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Interdiscipline English! A Series of Provocations and Projections

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Prelude

Here are three ways into the subject—and out again:

- (i) The point about ‘English’ as the name of a subject is that it is an adjective being made to serve as a noun. So ‘English’ is always pointing to an absence—the noun. Is the subject English literature, language, society, culture, people?

Colin Evans, *English People: The Teaching and Learning of English* (1993, p. 184).

- (ii) Clearly the proper study of literature is—everything else!

Peter Widdowson, ‘W(h)ither English?’
in Coyle *et al.* (1990, p. 1228).

- (iii) It would be more accurate to call the predominant activity of contemporary literary scholars *other-disciplinary* rather than interdisciplinary [...] what we need is more theoretical, historical and critical training in our own discipline.

Marjorie Garber, ‘It Must Change’ (2006)
in Moran (2010, pp. 170–171)

This chapter is all about relating the internal variety of the subject called ‘English’ to a variety of subjects that go by other names. The perspective is therefore not just *interdisciplinary* but also *intradisciplinary*, and the process involves working inside-out as well as outside-in. Indeed, it is precisely through the constantly renegotiated relation between English and its various ‘selves’ and ‘others’ (internal and external) that

the subject continues to develop dynamically, reinventing itself even while becoming other things. In short, this is an evolutionary view of English and other subjects—with some revolutionary implications. *Interdiscipline English!* should therefore be read both as an imperative and an exclamation. It urges action and more or less free association, but also invites (and expects) scepticism and surprise.

The three opening quotations indicate the main directions and dimensions in which we shall be moving. They all in one way or another come down to a couple of questions: 'What is the relation between English and other subjects?' and 'What is English in itself?' But each speaks from a different position for a different conception of the subject. Reviewing them in turn will help gauge what English actually means and might yet become in relation to its many others, within and beyond the current subject of that name.

Colin Evans, quotation (i), was both a teacher of Creative Writing in English and a lecturer in French, and he became a university-wide director of curriculum development. He was therefore well placed to see English close up and at a distance, outside-in as well as inside-out. Evans puts the apparently simple question from which most of the complex answers—and most of the relations with other subjects—flow: 'Is the subject English literature, language, society, culture, people?' He also reminds us that, grammatically, the adjective 'English' has constantly to be attached to and informed by whatever is understood by such nouns as 'language', 'literature' and 'culture'. (I shall stick with just those three for the moment, subsuming his 'society' and 'people' under the last.) The theoretical dynamic of this triad is worth clarifying. What is at issue is the fact that the insistent *presence* of 'English' as a linguistic, literary and cultural construct has constantly to be underwritten by a whole host of partial and potential *absences*. For of course, while such activities (and categories) as language, literature and culture cut across and are very variously configured in whatever we mean by 'English', they extend all around and way beyond it. Indeed, historically, as is well known, English is a composite of French and Latin overlaid on a Germanic base, along with traces of other languages ranging from Spanish to Russian, Japanese, Hindi, Xhosa and so forth. As a result, English is itself one *and* many, and thereby, so to speak, both 'its self' and a selection of 'its others'. In Evans's terms, it is a varied and variable *presence* carrying traces of a succession of far-flung *absences*.

Having got some preliminary bearings 'within' English, we can now turn to the writers of the other two quotations and the prospects beyond. If Evans posed the question that English is always already

interdisciplinary, then Widdowson (ii) and Garber (iii) would evidently respond in very different ways. At face value at least, the former appears to be saying: 'Go on—get more interdisciplinary. Just see what else you can make of English!' And in a sense he was. For Peter Widdowson—the editor of an early, highly influential volume devoted to *Re-reading English* (Widdowson, 1982, and more recently Widdowson, 2004)—was writing provocatively and to some extent polemically at another moment of perceived disciplinary crisis, in the last decade of the 20th century. ('Crisis', by the way, is such a recurrent cry with respect to the disciplinary state and status of English over the past hundred years that it is much better viewed as the rule rather than the exception, an ongoing process of emergence not a sudden state of emergency. Its consideration across the decades is exemplified in works by Wellek and Warren (1963), Graff (1987), Kress (1995), Scholes (1999), Doecke et al. (2006) and Moran (2010). In 'W(h)ither English?', the quizzically challenging essay from which Widdowson's declaration has been plucked, its author was clearly playing devil's advocate. He was suggesting that because literature talks about and plays around with all aspects of the world, including language, then naturally its study potentially involves 'everything else!' Now, some people will find this injunction unexceptionable; after all, the traditional appeal of 'doing English' is that you get to read books about all sorts of things. But others will still find the proposition ridiculous, or at least mischievous, especially if taken as a serious proposition about the limitlessness of the subject.

That brings us to 'Interdiscipline English!' as an exclamation, perhaps even a stifled explosion. 'The very idea! Whatever is English coming to!' Such a view could be aligned, again at least at face value, with that expressed by Marjorie Garber in the third quotation. She was speaking as President of the Modern Language Association in America in the first decade of the 21st century. But she was also a professor of visual and environmental as well as literary studies, so Garber's scepticism about 'other-disciplinary' work at the expense of specifically 'literary' attention to texts sounded an informed note of caution about work across disciplines. It was also an influential rallying call for work within and around English literature. In the latter, she argued for a decided turn—in part a return—to the aesthetic homeland of literary studies: *poetics*.

The present writer aims to have it all three ways and more. Widdowson and Garber both have concerns and aspirations that I share, however contrary that may seem: English can be in touch with 'everything else' but it also needs some guiding principle of its own, perhaps even a 'poetics'—in the root sense of 'makings' of all kinds. At

the same time it's crucial to keep the 'language' and 'culture' aspects of English (highlighted by Evans) firmly in the picture, whether in the foreground as objects of study in their own right or as an essential background to all other studies. By extension, it is worth observing that if the English language in some shape or form (literary or otherwise) is not a key component in interdisciplinary ventures involving 'English', then the subject's contribution is likely to be indistinct and its links with other subjects weak. What's more, it's the critical understanding and creative use of the language that's crucial. That is what 'English' has to bring to the party—potentially any party. And it is demonstrated as well as defined in the next section.

Meta-English: extending 'discipline', exploding 'subject' ...

Q. What did the language say when it met-a-language?

A. Search me!

Academic linguist's joke. (It only works in English.)

What follow are some strategies for exploring key terms and concepts in the area of interdisciplinary study, including some that will emerge here. The aim is to develop a flexible and capacious working vocabulary, along with a method for constantly refreshing it. Given the eclectic and opportunistic nature of most things interdisciplinary, the words used to describe it tend to be a heterogeneous mix of the intellectual and institutional, the considered and the convenient. Aside from *discipline* and *interdisciplinary* and the like, the terms involved range from roughly interchangeable synonyms like *subject*, *area* and *field* to more or less formal designations such as *department*, *faculty* and *centre*. These in turn connect to overarching categories such as *arts*, *humanities* and *sciences* and underpinning institutions such as *university*, *college* and *funding council*. We shall concentrate on the verbal history and vexed senses of 'inter/disciplinarity' to begin with, and then move to 'the subject of subjects'. Other terms make brief yet provocative appearances in an interlude. But first it's worth deepening our sense of what is distinctive about 'English', and most immediately what it has to contribute to the present investigation of terms and concepts.

It all revolves on the fact that 'English' as a subject is typically *about* English and *in* English. That is, English features both as a *what* and a *how*, object and medium, ends and means. This is such a fundamental 'given' in the subject that it tends to get overlooked or taken for granted. Yet the fact is that 'doing English' does indeed mean what we do as well as what we study, and this is a core aspect of the subject's

power and pleasure. Of course, this double-edged, Janus-faced aspect is not in principle unique to 'English'; it occurs whenever a language and literature are the medium as well as the object of study: 'French' in France, 'Chinese' in China, and so on. But it is worth stressing that this is not at all the case with most other subjects, from History and Politics to Physics and Life-Sciences or Law and Engineering. In all of those the *objects* of study (what happened in the past, or happens inside an atom or organism, or how a legal system or building is structured) are notionally quite distinct from the means and medium (words, numbers, codes and diagrams). But in the teaching and learning of English, especially in countries where English is a first language, the situation is quite different. 'English' is then a kind of compound subject-object, how-and-what. What's more, English is unique, as both language and educational subject, in its historical and global reach and its ready connectivity with other subjects. This makes all the difference to what it is and can do. In countries and educational contexts where English is not the main medium of instruction the situation is obviously different. Nor is this to minimise the importance of educational work about English in other languages. But the overall point still holds, especially in tertiary education and academic publication: the preferred medium of instruction and professional communication is English. *The European Journal of English Studies*, for example, though written mainly by and for academics from continental Europe, is published in English.

The crucial and constitutive dimension of 'English on English' is what is here called *Meta-English*. The term is formed readily enough by analogy with *meta-language* (language about language) and *meta-fiction* (fiction about fiction); it draws on the sense of the Greek-derived prefix *meta-* meaning 'across' or 'beside' and is equivalent to Latin *trans-* (hence Greek *metamorphosis*, Latin *transformation*). In a simple and obvious sense, Meta-English is what practitioners of English do whenever they use more or less technical and specialist language: whether to analyse a text or discuss the structure of a sentence, develop a critical theory or explore the composition of a piece of creative writing. 'Pronoun', 'discourse', 'subject-object relation', 'point of view', 'dramatic monologue' and 'free verse' are all obvious instances of meta-English vocabulary. They are the kinds of word that crop up in class, seminars, essays, analyses, and more or less specialist publications. Meta-English, then, is the most obvious mark of 'doing English'.

More generally, however, and just as importantly, Meta-English is the pervasive activity of reflecting on English in English: exploiting the reflexive capacity of the language to explore itself, being critical of

English even while being creative *in* it. (The critical-creative core of the subject is expressly highlighted in Scholes, 1999; Knights and Thurgar-Dawson, 2006; Pope, 2012.) In its most formal and self-conscious guise, Meta-English is what happens to English when it enters the Academy. More widely, for practitioners of English at all educational levels, what this means—to accent the plural as well as the positive—is that *MetaEnglishes* *Aus!* The implications for the subject's contribution to interdisciplinary work are profound. The rest of this section is a seriously playful demonstration of what Meta-English can bring to the elucidation of 'interdisciplinarity' as term and concept.

Into discipline or interdiscipline?¹

Discipline nowadays has a rather archaic and forbidding ring to it. Apart from its specifically *academic* application, its primary association is with *military* discipline (where 'order' is enforced and 'orders' are the characteristic speech-acts). From there it has extended to any kind of highly organised, impersonal regime requiring automatic compliance or complete obedience, often backed by a threat of punishment—notably in prisons, the police, the church and schools (see Foucault, 1977). In modern Western, broadly liberal and individualist circles all this has tended to stack the odds against a positive valuation of 'discipline'. In an educational context, perhaps unsurprisingly, 'school discipline' (meaning orderly conduct in and out of the classroom) has vaguely carried over to notions of 'academic discipline' (typically characterised as 'rigorous', 'systematic' and 'methodical'). As a result, by an understandable but not particularly productive convergence of association, academic *disciplines* (i.e. areas of expertise, subjects) are primarily expected to be *disciplined* (i.e. ordered and orderly, and perhaps subject to a higher authority).

All this has significant implications for the professional standing as well as popular understanding of 'English' as a discipline. Is it really that 'orderly', 'systematic' and 'methodical'? Can such 'order' be imposed from above? To what higher or deeper principles of knowledge can the subject be subject? There is often at least an implied contrast with the *sciences*. There, it is assumed or asserted, the emphasis on 'scientific method' and specific experimental and observational procedures seems to make them 'harder' subjects—and therefore more 'disciplined' disciplines. History, similarly, because purportedly more 'factual', is often projected as the 'hard' nut on the Humanities block—as are Economics in the Social Sciences, and Physics in the Natural Sciences. Can English readily make such claims, except in certain empirical areas such as,

say, corpus linguistics (data, statistics) and editing (textual facts)? Or is English—if not a soft option—a subject with a ‘soft-centre’? These are anxieties sometimes felt by practitioners within the subject and not just imposed from outside.

But such a caricature of ‘English’ is obviously crude and far from complete. It also depends on an understanding of ‘discipline’ that is etymologically inaccurate and educationally inadequate. For ‘English’ clearly has plenty of hard facts and systematic thinking of its own: facts about language and history, authors and periods, and thinking about grammar and genre, the nature of texts and the conditions of verbal communication. So there need be no undue anxiety on not being ‘disciplined’ (i.e. orderly) in that sense. What’s more, the currently dominant view of discipline is far from the whole story of ‘discipline’ as either historical term or educational concept. And this is precisely the kind of area in which ‘English’ comes into its own with pertinent facts about language and revealing insights about culture.

In short, ‘enter *Meta-English!*’ For the root and stem of *discipline* has nothing directly to do with ‘order’ but everything to do with ‘learning’. The word comes from *disco* (Latin) and *didasco* (Greek), both of which mean ‘I learn’. A *discipulus* was therefore a Roman pupil or student, one who followed a master, hence Christian *disciple* (Old English *discipul*). By the same token, *disciplina* was the Latin for ‘learning in general’, whence it narrowed to Medieval French *discipline* referring to scholarly, ecclesiastical and military instruction, from which Middle English got the word with a similar range of meanings. The overall trajectory of the term is worth stressing. The ancient emphasis on things ‘discipular’ is on *learning* and being a *learner* following a teacher. The modern ‘disciplinary’ emphasis is on the *form of instruction* and *ordering of conduct*. Significantly, none of these senses has anything to do with content and substance—with knowledge and subject-matter, for example. All have to do with human relationships and formal relations.

A radical approach to *discipline* therefore means neither more nor less than ‘learn from a teacher’. It’s the educational equivalent of an apprentice-master model, the interpersonal dimension of what’s currently dubbed ‘the teaching and learning experience’. What’s more, despite its potential shortcomings in terms of dependence and patronage, the grateful memory of an influential teacher or mentor is still what most people carry with them from their experience of school or college. (The present writer is no exception, as my parting dedication of this piece attests.) In fact, you don’t have to be a pure disciple, a mere follower, to be ‘disciplined’ in the best educational sense. For as every good

teacher or scholar knows, the point is to encourage and enable others to make their own ways, not merely to follow but to go beyond—in current parlance ‘to become independent learners’. Indeed, the future health of genuinely independent disciplines depends on precisely such things. For all these reasons, ‘English’ can confidently claim to be a well-grounded educational *discipline*: to have a *human* centre dedicated to *learning*, along with a subject-base revolving around English as language, literature and culture. What’s more, through Meta-English, we can show that we know this.

Interdisciplinary, as a term, is first recorded in the US in the 1920s and became increasingly common in educational circles from the 1960s onwards, when it was chiefly associated with the liberalisation and recombination or replacement of older disciplines. Nowadays, too, the promotion of ‘interdisciplinary initiatives’ is a fashionably upbeat alternative to talk of ‘disciplinary’ ones (especially amongst university managers and funding councils). Though there is also a growing suspicion that this can be a cover for hyper-flexible staffing and code for economies of scale. Interdisciplinary then comes to mean ‘readily redeployable’ and ‘low individual unit cost’ (see Moran, 2010, pp. 165–76; also Monk *et al.*, 2011). That aside, there are some strong intellectual and educational reasons why interdisciplinary perspectives should be not just entertained (as fashionable or expedient) but actively engaged with (as necessary and indeed natural). To indicate the full range of options, first in theory and then later with examples, here is a working-over and playing-around with other possible prefixes for ‘disciplinary’. They are distinguished as actual and potential (Tables 13.1 and 13.2).

Table 13.1 Common actual terms using ‘disciplinary’

inter-	DISCIPLINARY	between and among, ideally integrated
multi-		many and various, often more or less separate
cross-		more the latter than the former
trans-		supposedly a superior synthesis

Table 13.2 Uncommon and potential terms using ‘disciplinary’

hetero-	DISCIPLINARY	emphasising variety and variation
intra-		the ‘internal’ dynamic
extra-		outside the discipline, or disciplines in general
post-		‘after and continuing’ and/or ‘after and distinct’

Interestingly, there is no single term in common use to express the *monodisciplinary* or *unidisciplinary* nature of particular disciplines. Linguistically speaking, ‘interdisciplinary’ is the marked optional term against the unmarked norm. And that is why, whatever the rhetoric, the currently dominant single-discipline option is often the default position when institutional push comes to intellectual shove. Certainly, funding bodies for teaching and research *can* be innovative and adventurous. More usually, however, they are conservative and cautious. After all, most members of their committees are virtually by definition senior academics with established reputations in existing disciplines. They tend to be ‘into discipline’ rather than ‘interdiscipline’.

The subject of ‘subjects’

Subject has a wide range of meanings—grammatical, ideological and social-scientific as well educational—but it is this last that most immediately concerns us. English, then, is the name of an educational subject, like Art, Biology and Mathematics. What I particularly want to do here is give the term and concept of *subject* a good shake-up: to disturb the complacent sense that we all naturally know what an educational subject is, and to help reconceive the process of *subject-making-and-breaking* from the base up. My base in this case is the stem of the word *subject*, which has the root sense of ‘thrown’: the *-ject* part comes from Latin *iacere*, ‘to throw’, past participle *iectum*, ‘thrown’. (Hence *projectile* and *projection* ‘things thrown forwards’—a missile or a light, for instance.) The *sub-* part of *subject* means ‘under’, of course; so a ‘subject’ in some sense deals with whatever is ‘thrown under’ it. And by extension practitioners of a subject are in large measure *subject to* whatever is thrown their way. But obviously there are all sorts of ways and many directions in which things can be *thrown*—up, down, in, out, away, behind, forward, and so forth. So again, as with *interdisciplinary*, we shall start with some seriously playful alternatives to the prefix of *subject*—*object*, *project* and so forth. And again it is the apparently small changes in words that make big differences to the worlds they help realise. The basic contention with ‘subject’ is quite simple and can be expressed as follows:

An educational *subject* is composed of a number of *objects* which are *projected*—or *rejected*—so as to form a *trajectory* across a domain of knowledge and experience and thereby define it. In the process a number of strange things happen which tend to get ignored—and these are registered here by such oddball terms as *abject*, *deject* and *eject*.

Don't be too thrown by these last! Their basic meanings, like those of their more familiar counterparts—subject, object, project, and so forth—depend upon the particular prefix to signal what kind of 'throwing' is reckoned to be going on, and in what direction ('up', 'down', 'away', etc., as explained below.) The important point is that all these '*ject*' words can help prompt fresh thinking about what goes into the *making* of any particular educational subject (and by extensions any subject at all). Equally importantly, they help generate awkward questions about what gets actively, or accidentally, 'thrown' away (aside, back, even forwards) in the ongoing process of making *and breaking* subjects. Here the focus is naturally on 'English', with other subjects on the edges. But obviously a shift or switch of focus would bring those other subjects to the centre and put English on the edge. This is an overall dynamic explored in the final section. But as always the devil and the delight are in the detail. So here, by way of provocation, are some cryptic observations about what has gone into and come out of the process of making and breaking the modern subject called English. (I leave it to the present reader to add examples or counter-examples, refine the categories, or recast the terms of engagement completely.)

- *Rejects* ('thrown back'): older parts such as Old Norse, older aspects such as Literary Appreciation—left to Scandinavian languages and the Literary reviews.
- *Projects* ('thrown forward'): newer parts such as Corpus Linguistics, newer aspects such as Ecological and Environmental approaches—brought in on the back of new technologies and social agendas.
- *Ejects* ('thrown up and away'): reverence for—along with substantial ignorance of—ancient Greek and Latin languages and literatures (better left to Classics); likewise the Bible and Koran (better left to Theology and Religious Studies). Sometimes '*ejects*' get readmitted in Translation and Comparative Literature. Meanwhile, certain canonical authors and whole literary periods (e.g., Bible-laden Bunyan, Dryden the neo-classicist, the later 17th century at large) may get given up as too difficult or ideologically awkward or left to bigger English departments in older institutions.
- *Dejects* ('thrown down and away'): such as comics and graphic novels (leave them to Media or Cultural Studies) and Children's Literature (leave it to Education and Teacher Training).
- *Abject* ('thrown away'): all-but unmentionable things because almost unthinkable (except virtually) such as real poverty, widening

inequality, injustice, privilege, religious intolerance, environmental degradation..., the Earth without humanity (again)?

Meanwhile, throughout:

- *Objects* ('thrown in the way') are all those materials and models (texts, theories, authors, genres, periods, etc.) that 'English' works on and with. These are all typically in English; so the subject-object relation is basically 'English-on-English' (i.e. Meta-English). Objects from other languages and cultures are usually translated into English and thereby assimilated.

And, also pervasive:

- *Trajectories* ('thrown across') are local-global concerns or emergent cultural phenomena that many people might recognise but few have got round to thinking about studying coherently. The actual provenance and symbolic meaning of just about everything we eat and wear is one such local-global concern; 'Adaptation' (page-stage-screen) is one such steadily emerging academic field (see Sanders, 2006). By definition, such trajectories cross many territories and have many passing contacts but no single point of departure or arrival. They are inherently interdisciplinary and therefore studied in parts by many subjects but as a notional whole by none. When first recognised such trajectories tend to crystallise as one-off *projects*. When fully grasped they may become fresh departments, even whole programmes.

That, then, is one way of talking about changes in and around English as a *subject*. It's another instance of Meta-English in action. The next section offers a more institutional perspective at the level of course titles and programme design.

Changing courses—some trends

There are some broad trends discernible in and around 'English' over the past thirty years (see Scholes, 1999; Peel et al., 2001; Moran, 2010, Epilogue; Pope, 2012). Figure 13.1, a simple and rather schematic diagram will help set the scene. (The list invades the margins and is unevenly staggered to represent the fact that trends are like this.) By and large, the movement (⇒) has been in these directions:

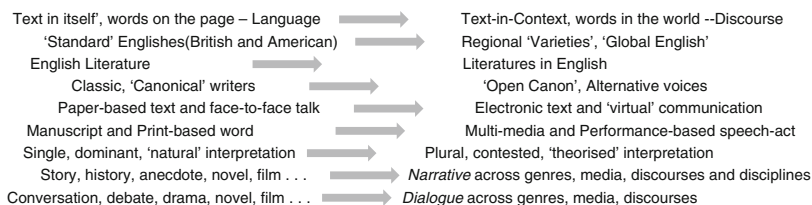


Figure 13.1 Changing trends in English

But of course the flows are not all one-way; there are numerous cross- and counter-currents and not a few swirls, eddies and standing (if not stagnant) pools. Put another way, and to switch metaphors, it's not always a matter of 'Fast forward'; there are also 'Pauses', 'Reverses'—innumerable 'Re-mixes'—and the odd, seemingly endless 'Replay'. One thing's for sure: there isn't a 'Stop' button.

The above, however, is obviously a series of global snapshots, an attempt to catch a big and moving picture. Down on the ground, 'English' can look and feel very different. Much depends, of course, on institutional as well as national cultures, and on local associations and personal relations. For these are what actually mediate and can actively express what otherwise may appear to be vast and apparently impersonal global movements. The relation between secondary and tertiary 'English' is a crucial but often neglected interface in this respect (but see Carter this volume). For while there is usually more autonomy and still a degree of 'academic freedom' in the design of courses and programmes at tertiary level, the power of self-consciously 'national' curricula at secondary level is immense and can be decisive. This is the case in the UK and Australia at the moment, and has been for a while (see Peel *et al.*, 2001; Pope, 2008). Meanwhile, in UK schools at the 16–18 years range, the introduction of 'A-level' (Advanced) courses in 'English Language and Literature' and 'Creative Writing' alongside traditional courses in 'English Literature' is currently tending to increase demand for and provision of university programmes in 'English' more capaciously conceived rather than 'English Literature' alone. This naturally affects the relative openness of university English to combination with other subjects as well as its own internal configuration. Again, the external–internal dynamic—like that between secondary and tertiary Englishes—is fundamentally constitutive not merely

additive. English 'itself' is braced by its 'others'—outside-in as well as inside-out.

The changing names for 'English' in prospectuses and on corridors and letter-heads do not tell the whole story. But they do offer clues as to how the subject wishes to project itself and they point the ways in which it appears to be moving. For example, in the UK alone, there has been a tendency for some university departments of 'English Language and Literature' (mainly in older universities) to rename themselves 'English Studies' or just 'English', while others (mainly in newer universities) have explicitly gone for a double-barrelled 'English and ...' designation: 'English and Cultural Studies', '... Literary Studies', '... Film Studies', '... American Studies', or 'English and Drama' or 'English and Comparative Literature'. A currently favoured and particularly significant configuration is 'English and Creative Writing' (of which more later). A further complicating factor is the relation between 'English' and 'Education', which may or may not be registered in the course or programme title. It depends whether the institution has a broad educational or teacher-training dimension, and how far qualifications in English Language Teaching (ELT) are handled on a departmental or institution-wide basis. Meanwhile, in Australia and the USA, while 'English' remains in the names of plenty of courses and departments, there is a tendency for it to occur alongside—or give way completely to—such designations as 'Rhetoric and Composition' or 'Writing and Communication'. This is in response partly to more overtly multi-lingual populations (where English is not the assumed norm) and partly to perceived vocational needs (see also Russell, this volume).

The overall projection for 'English' *and* or *as* other subjects is therefore richly complex and highly variable. Nonetheless, the global trends presented above are clearly discernible. In fact, if names are anything to go by, 'Interdiscipline English' is already a reality. So we should probably stop being surprised (drop the exclamation mark) and get on with reviewing the present with a view to the future.

There follows a brief interlude which sports with other key terms and airs some outstanding concerns. It's a poetic response to institutional pressures—which is also a very 'English' way of going about things.

Interlude for the institutionally perplexed ...

The Field cannot well be seen from within the Field.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Circles* (1841)

And what should they know of 'English' who only 'English' know?

Rudyard Kipling, 'The English Flag' (1891): 'English' for Kipling's
'England'

So why should earlier education take place in a school (singular)

but a university be divided into academic Schools (plural)?

And why *university*? Why not a *multiversity*? Or even a *heteroversity*?

(There were and still are *polytechnics* after all)

But whatever you care to call it ... them ... be sure to use *all* your
Faculties

because

Humanity is not limited to 'the Humanities'

Latin *humanitas* meant being 'fully human', 'civilised', in their case
'Roman'.

Science is not limited to 'the Sciences'

Latin *scientia* meant any kind of systematic 'knowledge', from *sciens*,
scientis, 'knowing'.

Nor Art limited to 'the Arts'

the root is Latin *ars*, *artis*, which covered any kind of systematic
'making'.

Nor Poetics to 'Poetry'

the root is Greek *poieisis*, also meaning 'making', the counterpart of
Latin *ars*.

So if all these things are not limited in their initial meaning

how come they are so limiting in most institutions?!

Perhaps, then, we had better think not of 'limits limiting'

but of 'liminal' and 'preliminary' spaces

from Latin *limen*, *liminis*, meaning 'threshold'

Because

bearings in and around the subject (like a compass) and then head off in whatever directions they decide to go (by turning the steering-wheel). But it deliberately does not offer to ‘map’ the educational landscape by determining particular shapes and configurations as fixable ‘areas’ or ‘territories’. (How could it? They change and move all the time, relative to one another and particular people and places.) So this is all about setting off and travelling but never absolutely arriving. Genuine learning, like life in general, is like this.

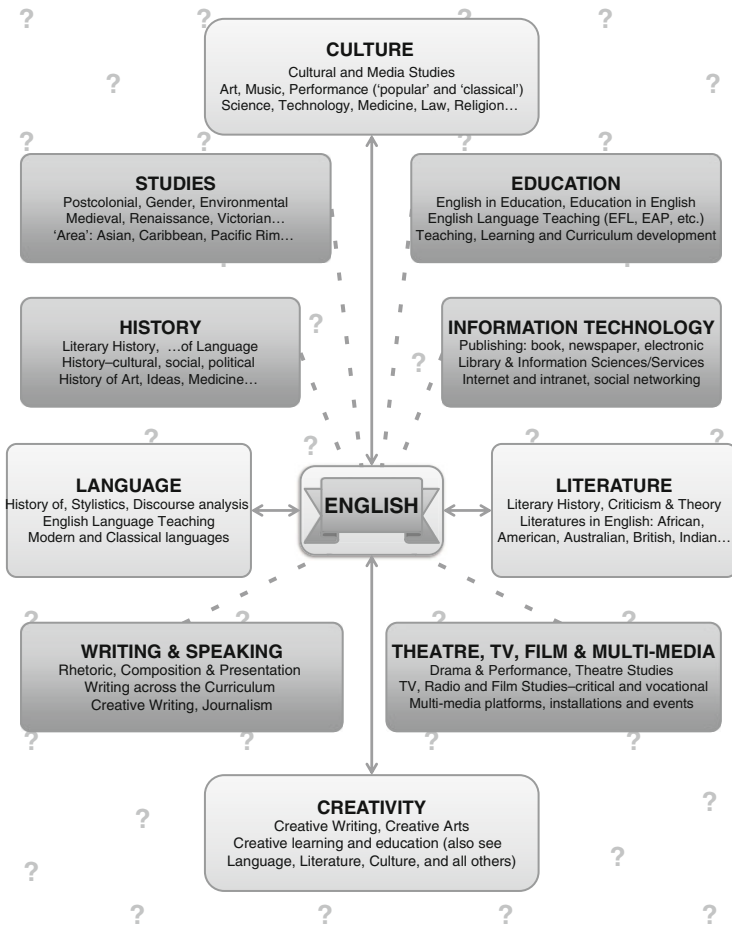


Figure 13.2 ‘English’ and ‘other subjects’: a steering wheel or compass—but not a map

It is worth pointing out that this diagram can be used at a variety of levels:

- *individually*, to check where one's own present interests lie and to gauge where they may be going next and in the longer term
- *institutionally*, to review the present emphases and tendencies of a particular programme and to project some likely and desirable configurations
- *in broader intra- and interdisciplinary terms*, to help get an overall sense of the current shape of 'English in itself' and to try to discern some of the shapes to come in relation to its many 'others', internal and external. (The '?'s are a reminder about *gaps*, both omissions and opportunities).

The main thing is to set the compass or turn the wheel to suit yourself.

A little more explanation about the precise design and rationale of this summary diagram is in order. At the beginning of this chapter 'English' was provisionally projected in *intra-disciplinary* terms as a three-in-one configuration of LANGUAGE, LITERATURE and CULTURE. These aspects are represented by three points of the compass, or arms of the steering-wheel. But now a fourth aspect is added, CREATIVITY, represented by the remaining point/arm. This last aspect has been strongly implicit and frequently referred to throughout the present piece; so now its presence as a crucial and constitutive dimension of the subject is made explicit. In consequence, English can now be fully grasped as an intrinsically heterogeneous subject constituted by the complex interplay of *Language-Literature-Culture-Creativity*. This may sound a monstrous mouthful, but in fact it's just like actually occurring materials and machines of all kinds—a lump of earth or a computer, for example. They are made up of complex molecules (not single atoms) and physical mixtures as well as chemical compounds, some of them organic (not isolated and inert elements). It should be stressed, therefore, that in reality each aspect of the subject partakes of the others. CREATIVITY, for instance, obviously includes 'Creative Writing', but it also includes creative dimensions of Language, Literature and Culture, and it extends to creative practice within Education and beyond (see Dawson, 2005; Knights and Thurgar-Dawson, 2006; Pope, 2010; Swann *et al.*, 2011; Harper, 2015).

That brings us to the expressly *inter-disciplinary* aspects of the diagram. These are represented extensively—though far from exhaustively—round the edges. EDUCATION, HISTORY, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, and so forth, gesture to readily recognisable and immediately relevant categories of knowledge and expertise, without being exclusively tied into educational subjects as such. ENGLISH, meanwhile,

sits at the notional centre of this diagram, meaning whatever you here care to make it mean. For there are still plenty of wide open spaces for questions (?) and further suggestions round the edges. And there is always the possibility of a slight shift or radical switch of perspective. ‘At the centre of what?’—as the above reflection by Adrienne Rich puts it. Margin-centre, background-foreground relations are always flexible and, under certain conditions, can sometimes flip completely. *ENGLISH* occupies pride of place here with good reason. Many people would see it differently, also with good reasons.

Finally, it is worth considering some of the many other ways in which the relations between English and other subjects might be realised. For good interdisciplinary work should be a party that all parties want to come and contribute to. And the above model has all the strengths and weaknesses of a fixed plane surface diagram with a single centre. In a more openly interdisciplinary perspective this could be replaced by a physically flexible and multiply centred model that changes over time. This might be done ‘virtually’ with a 4-D computer programme, or ‘actually’ through face-to-face discussion. Perhaps best of all, it would give way to a cunning combination including video-conferencing and things to eat and drink (i.e. a modern ‘symposium’). That’s just the kind of party ‘English’ is well placed to help organise—along with others.²

Notes

1. The perspectives adopted here are both historical and theoretical; they require verbal knowledge as well as know-how. There has therefore been frequent recourse to such essential—and essentially meta-linguistic—resources as: *The Oxford English Dictionary* and online supplements (*OED*, 1989—; also Ayto, 1990); influential collections of *Keywords* (Lewis, 1960; Williams, 1983; Bennett *et al.*, 2005; also Bennett and Royle, 2009); and an international update of a classic thesaurus (Roget 2011). A key reference on interdisciplinarity in general is Frodeman (2010) and another on interdisciplinarity and English in particular is Moran (2010); Griffin (2005) is good on English and interdisciplinary research. Meanwhile, the present author and others have often traversed overlapping terrain with similar apparatus and various aims e.g.: Stacey, Pope and Woods (2002); Pope (2006, 2008, 2011, 2012); and Swann, Pope and Carter (2011). These references should be understood throughout but, for the sake of readability, are not registered at every turn.
2. This essay is offered in memory and celebration of four former teachers. Each would have had their own very different and equally provocative views of the matter: Gwyn Jones through Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse; Elizabeth Salter through Late Medieval Literature and Art; Colin Evans through Modern Languages, Creative Writing and Curriculum Development; and Terry Hawkes through Critical Theory and Shakespeare Studies. *Vivent les différences!*

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