

**THE NEW TEWCHNOLOGY: STAKES AND CHALLENGES for Speech Communication Instruction**Mitra Farsi\*<sup>1</sup> And Sorayya Farsi<sup>2</sup><sup>1, 2</sup> Student Under the Program of Doctor of English Literature  
B.A. in English Language Translation\* Corresponding Author: [farsi\\_1977@yahoo.com](mailto:farsi_1977@yahoo.com)

**ABSTRACT:** This essay is about the digital world today, with all its amazing inventions and technology and its immediate effect on language learning. Throughout the article, I've been trying to show how through the innovativeness and creativity of the communications, the teacher is forced to be reduced to that of a service provider as in a hamburger chain store. I have based my discussion on a body of knowledge accumulated from the scholarly works of the famous names in the fields of language learning as well as information technology, and to a large extent on the theory and views of the notorious American sociologist, George Ritzer and his Mac Donaldization social theory, connecting it to what I have observed in the Philippines educational system. Based on this theory and also on the famous quote by a prominent university dean in the Philippines universities, my final proposition is to find ways to keep what is essential from the language teaching traditional systems, to re-define the usage and usefulness of the modern technology applications, and to adapt both to come to a really useful modern language learning-teaching system, considering the modern active attitude of the students while not undermining the central role of teachers in the process of language learning.

[Mitra Farsi And Sorayya Farsi. **THE NEW TEWCHNOLOGY: STAKES AND CHALLENGES for Speech Communication Instruction.** *Life Sci J* 2012;9(4):3220-3224]. (ISSN: 1097-8135).  
<http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 474

**Key Words:** ICT (Information Communication Technology), Mac Donaldization, Fragmented Information, email, localization, globalization

**Introduction**

Our world is speeding up in its g y area of human activities. The new mediums of communication are so rapidly changing to the latest versions and innovations that they leave no choice for communities other than to take them in and use them just not to fall behind with the new world. Today we live and learn in a media saturated society. Communication by e-mail is routine. We watch the news on our iPods, and communicate with others in remote locations via video and web conferencing. The workplace of today demands expert thinking and complex communication.

Every day, newspapers and professional journals and television broadcasts even shopping centers remind us of this new technological world where we live. We are bombarded by images of technological wonders, all promising to make our lives even better. Information and communication

technologies are binding everyone in the world today in a real way never imagined before. We are told these technologies offer great hope for mankind – and they potentially do. They promise to connect people across distances and time and space as never imagined few years ago.

What should education be like in his digital era? What demands shall be made on education to help people adjust to the new, swiftly changing conditions of their lives? What can be done today to meet those demands adequately? These questions are matters of concern for the learning society composed of the academics and state and public leaders, who along with key institutions, are struggling with the task of modernizing and reforming systems.

In our digital world today, the learners need have access to this century tools, like the ICT( the Information Communication Technology; i.e.,

the communication tool which is used to access, manage, integrate and evaluate information, construct new knowledge, and communicate with others in order to participate effectively in the society. Information technologies enable their successful application in education and allow the creative potential of the student to be tapped into. It is these new information technologies that will help us develop an open educational system, a system that will bring about dramatic change in the technology of obtaining knowledge, owing to more efficient organization of students' cognitive activities. These changes are effected through the use of computers and their very important didactic characteristics of individualizing the classroom work without disrupting its entirety, via programmed and adapted curricula. As Mark Warschauer and many other authors who have worked on the subject of internet usage in language classrooms contend, internet tools can be useful for a variety of purposes in language learning, and they all could be integrated within an educational program (1995, chap. 7). In his later co-authored book, the use of internet for teaching purposes is better developed and explained, while identifying issues relevant to developing and evaluating courses and programs (M. Warschauer et al. chaps. 3&4).

While computers are serving as multi-media tools, and ICT has rapidly expanded new directions, and innovations are frequently emerging with the instructional possibilities of the internet electronic mail, bulletin boards and worldwide websites. Teachers can always benefit from using email for a one-in-one correspondence with their students who can get teachers feedbacks about their assignments or performances. The internet can be used for different teaching activities, including collaborative assignments, student research, and student-managed publishing of their book, etc. The benefits of the internet technology are discussed in detail by Mark Warschauer and his co-authors (2000). They elaborate on how teachers can use internet for various learning ends: as setting up bulletin boards for student to student interactions and dialogues, or a home page to cover information about the class, including syllabus, exercises, portfolios and many others, but mostly "the latest developments in research, theory, and curriculum" (p.vii). However, in modern societies, there are already many innovative teachers who have been long and broadly using internet

facilities to instruct their students, monitor their activities through various access tools like skype, or yahoo live voice chat, to send and receive and share files to go through and work on together with their tutees, the procedure which gives the teacher the freedom to interfere with and control the student's activity as in real classrooms.

There is a prevailing stock attitude and notion among us today: teachers should go beyond the passive learning that characterizes classroom lectures towards the more active engaged forms of teaching. Today, the name of the game is innovative use of technology, such as Computer-assisted Language Learning (or CALL: "defined as 'the search for and the study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning' (Levy, 1997, p.1)" (Kern, 2006, p.184), or multi-media approaches to support teaching and learning. I do not mean to say that lecture method is out of date and is already out-of-place but it has to be modified considerably. Likewise, speech laboratories have long been considered out of date because they give only audio training, the video and audio-video ingredients are missing. However, more and more teachers in developed countries have long been incorporating these media into their classrooms, through which they have been able to get the optimum results. But considering the number of language classes in various countries where many of which have not already taken in the new technologies, there is a lot of modifications yet to be done to the language classes all around the globe. Among the most crucial modifications to be done to classrooms is the shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered one.

So as the nature of communication in our world today keeps changing, teachers have to develop teaching techniques and adapt themselves to the new modes of teaching which could keep pace and be in line with the new technological world. Whatever techniques and strategies used, teachers should always consider wisdom in choosing the right instructional tools. Speech communication instruction requires a wide range of activities and initiatives in its development as there is always the need for refinements and cultivation of current trends, awareness of new and often specific demands and directions in different classes and societies, problems and opportunities, improved practices and new thinking. Today, students have become vocal and

verbose, assertive and aggressive, dynamic and mobile, updated and articulate. They do not just sit, watch and listen. They want higher levels of learning. So the traditional teaching methods and tools have to be modified to cover their demands while keeping the teacher as the center of the class and of teaching.

All research has pointed to the centrality of transforming teaching in order to integrate ICT effectively. ICT should not be seen as a replacement for traditional teaching methods but as a part of the teachers' repertoire of instructional approaches. To increase the pedagogical repertoire of Speech Communication teachers, they should thoroughly examine every new form, level or area of communication and so with possible innovative ways to teach these new forms through their curricula and across cultures. The results of the OFSTED report by the European Commission on the impacts of the use of new information technologies and the internet on teaching foreign languages and on the roles of their teachers indicate, the teacher is the most important part of the process of the implementation of ICT(section i); and that distance learning students cannot be left without mentor support(section vii); besides, technology used for distance learning must be 100% reliable, backed up by considerable teacher intervention(section viii); moreover, to quote "Kirkman et al.(2002)(section5):'[...]a focus on extending ICT coverage without complementary training or content can dilute users'(section vi)'"(T. Fitzpatrick &G. J Davies, 2003)

However, the way the information systems and correspondingly the ICT have spread about their branches in the world of learning as in everywhere else, the result, as it was predicted a decade before by scholars like G. Mccalla, will be the "localization" and not "globalization" and the final outcome will be a "fragmented social environment"(p.177). The main point to be noted here is that in the process of adapting classrooms to the new technological world of today and getting assisted by them, one should never compromise with the core of the modern technological world of binary digits and that core is fragmenting the information, the idea which lies beneath all the digital technology of the computerized world today. However, unfortunately though, fragmentation system is taking over all the fields of knowledge and work, and so in the world teaching. But the question

arising here is whether it is possible for learning languages to be whole and complete, just to be achieved through fragments and bites of knowledge as in anywhere else in the real world? Are the results adequate enough to enable the learners at last to master the language they have learned in fragments?

Here let's refer to George Ritzer, an American social scientist with his "Mac -Donaldization" theory on American societies – the manner in which the world's largest hamburger chain is gradually colonizing other areas of social life. As this social scientist observes, MacDonald's, characterized by a high degree of control, is like a "caged society" where efficiency and predictability are keys, every action and routine is pre-scheduled and scripted. Service assistants, for example, are only permitted to use specific formulaic utterances in their dealings with customers. All interactions are standardized and dehumanized. And since hamburgers themselves are largely unremarkable products, it is not the hamburger that is sold but the *packaged* experience, an experience of fun and entertainment when going into any branch of MacDonald's anywhere in the world.

What relates to my discussion here is his assertion that similar forms of standardized and dehumanized package interactions are becoming evident in the field of education, not only in the United States but all over the world, such that we have *McTV*, *McNews*, *McNewspaper*, *McUniversity*, - all offering increasingly standardized and dehumanized framed products. I have observed this in several schools, colleges and universities in the Philippines educational system. Ritzer adds that this is the "*bite-sized culture*" where knowledge is reducible to easily digested forms, compact nuggets of information that can be taken in and promptly forgotten, and ensure fast, effortless learning, like fast foods. It is actually the development of "unit-credit" approaches to degree courses where students can earn credits which they can accumulate towards a degree. To one American author, learning is to be fun and calls this concept, *edutainment*, familiar from computer software and becoming evident in the classroom, with teachers increasingly under pressure to ensure that their students or customers as they are often now known, have a good time, in the classroom.

Let us now ask ourselves – where do these influences of MacDonaldization leave us in the

communication instruction? Are these influences reflected in our learning and teaching activities? My answer is yes. Ritzer calls it Mac Course-book or syllabus, or course outlining containing “units” of classroom work, increasingly standard length “bite-sized” nuggets of two or four pages, each containing routine interactions that have the potential to produce exactly the same classroom outcomes wherever they are used in the world, with whatever students. This course-book, is of its nature, the way in which explicit scripts are provided to teachers and students with the aim to produce standardized outcomes, rather than unique classroom events. The devices for doing this are now commonplace, closed “ask and answer” routines, the gap-fill exercise with its easily countable right/wrong solutions, questions the answers of which are supplied in accompanying texts. For teachers, this gives explicit indications of what precisely are to do in the classroom and even say just as the Mac Donald’s hamburger may be low in nutritional content, so is this course-book, because it increasingly meets the expectations of teachers and students, who are now used to fragmented and routine products in other areas of their lives.

I may sound radical and over reacting, but I agree with Ritzer’s above-mentioned views. It freezes the creativity and innovativeness of the teacher. The view that our only objective is to teach the English language, and once it gets learned, we do not bother much more with issues of content or the form of the methodology.

Let us ask ourselves, “Do these patterns of learning in MacDonald’s adequately prepare our students? Are we still to embrace with Mac Donaldization? Are we resorting to innovations because we want to rival with other institutions which are already using more innovative techniques? Are we innovating out of our own personal enthusiasm in reaching and expanding the minds of our students? ” Whatever answers you may have to these questions will all depend on your sets of values and priorities. However, I strongly insist that we move away from anything that is fragmented, dehumanized and routine. Let us make our instruction educationally nutritious by making it creative and innovative.

Finally, we must not believe that the nature of the future is fact. The future is one we shape. The future does not just happen. The future is the continuation of our past and present. As such, it is a development of the factors that are at work now.

There may well be developments that seem unstoppable, but it is incumbent upon us to look for opportunities in these developments, to ensure that they enrich our lives by stretching our pedagogic imaginations to the full

### Conclusion:

Dr. Pat Lazaro, professor emeritus of the University of the Philippines once said: “With the rapid pace of change in today’s shrinking world, we are challenged to engage ourselves in new innovative strategies, what should guide us in considering the what and the how of our present teaching of speech communication, is the unity of three R’s - *Retain, Regain* and *Retrain*, that is retain the old techniques, Regain the new techniques, and Retrain or restructure the present to make a difference. To cut it simply, *preserve the best, reinvent the rest.*” Perhaps what Zhao(2003) and other scholars like C. Jones(1986) have said would make the best conclusion for my discussion as:” It is not the technology per se that is effective or ineffective but the particular ways in which the technology is used”(Kern, 189-90). As Kern further points out we cannot question the presence of computers with their various uses in language teaching, so the thing which remains to be solved is the way they are used in order to yield the best results. However, the issues involved in this modern way of language learning are too complex to be so easily resolved.

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