultural and Linguistic Studies. She set up and coordinated the University of Naples, “Orientale” self-access resource centre (1996-2004), and was involved in pre-service English teacher training modules for the Naples SICS. Her research interests are mainly in contrastive pragmatics, with specific reference to the connections between solidarity, politeness and non/truthfulness from a cross- and inter-cultural perspective, and in multimedia and textual translation, and English in international and intercultural interaction (f2f, on the web, and in translation). She is the co-editor of *English and the Other* (thematic issue of *Anglistica*, 3.1, 1999), *Menzogna e Simulazione* (ESI, 1997), author of *Words in the Way of Truth: truthfulness, deception, lying across cultures and disciplines* (ESI, 2004), and a contributor on ‘Truthfulness’ to the *Handbook of Pragmatics* (J. Benjamins, 2003, 2006). She has also published on combining culturally appropriate, humanistic and technological environments in self-access learning centres (postface to Cordisco, ESI, 2002), and on gender and language and multilingualism issues (in Curti ed. Liguori, 2004). Her most recent publication related to the English and Technology topic “Netiquette Rules, OK!... OK?: speculating on rhetorical cleansing and English linguistic and cultural imperialism through Email netiquette style guides” appeared in Bertuccelli Papi, Bertacca & Bruti eds. *Threads in the Complex Fabric of Language* (Felici, 2008).

Chantal Zabus is Professor of British and Postcolonial Literatures, and of African literatures at the Universities of Paris III and XIII.

A member of the Institut Universitaire de France, Chantal Zabus is a recent recipient of a medal at the Collège de France from French President Nicolas Sarkozy. She is the author of *The African Palimpsest- Indigenization of Language in the African Europhone Novel* (Amsterdam & New York: RODOPI, 1991; 2nd reprint 2007); *Tempests after Shakespeare* (New York & Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2002); *Between Rites and Rights: Excision in Women's Texts and Human Contexts*, (Stanford University Press, Summer 2007). She has also edited *Le Secret: Motif et moteur de la littérature* (with Jacques Derrida, Louvain, 1999); *Changements au féminin en Afrique noire: Littérature et Anthropologie*, 2 volumes (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000; Italian transl. 2003), *Fearful Symmetries: Essays and Testimonies Around Excision and Circumcision* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi/Matatu, 2009), and *Perennial Empire* (with Silvia Nagy-Zekmi; Rodopi B. V., in press 2009). One of her recent projects concerns homosexualities in African Literature (see "Out in Africa: Queer Desire in Some Anthropological and Literary Texts" *Comparative Critical Studies*. 6, 251-270, 2009).

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- Fazal-ur-Rahim Marwat et al., eds., *Afghanistan and the Frontier* (Peshawar: Enjay Books International, 1993).

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- Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

- Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

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- Harold Williams, ed., *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

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- Bernth Lindfors, ed. *Approaches to Teaching "Things Fall Apart"* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1991).

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- Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", *New Left Review*, 50.5 (July-August 1968), 44.

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- Maria Stella, "Il poeta e la lettura del cuore", in Agostino Lombardo, ed., *La figlia che piange: saggi su poesia e metapoesia* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1995), 169-180.

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- Dino Felluga, *Guide to Literary and Critical Theory*, (Purdue University, 2003), <<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/>>, 10 May 2006.

- Mark Grabe, "Voluntary Use of Online Lecture Notes: Correlates of Note Use and Note Use as an Alternative to Class Attendance", *Computers and Education*, 44 (2005), 409-21, <<http://www.sciencedirect.com/>>, 28 May 2006.

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