

arts and humanities

Fashioning global English to suit local needs: university students' use of English borrowings in their native discourse

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Abstract

The role of English as the *lingua franca* of the globalised world has resulted in it becoming a site of communication across borders and the vehicle through which native and non-native speakers of English exchange meaning. In this way, it is often perceived as a language which is devoid of its own identity, facilitating its use as a linguistic resource to be appropriated by others and imbued with the speakers' own intentions and culture. This is particularly evident with young people, who use English when communicating in their native languages, affecting language shift on a local level. This poster presents the ongoing findings of a PhD thesis looking into how university students use English borrowings in their native oral discourse, thus affecting language on a local level with potentially global implications. It presents some provisional results of 788 questionnaires completed by university students from several countries on different continents, with a view to ascertaining students' perceptions of and attitudes to the use of English on a local level.

Introduction

English has increasingly become the language of international communication world wide and has provided people with a wider linguistic repertoire. In this way, English has become the *lingua franca* used by native and non-native speakers alike, with studies indicating that it is perceived as a cultureless language which can be appropriated locally to express meaning. The result is that the use of English on a local level has had an impact on native languages and has worked its way into its discourse. This is particularly evident with young people, who seem to be the new fashioners of language shift.



Methodology

This work is based on a total of 788 questionnaires completed by university students across the world from Portugal to China, Brazil and Finland, into their use of and attitudes to the use of English in their native discourse. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, the first aimed to create a profile of the respondents, the second to gather information on their use of English in their native discourse and the third and final section, which is the main focus of this poster, was on the students' opinions on the use of English on a local level.

Respondent profile

The majority of respondents were first degree students, mainly from the Humanities or Social Sciences and with a compulsory English component.

Respondents' use of English

The students claim to use English more in spoken than written contexts and mainly with friends, university peers and teachers. Their main sources of English are the media and technology.

Findings

The findings show that students claim to use English in their everyday discourse and that it helps them feel international and knowledgeable. The top five English words students state they use in their native discourse are:

- OK
- Hello (and its variations)
- Cool
- Yes (and its variations)
- Night



Figure 1 'Lojas Hello' (Hello Stores)
- Electrical appliance shop

The presence of some of these words can even be seen in the names of local businesses, as can be seen in Figures 1 and 2. In the latter example, an alternative use of the traditional English spelling for both 'Kool' (Cool) and 'Caffé' (Café), shows how English has been fashioned to suit local needs. Other examples of how English is altered and moulded to native contexts can be seen in Figure 3.

According to the respondents, English is important in the areas of business settings, science and technology and in interpersonal communication, particularly when travelling abroad..

When asked about the ownership of English, 53% stated that it belonged to whoever used it and only 7% said it belonged to native speakers.

With regard to the respondents' perceptions of the role of English in the world, 84% stated that it is the global language for communication whereas only 3% said it was a language used in English speaking countries.



Figure 2 'Kool Caffé' (Cool Café)
- Café / Nightclub

A total of 115 respondents decided to complete an optional comment box at the end of the questionnaire. Despite some concerns that the ubiquitous use of English on a local level could lead to the loss of language purity, the majority of comments put forward by students indicate the importance of a global language which allows people to express their intended meaning, irrespective of language. One comment sums up the thoughts of many:

'Globalisation and social networks ... create new words and expressions in English that don't exist in other native languages. Some of those native languages adapt those new words and others just adopt the English version. However, the English expressions seem to be more accurate and understandable [in] defining concepts ... so people use them often in their native language'



Figure 3 'Coimbra Concept Store' 'Ez-Team' 'Prink' 'Low Kost Bar' 'The World Needs Nata' 'Grill & Go'

Conclusion

The collective attitudes of young people and their lexical choices can influence language shift and adopting global resources in local settings is one of the ways through which they can express themselves.

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