From Lingua Franca @ E-Learning to Multilingualism?

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Abstract

Thanks to the ever upgrading new media in the informational age, the e-learning of new languages becomes a daily practice for everyone: timely shifting one's linguistic worldview from one's mother tongue (L1) to acquire foreign language (L2) or the lingua franca (say, English) to cope with one's survival in a globalizing world. The new regime of e-learning for new languages is seemingly embedded in the ubiquitous information and communication technologies (ICT)-driven mediated (new and highly differentiated cyber-) communication: with the ever-increasingly opening-up -cum-deepening of cyber-experience for "inter-personalized" mediated communication, all facilitate the interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and cross-border / cultural encounters in/beyond virtual and real social communities. Yet the challenges for cross-(or multi-)cultural and temporal-spatial communication in both cyberspace and the real world quest for not just linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) adaptation but also audio-visual interactive revolution with multiple re-presentations, towards the communicative capacity building for foreign language (L2) and/or Lingua Franca, beyond the linguistic spaces of one's mother-tongue (L1): all re-shaping our linguistic adaptive ability and skills, say the least to acquire the basics of foreign language(s) as the core part of our new cross-cultural encounters in a new communicative borderless world. This paper critical examines the new regime of e-learning (the manifestations and underlying contradictions in particular) for new language acquisition; as cyber-activism and virtual linkages are revolutionary in changing the modi operandi of socio-cultural communicative actions and interactions, global and locally, behavioural repertoires among people in different geographical regions and time zones. Our discussions focus on the most salient aspect of the new experiential learning discoveries: not just of the multilingual, but also the cross-and-inter-cultural, communication, in both virtual and reality milieus. Critically examining the policy issues on (new) language for e-learning and cross-cultural communication in/beyond cyberspace, it highlights the challenges for multilingualism, and multiculturalism in 21st Century, in a globalizing world.

1. Prelude to multilingualism: *lingua franca as overture*?

We are in a new epoch of learning for humanity development! Thanks to the ever upgrading new media in the informational age, the e-learning of new languages becomes a daily practice for everyone: timely shifting one's linguistic worldview from one's mother tongue (L1) to acquire foreign language (L2) or the *lingua franca* (say, English) to cope with one's survival in a globalizing world. The new regime of e-learning for new languages is increasingly embedded in the ubiquitous information and communication technologies (ICT)-driven mediated (new and highly differentiated cyber-) communication: with the ever-increasingly opening-up -cum- deepening of cyber-experience for "inter-personalized" mediated communication, all facilitate the interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and cross-border / cultural encounters in/beyond virtual and real social communities.

A new era for communication perhaps defines the 21st Century, thanks to the advanced information and communication technologies (ICT) -- a new epoch of digital global advanced capitalism. Cyber-linkages and new media dynamics are revolutionizing mode(s) of socio-economic interactions locally and globally, behavioral repertoires among people in different geo-temporal spaces. Socio-economic activities at a global-cum- scale are more and more borderless and just-in-time, allowing most forms of communication: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and many-to-many.

Both linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) and the non-linguistic (visual and symbolic) modes of communication are changing as well; *lingua franca* is only one of the many possibilities for communication and comprehension of meanings, other than para-linguistic symbols and abbreviations. The key issue for communication fo all purposes, including learning and knowledge acquisition here is the opening up of new ways and modes of communications as far as interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and the agenda setting are concerned, both in virtual and real social communities. All communications, ranging from the core to peripheries, the real vis-a-vis the virtuality, are yet subject to inter-interpretation and exchanges....

English is an obvious example of the common *lingua franca* (ELF) in recent decades for international communication; the use of ELF has more more non-native speakers than native speakers, and it is more than obvious in far more settings where there are no native speakers present than in those between or including native speakers. Seemingly, there is a challenge for *lingua franca* being used beyond its socio-cultural embeddess and settings – many of these settings are beyond contexts of language learning, due to increased transnational mobilities of all walks of life – thanks to the globalization project for enhancing mobility of capital, goods and labours.

Obviously, the role of *lingua franca*, as catalyst of learning new language(s), can be illustrated by e-learning for foreign language(s) with new media. A recent study shows that most students' beliefs about English remain consistent: they cared less about grammar after using English as a *lingua franca* in their written communication; and started to perceive English as a language they may be able to use with greater confidence (Ke & Cahyani 2014).

Furthermore, it has been strongly articulated that an ownership discourse and a maintenance (or cultivation) discourse - for English as *lingua franca*, should be distinguished; whilst the appreciation of *lingua franca* should be cultivated with inter-cultural and linguistic understandings in real life within, and beyond in virtual communication, its socio-cultural contexts (cf. Haberland 2011).

More specific, socio-cultural context and communicative dynamics yet define the parameters and extends of foreign language learning, in both traditional and new media-driven learning milieu – it is revealed that English (as *lingua franca*, ELF) users' institutional roles are culturally determined, and are not fixed but vary in different phases of the discourse. More importantly, both identity and power interplay are involved in ELF communications, and the macro linguistic context plays a role in constructing identity and negotiating power relations in ELF conversations (Gu, Patkin & Kirkpatrick 2014). Here, the question is how far, or how strategic-instrumental, is lingua franca enabling us to develop multilingualism – engendering multiculturalism?

2. Beyond the limits of codified lingusitics in/beyond the cyberspace?

The challenge for new language learning in new media spaces with a particular *lingua franca* is the ampleness of contextual fluidity with new and old varities and differences – which need to be specifized and articulated by learners and instructors in new media spaces and gaps. Hence, the lack of contextual specificity and relational orders in new media poses challenge for the fostering echoed and responsive learning milieu.

Communications in reality, as well as in cyberspaces require not just the reciprocity of social agencies in terms of networking, but also a parameter for making sense out of the messages in/out codification and de-codification Yet, the cross-(or multi-)cultural and temporal-spatial communications in both cyberspace and the real world quest for not just linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) adaptation but also audio-visual interactive revolution with multiple re-presentations, towards the communicative capacity building for foreign language (L2) and/or *Lingua Franca,* beyond the linguistic spaces of one's mother-tongue (L1): all re-shaping our linguistic adaptive ability and skills, say the least to acquire the basics of foreign language(s) as the core part of our new cross-cultural encounters in a new communicative borderless world.

People's perceptions, influencing their interpretations, of societal multilingualism are important in shaping, as well as organizing their approach(es) to learn new languages in real and virtual spaces – here is the eenvironmental factors – *linguistic landscape* (Rowland 2015) provides the most important shaping for motivational factors account for many successful, continuing learning experience for foreign languages (Bensoussan 2015). One obvious case is that "Highly successful languages learners, with superior level of proficiency, reported high levels of extrinsic and instrumental motivation, as well as being intrinsically motivated by an interest in linguistics, nearly all being polyglots, some of whom reached near-native levels in more than one foreign language" (noted by Ehrman, Leaver and Oxford 2003: 323; cited by Bensoussan 2015: 426).

Under globalizing forces, English becomes *lingua franca* and/or foreign language (L2) for many non-native speakers who want to pursue international business and cultural exchanges. The challenge is obvious that "Although the use of a corporate lingua franca may facilitate global communication in multilingual settings, it may also present linguistic, cultural and organizational challenges for those who are non-native speakers of the corporate language". (Van Mulken & Hendriks 2015: 405)

In spite of (mostly optimistic) rhetoric on the promising e-learning for foreign language(s) acquisition, a prelude to multilingualism, the successful experience is still by far a limited one. The most instrumental one is to keep learners engaged and motivated to using new media for positive learning processes – the so-called student "stickiness" (Clark, et al. 2014). Accordingly, taking the case of Form-focused instruction in cross-training and "stickiness"; aspects of form-focused instruction applied to cross-

training that promote "stickiness" highlight eight dimensions of new language learning (Clark, et al. 2014: 23), which are all relevant for new media based language learning :

- *Autonomy* (the feeling that learners have control)
- *Appropriate challenge* (too hard = frustrating; to easy = boring)
- *Variety* (good for learning and preventing burnout)
- *Feedback on performance* (immediate feedback to improve in the moment)
- *Measureable progress* (visible progress towards longer range goals.
- *Feeling of community* (belonging to something greater than yourself; not isolated)
- *Meaningfulness /Relevance/Utility* – new media based communication enhances the optimal language to learn
- *Usability* (quality user interface, user experience) – praxis of new language(s) is possible for students learn more than grammatical features of language while being engaged in reading and responsive activities.

Similarly somewhat to the mobile phone's attachment for many people's daily life encounters for social activities, to enhance student's "stickiness," to learning new language activities– defined as keeping learners engaged and motivated to continue using the platforms of learning, new media is a logical choice for using as new language learning media, beyond the traditional ways of learning in classroom and with textbook alike. In short, the essence of the "stickiness" is anchored upon the motivational realm of learners and learning community at large; say the expected learning processes and outcomes which are beneficial for the involving parties, the learners in particular.

3. New praxis @ e-learning: differentiated fluid exchanges for multilingualism?

New media communication tools and modes like *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Twitters*, *WhatApp* or the *Line* transform the landscape of inter—cum-cross cultural communication. Obviously shown in the history of cross-cultural communications, the practice for *Lingua Franca* (Espanol/French/German/English) is a consequence of socio-economic necessity under specific geo- political hegemonic influence. English is common used today as business language – in our present global advanced capitalism, a new (post)modernity based upon the highly ubiquotous networking of ICT around the world: the real-time and just-in-time global factory and capital-financing networking. Perhaps, more even so in the ICT development sector and the business inter-activities: more jargons and/or acronyms are used not just for communications between people only, but for the products branding and marketing themselves; like *Windows 10*, the *Line* and *Facebook....*

The new regime of e-learning (the manifestations and underlying contradictions in particular) for new language acquisition poses risk as well as opportunities for educators and learners; as cyber-activism and virtual linkages are revolutionary in changing the *modi operandi* of socio-cultural communicative actions and interactions, global and locally, behavioural repertoires among people in different geographical regions and time zones.

Studies of computer mediated e-learning experience suggest the significant potential of ICT text-based interaction in promoting language learning in general and pragmatic learning in particular (Eslami, et al. 2015); though it is far from conclusive how far and how depth foreign language acquisition via new media *per se*, with respect to multilingualism and multiculturalism. More importantly, learners and teachers account for enhancing the reciprocities of inter-group (novice-expert) partnerships and collaborations. The ICT-coupled initiatives become feasible and cost-effective only when there is institutional agreement or managerial coordination between the EFL learning setting and the cooperating academic context. More specific, the importance of pragmatics and appropriate language use for successful intercultural and cross-cultural communication should be stressed: L2 practitioners should help to make pragmatic similarities and differences perceptually salient to students through explicit feedback and instruction. In short, explicit awareness-raising activities and instruction in L2 pragmatics are becoming more urgent in alien settings where EFL learners are largely deprived of native speaking stimulation: new media and systematic goal oriented partnership with expert users of English can be of great benefit to the development of EFL students' pragmatic competence (Eslami, et al. 2015: 107).

But the fluidity of new learning dynamics can be shown by the frequent, if not abusive, use of the highly differentiated, not fully shared meaning, code in txt.msg is a tendency towards standardization of characters, seemingly implying that the standardization of life experience, as well as the harmonization of languages in/beyond cyberspace referring to the simplified English text and ideas.

Socio-functional differentiation with linguistic-knowledge specialization, coupled with generalization of professional knowledge via informational media, plus the further specialization processes of business life, facilitates the development of acronyms. The use of acronyms is becoming the default (sub)linguistic requirement for socio-functional communications in our (post)modern world, more particularly it constitutes to the default communications in cyberspace.

The enigma, if not the problematic, of present day wired/wireless mediated communications is the re-creation of new text, semantic and symbolism within the given media – the expressed form(s) and manifestation of communications hence is a contingency of technological set up. More often than not, the communications have to customize into the given logics and designs of the communicative tools (e.g., mobile phone and/or PDA with small LCD display screen and miniature buttons) – it ends up into the re-emergence of symbolic code (like the Morse Code in telegraphy). The above txt.msg example of the simplification of the text form, within a given limited characters, used in the txt.msg (Short-Message-Sending, SMS) sending highlights the emergence of a new way communication in term of text-and-meaning in linguistic terms – a new linguistic turn conditioned by comunicative gadget-modes?

The studies of language(s) landscape, whereby foreign language(s) is learned and used as *lingua franca*, highlight the dialectics of not just the native, vis-à-vis foreign, language(s, but also the differentiated distinction between local and foreign. For the engima of *linga franca*, the case of English use and its learning in globalizing Japan perhaps give us some insights:

> 'A high profile discourse of globalization exists in political debate and in the popular imagination [in Japan]'…. However, the motivations behind such exhortations are not always clear….For example, as Kawai (2007, 48) notes, in her analysis of the opinions of Japanese people on whether English should be adopted as an official language in Japan, there exists a view among the populace that studying 'the English language makes Japanese people more appreciative of the Japanese language and so they become more, not less Japanese' (Rowland 2015: 10-11.).

All that said, Japanese Ministry of Education in August 2015 mooted to adopt a new policy of introducing English as foreign language teaching in primary school (as foreign language activites starts at primary 3 and formal teaching from pirmary 5), doubling learning to 70-hours per year.

Languages and communicative actions are the operational representations, and integration, of our complex ideas; the embodiment of socio-cultural arrangements for history and contemporary socio reciprocities at large. Though we use to think that 'what we think determines what we speak/write/communicate' but the reality is seemingly the otherwise. For our contemporary, against and beyond the techno-limits, and time/space compression which engender certain reductionism towards techno-monolinguistic communications, multilingual encounters and creative (unique cultural specific) interpretations should be promoted. The call and actions for multilingualism therefore are to embody the essence of multiculturalism and historic-specificity of time and space, hence the highly differentiation of socio-cultural life experience. Yet the fluid dynamic processes of socio-linguistic reciprocities towards multilingualism - multiculturalism are uncertain.