

THE IMPACT OF CYBER-GENRE ON LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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Abstract

New cyber-genres such as emails and web pages have long been generated by the interaction of people through the discourses of business, government, and media. When at the moment schools have access to expertise in the advancement of Information technology, the interaction of schools and the internet is also enhanced. The paradigm creates a new practice in the use of language and literacy. Positive attitude of English teachers, experts in English education and information technology, and the government towards the new paradigm should critically be formulized. Therefore, this paper tries to provide some annotation on how the new literacy practice could be facilitated to students.

Key Word: cyber-genres, literacy

BACKGROUND

Business, government and media have long made use of computer to generate their emails and web pages for the purpose of maintaining communication and promotion. Such communication paradigm has put a high value on the dynamic nature of human communication in the context of cyber-era (Zhou 2005). People thought it was significantly effective to introduce something, to negotiate a transaction, to promote a product or to report a progress through a cyber media. They even think it is still effective today.

Recently educational institutions begin implementing computer to generate emails and web pages to promote their institutions and to maintain communication. Only some educational institutions are challenged to develop e-learning system and multimedia-based learning, which are unquestionably important for the educational institutions' facilities. In response to the need of providing sufficient facilities and of developing the quality of education and the online educational program in Indonesia the government has provided a billion rupiahs for the implementation of computer and internet in 10,000 senior and junior high schools in Indonesia in 2008 (Checep 2005). This in turn brings the transformation process of conventional education to a digital system. As a result teachers of high schools are

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challenged to provide materials thought to be appropriately associated or linked with e-learning system or multi media system. Software companies in Indonesia are also challenged to participate in developing the supporting networking system and software (Wahono 2008).

There are, of course, some interesting points to consider in relation to the internet access and computer use in support of the implementation of e-learning system and multimedia-based learning. First, Indonesia is known as a good place for cybercrimes though the penetration of internet use is only 8% or relatively low (Wahono 2007). Second, we can still find many people who are computer illiterate. This may mean there are people, including teachers, who are unable to operate a computer let alone accessing internet resources. Third, out of the school environments, such as families or malls, also provide opportunities in computer usage and internet access.

It is actually a good momentum for the authority in this beloved country to get the benefit from the situation before its young generation become addicted with cyber games and pornography since there are many internet cafés founded almost everywhere offering opportunities for those two negative aspects of computer use and internet access. The authority of this beloved country has done something good in respect to the computer use and internet access by enforcing law and employing technological approach. Both are expected to counter attack the cybercrimes and pornography. However, socio-cultural approach could be effectively applied to make teachers learn how to use computer to develop their teaching materials and to make our young generation fully aware of the benefits of computer use and internet access. Therefore, socio-cultural approach must be reformulated operationally by those involved in educational system in Indonesia including English teachers. They should think by now what materials, assignments, activities and communication could be made creative to keep teachers and students busy with their computer or internet. Once this new paradigm is maintained a new practice in the use of language and literacy is also created.

Thus, positive attitude of English teachers, experts in English education and information technology, and the government towards the new paradigm should critically be formulized. They may think of what cyber genres can be facilitated to students of high schools and how they are linked to the e-learning system or multi media system.

EMAIL AND CHATTING AS CYBER-GENRES

Cyber-genres are genres created by computer usage and used in cyberspace. Some popular types of cyber genres known by people are e-mail, chatting, e-news item and e-zime (an electronic version of a magazine delivered through World Wide Web pages). Emails are potential to adopt for English language learning and teaching mainly because emails facilitate students with technical skills, communicative competence and language literacy.

1. E-mail

E-mail, the short form for **electronic mail** and often abbreviated to *e-mail*, *email* or simply *mail*, is a store and forward method of composing, sending, storing, and receiving messages over electronic communication systems (Wikipedia 2008-a). The term e-mail, which can be used as a noun or verb, applies both to the internet e-mail system and is often used in conjunction with World Wide Web pages allowing users within one organization to e-mail each other.

Having the expertise to what email is we need to be literate in some way in computer usage, internet access, and most importantly email writing that we can benefit from this electronic mail. By bringing the students to a computer laboratory, for instance, the teacher herself and the students may experience a new paradigm of teaching and learning how to write an email to a friend. This, of course, means leading to a new practice of language use and literacy. Both the teacher and students can learn how to use computer appropriately, access internet for an intended purposes, learn how to make an email address and learn how to write, send and read emails. In short, there are many we can do for this kind of cyber genre, email. The following email is provided as an example.

Subject: Thank you and hello
To: jeather@iprimus.com.au
From: Zach <ddrf3521@go2net.com>
Date: Sat, 2 Aug 2008 05: 08: 11

Hello Mrs. Eather,

My name is Zach and I am a grade 6 student. I would like to thank you very much for making your math dictionary for kid website.

This website helped me a lot when I was stuck on my math project and I forgot a few basic math things. Where did I get help?

OBVIOUSLY! I got it from <http://www.amathsdictionaryforkids.com>.

I have attached my project. I hope you like it.

Yours truly,
Zachary Dorfler
📎myproject.doc (100kb)

A teacher may teach her students how to write and send an on line email, thus by connecting to the internet, or teach how to write an email as a part of a text type that she could group into the other text types such as recount and narrative within a hypertext.

2. Chatting

Chatting is another form of cyber genre. Unlike email, which has a clearer generic structure potential, chatting tends to occur within the pattern of a casual exchange. The dialogues occur within adjacency pairs and contain unlimited topics of discussion. People who are involved in a chatting usually use the language as if they were in a casual exchange but they frequently display emoticons in their sentences. Emoticon is a combination of the English words *emotion* (or *emote*) and *icon*. It is a symbol or combination of symbols used to convey emotional content in written or message form (Wikipedia 2008-b).

Below are some popular emoticons and their meanings.

| <u>Icon</u> | <u>Meaning</u> |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| : -) | Classic smile |
| : - (| Classic sad |
| : ' -) | Happy crying |
| - O | Yawn |
| : - D | Laughter (originally 'big smile') |
| % - (or : - S | Confused |
| - - - | Asleep |
| : - @ | Scream |
| : - | Indifferent |
| : - 0 | Surprised |

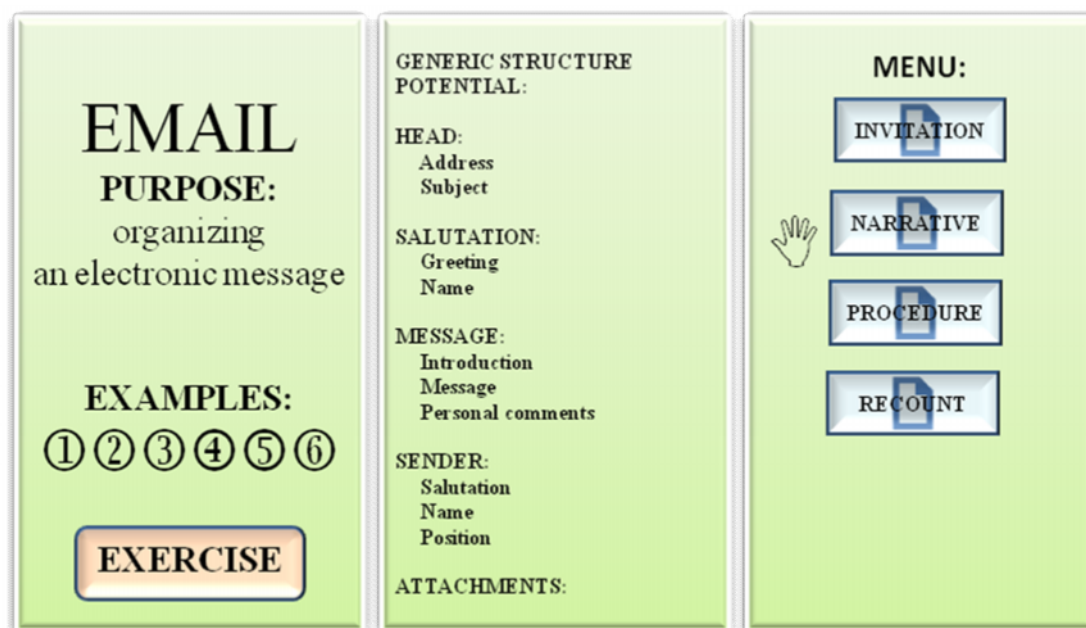
| | |
|---------------------|--|
| ; -) | Winking smile with nose |
| 8D | Awesome |
| :P | Tongue sticking out (silly or feeling lousy) |
| : -X | My lips are sealed |
| x-(| Angry, bummed out |
| : -* | Kiss |
| O.O or o.o | Shocked |
| : -\$ | Money mouth (being greedy for money) |
| (-_-) | A bored face |
| Oo | Interested, the equivalent of raising an eyebrow |
| (-.-) | The showing of annoyance |
| ~.^ | Alternate wink (almost crying from laughter) |
| D: | Total fear |
| ()--,'--- or @-->-- | Rose/Flower |
| ±_± | Tiredness |

Chatting can be taught to students with the main purpose to help them express their feelings and wants or messages using informal style of English for communication. The contents of the chatting can be controlled and supervised by the teacher in a language laboratory.

HYPertext

Hypertext is a method of making documents which allows the grouping and organization of text, graphics, sound and video and links the elements together so that they can be accessed in a non-linear fashion. This method is definitely important for developing language materials, for instance, within e-learning system or multimedia learning. A teacher can use this method to help her students understand the social purpose of an academic genre, its generic structure potential, its lexical elements and grammatical elements. Even she can design an exercise linked to the academic genres designed within the hypertext.

The following is an illustration of how an email is designed in a hypertext.



When, in the main menu, we click the email box, the above display appears. The first box from the left displays the purpose of an email, i.e. to organize an electronic message. When we click button ① of the six buttons of the email examples, we are directed to an email example one:

To : jeather@iprimus.com.au
 Subject : Your Site
 Date : Mon, 6 Oct 2003 18:34:54 EDT
 From : Ericyah0047@cs.com

Hi Jenny,

I like your site. It is good.

From Eric

When we click button ② of the six buttons of the email examples, we are directed to an email example two:



From : PeachyG <Pea789f194@aol.com>
 Date : Thu, 8 May 2003 09:23:12
 To : jeather@iprimus.com.au

Subject : Help please!

Hello Jenny,

I always use this site for my homework!
ME AND MY SISTER THINK IT IS PERFECT
Help please. How do you write adjectives????

From Peachy girl

When we click  (the exercise button), we will be directed to different exercises on writing head, salutation, message and sender. The middle box displays the generic structure potential of email. The right box displays the main menu with buttons  indicating text types, such as (email), invitation, procedure, narrative and recount buttons. When we click one particular part of the email, for instance [Hello Jenny](#), we will be directed to the display of generic structure potential under **SALUTATION: Greeting - Name**. In short, almost every important part of the display may be clicked and directed to another intended display. This process of clicking on a button and redirecting the click to an intended display is the prototypical procedure of a hypertext. With hypertext students are expected to have fun with their own learning materials.

THE IMPACT OF CYBER-GENRES ON LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Nowadays schools have access to expertise in computer use and advancement of information technology. As a result the interaction of schools and the internet is also enhanced. The paradigm creates a new practice in the use of language and literacy. School academists and academia, in this new paradigm, are challenged to use language in different cyber genres. They may also be challenged to employ different levels and kinds of literacy.

With this new paradigm school academists and academia are naturally forced to use their language within performative, functional, informational and epistemic levels. At the same time they have to also demonstrate their literacy skills in operating computer, browsing the internet, creating different types of cyber genres, creating an email address, sending their messages, opening their mailboxes, etc. So mastering the expertise of cyber genres and being a computer and internet literate for a school academist to date is a must. Therefore, experts from different disciplines such as linguists, English teachers and experts from computer

science should work within a team project in order to create appropriate English learning and teaching materials.

1. Positive attitudes of English teachers

Recently English teachers realize more that the new electronic forms of communication, emails, are rapidly becoming an established part of the cultural capital of the postmodern world (Emihovich, 1990). The new literacies give not only new forms of readership, but new writing processes which are redefining the genres and forms of knowledge at the heart of our education systems. This may become a new paradigm that the new communicative functions, such as 'flaming' in email exchanges, and new forms of 'netiquette' for net communications turn to be 'teleliterate' (Beazley, 1996: 23) as an essential learning experience, and one that should be a prime focus in classroom lessons taught by net-literate teachers.

2. The role of experts in computer science

As has been explained, experts in computer science now begin to work hand in hand with English teachers to develop English language learning and teaching through a multi media system. Some materials have been commercially produced and are now available in bookstores. Not all of them are appropriate for their school-based curriculum that they have to innovatively create their own materials.

3. The role of authorities

In pedagogical terms, the linguistic and cognitive demands of email, as a new electronic genre, present language and literacy teachers with new opportunities for authentic communication to be incorporated in student projects (Kroonenberg, 1994), as well as to perform important tasks for teacher development in the exchange occurring at increasing rates on email forums. Using email and computer networks with language and literacy students, it is possible to shift the focus of control from the teacher to the students, achieving higher levels of collaboration between students, and disengaging teachers from their traditional role of assessor and censor of student work. What is becoming possible, it is claimed, is a more collaborative approach to learning tasks in teacher-student exchanges on

computer networks (Snyder, 1994: 187). The government, school principals and English teachers should take the roles in facilitating this pedagogical project that students may gain benefit from it.

4. New literacy practice for students

Email, chatting and hypertext can create a new literacy practice for both students and teachers. Their literacy level both in language use and computer technology are supposed to be greatly developed when this new paradigm of e-learning system and multimedia-based learning are implemented at every school in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

As the Internet and similar networks become a major means of knowledge production and information retrieval in our education systems, e-learning system and multimedia-based learning are implemented at every school, the new literacies will quickly become an integral part of a globalised curriculum. Significant problems to be addressed, therefore, include ensuring that sufficient high quality material is available on the net, and that equity of access to the net by different types of schools (urban/rural; rich/poor) is attempted. The role of government will be vital, particularly since, to date, the government policies in this area have lacked focus and resources. The impact of information technology on traditional schooling in general, and on language and literacy education in particular, will be considerable.

It is critical, therefore, that language and literacy teachers enter the debates about educational applications of the internet, e-learning system and multimedia-based learning and in particular develop responses to the following crucial questions:

- What role should internet resources play in the language and literacy curriculum?
- What are the professional development needs of language and literacy teachers for internet use?
- How can we best teach new electronic genres in language and literacy classrooms?
- How can we ensure equitable access to internet resources?

What is at stake here is the future shape of the new literacies in the classroom, with equitable access for language and literacy education students to significant new forms of

cultural capital. Language and literacy teachers must respond to the demands of the new cyber-genres and the computer-mediated curriculum which utilizes educational networks.

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