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Worlds of English

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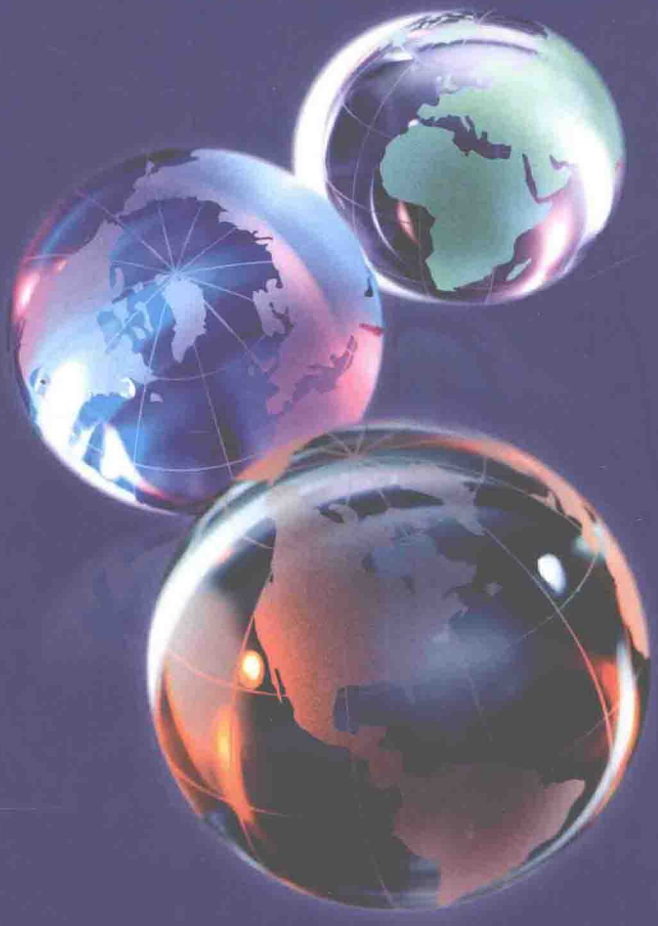

Communicating in English

Talk, Text, Technology

Edited by Daniel Allington and Barbara Mayor

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Communicating in English

Talk, Text, Technology

Series preface

The books in this series provide an introduction to the study of English, both for students of the English language and the general reader. They are core texts for the Open University module U214 *Worlds of English*. The series aims to provide students with:

- an understanding of the history and development of English, and a critical approach to its current global status and influence
- skills and knowledge to use in analysing English-language texts
- an appreciation of variation in the English language between different speakers and writers, and across different regional and social contexts
- examples of the diversity of English language practices in different parts of the world
- an understanding of how English is learned as a first language or as an additional language, and of its role as a language of formal education around the world
- an appreciation of how media, from print to the internet, have affected the English language and contributed to its position in the world today
- an understanding of how English is promoted around the world and the controversies surrounding the politics and economics of such decisions and its impact on other languages and the people who speak them
- informed reflections on the likely future role of English.

The readings which accompany each chapter have been chosen to exemplify key points made in the chapters, often by exploring related data, or experiences and practices involving the English language in different parts of the world. The readings also represent an additional 'voice' or viewpoint on key themes or issues raised in the chapter.

Each chapter includes:

- **activities** to stimulate further understanding or analysis of the material
- **boxes** containing illustrative or supplementary material

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- **key terms** which are set in coloured type at the point where they are explained; the terms also appear in colour in the index so that they are easy to find in the chapters.

The other books in this series are:

Seargeant, P. and Swann, J. (eds) (2012) *English in the World: History, Diversity, Change*, Abingdon, Routledge/Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Hewings, A. and Tagg, C. (eds) (2012) *The Politics of English: Conflict, Competition, Coexistence*, Abingdon, Routledge/Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Ann Hewings
Series Editor

Biographical information

Daniel Allington

Daniel Allington is Lecturer in English Language Studies and Applied Linguistics at the Open University, although he has also worked as an illustrator and taught English in the UK and abroad. His research into the production and consumption of culture has appeared in major journals and edited collections, and he is part of an international team of scholars writing a history of the book in Britain.

Guy Cook

Guy Cook is Professor of Language and Education at the Open University. He has published extensively on various aspects of applied linguistics. From 2004–2009, he was co-editor of the journal *Applied Linguistics*. He is Chair of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (2009–2012) and is an Academician of the Academy for the Social Sciences. His books include *Translation in Language Teaching* (2010), Winner of the International House Ben Warren Prize.

Ann Hewings

Ann Hewings is Senior Lecturer in Language and Communication at the Open University. She has taught English in a variety of countries to children, young people and adults. Her research and teaching interests focus on academic literacy in English and interdisciplinary and global perspectives on English language. Her publications include *Grammar and Context* (2005, co-edited with Martin Hewings).

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Almut Koester is Senior Lecturer in English Language in the Department of English, University of Birmingham. Her research focuses on spoken workplace discourse and she is author of *The Language of Work* (2004), *Investigating Workplace Discourse* (2006) and *Workplace Discourse* (2010). She also writes Business English materials and is interested in the application of research to English language teaching.

Barbara Mayor

Barbara Mayor is Lecturer in the Centre for Language and Communication at the Open University, where she has contributed extensively to courses in applied linguistics. Her research interests include the pragmatics of bilingual interaction, English as a global language of education and linguistic landscapes. Recent publications include 'Perspectives on children learning English' in Maybin and Swann (2010, eds) *The Routledge Companion to English Language Studies.*

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Joan Swann is Director of the Centre for Language and Communication in the Faculty of Education and Language Studies at the Open University. Recent books include *Creativity in Language and Literature* (2011, co-edited with Ronald Carter and Rob Pope) and the *Companion to English Language Studies* (2010, co-edited with Janet Maybin).

Caroline Tagg

Caroline Tagg is Lecturer in Applied Linguistics in the Centre for English Language Studies at the University of Birmingham. Her research interests include the application of discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to digital interaction, particularly text messaging and social network sites. She is author of *The Discourse of Text Messaging* (forthcoming) and has published articles in journals such as *World Englishes* and *Writing Systems Research.*

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General introduction

Daniel Allington and Barbara Mayor

This is a book about the relationship between communication, technology and the English language. It is often remarked that language and communication have been transformed in the digital age. But new communications technologies do not force people to communicate in particular ways: they simply provide their users with possibilities that they may or may not take up. There is thus continuity as well as change, and this book is able to draw on decades of scholarship while simultaneously keeping up with the cutting edge of research.

The focus throughout is on *people communicating*. This means that the contributors to this book discuss neither language nor communication in the abstract. When we use language to communicate, it is never language in general that we use, but always a *specific* language or language variety: one that may have an association with a particular community, with high or low social status, with work, with education, and so on. English has a unique place in the contemporary world – both as an official language of many countries and as the most widely used international language for business, trade, diplomacy and the mass media – and this must be remembered in any account of how it is used.

'Talk' and 'text'

In linguistics, the term 'text' is often used to mean 'any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that … form[s] a unified whole' (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p. 1). However, this book is centrally concerned with the distinctions between speech, writing and other forms of language use. For this reason, communication will generally be referred to as **talk** if the words involved are composed of sounds produced by the human mouth, and as **text** if the words involved are composed of visual or other symbols. These are fairly commonsensical definitions, but by no means perfect. When people type messages in online chat, are they speaking or writing? And when we listen to a speech that was prepared in written form, is it talk or text that we are hearing? In some circumstances, it may be more helpful to use the word 'talk' to refer to communications produced in a situation of rapid interaction, and the word 'text' to refer to more extended and deliberately crafted communications that take a relatively stable and permanent form. Even this leaves grey areas, however. We might want

to classify songs as texts, for example – but what if the lyrics vary from one performer or performance to the next? The words 'talk' and 'text' are useful because they remind us that people communicate in different ways, some of which require the mediation of technology. But it is important to bear in mind that such terms do not necessarily refer to discrete or easily separable things in the real world.

It is also important to remember that when we study talk (in the sense of speech), we generally do so through the medium of text (in the sense of writing). In this book, for instance, examples of spoken language are given in written (or rather, printed) form. This is not unusual: when linguists and other scholars research speech, they often capture it using an audio recorder, and then transcribe it (write it down) using letters, punctuation marks and other symbols. In fact, the technological ability to record speech and render it into textual form has been of fundamental importance to language study since the mid-twentieth century. However, a transcript (and even a recording) can never be any more than a *representation* of what somebody said: it is not *talk itself*, and, while some transcripts include more information than others, many details will always be left out. On the other hand, the process of **transcription** can help us to focus on what is useful for our purposes. If we want to know about the role of silence in speech, for example, then we can choose to transcribe every slight pause and hesitation. But if we are interested in other aspects of speech, such as pronunciation or vocabulary, then it may be more helpful to leave out such details. In this book, you will see that different authors have taken different approaches to transcription, depending on their particular focus, purpose or disciplinary background.

The focus and structure of the book

The first two chapters of the book, 'Talking in English' and 'Reading and writing in English', look at how people use talk and text to communicate in English. As these chapters show, communication is always shaped by habitual activities and social situations. These chapters use a wide range of real-world examples (from conversations over dinner to online journals) and introduce some of the most important theories in the field of discourse analysis. There is a special focus on the importance of 'paralinguistic' forms of communication such as tone of voice and typography, and the two chapters provide a grounding of skills and ideas that will be built on throughout the remainder of the book.

Chapter 3, 'Growing up with English', looks at how children, whether monolingual or bilingual, learn to participate in spoken and written communication involving English. It explores both cognitive and social factors in language acquisition, weighing up the respective roles of a child's individual meaning-making and of the ways of communicating that are prevalent in the child's community. Chapter 4, 'Working in English', moves forward in the life of the individual, focusing on the use of English in the adult world of work. It shows how English is used for social and professional purposes at work and how international business communication is changing assumptions about 'correct' English – but it also shows how difficulty in speaking the right kind of English can lead to disadvantage in the job market.

Chapters 5 and 6, 'Everyday creativity in English' and 'Persuasion in English', address fundamental questions about how language is used and what it is used for by investigating two familiar phenomena that can be found in many contexts. These phenomena are the playful, creative use of the English language that we see not only in so-called 'creative writing', but also in everyday conversation; and the use of spoken and written English to persuade an audience, whether it be to make a purchase, support a cause or simply concede a point. As these chapters show, rhetorical and poetic features are not restricted to particular kinds of text, but infuse all human communication. The recognition of this has been vitally important to much recent research on language and communication.

Chapters 7 and 8, 'Material English' and 'Digital English', discuss the impact of communications technologies on the English language, and on how it is used to communicate. This is a new topic for language research. These two chapters take us from the development of the alphabet, through the invention of printing, to the world of digital communications. As these chapters show, it is always important to think about the material and technological basis of language and communication – but that basis is itself shaped by social and economic factors.

All these chapters balance theory with empirical research and provide opportunities to analyse data and reflect on ideas. They share a commitment to exploring the English language as it is used to communicate in real-world situations.

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