

**Revitalizing the BASIC ENGLISH of Ogden and Richards: Toward New Conceptions of a  
People's English as a Lingua Franca**

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### ABSTRACT

Proficiency in a complex 'Complete' English is becoming a major educational and socioeconomic gatekeeper in Asia and many societies across the globe. Yet great masses of learners of English as an International Language (EIL) at the grassroots remain at poor levels of control even after extended years of classroom study. That is the striking case throughout Thailand and elsewhere in many corners of rural and working-class East Asia and the Global South: a widening gap between EIL haves and have-nots, or in the phraseology of Hardt and Negri (*Empire*, Harvard UP 2000), English for the Empire versus English for the Multitude.

The paper proposes new perspectives and agendas for TESOL, especially in Asia, in re-exploring a "suppled-up" BASIC (Richards) for the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both as a people's lingua franca – an ELF for greater equity and for the 'multitude' rather than the elite -- and as a simplified language for science, business and other discourses. BASIC is "not merely a list of words, governed by a minimum apparatus of essential English grammar, but a highly organized system designed throughout to be as easy as possible for a learner" (Richards, *Basic English and its uses*, 1943, 21). Rooted in experience in East Asia, the paper discusses new developments in Japan and the U.S., such as the Basic English Institute set up online in January 2003, and suggests some directions for the future.

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I expect to be on that job of showing how to make things easier to learn the rest of my life. (I. A. Richards 1938)

This is a paper about the need for a fundamental rethink of what we are doing. Especially for the many of us teaching English as an international language (EIL) to non-elite students on the myriad margins outside the major cities, high schools and colleges. It argues for flexibly re-exploring in depth the simplified auxiliary language BASIC developed by Charles K. Ogden, Ivor A. Richards and their associates in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, attuned to the needs of the mass teaching and learning of EIL today.

It is important from the outset to understand that BASIC is not 'simplified' English for elementary learners, it is something far more flexible and sophisticated in its power of expression and clarity. It is being taught today in Japan, for example, vigorously promoted there by Yuzuru Katagiri and his associates in the GDM (Graded Direct Method) current of EFL teaching there.

The purpose of the present paper is to encourage TEFL experts in Asia to begin rediscovering and exploring BASIC and Every Man's English (Ivor Richards' variant) for our own needs today. And the cross-cultural communicative needs of the great emerging transnational proletariat of today and tomorrow, what has in political analysis been called the *multitude* (Hardt and Negri 2000, esp. pp. 393-411; *idem*, 2004).

We need a newspaper in BASIC online, and much more literature written in BASIC and broadly disseminated in cheap editions. Excellent new textbooks from Canada are available (Richards and Gibson, rev. ed. 2005). BASIC ENGLISH can of course serve as a remarkably solid foundation for the far smaller number of learners who may want to try to master 'Complete English'. My major appeal to fellow TESOLers is: we have to start (re)experimenting seriously with BASIC in the region now.

## **ELT in Thailand: the Contours of a National Disaster**

The initial point of departure for these reflections is my own experience teaching EFL in non-elite provincial higher education in Thailand, and the extraordinary recent discourse in the Thai national media about the failure of English language teaching in Thailand. The central thesis drawn from experience in Southeast Asia is that the multitude is spending huge amounts of time and energy learning EIL with very poor results.

In late August 2005, the new Education Minister Chaturon Chaisang called in Bangkok for a “complete overhaul of the teaching of English” in Thai schools at all levels, stressing that “most students inability to communicate in English despite spending years learning the language.” He pointed to a massive failure in language-teaching in Thailand, as reflected in a recent government-convened conference in Bangkok in August 2005 (Kaewmorakot, 2005) and repeated criticism of Thai English learners’ proficiency and performance in international exams such as TOEFL (Editorial, 2005). Many Thai learners are caught in the throes of endemic ‘fossilization’ within an interlanguage frozen at a mid-elementary false beginner level in most skills even after 10-12 years of classroom instruction.

## **Elsewhere in East Asia and the ‘Two-Thirds World’**

In the Lao P.D. R., the situation is probably worse, and little EFL is taught outside the capital Vientiane, and a handful of institutions in provincial centers like Savannakhet, Luang Prabang and Phonsavan (Xieng Khuang Province), the latter with its remarkable Teachers’ College built on land still littered with UXO (unexploded ordnance from the Vietnam War). The fledgling university in Luang Prabang has no resources to hire any foreign experts for English, despite great need. Likewise in Cambodia, problems for TEFL abound. But intriguingly, even in countries like Korea, EFL instruction for the multitude is producing learners who can often hardly communicate, and are very weak in skills such as listening comprehension (E. K. 2005). And EFL for the masses in provincial China and Indonesia probably faces similar challenges, an intriguing terrain for exploration and experimentation with BASIC.

Information from other corners of East Asia, parts of the Arab world and across many school systems in Francophone sub-Saharan Africa (esp. the Democratic Republic of Congo), Mozambique, Angola and Ethiopia (Holloway 2005) suggests this is but the tip of a learning malaise that extends across many countries in the ‘Two-Thirds World’ (Prakash and Esteva 1998), particularly outside the larger urban areas and the ‘core-periphery’ social geography of the middle-class elites.

## **Class Structures along Educational Fault Lines: A Widening EIL Gap**

Proficiency in English is becoming a major gatekeeper to entry into a social elite in many societies across the planet, in a sense the language of what Hardt and Negri (2000) call the ‘Empire’. Yet great masses of learners of EIL in the grassroots cultures of the Global South, the emerging “multitude, the living alternative that grows within empire” (Hardt and Negri 2004) have little access to EFL instruction to begin with, or remain at fossilized levels of weak control even after extended years of classroom study. There is a rapidly widening gap between EIL haves and have-nots. Education is creating ever greater inequality. Millions of young and adult working-class learners in developed economies face a similar problem, especially in Eastern Europe. As do all socially disadvantaged learners everywhere. Roma children and youth in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia, for example, have little knowledge of EIL, and many leave formal schooling at an early age. Any version of English adopted for wider communication will have its defining socioeconomic class in a given country, usually those with privileged access to education and mobility.

## Are There Alternatives?

Can these trends be countered? Is there an economical alternative, an EIL that is a more simple, more learnable and thus more democratic? Not an 'elementary' English such as the first two levels (A1/A2) of the six-level Common European Framework proficiency scale, but a controlled smaller-scale language that is a self-contained global auxiliary medium, a kind of 'Occam's Razor' within TEFL, in the sense of "If you have two equally likely solutions to a problem, pick the simplest, keep things simple!"

We need a 'learner-friendly' EIL that is a more delimited skill, instead of the seeming 'Everest' of Cambridge First Certificate complexity learners face today. There is also need for a wealth of serious reading materials of all kinds in that more simplified form of English as an instrument for democratizing knowledge, for 'talking science and humanities' in a far leaner and more 'analytic' medium. Not 'graded readers', but *another species of discourse* for the multitude. In the sense that the 'multitude' in Negri's view is a new transnational proletariat, BASIC can become its reinvigorated cross-border language of wider communication as part of the social transformation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: counterposed to the elitist EIL of the Empire and its networks of control, a BASIC ENGLISH for the multitude.

## Ogden and Richards Revisited

The prime candidate for such more 'pared down' global communication, a kind of 'people's English', is an experimental lect developed and promoted in the international infancy of the EFL profession, launched by the psychologist Charles K. Ogden at the end of the 1920s: BASIC. Spread by the Orthological Institute in London, its quite remarkable influence peaked in late 1943, and withered during the Cold War. The original BASIC vocabulary was 850 'essential' headwords, and as Ogden stated, it would make it "possible to say all that we normally desire to say", with no more words than can be put in compact form on a one-page word list (Ogden 1930, p. 9): "In Basic English, the end of the work is in view all the time" (1932, p. viii). Four-skill mastery of unlimited English remains elusive for many, but within BASIC is a feasible aim: "Basic English is a system in which 850 English words will do the work of 20,000, and so give to everyone a second or international language which will take as little of the learner's time as possible". This "language within a language" (Richards 1968a, p. 242) can be taught at minimum cost, even in low-resourced learning environments, and to large classes, in a fraction of the time invested in most EFL curricula. As Horst (1956) exemplifies, it is also uniquely geared to self-instruction.

The famous BASIC word list -- 100 Operation Words, the 600 Things (400 General and 200 Pictured), the 100 Qualities and the 50 Opposites -- put in columns on a single sheet of paper is an emblem of that economy in learning effort, compactness of presentation, and the separation of the "functional" from the "content" words (<http://www2.educ.fukushima-u.ac.jp/~ryota/word-list.html> or <http://ogden.basic-english.org/words.html>). A corollary in simplicity is the 'Panopticon' word wheel for BASIC syntax (Ogden 1932, p. 186; <http://www.basic-english.org/learn/oww.html>). The list, based on research over seven years (1925-32), was the product of the testing out of the powers of English words, how they are able to take over the work of others. It is important to understand that BASIC is not about some highly reduced 'essential' vocabulary, a kind of 'survival mini-language' -- it is a different kind of English discourse, a 'working model of full English'. And was "conceived with a dual purpose—a means of International Communication, and as an aid to the Science of Interpretation" (Ogden 1937).

The idea for BASIC was born as Ogden and his colleague I. A. Richards, the major British literary theorist of the 1920s, were working on the chapter on "Definition" in writing their path-breaking semantic study, *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923): "at the end of it we suddenly stared at one another and said, 'Do you know that this means with under a thousand words you can say everything'" (quoted

from a 1973 interview with Richards, Koeneke 2004, p. 92). Though radically simplified, BASIC is still normal English. As Richards noted:

It is limited in its words and its rules, but it keeps to the regular forms of English. And though it is designed to give the learner as little trouble as possible, it is no more strange to the eyes of my readers than these lines, which are in fact in Basic English (1943, p. 20).

### **Every Man's English**

In a broader compass of re-exploration, the profession should also look at the more flexible, 'supple-up' version of BASIC that I.A. Richards spent the last 30 years of his life developing and promoting, Every Man's English (Richards 1968a; Richards and Gibson 1974). By the late 1940s, Richards and Ogden had largely parted company over BASIC, and Richards, based at Harvard University and teamed with Christine Gibson, was pursuing new ways of teaching EME. As Richards (1968a, p. 241) stressed: "No doubt we can see now, as the proposer of Basic English hardly could, that an auxiliary world language will have to be (as with the automobile and the airplane) a developing design, redesigned as performance data indicate".

### **BASIC in an Ecology of EIL**

It is remarkable how BASIC and Every Man's English have disappeared totally from the radar screens of the EFL profession and applied English linguistics. Standard works such as Crystal (1995), Carter and Nunan (2001) and a key volume on EIL (McKay 2002) make no mention of it whatsoever. Yet BASIC and its sister EME would seem to be an especially intriguing option at a point in global communication patterns where "the majority of EIL interactions world-wide take place between speakers for none of whom English is the mother tongue and for none of whom English is a cultural symbol" (van Essen 2004). In part, my reflections here are a response to van Essen's observation: "As an international language, English has become de-nationalised. It is no longer the property of the native English-speaking nations; it has got into the hands of foreigners. They own it now. What does that mean for us teachers and materials designers?" I suggest: take a fresh serious look at BASIC.

And perhaps instead of 'international', "*Supranational* would be the better fitted word. The common language must carry and be carried by the supranational impulse, and be the organ of the supranational mind" (Richards 1943, p. 10).

### **Some Basics of BASIC**

An all-purpose auxiliary language suited for **B**usiness, **A**dministrative, **S**cientific, **I**nstructional and **C**ommercial uses --- BASIC is "not merely a list of words, governed by a minimum apparatus of essential English grammar, but a highly organized system designed throughout to be as easy as possible for a learner" (Richards 1943, p. 21). The original BASIC has only 16 verbs or 'operators' (*come, get, give, go, keep, let, make, put, seem, take, be, do, have, say, see, send*, along with *may* and *will*), plus 20 'directives' (prepositions and particles), conceiving of verbs as 'directional actions': "there are 4000 common verbs in the English language which may be similarly displaced by the sixteen operators" (Ogden 1937). Utilizing the suffix '-ed', many additional 'verbal' expressions are created, such as *I was surprised* from the noun ('thing') *surprise*, or *It was covered with flowers* from the noun *cover*.

Syntax is pared down and made more transparent, grounded on a handful of 'rules'. A useful chapter on grammar simplification (<http://ogden.basic-english.org/lbe4.html>) provides a readable overview (Richards and Gibson 1945). As an English 'nuclear mini-lect' in its own right, BASIC can be taught far more economically than Complete English, and with a unique classroom focus on a kind of practical hands-on semantics, what Katagiri (1993) terms a 'semantically sequenced way of learning English'. Indeed, Ogden's practical semantics in presenting 'simple and complex acts' is quite fascinating in its clarity (1932, pp. 146-155), as reflected in this brief excerpt:

To ‘understand’ what we ‘know; we have to *be clear about it* or *have a grip of it*, although when we ‘understand’ horses, all we are saying is that we *have a good knowledge of* them. But we do not ‘understand’ a friend till we *see his point of view*, which is not unlike *seeing the point* of an argument, or, in other words, what a person ‘means’ (p. 151).

The verb ‘understand’ itself is not part of the BASIC operators. Central to BASIC and Everyman’s English is the technique of paraphrase: ‘give thought to’ or ‘have in mind’ instead of ‘think’, ‘give up’ instead of ‘abandon, abdicate, resign, vacate’ and so forth: “Put is an operator; in is a directive; put in says what it might be expected to say, and neither constituent can be dispensed with in an ultimate analysis. Insert, on the other hand, is a linguistic device, or stylistic luxury, which can be dispensed with” (Ogden 1937). The verb ‘know’ is replaced by ‘have knowledge of’, ‘be certain of’, ‘be clear about’. The *General Basic English Dictionary* (Orthological Institute 1940) gives 40,000 meanings of 20,000 words in Standard English, all defined in minimal BASIC.

A text in BASIC reads much like standard English, despite its paucity of verbs. This is quite different from ‘graded’ readers and analogous material ‘scaled’ for difficulty or ‘written-down’. Here is a bit of the Atlantic Charter in the original (left) and rewritten in BASIC (Richards and Gibson 1945):

after the final destruction of Nazi tyranny,  
  
they hope to see established a peace  
which will afford to all nations the means  
of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries,  
and which will afford assurance that all the men  
in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom  
from fear and want.

after the complete destruction of the  
Nazi rule of force,  
it is their hope to see a peace made  
which will keep all nations  
safe from attack from outside  
and which will make certain that all the men  
in all the lands will be free from fear and  
and need through all their days.

And an extract in BASIC from Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” (Ogden 1937), followed by the original:

Seven and eighty years have gone by from the day when our fathers gave to this land a new nation—a nation which came to birth in the thought that all men are free, a nation given up to the idea that all men are equal. Now we are fighting in a great war among ourselves, testing if that nation, or any nation of such a birth and with such a history, is able long to keep united.

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.

A fair assessment of BASIC as a medium for thought and expression can only be achieved by reading a full book written in BASIC, like Richards (1933), McGrath (1934) or Rossiter (1935), or Plato’s *Republic* in expanded BASIC (Richards 1942). Annex 1 below provides a brief text from a Czechoslovak adaptation of Ogden (1935) for Czech fighter pilots in WW II.

### **From BASIC to Wider English**

Richards repeatedly stressed that Basic is “no rival to or substitute for an ampler English, where the use of that is feasible. It is an introduction and exploratory instrument” (1943, p. vi.). The concept is in some way two-tiered: a supranational auxiliary with a “reasoned design” (Ogden) and compact grammar, a versatile power tool -- and some variety of Complete English for those with the time, opportunity and ‘privilege’ to master it. But BASIC can also be the main plateau of proficiency, with its solid mastery the central goal for millions of learners. Instead of being left at a ‘beginner’s’ level and thus stigmatized, a learner can truly learn to control this ‘controlled’ nuclear model. *That is the*

*shift in pedagogical vision I propose we should be (re)considering.* Realism suggests we deal with realities.

## **Now is the Time**

Barbara Seidlhofer (University of Vienna) has argued that

Basic ... is highly significant as a stimulus for thought. What now needs to be done is to see how far Ogden's conceptual scheme relates to (the still very scarce) empirical findings of how people actually use English as a lingua franca ... I am not advocating that we should go into classrooms and teach Basic as described by Ogden. This would be ridiculous (without further research anyway). But it would be equally ridiculous to disregard a great deal of work that has gone into conceptualising, operationalising and trialling a model of English which was designed from the outset as that of an international lingua franca" (2002, pp. 295, 297).

Why "ridiculous"? Experiments need to be redesigned and initiated now, building creatively on past work. Seidlhofer seems to disregard the huge amount of hands-on experience BASIC accumulated in the 1930s and 40s, especially in East Asia (Richards 1935; Koenke 2004) – "no other restricted English has been tried out so variously and on such a scale" (Richards 1968a, p. 245) -- and the teaching of EME under Richards' guidance in the U.S. and Latin America (Russo 1989, pp. 430-70). As Richards observed: "The medium exists. Its period of trial or of tutelage [...] may be taken to be over" (1943, p. 119).

## **Japan as a Laboratory for BASIC/EME**

In revisiting the terrain of a limited controlled auxiliary English, the wealth of experience teaching 'Baza Angla' in Japan over many decades since the 1930s, largely unknown outside the country, needs to be examined in empirical depth. The work of Yuzuru Katagiri and others connected with teaching BASIC and EME is one solid current of experience over many years, often grouped under the umbrella of Graded Direct Method, a term associated with Richards' work (<http://www.gdm.pos.to/>). Richards and Gibson's textbooks were appropriated by Japanese EFL teachers in the early 1950s, and lasting interest there is reflected in the volume of Richards' papers edited by Katagiri and Constable (1993). There is a GDM Newsletter, and a conference of GDM teachers met in Kyoto in February 2005. Their seasoned expertise and input in any revitalization of BASIC are crucial.

## **Experimentation in China**

A prime arena outside Europe for diverse experimentation with BASIC teaching and teacher training was China. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, even as war raged, it was being taught in middle schools in Beijing, Yunnan and elsewhere. The only Orthological Institute outside Britain was the Orthological Institute of China which Richards set up in 1936 in Beijing. Relocated to Kunming in Yunnan, it continued work under the guidance of Bob Winter down to the end of the war. A Provincial English Teachers' College was set up for training teachers in BASIC in Kunming in 1940 (Koenke 2004, chap. 6). In 1937, on the eve of the Japanese invasion, the Nationalist Ministry of Education agreed to adopt Basic English in schools across China, and instructed the Orthological Institute of China to develop a workable curriculum. War then brought this initiative to a halt. In 1938, Hong Kong University expressed its willingness to train middle school teachers to teach BASIC (ibid, p. 151). Many associated with the experiment in Yunnan, promoted by the education ministry there, were enthusiastic about the results in middle schools compared with the teaching of Standard English. Much testing of the students' progress in BASIC was carried out, a range of teaching materials were developed (ibid., chaps. 5-6). Two textbooks (Winter and Shui 1938, 1939) and a teacher's handbook (Winter and Shui 1938) were widely used. [1]

## **Spadework in Malaya**

Closer here to home – indeed directly here in Penang -- is the interest in BASIC and its promotion by a famous official in British Malaya in the 1930s, the distinguished historian Victor Purcell. Purcell had been the Assistant Director of the Education Department for the Straits Settlements, which included Singapore, Malacca and Penang, and from the mid-1930s began collaborating with Richards with the idea of promoting BASIC teaching, especially in the Chinese schools in Penang and elsewhere in Malaya (Koeneké 2004, pp. 146 ff.). He later became Protector of Chinese, based in Ipoh (Perak). In his book, *Basic English for Malaya*, he describes his encounter with Richards in 1933 and later interest in BASIC as a way to remedy “the poor quality of English in the Chinese schools” in Singapore and other towns. Interesting is his comment: “In other parts of the country, in Penang specially, an attempt is being made to get the public interested, and a great number of teachers from the schools came to the talks on Basic English which I gave at the Chinese Town Hall, Penang” (Purcell 1937). There is an unwritten history of BASIC in Penang still awaiting some scholarly digging and analysis.

## **BEI in Marshalltown**

The demise of Ogden’s Orthological Institute (1930-1962) and Basic English Foundation (1947-1955) has led more recently to a bold venture in the American heartland, the Basic English Institute. It was set up online in January 2003 out of Marshalltown in central Iowa, a spin-off of basiceng.com, created by a team around Jim Manor, a dedicated non-linguist and systems engineer. Its aim is to expand Basic in the 21st century, as a lingua franca and in terms of computer adaptations: <http://www.basic-english.org/> Yet the BEI in Iowa is still largely untouched by the present surge in TEFL. Few linguists or TESOL specialists seem to be involved. The Institute deserves to be brought into the TESOL research & development mainstream. Many projects await facilitators.

The website has numerous online books from BASIC’s classic era, including Ogden (1968), which reprints an anthology of Ogden’s key works. It highlights a core bibliography (<http://www.basic-english.org/learn/basicbibio.html>) and numerous key texts (<http://ogden.basic-english.org/books.html>). An excellent online handbook there written at Harvard is Richards and Gibson (1945). Richards and Gibson’s *English Through Pictures*, Books 1-3 (1973), recently reprinted in an updated edition in Toronto, could serve as a prototype for new types of textbooks, as could *First Steps in Reading English* (Richards & Gibson 1957). English Language Research, Inc. (1945) is a teacher’s guide written by Richards and Gibson for the *English Through Pictures* textbook, and stresses the idea of the “graded direct method” now promoted by GDM in Japan, which has reprinted the guide. Refreshing here is the central focus on ‘pointing-naming’ statements in early lessons, rather than communicative pseudo-dialogues, and accompanied by stick drawings and other simple illustrations through all three books. These drawings appeal strongly to what Gardner (1983) calls “spatial intelligence”.

## **A Window for Language Awareness and Interpretation**

Ogden and Richards were both geared to the compass of ‘simplify, simplify’ – learning how to say the most complex things in concise, straightforward language:

it is not the quantity of the words we are acquainted with, but the quality of our understanding of them, which matters. The chief vice of foreign-language learning (and indeed of much native-language learning) is picking up words without learning quite what they mean, accepting them with indefinite and vague meanings that thereafter obscure their real uses from us. Basic, through its analytic procedures can avoid this danger more thoroughly than any other mode of introduction to Complete English. (Richards 1968a, p. 250).

This notion of reducing lexis to a minimum and better grasping denotative meaning and ‘vertical translation’ – learning how to rephrase complex words into simpler ones -- is central to what Richards termed “techniques in language control” to make communication, even for native speakers, clearer and more effective (Richards and Gibson 1974). Is BASIC paraphrasing more efficient than paraphrase in full English? Some scholars think it is -- because you cannot rely on the rich resource of ready-made synonyms, you must think more about the real and ‘basic’ meaning (Richards and Gibson 1974, pp. 124-136; Sweeney 1943).

It is precisely this meta-linguistic dimension that intrigues Seidlhofer: “current language pedagogy remains ‘code-fixated’ in the sense that it may just develop an unthinking proficiency in abilities for use rather than an intrinsic awareness of the nature of language itself and its creative potential” (p. 294). Conjoint with work on BASIC, Richards (1942) strove to teach new semantic approaches, via the prism of “100 great words”, to in-depth reading for everyone, in effect a kind of ‘English-English’ translation, techniques of paraphrasing and using simple language to examine complex words and ideas. That built in part on his earlier work as a literary theorist on why readers misinterpret poetic language (Richards 1929).

As a teacher of English at Cambridge, with decades of experience of similar conditions at Harvard, I feel some confidence in saying that our most careful and expensive methods of teaching people how to read are, judged by their results, at present almost ludicrously inefficient (Richards 1968a, p. 254).

An extended sample of Every Man’s English for semantic description (Richards and Gibson 1974, chap. 8) suggests its potential power.

### **Building a Platform of New Practice and Theory**

What is needed is an international network of teachers and scholars to build a platform and network for experimentation with BASIC and Every Man’s English, ‘retrofitted’ to current realities. A small international association could be established. An online newsletter could follow. Intensive short courses to train teachers in using EME and BASIC, as Richards pioneered in China and later in the U.S., would be a concrete beginning (Richards 1968). For us as teachers, learning to write in BASIC takes time and skill, speaking well requires guided practice. Ogden (1968) remains a main text for self-instruction. The BEI is developing new angles for instruction and computer adaptations.

One goal should be a new form of streamlined EAP, which would allow scientists to write abstracts and presentations of their work in a simple, understandable form in ‘transactional’ professional communications. My experience with scientists in Thailand indicates that even after 12 years of English instruction and an ability to passively decode texts in their sub-field, very few can formulate simple expositions of their own work. Every Man’s English for science and technology offers an effective written alternative *that can be actively mastered*. Unusually weak listening comprehension skills, common in Thailand, may also be amenable to corrective therapy via EME. Schooling the ear through dictation is a major desideratum in EIL learning environments in East Asia: innovative nuts-and-bolts approaches anchored in an amplified BASIC could also be developed. Certainly Jenkins’ (2000) notions of a simplified Lingua Franca Core for teaching phonology, aimed at intelligibility among non-native speakers, could be readily adapted to instruction for BASIC and EME, and is indeed ideally suited to a ‘small-scale’ form of the language for global communication that in effect has no native speakers in the strict sense.

### **Democratizing Knowledge: a Micro-Language for the Multitude**

Ogden and his associates wished to create a rich array of reading materials, a kind of Every Man’s Library in BASIC. That can be revitalized inside a TESOL profession committed to the fuller, more direct democratizing of the knowledge society: “It is the humanities as well as the sciences which we

must make accessible again” (Richards and Gibson 1974, p. 53). Richards (1933) presented a course in logic written fully in BASIC. In 1942, he published an edition of Plato’s *Republic* in amplified BASIC, released as a GI pocketbook. He also did a version of Homer’s *Iliad* in EME (1950), distributing it in China. A BASIC version of Shaw’s *Arms and the Man* by Ms. L. W. Lockhart appeared in 1936, praised by Shaw. There is a complete translation of the Bible in elegant BASIC online (<http://www.o-bible.com/bbe.html>).

We need current introductions in BASIC to many disciplines, such as Salzedo (1933) pioneered for business. Rossiter (1935) applies BASIC as a critical tool in the humanities for interpreting poetry, as did later William Empson (Richards and Gibson 1974, pp. 61-63), grounded on the “way in which BASIC gets a complex idea broken up into its parts”.

Exciting would be an online BASIC newspaper, in part akin to the aims of VOA’s Special English (1,500 headwords), itself largely a restricted lexis spoken at slower speed. With imagination, even a satellite channel like Discovery, in BASIC, seems doable, and of course feature programmes on local radio. The Basic English Institute is inviting people to create WebZines. Numerous texts from the 1930s, like McGrath’s (1934) classic written in BASIC on architecture, and E. C. Graham’s *The Basic Dictionary of Science* (1966), William Empson’s version of J.B.S. Haldane’s *The Outlook of Science* (1935) and Rossiter’s *Basic for Geology* (1937) demonstrate that technical description in BASIC is highly efficient, and can reconstitute ‘talking science’.

In reconfiguring the framework for such an English for the multitude, the ultimate dynamics for its adoption and spread must ideally flow from the grassroots, not imposed by governments or elites from above: “A common language for the earth will only come into being through the common work of common men and women in their common interests” (Richards 1943, p. 119).

## Past as Prologue

H. G. Wells, in his *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), had a relevant vision of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its global communication landscapes (here from a version put into BASIC):

One unlooked-for development of the hundred years between 2000 and 2100 was the way in which Basic English became in that short time the common language for use between nations [...] C. K. Ogden and another Fellow of Magdalene College, I. A. Richards [...] got out a book, *The Meaning of Meaning*, in 1923 which is one of the earliest attempts to make the language-machine better. Basic English was produced in the process. The new Science had almost no money at the back of it, only a small number of workers were interested, and in the troubled years which came later it went from view. It came to the front again some time between 2000 and 2050 (Turner 1941, pp. 163-166).

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## NOTES

1. By 1939, the Orthological Institute in London had extended its operations to 25 countries. Ogden elaborated his concept of the new field of Orthology, the ‘normative science of language’, in numerous essays. During WW II, the Harvard Commission on English Language Studies that Richards guided, along with his Orthological Committee at Harvard University and Language Research, Inc., developed materials for BASIC for Latin America and in immigrant ESL and literacy education in the United States (Koenke 2004, pp. 186, 190). All this was part of Richards’ life-long commitment within reading theory, applied semantics, literary criticism and EFL pedagogy to what he called “linguistic engineering” (ibid., p. 32). In September 1943, a speech by Winston Churchill at Harvard *inter alia* praised BASIC and its prospects for the future. Here he formulated his famous phrase: “The empires of the future are the empires of the mind” (Koenke 2004, pp. 186-187). *Life* magazine later carried a feature story on BASIC presenting the venture to a broader American public (Barnett 1943).

President Franklin D. Roosevelt also expressed interest in the mini-language's potential. Empson, in retrospect, regarded Churchill's interest as the "kiss of death" (Russo 1989, p. 438).

This was BASIC's heyday, rapidly eclipsed by later events, including the departure of Churchill, a cooling of interest in BASIC at the British Council, the dismantlement of the British Empire, revolution in China and the advent of the Cold War. But Richards' post-war global impact through his textbooks *English Through Pictures* was considerable. In Japan, 200 teachers have worked with the GDM methods he pioneered, and various materials developed there, including videos and DVDs, are still in creative use (Katagiri 2005). The files of Richards' Language Research, Inc. were transferred to the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1984 and researchers can examine them there. There was much experimentation in teaching (Richards 1968b; Russo 1989, esp. pp. 430-70).

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## ANNEX 1.

A BRIEF TEXT IN BASIC (from D. M. Turner, *Basic English for Czecho-Slovak Students*, London: British Council 1941, from 'Step Twenty-Six,' p. 117)

### PEACE

Even in early times, when it was almost as common for two countries to have war as for two men to have a fight, there were some who had the feeling that this condition was not right. The love of peace has been a part of the teaching of almost every great religion, and it is clear from this that the men of the past were conscious of the value of living in harmony with one another.

But til only a short time back, almost no one, not even those who had a belief in religion, had any hope that we would ever be able to put an end to war, and no serious attempt was made to take steps against it. [...] In present conditions no country gains any profit from the use of arms, though when a war has been started hate and fear will keep it going. The connection between the trade of all countries is so complex that damage to one is damage to all, and the loss to a country in this way is greater than anything it may have hope of getting by making an attack on another. Dead men and burned towns are only a small part of the price of war today. The bad conditions which come after it seem to have no end, and it is not possible for anyone who has the experience of them not to see that the old view of war as good business is quite wrong. [...] All these things had made men conscious that war is not only bad, but against all reason. War at all times has been a shocking waste of time, of money, and of men. It is now clearly seen to be so, and that gives the greatest hope for peace which there has ever been in history.

