

Netlinguistics and English for Internet Purposes

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Abstract

This paper proposes the development of a new field of research and study within applied linguistics: netlinguistics¹. This is to be a functional, stylistic and pragmatic linguistic and sociolinguistic analytical framework concerned with the technology of Internet, the lexicological production of new e-terms, the evolution of cybergenres, digital tenor (as manifested in the informalisation process of Internet discourse), digital mode (as realised via hypertext and hyperlinks), the power relations established between different digital communities, and the overall *Englishisation* of Internet. Complementarily, the paper describes some of the pedagogical implications of netlinguistic research in the teaching of English for Internet Purposes in ESP/LSP teaching contexts and other language learning settings.

Key Words: Netlinguistics, English for Specific Purposes, English for Internet Purposes, Genre Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Stylistics

Resumen

Este artículo propone un nuevo campo de investigación y análisis dentro del ámbito de la lingüística aplicada. Esta nueva área representa un enfoque funcional, estilístico y pragmático sobre el que se construye un marco de análisis lingüístico y sociolingüístico centrado en el estudio de la tecnología de Internet, la producción lexicográfica de nuevos términos electrónicos, la evolución de los cibergéneros, el tenor digital (tal y como se manifiesta en el proceso de "informalización" del discurso de Internet), el modo digital (tal y como se muestra mediante el hipertexto y los hipervínculos), las relaciones de poder que se establecen entre las diferentes comunidades digitales y el proceso general de "anglicización" de Internet. De forma complementaria, el artículo describe algunas implicaciones pedagógicas que la investigación "metalingüística" tiene para la enseñanza del inglés de Internet en el contexto de IFE y otros co-textos de la enseñanza de lenguas.

Palabras clave: Inglés para Fines Específicos (IFE), Inglés para Internet, análisis de género, análisis crítico del discurso, estilística

A new area in Applied Linguistics

This paper proposes the development of a new field of research and study within applied linguistics. The name suggested for this new area is netlinguistics, since it is to focus on the linguistic analysis of language use in Internet. We believe that netlinguistics is necessary for three major reasons:

- a) because other collateral fields in applied linguistics do not cover the major subjects of netlinguistic interest; these collateral areas may be sociolinguistics and computational linguistics; in section 5 we explain the overlapping elements between netlinguistics, sociolinguistics and computational linguistics describing what features distinguish netlinguistic analysis from the other two applied fields;
- b) second, because in netlinguistics terms and linguistic concepts already in use in different areas of applied research adopt new profiles and realisations; this is the case, for instance, of genre theory, digital tenor and digital mode, or the concepts of speech and discourse communities;
- c) and, third, because the subject of netlinguistic research-i.e., language use in Internet-generates new phenomena which affect language at large; this is the case, for example, of the new realisation of cohesion and coherence through hypertextual referencing links, or the interaction and exchange of information among an ever increasing number of L2 speakers of English through email systems and websites.

Nevertheless, even though it is the contention of this study that netlinguistic deserves a relatively independent status within applied linguistics, no new field of study starts from scratch. Netlinguistics builds on previous linguistic studies and theories from which it may develop and evolve. Accordingly, the next section is devoted to the description of the linguistic theoretical foundations of netlinguistics. It should be understood that, since we are in the inception of netlinguistics, which is yet to grow and, probably, change, complementary theoretical foundations may be necessary for the full development of this new field.

Theoretical foundations of Netlinguistics

Netlinguistics is then presented here as a comprehensive linguistic framework to account for language usage and change in Internet. We believe that although the netlinguist does need to be deeply concerned with the gathering of significant linguistic data, a theoretical background is essential for analyses, interpretation and,

ultimately, the drawing of conclusions. In this respect, we subscribe Jones' and Brendel Viechnicki's (1997: 71) emphasis on the need of sound theoretical background in any linguistic undertaking, especially in the case of discourse analysis:

“The data are said to 'speak for themselves', and, the claim goes, the results of the analysis are thereby purer, unsullied by complicating theory. We are reminded, however, of a quote by Milford Wolpoff: 'The data do not speak for themselves. I have been in rooms with data and listened very carefully. They never said a word' (Milford Wolpoff, 1975). All humour aside, we believe that discourse analysts who strive for completely 'theory-free' analyses are misguided.”

We propose then to resort first to discourse analysis because a central issue in netlinguistics is the analysis of Internet discourse. To be precise, we feel that Fairclough's (1992) critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework is particularly appropriate for this task due to his emphasis on combining what he defines as the textual, discursive and sociodiscursive practices together with a final aim of influencing social change for the better.

From functional grammar, we incorporate the functional interpretation of such concepts as mode, tenor, and the interpersonal and textual functions of language. We are not incorporating the more semantic oriented terms of field, ideational function and transitivity at this stage. However, further developments of netlinguistic theory should pursue the semantic realisation of language at discourse level in Internet.

In relation to genre theory, the first significant concept is Bakhtin's division into primary and secondary genres-relevant to understanding the complex nature of Internet genres (see below). A second essential idea is to interpret the term genre as dynamic (Devitt, 1993), otherwise it becomes impossible to classify and categorise cybergenres. It should also be noted that in relation to genre theory we adopt a descriptive and not a prescriptive perspective. Finally, the netlinguistic framework is completed with the inclusion of the sociolinguistic concepts of speech community and community of practice to account for the different digital communities of Internet users.

English and Internet

English has become the international lingua franca throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. A combination of various reasons has generated this generally accepted outcome. First, the British Empire controlled the seas in the 19th century, and, second,

this control was extended to the first major international long-distance communication network (the telegraph). In the 20th century, the United States have been leading television programming, satellite TV, the film industry and in general-and most especially after World War II-international economy. Then, Americans invented Internet.

We share Lockwood's and Scott's (1999: 8) opinion in that Internet represents the most important human invention in communication since the invention of the printing press in 15th century Europe. Never before in human history have so many people been interconnected, and never before have individuals had so much information and so many resources to communicate with others at their disposal.² At this stage, there are two questions: what is to come of all this and what is now in fact happening. Most probably not even the president of Microsoft has a precise answer for the first question. In relation to the second question, a substantial amount of netlinguistic, sociolinguistic and computational linguistic analysis will be required to obtain a clear picture. Complementarily, sociologists will have to work on the implications of this enormous and constant flow of information for society at large; psychologists may study the effects of Internet usage to individuals, and historians may place the network in the wider context of human existence. In this context, however, linguists may feel a little at a loss as to, first, how to cope with the task of studying all the linguistic phenomena related to Internet and, then, when a relevant study has been carried out where to submit their results or, in other words, with whom to exchange ideas.

Yongyan's (2000: 34) e-invitation for feedback on her keen stylistic study on e-mail discourse illustrates this situation. Significant proposals for a comprehensive description of language use in Internet have already been made and are being made. Baron's (1998, 2001) extensive analysis of email discourse is one of the best examples where linguistic theory is put to work to account for all the linguistic phenomena related to this new mode of communication. Similarly, Shepherd and Watters' (1998) classification for cybergenres is another major step. In a way, such works as Baron's detailed study or Yongyan's message-asking for feedback on her study of email texts-have been readings which have triggered the aim of this paper: to suggest a wider framework where all these related efforts may find a common ground so that future studies may build on the interconnections among these significant previous analyses.

Netlinguistics

Language analysis may be divided into distinct analytical levels: substance, form, discourse, situation and ideology (Haynes, 1989). However, all levels are interdependent -i.e. what happens at the level of substance will necessarily affect the rest of levels and vice-versa. In other words, no matter how we parse language for its study all elements in whatever framework we apply will depend on the rest. Parsing a system such as language-or any other system-is an artificial process, but it is also both enlightening and clarifying for a better understanding of the system itself. Our aim in the following sections is to apply a modified realisation of Haynes's framework-in combination with CDA, functional grammar, genre theory and sociolinguistics-to the analysis of language use in Internet.

1. The technological layer

The substance of language is made up of the signs we use to express meaning. In the case of written discourse the letters of an alphabet represent the substance of language, whereas in the case of spoken discourse sounds carry out that function. In the case of Internet and from the point of view of technology, the set of binary digit combinations by means of which data are recorded and transmitted could be considered to constitute the substance of the net. This technological layer however is not relevant for the average non-computer expert user of Internet. Most users relate with the net by means of a semiotic interface made up of-initially-a set of 128 ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) characters and more recently through the combination of a more ample set of 256 ASCII characters and a set of common icons within the what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG) interface. This technological layer is of significant interest for netlinguistics, since it has far reaching sociolinguistic implications in other layers, most especially at the ideological layer.

One example of this technological-ideological vertical connection in our framework may be summarised as follows: Internet initiated its development on the basis of a 7-bit binary numbers technology which only allowed the use of 128 ASCII characters, many of which had to be applied to organise computer output thus leaving only a limited number for a restricted version of the Latin alphabet. This meant that only the letters and symbols necessary for English language were initially introduced so that letters and accents used in other major Western languages (namely, French, German, Spanish or Portuguese, to mention some) were not included. In fact, as Goodman and

Graddol (1996: 113) have noted, the initial ASCII code was so much American English oriented that only the dollar symbol (\$) was introduced without any pound symbol counterpart (£). It is true that soon an enhanced 8-bit ASCII code with up to 256 characters was generated to allow the use of Western languages other than English. However, as Goodman and Graddol (1996: 114) explain:

Eight-bit ASCII establishes a 'common core' of 128 characters required by US English and a separate nonstandard 'upper set' (of codes 128-255) which are customised for different countries. The lack of standardisation for these 'extra' characters means that the exchange of electronic documents between European countries or even between software systems is still notoriously problematic.

As a consequence, it is feasible to conclude that the arbitrary selection of an initial limited code has favored the use of one Western language over the rest, and certainly over languages with different alphabets or written symbols (e.g. Greek, Russian, Arabic, Hindi, Japanese, Chinese, etc.). This has aided the power of English in Internet. It may not be the major reason but has surely contributed to English supremacy in cyberspace.

Many other vertical connections between the different elements in the netlinguistic framework may be detected and analysed, as well as the various horizontal relationships suggested in figure 1. However, these connections -relevant as they are- are beyond the scope of this paper, which focuses on the description of the framework itself. The analysis of the ASCII-ideology connection above is an illustration of the many other studies which may be undertaken.

2. The terminological layer in netlinguistics

The level of form of language is made up of the following ranks: morphemes, words, word groups, clauses and sentences. In this respect the terminological netlinguistic layer is extremely active in the three lower ranks. In terms of morphemes certain prefixes have become among the most productive in English language: *web-* as a prefix is being systematically added to different nouns as the number of technical terms or professions related to those new terms increase (e.g. *website*, *webpage*, *webmaster*, *webcrawler*, etc.). An even more productive case is that of the abbreviated form of electronic, *e-*, whose initial use in *e-mail* (lexicalised in *email*) has now been extended to an ever increasing number of terms (e.g. *e-commerce*, *e-business*, *e-commerce consultant*, *e-war*, *e-money*, etc.).

In general, when it comes to new words and word-groups, Internet is a constant generator of new terminology. For instance, to the examples above mentioned we could add an endless list of illustrative examples such as *search engine*, *netvertising*, *cybergenre*, *postmaster*, *portal*, *spider* [program], *banner ad*, *MP3 file*, *IP/TCP protocols*, *emoticons*, *chat*, *backer*, *browser*, *network architect*, etc.). Certainly, this is not new in human history and, more specifically, in language development: whenever a new invention has been created new specialised terminology has also come into use. However, several factors make this new terminological phenomenon different from previous ones. First, the speed in the generation of new terms is enormous due to the velocity of technological advancement in networks. And, secondly-paraphrasing a famous statesman- never before was so much new terminology so quickly distributed to so many people in so little time. Nowadays, once a new Internet term appears it is a matter of days, weeks at the most, before several million people in the world who surf the net on a daily basis are aware of its existence and its meaning.

3. Net-discourse: cybergenres

The discursive realisation of language includes speech acts, moves, exchanges and transactions. One analytical possibility is to apply Searle's (1969) categorisation of speech acts to study the interpersonal relations established between Internet users among themselves (via chats, emails, newlists and other interactive cybergenres) and among users and the net itself (i.e. between users and servers, browsers, websites, on-line databases, etc.). The interaction between two computer users has already been and is currently being studied especially in certain cybergenres-for example in relation to email discourse (Giménez, 2000; Lan, 2000; Li, 2000; Yonyang, 2000). However, speech act theory has not been considered in this context and probably there is ground to explore such possibility.

Another complementary approach to interpret Internet discourse is to consider Fairclough's (1992) critical discourse analysis theory in combination with genre theory (Bakhtin, 1986; Swales, 1990; Devitt, 1993), and some initial textual typologies suggested for Internet cybergenres (namely, Shepherd and Watters, 1998). Fairclough (1992: 73) divides language into three levels: the text practice (i.e. the terminological layer in netlinguistics), the discursive practice (i.e. discursive and contextual layers) and the social practice (i.e. ideological layer). He considers that the production, distribution and consumption of genres takes place within the discursive practice, in other words within the discursive layer and, to a certain extent, the contextual layer.

Assuming that cybergenres are generated within the discursive layer of Internet, the next issue is to see what type of genres are we dealing with within the net.

4. Blurred genres

Genre analysts, especially in the area of academic discourse, have emphasised the idea of change in genres, in other words, that genres are dynamic instances that evolve as society changes (Swales, 1990; Devitt, 1993). This dynamic nature is even more acute in certain disciplines such as all computer-related areas of development (Posteguillo, 1996, 1999, 2000).

In connection with technological advancement, Ferrara, Brunner and Whittemore (1991) contend that technology alters genres, generating what they defined as blurred genres. This is precisely what we have now in Internet: a substantial number of different blurred genres that overlap and which are in permanent change. Shepherd and Watters' (1998) dynamic classification of cybergenres appears to us as the most appropriate taxonomy of Internet genres. These authors have concluded that change is the key factor in the net and that, accordingly, a classification of Internet genres had to be based precisely on the various degrees of evolution of the genres themselves. Thus, they suggest the following four major categories: (a) extant replicated cybergenres, such as an electronic newspaper or an on-line dictionary; (b) extant variant cybergenres, such as electronic news; (c) novel emergent cybergenres, such as personalised news or a mathresource on-line; and (d) novel spontaneous cybergenres, namely homepages or hotlists. A significant characteristic of this classification is that a genre may evolve from one category to the next. The evolution of e-newspapers are a good illustration of this change. Most on-line newspapers were, in their inception, simple replications of their hard-copy original genre formats (i.e. extant replicated cybertexts), but they have come to incorporate many of the features that Internet technology allows (e.g. graphs or diagrams with movement; conversations or political speeches which may be listened to; MP3 files with music; etc., thus becoming extant variant cybertexts). And then, nowadays many browsers provide such services as personalised news, where users may select specifically what news they wish to receive (i.e. generating novel emergent cybertexts). The last category (d), novel spontaneous cybergenres, cannot be illustrated by this example, since this category comprises new textual forms that have appeared in Internet without previous clear generic predecessors.

The relevance of linguistic research in this area has been acknowledged on a worldwide scale. For instance, the Hawaii Annual International Conference on System Sciences (an

interdisciplinary conference on computer technology advancement and its social implications) has included (since 1996) a specific section labeled as Digital Genres Track. It is true that independent off-line digital genres exist (e.g. CD-ROMs)-which by their nature would be beyond the scope of netlinguistic research. However, on-line digital documentation has become the leader in digital text development (e.g. on-line databases, information resources of all types, on-line newspapers, catalogues, libraries, etc.). This, in fact, represents a substantial area of research within netlinguistics.

5. The contextual netlinguistic layer and the realisation of digital tenor

Cybergenres can only be properly analysed by taking into account their pragmatic context. Internet as a special communications medium produces a distinct realisation of tenor and mode -if we apply Halliday's (1978) systemic-functional terminology. To be more precise, the interpersonal function in Internet is realised by what we might define as digital tenor: the speaker-receiver's interaction in a cybergenre is subject to a modified tenor which tends towards what Fairclough (1992) described as a process of informalisation of discourse. In other words, there is a tendency towards a reduction of formality when interacting with another person via the net (Posteguillo and Esteve, 2002). This is especially the case in email discourse as the studies mentioned above (Giménez, 2000; Lan, 2000; Yongyang, 2000) have attested. But it is also the case in many other understudied cybergenres, such as personal homepages (Roberts, 1998; Saint-Georges, 1998), netvertising (Posteguillo, forthcoming), company homepages, in-company email, cyber-cafes or newsgroups, to mention a few representative instances of this trend toward informal discourse.

6. The contextual netlinguistic layer and digital mode: hypertext

Complementarily to digital tenor we have the realisation of digital mode. Mode has been defined by systemic-functional stylistics (Haynes, 1989) as the channel of communication with the dichotomy of written versus spoken discourse as the most salient one. Mode in Internet is complex because even though we are dealing-for the moment-with mostly written genres, there are certain specific net features which bring cybergenres towards spoken mode (see the Bakhtinian explanation above where cybergenres are considered a mixture of primary and secondary genres, i.e. a mixture of spoken and written modes). For instance Giménez (2000: 239) underscores the spoken nature of email discourse when he says: "e-mails combine features of spoken discourse (its nature) with those of written discourse (its representation)." Giménez's division of this cybergenre into its nature versus its representation, thus opposing the spoken versus

the written modes condenses the tension in which the digital mode is realised daily in Internet. A tension which is bringing about substantial linguistic changes in many people's everyday on-line communication.

In sum, two factors bring 'written' cybergenres towards the spoken mode. First of all, the reduction of time to obtain feedback to a written instantiation (in an email or a chat this is obvious, but also with regard to personal homepages or to company websites where communication time between the producers of a text and their audience is highly reduced). And, secondly, the constant tendency towards an informal register of language, a typical feature of spoken mode. But there is also a third complementary and specific feature of digital mode which demands a specific debate: hypertext.

Hyperlinks represent the axis of Internet. Without them the net would be an enormous - also very valuable but more limited and disconnected - database of unrelated websites. The fact that we may surf from one webpage to another, and that a specific site may guide us to hundreds of related addresses makes of this mode, of this digital mode of communication a distinct one. It is true that hyperlinks in the form of conventional cross-references have always existed in well-established written genres such as research papers, textbooks or encyclopaedias, but again here the specific feature of the Internet is the speed of this reference system.

An open question here for further research is whether hypertext is an especial realisation of intertextuality or if, it may be also argued, this is not so, since hyperlinks do not operate on the basis of the conventional operators of the textual function, that is cohesion and coherence (when we click on a hyperlink we jump to a complete new page where there may not be a, for instance, conventional pronoun reference to the previous page; e.g. for more on this click here, and a full new page appears on the screen with no anaphorical reference). It may be considered that many of these jumps or links are based more on ideational basis than on strictly textual ones. Probably, if we are to discuss the textual function in Internet in relation to hyperlinks, we would be better to talk about a special digital textual function where both textual and ideational elements are combined.

Finally, in relation to genre analysis and language in Internet, it should be noted that spoken cybergenres are being introduced in the net. Teleconferencing is the most well-known and the one with more possibilities of being fairly extended in the near future. However, Internet technology is still unable to cope with teleconferencing in large

proportions. Only, special newly generated networks in the United States provide the necessary technology for real-time teleconferencing with good quality for a few selected research and university institutions.

7. Ideology in Internet: digital identity

At the ideological layer, netlinguistics needs to be concerned with the issue of identity in Internet. It may be very significant to analyse how linguistic devices are applied by different groups of net users to generate their distinct identities. In different sub-areas of linguistic analysis different terms have been labeled to characterise distinct groups of language users who share a common set of features, such as speech community, discourse community or community of practice (CofP).

A speech community is a sociolinguistic term used to refer to a group of people who use the same dialectal variety within one language, or simply the same language (Alcaraz & Martínez, 1997: 126). A discourse community, however is a term introduced by Swales (1990) for the genre analysis of academic and professional texts. He defines the term in opposition to the one of existing speech community. According to him, a speech community uses a spoken communication mode, it is determined by sociolinguistic characteristics, and it is centripetal (i.e. it tends to absorb people). On the contrary, a discourse community tends to use a written communication mode (in various forms), it is determined by functional and sociorhetorical characteristics (all members share a common purpose and use similar rhetorical devices to attain it) and it is centrifugal (i.e. its members struggle to be separated from those who do not belong to the community by means of a specific lexis and specific genres in order to obtain a discourse identity). Consequently, one may distinguish between the discourse communities of medical researchers, physicists, linguists, literary critics, etc.

Parallel to the development of this concept, sociolinguists also felt the relevance of the purpose of language for a group of users, in other words, that the objective for which a community uses language can frame a specific set of distinct features. Thus, the term community of practice was introduced. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992: 464) define the term as:

an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations -in short, practices- emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a CoP is different

from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.

8. Digital communities

The definition of language communities in Internet has its own specific peculiarities. Goodman and Graddol (1996: 129-133) speak of imagined communities and relate the concept to the nationality of net users; Cherny (1995) used the concept of virtual community in her analysis of the conversational practice of a group of MUD (Multi User Dimensions) users in a chat; and earlier still, Poster (1990) used the term electronic communities when referring to the first users of the initial email software programs. However, none of these authors focused on characterising the different groups in Internet, but analysed what makes Internet users in general somehow different to non-users.

Thus, the main question remains as to whether there are different types of communities in Internet and, if so, what are they—speech communities or communities who are joined by a purpose (i.e. net-discourse communities or net-communities of practice). It can be argued that Internet is constructed on a set of overlapping speech and discourse communities or communities of practice. First of all we find two major speech communities: native English speakers and non-native speakers of English and then a variety of purposes around which net users of both speech communities get together. For instance, an international group of native and non-native speakers of English who share the information and participation in a specific newsgroup. Such a group may be considered a net community of practice. The sociolinguistic term seems more appropriate than the academic discourse community, since this second one is generally identified with professionals, scientists or university faculty. We suggest that the term used may be netcommunities. A netcommunity, then, is a networked community of practice made up of Internet users who share the use of one-or a few-cybergenres for a certain set of common purposes. Net users in a netcommunity may belong to different speech communities of either native or non-native speakers of English. However, netcommunities who surf Internet worldwide share the Englishisation—a term introduced by Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1999) to account for the world wide use of English as today's international lingua franca—of Internet, that is the fact of using English as the lingua franca in the net. Englishisation, however, also affects netcommunities who—due to a lack of proficiency in English—surf the net focussing on websites generated in their own specific language (namely, Spanish, French or German speakers), since they frequently resort to code-switching, mixing their own language with

many English Internet technical terms (such as *email, website, links, JAVA, applet, attach document*, etc.). Finally, a whole new set of specific netcommunities have appeared whose behaviour and, from our perspective, whose use of language requires further social and sociolinguistic and netlinguistic insight: hackers, crackers, webmasters, postmasters, content engineers, or e-business consultants to mention a few representative examples.

Netlinguistics, Computational Linguistics and Sociolinguistics

Thus, taking into consideration the different elements which may be analysed in the study of language use in Internet as we have outlined above, we believe that there is ground for a unifying analytical framework-for which we suggest the term netlinguistics. This, then, is to be a functional, stylistic, pragmatic, linguistic and sociolinguistic analytical framework concerned with the technological elements of Internet (i.e. ASCII codes and the WYSIWYG iconic interface), the lexicological production of new terminology in relation to network computers and software, the evolution of cybergenres, digital tenor (as manifested in the informalisation process of Internet discourse), digital mode (as realised via hypertext and hyperlinks), the relations established between different netcommunities, and the overall Englishisation of Internet.

Netlinguistics, as it is usually the case of any new research area, may overlap-but not necessarily collide-with well-established linguistic areas of study, mostly with sociolinguistics and computational linguistics. In fact, these two areas of applied linguistics may proceed to netlinguistic research-something which is yet to be seen. The issue here, however, is that, first, sociolinguistics initiated its development in the 60s and 70s establishing, as all new sciences do, a set of subjects of its special concern (namely, social class and language, sex and language, ethnicity and language, languages in contact, and so on); and, then, computational linguistics began its development in the mid 80s along with the expansion of personal computers for all sorts of uses, focusing also on certain key subjects (for instance, tools for indexing, language engineering, machine translation, speech recognition or language parsing). The problem is that none of the central issues of sociolinguistics or computational linguistics are, in our opinion, the central issues of netlinguistic insight, such as the analysis of digital tenor and mode, cybergenres, e-terminology or netcommunities.

Nevertheless, it may be argued that sociolinguistics may be concerned with the ideological and- up to a certain extent -contextual features of net discourse, while

computational linguistics might incorporate within its scope the technological elements of Internet, its terminological issues and even some cybergenre issues such as website layout or image-text integration. In fact, depending on the perspective it may be contended that with an expansion of the already existing areas of applied linguistics all linguistic change and phenomena in Internet may be described (see figure 1)-thus engulfing the netlinguistic research area.

However, we strongly believe that if we come to reflect on the rapid speed of Internet expansion (consider its growth in the 90s) sooner or later applied linguistics will have to generate a specific sub-area of applied linguistic research focused on net linguistic usage so as to better cope with history's largest ever network of interconnected language users.

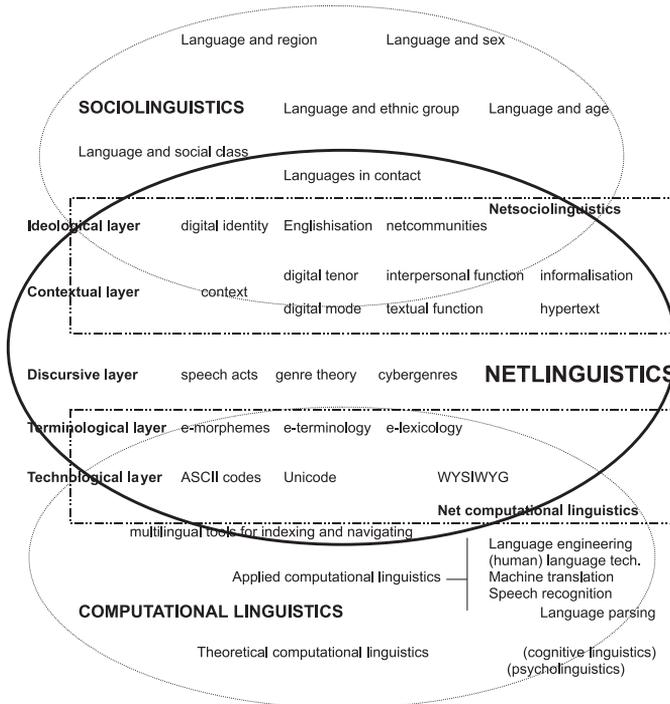


Figure 1. Nedinguistics (version 2.0): An analytical framework to account for linguistic change in Internet and the theoretical grounding for EIP development. The figure also shows overlapping areas with sociolinguistics and computational linguistics as well as where to locate net-sociolinguistic and net-computational linguistic analyses.

Pedagogical implication of Netlinguistics: English for Internet Purposes

ESP has evolved since the 60s and a variety of sub-disciplines have appeared: EAP, EST, or such major discipline oriented ESP sub-areas such as Medical English or Business English. Complementarily, as disciplinary variation studies have increased a substantial number of discipline-oriented ESPs have been generated to meet specialised students' needs: ESP for Advertising Studies, ESP for Computer Science, ESP for Chemistry, ESP for Biology, ESP for Industrial Engineering, etc.

We argue that, along with the development of computer systems and, most especially, with the development of Internet, each of these ESP sub-areas may -and should- be complemented by a corresponding electronic ESP related to each discipline. Thus, we would say that we have electronic Business English (e-BE), electronic Medical English (e-ME), electronic English for Science and Technology (e-EST), and so forth. Each of these specific electronic ESPs would include within the specific ESP sub-area the knowledge necessary to obtain information from Internet, as well as the necessary skills to carry out tasks successfully in the net directly related to each student's field of study. These would include becoming familiar with certain specific programs and cybergenres depending on their field of studies. For instance, students in Tourism need to become especially proficient with airlines websites, travel agency software and similar programs, whereas students in Mathematics or Physics would better be taught certain specific programming languages, spreadsheet programs or to search through university websites and international libraries sites.

Furthermore, we would argue that in the same way that we have General English-as opposed to ESP-similarly, we could say that there is a general English for Internet Purposes (EIP) as opposed to the various e-ESPs. This EIP focuses on the English language skills necessary to become a skillful Internet professional. In other words, EIP is the English needed and used by the new specific digital professions, such as webmasters, postmasters, online consultants, content engineers, online translators, e-business consultants, etc. Although, as Internet becomes more and more important, a basic knowledge of EIP also becomes more and more relevant for any professional in any field.

Finally, it is our understanding that EIP is not only an ESP concern. In our opinion, EIP is becoming so important that it should be incorporated as a compulsory subject in all

English Philology degrees. Previous research on the limited skills of English Philology students in relation to Internet (Posteguillo, 2001) confirm this need. It is our contention that if we do not provide ESP students with an appropriate corresponding e-ESP, or if we do not teach, for instance, English Philology students EIP, we are seriously limiting their future professional careers. However, even though research on the use of English in Internet is increasing exponentially (Baron, 1998, 2001; Giménez, 2000; Lan, 2000; Li, 2000; Shortis, 2001; Yongyan, 2000; Yus, 2001; to mention some), there is still the major lack of an appropriate analytical framework that may guide both linguists and Internet professionals in a better use of English across the net. In this respect, the netlinguistic approach which we have outlined in this paper may be one of the possible tools which both ESP teachers and linguists may use to undertake the necessary research to first describe and then teach the English used in Internet to both students and professionals. This teaching would be part of what Alcaraz (2000, 2001) has labelled as the *tercera didáctica*, that is, the teaching of English to professionals, beyond the grounds of secondary or university education. In this specific professional context, netlinguistics first and then English for Internet Purposes, in our opinion, are bound to become developing areas within ESP research and ESP teaching. It should be noted, however, that EIP has already been introduced in many ESP classrooms around the world. That is, the use of Internet, web-based teaching or email are not anymore unusual devices in ESP teaching. This, in fact, has been common rule in past ESP history. In Gosden's words³: "in much ESP/LSP work, the need arises, students have to be taught immediate skills, then principles develop from the practice and research." In our opinion, EIP is now one of these immediate skills much needed by all our students.

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NOTAS

- 1 Crystal (2001: 231-237) suggests that what he labels *applied Internet linguistics* represents a new growing area within applied linguistics. The main difference between Crystal's perspective and our proposal is that *applied Internet linguistics* is, as its name appropriately indicates, an *applied* discipline—applied mostly to the teaching of ELT, EFL/ESL and other language teaching contexts. Our proposal (*netlinguistics*), as we outline in this paper, comprises both the linguistic study of language as used in the net across different levels (iconic, written, terminological, discursive, contextual and ideological levels), as well as the possible language teaching applications related to this linguistic description of the net, and to the technological possibilities of Internet for specific applied ends such as language teaching or translation work.
- 2 It is true that Internet may generate also certain problems in human development. It has been pointed out (Cebrián, 1998) that it may create more differences between developed and underdeveloped countries, and, on a more individual basis, that some people may misuse the technology and either become addicts to the network or introduce all sorts of totally unacceptable contents in the web.
- 3 Hugh Gosden's comments on this article.

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