CHAPTER 8

MACRO ISSUES FOR WORKPLACE LITERACY

8.1   LITERACY

This study into the system and process in computer mediated discourse has indicated that literacy for today's workplace is very different from that of previous years. The changing face of society especially a technologically advanced society demands that people be not only proficient in the three R's but also be able to cope with the complex culture that the range of machines currently available has brought about and the social processes associated with it. For example, the simple computer has revolutionised and made possible activities that were thought impossible ten years ago. Now, many business communities, activities within the organisation and activities outside the organisation require data to be generated at optimum speed and transferred to places near and distant within minutes.

This rapidly changing socio - economic society insists on speed and speed is only possible with the right technology. To be literate in such a society demands that one needs to be aware of the possibilities of technology within the social processes of the target society. Besides being techno-literate, there is also the need to study and master the

English language the conduit between technology and the business communities.

English is the language of trade and commerce and is also the language medium for technology. In the discourse community of Perdana, English appears to be the primary medium of communication even though eighty percent of the community members are native speakers of the Malay language. Malay is the national language of the country and the medium of instruction in all national schools in the country. This new development in the communication medium in the national business corporations is, I belief, due in part to the influence of technology and also because of the globalisation of markets. Proficiency in this variety of English therefore becomes crucial for effective functioning in the community.

Language is a social phenomenon and its role as a resource in the creation and negotiation of meaning can not be overlooked in any literacy program. It is in and through language that the changes taking place in society are encoded, and explained and utilised. In today's world a person needs to be equipped with the **3 C's** (as I have named them), namely: (i) competency skills in the language register, (register as in Halliday 1978,1980), (ii) culture of technology which has become an inevitable part of contemporary society, and thirdly, (iii) the critical dimension or the politics of discourse associated with the technology and the community. The new workforce that has not been educated in the 3C's will eventually be marginalised and excluded from market share and effective participation in the community.

As this study has shown, in the business community, language and technology play a very important role in socialising an individual for the workplace. That not withstanding, one must not be blinded into thinking that the English language or any language for that matter is a neutral and transparent medium transferring valuable information from one source to another. Language is not a neutral transmitter of meaning but is a resource that can constrain and at the same time enable the kinds of meanings that can be made. One needs to be critical and conscious of how language can be "massaged" to create the desired meaning and impact intended in the community that it is used. The strength of the 3C's lie in the development and the empowerment of critical readers and fluent writers.

The way to go about it is basically to first understand the language of the community as it is actually used in the community and the way it works in the building and ordering of meaning. This attempt at understanding the language should be seen as the discovery and explication of the rules for contextually appropriate behaviour in a particular community. Language is one of the main resources for meaning making. (Lemke, 1988; Kress 1985; Hodge & Kress 1988; Halliday 1978; 1980) and thus taking the pains to understand the language as it is actually used would indicate what an individual needs to know to be a functional member of the community. In addition, it is language that enables one to work with changes and in this age of technology. According to Christie:

> Knowing how language works in one's
> culture is important, I suggest, not only
> because it enables the individual to operate
> effectively in the culture, but also because it
> enables the individual to work for changes

within the culture, where that is deemed a
desirable thing (Christie, F. 1990:03).

An individual is not an isolated entity but a social being. An individual
must be seen, "as a social agent, located in a network of social relations,
in specific places in a social structure." (Kress 1985:5). A development
from this statement is the notion that language is social behaviour and
an individual's language must conform to the accepted standards or
conventions in the contexts and society where such conformity is
required. (Lemke, 1988; Kress 1985; Hodge & Kress 1988; Halliday
1978; 1980; Swales, 1990). Literacy for the workplace should be looked
as a thinking tool, a tool for learning and meaning because in the
workplace, language is used for the discovery and production of
meaning. Literacy refers to the way in which knowledge, information
and experience are organised, classified and produced either implicitly
or explicitly. Since for each community, these items may be organised
in different combinations and stresses, context plays a very important
part in workplace literacy. For Green, (1988) subject -specific literacy'
or situation/context -specific literacy refers to a set of literacy
competencies that is an integral part of the operation of specific subject
areas. Consequently, subject-specific learning or cultural learning
refers to the socialisation into the culture of the business community.
Robin, 1985 explains this concept clearly.

> reading and writing are complexly
> constituted and potentially enabling
> competencies that develop only when they
> are practised; literacy that is worthy of the
> name....... develops only through the
> productive exercise of available and
> developing competencies with language -
> through the use of such competencies in
> composing and comprehending texts,
> through the use of language to make

meanings that count for something in
contexts where learning and sharing what is
learned counts for something. **Literacy is an
outcome**, (my emphasis) not a skill and not
(even) a competency. It is something that is
achieved when competencies are enabled
through exercise of the human capacity to
make meaning(Robin, 1985: 485 in Green,
1988:6).

Green (1988), advocates that to view literacy holistically one must view it in terms of three interrelated dimensions: the Operational, the Cultural and the Critical. These three dimensions build on and complement each other to produce an individual who is not just socialised but also critically well informed of the mechanisms that operate in the culture.

8.1.1 THE OPERATIONAL DIMENSION

The operational dimension refers to the understanding that it is through the medium of language that the literacy event happens. In other words it assumes competency with regard to the language system. It refers to the way individuals use language to operate effectively in literary tasks in specific contexts within the community. It is a question of individuals being able to read and write in a range of contexts in an appropriate and adequate manner for functioning in that community. In this study the operational dimension refers to knowledge of the workings of the discourse system and its related genres in the business community. (This is the first **C** mentioned earlier).

8.1.2 THE CULTURAL DIMENSION

The second aspect, the cultural dimension, refers to competency with regard to meaning making within the community. (The second **C** mentioned). It takes into account the fact that literacy acts and events are not only context-specific but also entail a specific content and medium. The medium and content can be technology and/or specific genres.

Thus it is not just a question of being literate in itself generally but literate with regard to something or some aspect of knowledge or experience in relation to the community. A truly literate person knows that he/she cannot be literate with regard to everything in this world but such individuals are not powerless in circumstances outside their competencies because they have will know what to do, who to see in order to achieve their purposes because of the literacy training they have undergone. Through subject specific learning, one learns the culture as one is socialised into the community through a process of enculturation. In present techno - business communities, it refers to the meaning system entrenched in the technology and the genres of the community. To learn and internalise the culture is to become an effective functioning participant within the constraints and facilities available in the community. Learning the ways of behaving and doing business (the social processes) constitute subject specific learning. There is a mutually enriching and informing relationship between the language system and the meaning system and thus between the operational and the cultural dimensions of literacy. According to Green:

> Learning a subject inevitably involves
> being socialised into the subject. This can be
> expressed as socialisation into the culture,

or sub-culture, of the subject the specific
meaning-system of the subject, which in
turn is socialisation into the culture
generally. It is in this sense that subject
-area learning can be described as culture
learning (Green, 1988:10).

8.1.3 THE CRITICAL DIMENSION

The third dimension of literacy, the critical aspect, (the third C
mentioned earlier) has to do with the social construction of knowledge
and the notion of training as socialisation. A significant aspect of
training is entry or socialisation into the dominant culture - the
corporate culture of the business community. Individuals need to gain
entry into the meaning system of a particular culture in order to
function effectively in it. But meaning systems of cultures are not
neutral but value- laden. Cultural meaning systems tend to be selective
and sectional in the sense that they represent particular interpretations
and classifications. For example, we, as ESP trainers have taught many
aspects of business culture such as persuasive communication, skills
management, conflict, negotiation etc. to managers and executives but
not to all across the board irregardless of their social positions in the
community. By imparting such skills/strategies to a privileged few, we
inadvertently reinforce the play of social games disproportionably by
empowering some players over others.

The point being made is that it does not necessarily mean that
these skills should be mastered by all because not all the social agents
in the community need these skills to function in the environment.
What is important is that the politics of such discourse must be made
transparent to all - as a function of awareness raising. All potential
new-comers into the society should be given access to the grounds for

selection and the principles of interpretation, and thereby provided with critical insights into the processes and possibilities of knowledge-production both of their own, and that of the target culture. If newcomers are deprived of this critical awareness, they will only be superficially socialised into the dominant meaning system.

They will probably lack the ability and capacity to take an active role in the transformation of knowledge. In other words, they will be merely performers but not transformers. When new comers are socialised to become mere performers, as is currently done through ad hoc, isolated piece-meal, training in the workplace, subject specific literacy can operate as a means of social control. In such a situation members will be ignorant of the wider implications of many issues and will not be critically aware to question them either. The importance of the critical dimension of literacy therefore cannot be overstated. It empowers the individual. It enables the individual to not only participate in the culture and knowledge but also in various ways transform it and actively produce it.

Thus subject -specific or workplace literacy is not simply about the reproduction of knowledge and information within the boundaries of the subject or content, it is also about the production of knowledge, of personal meanings with significant bearings on the maintenance but more importantly on the transformation of culture. The critical dimension of literacy calls for the critical reflection of both, what is being taught and how to ensure that learners take an active role in the production of knowledge and meaning. It means giving individuals the capacity to recognise the socially constructed and conventional nature of knowledge but also to work collaboratively and constructively towards informed personal meanings. In the context of

this study, this aspect of literacy refers to knowledge about the political system of the community. All these three dimensions (Green 1988), need to be considered if one wants to understand literacy in the workplace in the fullest sense.

In sum, looking at the present study one can relate the operational dimension of literacy to learning about the discourse system of a community (the first **C**), the cultural dimension to learning about the operations of the meaning system and the facilities that enable the social processes of the community (the second **C**), and finally the critical dimension - the interpretation of the political system of the community (the third **C**). As this study has shown, to be well socialised into the business community the interpretations, awareness and knowledge of the operation of all the three systems is essential.

Related to the three dimensions mentioned, one needs to understand the concept of information, especially electronically transmitted information and technology. These two important constructs are an integral part of the workplace of this age. One is constantly reminded that this is an information age. The concept and attributes of information therefore warrants some discussion as it has a crucial role to play in what has been dubbed the information society. Information, though in many ways intangible, is a very important commodity while technology is an important enabler in the business community. Knowledge about these two issues therefore create greater understanding about the concept of workplace literacy.

8.2 INFORMATION

Information is power. Anyone interested in organisational communication must also be interested in the concept of information. Information about social agents or events in the external environment initiate or affect many task-related communications within the organisation and information about threats and opportunities affects organisational actions and decisions. In the words of Huber & Daft,

> It is information about the organisation's environment, as contrasted with the environment itself, that constitutes the raw material of organisational communication and actions
> (Huber & Daft 1987:130).

In this era organisations are changing from goods and services producing systems to become information processing and decision making systems. It is clear that the quantity of information in the environment is increasing and with communication and computing technologies the availability of any information produced is also greatly increased. Therefore the environmental characteristics of information, especially technology transmitted information, can greatly affect organisational communication.

8.2..1 ELECTRONIC INFORMATION

One of the most obvious factor of this age is the wealth of information currently available via the technology network. This fact is confirmed by the amount of electronic data interchange (information) in the world today. (Refer figure 8A).

(FIGURE 8A)

WORLD ELECTRONIC DATA INTERCHANGE MARKET REVENUE
FORECASTS 1994-2001
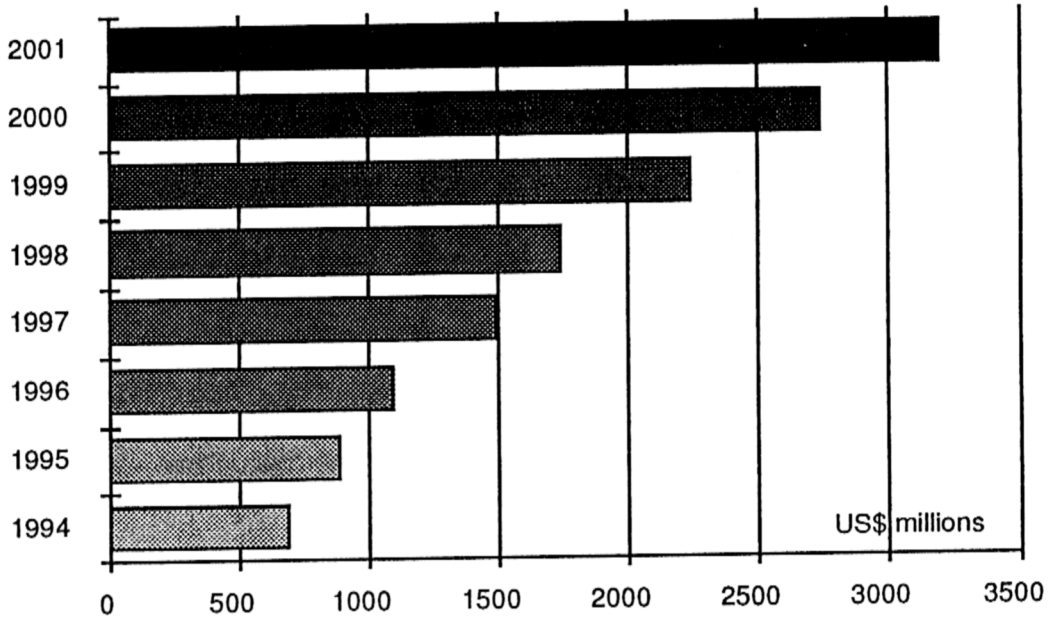
(IDC, Computimes, August 3rd, 1995).

As figure 8A shows, the forecasted percentage increase in data exchange is tremendous and will continue to increase rapidly. Information is becoming the rapidly increasing economic commodity of the future. (IDC Computimes August 3, 1995). Although information is by nature intangible and hard to define but one can look at information through its properties and with this awareness see its relevance to the concept of literacy for the workplace.

8.2.1.1 INFORMATION IS AN ACTIVITY

Information is something that happens between minds and objects and other pieces of information. Information is that which makes a difference in a relationship. That making of the difference is an activity within a relationship, an action and not a physical space as with traditional agricultural goods. In other words there is no need for the exchange of or for the physical form of goods. Even when information is encapsulated in a static form like a CD Rom running at gigabytes per second, it is still something that must be decoded and processed by the mind - as an activity/a process. For the individual in the workplace, having the command of language to engage in this activity will be an asset.

8.2.1. 2 INFORMATION HAS TO MOVE

The way information moves is very different from the way goods and services move. "E-mail is rapidly becoming the main channel for moving information." (Angell & Heslop 1994:1). It can move fast or slow, it can overwhelm and drown you or simply skim through. Whatever it does it terms of movement, it leaves evidence of where it has been. But it is useful to note that unlike other possession, information does not completely leave the owner in the physical sense as say transferring a car for example.

In the transfer of information more people are brought in contact with it but the owner does not lose it. In other words everyone possesses it as if it were alive. Information interacts with its surroundings, and adapts to them, it may mutate but it certainly affects the belief systems, and cultures of its host. It is also able to reproduce itself and it is no easy task to stop a strong piece of information entering the market. However once a piece of information has entered

a market it evolves and adapts in forms suitable to the new environment it is in or there maybe transgressions too depending on the nature of the information. Movement of information is mostly through new technologies because it the fasted medium available. In relation to workplace literacy, knowledge about the workings of these technologies and its use for communication become crucial for survival.

8.2.1.3 INFORMATION IS PERISHABLE

The quality of information degrades over time and distance from its source of production. That is why speed is an important factor in information processing. In the workplace, survival depends on being techno-literate to ensure effectiveness and speed in retrieval and information processing.

8.2.1.4 VALUE OF INFORMATION

The value one places on information is based on its meaningfulness and the relationship between sender and receiver and their interaction. The value placed on information is therefore highly subjective. For example in an active business environment, a broker may consider news that occurred more than an hour ago as useless but on the other hand a historian may value last year's newspaper. Receiving information is often as creative as the art of generating it and the relationship is unique because there are a lot of variables involved in this relationship. The value of what is sent depends on the mind set of the receiver - the shared terminology, interests, language, attention and whatever is necessary to render the information meaningful. The key element in transforming information into a commodity is understanding. Data in itself is meaningless and useless. In the

economic sense of the word data becomes information when it has passed through the human mind and the mind has deemed it so. What is information to one person may only be a collection of data to another. For example, this study may be information to the academic society, however modest, but it is merely data to those not interested in this area of study. In relation to workplace literacy, having a critical understanding of the social construction of knowledge would provide for the efficient processing of the in -coming and out -going information.

8.2.1.5 BEING COMMON IS A DESIRABLE

Another characteristic of electronic information is that unlike goods and services where there is a definite correlation between scarcity and value, it is different with information. Information increases in value as it become common. Familiarity and visibility can be important assets in information. For example the widespread use of software like WordStar or Micro Soft word is based on familiarity. It is one of those softwares that has been pirated extensively in many parts of the world. Ironically, the familiarity and popularity by virtue of it being pirated has now made it almost an industry standard and has since brought increasing returns to the company that owns it. With the new laws on copyright, profits have greatly increased because it is the software that many companies buy because its people are familiar with the program. The fact that it has become common and familiar and visible has made the program the choice from a number available in the market. An aspect of this is also true in academia. Ideas are published and the more people read and cite the ideas the more value is placed on them and the authors of the ideas. Therefore by becoming

common (that is often quoted by members of the community), value increases and the more famous the originator of the idea becomes.

Of course some information has value only because of its exclusivity. For example, if everyone knows about what stocks and conditions are going to drive the share market prices up then that information is useless to the investor because it is common knowledge. In such circumstances the critical factor is time or speed.
Using the same example above, it does not matter if such information about the stock market becomes ubiquitous if one is the first to posses the information and be able to act on it before the others. In this situation, being the first to access the information will enhance the chances of greater profit. Speed of access empowers. In relation to workplace literacy, knowledge about technology - related communication empowers because it enables speed of access.

8.2.1.6. TIME IS A FACTOR

In the physical world and the virtual world proximity in time is value determinant. An informational product is more valuable, the closer the purchaser can place himself/herself to the moment of its expression - a limitation in time. Many kinds of information degrade rapidly with either time or reproduction and relevance fades the greater the distance from where the information is first produced. The closer one can get to the source of information the better one's chances of finding an accurate picture of reality in it. Ideas in themselves do not give one much credit. The real winner is usually the one who gets to the market first. Of course this has to be reinforced with enough organisational force to continue keeping ahead. In relation to workplace literacy therefore, an individual's ability to capitalise on information, depends on his ability to work the technology in his community.

8.2.1.7. INFORMATION IS WEALTH

In our world today, information has become as crucial and fundamental as sunshine for the creation of wealth. This is especially true for the business community. There is now the buying of information with money. It will not be long before we become an economy that consists only of information. In this third wave as described by Alvin Toffler, information will probably not only replace land, capital and hardware of the first wave (agricultural products) but also the manufacturing products of the second wave. The third wave is likely to bring a shift in the way we think about information economics. In the years to come, in the conceivable future, it is very possible that most human exchange will be virtual rather than physical. In this context, information should be looked at as an activity a "verb"

and not static a "noun". In relation to workplace literacy, it is obvious that technology is an important enabler of information retrieval and therefore knowledge of technology related social processes of the community become important not only to the ESP trainer but also to those being socialised into the business culture.

From the attributes of information discussed above, two important issues repeatedly come up in relation to dealing with information available in the environment. The first is one's command of the language and the second is one's ability to capitalise on the technology. The concepts about information/knowledge and how they work through technology in this society has important implications for workplace literacy and the suggested three Cs in any literacy program. This perception is confirmed by King (1984),

> ' Students today must be enabled to respond flexibly, and to take initiatives, in situations where holistic thinking and the ability to anticipate problems and synthesise solutions are at least of equal importance as factual information or analytical skills. In industry, each problem is unique, and as technologies become more complex and interact more profoundly than ever with society, it is vital for the successful initiation and direction of change to be able to operate in terms of dynamic, interactive sociotechnological systems"
> (King 1984:37).

In sum, one can conclude that a good understanding of the language system enables one to utilise the new technologies and prepares one for change and adaptation within society. In the Malaysian context it enables Malaysians' to achieve the nation's dream

of Vision 2020 or achieving the status of a developed country by the year 2020.

8.3   TECHNOLOGY

Investigations into the information processing network of the community indicate that deciding on which technology medium is appropriate depends on which are available or what the intent of the message is- not to mention the political personal and non rational aspects of the situation. The choice of response would be influenced by the writer's intent, role and shared meanings in the social network within the organisation. Because the range of communication genres and technology choice is relatively wide, the right choice of the appropriate medium has become an especially important feature in communication in the workplace. One can only make choices if one is aware of the capabilities of different media and be aware of sensitivity to the genres and their effect, appropriacy and impact on different people.

The availability of a wide range of communication media (technology) to which everybody has access to means that users need to understand media constraints and must be able to arrange their messages in a variety of ways for maximum media effectiveness. The way certain systems work, the size of the terminal screen and the choice of software influences messages especially in terms of design, layout, speed and user-friendliness. Restricted linear capacity may influence a writer to put critical information up front and abbreviate or stress key points through formatting ie by using bold, underline, caps,

larger typefaces, spaces, face smilies etc. Furthermore, user-friendliness and speed would encourage more people in the community to use it. Since electronic communication especially e-mail communication is common and available to everyone one, it has to a certain extent taken over actual face to face communication between workmates. This phenomenon has led Man the social animal to devise ways to communicate electronically without losing the warmth of interpersonal communication.

8.3.1 HUMANISING COMPUTER MEDIATED DISCOURSE

Since man is a social animal functioning interactively in a society, the industry has developed paralinguistic cues to "humanise" electronic communication. For example, the industry has actually created para-linguistic cues online for writers to incorporate in their discourse. These creative innovations have in fact created a new register for electronic communication. (Le Vasan 1993). The following (tables 8B, 8C. 8D & 8E), give a glimpse of the register available to people involved in electronic discourse. The "human" features available to electronic communication makes computer conversation personal, interactive and warm much like face to face interaction. On the other hand, electronic discourse can also exhibit characteristic forms of formal traditional written discourse. Many possibilities and permutations for communication are available and interactants need to decide on the "voice" ahead of time - from solidarity to unscrupulous business person, from friendly to cold.

This political manipulation of computer mediated discourse is carried through the interaction as language moves along the oral-written continuum. The sensitive selection of sender's role very much paces the

language and chosen voice and this to a certain extent also shapes and astutely "moulds" the voice of the response in a form acceptable to the sender. Interactants in virtual boardrooms have become very creative in meaning making. (for more details refer Le Vasan 1995).

TABLE 8B

COMMON E-MAIL ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	EXPRESSION
BRB	Be right back
BTW	By the way
CUL	See you later
F2F	Face to face
FWIW	for what it's worth
FYA	For your amusement
FYI	for your information
GD&R	Grinning, ducking and running
GMTA	Great minds think alike
HHOK	Ha ha only kidding
IMHO	In my humble opinion
IOW	In other words
LOL	Laughing out loud
OBTW	Oh, by the way
OIC	Oh.I see
ROFL	Rolling on the floor laughing
SO	Significant other
TIA	Thanks in advance
TNX	Thanks
TIFN	Ta-ta for now
WB	Welcome back
WRT	With respect to
WTG	Way to go

(Angell & Heslop 1994:94).

TABLE 8C

COMMON E-MAIL ABBREVIATIONS

Term	Abbreviation
also known as	a.k.a.
ante meridian (before noon)	a.m.
approximately	approx.
et alia (and others)	et al.
et cetera (and so forth)	etc.
as soon as possible	ASAP
blind carbon copy	Bcc
building	bldg.
calendar year	CY
carbon copy to	Cc
cash on delivery	c.o.d.
cost of living adjustment	COLA
company	co.
corporation	corp.
department	dept.
doing business as	dba
each	ea.
end of the month	e.o.m.
fiscal year	FY
exempli gatia (for example)	e.g.
for your information	FYI
government	govt.
incorporated	inc.
I owe you	IOU
limited	ltd.
manufacturing	mfg.
merchandise	mdse.
month	mo.
videlicet (namely)	viz.
numero (number)	no.
post meridiem (past noon)	p.m.
postscript	PS
quarter	qtr.
very important person	VIP

(Angell & Heslop 1994:93).

TABLE 8D

POPULAR SMILEYS OR EMOTICONS

SMILEY	EMOTION	SMILEY	EMOTION
:-)	Happy	:-[	Sad sarcasm
:-(	Sad	:-(	Feel like crying
:-&	Tongue-tied	:'-(	Crying
:-<	Really upset	%-)	happy confused
:-| |	Angry	%-(	Sad confused
:-(O)	Yelling	:-*	Kiss
:-D	Laughing	:-\	Undecided
:-)	Winking	:-#	My lips are sealed
:-)	Grinning	8-O	Shocked
8-)	Wide eyed	:-/	Skeptical /perplexed
:-|	Apathetic	:->	Sarcastic smile
:-o	Shocked or amazed	:^)	Smirking smile
:-]	Happy sarcasm/smirk	x-(	Brain dead
>:-)	Devilish	:-P	Sticking tongue out
o:-)	Angelic		

Source: Angell & Heslop 1994:111

NB. (to understand expressions turn head anticlockwise to read them)

TABLE 8E

COMMON SHORT HAND EXPRESSIONS OF EMOTION

Shorthand	Emotion
<g>	Grin
<s>	Sigh
<l>	Laugh
<i>	Irony
<jk>	Just kidding
<>	No comment

Besides using the features shown in tables 8D & 8E above to simulate paralinguistic cues and features to create a sense of personal involvement, interactants also use graphical representation for eg. exclamation marks,

(!!), bold print (**Yes**), elongated vowel sounds (Yeeeeeees), stress through underlining (Yes), etc. These interactants use discourse features from both oral and written discourse.

There is a great need for knowledge about discourse styles when using these new technologies especially in relation to writing. E-mail seems to invite a less formal style than word-processed messages. Previous training in business discourse which stress the frozen formal style where writers can write for a date in future with ample time and resources to tidy up has to be reconsidered because writing on the new media is becoming closer to actual face to face conversation even to the extent of taking the same amount of real time in the dialogue. Turn around time is within minutes. Users of the new media need some background information about what combinations of mechanical,

grammatical and lexical features and knowledge of other semiotic systems to allow them to select the appropriate form for the message they choose. Since the new media provides for international communication, the users also need to have more knowledge about cross-cultural rhetorical sensitivity in electronic discourse.

When using these new systems, proficiency in written and oral skills become very important because a lack in these skills shows up more clearly especially because there are less opportunities in the sense of intermediaries and time to clear up and polish the final product. Also the kind of written discourse that is currently popular in electronic composing is one that shifts back and forth along the continuum of spoken and written discourse.
In terms of strategies the new systems are bringing the speaking and writing skills together therefore knowledge of both mediums becomes necessary.

Thus to use the media effectively, people need to know even more about how language works. Such knowledge cannot always be preempted as is done in traditional Business English courses and cannot completely be "taught" as some things must only be "caught". Language should become intuitive and therefore members must be sensitised through a process of awareness raising. This has important consequences for the ESP trainer in the corporate discourse community. There is a need for closer ties and negotiations with the industry and more case studies to provide greater insights. In the words of our prime minister Dr. Mahathir:

in the information age, people who do not
possess the information, no matter how
fluent they are in their own language, will
become backward and easily conquered
(The Sun, Nov. 25th,1995).

Power and knowledge are important constructs in any successful
business organisation and these constructs are greatly dependent on
the winning combination of competency skills in technology and
language.

These discoveries suggest that to enable Malaysians to achieve
the status of a developed nation there is first a need for a strategic
refocus on the way the English language is taught in Malaysia.
Government second language policy planning must take into
cognisance global trends and the positions of Nations. Effort must be
made to move away from narrow nationalistic isolation and think of
long term and internationalisation to bridge communication gaps that
may arise. English language skills have always shown to correlate
highly with professional success and achievement and thus economic
advancement. (Estad and Ferryman 1990; Chan and Goh, 1992).
Judicious selection and careful planning of language education for the
business community in particular and the nation in general holds the
key to development and progress. Acquisition and training in the
English language systems must therefore be seen against the backdrop
of social, political, technological and other communicative
relationships of the business community with international networks.
This view is echoed by the minister of Education, Datuk Seri Najib
Abdul Razak:

> The education mainstream cannot be static. We must accept changes if we truly want to progress and be on par with developed countries........In the past we struggled with our strong sense of nationalism but now we realise that without mastering foreign languages we are handicapped in the global scene (The Sun, Nov. 25th. 1995).

When considering literacy for the workplace, the three dimensions of literacy mentioned as well as understanding the concept of information and technology, the important constructs in this context become crucial for socialisation and effective participation in the community.