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***Working with new forms of online engagement:  
the challenges of web residency***

**Matthew Platts, Sally Reynolds, Simon Williams**

Earlier this year, three members of SCLS participated in a small-scale HEA-funded project, one of a series intended to encourage the development of digital literacies among staff and students in their disciplines. As many readers will know, all courses offered by SCLS have a dedicated Study Direct site, offering a forum and serving as a repository for course materials and information. Student and tutor use of the sites, however, is variable. Discussion forums are generally quite active at the start of the academic year, but activity tails off in the Spring term. There is anecdotal evidence that some students make alternative use of Facebook for social and course-related discussion.

White and Le Cornu (2011, available at <http://firstmonday.org/article/view/3171/3049>), offering the notion of 'visitors' and 'residents' to replace the maligned 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants', have developed a simple four-quadrant figure on which web users plot their own online engagement ([https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B\\_sfm89i9DC9YmVhczg2ak5DTIE/edit](https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_sfm89i9DC9YmVhczg2ak5DTIE/edit)) and the project sought to collect data based on these maps. One of the authors piloted a mapping workshop in a foundation-level English language class in March 2014. Eight maps were produced, with a handful making reference to Twitter and most with an empty resident/institutional quadrant. Two subsequent workshops were conducted. A lunchtime workshop for SCLS MA ELT students took place two days later. Eight students and two

others, a visiting Erasmus tutor and a student friend of one of the students, completed maps on this occasion. In the email invitation to the workshop, it was suggested that participants read the blog <http://goo.gl/Wom15> and watch the 7-minute video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nmbc1oiwdxc>. The 10-minute film <http://goo.gl/9a1D1X> was shown at the start of the workshop. Two more MA ELT students completed maps in the same room with one of the authors present on later dates. It is difficult to generalize the map content, though most reproduced an L-shape (visitor/institutional/resident) with an empty resident/institutional quadrant (see Fig.1) and there were a handful of references to Facebook. Chinese students included the alternatives Weibo and Wechat.

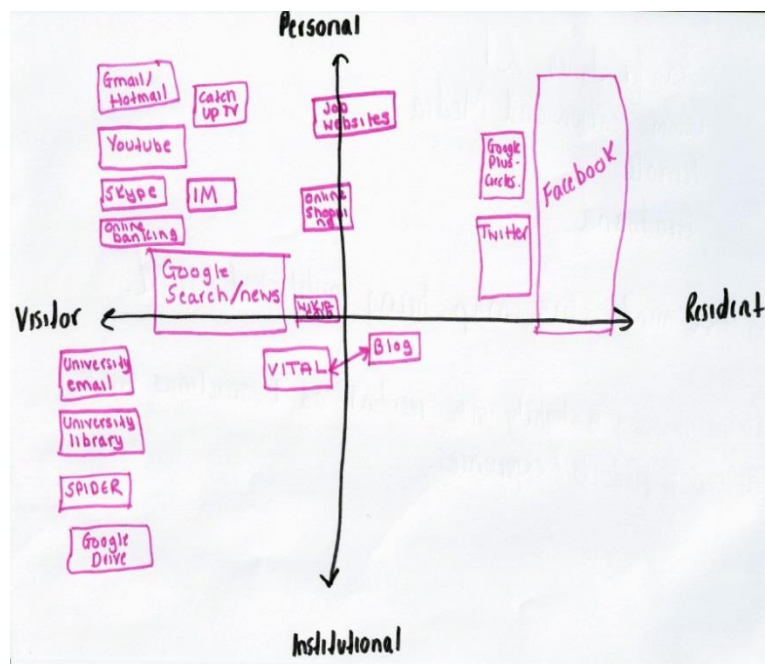


Figure 1: Example of online engagement map (Example maps)

In addition, one of the authors ran a mapping workshop as part of a three-hour class for part-time Masters students in IT at the University of Nantes in April 2014. These students needed little prompting and followed the instructions well, becoming engaged in the task. In this way, 18 maps were produced, having a similar L-shape to the Sussex University maps. One of the students appeared to speak for the group when he commented that it was their intention to leave as little trace as possible on the web. Given that students are reluctant to engage in communication that can be viewed by tutors, it is unsurprising that posts on Moodle forums tend to become more sparse as the academic year wears on. By that time, students have found alternative sites. And recognising the public/institutional nature of HE, it is unsurprising that the bottom left quadrant of most maps is densely populated. It creates a stark contrast with the sparsely populated bottom right resident/institutional quadrant. Yet, the resident/institutional quadrant of some older participants, including a final year research student at Sussex, were exceptionally busy, presumably reflecting the building of an online presence in preparation for a professional career.

As educators, we need to offer students with similar profiles, i.e. final year students, the encouragement and opportunities to be similarly active residents online. Despite some suggestions to provide a Moodle link to Facebook, which is not universally used by or popular with students, it is suggested that as an experiment a small clustered non-contributory assignment activity be provided on an existing Study Direct site. The key features of the

learning activity would be (1) the formation of small student groups (3-4 people), whose assignment site would be visible only to themselves and the tutor; and (2) a requirement for the students to upload a product rather than to engage in the more typical discussion process of a forum (although it is hoped that students would subsequently reflect on the experience). The tutor would provide summative feedback.

As an example of a pilot, a wiki could be set up and students assigned to one of four groups, each group having separate access but no access to the other groups' pages. Groups would have a set period, say 14 days, to work in privacy and construct an academic product that would receive tutor feedback. For an EAP group, the task might be a non-assessed 500-1000 word critical review of one or two accessible papers provided by the tutor. Like the assessed project, the tutor would also provide academic papers as prompts for the wikis, but the papers would be different for each group so that groups would not confer. Although student work on the wikis would be non-assessed, tutor feedback could be used by students to improve their performance on possible future individual projects; and working on the wiki would provide students with the experience of leaving an online trace within the notional Resident/Institutional quadrant, a trace that could subsequently be developed, if the student chose, into a more significant individual presence. The outcome of the pilot would be reported to a departmental teaching and learning group meeting and convenors for other SCLS courses could then consider whether to adopt or adapt the idea for their own use.

As educators, we would have fulfilled part of our responsibility to enable students to participate more fully in their post-course, professional lives, e.g. HEFCE's programme, *Changing the Learning Landscape*, focused on enhancing students' learning and life prospects (<http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/en/programmes-events/your-university/ell/index.cfm>).

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Example maps (n.d.) Available at:

<http://d20uo2axdbh83k.cloudfront.net/20131011/6c26fe8e2665c334491903cd9353a5f9.jpg>

(Accessed 31 July 2014)

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## ***Reading technologies and their effect on the cognitive mapping process***

**Catherine Rogers**

There is no denying that we are living in the digital age, and devices such as Kindles, iPads, laptops, tablets and android phones, and services such as Twitter and digital libraries are no longer even second-nature to the vast majority of young people in the UK; they are almost *first-nature* and provide many advantages, both to young people's social lives and their academic lives. We can be connected to technology almost everywhere; it has become ubiquitous and we are interacting with digital screens like never before in history. However, this has resulted in mixed reactions and deeply divided opinions in society (particularly within the field of education) regarding the effects that leading a digital life, being connected twenty four hours a day to a screen, can have on the process of learning itself, as learners are often more familiar with using technology for their social lives than for their education. This debate surrounding on-screen viewing and reading behaviour is particularly acute in Higher Education, with this paradigmatic shift in students' connection to and reliance on digital devices and technologies presenting learners and educators with both challenges and opportunities. Hillesund sums this up well by stating:

*the computer alters the materiality, physical handling, and ultimately reading of text. Having little of the tactile materiality of printed text, digital text is a volatile virtual image of an electronically stored text. Thus, digital texts are highly editable, extremely moveable and — through the linking system of the Web — globally accessible. (Hillesund 2010: n.p.)*

Brabazon (2013) describes a common sight in many classrooms across campuses: that of students using their android phones to capture power point slides, or, in my case, board work that I have done in class. Instead of noting down the information themselves (in instances where I do not have access to an IWB, or choose to use a whiteboard instead), either verbatim or in an annotated note form, they ‘capture’ the information. Brabazon is quite rightly concerned that photographing text does not ‘constitute remembering ... or understanding it in-depth’ (40). In my case, I always directly ask my students what they are planning on doing with the image(s) they have of the work. They usually reply that they will look at them later, yet, as Brabazon suggests, when I have questioned them at a later time, they have almost all forgotten about the images they had taken. By merely taking photographs of text, one cannot ‘possess’ it.

Over the last nine years of teaching in Higher Education in the UK, I have observed many changes in the way that learners interact with technology in the classroom. As an English language and study skills tutor, I have witnessed the shift from reading from paper to reading from a screen and have observed that learners appear to be less connected to and more distracted by a text they are reading on screen than if they are reading on paper. This led me to question whether reading and annotating from printed paper increases understanding, compared to reading (and annotating, if the digital platform supports this) from a screen. This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are learners adopting or rejecting new reading technologies?
2. What impact does the reading medium have on the message?
3. Is there a need for some form of critical digital literacy in light of these findings?

It also investigates how technology is changing reading behaviour in Higher Education and the implications this has for teaching and learning. It makes use of a wide body of literature related to issues surrounding the use, adoption and rejection of digital reading technologies in Higher Education today.

The paper begins with an attempt to de-construct the concept of the ‘digital native’. It continues with an overview of the roles of digital reading technologies in Higher Education and the impact these have on reading strategies and reading skills. Finally, in light of the findings, an attempt to re-construct the ‘digital native’ has been made, along with suggestions on how to improve the integration of digital reading technologies as well as provision for a critical reading literacy. While information literacy is part of the wider debate, this will not be discussed in any depth in this paper; but the debate surrounding provision for a critical digital literacy within Higher Education will be. This paper is written from the point of view of a digital native, albeit one with a slight accent, who resides comfortably both inside and outside the university classroom and lecture theatre.

## **References**

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## ***Cultural Awareness and Teacher Training Pedagogies***

**Jules Winchester**

Abstract from paper presented at BAAL IC SIG Annual Seminar:  
*Language Teaching and Language Learning*, University of Edinburgh, March 2014.

The main aim of the talk is to explore the role of (critical) cultural awareness in teacher training pedagogies. Based on the assumption that language teachers want to develop their students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC), it behoves the teacher trainer to discover what constitutes effective and appropriate communication (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009) in the context(s) within which the future teachers will operate, and to evaluate teacher training pedagogies accordingly. There has been a long-held tendency within the communicative language teaching approach to regard the Native Speaker as the model for judging appropriateness (Byram 1997), as well as a type of methodological imperialism which assumes that the approach is an effective one on which to base teacher training courses.

The pilot study on which the talk is based questions these premises. Within the modified communicative language teaching approach adopted on an MA in ELT teacher training module, the envisaged location(s) of the trainees' future teaching and the roles of teachers and students are considered. Moreover, the teacher trainer encourages cultural awareness and reflection by providing a balance of challenge and support in feedback (Hua 2014). Based on the provisional outcomes of the study, the implication for teachers-in-training and the ICC of their future students is that (critical) cultural awareness should be an essential part of any teacher training pedagogy.

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## ***Gender in the language of the British liberal press: Beta males and why sometimes it's hard to be a woman***

**Yolanda Cerdá**

Most research into the gendered nature of language since the 1970s gave rise to theoretical frameworks focusing primarily on the differences between men and women's linguistic practices. These have come under increasing scrutiny, and recent accounts critique the adherence to a rather reductive concept of gender both as a single, binary male-female opposition and as a problematic analytic category in itself (Hawkesworth 1997).

Current postmodern or post-structuralist approaches focus on the notion of gender as a far more complex function of social categories including class, age, sexuality as well as context, and individual identity. Gender has become a more fluid concept in relation to identity: something ‘performed...and / or displayed in spoken and written texts’ (Sunderland 2006: 22). Thus, recent theorists problematize the key concepts of gender and sex, and there has been a marked turn towards viewing texts and language as a form of identity construction which is inflected by many of the other aspects of identity mentioned. As well as this ‘intersectionality’ (Block 2013) and the espousal of performativity theories (Butler 1990), (gendered) identity construction and representation are increasingly regarded as context-specific, resisting the reductionism of ‘natural’ attitudes or difference theories (i.e. which, to put it rather crudely, hold that men and women talk differently because they are biologically different). Despite these new directions and the influential appeal of performativity accounts, there is still the problem of the social and psychological constraints on identity enactments. In other words, the ‘performance’ of gender (whether through language or other means) can only succeed in as far as it is recognised and accepted, and the impact of sex and the body is not easily ignored.

Nevertheless, Freed (2003:700) points out that this apparent paradigm shift has had a minimal impact on the minds of the general public and even many ‘trade, academic...[and] scholarly publications’. One proposed explanation is that print media continues to express and (inherently) promote a persistent obsession with the differences between the sexes, as well as supporting hegemonic masculinities and femininities which ultimately reproduce consensual and (de)limited gender roles and identities.

My research aims to identify and analyse the representations and enactments of gender, or masculinities and femininities, in the UK liberal press (mainly texts from *The Guardian* and *The Independent*) in the last few years. It will do so by considering the texts in relation to hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity, as well as their relationship to naturalised hegemonic ideologies and feminism. To do so, I am taking a critical discourse analysis approach to the texts, hoping to achieve an analysis which may help elucidate or ‘demystify’, in Fairclough’s terms (2001), some of the discursive structures involved in the construction of gender roles and identities in the liberal media, revealing discourses which potentially operate dialectically to affect the *real* role, representation and creation of gendered identities in society. An initial study of small data sets has already pointed to some potential patterns – e.g. the widespread contemporary view of masculinity in crisis, the empowerment (or rather disempowerment) of women through consumerism, etc.

Broadly speaking, at this stage, my research questions include:

- What dominant masculinities and femininities emerge in the liberal press and how do they intersect with other identity constructs such as class, etc.?
- Do the texts reveal the possibility of a sophisticated joint theorizing of (male and female) gender?
- Do these representations of gender show support or resistance to dominant gender ideologies?

### Relation to language teaching and learning

Although this research project is broadly sociolinguistic and not directly related to the practice of language teaching, the methodological frameworks it will use (i.e. discourse analysis and corpus linguistics) relate directly to different empirical ways to study and

understand language and texts, which are useful to any language learner or teacher. At the core of these approaches is the belief that language is not neutral, that it is rooted in the social and that it reveals patterns with particular, though not always obvious, social meanings. The connection of texts and language themselves to identity constructions and representations are also a potentially valuable way in which to analyse learners' linguistic productions and teacher beliefs and identities (for example) in ways that (ideally) go beyond the superficial or purely linguistic.

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## From our students

### *The 'motionisation' of verbs: A contrastive study of thinking-for-speaking relativity between English and Tunisian Arabic.*

Imed Louhichi (PhD Linguistics)

Summary of thesis; completed October 2014

This thesis investigates Linguistic Relativity – the idea that the grammatical system of a language influences aspects of thought patterns and communicative behaviour. It examines the **linguistic conceptualisation** of motion events in English and Tunisian Arabic (TA) in order to contribute to current debates in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and its associated field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The main research questions are whether in learning a typologically different language, the conceptualisation acquired through first languages (L1) interferes with the learning of the conceptualisation inherent in a second language (L2).

In order to address these questions, I adopt three analytical frameworks: a grammatical framework based on Talmy's binary distinction between *verb-framed* and *satellite-framed* languages, a discourse framework based on Berman and Slobin's application of Talmy's typology to verbal behaviour; and a 'Whorfian' framework based on Slobin's *Thinking-for-Speaking* (TfS) hypothesis. A fundamental claim of the TfS hypothesis is that the grammar of a language and the discourse preferences of its speakers play a fundamental role in shaping **linguistic thinking**. From this follows the prediction that L1-based conceptualisation resists change when a typologically different L2 is learnt in adulthood.

A comparison of the TfS behaviours of speakers of L1-English (L1-Eng), L1-TA, and ‘advanced’ L2-English (L2-Eng) whose L1 is TA support this prediction. Based on the notion of ‘motionisation’ – a term I coin in order to describe a conceptual strategy L1 speakers of English use when TfS about events – I show that the TfS behaviour of L1 and L2 speakers of English differ in more ways than one largely due to the conceptualisation inherent in their respective L1s. The findings reported here have implications for L2 English learners, in general, and, in particular, for learners of English whose L1 may be characterised as a verb-framed language.

Supervisors: Jules Winchester and Lynne Murphy

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### **Forthcoming events at SCLS: Monday 12<sup>th</sup> January 2015 Symposium on Intercultural Communicative Competence in Action**

Exploring the role of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in language teaching and teacher education at university level with the objective that participants gain a clear understanding of the relationship between theory and research into ICC and how these might relate to practice. It is envisaged that the symposium will appeal to all language teaching practitioners; researchers, teachers and teacher trainers, and particularly to those involved in the higher education sector.

Keynote speakers:

[Mike Byram](#) (Emeritus Professor, University of Durham) and Dr [Will Baker](#) (University of Southampton).

Book online here: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/languages/newsandevents/events?id=26891>

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**Details of future *Research on ELT and Language and Culture* talks available on the SCLS website:**

Sussex Centre for Language Studies: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/languages/>

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