Chapter 1
Definitions and Basic Conceptual Notions

INTRODUCTION

Given the multi- and inter-disciplinary nature of computer-mediated communication in an era that is often referred to as the Information Age or even the Knowledge Society, it is necessary to carefully delineate the key terms and concepts of this complex area of study in this first chapter. In this age and society we constantly witness a massive explosion of new types and styles of communications gadgets such as computers of all types (including desktops and laptops), PDAs, mobile phones, Blackberries, etc; and media like the internet, emails, ICQ, chat, text messaging and others. We can expect that new ones will be invented. All these types and styles of communication gadgets lead to new terms and concepts that can potentially have differing interpretations from context to context.

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In this book, *Computer-Mediated Communication for Linguistics and Literacy: Technology and Natural Language Education*, I will discuss how these different types and styles of information and communication technologies impact the way we communicate. In particular, I will examine the nature and uses of language in what may be described as a revolutionary environment for information and communication. As these communication technologies bring us closer together, we are forming a global village, and indeed, this era has also been referred to as an era of globalization. We will find that in this global village our everyday communications may involve not just one language, but several languages. In fact, it is hardly ever sufficient to operate in only one language anymore. Bilingualism/multilingualism is now an essential part of this information communication revolution. I will examine how these combinations of technologies and languages affect the nature and structure of each language and whether this leads to changes in language structure and language use.

Not only are these technologies creating an environment of multiplicity of languages, they also have an impact on the way we read, write, and process information. I will examine the different ways in which we are called upon to speak, read, and write in these different technological environments. We will notice that we are called upon to juggle different ways of reading and writing in these different environments. Literacy is no longer a mono-modal practice but very much multi-modal; various kinds of literacies are needed to function well in the information society.

This ecology of languages, literacies, and technologies will be shown to be very dynamic, and in this ever-changing ecology many issues about human nature will be discussed. In particular, an examination of these interrelationships helps us understand some important aspects of our culture and society. Throughout the book I will examine some consequences for learning and knowledge acquisition in this complex ecology, and attempt to show how we can harness these languages, literacies, and technologies to improve education for our future generations.

Outline of the Chapter

Towards addressing all these issues, this introductory chapter is organized as follows. The next part will outline the objectives of the book. Following from this I will then address important foundational concepts such as language, linguistics, literacy, and computer-mediated communication before examining their interrelations in the next part. The discussion concludes with an attempt to put together all the ideas introduced in this chapter.
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