

Title: Remapping Englishness: The Impact of Globalization on College English  
Instruction in Taiwan

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of globalization upon the college-level instruction of English/American literature in Taiwan. The examination will be centered upon the subject of Englishness as demonstrated in the courses of English/American Literature taught in Taiwan. By focusing on the term "Englishness," the paper broadly discusses the institutionalization of the term, addressing its acquired implications, and delineates its constructive and transformative possibilities and problematics. The paper consists of three parts: (1) English studies and the impact of globalization: definition, phenomenon, influence on English education; (2) Englishness: then and now, evolution, definition, perceptions; and (3) A curriculum design of American literature instruction at NCKU: language & culture. A specific concern of this research is to show how the global awareness informs an innovative mode which has reflected or constructed the changing structure, identities and social relations. Results show that in a classroom project called "American Literature: To Think and Act Locally," the learners are able to formulate independent thinking and fulfill a mission with their own knowledge base grounded a comparatively cross-cultural awareness. Non-native English educators need to adopt a "culture package" in the teaching of English/American Literature and stress the importance for training of critical and local thinking and acting.

**Keywords:** Englishness, College English Education, Teaching of English/American Literature, globalization, imperialism

Remapping Englishness:  
The Impact of Globalization on College English Instruction in Taiwan

Jade Tsui-yu Lee

This paper examines the new instructional pedagogies of English/American literature that have appeared at National Kaohsiung Normal University (NKNNU) in Taiwan as a consequence of global awareness and technological innovation. On a general level, it aims to explore the impacts of Globalization upon the instruction of English/American literature at NKNNU. The impact, however, is neither local nor insignificant. It helps us to reconsider the meaning of globalization; that is, in this global village where globalization becomes an inevitable trend, how do educators encounter or respond to the epidemic wave of globalization. A specific concern of this research is to show how the global awareness informs an innovative mode which has reflected or constructed the changing structure, identities and social relations.

The examination will be centered upon the subject of Englishness as demonstrated in the courses of English/American Literature taught at NKNNU. By focusing on the term “Englishness,” the paper will broadly discuss the institutionalization of the term, addressing its acquired implications, and delineate its constructive and transformative possibilities and problematics.

The paper consists of three parts: (1) English Studies and the Impact of Globalization: definition, phenomenon, influence on English education; (2) Englishness: then and now, evolution, definition, perceptions; and (3) A curriculum design of American literature instruction at NKNNU: language & culture.

### **I. English Studies and the Impact of Globalization**

In 1826 a University College in London was founded to award degrees and in

1828 English was offered as a subject of study. In 1831, English literature was included in the curriculum at King's College, London (Barry 2002, p. 13). Ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the studies of English were established as an academic subject in universities in Britain, the studies have been combined with intricately political, ideological and cultural missions, along with its original and secularized attempts to replace classics. Matthew Arnold argues that function of literary criticism is to "learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" (Arnold 1864, p. 1526), suggesting that the practice of literature should be in service of political and social purposes. In F. D. Maurice's 1840 Professorial inaugural lecture at Kings, he claims that the education of English literature is essential to middle-class education, as English literature would serve "to emancipate us ... from the notions and habits which are peculiar to our own age," informing eternal values, and providing a stronghold for the middle class to maintain the political stability (Barry 2002, p. 13). The teaching of English in England in the nineteenth century provided an opportunity in cultural matters to the populations who had no access to education. The thinking was reaffirmed and highlighted in the Newbolt Report on the Teaching of English in England in 1921 whose rhetoric was to "[save] high culture in an age of mass civilization" (Engler 2000, p. 341).

The English education was later enveloped with a nationalist agenda. Engler (2000) stresses that tensions occurred between England and Germany intellectuals in terms of the different attitudes of seeing English and its shared Germanic origin (p. 340). Despite the shared heritage between English and German, the English would prefer understanding themselves as part of Anglo-Saxon cultures, whose struggles with the French-speaking Normans were reinforced by historical romances and accounts (p. 341).

The nationalist rhetoric was merged into colonial form of imperialism in the

nineteenth century. Gauri Viswanathan argues for an ideological nature of English education by saying that “British colonial administrators. . . discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education” (quoted in Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 3). Ashcroft et al. note that English education and the growth of Empire have been intricately tied with each other in their historical development, however consciously or unconsciously. Yet, what is significant is the way in which the coupling leads to a naturalizing process of constructed values which established a “privileged norm” as a template to deny the native, primitive and savage as marginal, uncanonized or peripheral: “Literature was made as central to the cultural enterprise of Empire as the monarchy was to its political formation” (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 3). Even more subtly, the marginalized and the excluded will be incorporated into the center when the former starts to threaten the center, a process termed by Edward Said as that of conscious “affiliation” in the guise of “filiation” (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 4).

As Ashcroft et al. (1989) have noted, many post-colonial societies, knowing the complexities of ideological power and cultural incorporation, have been devoted to deconstructing or dismantling the link. Ngugi wa Thiong’o in his 1972 work claims for the abolition of English department in Africa. John Docker addresses the issue from the Caribbean and Indian contexts in his essay “the neocolonial assumption in the university teaching English,” arguing that the power networking involving literature, language and the imperial culture resists the dismantling of the institution on the one hand and on the deeper level, becomes even more influential in the cultural formation (Ashcroft et al 1989, p. 4).

Nevertheless, it is an undeniable truth that English language has increasingly acquired its world supremacy. Particularly since the twentieth century, the English

language has become *the lingua franca* of a global language. The British Council once gave an account of the population speaking English in the world,

World-wide, there are over 1,400 million people living in countries where English has official status. One out of five of the world's population speak English to some level of competence. Demand from the other four-fifths is increasing... By the year 2000 it is estimated that over one billion people will be learning English. English is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air-traffic control, international business and academic conferences, science, technology, diplomacy, sport, international competitions, pop music and advertising.

(British Council, English 2000 press release, 23 March 1995)

Umberto Eco (1995), an Italian novelist and cultural theorist, has explained why English has acquired the prominence:

The predominant position currently enjoyed by English is a historical contingency arising from the mercantile and colonial expansion of the British Empire, which was followed by American economic and technological hegemony. Of course, it may also be maintained that English has succeeded because it is rich in monosyllables, capable of absorbing foreign words and flexible in forming neologisms, etc.; yet had Hitler won World War II and had the USA been reduced to a confederation of banana republics, we would probably today use German as a universal vehicular language, and Japanese electronics firms would advertise their products in Hong Kong airport duty-free shops (*Zollfreie Waren*) in German.

(Eco, 1995, p. 331)

## **II. Englishness then and now**

The above review of historical development of English studies as a subject provides a point of reference for us to reconsider the role of English education in Taiwan. Though not a former colony of British Empire, Taiwan cannot be immune to the prevailing influence of English as language and culture. On the linguistic level, for many people who do not speak English as a first language in Taiwan, a good command of English ability means opportunity, which will help improve an individual's status or economic development. Also, because of the importance of English in international trade and technological research, learning English and speaking English well are considered an important stepping stone for the career success and personal growth. An "English fever" occurs, according to Stephen Krashen, refers to a phenomenon of "an overwhelming desire to learn English (and make sure your children learn English)."

Despite the pervasive and ubiquitous "English fever" in Taiwan, and the fact that English Department has been often ranked as the top choice in the humanities, it is undeniable to say that most college students in Taiwan are not motivated to study English/American literatures for several reasons. First, for the majority of English majors, English and American literatures are simply some of many required college literature courses. Although many students have acquired experience reading English, literature classes are often thought to be difficult because they require students to struggle with complex semantic and syntactic structures. Second, the instructor, basing on their own experiences of learning literature, often requires students to read hundreds of pages in thick anthologies. It is principally this classroom activity that forms the perceptions of Taiwan students about English/American letters, particularly the instruction they receive and the assigned readings they complete.

Another aspect needs to be taken into consideration; that is, the cultural implications of English education in Taiwan, along with the possible positive and

negative views of English cultural traditions. If English education was (and still is) essentially ideological and political, how do we the “third-world” educators discern the power networking, avoid duplicating the imperialistic rhetoric and locate our own identities and positions become all urgent issues to address. In other words, when we design a course such as English/American literature, educators should take into accounts many important questions: (1) how the assigned readings adequately represent the canonized norm which reflects literary and aesthetic merits; (2) how the chosen works help the non native speakers to relate the materials to their personal vernacular experiences, and eventually formulate critical thinking; a sense of “Think Globally, Act Locally” and (3) how the learning of English cultural and literature, and the awareness of “western” and “global” framework help them construct their worldviews.

These questions revolve upon several crucial concerns. The first concern is the questioning of authenticity as represented by the canon. The selection of assigned readings will reveal how the Taiwanese societies continue to engage with or mediate with English (imperial) experiences. By reading canonical works, we will have a better understanding as regards how the imperial center maintains its cultural hegemony and the Eurocentric standard of judgment, and also by reading them can we “write back” to the center by calling the standardized into question. The cross-cultural reading is necessitated as it allows the “center” and the “margin” to both realize what is overtly manifest or “silenced.” Such cultural revelation or silence requires a gap, a distance and a new perspective. Quite understandably, the Taiwanese students, if well-informed and trained, can offer their perspectives when approaching the texts, bringing forth possible dialogues with the cultural messages behind the texts. Rather than fixed or unified, Englishness should be understood as slippery, changing, or even always contradictory to the native expressions. In this vein, as Ashcroft et al. argue, we realize that the “authentic” experiences can be false or validating the center, but also that the “inauthentic” and “marginal” are real (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 41).

The second concern is the technologies to be employed for the mediation. We now live in a world in which human communication relies heavily on technology. Technological advancement has drastically changed our perception of the world, from daily practices to academic research. Educators need to ask as to how students can benefit from the advantages of internet technology, i.e. more accessible and readily available resources, while minimizing the possible disadvantage, i.e. superficial and

sketchy information of little substance or significance.

Next, one should also note the changing nature of text. Originally and in a strict sense, text refers to verbal or linguistic signs, whereas drawings or visual signs used to be considered to be different from, if not secondary to, the verbal text. However, since the late twentieth century, developments in technology have brought about a return of visual semiotic. The increasing availability of visual texts (making photos by cameras, or cell phones), and the means to disseminate them globally—have changed the status of the visual signs. Subsequent to the return of the visual semiotic to in the postmodern age, one has to be aware that words, typography, pictures, animation and films are woven together into English texts to form multimodal texts.

As mentioned from above, the noted feature of the postmodern world is the blurring of boundaries—not just geographical, cultural, generic boundaries but also in social identities. The privilege of English—the language of capitalism-- informs a thesis of globalization in which one cannot neglect that the conditions of social and economic inequality are assisted by the hegemonic power of the English language. Hence, while knowing and using the language as a tool, one has to locate one's position and construct one's own identities from the positioning.

### **III. English/American Literature Courses at NKNU in Taiwan:**

It is high time now to think of modifying the curricular planning for Literature Courses in English Department at NKNU in Taiwan. Teaching English and American literature in Taiwan during the 21st century requires striking a balance between traditional and (post)modern instruction, between the foreign and the native, between the global and the local, which involves the continuous negotiations between curricular requirements, social demands, and personal interests. I urge that a multicultural perspective be introduced for the new curriculum. To achieve this, the following concerns-- with canonicity, curriculum, and pedagogy-- need to be addressed:

First, in terms of canonicity, the instructor should be keenly aware of and sensitive to the canonical transformation of English/American literature during recent years. In the case of American Literature, throughout the past decades, the definition and function of the literary canon has been challenged in the United States. In 1992, a vigorous debate in America focused on the historical significance of Ferdinand Columbus and his "discovery" of America. Likewise in English Literature, given the

fact that the term “English” has triggered the controversy over what “standardized” English should be adopted and what “englishness” signifies. On top of this, the reconstruction of academic institutions, the emergence of feminism, minority discourses, and human concerns for ecology, cyberspace, and cultural issues have markedly affected the way that humans perceive the world. It is not an exaggeration to assert that peoples live within multicultural societies within which perspectives differ among individuals. Accordingly, traditional classical literature that has been taught in Britain and/or in the U.S. classroom no longer seems representative of ever-changing social conditions. Hence, the understanding of the critical inquiry about the expansion of canon may provide new instructional perspectives, and also inform the students of the continuous transformation of the canonical works.

The second concern is with curriculum planning. The curriculum syllabi in literature classrooms provide a means to define, transmit, and reproduce the literary boundaries of literature. It is important that college English professors present multiculturally informed literary texts to students. Take American Literature as an example. In the preface to the fifth edition of the *Norton Anthology*, Nina Baum, its editor, acknowledges a revision to the traditional canon “in response to teachers who found that the traditional canon was insufficiently representative of American literary history” (xxiii). The result is the inclusion of writers such as Anne Bradstreet, Mary Rowlandson, Sarah Kemble Knight, Edith Wharton, and W. E. B. Du Bois, among others. Baum states:

As every teacher of American literature knows, over the last two decades the American literary canon has become still more extensive and diverse than it was in the mid-seventies. In each successive edition, we have adjusted our selections in response to detailed suggestions from many teachers. (xxiii)

The innovative changes Baum describes include (a) the enhancement of “Literature to 1620” with a “much-requested section of Native American trickster tales from the Navajo, Clatso Chinook, Koasati, Winnebago, and Okanogan tribes” (xxiii); (b) the inclusion of “requested female writers” in the section “American Literature 1820–1865” such as Catharine Maria Sedgwick and Louisa May Alcott; (c) the addition in vol. 2 of Black writers to represent “American Literature During 1856–1914,” a period that included the Harlem Renaissance; and (d) the inclusion of writers in the section “American Prose Since 1945” from different ethnic backgrounds, “with an emphasis on ethnic diversity and experimental writing.” Baum describes the

revised anthology as “a testimony to the continuing richness of American literary traditions” (xxvi), which is believed to be a response to the trenchant challenge from the new rival—the *Heath Anthology*.

Introduced proudly by its editorial board, the publication of the *Heath* challenges successfully the dominance of the perennially reigning *Norton Anthology*, fostering a dynamic dialogue and debate of canon formation. *Heath* editor, Paul Lauter, admits that the revision of the anthology began during the 1970s, a period during which he was organizing a project called “Reconstructing American Literature.” The Project originated in 1982 at an MLA Conference, leading to the publishing of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* nine years later. In the first edition Lauter sets forth the agenda inherent in the publication:

First, scholars documented the fact that the canon of American literature had changed substantially over time. . . . A new anthology would necessarily be different from its predecessors for as Emerson had put it, “the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet.” (xxxiii).

Second, scholars in the late 1960s, recognizing the richness and diversity of American culture, began to seek out the large number of lost, forgotten, or suppressed literary texts that had emerged from and illustrated that diversity. . . . Anthologies were even slower to change; they continued to focus on a canon little different from that established half a century ago. The problem came to be how to provide teachers and students with a textbook that truly displayed the enormous richness of the cultures of America. (xxxiv)

We believe that reading this range of writers offers opportunities for drawing stimulating comparisons and contrasts between canonical and noncanonical figures, between female and male, between one ethnic writer and another. It allows us to study the diverse and changing cultures of America, not only a narrow group of authors. It is not that heretofore noncanonical texts provide, so to speak, the landscape of “minor” writing from which the great monuments of American literature rise. Rather, studying and comparing these differing works will enlarge our understanding of—even help us fundamentally redefine—the literature that has in fact been produced in the United States. This comparative process

may thus play a key role in changing the traditional foci and contexts for the study of American literature and bring into the classroom the energy and excitement generated by the new scholarship on women and minorities.

(xxxv)

In addition to its expansive selections written by female writers and authors from minority groups, the *Heath Anthology* differs from the *Norton Anthology*.

Hence, American Literature should not be limited to literatures produced in the U.S. only; Native American literatures, Northern American (Canadian), Chicano literatures, Caribbean literatures should be also included. Also, texts written by writers of minority groups, Asian American, African American writers should be taught in an appropriately proportional manner. More than a few students of American literature in Taiwan find it interesting to read works written by writers of Chinese ancestry. David Henry Hwang, Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, Gish Jen, Cathy Song, and Li-Young Lee provide access for Chinese readers to understand immigration experiences and Chinese communities in America.

English Literature presents an even wider spectrum. Traditionally, English Literature in Taiwan's universities focuses on the Great Britain and is hence "anglocentric." Almost all the syllabi will start with *Beowulf*, which is unexceptionally and chronologically followed by Medieval, Renaissance, Classicists, Romanticists, Victorian, Modernist works, setting up a "norm" for the teaching of English Literature. One cannot help but question the validity of the "norm" now in Taiwan in the Twentieth-first Century. It is debatable as to whether the selection of readings can help a Taiwanese student to formulate a vantage point from Asia. After all, students are expected to learn how to be a global citizen instead of being a British subject. Hence, I argue that the assigned reading for English Literature should not be limited to read "British" writers only. Instead, it should contain literatures written in English in order to introduce different perspectives, questioning and challenges on the notion of Englishness.

Finally, classroom teaching can make a lot of differences. As is well known, a bad teacher can make interesting materials deadly boring; and a good teacher can give an insipid text a spirit and life, thus making it fascinating. Teachers nowadays should be aware of the fact that the students they have are those who grew up in a world of myriad graphic signs. If they find words boring and less appealing, it is mainly because they have not yet been trained to read extensively or to decipher the written

signs. Reading is essentially important; no doubt for that. However, the offering of supplementary teaching aids such as recorded sounds, pictures, maps, graphics, realia, costumes, films, will certainly be helpful for students to “imagine” and understand the texts. Overall, I argue for a “culture package” in the teaching of English/American Literature and stress the importance for training of critical and local thinking and acting. In a project called “American Literature: To Think and Act Locally,” (as shown in the Appendix), I emphasize the connectedness of thinking and acting, as well as the importance of personal interests and local issues. The underlying principles are that learners are able to formulate independent thinking and fulfill a mission with their own knowledge base grounded a comparatively cross-cultural awareness. It is hoped that a well-designed package in a literature classroom will not only motivate, engage the students, inform the students of the contexts, but also eventually help them construct their own identities.

## A “TO THINK &amp; ACT LOCALLY” Project

Instructions: This is a project to incorporate American literary materials into your personal knowledge base and experiences. You are supposed to finish the project by demonstrating your ability of critical thinking of the issues and fulfilling a DIY mission. Your work should be presented on a webpage with copyrighted pictures, music or materials.

1. What might be William Cullen Bryant’s zodiac sign? Imagine you were Bryant, a eighteen-year-old poet who was about to write a love poem. What might you write about? Compose or find the background music to fit your poem. How has Bryant changed or maintained his essential view of life/death between the different versions of “Thanatopsis”? Identify a friend or relative who has the experiences of attending the funeral and conduct an interview with him/her. How do you think of the funeral and if condition allows, how do you improve the funeral?
2. **Witchcraft** Belief in evil forces such as witches, and diabolical spirits was widespread in America and Europe during and before the 17th Century—indeed, all the way back to the beginning of time. Thousands of innocent people were accused of witchcraft and put to death. Discuss the witchcraft in Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” and identify any contemporary film adapting the theme of “witch” that are occurring in Japanese animation and/or Asian (Japanese, Korean, Chinese or Taiwanese) TV soap operas today. Discuss situations and circumstances that cause people in today’s society to enter a “dark forest,” as Young Goodman Brown did.
3. You are a film producer who is interested in documenting Thoreau’s life in Walden Pond. Write a script and shoot a film clip (less than 15 minutes) that faithfully but originally reflects how a modern person gets inspired from what Hawthorne saw and thought during his residence in Walden Pond.
4. You are a detective and you hope find out the cause for Lenore’s death. Based on the clues from Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven,” what would you do and say? Write a script about the prequel and the sequel of the poem “The Raven.” Also, we do not usually see ravens in Taiwan. If you are asked to rewrite the poem into a dramatic form in a Taiwanese context, what would you take out or add?
5. You are an attorney and you always win the case. If you were to defend Bartleby or Billy Bud, what would you do and say? Write a script of the trials, in which the judge, the jury, the accused, the plaintive, the witness and the attorney are all present for cross-examination.
6. It’s said that Whitman’s Song of Myself (Particularly No. 21) has influenced Van Gogh’s most famous painting Starry Night. Compare the poem, the painting,

and the well known song “Starry Starry Night” by Don McLean. Find another Whitman’s poem, draw your own painting and make a song for it. (The following passage is quoted from a website, for your reference.)

It is admittedly a stretch to label Vincent Van Gogh a Whitmanian painter, but there is irrefutable evidence that Walt Whitman’s poetry influenced Van Gogh’s most famous painting. But Whitman’s influence is clear from Van Gogh’s mindset in late-1888 to mid-1889, when he painted *Starry Night*. The fact that Van Gogh not only admired Whitman but was avidly reading him during this time surfaces in a letter to his younger sister Wilhelmina:



Have you read the American poems by Whitman? [his italics] I am sure Theo has them, and I strongly advise you to read them, because to begin with they are really fine, and the English speak about them a good deal. He sees in the future, and even in the present, a world of healthy, carnal love, strong and frank— of friendship— of work— under the great starlit vault of heaven a something which after all one can only call God— and eternity in its place above this world. At first it makes you smile, it is all so candid and pure; but it sets you thinking for the same reason. The "Prayer of Columbus" is very beautiful (Van Gogh 445).

Following the above question, can you identify the theme of star gazing in any of Chinese classical poems or paintings? If yes, please discuss the similarities and differences.

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