

Professor Chris Kennedy

Professor Chris Kennedy discusses his research interests at the Centre for English Language Studies in the University of Birmingham

Duration: 4:48mins

I'm Chris Kennedy and I'm Director of the Centre for English Language Studies.

I've got three main research interests. They all inter-relate. One is language policy. The second one is curriculum innovation. The third one is English as a global language. Language policy simply means the decisions that governments, ministries and institutions take to try and influence how people use language. That's most evident, say, in education where you get educational ministries of education deciding whether to educate their students through English or through their own language or through another language.

The second area is curriculum innovation which, of course, is related to language policy because many governments want to achieve the best educational system they can. So they are constantly looking for ways of improving the curriculum and I'm quite interested in ways that governments, institutions, teachers and pupils all respond to curriculum innovation. Why curriculum innovation sometimes succeeds, sometimes fails. What one can do to achieve a really successful innovation.

The third element is English as a global language and that's a really interesting area. There are several areas that are worth investigating. There's the whole area of whether we are forcing people to learn English around the world. Whether that is causing resentment, a sort of neo-imperialist type of feeling. Whether, also, we're denying people who don't have English, whether we're denying them access to jobs and so on if they don't have English.

The other interesting area is the whole notion of whether a new variety is developing. Whether people who speak English as a second language are actually producing a new form of English which you might call English as lingua franca, English as an international language. Whether in a few years time we will all be speaking a different variety of English. When a German businessman meets a Japanese businesswoman, they talk in English because they don't have Japanese and German, but it becomes a new variety of English. There's a lot of research going on in that area that is very interesting. There is almost a new dialect emerging. Another interesting area is investigating the linguistic landscape. When you walk down the street, go to a park, go to a theatre, you're surrounded by a language, notices, the drink you buy has got a label on it, there's language on there. You look at adverts. All that is part of what we call the linguistic landscape.

I'm particularly interested in the use of English and other languages in those areas. I've got several students working on areas in Spain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Greece. They're walking down streets, various types of streets in their own countries, taking photographs of various signs, adverts, shop signs, even names of drinks and looking at how English and other languages are used in that context. In Japan, for example, the drink that you're looking at is not designed for English speakers, it's designed for Japanese speakers, but you often find a lot of English in it. The other area within that is the whole fact that new forms of English are emerging. English no longer belongs to native speakers, it belongs to second language speakers, it belongs to everyone. As they gain ownership of English, they're developing their own type of English, so English is changing gradually over the world.

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