

Voices in EFL Education* เสียงสะท้อนจากห้องเรียนภาษาต่างประเทศภาษาอังกฤษ

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาว่านักเรียนไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ โดยมีต้นทุนทางวัฒนธรรม (cultural capital) ที่หลากหลายมีการปรับตัวเองและบทบาทของตนเองเพื่อให้เข้ากับปรัชญาทางวิชาการของสถาบันการศึกษาในระดับอุดมศึกษาที่ศึกษาอยู่ได้อย่างไร ในห้องเรียนภาษาอังกฤษที่ “มีการประทับน้ำใจและความหมายทางการเมืองที่ต้องการให้เป็นเด็กไทย แต่ความคิดเป็นสากล” ในยุคโลกาภิวัตน์ บทความลับนั้นเป็นงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพที่ศึกษาลงลึกนักศึกษา 2 คนที่มีต้นทุนทางวัฒนธรรมในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษน้อยกว่าผู้ที่เข้าร่วมงานวิจัยครั้งนี้ มีการใช้สัมภาษณ์กลุ่ม การสังเกตในห้องเรียน และการเก็บรวบรวมเอกสารต่าง ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้องเพื่อใช้เป็นข้อมูลในการวิเคราะห์ผ่านมุมมองของ Bakhtin ที่ว่า ในการสื่อสารแต่ละข้อความจะมีหลากหลายความคิดที่หล่อหลอมความคิดของผู้สื่อสาร ดังนั้นการศึกษาต่าง ๆ จึงไม่สามารถตีความตามรูปแบบผิวเผินเท่านั้น

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ผลการวิจัยสรุปได้ว่า นักศึกษาทั้ง 2 คนที่มีต้นทุนทางวัฒนธรรมที่ต่างกันเพื่อนร่วมชั้นเรียนต้องเรียนรู้การปรับตัวให้เข้ากับปรัชญาทางวิชาการของสถาบันการศึกษาของตน ค่อนข้างมากทั้งในแง่ตัวเนื้อหาทางวิชาการและการพัฒนาทักษะทางสังคมในการสร้างปฏิสัมพันธ์เชิงโต้ตอบกับอาจารย์ผู้สอนและเพื่อนร่วมชั้นเรียน สภาพภูมิศาสตร์และการอบรมเลี้ยงดูของครอบครัวเป็นเงื่อนไขที่บ吒กสำคัญต่อกระบวนการเรียนรู้ในวิชาภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาทั้งสอง

ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่า การจัดการเรียนการสอนภาษาต่างประเทศภาษาอังกฤษ ในยุคศตวรรษที่ 21 มีความ слับซับซ้อนมากยิ่งขึ้น การสอนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ ที่ครั้งหนึ่งถือว่าเป็นอาชีพที่มั่นคง เป็นที่การพยอกย่องในสังคม เกิดการสั่นคลอน ทางพฤตินัย (de facto) เนื่องจากกระแสกระบวนการปรับพฤติกรรมใหม่ลักษณะโลกตามลักษณะที่นิ่น (glocalization) ซึ่งต้องการให้ครูสอนภาษาอังกฤษปรับบทบาทมากขึ้น มิใช่อาชีพที่สอนเพียงทักษะทางภาษาแต่ยังรวมถึงทักษะอื่น ๆ อีกเพื่อสร้างพลเมืองโลก (global citizen) ที่มีความตื่นตัว

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ABSTRACT

Through Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, this study aimed at uncovering how Thai EFL students with varying amounts of cultural capital negotiated their "selves" into the institutionalized discourse of EFL teaching and learning at the tertiary level. In the 21st century, "glocalism" is a phenomenon which requires EFL teachers to teach not only language but also other necessary skills relative to the language and culture of a given society. Through focus-group interviews, classroom observations, and adjunct material collection, I explored the construction of how the two EFL students with lower cultural capital became engaged with push-and-pull political and ideological configurations during their EFL course.

The two participants with lower amounts of cultural capital discursively contended that they inevitably had to struggle and work harder to familiarize themselves with their institutionalized discourse of EFL language learning—one which is quite different from that of their previous school. Both of the participants asserted that not only linguistic content but also academic socialization skills are requirements for their scholastic achievement in their EFL course at the present school. The data also suggest that geographical affiliation and family rearing are social conditions conducive to the two learners' higher success in English.

The findings suggest that EFL education in the 21st century, where teaching has become more complex, that is, EFL teaching once a secure, highly respected job is no longer held *de facto* true due to glocalization. EFL teachers are obliged to educate their students to be an active global citizen.

Keywords: Cultural capital, EFL Education, Discourse Analysis

INTRODUCTION

English is the language of opportunity, science, social movement, and intercultural exchange. Due to the advancement in information technology, the learning mode has shifted from being “just in case” to “just in time” (Lemke, 1998). About 85% of the electronically-stored information is written in English, which has given rise to its importance. With its great advantages to become a global citizen, English has become socio-politically acceptable as symbolic capital worldwide. From this perspective, in a knowledge-based society, language learning not only covers the acquisition of appropriate rules of usage, but also the mastery of multiple discourse and texts (Luke, 2000) or what the New London Group (1996) has called “multiliteracies.” Each school, therefore, needs to redesign its curriculum to enable students to acquire not only the technical but also the language skills needed for academic success and future employment. This is part of preparing citizens for a knowledge-based economy in the 21st century, where the conception of glocalism, “the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or—in more abstract vein—the universal and the particular” (Roberston, 1995, p. 30), emerges as a major issue in EFL teaching and learning.

In ESL/EFL education recently, many researchers have argued that English as foreign language (hereafter EFL) learning has its own discourse. Therefore, like other fields, a researcher “must attend more closely to the social practices within which discourse is produced, distributed, and consumed (e.g. Cazden, 1998; Hick, 1995; Kamberelis, 2001; Luke, 1995; and Wilet, Solsken & Wilson-Keenan, 1998). Some studies have shown the linkages between various discourses and practices and teaching/learning processes in productive ways. Given that, the dissonance between the cultural worlds of schools, educational institutions, and homes for any learners may affect, in some ways, their academic achievements if language administrators and practitioners are not aware of the relationships of discourse to power.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Since English is a powerful medium of relationships, an understanding of how EFL students become engaged in the discourse of this subject in particular would enhance the success of teaching and learning practices. In order to explain and understand how Thai EFL students with lower “cultural capital” engaged themselves in the institutionalized discourse of EFL teaching and learning at the tertiary level, especially the first year which is considered as a critical period of university life. To a large extent, it determines how academically successful each student will be. The concept of “cultural capital,” introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) was used as a lens to explicate the phenomenon being investigated.

The concept of cultural capital, difficult to identify and measure, represents “the collection of non-economic forces such as family background, social class, varying investment and commitments to education, different social resources, etc. which influence educational achievement” (Hayes, 2004). The term has been extensively elaborated on in the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In his opinion, all human activities, or practice, involve exchange between individuals and groups within the so-called economy of practice (Bourdieu, 1986). That is, in Carrington and Luke’s (1997) words “the theory of practice then outlines the dialectical relationship between the objective structures of a society, and the practical, goal-seeking activities of individuals” (p.100). Education is considered as a field where discourses and practices of dominant groups are embedded in the curriculum. Learners recognize particular sets of discourses and practices and adopt particular values in relation to their social status.

Recently, Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory has been used as a multi-causal approach to understand the complexity of achievements at schools (e.g., Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007; Lareau & Weimninger, 2003; and Nespor, 1987). Favoring a nurture rather than a nature argument, he proposes that there are three forms of cultural capital; that is, embodied capital, the objectified state of cultural capital, and institutionalized capital. These three forms of cultural capital — stored experience and knowledge one acquires throughout life,

through family, and sociocultural experiences — are operating with economic capital and social capital through the social networks each individual develops through the course of his or her life. Subsequently, through the synergization of forms of cultural capital, his or her practices are formed and shaped. Table 1 summarizes the types of cultural capital in operation with other types of capital proposed by Pierre Bourdieu.

Table 1 Types of capital proposed by Pierre Bourdieu.

Symbolic Capital		
Institutionally recognized and legitimated authority and entitlement requisite for the exchange and conversion of Cultural, Economic, and Social Capital		
Cultural Capital	Embodied Capital	Knowledge, skills, dispositions, linguistic practices and representational resources of the bodily habitus
	Objectified Capital	Cultural goods, texts, materials objects and media physically transmissible to others
	Institutional Capital	Academic qualifications, awards, professional certificates and credentials
Economic Capital	Material goods and resources directly convertible into money	
Social Capital	Access to cultural and sub-cultural institutions, social relations and practices.	

(From Luke, in press)

In this particular report, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital refers to the premise that "certain" standards of evaluation of the educational institution have been imposed in an implicit way. Schools make certain sets of knowledge construction and discourse seem legitimately natural. His theorization of cultural capital seems to be a powerful tool to present a more nuanced account of how the informants in this study have acquired the institutionalized

discourse in the undergraduate program. To date several studies have suggested that an understanding of multiple forms of cultural capital helps elucidate the structure and functioning of students' academic achievement/underachievement.

Nonetheless, the focus of these studies mainly involves two groups; namely, the marginalized ESL student in English-speaking countries and elite EFL students in Asia — Hong Kong in particular. The empirical studies most relevant to this study would be the latter, as the students are in the context where English is mainly for employment purposes and is regarded as a foreign language in the given community.

To exemplify the application of Bourdieu's cultural capital concept in the EFL context, Xuesong (2006) examined how family involvement has affected Chinese mainland students' English language learning in Hong Kong. The finding shows that zealous participation of the parents is closely related to the development of the informants' language learning. It should be noted that this study looked into the voices of "elite" students only.

Related to Xuesong's study Choi (2003) analyzed educational policy in Hong Kong; that is, the language selection policy, where only the best students can get a place in a monolingual education in English. The analysis shows that English, as the language of power and wealth, still carries on its utilitarian discourse in the Hong Kong education policy at the secondary education level after the changeover in 1997. Students that are barred from sufficient economic and cultural capital will not benefit from the policy.

The above two studies have not included the voice of "typical" students in EFL contexts. The word "typical" refers to students whose parents assume that their children's language learning development is largely the language teachers' responsibility. To fill in this gap this paper will focus on how typical Thai EFL students negotiated themselves into the discourse of English language learning at the tertiary level.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

To collect the data for this study, a semi-structure interview of a focus group was conducted twice to record discussions about the informants' self-negotiation regarding the institutionalized discourse of the EFL class. The first interview was held in January, two months after the second semester of the 2004 academic year, while the second was held in March. The rationale for such selection was that the students had just completed their mid-term and final examinations. The immediacy of the examination would be a good starting point to brainstorm, review and discuss their EFL learning and performance. During each focus group interview the researcher played the role of moderator in order to enrich and probe the informants' discussion. All of the interviews were audio-taped and video-taped and later were transcribed to categorize the themes and issues that were emerging. Video-taping was carried out as a way to observe the informants' reaction during the interviews.

In addition, all the informants needed to fill out a biography information sheet after the first interview. Multiple sources of data were collected as a means of creating the trustworthiness and rigor of the information. These sources include document analysis (textbooks, tests, quizzes, and assignments) and classroom observation.

Context of the Study

Being an exploratory qualitative case study the study took place in a medium-sized science-oriented university where the majority of the student population is comprised of male students from rural areas. Most of them are male graduates from vocational schools and have had limited exposure to English supportive environments at home. They are required to take two fundamental English courses to fulfill their degree requirements. The students are assigned to a section in accordance with their major, not by a placement test. The nature of the course involves general English with a focus on practice at the sentence level. Communication-directed EFL lessons are encouraged.

Participants

Through snowball sampling, seven participants voluntarily participated in this study. In this study, I chose two out of seven participants to be the focal students to discuss in detail. Both of them are representatives of the majority of the student population of the school. During the data collection, they were first-year students that were taking a fundamental English II course at a medium-sized, science-oriented university in Bangkok. These two students made considerable effort while taking the English class and demonstrated their eagerness to join class activities as much as they could.

The researcher was their English teacher during the previous semester, noting the high level of their involvement while taking the EFL class. They voluntarily joined almost all of the class activities and raised questions during and after the class. They were not afraid to produce English sentences when they had the opportunity. The class was designed to be as interactive as possible.

Table 2 Biodata of the two informants

Category/Name	Chai	Yang
Gender	Male	Male
Educational background	Vocational certificate	Vocational certificate
Geographical affiliation*	Rural	Rural
Parental educational attainment**	Vocational certificate	Primary school certificate

* refers to the context in which the participants mostly spent their childhood.

** refers to the highest educational degree that either mother or father has earned.

Data analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher read through the transcript and coded the issues and themes that emerged from the discussion. The biography data sheet and field notes of observations during the interviews were used to triangulate the responses.

To answer the research questions, the researcher applied the five stages suggested by Carspecken (1996) in his definition of critical ethnography: compiling the primary record, doing reconstructive analysis, generating dialogical data, describing system relations, and explaining findings in terms of those systems relations. The final two stages entailed conceptual interpretations of the existing relationships within the researcher's social site or cultural group and the broader society. In order to capture this phenomenon holistically a Bakhtinian framework (Bakhtin, 1981) — the notions of heteroglossia and dialogism — together with cultural typification, were used for data analysis. That is to say an individual's discourse constitutes multiple and intertextual voices; it is not ideologically neutral. Rather, the production of any prose text consists of the selection and organization of different idioms and voices. There is no original voice in discourse; human beings borrow and/or appropriate elements from the various vocabularies and idioms to which they have been exposed (Kamberelis & Scott, 1992; Knoeller, 1998). In Bakhtin's words, individuals "populate them [others' voices] with their own intention (1986, cited in Yancey, 1994. p. xiii)." Thus the discourse should not be considered as coherent or single-voiced.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, the first year at the university is a critical period in higher education. Understanding what struggles freshmen go through would enable both schools and teachers to provide a supportive language learning environment. This study involves the institutionalized discourse of EFL learning at the tertiary level in particular.

The two participants possessed lower amounts of cultural capital in comparison with the other informants in this study. In order to better understand their appropriation of the academic discourse in their new school below are the findings together with a discussion.

Existing cultural capital and academic performance in EFL education

Though the two participants clearly perceived the importance of English as a motivating factor for their vigorous educational participation they were not as successful as putting an effort. This is shown in their course grade. There is no significant difference between the grade of the first and that of the second semester. Their educational background largely accounts for their lack of educational success. The two informants perceived their limited competence in English grammar before studying in their present school as a key factor leading to difficulties in self-negotiating the institutionalized discourse of the academic institute in Bangkok. When being asked to produce their own sentences, both of them were hesitant to activate their stored knowledge thus hindering their learning of linguistic skills in the target language. The teacher had to provide the class more grammatical explanations and examples to fill in the silent period during the class. In addition to their limited knowledge of English, the data from classroom observations exhibited that the two informants did not possess sufficient associated dispositions for classroom interactions. They were too diffident to paraphrase their questions or misunderstanding during the class activities.

From the interviews, the data revealed that the textbooks used and the way in which the lessons were taught were issues contributing to these two participants' involvement in the EFL class.

"Here the textbook is different from [that of] my old school. There the textbooks are the one published by the Ministry [of Education]. The textbook we are using now is very attractive. We can find more references to get more understanding outside of classroom." (Chai, 2006)

"Textbooks here are very colorful. It makes me er, er... want to read it or flip through it. The one we had is more like a black-white TV. Very plain." (Yang. 2006)

From the above excerpts, it can be seen that the institutionalized discourse of English language learning is also legitimized through the use of the textbook—*Natural English*—written by native speakers of English. The layout, graphic design, and content are made “authentic” for the educational purposes. The two participants found no difficulty in appropriating the discourse as part of the correct construction of knowledge they had been in quest of.

Being graduates from a rural vocational school, Chai and Yang were trained with different teaching emphases in the target language. In the previous school, the teaching practice was geared toward language drills as Chai rightly states it: “*There [my old school], we just translated and memorized the text. Just simply like that.*” while the current institute integrates both language form and use. For them their self-negotiation into the institutionalized discourse of EFL learning is a discovery-based mode in every class. Although they struggled along the way they accepted that they understood more about language form and meaning as a dominant practice in their present school.

Well, er, er, at my old school, we mostly deal with technical English. I mean lots of technical vocabularies from the Ministry (of Education) textbooks. But here, it's a total different story. No more technical vocab. It IS really different, INDEED. At this university, I've learned a lot, especially grammar. I feel that I've learned and understood a lot. I have er... a chance to put each grammar topic into practice. The lesson is here sort of connected to one another. Like a series story.” (Chai, 2006)

Chai and Yang contended that their language learning experience in technical English made it difficult for them to acquire the EFL discourse at the university. On one hand both the content of the English course and the test—mainly the mid-term and final exam test—leave them a gap to internalize the teaching-and-learning practice at the current school. Yang’s interview transcript below disclosed how hard he had struggled even though this was his second

semester at this school. On the other hand such discovery-based teaching and learning practice caused the two informants to be held accountable for their academic performance.

“The test here is not what I had in my old school. There we had it in a multiple choice. But here it’s more like a show-me-how-to-do-it test. It’s more difficult. It makes me study harder. It’s not what I studied in the vocational school. I am not good at English, but I can understand some.” (Yang. 2006)

Furthermore the two male informants also stated that they had no English classes outside the school because of their limited financial support from the family. The only channel for their EFL learning as through the school—both in terms of their teachers and the resources provided. As rural students the two participants’ parents as typical financial supporters for basic education assumed the entire educational responsibility for their schooling. Thai parents feel more comfortable in passing on this responsibility to the school at the university level.

The data indicate that both Chai and Yang alluded to the importance of English as a language of power and wealth in education and career. They themselves are very well recognizant of its power as Yang a quite reserved participant during the interviews stated: *“At this moment, the benefit I will get [from learning English] is ... I can use it in other subjects.”* This perception is resonant with the findings in the studies of Choi (2003) and Xuesong (2006) regarding English education in Hong Kong. Despite limited finance, the parents of the two participants, from the interview data, still want to give the best to their children, thus always stressing the importance of English for academic success and their future career. Quantitatively, the investment of Chai’s and Yang’s family in their English language learning is not as high as that of the other four participants, whose parents have been very active in their children’s English language learning development since they were young. It should be noted here that in this paper the parental involvement is not as much as that in Xuesong’s (2006) study.

For Chai and Yang, they had to discover how to succeed educationally during their first year all along by themselves because of the restricted EFL learning resources available from the family and at home. Throughout the interviews and classroom observations the two informants were acquiring the required skills and dispositions oriented toward managing their interactions within the institutionalized standards of teaching and learning practice.

According to Bourdieu (1981), parents are major determinants of supportively training their children for their formal education and social world. This finding also echoes the studies of Lareau and Horvat (1999), Lareau & Weininger (2003), Piyaseelo (2007) and Xuesong (2006); that is “parents’ cultural and social resources become forms of capital when they facilitate compliance with dominant standards in school interactions” (2003, p. 584).

“I feel somewhat that some of my classmates from the city is better than me. I accept their basic [English] or fundamental is stronger [than me]. On top of that, like er.. their family must fully support them to learn it [the language] since they were young. They [my classmates] have multimedia for their learning, I guess” (Chai, 2006)

The above excerpt illustrates how cultural capital appears to have influenced the language learning culture at the present school. However, later on in the interviews, the two informants did not interpret this issue as an obstacle to their language learning. They admitted that they were aware of the lower amount of their cultural capital. For them, this pushes them to learn how to adopt to new, additional repertoires of “knowledge” and practices that are valued in the present school valuing the pay-offs they will gain eventually. Through the plight of their English language learning in their internally persuasive discourses about English as an international language, they hold steadfast in their determination to leverage their performance in the target language as shown in the excerpts below where Chai and Yang adamantly pursued the institutionalized discourse of English language learning at the present school.

“The content here is not different from my old school. It’s just a matter of how hard I will work for my studies. I think if I read more, I can reach it. Just have to study harder for the basic or the fundamental. Everything is from the grammar, I mean, grammatical structure.” (Chai, 2006)

“I actually don’t like it [English]. It’s because I am aware that English is really important in the future — for everything. That’s why I think I have to study hard to know more English.” (Yang, 2006)

Comfortable Zone of EFL Engagement and Participation

As the cultural capital that Chai and Yang possess have, by and large, exerted a profound influence on their EFL learning, attitudes and motivations they two still persisted in their active class participation by alleging the “payoffs” of accumulating capital in English —a language of further education and future employment. In their own words, they repeatedly maintained that they were aware that they have not had sufficient convertible capital to social institutions and are less equipped for their institutionalized discourse, but would be in the future. Being aware of the present resources has driven them to make a greater endeavor to gain a stronger grip on English. Both informants often asserted the recognition of English as a global language for opportunities. Thus it seems fair to refer to their willingness to accept the institutionalized discourse without question and to start the practice of self-directed EFL learning to leverage their capital.

“Compared with my classmates, especially the graduates from this school, I think my English is not that good. But in my class I am quite ok. I may be slow and cannot say as I want. But if I have a chance I think I should try. In the whole semester, I should become better. When I do it my class will be lively.” (Chai, 2006)

"I agree with Chai. I'm in the same class as him. I think it's good when we have a chance to put er, er, what we've studied into actual use. No, no, no, I'm not that good. I mean I still feel shy, but want to keep doing it as much as I can. At least I can get your attention." (Yang, 2006)

The above excerpts illustrate how the less-equipped participants have positioned themselves within the language learning discourse at the school. English is considered as symbolic capital for gaining power and wealth. It appears that both Chai and Yang have fully internalized the authoritative discourse to bridge the cultural differences between home and school. The researcher witnessed this internally persuasive discourse of the two participants through their class activities. The two often came to the researcher after the class or during office hours asking for suggestions about how to become competent in English, what kinds of multimedia should be used, and what textbooks and websites are good for grammar and other skills.

Data from the interviews and classroom observation also demonstrate that Chai and Yang are more comfortable in assimilating the institutionalized discourse of English language learning when the source of knowledge is from the teacher and textbooks. During the class activities, they were willing to apply the stored information. But from the classroom observations it could be seen that both of them looked more comfortable when receiving feedback or comments from the teacher not from their classmates. This information echoes Thai students' learning style preferences. Like the Chinese students' learning cultures proposed by Jin & Cortazzi (1998), the Thai learning culture highly values feedbacks from the teachers and textbooks, as shown in Diagram 1 (p. 102). In this study, when being given the opportunity to put the target language into practice at the sentence level, Chai and Yang, the two informants, found no difficulty in adjusting themselves to the institutionally authorized discourse. They accepted that the level of success largely corresponded to the zone of comfort in their EFL learning.

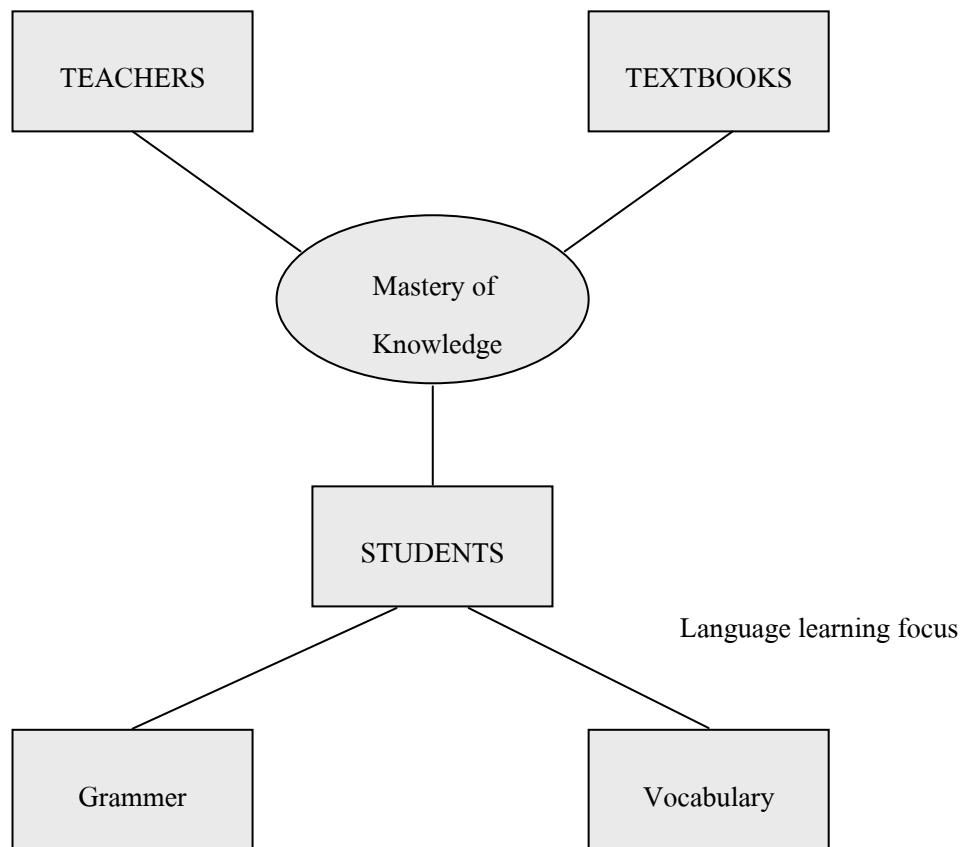


Diagram 1 A diagram of Thai students' English language learning (from Jin & Cortazzi, 1998)

One issue is worth mentioning here. As less resource-equipped students, they felt uncomfortable when they were not able to express themselves. Data from the interview and documents reveal that they had a positive attitude toward cooperative learning in which students are part of the teaching and learning environment. Nonetheless, this mode of pedagogic practice is quite novel for them. Chai and Yang often stated that they felt sorry when their EFL class did not go as planned. The students could not produce the target language. As often stating in the interviews, they were concerned about the grammatical structure rather than the production of the target language. As Bourdieu states, in order to become academically successful a learner

needs to possess certain dispositions and socialization skills. That the two participants could not perform well may stem from the lack of such dispositions most of the students have not been instilled by the family. They did not try to find any strategies to make a contribution to the class. Rather they kept reticent. However, both Chai and Yang argued that part of the reticence and silence could also be attributed to their limited knowledge of the target language. For them, such situations encouraged both to become aware of self-directed learning for more successful EFL learning.

CONCLUSION

In the course of EFL learning, many possibilities account for each individual student's degree of engagement and success. In this study the informants, as less equipped students for learning the target language were well aware that English is a "money-loaded" language, providing greater access to power and affluence. The findings suggest the interrelationships between the learner's cultural world and their institutionalized context in the course of their English language learning. Cultural capital, as theorized by Bourdieu (1981), seems to serve as a powerful determinant of academic success in the institutionalized discourse of EFL learning and in the Thai context especially in the school in this study.

But this concept is not completely applicable to the EFL learning context. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital does not deprive Thai EFL students with the less cultural capital from becoming less engaged in their language learning. Instead, the study shows that the two participants positively viewed their restricted capital as a push to acquiring the necessary skills for EFL education. The study also illuminates the significance of the cultural capital that each student possesses and brings into the EFL classroom at the tertiary level. In order to provide an environment conducive to successful EFL learning, school administrators, EFL teachers and others involved need to become sensitive to differentiating cultural capital when delivering a lesson.

The findings also suggest the intersection of the institutionalized evaluative standards and educational practices of schools between urban and rural areas. Given that teachers and schools, as the “middleman” should bridge the differences in cultural capital as Tara Yosso (2005) suggests: “the process of schooling can be transformed if teachers place more value on the cultural assets students bring to school” (p. 46) in her study regarding the cultural capital in communities of color in schools.

For EFL teachers in the 21st century when the world has become more interconnected and English has become more socio-politically acceptable as symbolic capital worldwide they are required to be part of preparing an active global citizen. Their EFL course should involve both acquisition of appropriate rules of usage in the target language and mastery of multiple discourses and texts (Luke, 2000) or what the New London Group (1996) called “multiliteracies.” A simplified example is the situation in Spain (Castro et al., 2004). According to the national curriculum Spanish secondary school, EFL teachers are required to take an additional role as a teacher of culture broadening the learners’ familiarity with the target cultures associated with the foreign language being studied. Though supporting the curricular innovation the Spanish teachers still have a dilemma to prioritize linguistics skills and culture teaching. The EFL teaching profession has become challenged and more complex than it was. The notion of Bourdieu’s cultural capital would provide another alternative perspective for Thai EFL teachers to become sensitive and understand why some students are behind the expected standards.

Limitations

It should be noted that this study is aimed at being qualitative in nature. The highlight is on the portrait of the phenomenon being investigated in a particular setting. With the use of qualitative methods there is no generalizability to reach when reading. Rather the research should be considered as a case study that allows the reader to gain insight into the plight of these two Thai EFL students that are self-negotiating themselves into their institutionalized discourse of language learning.

For future research, ethnographic observations for a longer period of time should be conducted to better provide insights on how the less resource-equipped students have gone through their EFL courses. In addition, the number of informants should be higher to create more trustworthiness. Last but not least, it is reasonable to design future research to address the trajectory of these students through their higher education. This is to get a fuller understanding of links between their cultural capital and their EFL education.

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