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Bourdieusian Approach to ELT among Pashtun Learners: A study of the field and capital among Pashtun learners in Mardan (Pakistan)

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Abstract

The study explores the reflections of English language teachers who taught English as TESOL (Teaching of English to the Speakers of Other Languages). The pedagogical experiences of such teachers are significant in understanding how the home (background) experiences of the students determine the pedagogical considerations in the classroom. The study used the Bourdieusian framework for the observation and interview-based data. The study explored the linguistic, professional, social and cultural capital of English language in the education field. It was identified that English language has a high linguistic capital as compared to Pashto, its value in the profession was the highest as compared to Pashto and Urdu, while in culture (especially in dress) it remained a low valued commodity for exchange in the classroom, standing far below Pashto language. The study, therefore, established that any resource allocation needs to be informed by the Bourdieusian need analysis, especially the study of the local (marketplace) in contrast to the national.

***Kew Words**: ELT, TESOL, Bourdieu, language capital, linguistic market, linguistic field, District Mardan*

Introduction: Bourdieu as a theoretical construct

Bourdieu's concept of the field, habitus, and capital as enunciated in his book, "Language and the Symbolic Power, (Bourdieu, 1991). This work explains how the symbolic power assumes actual form when language is being used, and like any social context, the same stand true for classroom practices while the learning and teaching of English take place. This work connects with Bourdieu's earlier work, "The Logic of Practice", (Bourdieu, 1990) which explains the essence of language and enables the reader to apply it to a context such as a classroom. The attraction for

action researchers like teachers and language planning analysts lies in his opposition to conception of Saussure (1915) and Chomsky (1965) who considered the language a homogenized social asset to which all the native speakers have privileged access. Both of these ideas of homogeneity and privileged access of the native speakers is wrong in Bourdieusian conception (Bourdieu, 1991) because language is not the detached, dehumanized homogeneous entity, it is full of opacity and inconsistencies arising out of the unequal access of members of society to its resources. Similarly, all speakers (even native) do not possess the magical power of seeing through a language all its implications, innuendos, and suppositions, language as intrinsically woven into social fabric becomes opaque and elusive for the speaker and listeners.

Nations come up with a myth of a single language in order to give the people a superficial impression of unity, however, under the façade of unity substantial variation lies, even for a monolingual nation like United Kingdom (Luke, 2008). The purpose of forming a national language status aims to later use the same as a measurement standard for other languages. The national language or form of a language act as the highest form, the standard that is used to find the shortcoming of non-conforming codes (languages or language varieties) (Bourdieu, 1991). The dominant language enables the users to benefit from their knowledge in the form of employment, prestige, political power and access to higher and technical knowledge (Ahmad, Hussan, & Malik, 2018). Language as the medium of communication becomes the basis for all field, this makes the linguistics field a transcendent force that permeates and goes through all other fields of human existence as a society (Lecercle, 2006: Bourdieu, 1991).

Any language has a worth and this worth manifest at various levels in a given field of language use (Grenfell, 2012)

Bourdieu presented the concept of 'linguistic marketplace' as a metaphor of how interactions, where language is used, have a structure and it enables the participant of interaction to reap dividends similar to exchanges of goods and money returns dividends. The metaphor of marketplace necessitate ownership of the linguistic capital, and those who own the capital, reap the dividends. Commanding and owning give the owner a headway in the competitive environment of the marketplace.

If we consider education as a Bourdieusian field, we can except education as the locus of exchanges through language that returns profits for the owner of certain favored forms of a language, that in most cases happens to be the national or official language of that community (Bourdieu, 1991).

Education, if conceptualized as a field, present a broad array of features that relate to exchanges, ownership, and profits. This field due to its breadth can be further subdivided into aspects of curriculum and infrastructure, such as classroom, playground, administration, audiovisual aids, libraries, canteen etc. based on infrastructure and the learning activities, assignments, examinations, counseling, parent-teacher meetings, teaching methods, need assessment, program evaluation, lesson planning etc. based on the processes. Both the infrastructure and processes contribute to the dynamics of the education field.

Hardy (2012) associated the field of education to the field of power and finds some overlaps, as in the field of power an authority enables and unlocks some actions

through a permission system (from center to the periphery) and through laying out the rules of games in the field so in the field of education some authority that is distant to the classroom layout the language policy and the classroom becomes a venue to negotiate this policy into realization. A teacher smoothes up the conversion form policy into action through a process of the pedagogical method.

For the teaching of English at the primary level government of Pakistan provides essential policy statements in the various education policies,

Statement of the problem

A critical revision of the teachers' experiences especially their failure to adapt their teachings to the learning needs of these students provides ground for the application of the Bourdieusian perspective. The tenets of Bourdieusian concepts such as linguistic field, habitus and capital provide the required perspective for understanding the reasons for teachers' failure to adapt pedagogy to their students' needs.

The Bourdieusian concept of habitus, capital, field associated with the linguistic marketplace is suited to the study of English language teaching in a TESOL classroom as the classroom can be visualized as marketplace venue where field and capital become a sufficient descriptor of the uneven success in language learning. The suitability of the Bourdieusian concept hinges on two points. First, English has an established global position of superiority over other places, the continuation of English in former British colonies such as Pakistan is often made on the basis of the utility of the English language at home and internationally. The superior position forms the habitus of acquiescence of the learners to the value of the English language. Those who own the linguistic capital i.e. those who are proficient in the English language remain active and excel in studies, while those who lack this capital, lag behind in education and ultimately are denied access to power (social, economic, and political), they are silenced and marginalized. As a locus of exchanges, the motivated superior learners gain grades, knowledge, praising reference letters, psychological confidence and contentment, social trust, economic opportunities and access to key political platforms and circles. An informed and conscientious teacher being aware of the linguistic capital presents the language while allowing the students the right to choose. Even a uniformed teacher plays a vital role in the field of education as she/he acquiesce to the choices that were made by others and in this way reinforces the central authority's prescribed/envisioned exchanges and beneficiaries (Bourdieu, 1999). Second, the centralization of the Pakistani curriculum makes the English language teaching process an essential center to periphery unfolding of a marketplace where those at the periphery do not find the center's prescribed rules of the game as a feasible and profitable enterprise. The set of rules as laid down in the National Education Policy (see Government of Pakistan, 2017). The National education policy sets the broader aims, achievable objectives and rationale for decisions. The NEP of 2017, for example, makes the English language compulsory from primary classes, links proficiency in the English language with improvement in the quality education in science and technology. The document implies that the standards of the English language come from inner-circle countries. Pakistan as a country of the outer circle is a norm developing country that

depends on the norm providing countries of the inner circle, where an L1 population of English language lives (Jenkins, 2009).

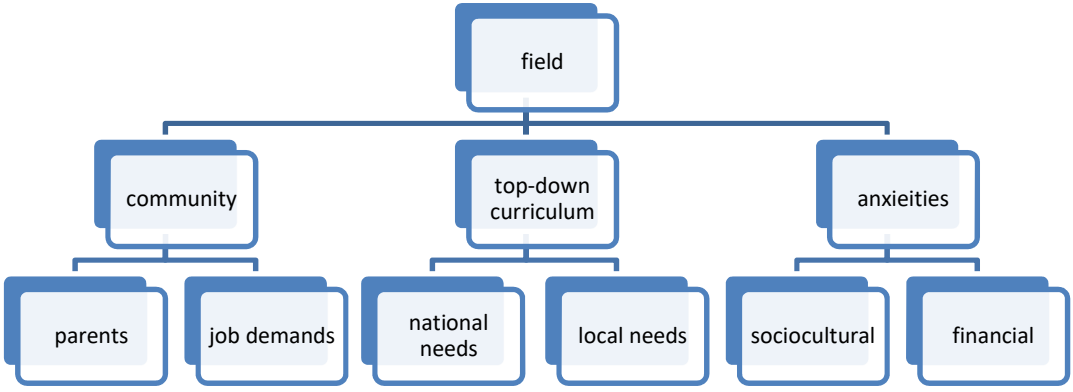
Research Methodology

The analytical construct of the research demands a qualitative approach to data that is primarily collected through personal observations of classes within district Mardan, in addition, to open-ended, exploratory interviews conducted to further explore and triangulate personal findings of researchers. While, theoretical construct relies as has been discussed earlier, on the work of Bourdieu, the researchers confined themselves to the exposition of habitus, field, and capital. The researcher did not strictly confine themselves to the defined parameters and discarded everything in observations and interviews that did not fit the definitions. Rather than restricting themselves to the confines of the definitions and losing the insight about the enactment and negotiation of these concepts in the classroom, the researchers used a flexible approach to definitions while attempting the explication and explanation of data with them, which granted a synthetic quality to the research. This not only helped in deeper insight into the nature of classroom exchanges, but they also provided the researchers with an opportunity to add to the concept through the addition of their experience. Researchers engaged with 10 schools. As the area of study lies in the Pashtun speaking belt, and the researchers had found the best level to be grade 9^{th} and 10^{th}, so they were to select 5 boys and 5 girls school, as mixed sitting of boys and girls in classrooms of the secondary level does not exist in district Mardan. Further, out of the 5 schools, 2 schools were from the elite private system, and two were from the public sector in an urban area, while one was from a rural area. Researchers, through a schedule, spent 2 months in the study and spent 10 working days in each school to complete observation. The observation notes were without a specific format, which allowed the researchers some flexibility to note everything that appealed to them to be relevant to the objectives of the study. Normally, most of the schools in their daily schedule began the day with the class for English language. Upon the request of researchers, the school scheduled the classes of 9^{th} and 10^{th} grade in such a way that they did not commence simultaneously which allowed the researchers to observe both grades in each school. After observation of the classes, which normally ended before 11 a.m. the researchers would engage one to two school teachers in the interview of 30 minutes duration. The interview would normally take place in a quiet place where the least disturbance was expected. Afterward, the researcher would sit with teachers in the staffroom at the recess time, and participate in the discussion on the Bourdieusian perspective and its relevance to the classroom. The study aimed to reason the failure of students in the English language classroom by finding answers to the following questions.

1. How the Bourdieusian concepts of field, habitus, and capital translate into application in an ELT classroom?
2. What are the determinant forces that influence exchanges in the classroom?

The researchers rationalized field as following

Figure 1. English language field (education)
The researchers rationalized the capital as following



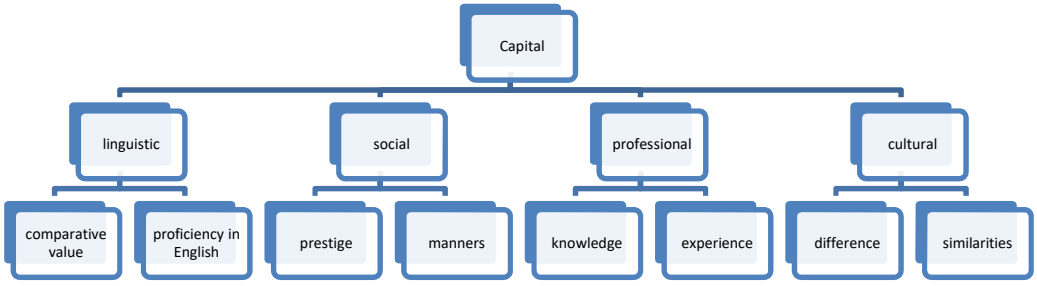


Figure 2. English language capital

Findings and Discussion

Education as the Bourdiesian field is diverse and complex. Straightforward distribution of the field into subfield is challenged by the overlaps and redundancies, for example, the subfield of anxieties when further divided yields worries about family finances the same sub-element of anxiety shares much with the community and its subfield of job. The researchers, therefore, do not insist on watertight discrete subgrouping of the education field and propose that the overlap in subfield act as a sign of organic connection between the subfields, making the field of education dynamic and the one with sufficient loops and feedbacks from one subfield to another. Similarly, education as a field is not unique, as discussed earlier, it shares much in its structural format with the field of power not only in the hierarchy but also in the overlap of subfields and thus we can say that education can be transformed into power or vice versa power can transform into education.

The researcher though explored a large number of subfields in education, at the moment this paper is limited to the discussion of community, curriculum, and anxieties. Community forms the bulk of outside factors that influence the form of exchanges in the classroom among learners and teachers that arise from and feeds back the community. Among the factors of the community, the study focused on parents and job demands/nature that is useful to the community or is allowed in the community. Parents value the native-like L1 or BBC English as the full return for learning English at the school. However, parents as per their resources when sending their child to a government school expect the least from the school and take

the occasion and weak interest in the progress of their children. Often parents engage their children in their work as a helping hand instead of giving them the opportunity to spare time for studies. The in government school seldom meet the parent regarding the progress of their child in studies. Most of the government school children's parents do not have sufficient command on English language, so they do not provide an opportunity to practice and improve spoken English. Parents, normally do not consider English as a language but as a subject that offers some challenges in learning for their child that they must get over in the school. As compared to the typical parents of government school children, the parents of private schools differ in terms of interest in their child's progress and understanding of the objectives of English language that their children need to achieve. Parents of the private school students pay a reasonable portion of their income/salary/wages towards the studies of their children, that include school fee, promotion fees, uniform, transport charges, pocket money, and stationery. They value proficiency not only in speaking but also in listening, reading and writing. They feel satisfied, that their children by studying foreign published books and teachers with a better accent will excel in the quality of English language and they expect that such excellence will make their child confident, intelligent, more knowledgeable and successful in earning a prized job in the government or private sector.

The community also fixes what jobs are prized and what jobs are not considered attractive. Government jobs are prized higher than in private jobs. The English language is considered as a key to gaining the jobs that are most prestigious such as CSS, PMS etc., entry as a cadet in the military, teaching even medicine and engineering jobs are linked with gaining early proficiency in the English language. Not only the government jobs but also the private sector jobs with handsome packages in multinational companies are linked by the Pakistani community with excellence in the English language. Unlike old times when expertise in only reading and writing was considered sufficient, a contemporary community in district Mardan values the excellence in listening and speaking more important than reading and writing. Fluency is valued higher than accuracy. Native like accent is considered better than a Pakistani accent. Reading of western writers is considered superior to the reading of Pakistani writers. For the community of Mardan, the local Pakistani form of English is "desi" (local) hence inferior. The community gauges the level of education through the command of the English language.

The top-down curriculum is diversified into two branches in district Mardan, i.e. the local needs and the national needs. The local in the field of education is largely influenced by the local community's views, the available resources (both human as trained and proficient teachers and material as infrastructure, furniture, books, etc.), the legacy of teaching practices at school. While at the national level productivity, innovation and applications are valued as essential components for higher proficiency in the English language, the local teaching and administrative community consider it as ideal framed by those who are not connected to the classroom. Therefore, they interpret the national curriculum in a way that is feasible in the available means. The lack of enthusiasm and complaints of impossibility and exaggeration in the national curriculum and education policy make the national needs and their expression in various policy documents as a mere wish list that is

not serious taken by the local administration of school and teachers. And there has never been any serious effort in the form of an audit of schools that find what objectives in a curriculum are achieved and what was not achieved and come up with solutions for improving the new curriculum with the help of the evaluation of the old. The lack of resources and a dearth of quality teachers have cropped up as the reason for the successful implementation of the center's vision of curriculum.

Our language learning system is heavily influenced by the assessment and evaluation process. Most of the time the learning activity is consumed by mere preparation for a milestone test. Rote learning and examination wiseness practices dominate, instead of giving students an opportunity to practice, learning, analyze and apply. The sociocultural anxiety of performance of the terminal examination of secondary school certificate make students not interested in the time-consuming practicing language skills and polishing their command. They prefer to take the short-cut and rely on rote learning of pieces of writing by a seasoned professor which in the evaluation system is guaranteed to fetch them excellent marks.

Most of the prized and high-end English language learning experiences are expensive for the students to afford, especially the government school students who cannot afford to buy books, practice taps, internet, cellphone/laptop access to the resources of English language learning becomes impossible. This leads to the formation of the difference between the command on the English language, leading to anxieties that are higher among the students of the government school.

The interplay of these subfields of education in the linguistic market of English creates an intense and emotionally charged atmosphere, where the exchange between the teacher and students is negotiated in the classroom. The aspects of English that are valued by the community and national curriculum are not fully realized through the exchange and the result of a failure in language learning emerges. The process often leads to blame game, students blame the competence of teachers and lack of resources at the school, teachers blame uninterested student and lack of professional growth, administration blame the absence of resources and high demand of community and national curriculum besides the pressure of a large number of enrollments, parents lament being cheated by the schools and job market suffers due to low quality of language skill set of the young applicants. These forces interact in the education field of the linguistics market and lead to adjustment and need assessment (factual) which results in the improvement of the overall linguistics market. However, the intervention needs to be informed by an objective appraisal of the field.

Following Bourdieu, the researchers divided linguistic capital into four categories i.e. linguistic, social, cultural and professional. The following discussion explores these aspects of district Mardan.

English is the language with the highest capital and value (Jenkins, 2009; Crystal, 1997). The classroom exchanges when happens in this language adds to the value of the contents, knowledge and the subject that is imparted in this language in district Mardan. The schools in Mardan can be divided into girls and boys (with girls schools lagging in providing higher capital variety of English), rural and urban (with rural schools lagging behind the urban schools), private and government (with government schools lagging behind the private schools), and further among private

school there is difference between the high fees and low fees variants (with low fees lagging behind the high schools). If we make a hierarch the government girls school in rural areas being the one where the linguistic capital is expected to be at the lowest, and the urban private school with high fees would remain at the top. Here, the linguistic capital closely matches the economic capital and the more costly the mode of exchange becomes, the higher the quality of the received product is expected.

The social capital is gauged by the level of prestige and appearance of being mannered (civilized, educated, nice, well-bred, well taught etc.) are the forms that language acquires. The social capital of the native English language variety remains at the top, while the Pakistani accent is considered lowest in prestige, and between these two poles, the international variety lies. The social capital is linked in district Mardan with position and occupation. A person with a job or a position is respected for proficiency in the English language. Similarly, the professional capital of the English language makes a person appear more experienced and knowledgeable. The study revealed that the professional capital of the English language stands above even Urdu language as the popular anecdotal distinction of Urdu medium being low-quality professional experience and knowledge as compared to the English medium that is considered synonymous with high-quality job experience (expertise) and knowledge.

The cultural capital of English language is the one that is found to enjoy the least amount of valuation in district Mardan. The parents, teachers, and students all agreed that English language is good but the English culture is considered bad specifically in terms of gender equality, dress, care for family, addiction to alcohol, and secularism (as animosity to Muslims). However, modern governance, technologies and democratic spirit are appreciated. However, the English language as cultural capital is often attributed that stands in contrast to the value system of the heritage culture of Pashtuns.

Conclusion

The study established the features of English in the local field of education in district Mardan and revealed some aspects of the culture especially the professional capital being the highest and the cultural capital stool much low as compared to Pashto language. The study answered the first question, by coming up with the subfields and the features of these subfields of English language marketplace in district Mardan. The study found that the field (at the local level) has the community as the most important player in shaping the features and accepting/rejecting the top-down curriculum. The field inevitably results in tensions related to financial securities among those who were not in schools where higher valued exchanges of English language (learning) took place. Further, the study established that culture remains a low-value aspect and professional knowledge and experience remained the high-end values of English language capital, and institutions were ranked by the community, teachers, parents, and students on this basis (as wherefrom more professional in the prestigious job come). As for the second question, the study found that each category of the field and capital of English language were important determinants of exchanges in the English language classroom. The study also noted that the field and capital of English language

marketplace closely resemble the field of power of English language. Further, studies may be undertaken to identify the nature of this similarity.

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