

A Two-Tier Model for a More Simplified and Sustainable English as an International Language¹

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It's a worldwide war. It's a war on the workers /
And it's time we started calling the shots.
—Anne Feeney²

1. RECLAIMING THE COMMONS OF DISCOURSE IN EIL

1.1 Introduction

The teaching of English as a lingua franca (ELF) across much rural and working-class urban education in the ‘developing’ world faces formidable challenges: a lack of qualified teachers, a lack of materials for extensive graded reading and listening in English, low levels of motivation among many pupils, and little sensitivity to the special needs of non-privileged and underprivileged learners in low-income and minimally-resourced learning environments. For the small privileged stratum of learners, a transnational ‘gentry,’ proficiency in high levels of ELF is increasingly a core component in their kit of ‘cultural capital’ for reproduction of class privilege and upward mobility to the levers of social and economic power, English for Empire.³

There is a demonstrable and widening chasm between small privileged islands of middle-class learners of English as an International Language (EIL), especially across the Global South, the ‘EIL haves’ -- and the masses of working-class learners and ordinary poor folks, the ‘EIL have-nots.’ They are caught up within the destructive dialectic of an education that fails to meet the needs of many working-class kids (Finn, 1999, pp.1, 197-199; Freire, 2006; Tatum, 2005). Money talks English, and generates vast educational inequity. ‘Class in the classroom’ puts its indelible stamp on EIL pedagogy, achievement levels and student intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Lest we forget: 1.4 billion of us live on USD 1.25 a day or less, and nearly half the planet’s population on \$2.50 or less (Parsons, 2008). In India, nearly 42% of the population eke out an existence surviving on 58 rupees or less per day (= USD 1.25), as a Maoist insurgency spreads.⁴ The social geography of learning and using EIL is nearly isomorphic with poverty’s topography.

Yet even in the ‘developed’ economies, huge gaps persist. In Germany, surveys indicate some 40 percent of the population feel incompetent to have even simple English conversations, and data from the EU suggests that over 50 percent of the population in a number of EU countries can barely communicate in English, despite years of study in school (Lehner, 2009). Many of these individuals are ordinary folks, from the social majority working-class population. A teacher from Serbia, for example, notes: “I’ve mentioned several times how bad language education (in primary and high schools, but often the faculties too) in Serbia is, how after 10 years of second language study the vast

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majority of students [...] gets no further than a set of several basic sentences and a mediocre vocabulary which they can't put to any real use.”⁵

1.1.2 Rethinking the ‘E’ in ELF

This paper argues for new departures in EIL pedagogy for the social majorities *in their own interest*, not that of the privileged stratum of metropolitan elites. The TESOL⁶ profession, at least in part, needs to re-explore in depth and experiment with reduced, simplified, 'minimalist' forms of English as an auxiliary language for the multitudes within the broader matrix of ELF pedagogy (Seidlhofer, 2004). The goal is the effective teaching and rapid learning of a *simplified communicative tool for the global working classes*. That tool will be dynamically transformed once it is used by autonomous learners and communities. My experience in Asia and input from teachers across the Global South have convinced me of the need for that shift at the pedagogical grassroots (Templer, 2007). But field research on the model outlined here in a variety of teaching and learning environments is imperative. Syahro (2009) provides one model for empirical inquiry.

1.2 A ‘Bill of Rights’ for lingua franca literacy

Basic human rights in the 21st century suggest that ideally, all individuals on this planet should have the opportunity to learn an efficient, compact lingua franca for trans-cultural and trans-national communication, in effect ‘reclaiming the commons of discourse’ through pedagogies for plainer talk (Templer, 2008a). Proficiency in EIL ‘plain talk’ is an equitable power tool in language learning policies grounded on the notion that ordinary working people and their kids, across the planet, have a ‘right’ to meaningful modes of literacy across the planet, North and South (Gee, 2000). Practitioners in TESOL pedagogy need to take to professional heart and mind the insights of the New London Group (2000, p. 18) and their vision of a transformed *pedagogy of access* for all within the teaching of Multiliteracies:

-access to symbolic capital with a real valency in the emergent realities of our time. [...] The role of pedagogy is to develop an epistemology of pluralism that provides access without people having to erase or leave behind different subjectivities. This has to be the basis of a new norm.

I wish to argue that part of the progressive politics of such a trans-national working-class literacy pedagogy should be simplification -- the learning and use of plain talk, in first language,

second and third. That includes ‘native’ speakers of English learning an easier, clearer, uncluttered mode of ‘straight talk’ for their own discourse. A critical people’s literacy entails regaining a discursive commons where ordinary working folk can communicate without translators. Solidarity is enhanced when workers can communicate across borders online and face-to-face in a shared readily learnable lingua franca and build resistance together. The World Social Forum underscores the need for this.⁷ In the Two-Thirds World (and elsewhere), we need a slimmer, sustainable lingua franca specially *for trans-cultural working-class communication needs*, a kind of ‘convivial’ English for the Multitude counterposed to English for Empire.

The term “convivial’ is in Illich’s (1973) classic proletarian sense, integral to the kind of “convivial regeneration” of society he envisioned: “designed to allow all its members the most autonomous action by means of tools least controlled by others.” It entails *a re-conquest of practical knowledge by ordinary working people*: “I propose to set a legal limit to the tooling of society in such a way that the toolkit necessary to conviviality will be accessible for the autonomous use of a maximum number of people” (Illich, 1976, p. 29).⁸

1.3 But why EIL?

It is incontestable that the unstoppable spread of global English is a product of cultural, socioeconomic and political hegemony that is ultimately imperial in origin and in significant measure neo-imperial today. EIL is prime cultural capital for a privileged trans-national and comprador elite within global capitalism (Phillipson, 2003). In many ways, the tidal wave of English and Western neo-liberal educational values and curricula, spurred and reproduced by global and local elites, is arguably a “Trojan horse of recolonization” (Prakash & Esteva, 1998, p. 1).

Yet current neo-liberal/colonial realities on the ground suggest that we concentrate on possible transformation inside the teaching of what has become by imperial-historical fiat the default global language. While rigorously questioning its unwarranted and seemingly illimitable dominion, I would argue that ways must be found to lessen its burden for the great mass of learners, largely underprivileged, everywhere.⁹

1.4 ‘Literacy with an attitude’

Simplifying the lingua franca taught is also central to a working-class second language pedagogy that seeks to promote ‘literacy with an attitude,’ educating working-class kids and adults *in their own self-interest* (Finn, 1999, 2009; Knopp, 2009; Gee, 2000, 2008). Patrick Finn reminds us

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that working-class kids, urban and rural, often develop an “oppositional identity,” resisting school talk that seems to them alien, anchored in beliefs, behaviors, values and attitudes from a different class world. A powerful “clash of discourses” (Finn, 1999, p. 119) saturates their everyday life in the classroom. Such a “counter-school culture” (Willis, 1982) can mean resisting undemocratic authority, passive learning, standardized testing, boring texts, elite school and teacher talk and values, the hidden curriculum of social passivity: “Working-class children with varying degrees of oppositional identity resist school through means reminiscent of the factory shop floor—slowdowns, strikes, sabotage, and occasional open confrontation” (Finn, *ibid.*, p. x). That helps in part to explain the huge resistance to learning ‘officially sanctioned school English’ among many kids from the underprivileged social majorities, North and South.

The classroom is a battleground in a class war over discourse, both in native and additional language instruction. Gee (2008, p. 39) reminds us that “[c]hildren will not identify with – they will even dis-identify with – teachers and schools that they perceive as hostile, alien, or oppressive to their home-based identities.” Tatum (2005) has reinvented literacy instruction for inner-city working-class black male youth caught up in turmoil, cynicism and oppression, seeking to overcome the radical disconnect between their life worlds and school discourses, reaffirming their dignity.

Based on my own experience in Southeast Asia, learners from working-class life worlds are often markedly de-motivated in learning English as part of “school-imposed literacies,” alien to their own vernacular home-based and peer literacy practices. Empirical research in Malaysian farming villages (Asraf, 2004, p. 94) indicates that

the majority of the students felt bad about their lack of proficiency in English, which affected their self-concept, leading them to withdraw from participating in the classroom [...] If rural students get de-motivated to learn English, it has to be understood in light of their difficulties in learning the language.

Of course, the problem behind all problems is not lack of ability. “Poverty is poison” (Bracey, 2009, pp. 143-156; Krashen, 2009): hunger, malnutrition, lack of books at home, are toxic for kids’ brainpower, concentration and learning abilities anywhere.

1.5 A ‘Matthew Effect’ in learning ELF

Part of this lack of motivation is probably attributable to the familiar phenomenon in reading pedagogy for first and additional languages of the ‘Matthew Effect,’ where the learning gap grows

between kids who learn to read readily and others who struggle and fall more and more behind, gradually sinking into a cycle of frustration and lower self-esteem as the “rich get richer, the poor get poorer” in their achievement in reading and related subject areas dependent on literacy skills (Stanovich, 2000):

Researchers have noted repeatedly that some children come to school somewhat "wealthier" than their peers when it comes to early reading skills. As time goes by, those students who start out with some literacy advantages tend to thrive and grow academically, while their less fortunate peers tend to get left behind. [...] Without early intervention, children are swept along their respective paths by the Matthew Effect until they reach an age where the odds of the struggling readers ever developing literacy skills are depressingly small” (Wren, 2003).

It can be hypothesized such an effect also impacts on learning English, especially among kids from lower-income and rural backgrounds.

1.6 Shifting the bourgeois paradigm

In most rural learning environments, and among the urban poor, few students have the time, means or motivation to climb the ladder to lower-intermediate proficiency in ‘full’ English, let alone go beyond. That is a demonstrable fact, poorly reflected in metropolitan British Council discourse (Graddol, 2006) about the ‘globalizing’ role of English under regimes of pervasive power disparity. In their recent assessment of the state of the discipline, major scholars in the field like Canagarajah (2006) and Kumaravadivelu (2006) make no mention whatsoever of how social class impacts on EIL/ELF pedagogy. The sites of representation of many educators based in the rich economies of the geopolitical North – “hegemonic intellectuals” in the sense of Aronowitz & Giroux (1993) -- often blinker their perception of these obvious realities in the real classroom among the planet’s social majorities, and even among ordinary working families in their own countries. These are, I would argue, the bourgeois blinders at the very heart of the TESOL discipline, distorting its vision of the multiple marginalized peripheries in EIL pedagogy. Other more self-manageable and ‘convivial’ options need to be experimented with.

1.6 Overview

The first half of the paper sketches a notion of a two-tier, leaner more ‘downshifted’¹⁰ or minimalist model of simpler English for mass instruction, grounded on BASIC 850 and VOA Special

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English. The second half of the paper describes in brief detail these two models, followed by a conclusion that recommends empirical research on what can actually work, and a possible *mini-research center* to guide and galvanize investigation in the field.

2. TOWARD A ‘PEOPLE’S LINGUA FRANCA’

2.1 Simple talk for social justice

My frame thesis: *both in native language instruction and foreign language instruction, we live in worlds of talk and action too dominated by privileged elites and their hegemonies.* These prioritize complex discourses that marginalize and exclude many ordinary people. In our own work as educators and activists, critical pedagogy and socialist critique need to simplify, clarify and de-jargonize discourse to communicate with ordinary working people. A vernacular ‘people’s plain talk’ seems to me to lie at the heart of any discursive socialist praxis, as reflected, for example, in Errico Malatesta’s *Fra contadini* (1884), his introduction to anarchist socialism framed as a conversation between two Italian farmers in their own vernacular discourse. It was the most widely distributed of all of Malatesta’s works.¹¹ Upton Sinclair’s *Letters to Judd, an American Workingman* (1926) is a text on socialism meant for working-class readers. The only ‘simplified’ version of *Das Kapital* for the working masses approved by Marx and Engels was that by the then Socialist Reichstag deputy Johann Most, *Kapital und Arbeit* (1876 [1972]). Most’s version of Marx for the ordinary workers was widely circulated in working class education and struggle a century ago on both sides of the Atlantic, though never translated into English. Charles Ogden’s and Ivor Richards’ visions about democratizing knowledge” through BASIC ENGLISH (see below) were also in this spirit of “literacy equity” and democratizing of access to knowledge (Gee, 2000). It entails tailoring what people say to the ‘comfort zone’ of readability and comprehension of the targeted audiences (Dubay, 2004, 2007).

3. A TWO-TIER SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO ELF

3.1 Minimalist models re-emergent

The past decade has witnessed an upsurge in interest in simplified English as a lingua franca for a variety of purposes within global communication. Several models for an alternative lingua franca learning agenda are central here, but I would like to focus on two as a basis for some necessary thinking out of the pedagogical policy box, re-conceptualizing the ‘E’ in EIL: Tier One centered on BASIC 850, and Tier Two grounded on VOA Special English.

BASIC 850 was pioneered by Charles K. Ogden and Ivor Richards beginning in 1930. The establishment of the online Basic English Institute (<http://www.basic-english.org>) in 2003 has made numerous books and articles on BASIC 850 accessible to all, and galvanized renewed interest. BASIC 850 is the grandfather of all present 'reduced' versions of English as an international language. A good overview to BASIC 850 is Ogden (1968). Its close cousin, Everyman's English, developed by the literary critic, poet and language educator Ivor Richards in the U.S. over a period of four decades from 1940, is a spin-off of BASIC 850 that has an amplified lexical core of about 950 word families (Richards & Gibson, 1974). A form of Everyman's has been taught now for several decades in Japan, known as GDM or Graded Direct Method (Katagiri & Constable, 1993). The BASIC textbook *English Through Pictures* by Richards and Christine Gibson (2005), the foundation stone of GDM, has recently been reissued in Toronto in a revised and updated three-volume edition, and is based on a multimodal, text-plus-stick drawing approach. VOA Special English, launched by the Voice of America at the height of the Cold War on October 19, 1959, is today a unique multimodal resource for a graded, simplified form of ELF based on 1,500 word families as core lexis, accessible online and via shortwave radio.¹²

3.2 Tier One

In my view, BASIC 850, in a revised version, perhaps grounded on Richards' model of Everyman's English, can form the first self-contained tier for a kind of 'convivial people's ELF.' Initially, teachers can use the available multimodal textbook (Richards & Gibson, 2005). It should be taught at that level of lexis, with virtually all basic grammatical structures, so that students would -- through massive recycling -- 'overlearn' this prime downshifted model. It would require experimentation in pilot projects, new teaching materials, and the creation of a large amount of diverse reading material, so that acquirers could through extensive reading (and extensive listening, Waring & Brown, 2003) in BASIC could build up a strong proficiency at this semantically graded 'lean' lexical level. In many rural areas, it would perhaps be a sufficient power tool that students could really master, allowing them to 'say almost anything' and thus actively communicate. I would hypothesize that using such a leaner more learnable mode, learners can more readily and rapidly "speak, write, and assert their own histories, voices, and learning experiences" (Aronowitz & Giroux,

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1993, p. 46) – which is what learning a second language should center on. Ogden and Richards had much evidence for this over some 40 years of experimentation across the planet, including China in the 1930s and 40s (Katagiri & Constable, 1993). Ideally, native speakers and others would also be encouraged to learn BASIC 850 so that they could likewise use it with people who have acquired this power tool but no further proficiency (Templer, 2005, 2006).

One major advantage for introducing mass instruction in BASIC 850 is that teachers could be trained to a good level of competency in far less time and with much less effort than the normal training of English teachers at the moment anywhere on the planet. In Thailand, some 80% of all teachers of English in the elementary schools do not have special training to teach English, and many are themselves at beginner's level (Mackenzie, 2005). In Indonesia, different conditions hold, but there are numerous districts where a program centered on BASIC 850 would perhaps be both beneficial, innovative and pragmatic. That may also be true for the overwhelming majority of potential ELF learners in many less and 'least-developed countries' (LDCs),¹³ in particular landlocked 'fourth world' nations, such as Nepal, now in protracted political struggle toward a "People's Republic."¹⁴

3.3 Grzega's Basic Global English – a Possible Alternative

Other simplified models, such as Joachim Grzega's Basic Global English and Jean-Paul Nerrière's Globish will not be dealt with here at length (Pagon, 2005; Sage, 2006). But Basic Global English (Grzega, 2006) is clearly worth considering as a viable alternative to BASIC 850. It is grounded on an experimental model of 750 headwords, based largely on frequency, plus 250 words of the student's choosing, and 20 clear and simple grammar rules. BGE is taught largely with learning through dialogues and learner self-generated speech. Mehan-Schmidt (2009) gives a brief introduction to Grzega's concept, which is being experimented with in Germany with notable success (Lehner, 2009; Kubeth de Placido, 2009). As a mini-form of highly communicative, rapidly learned English, it is gaining increasing public interest.

On his website www.basicglobalenglish.com, Grzega notes: "The idea of BGE is to allow learners to quickly acquire a level of global communicative competence characterized by tolerance and empathy." The emphasis is to encourage learners to speak about what is important to them, right from the start, in some ways reflecting a kind of DOGME approach 'unplugged' from textbooks and rigid lesson plans (Meddings and Thornbury, 2009). The website offers two useful videos, and a number of articles and links. Joachim would argue that his model is better suited than BASIC ENGLISH 850 to current needs, and would thus be a better paradigm for Tier One. There is some

evidence that young learners of BGE in Germany progress more rapidly in one year than their counterparts in German schools in two or even three years of conventional instruction (Lehner, 2009).

3.4 Tier Two

There is growing pedagogical interest in a well-established and time-tested paradigm in reduced learner English: Special English as developed by the Voice of America. SE was launched in 1959 on shortwave radio, and has been accessible for eight years in multimodal form via Internet as well. It is based on a 1,500-word core vocabulary, and simplified syntax and slow rhythm of delivery as a spoken language, for news and feature programming on the Voice of America. I wish to argue that SE needs to be fore-grounded for developing fresh multimedia approaches to teaching simpler English both for *active* production skills, and for extensive reading and listening, with a vast archive of texts growing by addition of two feature texts every day (<http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish>). As Special English Chief Shelley Gollust has commented: “It’s almost like Hemingway. You can write something easy and direct, and it’s more powerful that way” (quoted in Goodman, 2007).

Significantly, spoken discourse analysts are also beginning to stress that a core of 1,500 highest-frequency lexical items is sufficient for proficiency in most kinds of conversation (Grzega, 2006a). I wish to argue that such a 1,500 lexical core is a reasonable target ‘plateau level’ for the vast multitude of learners today. Michael West (1955) was thinking along similar lines: “At 1,700 words one can tell any strong plot, keeping much of the original style. A vocabulary of 2,000 words is good enough for anything, and more than one needs for most things” (p. 70). Eldridge & Neufeld (2009) set the critical lexical threshold at 1,650 word families (see below; see also Neufeld & Billuroğlu, 2006).

In this two-tier model proposed here for experimentation and action research, VOA Special English, re-conceptualized as an *active* as well as passive simplified form of a more advanced ‘people’s ELF,’ can be taught to acquirers of BASIC 850 who wish to go on to a more complex but still carefully graded model. It is clear that Special English, which can be used for ‘English for Science Lite’ and many other text genres, and most certainly for the needs of everyday communication, can be mastered far more easily than climbing the virtual ‘Everest’ of ‘complete’ English. This requires massive recycling and over-learning at this level, promoting a kind of ‘plain talk fluency’ and learner confidence. This can also counteract some of the negative impact of a

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‘Matthew Effect’ that acts to frustrate and defeat weaker learners. Such pedagogy needs Internet accessibility in the ideal instance, but could also be experimented with in remote poorly resourced environments. A vast archive of texts, totaling some 3.5 million running words, already exists in VOA English online, along with a number of recent videos. Although no textbooks geared to this minimalist model exist, they could be created. The *Work Book* is online and can be readily reproduced in printed form. Like in Tier One, Tier Two could be taught as a target goal for acquirers to ‘overlearn’ and work with through highly extensive reading and listening, gaining ever greater familiarity and competence at this crucial plateau level.

Those who wish to proceed on up the mountain to more complete mid-intermediate levels of ‘complete’ regular English could then do so, on their own or through other more traditional kinds of courses. But for the vast majority of acquirers, especially low achievers, it is a ‘convivial’ alternative: sustainable in terms of opportunity for massive recycling of structures and *lexis*, and in terms of achievable proficiency for teachers. It would also help to surmount the whole continuing debate on the role and myth of the ‘native speaker’ in EIL instruction (Kabel, 2009), since there are no ‘native users’ of BASIC or VOA Special English.

As Krashen (2003) stresses: “The cure for English fever is a program in English that does not threaten first language development, and that is relatively easy to do, one that does not require the advantages of being upper middle class” (p. 9). In any event, from a good mastery at lower-intermediate level – i.e., a solid mastery of VOA Special English -- students who wish to advance can move on working in a more autonomous mode: “Our goal in foreign language pedagogy is to bring students to the point where they are autonomous acquirers, prepared to continue to improve on their own” (Krashen, 2004a, p. 51).

Rob Waring (2009) makes a powerful analogous argument for massive extensive reading precisely at a student’s level of ease:

Extensive reading (or listening) is the *only* way in which learners can get access to language at their own comfort level, read something they want to read, at the pace they feel comfortable with, which will allow them to meet the language enough times to pick up a *sense* of how the language fits together and to consolidate what they know [...] This *depth* of knowledge of language must, and can only, be acquired through constant massive exposure. It is a massive task that requires massive amounts of reading and listening on top of our normal course book work.

This can be recommended both at Tier One and Tier Two in the model proposed here. In Malaysia, Asraf & Ahmad (2003) describe an experiment in extensive easy graded reading for working class youth in low-resourced village schools, suggesting further inquiry into the “complexity of learning English in the rural school situation,” and gearing instruction to disadvantaged learners’ needs. I would also argue that this model should reduce ‘affective filters’ in Krashen’s classic sense, countering the “Matthew Effect” and giving learners more confidence, because the tasks they are working on and the goals before them are attainable. Acquiring BASIC 850 can be a more collaborative pursuit than the common highly individualistic and competitive structuring of standard EIL instruction. Working to achieve relative proficiency in such a minimalized model may also lessen “cognitive load” on the learner (Sweller, 2005), serving to ‘de-stress’ instruction for beginners, and instill teachers with greater self-confidence whose proficiency in ‘complete’ English is deemed weaker when assessed by dominant ‘native-speaker’-linked criteria. They can far more readily become reasonably proficient in the mini-power tools of BASIC 850, and, if they so choose, its somewhat more advanced cousin, VOA Special English. Only research in the classroom can shed light on whether this is feasible.

3.5 Lexitronics as an alternative lens

In a contemporary Web 2.0-centered approach developing eReaders, Eldridge & Neufeld (2009) stress that a threshold of 1,650 of the most common words in English is a key plateau level for achieving an acceptable 5.5 score in the IELTS international test of English proficiency, noting that a threshold in this range was also confirmed in empirical investigation on remedial Turkish students and their problems in learning English lexis (p. 226). The experimental work of Eldridge & Neufeld in Northern Cyprus using eTexts on Moodle is highly suggestive for concentrating on this crucial range of 1,500-1,650 most common words, but cannot be dealt with here. They offer strong data-based critique of conventional approaches using extensive graded reading of commercially available texts. Neufeld would welcome experimental work on VOA Special English along the lines of his corpus-driven research model on lexis acquisition (personal communication, 12 October 2009), in part exemplified in work on Lexitronics (Billuroğlu et al., 2009) at Eastern Mediterranean University.¹⁵

4. THE MODEL IN TWO TIERS

4.1 BASIC 850

BASIC 850 is a simplified auxiliary language, with only 16 verbs ('operators') — *come, get, give, go, keep, let, make, put, seem, take, be, do, have, say, see, send*, along with *may* and *will*, plus 20 "directives" (prepositions and particles) — conceiving of verbs as "directional actions": "there are 4000 common verbs in the English language which may be similarly displaced by the sixteen operators" (Ogden, 1937). Of the 850 core words, 513 are mono-syllabic, a further 254 have penultimate stress, reducing problems with stress which have proved particularly difficult for speakers of East Asian tone languages. A micro lingua franca, it is engineered to be capable of expressing even quite complex thought. Of course, its reliance on a battery of largely 'delexicalized' verbs with particles has provoked criticism as a highly artificial stripping of most higher-frequency verbs from the core vocabulary. Richards' version expands the verbal component in a flexible way.

BASIC was developed in the 1930s and 40s by the British linguists Charles K. Ogden and Ivor A. Richards. Both were pioneers in linguistic semantics. Their book on meaning (Ogden & Richards, 1923) provided the original basis for work on BASIC, when then discovered that they could define anything in English (and thus 'say' anything important, any common 'proposition') using less than 1,000 words, a 'leveraged' semantic core. That core is the very heart of BASIC 850, not a lexical list of the most 'frequent' words, but something significantly different.

The classic BASIC word list -- 100 Operation Words, the 600 Things (400 General and 200 Pictured), the 100 Qualities and the 50 Opposites -- put in columns on a single sheet of paper is an icon of that economy in learning effort, compactness of presentation, and the separation of the 'functional' from the 'content' words (<http://ogden.basic-english.org/words.html>).

BASIC is not 'simplified' English for elementary learners, it is a remarkable tool far more flexible and sophisticated in its power of expression and clarity. An all-purpose auxiliary language suited for **B**usiness, **A**ministrative, **S**cientific, **I**nstructional and **C**ommercial uses, it is "not merely a list of words, governed by a minimum apparatus of essential English grammar, but a highly organized system designed throughout to be as easy as possible for a learner" (Richards 1943, p. 21). The *General Basic English Dictionary* (Orthological Institute, 1940) gives 40,000 meanings of 20,000 words in Standard English, all defined in minimal BASIC. Ogden was guided, as Richards stressed, by "the balancing and ordering of many rival claims – simplicity, ease of learning, scope, clarity, naturalness – all to be as far as possible satisfied and reconciled" (Katagiri & Constable 1993, p. 50). Even as interest in BASIC in the Commonwealth and Britain waned after the mid-1950s, Ivor Richards vigorously continued to promote an expanded form of BASIC which he called Everyman's English (Russo, 1989, pp. 397-410; Koeneke, 2004).

At its inception, BASIC was not conceived as a ‘threshold’ or stepping stone to ‘full English’ but as a self-contained mini-ELF. Where you learn to say ‘bring together’ instead of ‘integrate,’ ‘come across’ instead of ‘find,’ ‘go beyond’ instead of ‘exceed,’ ‘keep in memory’ instead of ‘remember.’ Where instructors aim primarily at teaching learners a very high level of control; massively recycled in a tight learning spiral. And where much reading material is made available in BASIC 850, so that students can continue to read and learn in it. Extensive reading is a primary post-instruction goal, extending for years into the future as autonomous users of BASIC. A large range of texts in BASIC 850, long inaccessible, are now available at the Basic English Institute (www.basic-english.org).

Barbara Seidlhofer, a major Austrian scholar in the emerging field of ELF, has argued that “Basic ... is highly significant as a stimulus for thought. What now needs to be done is to see how far Ogden’s conceptual scheme relates to (the still very scarce) empirical findings of how people actually use English as a lingua franca” (2002, p. 295). In 1939, based on several years experience across China, most especially in Yunnan province, Richards stated: “we are now satisfied that we can in two years give a sounder and more promising introduction to general English than has formerly been given in six” (Katagiri & Constable, 1993, p. 61). That needs to be re-explored empirically for our time. Yet given the somewhat narrow, elite-oriented aperture of current research trends on English as a lingua franca, such mini-models of the language are generally overlooked. Jenkins (2006) makes no mention of BASIC or Special English, nor does Graddol (2006). One exception is Stein (20087): in her valuable monographic study little known outside Germany, she explores BASIC 850 in detail, as well as other ‘controlled vocabularies’ and their potential as a target plateau, but does not look at VOA Special English.

4.2 Democratizing knowledge: reading for the Multitude

There is need for a wealth of serious reading materials of all kinds in that more simplified form of English as an instrument for democratizing knowledge, for ‘talking science and humanities’ in a far leaner and more ‘analytic’ medium. Not ‘graded readers,’ but another species of discourse for the global Multitude. Among desiderata, we need a newspaper in BASIC online, and much more literature written in BASIC and broadly disseminated in cheap editions. Ogden had a dream of a "Basic Library of General Knowledge covering the sciences in 1,000 divisions -- all so cheap that no workingman would be without them," along with "a Basic Parallel Library of 1,000 books giving the Basic form of the works of great writers of the present and past and on the opposite page the words of

the writer himself, so that everyone would at last have a chance of learning any language in which he might be interested" (Ogden, 1930). Socialist in outlook as a younger scholar, Ogden maintained clear ties to Fabian thinking, anti-militarist circles and class-struggle syndicalism (Florence, 1977, pp. 21-24).

Ivor Richards, a major literary theorist and passionate classicist, published a remarkable shortened version of Homer's *Iliad* that is a prime example of how world literature can be 'translated' into powerful more simple texts (Richards, 1950), as is his version of Plato's *Republic* (Richards, 1942). It was issued as a special pocket-size paperback for troops in the U.S. armed forces, and also sprang from Richards' earlier teaching of BASIC in China. One of Richards' pupils and close associates in China, the later literary theorist William Empson, developed techniques for analyzing complex poetry by translating it 'vertically' into a simpler BASIC text (Empson, 1977). One aim could be to produce a series of politically progressive texts both in BASIC 850 and in Special English, the foundation of a world socialist library in a people's simplified English.

4.3 Some core advantages of BASIC 850

In sum, the 'convivial' advantages of such an auxiliary 'language within a language' are evident:

1. It is far easier to learn than climbing the Everest of 'full' or 'complete' English.
2. It is much faster to learn well, on average in 200 hours of classroom instruction. Empirical research in China in the 1930s and 1940s under Richards, and in Israel in the 1960s, suggested BASIC was highly effective and easy to learn quickly (Katagiri & Constable, 1993).
3. It equips learners to be able to say even complex ideas. As Ogden wrote: it would make it "possible to say all that we normally desire to say," with no more words than can be put in compact form on a one-page word list (Ogden, 1930, p. 9): "In Basic English, the end of the work is in view all the time" (Ogden, 1932, p. viii).
4. It is based on a form of 'leveraged semantics': "Basic English is a system in which 850 English words will do the work of 20,000, and so give to everyone a second or international language which will take as little of the learner's time as possible" (Ogden, 1932, p. viii).
5. It remains far easier to train teachers of this mini-form for the public schools.
6. It can be taught to L1 speakers for communicating with L2 speakers, to create a 'more even playing field' in World English. This was a central idea in Ogden's work.
7. It can be taught even in low-resourced learning environments, and to large classes, though pilot projects to test this empirically today are imperative.

8. It helps to turn off what Krashen (1997) calls "affective filters," emotions like the fear of "losing face" that keep many of our students from opening their mouths. BASIC creates "low-anxiety" learning spaces, because it is compact and can be more rapidly and thoroughly mastered, thus generating higher levels of user confidence, and a sense of potential 'conviviality.' As mentioned, it probably can help to counter the "Matthew Effect" in ELF instruction, especially in working-class classrooms.
9. BASIC 850 ensures exceptionally high levels of "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1997; 2004c) because of extensive reading in BASIC texts, a separate vast readily comprehensible textual universe as envisioned by Ogden and other architects of BASIC.
10. BASIC can be taught as a compact basis for English for Science and other forms of ESP (English for Specific Purposes), including English for Business. Scientists often know their technical lexis, they need the scaffolding of control of core grammar and general vocabulary, and say it as simple as possible, a kind of 'ESP extra-Lite.' Richards had direct experience with this (Templer, 2005, 2007).
11. As a non-native English lingua franca, owned by the world but spoken by no one as a 'native' first language, it decolonizes English for global communication, overcoming the debate on 'native speakerism' and the role of the non-native-speaker teacher (Kabel, 2009). No one is an L1 user/speaker of BASIC, with a claim to 'discursive proprietorship.' That is part of its intrinsic 'conviviality' in Illich's classic sense.
12. It poses less threat to 'full English' or other languages of the learner, because it is itself not a 'full language' with a heritage of culture, a literature, a whole identity bound up with its use. Its watchword is practicality and learnability. Yet much literature can be translated into it, as both Ogden and Richards envisioned and themselves did.
13. It can be used for generating 'language awareness' among native speakers of English, and all learners of EIL, in a pedagogy of 'vertical translation' of standard English into BASIC, including texts of poetry (Empson, 1977) and numerous other genres, saying things plainer.
14. BASIC is well-suited for purposes of teaching basic mass literacy, especially to underprivileged learners, as a sustainable, sufficient and solid downshifted power tool for trans-national communication.
15. BASIC 850 can of course serve as a remarkably solid foundation for the far smaller number of learners who may want to try to master 'complete English.' That is not a point of dispute, and experience with GDM in Japan substantiates this.¹⁶

4.4 VOA Special English

Special English (<http://www.voaspecialenglish.com>) rigorously employs a 1,500 word-family vocabulary, with simpler syntax, and very few idioms. Newscasts and topical reports generally utilize short sentences averaging 14 words, normally expressing a single proposition. All texts are structured to enhance readability. There is an online Special English *Word Book* with simple definitions. Broadcasters undergo extensive special training over six months in SE enunciation and delivery, at 90 words per minute, which is about 30 percent slower than normal broadcast speed (Templer, 2008b, 2008c).

In addition to the 10 minutes of daily news, the SE half-hour broadcast includes two slow-speed ‘features.’ These features, in 14 categories, are available as print texts and with audio, and many can be downloaded as MP3 files, for intensive and extensive listening (Krashen, 1996; Waring & Brown, 2003). Brief (370-1,380 words) and informative, they cover a wide range of topics from education, history, American biography and music, to health, science, economics and development. This builds a wide window onto *intercultural awareness*. Articles have high interest value, and often deal with topics of global significance currently in the news. The genre is multimodal, combining text, image and sound (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Mayer, 2005), where text on-screen can reinforce aural input and vice versa. Much empirical research suggests that young learners, especially with limited prior knowledge, perform better on transfer and retention tests when presented with a multimedia ensemble than just through print alone, in a kind of multimodal synergy (Neuman, 2009). Moreover, “feeling more efficacious in learning a topic might curtail the vicious cycle of low self-esteem, and low achievement document in Keith Stanovich’s (1986) now classic Matthew Effect” (p. 54).

Though many features deal with American culture and social life, numerous others focus on international or scientific themes, in a kind of ‘ESP Lite.’ The site is not some crude propaganda tool (Templer, 2008b). Of course, it is tilted toward a particular view of the current world system and selective imaging of America and the West, but so are all the dominant corporate media (Chomsky, 1997). Given that this is an American government initiative, it needs to be read critically against the grain, especially in its newscasts, yet there is a certain balance in approach and coverage in feature stories which will appeal to a broad segment of learners. A biography in December 2007 featured the radical feminist and political radical Margaret Sanger, who was on the far left of the political spectrum in her earlier decades of activism for birth control and women’s rights.¹⁷ A biography in March 2007 focused on a controversial jazz singer, African-American rights activist Billie Holiday.¹⁸

The life and work of the African-American poet Gwendolyn Brooks was featured in May 2008.¹⁹ Other multimodal features detailed the life and music of Bob Dylan,²⁰ the African-American singer and radical civil rights activist Paul Robeson,²¹ and a special on “Rosa Parks, 1913-2005: Mother of the American Civil Rights Movement.”²² Reports on the arts also use visuals and music, such as “Christo, Jeanne-Claude's Art Helps People See Their Surroundings in New Ways.”²³ This largely non-fiction textual world, integrating audio, builds a wide window onto intercultural awareness in leaner discourse. As with BASIC 850, radical progressive texts could be translated into Special English, and made readily available for extensive critical reading.

Virtually all past feature articles since 1 January 2001 are accessible in print form in the SE archive online at the site, now with 5,400+ articles, many with accompanying audio. The texts are based about 97.5 percent on vocabulary contained in or derivable from the Special English *Word Book*, and include some 2-3 percent of less familiar lexical items not in the *Word Book* and relevant to the subject. This is also in keeping with the finding that learners read and listen most comfortably and for pleasure if they know some 98 percent of the lexis (Nation, 2001, p. 7), with roughly one unfamiliar word for every 50-60 running words of text. SE fits that requirement, though often there is one lexeme beyond the *Word Book* core vocabulary in every 30-40 running words of text. Most articles and graded stories also contain a few lexical items above the core 1,500 headwords, so they provide a stepping stone to learning a few new words relevant to the specific topic. Many feature articles, such as on health, music, development, or agriculture, invite acquirers to engage in ‘narrow reading’ (Krashen, 1997, 2004b, 2004c) and ‘narrow listening’ (Krashen, 1996), focusing extensively on a more delimited subject area of their particular interest. An online site from Japan offers numerous quizzes and other material based on VOA Special English texts, including a list of biographies by profession of the individuals featured on VOA.²⁴ Interestingly, the VOA *Wordbook* with all its definitions employs 2,528 different words; well beyond the 1,500 lexical items the *Wordbook* defines (personal communication, Steven Neufeld, 19 October 2009). Almost all of these are included in the Billuroğlu-Neufeld list (BNL) of the 2,709 most frequent words in English (Eldridge & Neufeld, 2009, p. 226).

4.5 A more ‘progressive’ analogue to Special English?

It would be desirable to have a left-political source online looking at global issues, written in an easier mode akin to VOA Special English, but none today exists. A laudable but now defunct

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paradigm is “Global Issues for Learners of English,” a spin-off website based on the *New Internationalist*. This website, still accessible,²⁵ operated from 1997 to 2002, and was then discontinued. It could be revived. “The Story of Jeans,” a feature in easier English critical of international garment sweatshop manufacture, is one prototype of their work.²⁶

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Such a model for mass ELF instruction needs to be experimented with in pilot projects in countries like Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Brazil and other corners of the Two-Thirds World. A small mini-center for research on simplified ‘convivial’ teaching models for English along these learner lines needs to be set up somewhere in the Global South. It can encourage piloting and experimentation, all at minimal cost.

A ‘critical TESOL of social solidarity’ with our students, their working families and fellow teachers, grounded more on “mutuality, connectedness, and psychological sense of community” (Fox et al., 2009, p. 6),²⁷ calls out for new directions to truly benefit the greater mass of less privileged learners. Dialogue on such pedagogies in teaching EIL and empirical grassroots research needs to be generated, including empirical work on the efficacy of Grzega’s model outside Germany, a strong alternative mini-mode for Tier One, and on VOA Special English utilizing insights from Lexitronics and the fresh approaches being developed by Eldridge & Neufeld (2009; see also Neufeld & Billuroğlu, 2006). A recent master’s project paper at U of Malaya explores the impact of SE texts as an alternative source for texts in a college-level IELTS international proficiency exam preparation program (Syahro, 2009), based on an exacting statistical experimental design. The study offers convincing data for the efficacy of extended reading of SE texts to improve reading proficiency in a short time.

Such experimentation in language-learning transformation should best be sparked from the bottom-up, grounded on working families’ autonomy and dignity, beyond neo-liberal/colonial corporate educational agendas that predominate inside global English teaching. This is a critical TESOL counter to the discourse needs of the cultures of bourgeois control, “people as portfolios” (Gee, 2000, p. 61). It runs against the elitist meritocratic orientation in the dominant currents of practice in global ELT pedagogy and its ideologies. It seeks to overcome the pervasive “Matthew Effect” in ELF instruction in many low-income topographies of teaching. Relevant ideas could be appropriated from Finn’s (2009) conceptions of civic courage and self-transformation through “literacy with an attitude,” Christensen’s (2009) proletarian pedagogy for social justice, a radical and

liberatory “pedagogy of Multiliteracies” (New London Group, 2000), and Freire’s vision of “empowering the powerless *as a class* so they can stand up for themselves” (Finn, 1999, p. 172).

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¹ This is a substantially revised version of paper submitted to National English Language Teachers and Lecturers Conference, Faculty of Letters, State Univ. of Malang, Indonesia, 21 March 2009.

² Listen to Feeney's powerful song "War on the Workers," retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://home.earthlink.net/~unionmaid/id1.html> . On class war from above, Wolff (2009).

³ "What the new capitalism requires is that people see and define themselves as a flexibly re-arrangeable portfolio of the skills, experiences, and achievements they have acquired through their trajectory through project space as team members of communities of practice" (Gee, 2000, p. 61).

⁴ See <http://bdosintmonitors.blogspot.com/2009/10/india-maoist-insurgency-update-18th.html> , retrieved October 24, 2009.

⁵ Retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://sagefromrage.wordpress.com/2008/06/17/a-different-kind-of-language-learning-classroom> . A 2009 Eurostat survey indicates many EU citizens do not speak any foreign languages whatsoever. Hungary ranks first, with 75% of the adult respondents (aged 25-64) saying they speak only Hungarian. It is followed by the UK (65%), Portugal (51%), Spain (47%), Bulgaria (44%), Greece (43%), and France (41%). See *Sofia Morning News*, 25 September 2009, retrieved 17 October, 2009, from http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=108141

⁶ TESOL = Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages; TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) are also commonly used abbreviations.

⁷ Throughout Africa today, a huge paradigm shift in grassroots communication patterns via mobile phones is transforming the frameworks of discourse – and peoples' life worlds -- at an unprecedented pace (Ibrahim, 2009). Never before have working people, rural and urban, been so cheaply and massively interconnected, if this potential can be utilized for their own interests

⁸ The model proposed here seeks to strip 'knowing English' of part of its commodity character, and radically simplify and 'deprofessionalize' the basic tool. In my view, socialist critical pedagogies need to look far more carefully at Illich's analyses of how cults of productivity and technocracy

control and dis-empower ordinary working-class people. Social anarchism has long appreciated his insights.

⁹ In a more neo-liberal envelope within the corporate university, tackling unnecessary complexity and simplifying communication are core concerns of the new Simplification Centre at the University of Reading <http://www.reading.ac.uk/simplification/sim-home.asp> . This is a right-on initiative, but scholars working in “information design” could tend more to the needs of the working majorities instead of their corporate and government clientele. Simplification and ‘plain language’ should not become part of a new ‘leaner discourse’ consultancy enterprise.

¹⁰ ‘Downshifting’ is a term used in ecology for the attempt to create a simpler, more environmentally attuned and sustainable quality of life (Sevier, 2008).

¹¹ See *Between peasants. A dialogue on anarchy*. Johannesburg: Zabalaza Books. Retrieved October 24, 2009, from http://www.zabalaza.net/pdfs/varpams/between_peasants_em.pdf Zabalaza Books has numerous downloadable social anarchist classic and contemporary texts.

¹² For a special 50th birthday broadcast, see <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/2009-10-15-voa5.cfm> .

¹³ See http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/developing_countries.htm ; on land-locked LDCs, see http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/developing_countries.htm .

¹⁴ See “Resistance if suppression,” *The Red Star*, 9 September 2009, retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://tinyurl.com/ygfn7e> . Nepal has one of the highest percentages of child labor, and children who thus never go to school; that situation is part of the socialist struggle of the UNCP (Maoist) to transform education radically; see <http://www.nepalvista.com/realnepal/child.php> , retrieved October 24, 2009. The ongoing social and educational struggle in Nepal may signal alternative directions within the grassroots Maoist social revolution expanding in South Asia, but few groupings on the Marxist left in the Euro-Atlantic world pay much attention to developments on the ground in India, Bangladesh and Nepal; see REVSA. An Internationalist Info Project, <http://southasiarev.wordpress.com/> .

¹⁵ See also <http://lexitronics.org> and <http://lexitronics.edublogs.org/> . They have a course based on 2,709 key words, and soon will be developing e-readers online: <http://lexitronics.edublogs.org/research-in-action/> . This may provide the basis for a ‘three-tier’ controlled approach, with a high plateau at the BNL level of 2,700 lexemes.

¹⁶ On GDM, see their website (in Japanese), retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://www.gdm-japan.net/media/index.html> ; see also Yuzuru Katagiri's website, likewise in Japanese:

<http://www.kyoto-seika.ac.jp/yuzuru/>

¹⁷ Retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/2007-12-01-voa1.cfm>

¹⁸ Retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/archive/2007-03/2007-03-25-voa1.cfm>

¹⁹ Retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/2008-05-17-voa1.cfm>

²⁰ Retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/archive/2008-06/2008-06-08-voa2.cfm> ; <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/archive/2008-06/2008-06-12-voa1.cfm>

²¹ Broadcast on October 25 and November 1, 2008, retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/2008-10-25-voa1.cfm> , and part II,

<http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/2008-11-01-voa1.cfm>

²² Broadcast 7 March 2009, retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/2009-03-07-voa1.cfm>

²³ Broadcast on October 28, 2008, retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/2008-10-28-voa1.cfm>

²⁴ See 'Interesting Things for ESL Students,' retrieved October 21, 2009, from <http://www.manythings.org/> . The VOA archive from 2000 to the present is also handily available here: <http://www.manythings.org/voa/scripts/> .

²⁵ Retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://www.newint.org/easier-english/contents.html>

²⁶ Retrieved October 24, 2009, from <http://www.newint.org/easier-english/Garment/jeansintro.html>

²⁷ On critical psychology, a key field for critical pedagogy, see also the Radical Psychology Network, <http://www.radpsynet.org/> ; a standard introduction to critical psychology is Prilleltensky & Nelson (2002); for a well-established current of Marxist kritische psychologie in Germany, explore <http://www.kritische-psychologie.de/> .

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