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# **Downshifting Discourse: Revitalizing BASIC ENGLISH 850 as a Leaner Lingua Franca in Global Working-Class Literacy**

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## *Abstract*

My core postulate is that there is a widening chasm between small islands of privileged middle-class learners of EFL across the developing world, the EFL haves – and the masses of working-class and ordinary learners, often ‘low achievers’ in school parlance, the EFL have-nots. ‘Money talks English’, and generates vast topographies of inequity in global discourse. Basic human discourse rights within a TESOL of equity and solidarity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century suggests that ideally, all individuals on this planet should have the right to learn an efficient, compact lingua franca for trans-cultural and trans-national communication, in effect ‘reclaiming the commons of discourse’ through pedagogies for plainer talk. I present a vintage model for building solid competence in a simpler, leaner mini-form of ELF, adapting Ogden/Richards’ BASIC ENGLISH (850 headwords, [www.basic-english.org](http://www.basic-english.org)), developed in the 1930s, as a sustainable foundation and ‘target’ plateau level for L2 English literacy needs for the ‘Two-Thirds World’ of ordinary workers (Finn, 1999), the bottom 4 billion of humanity. BASIC can also be used for vertical translation, to sensitize native speakers to the ‘meaning of meaning’ in Ogden’s classic sense (Templer, 2012). And is a power tool for democratizing knowledge, creating a large library of classics and more complex discourse translated vertically into BASIC 850 for extensive free voluntary reading by the masses. Necessary is a research center exploring simplified modes of English for the social majorities (Templer, 2011, 2012).

Key words: Basic English 850, TEFL, English as a lingua franca, Simplification, Discourse equity

## **1. Introduction**

The paper interrogates the *politics of pedagogy* of English as a lingua franca, suggesting the immediate need to experiment with alternative models. My core postulate is evident to all in the TEFL field: there is a widening chasm between small islands of privileged middle-class learners of EFL especially across the developing world, the *EFL haves* – and the masses of working-class learners within the planet’s social majorities, the *EFL have-nots*. *Money talks English*, and generates vast topographies of discourse inequity. Many think that is inevitable. Rigney (2012) argues that the “Matthew Effect” – socioeconomic advantage begetting further advantage – is evident in schooling across the planet (see <http://goo.gl/ul7Y1>). A counter-pedagogy for social pedagogical justice and

fairness (Fox *et al.*, 2009; Finn, 1999) — and learning economy and efficacy — demands we strike out on new paths, and also interrogate the huge amount of time and money expended in teaching EFL for 6-9 years and more in the schools (Seidlhofer, 2002).

The teaching of English as a lingua franca (ELF) across much rural and working-class education in the Global South faces formidable challenges: a lack of qualified teachers & materials resources, low pupil motivation, poor levels of achievement among non-privileged learners, millions of largely wasted boy/girl hours in the ELF classroom.

A *TESOL of equity* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century argues that all individuals on this planet should have the right to learn an efficient, compact lingua franca for trans-cultural and trans-national communication, in effect *reclaiming the commons of discourse* through pedagogies for plainer talk (Templer, 2008a, 2009). This is sometimes termed “English for Everyone” (Wedell, 2008). Richards (1943), in the midst of WW II, stated the urgent need after the war for:

“...a reasonable degree of communication spread out more evenly over the planet. How to attain that goal is our theme. It is a necessity now; necessary for human progress, necessary perhaps for human survival. We can no longer risk letting any large section of the human race live in separation, cut off from the fullest possible communication with the rest [...] A common medium of communication between peoples rather than between governments is becoming an evident necessity [...] I present first some of the reasons for believing that a simplified form of English is the most practicable common language” (pp. v-vi).

Yet 69 years later, that is a pedagogical goal which is often difficult to realistically achieve in much of the developing world, and the working classes in the richer industrialized economies. In most rural and modest-income learning environments, and among the urban poor, few students have the time, financial means or motivation to climb the ladder to intermediate proficiency in ‘full’ English, despite the picture of a rising tide of global proficiency sketched critically by analysts like Cohen (2012).

Unfortunately, that fact, very evident here in the region, across Thailand, Indonesia, in Cambodia, Laos and much of China, is poorly reflected in metropolitan discourse (Graddol, 2006) about the *globalizing* role of English under regimes of vast power disparity, and thus discourse disparity. Coleman (2011) contains intriguing studies on this disparity here in Southeast Asia. *Whose globalization?* we may ask: of and for the social elites, or for the non-privileged often impoverished social majorities, the bottom four billion of humanity, the Two-Thirds World (Prakash & Esteva, 1998, p. 2; Willis, 1982)?

### **1.1. Downshifting Discourse: BASIC 850**

The first half of the paper sketches a notion of a more ‘downshifted’ or minimalist model of simpler English for mass instruction, grounded on BASIC 850. BASIC, with a core vocabulary of some 850 key headwords, is a power tool for a different mode of global literacy, based on what we can call a kind of *semantic leveraging*, learning how to say more with less. A key linguist in the field of ELF, Seidlhofer (2002, p. 295) has stressed:

“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.”

‘Downshifting’ is a term used in ecology for the attempt to create a simpler, less cluttered and more environmentally attuned quality of life (Sevier, 2008). Beyond radically downshifted life styles, inevitable as the age of petroleum comes to an end in the next 30 years, I am arguing for the need now for downshifted discourse, both for English as a lingua franca, and also more generally in the context of the Plain Language movement (<http://goo.gl/Xc9yo>). The goal is the effective teaching and rapid learning of a simplified lingua franca for the global working classes. That can serve as a discourse base for the much smaller number who wish or are required to climb the Everest of learning English at more intermediate and advanced levels of comprehension and active use. As Krashen has argued:

‘The cure for English fever is a program in English that does not threaten first language development, and that is relatively easy to do, one that does not require the advantages of being upper middle class’ (2003, p. 9).

The second half of the paper looks in greater detail at BASIC 850 redux, followed by a conclusion that recommends grassroots pilot projects, empirical research on what can actually work, and a possible mini-research center to guide and spur work in this area. At present there is none, and very few pilot projects or ongoing studies anywhere (Templer, 2011, 2102).

## **2. A Leaner, More Sustainable Approach to ELF**

The past decade has witnessed an upsurge in interest in simplified ELF for a variety of purposes within global communication. Several models for an alternative lingua franca learning agenda are central here, but I would like to focus on one in particular for re-conceptualizing the ‘E’ in TEFL, BASIC 850. It was pioneered by Charles K. Ogden and Ivor Richards beginning in 1930. The establishment of the online Basic English Institute (<http://www.basic-english.org>) in 2003 has made numerous books and articles on BASIC 850 accessible to all, and galvanized renewed interest. BASIC 850 is the grandfather of all present ‘reduced’ versions of English as an international language. A good overview to BASIC 850 is Ogden (1968). A brilliant introduction is Richards (1943). Its close cousin, Everyman’s English, developed by Ivor Richards in the U.S. (1940-1979), is a spin-off of BASIC 850 that has an amplified lexical core of about 950 word families (Richards & Gibson, 1974). A form of Everyman’s has been taught now for several decades in Japan, known as GDM or Graded Direct Method (Katagiri & Constable, 1993; Templer, 2005). The BASIC textbook *English Through Pictures* by Richards and Christine Gibson (2005), the foundation stone of GDM, has been reissued in a newly revised edition, and is grounded on a multimodal, text-plus-stick drawing approach.

Other simplified models, such as Joachim Grzega’s Basic Global English and Jean-Paul Nerrière’s Globish will not be dealt with here (Grzega, 2006;

Pagon, 2005). Basic Global English ([www.basicgobalenglish.com](http://www.basicgobalenglish.com)) is grounded on an experimental model of 750 headwords, plus 250 words of the student's choosing, based largely on frequency. A trial project with elementary school learners in Bavaria was deemed highly promising (Grzega & Schöner, 2007). VOA Special English, launched by the Voice of America at the height of the Cold War in 1959, is a unique neglected multimodal resource, available on shortwave and online ([www.voaspecialenglish.com](http://www.voaspecialenglish.com)), a powerful, versatile yet simplified form of English as a lingua franca at 1,500 headwords (Templer, 2008b, 2009; 2013).

## **2.1. Toward a People's ELF: Changing the Game and Playing Field in Transnational Basic Literacy**

I wish to argue that BASIC 850, in a revised version, perhaps grounded on Richards' model of Everyman's English, can form the first self-contained 'target level' for a kind of 'people's ELF,' to be taught at that level of lexis, with virtually all basic grammatical structures, so that students would – through massive recycling – 'overlearn' this prime downshifted model. It would require experimentation in pilot projects, new teaching materials, and the creation of a large amount of diverse reading material at this graded level, so that acquirers could through extensive reading (Waring, 2009; and extensive listening, Waring, 2008) in BASIC build up a strong proficiency at this semantically graded more minimalist level. Waring stresses the importance of simpler materials. In many rural areas, it would perhaps be a sufficient power tool that students could really master, allowing them to 'say almost anything' and thus actively communicate, a mini-ELF in their own working-class self-interest (Finn, 1999). Ideally, native speakers and others would also be encouraged to learn BASIC 850 so that they could likewise use it with people who have acquired this power tool but no further proficiency (Templer, 2005, 2006, 2009). This is central to Ogden's idea of BASIC 850 as a kind of English Esperanto that is not spoken by anyone as a first language, an engineered ELF. As Richards (1940, p. 19) notes, "there is a lot of theory behind Basic and Basic could no more do what it does than an aeroplane could fly the Pacific without the theoretical engineering behind its design." In this vision, everyone would first learn BASIC 850, including pupils in the U.S. Canada, Australia and all ESL countries, in part as a simplified lect for cross-cultural encounters.

One major advantage for introducing mass instruction in BASIC 850 is that teachers with a strong proficiency centered on it could be trained to a good level of competency in far less time and with much less effort than the normal training of English teachers at the moment anywhere on the planet. In Thailand, some 80% of all teachers of English in the elementary schools do not have special expertise in English, and many are themselves at beginner's level in any case (Mackenzie, 2005). In Indonesia, different conditions hold, but there are probably many districts where a program centered on BASIC 850 would likely be beneficial, innovative and pragmatic.

## 2.2. Some basics of BASIC 850

BASIC 850 is a simplified auxiliary language, with (surprisingly enough) only 16 verbs ('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). Of the 850 core words, 513 are monosyllabic, a further 254 have penultimate stress, reducing problems with stress which have proved particularly difficult for speakers of East Asian tone languages. A micro lingua franca, it is engineered to be capable of expressing even quite complex thought. Of course, its reliance on a battery of largely 'delexicalized' verbs with particles has provoked criticism as a highly artificial stripping of most higher-frequency verbs from the core vocabulary. Richards' version expands the verbal component in a flexible way.

BASIC was developed in the 1930s and 40s by the British linguists Charles K. Ogden and Ivor A. Richards. Both were pioneers in linguistic semantics. Their book on semantics (Ogden & Richards, 1923) provided the original basis for work on BASIC, when then discovered that they could define anything in English (and thus 'say' anything important, any common 'proposition') using less than 1,000 words, a 'leveraged' semantic core. That core is the very heart of BASIC 850, not a lexical list based on frequency, but something significantly different. Richards (1943, p. 23) describes that discovery:

"In our joint work we came to the theory and practice of definition. In comparing definitions - definitions of everything, from a sense quality to a force and from a rabbit to a concept - we were struck by the fact that whatever you are defining, certain words keep coming back into your definitions. Define them, and with them you could define anything. That suggests that there might be some limited set of words in terms of which the meanings of all other words might be stated. If so, then a very limited language – limited in its vocabulary but comprehensive in its scope - would be possible".

Seidlhofer (2002, p. 281) picks up on this, noting:

"This then, in a nutshell, is the principal idea behind Basic. In order to make it operational and to formulate his 850 word vocabulary, however, Ogden had to solve the problem of how to deal with verbs. The crucial point here was the realization that most English verbs can be analysed in combinations involving the verbs *come, get, give, go, keep, let, make, and put*. Examples often used for illustration by Ogden himself are the verbs *ascend*, which he analyses into *go up, descend* into *go down*, and *disembark* into *off a ship*, thus making systematic use of the analytic potential of English."

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://goo.gl/289t>).

BASIC is not 'simplified' English for elementary learners, it is a remarkable tool far more flexible and sophisticated in its power of expression

and clarity. An all-purpose auxiliary language suited for **B**usiness, **A**dministrative, **S**cientific, **I**nstructional and **C**ommercial uses, it 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 General Basic English Dictionary (Orthological Institute, 1940) gives 40,000 meanings of 20,000 words in Standard English, all defined in minimal BASIC. Ogden was guided, as Richards stressed, by ‘the balancing and ordering of many rival claims – simplicity, ease of learning, scope, clarity, naturalness – all to be as far as possible satisfied and reconciled’ (Katagiri & Constable 1993, p. 50). Even as interest in BASIC in the Commonwealth and Britain waned after the mid-1950s, Ivor Richards vigorously continued to promote an expanded form of BASIC which he called Every Man’s English (Russo, 1989, pp. 397-410). His last working day was spent lecturing on his form of BASIC in China in 1979 shortly before his death (Koeneke, 2004, p. 210 ff.).

BASIC is not conceived as a ‘threshold’ or stepping stone to ‘full English’ but as a self-contained mini-ELF. Where you learn to say ‘bring together’ instead of ‘integrate,’ ‘come across’ instead of ‘find,’ ‘go beyond’ instead of ‘exceed,’ ‘keep in memory’ instead of ‘remember.’ Where instructors aim primarily at teaching learners a very high level of control, massively recycled in a tight learning spiral. And where much reading material is made available in BASIC 850, so that students can continue to read and learn in it. Extensive reading is a primary post-instruction goal, for years into the future as autonomous users of BASIC. A large range of texts in BASIC 850, long inaccessible, are now available at the BEI ([www.basic-english.org](http://www.basic-english.org)).

In 1939, based on several years’ experience across China, most especially in Yunnan province, Richards stated: “we are now satisfied that we can in two years give a sounder and more promising introduction to general English than has formerly been given in six” (Katagiri & Constable, 1993, p. 61). That needs to be re-explored empirically for our time.

### **2.3. Democratizing Knowledge: Reading for the Multitude**

There is 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 global multitude. Among desiderata, we need a newspaper in BASIC online, and much more literature written in BASIC and broadly disseminated in cheap editions. Ogden had a dream of a “Basic Library of General Knowledge covering the sciences in 1,000 divisions – all so cheap that no workingman would be without them,” along with “a Basic Parallel Library of 1,000 books giving the Basic form of the works of great writers of the present and past and on the opposite page the words of the writer himself, so that everyone would at last have a chance of learning any language in which he might be interested” (Ogden, 1930).

Ivor Richards published a remarkable shortened version of Homer’s *Iliad* that is a prime example of how world literature can be ‘translated’ into powerful

more simple texts (Richards, 1950; see section below), as is his version of Plato's *Republic* (Richards, 1942). The latter was issued as a special pocket-size paperback for troops in the U.S. armed forces, and also sprang from Richards' earlier teaching of Basic in China. At the same time, the theologian S. Hooke (1941) translated the Bible into BASIC.

## 2.4. Some Core Advantages of BASIC 850

In sum, the advantages of such an auxiliary 'language within a language' are evident:

- i. It is far easier to learn than climbing the Everest of 'full' or 'complete' English.
- ii. It is much faster to learn well, on average in 200 hours of classroom instruction. Empirical research in China in the 1930s and 1940s under Richards, and in Israel in the 1960s, suggested BASIC was highly effective and easy to learn quickly (Katagiri & Constable, 1993).
- iii. It equips learners to be able to say even complex ideas. As Ogden wrote: 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" (Ogden, 1932, p. viii).
- iv. It is based on a form of 'leveraged semantics': "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" (Ogden, 1932, p. viii).
- v. It remains far easier to train teachers of this mini-form for the public schools, a serious problem in Thailand and many low- and lowest-income countries.
- vi. It can be taught to L1 speakers for communicating with L2 speakers, to create a 'more even playing field' in World English. This was a central idea in Ogden's work.
- vii. It can be taught even in low-resourced learning environments, to large classes, with possibly 'reluctant learners' in urban working-class and rural farmer settings, geared to the horizons of working-class pedagogy (Willis, 1982; Finn, 1999; Amritavalli, 2007). Pilot projects to test this empirically today are imperative.
- viii. It helps to turn off what Krashen (1997) calls 'affective filters', emotions like the fear of 'losing face' that keep many of our students in East Asia from opening their mouths in class or public. BASIC creates 'low-anxiety' learning spaces, because it is compact and can be more rapidly and thoroughly mastered, thus generating higher levels of user confidence.
- ix. BASIC 850 ensures exceptionally high levels of 'comprehensible input' (Krashen, 1997, 2004) because of extensive reading in BASIC texts, a separate vast readily comprehensible textual universe as envisioned by Ogden and other architects of BASIC.
- x. BASIC can be taught as a compact basis for English for Science and other forms of ESP, including English for Business. Scientists often know their technical lexis, they need the scaffolding of control of core grammar and general vocabulary, and say it as simple as possible, a kind of 'ESP Lite.'
- xi. As a non-native English lingua franca, owned by the world, it in effect decolonizes English for world communication. No one is an L1 user of BASIC.
- xii. It poses less threat to 'full English' or other languages of the learner, because it is itself not a 'full language' with a culture, a literature, a whole identity bound up with its use.
- xiii. BASIC ENGLISH 850 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.' That is not a point of central dispute.

## 2.5. A Power Tool for Vertical Translation and Language Awareness

One function of BASIC is to ask language learners, and native speakers, to redefine lexical items in terms of BASIC. Ask a student to define what is meant by ‘explain’, and she may say ‘make clear’, or ‘give the sense of’, both phrases in BASIC. What is ‘compassion’? ‘Feeling for one in trouble’. What is ‘despair’? ‘Condition of having given up hope’. William Empson, the literary critic trained by Richards, was in the late 1930s a teacher of BASIC, for a time with Richards in China. He also used BASIC to teach poetry, as did Richards at Harvard, translating complex lexis into its more basic primes, what can be called “vertical translation”. Empson (1940) published a piece on translating Wordsworth into BASIC to uncover a poem’s simpler prime meaning. Catford (1950: 46) pointed out: “Translation (from full English, or from any other language) into Basic is [...] a crucial test of the referential value of the original. What will not go into Basic may be nonsense - or it may be poetry. If it is the latter, the Basic parallel will help to show the reader exactly how the poet has produced his special effects”.

Seidlhofer (2002, p. 283) stresses how BASIC can serve as a powerful tool for heightening language awareness both among native speaker and users, and learners of ELF:

“It is precisely the status that English has as a lingua franca that creates a myriad of opportunities for learning about language awareness and intercultural communication - indeed, not to take these aspects into account would seem to ignore the very nature of lingua franca communication. This is because the very fact that ELF could be largely uncoupled from any specific primary cultural associations makes it a particularly good point of reference for the study of the way languages normally *are* inextricably bound up with such associations. [...] And it is here, of course, where some familiarity with both philosophical and practical ideas of the Basic era would have much to offer to today’s decision-makers”.

Richards (1943, p. 25) also emphasized this notion of language awareness through the prism of the primary nature of BASIC, from which “we can learn most about the nature, the resources, and the limitations of language in general.” Templer (2012) explores vertical translation as a meta-linguistic tool for language awareness.

## 2.6. Homer’s *Iliad*: a BASIC Sampler

Below is an excerpt from Richards’ (1950) translation of the *Iliad*, Book 1, into BASIC, followed by a parallel extract from poet Robert Graves’ translation. Richards’ intention here is to make Western culture, as he viewed its more essential discourses, accessible and understandable:

“The public which needs to understand the Western culture contains, for every present English speaker, five or six people who know no English as yet. A considerable proportion of these are fated (cataclysms apart) to learn to read some English before the century ends. Their presence, on or just below the horizon, can reasonably be kept in mind. Those who are going to learn English should find things of permanent value to read early in their progress” (1950, p. 20).

His aim is enhancing intercultural understanding, grounded on the Great Books of the West. And he stresses that the early reading of the *Iliad* can be especially well suited to the needs of both native speaker and foreigner learner “with its repetitions, its low intake of new words after the first few pages, its extraordinary clear action patterns and the surface simplicity of its motivations” (ibid.).

### 2.6.1. Ivor Richards’ Translation (1950, p. 37)

“Then swift-footed Achilles look at him angrily and said: ‘O you without shame, how can any Greek do your will with any heart either to journey or to fight! It was not because of the Trojan spearmen that I came to this war. They never did me any wrong, never took my cattle or horses, or cut down my harvest in deep-soiled Phthia. For many things stretch between us, shadowy mountains and sounding sea. It was for you, you without shame, that we came here, to make the Trojans pay—for Menelaus, and for you, you dog-face! But you think nothing now of that.. You would take my prize of honor, would you. For which I fought, and which the Greeks gave to me! My reward when we take a town is never as great as yours, though it is my hands which do the fighting. But now I will sail back to Phthia with my ships. It is better than going on fighting here without honor to get you more treasure and gold”.

### 2.6.2. Robert Graves’ Translation (1960, p. 5)

“Achilles scowled at Agamemnon. ‘Shameless schemer!’ he cried. ‘How can any Greek patiently obey your orders, whether to go off on a voyage, or to stay and fight? I did not join the expedition because the Trojans harmed me: they never took my cattle or horses, nor foraged through my cornfields in fertile, healthy Phthia, where I live. Ranges of misty mountains and vast stretches of echoing sea separate that land from this. Though no vassal of yours, I brought my men here as a favour, when asked to punish the Trojans for the wrong they did your brother Menelaus. Dog-faced wretch, you not only forget how much gratitude I deserve, but threaten to steal the prize with which the Greeks rewarded my exertions! At what division of booty after the sack of a populous city did I ever get a share even approaching yours in value, though I led the assault in person? I must always return exhausted to my ship, content with some hard-won trifle. Very well: because I have no intention of humiliating myself any longer by this thankless struggle to fill your coffers, I shall sail home to Phthia”.

## 1.7 Contrastive Readability and Lexis Levels

The comparison is instructive. Richards’ BASIC still remains poetic, powerful, but remarkably simple. Graves’ translation is lexically more complex by far. In terms of readability, the excerpt in BASIC has 16 words per sentence on average, and scores at Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level 6.29, Flesh Reading Ease 78.66, which is very high. By contrast, Graves has 17.82 words per sentence, Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level 9.12, Flesh Reading Ease 61.42, substantially lower. (as based on <http://goo.gl/AWUXO>). The analogous translation by Samuel Butler averages 21.82 words per sentence, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 8.90, Flesh Reading Ease 70.13 (<http://goo.gl/Ujzrr>).

In terms of lexis (as measured by <http://lextutor.ca/vp/bnc>), Graves’ rendering has a number of items above British National Corpus (BNC) frequency band 8K (*foraged*, *coffers*, *booty*, *scowled*, *populous*, *vassal*), with 20 different word types out of 141 (14%) above K3 (3,000 most frequent words).

Richards' version, which is 31 words shorter than Graves' rendering, has only 5 lexical items (4.6%) above K3. Graves has 72.8%, Richards 83.5% in band K1, and up to nearly 91% of Richards' text is covered by including band K2. By contrast, Graves' text has only 81.54% of lexis in bands K1-K2. Significantly, even Richards has some words above the BNC K1 level (21%), although his expanded BASIC is centered on 1,000 words. This partially reflects the fact that BASIC is not geared solely to frequency, and most certainly not the frequency as reflected in the British National Corpus. Useful would be a study determining the actual number and percentage of lexical items in Richards' translation into BASIC as he conceived it (closer to his later notion of Everyman's English) as compared with Ogden most rigorous version of BASIC 850, and the number of tokens of such words above K1 in the entire book.

### **1.8. "Literacy with an Attitude"**

Simplifying the lingua franca taught is also central to a working-class second language pedagogy that seeks to promote "literacy with an attitude" schooling learners from working families *in their own self-interest* (Finn, 1999; Gee, 2008). Finn stresses that working-class kids, urban and rural, often develop an "oppositional identity," resisting school talk that seems to them alien, anchored in beliefs, behaviors, values and attitudes from a different class world. A powerful "clash of discourses" (Finn, 1999, p. 119) saturates their everyday life in the classroom. Such a "counter-school culture" (Willis, 1982) can mean resisting undemocratic authority, passive learning, standardized testing, boring texts, elite school and teacher talk and values, the hidden curriculum of social passivity: "Working-class children with varying degrees of oppositional identity resist school through means reminiscent of the factory shop floor—slowdowns, strikes, sabotage, and occasional open confrontation" (Finn, *ibid.*, p. x). That helps in part to explain the huge resistance to learning "officially sanctioned school English" among many kids from the underprivileged social majorities, North and South. Gee (2008, p. 39) reminds us that "[c]hildren will not identify with – they will even dis-identify with – teachers and schools that they perceive as hostile, alien, or oppressive to their home-based identities." Knopp (2009), in reviewing a new edition of Finn's book, stresses: "Ultimately, if teachers, parents and students don't organize to demand something different, the ruling class' agenda for education is the one that will prevail." Introducing BASIC 850 as an alternative mini-skill may help counter this natural resistance to learning what kids identify as something alien to their own culture and social class. That hypothesis needs to be tested.

## **2. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Such a model for mass instruction needs to be experimented with inventively in pilot projects in countries like Thailand, Laos, Indonesia, and many other corners of the developing world and the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe, such as Bulgaria, where standard TESOL conceptions often benefit only the more privileged, and are often basically unsustainable under existing constraints across much of the rural countryside. A small mini-center for

research on simplified teaching models for English along these lines needs to be set up somewhere, perhaps in SE Asia, and can encourage pilot projects and experimentation, all at minimal cost (Templer, 2011, 2012). For BASIC 850, Richards & Gibson (2005) is an excellent textbook to experiment with, building to a headword vocabulary 1,000 words, substantially recycled. And this initiative needs to be sparked from the bottom-up, beyond neo-colonial 'mainstream' pedagogical agendas promoted by international elites beholden to elitist values (Templer, 2008a, 2009). We cannot expect that the powers that be in the TESOL profession, largely located in the rich economies of the geopolitical North, will take the initiative.

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