



## Lingua Franca in/beyond E-Learning: Future of Multilingualism

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### Abstract

*Powered by active social participation in advanced informational age, new media in/beyond the Internet of Things (IoT) regime of social reciprocities transform not just both the form and substances of knowledge exchanges but also expanding new learning opportunities across spaces and time. The new e-learning and e-sharing experience are in/beyond different linguistic-cum-visual and cultural spaces; like the Instagram, Facebook or Twitter. Hence, socio-economic activities at a global 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. More specific, the ever-increasingly opening-up of cyber-experience for "inter-personalized" mediated communication, facilitates the interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and the cross-border/cultural encounters in/beyond both in 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, towards the communicative capacity building for Lingua Franca: all shaping our linguistic adaptive skills, say the least to acquire the basics of foreign language(s) as the core part of our new cross-cultural encounters in a globalizing world. As cross-cultural exchanges are mostly mediated by and with Lingua Franca in 21st Century information age, ICT-driven linguistic world transformations are more than obvious with inter-and-cross-linguistic mainstreaming. Juxtaposing the once dominance of English as Lingua Franca (over 50% of the world webpage), in/beyond cyberspace; there is yet strong a rejuvenation and revitalization of local (new and highly differentiated cyber-) languages. All these mediated multilingual communications have been instrumental to further stimulating social innovations for progressive inter-cultural exchanges, questionably benefiting e-learning at large. Critically examining policy issues on (new) language for e-learning and cross-cultural communication in/beyond cyberspace, this paper highlights the challenges for, and contradictions embedded in, multilingualism in a globalizing world. It discusses new phenomenal (e-)learning of new languages; as cyber-linkages are revolutionary in changing socio-cultural interactions, global-locally, behavioural repertoires among people in different geographical regions and time zones. The most important one arguably is the enabling of multilingual, cross-and-inter-cultural communication – hence learning from, with a discovery of, new experiences.*

**Keywords:** e-learning, information society, multiculturalism, new media;

### 1. *Lingua franca as overture for multilingualism?*

Humanity is in a new epoch of lifelong re-learning regime for continuing survival!

The 21st Century defines a new era for communication with the advanced application and omnipotent of information and communication technologies (ICT) -- digital global advanced capitalism with Internet of Things (IoT). New media with their dynamics and cyber-linkages are revolutionizing mode(s) of socio-economic interactions locally and globally, virtually -cum- reality, as well as behavioral repertoires among people in different geo-temporal spaces. Socio-economic activities at a global-cum-local scale are more and more borderless and just-in-time, allowing most forms of co-communication: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and many-to-many.

The new media regime's conditions of e-learning define language acquisition: increasingly embedded in the ubiquitous information and communication technologies (ICT)-driven mediated (new and highly differentiated cyber-) communication; are juxtaposing the ever-increasingly opening-up -cum-deepening of cyber-experience for "inter-personalized" mediated communication, all these dynamics facilitate the interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and cross-border / cultural encounters in/beyond virtual and real social communities. New language e-learning becomes a moment-by-moment specific 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).

Under economic globalization, the common *lingua franca* (ELF) for international communication is obviously English and its variations in different socio-linguistic context; the use of ELF has more and more for non-native speakers than native speakers. Timeliness and strategy-wise, the *lingua franca* serves as a catalyst of learning new language(s), reinforcing e-learning for foreign language(s) with new media. It has been shown that most students' ideas on using English remain consistent: they cared less about grammar when and after using English as a *lingua franca* in their written communication; and more importantly, started to perceive English as a language they may be able to use with greater confidence (Lai 2014). More specific for highly differentiated in cyber-communication, 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 not fixed but vary in different phases of the discourse. E-learning prompts such challenge of losing the contextual, or even temporal, conditions of communication. More critically, 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, and how (or when) strategic-instrumental, is *lingua franca* enabling us to develop multilingualism – engendering multiculturalism (Lai 2015)?

What characterizes new communication in/beyond cyberspace of e-learning is not just the linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) mode but also the non-linguistic (visual and symbolic) communication are changing; *lingua franca* is only one of the many option-possibilities for communication and comprehension of meanings, say the emoji figurative symbolism, other than para-linguistic symbols and abbreviations. The phenomenal communication, 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. For their differential fluidity and variety, most communications, ranging from the core to peripheries, the real vis-a-vis the virtuality, are yet subject to inter-interpretation and exchanges in reality, in personal experience.....

## 2. Beyond the codified e-learning @ cyberspace?

With the 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 critical 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, eight aspects of learning experience, relevant to active engaging pedagogical approaches for enhancing learning outcomes. 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, which are all relevant for new media-based language learning.

The new media milieu is, different from the one with following grammatical syllabus and learning grammar rules as the focus of, the interactivity which can be motivating for the learners. In short, the essence of the “stickiness” is anchored upon the motivational realm of learners and learning community at large. To keep up motivation with focus language-learning, not distracted by other incoming messages and images in new media, is a real challenge. Similarly 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 likely logical choice for using as new language learning media; but the interferences from many known and unknown sources embedded in new media are not irrelevant: it is both a blessing and cursed for new media active engagement.

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 skills to acquire the basics of foreign language(s) as the core part of new cross-cultural encounters in communicative borderless world.



The 21<sup>st</sup> Century's global communication highlights 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. This implies that educational goals for *lingua franca* and/or foreign language(s) L2/L3 should consider facilitating or condoning multilingual practices, in addition to implementing a corporate language such as English as lingua franca (ELF). Yet for global business, a policy of multilingualism alone would be too expensive and goes against the wish to control and to coordinate information flows within the company: in many multinational corporations' multilingualism exists in combination with ELF as the official corporate language in that for the international workforce negotiating language practices is a daily routine.

### 3. E-learning @ differentiated fluid exchanges for multilingualism?

New media communication tools and modes like *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, *WhatsApp* 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 ubiquitous 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*, *Twitter*, the *Line*, *Instagram* 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.

One of the key (mis-)manifestations of cyber-communications, the mobile one in particular, is the shared meaning and mutual usage of common characters, words and text. What most important is the shared meaning, identity and trust derived from the existing social relationship, and with this commonness of sharing, there is an emergence of new linguistic form(s) in the mediated communication in general and the mobile communication in particular. 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.

To recapitulate our brief: the challenge for new language learning in new media spaces with a particular *lingua franca* is the amplexness of contextual fluidity with new and old varieties and differences – which need to be specified 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 (Lai 2014, 2015).

The saying of “What we think determines what we speak/write/communicate” is seemingly the otherwise. For our contemporary, the time/space compression engenders certain reductionism towards techno-monolingualistic communications, multilingual encounters and creative (unique cultural specific) interpretations should be promoted: the written (text, txt msg based SMS) and audio-visual (behavioral, MMS) communications should be liberalized from the simple codification of txt.msg. Hence, languages and communicative actions are the operational representations, and integration, of our complex ideas and thoughts; the embodiment of socio-cultural arrangements for history and contemporary socio reciprocities at large..The call and actions for multilingualism therefore are to embody the essence of multiculturalism and historico-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 with many resonances are yet noises – the path for multiculturalism is likely full of uncertainty.



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\*This paper draws extensively from Lai (2014, 2015).

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