

Doing-English-Lessons in the Reproduction or Transformation of Social Worlds?

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Abstract

This article tells a story of four classrooms, situated in different socioeconomic backgrounds. Drawing on the theoretical notions of cultural capital, habitus, symbolic violence, and creative, discursive agency as analytic tools, the story unfolds witnessing the classroom dilemmas in which students and teachers found themselves, as well as the creative, discursive strategies which they used to cope with these dilemmas. The implications of their strategies were discussed with reference to the question of whether they were doing English lessons in the reproduction or in the transformation of the students' social worlds.

1 "Teaching English to the World" c.f. "Telling Stories of English in the World"

Statements about the global spread of English and its increasing socioeconomic importance in the world have almost become clichés towards the end of the twentieth century. On colorful banners celebrating the TESOL Annual Convention in Chicago streets in 1996 was written the eye-catching mission slogan, "Teaching English to the World". Indeed, English seems to have become a precious commodity increasingly demanded by the world and TESOL practitioners and researchers seem to be striving to meet the demand of the world market with all our professionalism. In TESOL journals and annual conventions, practitioners and researchers share their findings about methods, approaches, material designs that are effective.

However, apart from the technical concern of efficiency in teaching and learning, it seems that a far more diverse range of questions needs to be addressed which includes questions such as whether, and if yes, how, English is implicated in the reproduction of social inequalities in different contexts in the world. With the notion of the worldliness of English, Pennycook (1994) points out both the global dominant position of English and the socioeconomic, cultural and political embeddedness of English in the world. Access (or lack of it) to English often affects the social mobility and life chances of many children and adults not speaking English as their first or second language. The classroom in many places in the world is a key site for the reproduction of social identities and unequal relations of power (Martin-Jones & Heller, 1996). It is also likely that many students in the world hold an ambivalent, want-hate relationship with English and the classroom becomes a site for students' struggles and oppositional practices which, however, often lead students to participate in their own domination (e.g., in Sri Lanka, see Canagarajah, 1993). This article is written for TESOL practitioners and researchers who want to listen to more of the lived stories of English in the world and who share a similar concern in exploring ways of doing TESOL that do not participate in the reproduction of student disadvantage.

2 A Theoretical Preamble: Cultural Capital, Symbolic Violence, and Creative, Discursive Agency

Some theoretical notions that can serve as analytical tools for achieving a greater understanding of social phenomena of reproduction are discussed in this section. Given limited space, what goes below must be treated as a highly synoptic characterization and the interested reader is urged to consult the references themselves for a more detailed account.

Cultural Capital:

This is a concept from Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1991) referring to language use, skills, and orientations / dispositions / attitudes / schemes of perception (also called "habitus") that a child is endowed with by virtue of socialization in her/his family and community. Bourdieu's argument is that children of the socioeconomic elite are bestowed by their familial socialization with both more and the right kind of cultural capital for school success (i.e., their habitus becomes their cultural capital). A recurrent theme in Bourdieu's works is that children from disadvantaged groups, with a habitus incompatible with that presupposed in school, are not competing with equal starting points with children of the socioeconomic elite and thus the reproduction of social stratification. The notion of cultural capital has been used by educationists (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Luke, 1996) to describe the disadvantaged position of ethnic and linguistic minorities and to problematize the notion that state education in modern societies is built on meritocracy and equal opportunity.

Symbolic Violence:

Another recurrent theme in Bourdieu's works concerns how the disadvantaging effect of the schooling system is masked or legitimized in people's consciousness. School failure can be conveniently attributed to individual cognitive deficit or lack of effort and not to the unequal initial shares of the cultural capital both valued and legitimized in school:

...the dominated classes allow (the struggle) to be imposed on them when they accept the stakes offered by the dominant classes. It is an integrative struggle and, by virtue of the initial handicaps, a reproductive struggle, since those who enter this chase, in which they are beaten before they start...implicitly recognize the legitimacy of the goals pursued by those whom they pursue, by the mere fact of taking part. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 165)

Symbolic violence, according to Bourdieu, is the imposition of representations of the world and social meanings upon groups in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate. This is achieved through a process of *misrecognition*. For instance, the recent "English Only" campaigns in the United States provide illustrations of the political struggles required to create and maintain a unified linguistic market in which only one language is recognized as legitimate and appropriate for discourse in official settings, and this "English = American" symbolic representation has numerous consequences for schooling and jobs (Collins, 1993). For another instance, many Hong Kong parents insist on fighting for a place for their children in English medium schools (often despite the fact that their children speak and understand little English) because of the "English mediums

schools = good schools" symbolic representation that they have steadfastly accepted even in a largely Chinese society and a post-1997 era (for some background to the symbolic domination of English in Hong Kong, see Lin, 1996, 1998; and more on this in section 3 below).

Creative, Discursive Agency:

Bourdieu has often been accused of being overly deterministic and a theorist more of reproduction than transformation (e.g., Jenkins, 1992; Canagarajah, 1993). Lemke, however, points out that Bourdieu is not limited to reproduction; what he does limit is the effectiveness of single agents in changing whole fields of valuation (Jay Lemke, personal communication). For instance, the legitimate prestige and value attached to English in Hong Kong cannot be changed by single agents unless there are systematic changes in the social selection mechanism (e.g., the medium of the universities and the professions; the language of the job market; see section 3 below). While the above seems true, an area in which Bourdieu offers few analyses is the creative, discursive agency of social actors who find themselves caught in dilemmas. As Collins points out:

...we need to allow for dilemmas and intractable oppositions; for divided consciousness, not just dominated minds;...for creative, discursive agency in conditions prestructured, to be sure, but also fissured in unpredictable and dynamic ways. (Collins, 1993, p. 134)

In section 4 below, we shall see some examples, and discuss the consequences, of teachers' and students' different creative discursive strategies in response to the classroom dilemmas posed by the larger social structures. However, before looking at the classrooms, let us first look at the larger social context of the classrooms.

3 Hong Kong: The Setting of the Story

Despite its international cosmopolitan appearance Hong Kong is ethnically rather homogeneous. About 97% of its population is ethnic Chinese, and Cantonese is the mother tongue of the majority. English native speakers account for not more than 3% of the entire population. They had constituted the privileged class of the society until July 1, 1997 when Hong Kong's sovereignty was returned to China and Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. The English-conversant bilingual Chinese middle class has, however, remained the socioeconomically dominant group in Hong Kong.

Notwithstanding its being the mother tongue of only a minority, English has been the language of educational and socioeconomic advancement; that is, the dominant symbolic resource in the symbolic market (Bourdieu, 1991) in Hong Kong. Even in the post-1997/colonial era, English has remained a socioeconomically dominant language in Hong Kong society. For instance, a 1998 survey on business corporations in Hong Kong found that the majority of business corporations said they would prefer employees with a good command of English to employees with a good command of Chinese (Sing Tao Jih Pao, May 21, 1998). Besides, English remains the medium of instruction in most universities and professional training programmes.

It can be seen that the symbolic market is embodied and enacted in the many key situations (e.g., educational and job settings) in which symbolic resources (e.g., certain types of linguistic skills, cultural knowledge, specialized knowledge and skills) are demanded of social actors if they want to gain access to valuable social, educational and eventually material resources (Bourdieu, 1991). For instance, a Hong Kong student must have adequate English resources to enter and succeed in the English-medium professional training programmes and in order to earn the qualifications to enter high-income professions.

To see how the larger social context can pose local dilemmas on teachers and students and how they can exercise their creative discursive agency in dealing with their dilemmas, let us compare and contrast four different classrooms.

4 A Story of Four Classrooms

Taken from the database of the author's ethnographic and classroom discourse study of eight classrooms in seven schools from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds in Hong Kong, the following four classroom scenarios¹ are meant to give the reader a sense of the diversity of discursive practices that can be found across even similarly constrained classrooms (e.g., Classrooms B, C, and D). In listening to these very different stories, however, you will sense a preoccupation with a recurrent question: To what extent are classroom participants shaped by the larger social structures such as sociocultural and familial background and to what extent are they free to transform their lot (and habitus)? We shall return to this question in section 5. For each classroom I shall first describe the background, with information based on questionnaire surveys and interviews of the students, and then an English reading lesson. All four teachers are Hong Kong Chinese, sharing the same mother-tongue with their students.

Classroom A: A scenario of compatible habitus

Background:

This is a form 3 (grade 9) class of thirty-three students, aged from fourteen to fifteen, in a prestigious girls' school. The majority of the students came from families in the expensive residential area in which the school is located. Their parents were professionals, business executives, or university professors, whose education level ranged from secondary, university, to postgraduate. They spoke mostly Cantonese at home, but sometimes also English, for example, when speaking to their Filipino domestic helpers. They read a variety of extra-curricular materials, including both English and Chinese, both serious and non-serious materials; for example, comics, Chinese newspapers, English newspapers, English fashion magazines, English detective stories, science fiction, pop youth magazines, TV news, Reader's Digest (both English and Chinese editions), and Chinese translations of foreign classics (e.g., *Gone with the Wind*). The students were fluent in their responses to the teacher's questions and could elaborate their answers with the teacher's prompts.

¹. To protect the anonymity of the schools and the participants, all names are pseudo-names and all identifying details of the schools and teachers are left out. Sometimes, the gender is changed.

Teacher A's English was the best among the eight teachers who participated in my study. English seemed to be a tool she readily used in her daily life and not just in academic contexts. She spoke to her students about her daughter, her shopping habits, Mother's Day, and her feelings naturally and comfortably in English. She was interested in both Chinese and English literature, and she read for leisure English magazines. Sometimes, she would bring her old magazines from home to the class library and shared them with her students.

The reading lesson described below was run smoothly and the teacher engaged students in high-level (e.g., beyond factual) questions about the story they had read. All through the lesson English was consistently used by both teacher and students and the classroom atmosphere was interestingly both relaxed and seriously on-task.

A reading lesson in Classroom A:

The teacher began the reading lesson with the following extended introduction:

T: Okay.. now.. have you brought back.. Flowers for Mrs. Harris? ... Now.. I'd like to discuss one thing with you.. for this lesson for this book. Have you ever wondered WHY this book is called Flowers for Mrs. Harris.. and not a Dior dress for Mrs. Harris? ... Now the whole book we are talking about HOW Mrs. Harris.. saved.. how she worked extra hard to save up the money.. so that she could go to Paris to buy the dress. And after that.. aa.. again she went through a lot of troubles in order to get the dress back.. and at the end it was ruined. So all along we were talking about a dress.. and Mrs Harris.. but why.. why Flowers for Mrs. Harris? ... Alright now.. I want to spend.. aa.. the next five to ten minutes or so.. and try to discuss in groups, okay? aam.. you can probably find some hints.. towards the end of this book, in the last chapter.

The students swiftly formed groups and discussed. The teacher walked to a group and started to engage students in thinking deeper about the story by asking them some guiding questions, e.g., "What did Mrs. Harris see in those flowers?" or, "Besides the flowers, how else can she feel that friends are very important?". After spending some time with one group she moved onto another group and did the same.

After about fifteen minutes she addressed the whole class again and asked more questions about the story. The students readily gave her answers and she built on their answers to bring out the themes of the story: friendship, hard work and courage. Then she talked about the class's upcoming examination and encouraged her students to emulate Mrs. Harris, to work hard and not to lose heart when faced with difficulties. Most of the time during the lesson, the students seemed to be attentive to their teacher or on-task.

Classroom B: A scenario of incompatible habitus

Background:

This is a form 2 (grade 8) class of forty-two students, twenty boys and twenty-two girls, aged between thirteen to fourteen. The school is located in a government-subsidized public housing estate. The students largely came from families who lived in the nearby public housing estates. Their parents were manual or service workers and their education

level ranged from primary to secondary school. They spoke only Cantonese at home. Most of the boys read comics, newspapers, TV news, and pop youth magazines. Most of the girls read TV news, love stories, ghost stories, newspapers, and pop youth magazines. They did not read any English extra-curricular materials.

I informally interviewed a group of boys who were observed to be the most resistant to the teacher in the classroom. They were playful and testing, as if checking out whether I could understand their insider jokes. When I asked them questions such as whether they liked English or their English lessons, they replied in the affirmative, but in an exaggerated and joking way. I sensed that they were trying to give me what they thought I was after, so I said again that I would like to hear what they really thought and that I would not tell anything they said to the school authorities. Then they seemed to be more willing to voice their feelings. They said they found their English lessons boring and they did not know a lot of the things the teacher said as the teacher would only speak in English. I asked why they did not tell the teacher and request her to explain the things they did not understand. They said the teacher would only explain again in English, and they would still not understand. They said they chatted and played in the classroom because the lesson was too boring but they were also afraid of being asked by the teacher to answer questions. They said they felt very "yyu" ("without face") standing up there in the class and being unable to answer the teacher's questions.

They had a very cynical view about school life and about their future. They said they did not like learning English but they knew they could not find a job without English in this society. They also stated that they did not consider they would be able to get into university.

Teacher B's relationship with some of the boys appeared to be stressful at times. For example, sometimes she had to chide the boys angrily for not paying attention or chatting with their neighbours. The following reading lesson will give the reader a sense of the atmosphere in her classroom.

A reading lesson in Classroom B:

The teacher started by saying they were going to read chapter 30 of the storybook, *Adventures of Tom Sawyers*, in groups of four or five and each group would send a representative to retell the story in 50 to 60 words to the whole class. Each group was to write down a summary on a piece of paper first and the summary should cover the main points in that chapter. As the teacher was saying these instructions, the class was noisy and some students said loudly in Cantonese that they did not know what to do. The teacher repeated her instructions and walked around to help students to form groups and to explain again what they were expected to do. Most of the students were off-task, chatting and joking in Cantonese. A girl at the back was writing the lyrics of a popular Cantonese love song on a piece of paper. There seemed to be a lot of non-teacher-approved activities going on in the classroom and a lot of noise. The teacher seemed exhausted circulating around the classroom trying to get her students to do the task. All through the lesson English was consistently spoken by the teacher while in contrast, Cantonese was invariably spoken by the students except when they were called upon to do the story-retelling. When they did that, they read mechanically from a series of sentences they wrote on a piece of

paper while most other students continued to chat noisily on their own. After a student had finished reading from the paper, the teacher would say "Very nice, their report includes all the points" or "Quite nice, they have covered some of the points" and then immediately called another group's representative to do the retelling. She seemed to be running out of time and had to get all the retellings done within the lesson. This might explain the brevity of her feedback to the students.

Classroom C: A scenario of incompatible habitus

Background:

This is a form 2 (grade 8) class of thirty-nine students, nineteen male and twenty female, aged from thirteen to fourteen. The school is located in a town close to an industrial area. The socioeconomic backgrounds of the students and their sociolinguistic and extra-curricular literacy habits are like those of their counterparts in Classroom B. Their English fluency, as can be seen from how and what they spoke in the classroom, seemed to be rather limited for their grade level. There were many words in the textbook that they did not understand or did not know how to pronounce.

When I informally interviewed a group of boys after class, they expressed that they found English "boring" and "difficult" but they also said they knew it was very important to learn English well. They found school work generally boring but said they still preferred to go to school because they said they could at least meet and play with friends at school. They said it would be even more boring to stay all day at home. "Boring" was a word these boys used frequently to describe their life and school. The reader can get a sense of the atmosphere in their classroom by looking at the following reading lesson.

A reading lesson in Classroom C:

The reading lesson can be divided into three stages. In the pre-reading stage, the teacher asked some pre-reading questions about the topic of the story--Heaven-Queen Festival, using the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) discourse format (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979; Heap, 1985). Then the teacher wrote ten numbered reading comprehension questions on the blackboard and the class was given fifteen minutes to read silently and find answers from the text to the ten questions by underlining relevant parts in the text. This constitutes the reading stage. The final stage is an answer-checking stage. The teacher elicited answers from the class using the IRF discourse format. The teacher often had to re-ask or elaborate her English questions in Cantonese to get responses from students and then the teacher rephrased the students' Cantonese response in English (L2).

In the following excerpt taken from the answer-checking stage, we find the creativity of the students bursting out in a niche that they capitalize on in an otherwise rather uninteresting IRF discourse. The teacher had been asking factual reading comprehension questions about the Heaven-Queen story that they have just read. She came to question 9 ("What happened when she answered her mother?") and first asked the question in English. No response was forthcoming and so she was now elaborating the question in Cantonese in pursuit of a response from her students:

Lesson Excerpt:

(To facilitate reading, Cantonese utterances have been translated into English; they are bolded and placed in pointed brackets. See appendix for other notes on transcription.)

870 T: <**What happened? .. Leih-Lohn-Mihng (2) when she answered her mum (1) her mum called her name, and when she answered her mum, what happened?**>?

*872 Leih: <**Her old-man fell off to the (ground)**>. {chuckling towards the end of his sentence}=

872.5 Ss: =Haha! haha! haha! hahahaha! {other Ss laughing hilariously}

872.8 T: <**What?! (2) louder!**>! {against a background of Ss' laughter}

*873.2 Chan: <**Her old-man fell off to the street!**>! {chuckling}=

873.5 S1: =Hihihihik!!= {laughing}

873.8 S2: =<**(Is there) a street?**>?

*874 T: <**Is there a street?**>? {T in an amused tone; some students laugh}

*874.5 L: <**fell into // the sea**>=

*874.8 //T: =<**WHERE did he fall into?**>? {quite amusingly}

875 L: <**Sea that is**>.

875.2 T: <**Yes.. fell into the sea**>.

875.5 S1: <**fell off to the street**>.

875.8 S2: <**Her old-man fell off to the street**>.

876 T: // Right? (1) Her father dropped into the SEA!==

876 //S3: Hekhek! {laughing}

876.5 ==T: Right? (2) <**In that manner died**>. .. SHH! (1) <**okay**> .. <**finally**> .. SHH!
number ten ...

The need to base one's answer (or to "find the answer") in the text has been a recurrent concern of the teacher voiced in her recurrent prompts and follow-up questions such as "Where can you find it?", "Does the book really say so?", "Look at paragraph ____, line ____" found in other parts of the lesson transcript. However, there are times when a bookish answer is boring to the students. The factual nature of the set of questions has left little room for imagination for these lively thirteen-year-olds. In the above lesson excerpt we see how a student has exploited the response slot to do something playful, to illegitimately put forward a contribution that will turn the whole story into a comic-strip type of story, which they enjoy reading outside school. In their most favourite comic strips, the characters usually do funny, impossible things and amusement and enjoyment come from the superimposing of impossible and unpredictable fantasy with the familiar, predictable, and boring mundane world. It seems that the boy who provides this funny answer (turns [872], [873.2]) is a skillful story-teller with a ready audience, and this is reflected in the hilarious laughter of his fellow students.

Classroom D: A scenario of transforming habitus

Background:

This is a form 1 (grade 7) class of thirty students², twenty boys, ten girls, aged between twelve to thirteen. The students came from families who lived in the nearby public housing estates. The socioeconomic backgrounds of the students and their sociolinguistic and extra-curricular literacy habits are like those of their counterparts in Classrooms B and C.

The classroom atmosphere was very lively. Most students were attentive to the teacher and focused on their lesson tasks most of the time. They seemed to enjoy their English lessons and were both eager and often able to answer the teacher's questions.

When I asked the students in informal interviews after class whether they liked English and their English lessons, they said yes, and they especially liked their English teacher. They said that they liked to hear her tell stories from their English reader book, and that she could also explain things clearly to them. They liked the way she explained some grammatical points. For example, when explaining the difference between "little" and "few", the teacher helped them to remember the difference by saying "little" has more letters than "few" and so is uncountable and "few" has not so many letters and so is "countable". The students said they found this mnemonic tips very helpful to them. They also sounded positive about their studies and their future. They said that they thought they could learn English well because they could see themselves doing better and better in their English dictations, exercises and tests. The teacher had kept a personal progress chart for the students so that they knew how they were doing over time, and the teacher would give prizes for the best-performing students. They felt that they could succeed in their studies and would have a good chance of furthering their studies (e.g., entering university) in the future.

Teacher D used Cantonese to explain vocabulary, give directions, make the English story texts come alive, explain grammatical points, and interact with students most of the time. She was the teacher who used the most Cantonese among the eight teachers in my study. She believed that since the students were still Form 1 students and were not up to a level for using English all the time, using Cantonese could help them become more interested in the lessons and understand the lessons better. She also found that her students had made good progress over the academic year, for instance, as reflected in their increased motivation to learn English, and their improved scores in school tests and examinations.

Teacher D was the form teacher of this class. She spent most of her recess, lunch, and after-school hours talking to individual students who had various problems, for example, forgetting to bring books to school, noisy in other teachers' lessons, scoring poorly in dictations or tests. I got a sense that the good relationships she had with her students (as could be reflected in their eager responses to her questions, and their co-operative responses to her directives) might have something to do with the amount of individual attention she gave to each student in her class. Every day, she had her lunch with a student together. In this way, she maintained both a classroom and a personal relationship with her students. However, that also seemed to make her school days fully packed and busy from

². This is a remedial English class (i.e., with low English ability). Extra government resources have been given to junior secondary schools in Hong Kong to enable remedial classes to be smaller than the normal class-size.

early morning till late into the afternoon. She seemed to be an energetic teacher who did not mind doing extra work and spending extra time with her students. The reader can get a sense of the atmosphere in her classroom by looking at the following lesson excerpt.

A reading lesson in Classroom D:

The lesson excerpt below is taken from the beginning of the reading lesson. The teacher announces that she is going to ask them questions about the part of the English storybook that they have read in a previous lesson:

469 T: **<Okay, let me ask you about the story, and see if you can still remember it! Last time we told the story to page forty, that is the last- the lesson before the last lesson, and then in the last lesson we told the story from page forty to forty-two! Now let me see if you can still remember the story ... Sinbad was sailing in a boat, remember? Those jewelries, then he had given away half of the jewelries to.. and he had bought a boat, and he had bought.. recruited many sailors, after that, he also bought four boats, one sailing towards the East, one towards the South, one towards the West, and one towards the North. Sinbad himself took a boat, sailing back to where? ... sailing back to where>?** {A girl raises her hand; T turns to her and says} Yes,

478 Girl 1 {stands up and speaks}: **<Brazil>!**

478.5 T: **<Go back to Brazil>?! No:::,**

478.8 Some Ss {speaking in their seats}: Baa-Gaak-Daht!

479 T: No, not **<Brazil>!** {many students raise their hands now and T points to a boy}

479.5 Boy 1 {stands up and speaks}: **<Baghdad>!**

479.8 T: **<Baghdad>**, how to spell.. **<Baghdad>?** English **<that is>**, in English ..

<Baghdad>. {Girl 1 raises her hand again; T turns to her and gestures her to speak} Yes,

481.5 Girl 1 {stands up and speaks}: b-a-g-h...-d-a-d {T writes it on the blackboard as the girl spells it}

483 T: Yes! **<How to read this word>?**

483.8 Some Ss {speaking up in their seats}: **<Baghdad>!** **<Baghdad>!**

484 T: No, Baghdad, Baghdad, Baghdad **<that is. Okay, as they were thinking of going back home, alas! on the way back, they ran into a GROUP OF>...**

487 Ss {speaking up in their seats}: **<monkeys! monkeys! monkeys!>**

488 T: Monkeys! Yes! {T writes the word "monkey" on the blackboard} **<That group of monkey-men, that group.. monkey-men that is, monkey-men that is, they took them to an island>**, what is the name of this island? Can you spell the word?

{Another girl raises her hand} Yes,

492 Girl 2 {stands up and speaks}: Z-u-g...

492.5 T: Z-u-g...

492.8 Girl 2 {standing up}: (d)

493 T: No, b, b for boy. {T writes the word "Zugb" on the board} **<How to read it? A very ugly place.>**

494.3 Some Ss {speaking in their seats}: Zugb!

494.5 T: Z:::ugb::

495 Ss {repeating in their seats}: ZUGB!!

495.5 T: <Alas>! Zugb!! An ugly place for the ugly men. <An ugly place for those ugly men to live in. Those monkeys brought them there for what>?
 498 Boy {speaking in his seat}: < (Dump him there) >! {Another boy raises his hand}
 498.3 T: Yes,
 498.5 Boy 2: < (Giant ? ?) >
 498.8 T: <Right! How to say giant in English>?
 499 Another boy {speaking in his seat}: <Giant>!
 499.5 T: <Giant in English is .. Leuhng-Mahn-Yih>!
 500 L {stands up and speaks}: Giant.
 500.5 T: Giant! Very good! Yes! {T writes the word "giant" on board}

In the excerpt above, the teacher dramatizes, with intonations and gestures, the part of the story about Sinbad sailing in a boat. The teacher then asks the students where Sinbad is sailing back to (last three lines in turn [469]).

The teacher gives negative feedback to a student's answer in turn [478.5]. Some other students immediately speak out their answers from their seats (turn [478.8]). The teacher signals to a boy to speak. The boy stands up from his seat and gives his answer (turn [479.5]: Baa-Gaak-Daaht). We see that in this way, the teacher maintains the practice of having a "student-bids-and-teacher-accepts" pre-sequence to a student response.

This time the student's answer is correct (turn [479.5]: Baa-Gaak-Daaht). The teacher repeats it and immediately initiates another question in the feedback-cum-initiation slot (turn [479.8]). This question is interesting. It seems to belong to a different type of question from the first question she asks (see last line in turn [469]: <Sinbad.... sailing back to where?>). Instead of following the storyline and asking about what happens to Sinbad next, the second question requires the students to give the spelling of the English version of the name of the place, "Baa-Gaak-Daaht", which has been offered by a student as a response and acknowledged and repeated by the teacher (turns [479.5], [479.8]). It seems to be a question that requires the students to focus on the linguistic aspects of the story. They have read the English text (pp. 40-42 of their storybook), and the English text is now laid out on their desks before them. The question requires them to shift their focus from the content of the story *for a while* to concentrate on the language in which this content is couched. It seems that the place name in Cantonese ("Baa-Gaak-Daaht") cannot be accepted by the teacher as an acceptable *final* answer. The teacher's follow-up question on the elicited answer would have the effect of getting the students to reformulate the answer into an ultimately acceptable format--"in English" (the words the teacher uses in her follow-up initiation; see line 2 in turn [479.8]).

We see in turns [481.5] and [483] that the teacher ultimately gets the L2 formulation of the answer--"Baghdad", and she writes it on the blackboard. Only L2 answers are written on the blackboard. It seems that the teacher's act of writing the student's response on the blackboard has the effect of conferring a final-answer status on the response of the student (Heyman, 1983).

Unlike Teacher C, who often does her initiations in an L2 (Question) - L1 (Annotation of Question) sequence, Teacher D often starts with L1 to initiate a question about the story. Teacher D seems to be using a couplet of IRF formats to do consecutively two different kinds of things. The first IRF format is always used to engage the students in co-telling the story (e.g., turns [469]-[479.8]). The focus is on the content of the story and the questions asked in the initiation slots follow naturally from the storyline. The second IRF format (e.g., turns [479.8]-[483]) is used to get the students to reformulate in English their Cantonese answer that has been acknowledged in the first IRF format. The second IRF format may be repeated to get the students to focus on the linguistic aspects of the final L2 answer. For example, the second IRF format is repeated in turns [483], [483.8], [484] to get the students to say "Baghdad" in English.

With the paired use of the story-focus-IRF format immediately followed by the language-focus-IRF format, the teacher can get the students to reformulate their earlier L1 responses into the language that they are supposed to be learning in the lesson: English. This special use of the IRF formats in Teacher D's classroom stands in contrast with the use of the IRF format in Teacher C's class. For instance, Teacher C always starts with L2 texts or questions in the initiation slot of the IRF format. She then uses the L2-L1 Annotation format in the same initiation slot to annotate the L2 text or question. Students usually respond in L1. Then the teacher herself reformulates the students' L1 response into L2 and confers on it the final-answer status. This kind of discourse practice has the effect of allowing the students to get away with L1 responses only. The students are not required to do any reformulation of their L1 responses into L2. The teacher does it all for them in the feedback slot of the IRF format. The discourse structure of Teacher C in the reading lesson can be represented as follows:

Teacher-Initiation [L2-L1]
 Student-Response [L1]
 Teacher-Feedback [(L1-)L2]

In contrast, Teacher D uses two different IRF formats in the following cycle in the reading lesson:

(1) Story-Focus-IRF:

Teacher-Initiation [L1]
 Student-Response [L1]
 Teacher-Feedback [L1]

(2) Language-Focus-IRF:

Teacher-Initiation [L1/L2]³
 Student-Response [L1/L2]

Teacher-Feedback [L2], or use (2) again until Student-Response is in L2

(3) Start (2) again to focus on another linguistic aspect of the L2 response elicited in (2); or return to (1) to focus on the story again.

³. "L1/L2" denotes "L1 or L2".

This kind of discourse practice allows the teacher to interlock a story focus with a language focus in the reading lesson. There can be enjoyment of the story, via the use of the story-focus IRF, intertwined with a language-learning focus, via the use of the language-focus IRF. We have noted above that the teacher never starts an initiation in L2. She always starts in L1. This stands in sharp contrast with the discourse practices of Teacher C who always starts with L2 texts or questions in her initiations. It appears to me that by always starting in L1, Teacher D always starts from where the student is--from what the student can fully understand and is familiar with. On the other hand, by using the language-focus IRF format immediately after the story-focus IRF format, she can also push the students to move from what they are familiar with (e.g., L1 expressions) to what they need to become more familiar with (e.g., L2 counterparts of the L1 expressions).

5 Doing-English-Lessons in the Reproduction or Transformation of Habitus?

"You want to know why I don't pay attention in English lessons? You really want to know? Okay, here's the reason: NO INTEREST!! It's so boring and difficult and I can never master it. But the society wants you to learn English! If you're no good in English, you're no good in finding a job!"

The above was said by a 14-year-old boy from Classroom B to the author in an informal interview after class (original in Cantonese). In section 2 above we mentioned Bourdieu's notion of habitus referring to language use, skills, and orientations / attitudes / dispositions / schemes of perception that a child is endowed with by virtue of socialization in her/his family and community. The four classroom scenarios outlined in section 4 above can represent situations where there are varying degrees of compatibility between the habitus of the students and what is required of them in the school English lesson. In Classroom A, the middle class students bring with them the right kind of habitus--cultural capital--to the school lesson: they have both the right kind of attitudes/interest and linguistic skills/confidence to participate in high-level discussions on the themes of the story in English with one another and the teacher. Doing-English-lessons in Classroom A reproduces, and reinforces, the students' cultural capital and both their subjective expectations and objective probabilities of succeeding in school and the society. Both teacher and students are not in any dilemmas caused by incompatibility of habitus, and thus the atmosphere of relaxed harmony in her classroom.

In Classrooms B, however, we witness a situation of incompatibility between students' habitus and what is required of them in the English lesson. The 14-year-old school boy's voice quoted above expresses vividly what Bourdieu would call a working class child's *subjective expectations of objective probabilities*:

...social class, understood as a system of objective determinations, must be brought into relation not with the individual or with the "class" as a *population*,... but with the class habitus, the system of dispositions (partially) common to all products of the same structures. Though it is impossible for *all* members of the same class (or even two of them) to have had the same experiences, in the same order, it is certain that each member of the same class is more likely than any member of another class to have been confronted with the situations most frequent for the members of that

class. The objective structures which science apprehends in the form of statistical regularities (e.g. employment rates, income curves, probabilities of access to secondary education, frequency of holidays, etc.) inculcate, through the direct or indirect but always convergent experiences which give a social environment its *physiognomy*, with its "closed doors", "dead ends", and limited "prospects",... in short, the sense of reality or realities which is perhaps the best-concealed principle of their efficacy. (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 85-86; underlining added)

In Classroom B, we witness students who seem to find themselves confronted with a language in which they have neither interest nor competence/confidence, and yet a language they recognize, though angrily, as a key to success in their society. Their conclusion for themselves seems to be that they can never master the language and that they are excluded from any chances of social success. Their behaviour in the classroom seems to stem from their contradictory feelings about both their self-recognition of inability to change, and angry protests of, their fate: they engage in classroom practices oppositional to the curriculum and the teacher, fully expecting themselves to be never able to master the "difficult", foreign language anyway (e.g., by ignoring the lesson task or the teacher altogether and engaging in peer talk in their mother tongue most of the time). Their resistance seems to resemble that of marginalized ethnic minorities in North American inner city schools (e.g., Solomon, 1992).

We also witness a teacher in dilemma in Classroom B. The dilemma is one of having to teach English in English only, as this is her school's policy and, in general, a methodological prescription dominant in ELT (English language teacher) education in Hong Kong, and at the same time having to get her limited-English-proficiency and apparently uncooperative students to understand her instructions and explanations as well as to complete the lesson task within the time limit of the lesson. We witness a teacher running around the classroom to get her large class of 42 students on-task. She was exhausted and frustrated, and apparently failing to get connected in any meaningful way to her students despite her painful efforts.

Let us turn to Classroom C, where we witness a slightly different picture. The lesson is perceived as equally "boring", a word used by the students describing their lesson and their view of English to the researcher in an informal after-class interview. However, the teacher seems to be (partially) successful in getting her students to collaborate in extracting information from the story text to answer pre-given reading comprehension questions, the kind of questions typically found in school tests and examinations in Hong Kong. She seems to be imparting examination skills albeit in ways that students might find unengaging. The mother tongue is a tool she uses to get her limited-English-proficiency students to collaborate in this text-information extraction process. She seems to be connected to her students at some level, e.g., sharing their joke (she smiles and appears to be amused by the student's fun answer), though she also seems to be eager to socialize students into the text-information extraction mindset. In this respect there is some incompatibility between the students' habitus and what the teacher requires of them in the reading lesson. Using the mother tongue (L1) as a bridging tool, the teacher seems to be

partly inducing and partly coercing her students into a specific school mode of orientations to text, albeit with varying degrees of success across her students.

It seems that as a result of the teacher's efforts, the students may become better versed in examination skills although their basic habitus orientation towards English--finding it boring and irrelevant to their daily life--remains unchanged. The teacher's use of L1 seems to reflect her discursive strategy to deal with her dilemma: how to get her students to collaborate in a task perceived as unengaging by her students.

Now let us turn to Classroom D. The students come from a similarly disadvantaged socioeconomic background as their counterparts in Classrooms B and C. Like their counterparts, their habitus does not equip them with the right kind of attitudes and interest, as well as skills and confidence in learning English. However, we witness some sign of their habitus being transformed through the creative discursive agency and efforts of their teacher. For instance, she uses L1 in a strategic way to intertwine an interesting story focus and a language-learning focus in the reading lesson. She helps her students to experience a sense of achievement and confidence in learning English (e.g., by charting their progress so that they can see their own improvement; by giving them mnemonic strategies regarding vocabulary usage). She also spends most of her school spare time with her students to establish a personal relationship with each of them. With all these extra personal creative efforts, she succeeds in helping her students to develop interest, skills as well as confidence in learning a language that is otherwise perceived as "difficult", "boring" and basically irrelevant in the daily lives of these students coming from a Cantonese-dominant working class habitus.

Searching for the appropriate methodology for different kinds of students coming from different cultural and social backgrounds with different habituses becomes an important task and possibility for TESOL practitioners working with students from backgrounds that do not give them the right kind of cultural capital. It seems that TESOL practitioners will benefit more from their own reflective action-research in developing their own appropriate methodology for their students rather than from merely following ELT prescriptions (Holliday, 1994). For instance, while the prescription of using only the target language in teaching the target language is widely held, it becomes clear from observing the above four classrooms that it is not whether L1 or L2 is used that matters, but rather, *how* L1 or L2 can be used to connect with students and to help them transform their attitudes/dispositions/skills/self-image--their habitus or social worlds. For instance, unlike the self-defeating-sounding students in Classroom B (see quotation of a boy's voice above), students in Classroom D are not pessimistic about their life chances: "I want to further my studies.", " I feel confident about learning English."--these are what the students in Classroom C told the researcher. Their school results confirm their newly-found confidence and expectations. The question then is not one of whether to use L1 or not but one of searching for appropriate creative discursive practices with one's own students. In this respect, we confirm Collins (1993)'s observation that individual creative, discursive agency can make transformation of one's social world possible despite the larger constraining, reproducing social structures outlined by Bourdieu (1977).

6 Interrogating Symbolic Violence

Although we can see a glimpse of hope in creative, discursive agency in transforming our habitus and life chances, we cannot neglect the need for the continual interrogation of power and fields of valuation in the larger society (Pennycook, 1994; Luke, 1996). For instance, students in Classroom D might have found a bit of the cultural capital that they need for school and social success through the extra creative efforts of their teacher's and theirs, they are still in a race the rules of which are laid down by the privileged classes, who are already way ahead of them in the race (e.g., Classroom A students). These rules are, however, often taken for granted and perceived as legitimate by all parties: teachers, students, curriculum designers, and parents--a case of symbolic violence exercised on them (see section 2 above). It seems that TESOL practitioners need to continue to encourage the interrogation, together with their students, of the role of English in their society and in their life chances--to develop a critical social theory of practice (Luke, 1996). As Pennycook points out,

In some senses, then, the English language classroom, along with other sites of cultural production and political opposition, could become a key site for the renewal of both local and global forms of knowledge. (Pennycook, 1994, p. 326)

Understanding existing practices and the sociocultural and institutional situatedness of classroom practices is a first step towards exploring the possibility of alternative creative, discursive practices that might hold promise of contributing to the transformation of the students' habitus. More of these stories await another opportunity to be told. It is my hope that through telling these lived stories of classroom participants, TESOL practitioners and researchers can gain some insights into how our role as teachers of English in the world can be reassessed, reconceived, and ultimately, re practised.

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APPENDIX: NOTES ON TRANSCRIPTION

- (1) The numerals preceding each turn is the transcribing machine counter no.; a speaking turn is referred to as: turn [counter no.]
- (2) Simultaneous utterances: The point at which another utterance joins an ongoing one is indicated by the insertion of two slashes in the ongoing turn. The second speaker and her/his utterance(s) are placed below the ongoing turn and are preceded by two slashes. The latching of a second speaking turn to a preceding one is indicated by a single equal sign, "=".
- (3) Contextual information: Significant contextual information is given in curly brackets: e.g., {Ss laugh}
- (4) Transcriptionist doubt: Unintelligible items or items in doubt are indicated by question marks in parentheses or the words in doubt in parentheses.