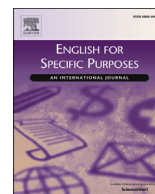




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## Nurses' narratives on workplace English in Taiwan: Improving patient care and enhancing professionalism

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## ABSTRACT

Based on a qualitative study of 19 nurses' written narratives on their use of English in the nursing workplace, we explore the current and changing use of English for Nursing Purposes (ENP) in countries where English is learned primarily as a foreign language, using Taiwan as the case study. The study gathered qualitative data regarding why and how nurses use English in the workplace. The most significant themes that emerged regarding why English is used were quality of nursing care, professionalism, and career advancement: to "Keep abreast of medical/nursing research and new treatments," "Improve quality of care/provide health education," "Communicate with doctors and other health-care professionals," and "Communicate with foreign caregivers." Regarding how they use English, in contrast to previous studies (Lee, 1998; Yang & Su, 2003), our study's participants emphasized professional reading to improve patient care and communicating with foreign caregivers more than communicating with foreign patients, and instructing foreign caregivers rather than patients' family members on patient care. The results of this study may be useful in ENP course development and future research on the English language use of nurses and other health-care workers in Taiwan and other countries where English is learned primarily as a foreign language.

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## 1. Introduction

Due to the dominance of medicine within health care, English for Nursing Purposes (ENP) has until recently been considered part of English for Medical Purposes (EMP) (Shi, 2009); in addition, it has received relatively little attention in the literature (Boshier, 2013a, 2013b). Furthermore, most ENP research has focused on internationally educated nurses practicing in countries where English is the primary language, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Despite the growing importance of English as a language of wider communication around the world, little is known about the use of ENP in countries where English is a second or official language in a multilingual country, such as India and Nigeria, or in countries where English has traditionally been taught as a foreign or international language, such as Japan and Argentina.<sup>1</sup> This paper discusses the findings from a qualitative study investigating why and how English is used in

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<sup>1</sup> Although the terms Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle have traditionally been used to capture distinctions between native speakers, second-language speakers, and foreign-language users (Crystal, 1997; Kachru, 1989), changing demographics, the rise of global English, and the increasing use of English as a lingua franca between non-native speakers of English have challenged these distinctions and the primacy these distinctions afford to the native speaker and native-speaker models of language proficiency. More recently, Graddol (2006) and others (Kachru, 2004) have argued for a model of English language use that reflects language proficiency regardless of how or in what context the language was learned.

nursing in Taiwan, a country in which English is still learned primarily as a foreign language and overall English language proficiency is relatively low.

### 1.1. Background

In Taiwan, practicing nurses and midwives (53%) comprise the majority of health-care professionals, followed by physicians (19%) and pharmacists (13%). Most nurses and midwives work in hospitals (72%), though some work in clinics (13%), community health centers, schools, workplace clinics, and social welfare institutions (12%) (Chang & Chao, 2008, chap. 6).<sup>2</sup>

#### 1.1.1. Use of English in medical and nursing publications

English is widely used in the dissemination of information in medicine and nursing. By 2000, 90% of all articles in the MEDLINE database were in English (Loria & Arroyo, 2005), up from 53.3% in 1966 (Maher, 1986). Likewise, in 2011, 92% of the 99 nursing journals in Thomson Reuters Social Citation Index (SCI) were published in English, mostly in the United States (Thomson Reuters, 2013). Concurrent with the transformation of nursing and medical colleges in Taiwan into universities over the last 25 years, publication in international journals of medical and nursing research articles by researchers with a Taiwanese academic affiliation has increased dramatically. From 1996 to 2012, nursing research articles from Taiwan showed an increase from 12 to 2,544, with 84.5% of that growth accomplished in 2005–2012, while medical research articles jumped from 1,947 to 65,920, with 63.7% of that growth accomplished in 2005–2012 (SCImago Research Group, 2014).

#### 1.1.2. EMP in Taiwan

In addition to academic publications, medical education in Taiwan includes teaching materials such as PowerPoint slides and textbooks in English (Chia, Johnson, Chia, & Olive, 1999; Hwang & Lin, 2010); English is also gradually being adopted as the language of instruction in medical universities in Taiwan (Lu & Corbett, 2012; Olmstead-Wang, 2011). Instruction in English in Taiwan is closely linked with internationalization aimed at increasing the prestige and reach of medical institutions and communities of practice, attracting international students, promoting medical tourism, and facilitating the successful integration and performance of international medical graduates in residencies and fellowships in English-speaking countries (Olmstead-Wang, 2011).

English is also widely used in medical practice in Taiwan. All doctors write their notes and reports primarily in English, and they use medical terminology in English in their communication with other health-care professionals (Chiang-Hanisko, Ross, Boonyanurak, Ozawa, & Chiang, 2008). These practices create institutional pressure on nurses to understand medical records, charts, and laboratory reports in English and to use English in their own interactions with doctors and other health-care professionals (Chen & Chiou, 2010; Yang, 2005) even when doctors and nurses could communicate in a shared native language, Mandarin Chinese or Taiwanese.

#### 1.1.3. ENP in Taiwan

In addition to the use of English among Taiwanese health-care professionals, English ability is considered vital to the provision of culturally competent care in Taiwan. Foreign workers now make up 4.5% of the Taiwanese labor force (Council of Labor Affairs, R.O.C., 2013), and 43% of these foreign workers are engaged in health and related service activities — primarily Indonesian (79.6%), Filipina (10.3%), and Vietnamese (9.8%) women caring for older people in home and private care settings (Council of Labor Affairs, R.O.C., 2014). There has also been an increase in foreign spouses, totaling approximately 129,000 (not including mainland Chinese) in 2008, mostly women from Vietnam and Indonesia. Each year in Taiwan, more than one out of 10 babies is now born to an immigrant mother (Wang, Lin, Yang, Tsai, & Huang, 2011). The number of foreign (non-mainland Chinese) visitors to Taiwan also continues to grow (e.g., from 2.9 million in 2006 to 3.6 million in 2011), mainly from Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Americas (Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 2012).

Nurses in Taiwan thus have a much greater chance of providing care to foreign patients than in the past and in using English to do so. In a survey of 139 senior nursing students and in-service nurses at a university in southern Taiwan (Chien, 2008), an area of the country that has fewer foreigners than around Taipei, 81% reported an increase in foreign patients. Despite this increase in diversity in Taiwan, Chiang-Hanisko et al. (2008) argue: “[N]urses remain ill prepared to offer culturally competent care to patients from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds” (Issues and Challenges, para. 11).

Although the likelihood of using English with foreign patients has increased, nurses in Taiwan are not required to study English for as many years as doctors and overall their proficiency is much lower than doctors’ (Su & Chu, 2004). Top national entrance exam scores in English are a key criterion for admission into medical school in Taiwan, so doctors begin their medical education already with a relatively strong command of the language. Nursing and medical students generally take two required, year-long English for General Purposes (EGP) courses in Taiwan – a reading/writing course and a listening/speaking

<sup>2</sup> There are registered nurses (RN), licensed practical nurses (LPN), and a small number of nurse practitioners (NP) in Taiwan. RNs have a nursing degree from a junior college or university; LPN certification requires at least 3 years of vocational high school and 2 years of advanced training, equivalent to a two-year associate degree. In 2006, there were 130,000 practicing RNs and 180,000 practicing LPNs in the government’s online database; however, since some have both licenses, there were actually about 200,000 working professional nurses in Taiwan (Chang & Chao, 2008, chap. 6). Furthermore, around 25% of nurses had at least a university degree, 68% had a junior college degree, and 7% had a vocational high school diploma in 2006 (Chang & Chao, 2008, chap. 6).

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