

A Social Quest for Language and Cultural Capital: Exploring Iranian English Language Majors' Habitus

Behrooz Nazarian* 

Ph.D. Candidate in TEFL, Sheikhabaee University, Isfahan, Iran

Gholam Reza Zarei 

Associate Professor in TEFL, Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran

Received: June 23, 2021; **Accepted:** October 10, 2021

Abstract

This research study was conducted to investigate the most representative characteristics of the habitus developed by academically successful Iranian English majors. Learning a second or foreign language, like many sociocultural practices, from a Bourdieusian perspective, is informed by the interrelation between habitus, field, and cultural capital (CC). Within an exploratory qualitative design, utilizing the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) of both semi-structured and unstructured one-on-one interviews, seven academically successful Bachelor of Arts (BA) students majoring in English language were studied in an attempt to explore their CC and habitus. Each participant was interviewed in three separate sessions. The constructivist grounded theory method was adopted to analyze the collected data. Constructed on 75 initial codes, 22 focused codes, 10 categories, and 4 themes, two major themes were most relevantly indicative of theoretical associations with the research problem. The findings suggest that the habitus developed by the English majors in this study was representative of their accumulation of certain forms of CC. Their habitus seemed to have been developed under the influence of their interaction with the mediatory field of learning and majoring in a foreign language. In an exigency-driven social quest for certain forms of cultural capital, the participants' habitus were majorly characterized and influenced by their strategic accumulation of institutional and social capital, their field-oriented social identities, and their strategic administration of CC in the field. The knowledge developed by the findings of this study can provide useful sociocultural insights into academic achievements of English language majors.

Keywords: Language education, Foreign language Learning, Cultural capital, Habitus

*Corresponding author's email: nazarian.beh@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

As one of the representations of an individual's symbolic cultural capital, from a Bourdieusian perspective on language, acquisition and accumulation of linguistic capital can lead them to experience major sociocultural changes. Having made the right social and cultural investment through a better realization of the field, some are at an advantage (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013).

Through an introduction of critical factors contributing to the success of language learning, Brown (2014), for instance, discusses individuals' affective states, self-esteem, willingness to communicate, empathy, extroversion, and motivation. Beyond personal psychological factors, from a sociolinguistic perspective, there is also an intricately interwoven tapestry of dispositions involved that make a longer-term in-depth impact on educational choices made by language learners, primarily referred to as habitus by Bourdieu (1990, 1991, 1998). He, according to an introduction by Thompson (1991, p. 12), explained the inclination displayed by agents to interact in certain ways as what is rooted in an individual's habitus, constituted by "inculcated, structured, and durable", yet "generative and transposable" set of dispositions (1991, p. 12). Bourdieu's focus on the relation between habitus, field, and symbolic CC contributes to better conceptualization of sociocultural practices, including language learning, since they are informed and explained by such realization of habitus (Schirato & Roberts, 2020).

This study was mainly concerned with a more contextual conceptualization of what characterized and motivated the habitus of academically successful Iranian university students who majored in English language studies. Such a concern called for a more in-depth exploration of the participants' cultural capital (CC) and social identities, since certain representations of CC, social identity, and different constituting forms of the constructs are commonly recognized as major contributors to development

of an individual's habitus.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With respect to the available literature of relevance to the field, concerns with sociocultural aspects of language learning and learners' habitus within Iranian EFL learning contexts seem to have remained relatively under-researched and require to be paid their due credit (Piri, Pishghadam, & Rasekh, 2021).

Instructors are at times either incognizant of constructs such as linguistic identity and habitus, or fail to realize the role they play in better approaching language learners' experiences from a sociological perspective. To realize what represents, characterizes, and motivates the educational achievements made by Iranian university students majoring in English language studies, from a sociocultural perspective, requires further thorough investigation, and hence was of interest for this study.

Regarding the concerns introduced above, a number of studies on Iranian EFL learners have revealed the tendency toward learning the target language to be culturally, socially, and economically driven. According to a study by Salehi and Razmjoo (2019), among certain other socio-economic factors, motivating Iranian EFL students, especially university students and graduates, to learn the language, emigration is concluded to be the most dominant one. Pursuing higher educational achievements in more prestigious universities abroad and seeking out professional opportunities on international job markets are the two major explanations behind the students' tendency toward learning a foreign language and emigration (Ardavani & Durrant, 2015).

Concerned with the significance of the social dimensions of learning a second or foreign language, beyond the cognitively oriented individual differences, such as aptitude and learning styles, certain social factors seem to be more meaningful descriptors of how individuals' language learning

experiences are motivated and facilitated (Duff, 2017).

Habitus, Cultural Capital, and Language

Regarding the socioeconomic concerns associated with a sociological perspective upon language learning, critical concepts such as cultural capital, linguistic market, power fields and habitus have been discussed for over two decades majorly informed by Bourdieu's theorization about, and realization of, the concepts in the field, and have enjoyed highly critical attention of interdisciplinary value. In his point of view, influenced by their habitus, every individual's "linguistic habitus" reproduces certain speech acts in an interdependent interaction with the linguistic market of their social context (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 37).

Regarding how identity is informed by sociocultural resources such as cultural capital, Noels (2013) discusses the investment individuals make in learning a second or foreign language. She emphasizes the influence of social status of groups to which learners belong or aspire to belong, for the important implications they have for the individuals' sociolinguistic identity and their motivation to learn and use a language. She believes that to make certain claims about their social identity, individuals are assumed to have access to some form of capital or resources, and through social interactions, they seek to negotiate their positioning and desired identities within a specific social structure.

Bourdieu (1998, 2010 [1984]) identifies three major types of cultural capital (CC), objectified, institutionalized, and embodied, accompanied by a fourth classification introduced later, that is, social capital. Habitus is interpreted as the incorporated (or embodied) CC, the bodily hexis of a person's habitus. According to McKenzie (2016), Bourdieu's definition of CC is primarily classified and realized into three forms or "states", embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. The first is a state of rather perennial dispositions, the second is represented in cultural products, and

the last is exemplified by educational qualifications. In addition to the three states, following the same Bourdieusian fashion, McKenzie takes social capital into consideration as the resources individuals rely on through their “social connections” and “group membership” (2016, p. 31).

Concerned with how habitus is characterized within certain social fields, reference should be made to Costa and Murphy (2015, p. 15) for their comprehensive perspective on researching habitus. They believe “uncovering habitus is not a straightforward task”. To operationalize habitus is deemed to be considerably challenging for its fluidity and broadness as a theoretical concept. Nevertheless, what provides a “useful gateway to habitus and its effects” is a set of dispositions constituting the concept, despite the controversy over how the dispositions, as well as the methods adopted to “capture them” are defined (2015, p. 15).

Habitus and the Field

To actualize habitus within more specific contextual frameworks, the role played by the social fields in interaction with which an individual’s habitus is shaped should be taken into consideration as central and of remarkable influence. As discussed by Costa et al. (2018), a relatively dual approach can be developed toward habitus. Such duality is rooted in a sociological perspective upon the nature-nurture dichotomy in developmental formation of habitus. On the one hand, habitus can be regarded as the culturally and socially characterized intrinsic nature that agents acquire and act upon. Habitus developed as a result of nurturing an agent’s active interaction with a field, however, is not typically conceptualized as what is merely acquired. Thus, habitus has also been classified into two types, primary and secondary.

According to Costa and Murphy (2015), a primary and more perennial habitus is believed to be acquired through the agents’ early social experiences. A secondary habitus, nevertheless, is accumulated later in life

through more active interaction of the agent with certain other social fields. Such latent potential for the development of a secondary habitus is actualized based on “a dispositional scheme” for contextual and field-oriented behavior in “more specialized contexts, such as the school or the workplace”. Interestingly, such nurtured secondary habitus “is more likely to encourage changes in individuals’ practices” (2015, p. 7).

Of considerable influence on individual’s interaction with a field is the symbolic linguistic market, which according to Bourdieu (1990, 2010 [1984]), refers to the social context where language, linguistic varieties, dialects and accents are conceptualized as commodities with certain values reflecting signs of distinction and sociocultural capital. It is, in other words, actually the market that assigns a certain value to such products.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To explore, disclose, and characterize the habitus developed by university BA seniors majoring in English language studies, and how their habitus inform and motivate their language learning achievements and academic success in the field, from a sociological perspective, have been the central focus in this research study. In addition, to investigate the habitus-oriented characteristics that are better representations of their achievements, for the implications the results can have for teachers and learners within contexts of similar characteristics, was the purpose of interest in this research study.

Indeed, capturing, characterizing, and operationalizing the habitus and cultural capital, developed by EFL learners and English majors, and how they can be of any influence on their language learning experience and educational achievements, in a country of culturally diverse social contexts and complicated cultural orientations like Iran (Mahboudi & Javdani, 2012), is under-researched and without a doubt of significant sociolinguistic value in the field.

Drawing on the results of this research study and the implications

made, language teachers, as well as stakeholders in the field, especially within an Iranian context or other settings of similar specifications will hopefully be encouraged to take into account the nuances of language learners' sociocultural realities.

METHOD

In this exploratory qualitative research, an interpretive approach was adopted by the researchers toward conceptualization and investigation of the research problem. Such an approach was primarily built on a relativist ontology and an inductive-abductive epistemology in conducting the study. Adopting a constructivist interpretive paradigm, the collected data was analyzed utilizing the constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014).

To lead collection and interpretive analysis of the qualitative data, an exploratory interview design was devised within methodological framework of the constructivist grounded theory. Therefore, the priority was with naturalistic collection, emergent analysis, and contextual discussion of the qualitative data collected through several semi-structured and unstructured interviews. As the primary method of data collection, the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) of interviews helped the study to also share certain integral qualities with narrative research designs.

Participants

Sharing the characteristics targeted by the purposive sampling of the study, seven academically successful university students were identified and introduced to the program, making sure the sample could also contribute to the collected data in its density, depth, and breadth. The participants were selected from Iranian university students, more specifically BA seniors, majoring in English language studies (TEFL and Translation) in a university in Isfahan, Iran, with high levels of educational achievement (with GPAs

above 17 out of 20). With more than three years of academic experience as university students, 5 female and 2 male students, within an age range of 22-25 (Mean = 24, SD = 1.25) participated in the study. The participants were chosen from a registry of university students' educational records inclusive of their academic backgrounds and GPAs, reported by the university on the researchers' written demand and commitment to the confidentiality of the data.

The participants were briefed on the general objectives of the research and procedures involved. They filled out a brief form of certain demographic information with a focus on their socioeconomic backgrounds, and were asked to respond to multiple-choice and short-answer items of an inquiry about certain factors such as their parents' educational backgrounds, their interests in arts and cultural activities, and average incomes. Subsequently, to reach and document their informed consent under the supervision of the university, they studied and signed an approved form of informed consent, reassuring them of their full anonymity as well as security of the collected data.

Considerable to the study was that the participants all turned out to be from families of relatively lower social classes, despite their considerable academic achievements, and conspicuously courteous and prestigious manners. This was while a rich body of related literature confirmed the positive correlation between social class, levels of CC acquired by individuals, and their educational prospects (Bourdieu, 1997).

Instrumentation

In regard to the problem around which the study was developed, and in exploring a tentative response to the question posed by it, the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) of both semi-structured and unstructured one-on-one interviews was adopted as the primary method of data collection in the study. Such a choice could also help the researchers to

tap on some of the productive features and representations of narrative methods of inquiry within a constructivist grounded theory research design.

Utilizing the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method of interviews (Wengraf 2001, 2011), the participants of this study were interviewed (in 3 separate sessions) for an exploration and characterization of their habitus in association with their lived experiences as academically successful ELS majors. Such mainly (but not only) retrospective narrative accounts were indicative of their social class and their sociocultural perception of, and engagement with, English.

Data Collection Procedure

The first round of sub-sessions of the interviews was developed around personal narrations of their lives involving their educational experiences and interactions with their field of study. It took approximately 30 minutes, on average for each participant, to narrate their stories with highly minimized interruption of the researchers to maximize room for personalization of the story narrated by each participant. Following the first sub-sessions, after a break for 20-30 minutes, the second sub-sessions began on the same topics brought up by each respondent, in their wording and following the same order in which the respondents had presented the topics. The second round proceeded around the interview tasks and questions that called for the participants' expansion on parts of their previous narrations. It took approximately 10-20 minutes for each participant. The third round of sub-sessions of the interviews was conducted after 7-10 days following the second sub-sessions. They were semi-structured interviews developed as an integration of a more in-depth inquiry customized for a relatively more theory-driven focus on the data and triangulation of the data sources. It took approximately 60-80 minutes for each participant to respond to the questions. Based on a primary analysis of the notes, and open coding of the data collected from the first two sub-sessions, the researchers were provided

with a greater degree of control to go beyond the stated in each of the participant's first narrative.

Limiting the researchers' choice in collecting the interview data was the outbreak of the pandemic (COVID-19) before the interviews could be actually conducted. This made telephonic interviews more efficient alternatives to video or audio recording of face-to-face interviews. Telephonic interviews could help maintain the required physical distancing and saved the potentially health-threatening and demanding trips required to attend several face-to-face sessions. Despite certain factors of constraint, interviewing the participants on the phone could actually provide the study with certain potential advantages, such as increased focus and coherence in narrating their lived experiences (Fujii, 2018 on telephonic interviews).

Toward hermeneutic reduction and thematic categorization of all the narrative and non-narrative interview data, through two stages of line-by-line and incident-by-incident GTM coding, certain segments of the data were meaningfully labelled. The coding primarily involved initial and focused phases. The size and characteristics of the segments that were coded by the researchers varied regarding the type of the data and the abstraction they required to undergo.

Focused coding was intended to lead to the emergence of major conceptual code clusters and categories as focal points around which specific facets and properties of the categories were sketched out, representing how they related to other codes and categories. Having plotted a qualitative frequency distribution of the codes, clusters of focused codes were formed toward development of tentative categories of higher abundance and relevance across the data collected from all the participants. Such procedures were followed by constant examination and refinement of the potential relationship between the categories of the focused codes before finalizing them. The data documented following the interviews consequently underwent systematic reduction in forming 10 categories and 4 themes conceptually reflective of meaningful connections.

Regarding the reliability and validation of the findings, corroborating preliminary evidence from more than one source of data was necessary to better conceptualize and justify the thematic categorization of the codes developed on qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Collection of data from two the major phases of the BNIM, as an episodic model of interview, contributed to the triangulation of the data. Wengraf (2011, p. 77) explains the potential for “triangulation by more than just one type of interview” when utilizing the method. This also provided for within-method triangulation of data collection for its collection of both narrative-episodic and semantic-conceptual knowledge (Flick, 2018).

In addition to triangulation of the data resources, measures were taken toward provision of rich thick description of the collected data and the research practices, as well as highly reflexive engagement of the researchers throughout all stages of the study. Moreover, following the peer review and external auditing conducted by two assisting scholars in the field, the feedback provided by the participants of the study helped with further validation of the results.

RESULTS

A Synopsis of the Participants’ Narrative Interpretive

Profiles

A synopsis of the participants’ narrative interpretive profiles is presented in this section before elaborating on the construction of the thematic categories grounded in the data.

Participant A (PA)

A 25-year-old senior university student, PA was very reserved, sounded quiet shy, and thought of herself as an introvert with still little self-confidence. She said that she used to find it challenging to start relationships

and often preferred non-verbal communication to verbal interactions with people. The challenge, however, had been relatively overcome under the social impacts of her successful interaction with the field.

I had always wanted to be so, and I think since choosing this major, I have been successful at it. I mean the impact English has had on my self-confidence, on my communication. It has been very beneficial. (PA)

She shared her story about her interesting interactions with tourists, not only native English speakers, but also those with L1s other than English. Happy with her field of study, she talked about her more modern lifestyle, productive application of computers, and how it all had resulted in the higher credit she received from the society, and a better self-image.

I studied this major aspiring to have a favorable image of myself in the minds of my friends and relatives whenever my name comes up. (PA)

Participant B (PB)

PB was a 23-year-old senior university student who expressed her keen interest in studying her lessons throughout the high school years until the last two years before university, when she had lost her interest in mathematics and had found it highly demanding. Confused and disappointed about her academic future, she had decided to take the university entrance exam on English language studies and invest in a field in association to which she had already made some non-academic achievements.

As I told you at previous interview sessions, learning English was an escape for me. I was tired of my field of study in high school. ... The only promising path ahead was the language. (PB)

PB believed that a better self-image had been developed in her, feeling not only more self-confident and independent, but also more socially reliable and helpful for the more up-to-date and authenticated knowledge she could share with others. She emphasized that mastering languages in general could confer more culturally and socially credited qualities on her, hence a better social status in the community.

I would like to reflect the image of someone who has been successful in this major in other people's minds. (PB)

Participant C (PC)

A 23-year-old senior university student, PC was unhappy about his childhood experience with English. However, he had gained his interest in the language back when he was a teenager. He narrated how watching English language movies was a hobby he shared with his peers then, which could give him topics of common interest to discuss with them.

There were those (classmates) who were not very interested in English language movies and songs, and I was not very close to them. Then, I met ... (mentioning some of his classmates) with whom I became quite intimate. They were into movies and encouraged me to see more English language movies and work on my language. (PC)

He talked about how he used to be very reserved, and rather non-verbal in his social relationships. He mentioned that his proficiency in English had helped him play online computer games more skillfully and interact more effectively with other online gamers, as members of the community in which he had made some reputation.

Most people in these online gaming "communities" (switching codes) speak foreign languages, often English, ... but rarely Farsi. To interact

with them, to assign tasks, give commands, I needed the language! I felt excited to realize that there are foreigners who play the same game as I do. (PC)

He had learned to value his better use of most technologies and the interdisciplinary influence of foreign languages like English or French.

Participant D (PD)

With no previous experience of learning any foreign languages and limited exposure to English before his junior high school, PD was a 22-year-old senior university student. He had been motivated to make more progress in English than other school subjects at which he was not performing well and got poor grades. More engagement with his English lessons turned out very productive since the higher grades had motivated him to make further progress, which had also earned him more attention.

At first, I encountered certain problems for my lack of linguistic competence among my peers in high school, and felt quiet embarrassed. (PD)

Introversion and lack of self-esteem had made him quite subdued. He did not feel very socially competent before his academic achievements with the language at university. Hopeless about his future in engineering, he had decided to study a major in ELS.

I think they (foreign language speakers) can be socially more competent. When we went out with friends, to a café or something, and saw some tourists, we really wanted to approach them and communicate with them. That is probably because we saw the competence in ourselves to communicate. We approached them immediately and talked to them. (PD)

He enjoyed discussing the same movies with his peers sharing their opinions

established on their common interests and close levels of competence in English.

It has helped me to be more expressive. ... If I cannot say something or cannot emphasize or exaggerate something, I switch to English and communicate what I want to say. (PD)

Participant E (PE)

PE was a 25-year-old senior university student who began her story with a strong portrayal of her fear of foreign languages since her childhood up until the time when her anxiety had begun to slowly wear off over the last years of high school. Trying to confront one of her major social fears, she had enrolled in some extracurricular English courses at a language school under the imposition made by her father, which had led to her gaining more self-esteem and relief.

I felt really more comfortable in contrast to the other classes I attended. It was a very tranquil social environment. I was at ease there. (PE)

To study a major in English language studies at university had helped her to finally materialize the ideal social image of herself. Having met her father's expectations in confrontation with her big fear, she felt much more self-confident and thought of herself as a more sociable girl. Belonging to the community of university classmates had made her more verbal in expression of her feelings and opinions.

I think English has had an impact. I feel I have become more verbal (in my communication of notions and emotions), ... I did not express much, especially verbally. I prefer to express myself verbally now. (PE)

She had learned how to utilize the Internet and computer technologies to her

advantage in conducting course projects while collaborating with her classmates online.

I often used the virtual space (social media) to be exposed to the words or structures I had learnt. It helped me with my computer skills too. ... I know majoring in ELS, we need to be up-to-date. (PE)

Participant F (PF)

PF was a 23-year-old senior university student who remembered how her dislike for English lessons at junior school had made her worried about deteriorating her overall success and a lower GPA at school. To increase her chances of getting a good result at the university entrance exam, she had enrolled in courses offered at a language school where she changed her mind about the language and began to develop an attachment to it due to a different cultural and social atmosphere she experienced in the language school.

Our language teacher and all the classmates were in a friendlier relationship. The teacher made jokes and did not have a rigid teaching method. We worked on our skills together. This appealed to me a lot and made me interested in the language. (PF)

Thriving on her family's aspirations, she had been able to draw a lot of attention to her progress in general English in the family and the new community of peers at university. At home, she could interpret English language news and movies, or read brochures and instructional leaflets that came with some products, and translate useful information for her parents. For her social involvement upon her practical use of English, she believed she had become more extroverted, expressive of her opinions and feelings, and also much happier.

Whenever a news reporter was reporting some news in English, ... my mother asked me to interpret for her. ... She was really happy with my help and encouraged me a lot. (PF)

Participant G (PG)

PG was a 25-year-old female senior student who narrated her life story copiously filled with the stress and anxiety brought about by her educational experience throughout. PG had always valued, but also worried about, the approval she sought from her parents, relatives, peers, and teachers for her educational achievements and high GPAs.

The only things that made me stand out were my educational achievements. ... This drew more attention to me. My report cards were filled with high scores. (PG)

Contrary to all the expectations, she could not enter university to study the major she desired, a major creditable and prestigious enough by her definition and to others around her. Having lost her self-confidence, she temporarily decided to opt for a major in English studies while keeping a low-profile.

I had dramatically lost my self-confidence in those years. ... Everyone advised me to study a major in engineering at university, and told me that it was a pity that I did not continue with my field of study at high school (mathematics). ... With all the belittling reprimand, I believed that I was a useless person in society. (PG)

She was gradually paid more attention by her classmates at university for the positive comments and remarks she received from some of her professors. Following a year of dilemma and emotional turbulence, her self-esteem improved noticeably. PG had found her English proficiency and academic interdisciplinary knowledge in the field very helpful and prolific.

Additionally, at home, her family began to show more approval of her decision.

Language has made me feel better. It has reminded me to be a [good] human, and that it is still possible to be useful. ... They need my help when they want to add captions to photos on Instagram. Today, my cousin had an exam and asked me for help. It had been for a long time that I was not their target audience, someone to turn to. (PG)

She described her experience with the language at university as a therapeutic experience, and had become more active and sociable. She believed that she had a “more colorful” life.

Thematic Categories Grounded in the Data

Constructed on 75 initial codes, 22 focused codes, ten categories, and four themes, two major themes were most relevantly indicative of theoretical associations with the research problem. Aside from a limited number of codes associated with the participants’ reminiscence of their childhood and early schooling experience, most of the codes were classified into two major chronological stages. The first set of codes was associated with the participants’ adolescence before majoring in English language studies (ELS). Representing a larger number of the individuals sharing the same characteristic under focus, the second group of codes was developed in association with the participants’ academic and/or social experiences throughout university majoring in ELS.

Dominant codes in Table 1 reflected the participants’ burgeoning of a new identity and embodiment of a secondary habitus around their interest in English and initial reinforcement of a more productive social interaction with a mediatory or secondary social field (e.g., codes 23, 37, and 42). Most of the participants in the study narrated the burgeoning of a sense of enthusiasm, comfort, and consequently more security and self-esteem in

their growing interaction with a secondary sociocultural context (accommodating their academic and non-academic social experiences with English) within which they played a more active role.

Table 1: An extract of codes indicating the participants' need and search for certain forms of cultural capital and a more favorable social image

Code No.	Initial code	Frequency	Cases
20	Valuing and looking for social status and respect	10	5
22	Willing to be useful and able to help others	16	4
23	Developing a high social image of foreign language speakers	27	7
36	Watching English language movies	12	6
37	Making further promising progress in learning English	12	5
38	Losing interest in math and getting poor grades in high school	14	5
42	Experiencing a sense of social security and comfort in English classes	10	5

Codes of higher dominance in Table 2 indicated the participants' strategic development of a socially and academically productive approach toward their major and educational experiences (e.g., codes 54, 59, and 70). Despite the cultural pressure the participants had felt for the partial loss of their institutionalized capital, their unapproved choice of a university major in English, and limited social capital, the new perspective they developed toward their competence in an international language like English, and their studies in the field as an interdisciplinary field had helped them productively. It had improved their self-esteem, expanded their networks of more social interactions and support, and led to a contextually more favorable social status. Such social developments seemed to have also helped them shape a more socially solid identity of favorable characteristics (e.g., codes 63 and 69). Through iterative and reflective review and refinement of the codes, 2 of the major themes, *exigency-driven quest for cultural capital* and *development of a field-oriented habitus toward strategic administration of CC*, were more meaningfully indicative of associations

with the central constructs of concern to the study. For an extract of the exemplary empirical indicators of the codes and their detailed descriptions, see Table 4 and Table 5 in the appendices.

Table 2: An extract of the codes indicating the participants' development of a more field-oriented habitus and strategic administration of the accumulated cultural capital

Code No.	Initial code	Frequency	Cases
54	Getting more engaged with extracurricular EFL materials	41	7
55	Cherishing the field for personal interest and social fulfillment	10	6
59	Valuing the interaction with several modes of Internet/computer technology	18	5
60	Feeling motivated to study other foreign languages	14	5
61	Gaining more self-confidence and independence	10	4
63	Improving a stronger self-image	23	5
64	Receiving more attention and respect	10	5
69	Interacting with people more effectively	28	7
70	Interacting with tourists, as well as online interaction with other nations	10	5

Exigency-Driven Quest for Cultural Capital

As indicated in Table 3, categories 5 and 6 contributed to the construction of the theme labelled *exigency-driven quest for cultural capital*. The theme was constructed on 16 focused codes and two major categories. The codes under these categories were highly frequent on the plotted frequency distribution of the codes (with an overall count of 73 for codes 20-25 and an overall count of 111 for codes 26-29, 35-39, and 42, each with counts of 42, 59, and 10, respectively). An interpretive analysis of the lived experiences narrated by all of the participants reflected certain cultural and social values informing their decisions about and interactions with English. Based on such values, they made critical choices that had influenced their both educational and social experiences. This appeared to have also contributed

to their social and academic achievements in the field.

The participants' urgent need or exigency for a contextually favorable identity had motivated their investment in and accumulation of certain forms of cultural capital, more specifically social and institutionalized. Such a need was reflected to be one of the driving forces behind most of the major decisions they made in their interactions with a mediatory social field. In other words, in an attempt to compensate for the diminution of their socially and culturally valuable institutional capital and the insufficiency they felt of their social capital, they made game-changing decisions that could provide them with the opportunity to accumulate more cultural capital amassed around the constituent forms of CC for which they had embarked on a quest.

As often was the case with most of the participants in this study, the disappointment, lack of self-confidence, and consequently, the introversion caused by their insufficiency and loss of the required credit for institutional capital, had been counteracted by a sense of security, comfort, and courage they could gain for the promising progress they were making in the field. Their interaction with a mediatory field (i.e., English language studies at university) additionally seemed to have led to their accumulation of more social capital through successful social interactions, development of new social networks and development of their desired social identities.

Table 3: Key themes and their specifications

Theme	Category	Description	Code
2 Exigency-driven quest for cultural capital (CC)	5 Urgent need & search for more institutional &/or social capital	The category was constructed on the codes indicating the participants' need for a contextually more favorable identity, saving their diminishing institutionalized credit improving their social status.	20-25
	6 Developing effective interaction with a mediatory field	The category developed based on the codes reflecting the participants' productive interactions/experiences in language schools & later on at university majoring in ELS.	26-29-35-39-42
4 Development of a field-oriented habitus toward strategic administration of CC	8 Investing the reinforced institutional capital & objectified capital in accumulation of social capital	The category was constructed on the codes reflecting the participants' productive utilization of their institutional credit & resources of cultural value building up a better social image, & more successful interactions with the field.	53-55-59-60
	9 Building on development of a field-oriented habitus	The category developed based on the codes reflecting the improvement the participants experienced in their overall psychological state, social status, & interactions with the field.	61-67
	10 Cashing in the accumulated institutional & social capital toward accumulation of more CC	The category was constructed on the codes indicating the participants' facilitated & more productive activities & interactions with different social fields utilizing the accumulated social capital.	68-71

Strategic Administration of Cultural Capital

Following their development of secondary (field-oriented) habitus, built on major shifts in the approach that the participants had formed upon English and improved social agency, they had learnt to manipulate the symbolic cultural capital they had accumulated toward gaining the same or other forms of cultural capital for more effective interactions with the field.

As indicated in Table 3, a significant number of such interactions with the field contributed to the construction of categories 8-10 leading to the construction of the fourth theme designated as *development of a field-oriented habitus toward strategic administration of CC*. Sixteen codes in the collected data were clustered to ground this theme, codes 53-55, 59-60, 61-67, and 68-71, with overall counts of 57, 32, 105, and 91, respectively were highly frequent upon the frequency distribution of the codes. In response to certain social exigencies, the participants seemed to have also seized the opportunities to cash in or exchange different forms of their cultural capital in their symbolic cultural transactions in the field toward their social and educational goals. In other words, they had learned to strategically administer the capital they had available to them. Therefore, for instance, the extra costs of books and movies (as forms of objectified capital) were offset by the increased chances of getting higher grades (as indications of institutional capital). They had gained more potential for reflecting a contextually more favorable social representation of their identities and playing a more active role, which could also lead to the expansion of their social network (constituting their sociocultural capital).

To provide the findings of the study with manifest depiction of the constructs and how they could relate to each other upon a tentative explanation around the overall projected delineation of the findings, the following diagram was designed (see Figure 1).

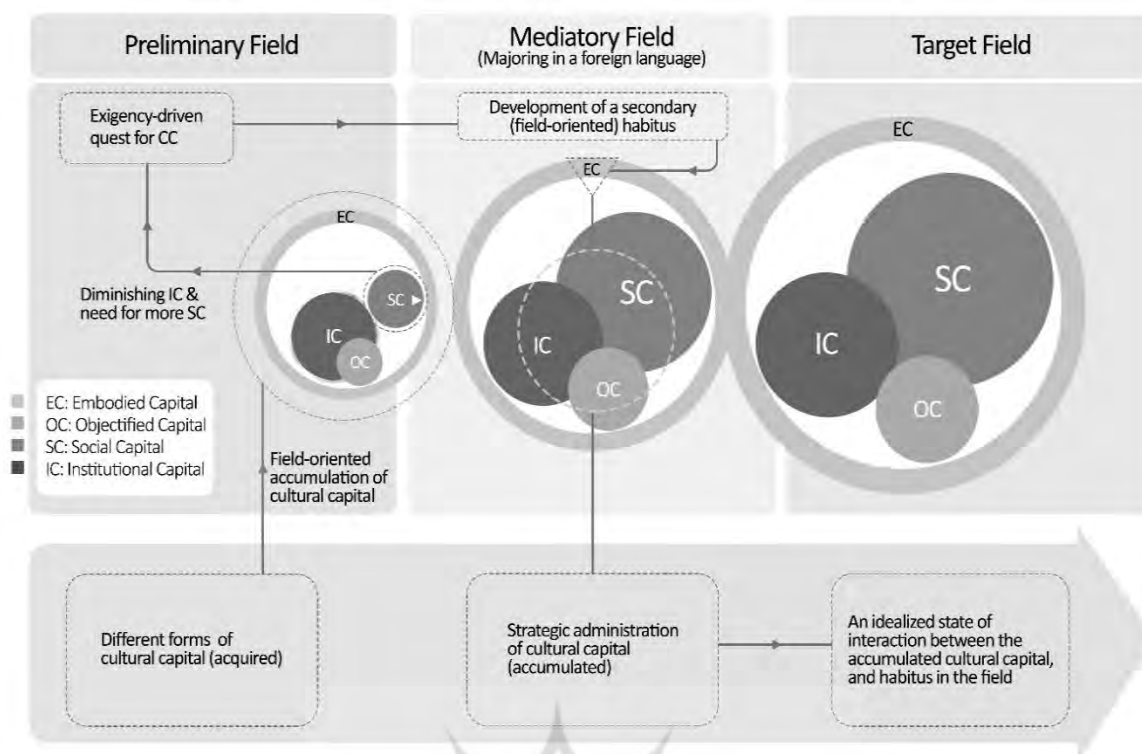


Figure 1: An exigency-driven quest for cultural capital (CC) and a field-oriented habitus toward strategic administration of the (accumulated) CC and development of a secondary habitus

DISCUSSION

This article was aimed at capturing a few moments of an exploration into culturally constructed social realities like habitus reflected in the lived experiences of academically successful Iranian university students majoring in English language studies. Regarding the field-oriented development of habitus and the crucial influence that individuals' interaction with different social fields has in shaping their habitus and "a feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 77), Ingram and Abrahams (2016, p. 149) discuss habitus conceptualized as "dispositions shifting between a state of latency and manifestation". Such a state is activated when individuals experience interacting with new (secondary) social spaces or fields, in their independence from the primary ones accommodated by their families and early schooling experiences, which challenges the already internalized sociocultural structures, values and identities, and internalization of the new, and often contradictory ones. Such changes also seem to be made in response to an urgent social need or contextual social exigency that is either primarily perceived as a result of an attitudinal shift toward certain forms of cultural capital, or may later lead to one. Probably of more practical value to the field was how the study could also focus on reflections of experiences and behavior that could have contributed to the participants' academic achievements and social fulfilment.

Having focused on the interrelation between power and identity influencing how young individuals construct their linguistic identities, Groff, Pilote, and Vieux-Fort (2016) discuss how opting for a contextually higher-status identity is a social strategy of more appeal. Such choices, according to their study, seem to be influenced by a reflection of how such identities are perceived by others within that context. Such a discussion can reflect a

considerable explanation for the concern expressed by the participants of our study with their social image as English majors. Concerned with the reliance students have on their cultural capital in reaching their academic goals, Gogolin (2001, p. 612) considers a learner's capital to be perceived as part of the social resources they are "equipped with", either in the form of class-defining affluence they inherit, or morphed into their own cultural and educational achievements. However, elaboration is not made on what constitutes such social resourcing and what contributes to effective transformation of the resources they are equipped with. Aside from the influence of their social class, some students cannot, or are not motivated to, effectively utilize the cultural capital they have already acquired, or have the chance to accumulate later, toward making the right prolific investment in the field.

The influence of an idealized social status, in which the students in this study had developed the right habitus to fit, or as termed in this study, *an idealized social niche*, in a prospective target field, appeared to be considerably critical in shaping their identities not only as students majoring in English language studies, but also as successful users of a foreign language. Such an image seemed to have motivated the participants to accumulate certain forms of cultural capital and strategically administer the capital they had accumulated, not only toward their academic achievements, but also toward their future social and professional accomplishments they had found more approachable and socially fulfilling in their culture. Beliefs developed by students toward EFL, according to an interesting study by Nasri, Shafiee, and Sepehri (2021) are required to be enhanced by instructors for the contribution the enhancement can make to their motivation and effective interaction with the instruction.

An expansion on the argument above, concerning context-driven development of learners' identities, is Norton's (2013, p. 3) concept of "imagined communities". According to her, an imagined community is the context within which a future self-image or a desired identity is envisioned by individuals, motivating them to make the required investment in learning other languages as prospective social agents with the required sociocultural capital in the community they imagine themselves in. In this regard, highlighting the significance of the relationship between identity and language learners' learning achievement, Abedi, Vosoughi, and Kowsari (2020) discuss how certain other aspects of learners' identity, more specifically imposed and public, are influenced by the contextual agency of other members of their community. They conclude family members and language instructors to be of significant influence for the impact they make on development of the imposed aspects of language learners' identity as motivating agents.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The sociological lens through which foreign language learning and academic achievements have been scrutinized was of remarkable value to the research because the sprouting sapling of the related studies with the same perspective of concern is still young and calls for nurturing attention and consideration in Iran. It is recommended that EFL/ESL teachers, and more importantly, with respect to the major concerns of this study, university instructors in language studies, respect and cherish students' tendency to administer their own cultural capitals to meet certain social and cultural needs accordingly. The differences in how the

students' cultural capitals are structured should be acknowledged in embracing the uniqueness of their habitus. They should avoid overgeneralizing about students' identities, social needs, and educational goals in learning a foreign language, and leave sufficient room for cultural and social customization of their objectives and actions in the field.

Socioculturally contextual personalization and specialization of university students' focus on certain subjects more than others, as well as evaluation of their academic achievements based on those individual subjects may turn out more productive. It can also be concluded that since students may regard their academic experience in the field with English as only part of their social interaction with a mediatory social field, they also feel the need to prepare themselves for their future interactions with target social fields accommodating their idealized social status and identity. Therefore, not all university students majoring in English language studies aspire to become perfect language teachers or translators, and merely majoring in a foreign language may not be all students' cup of tea (at least not the only one). That is, they may have not developed a taste for the language they learn, but have invested in accumulating the cultural capital they need to instrumentally develop a habitus for better social interactions with certain other academic or non-academic fields and related professions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Behrooz Nazarian



<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1493-7163>

Gholam Reza Zarei



<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5525-2876>

References

- Abedi, M., Vosoughi, M., Kowsary, M. (2020). A socio-linguistic study on relational identity and language learning performance within Iranian English language learners: A focus on parental involvement. *Issues in Language Teaching*, 9(2), 121-153. doi: 10.22054/ilt.2020.53444.516
- Ardavani, S., & Durrant, P. (2015). How have political and socio-economic issues impacted on the motivation of Iranian university students to learn English? In C. Kennedy (Ed.), *English language teaching in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Innovations, trends and challenges*. London, UK: British Council.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. (Ed.) John B. Thompson. Cambridge, UK: Polity in association with Basil Blackwell.
- Bourdieu, P. (1997 [1986]). The forms of capital. Reprinted in A. H. Halsey, et al. (Eds.), *Education: Culture, economy, and society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason*. CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2010 [1984]). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. MA: Routledge.
- Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (6th ed.). NY, NY: Pearson Education.

- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage.
- Costa, C., Burke, C., & Murphy, M. (2018). Capturing habitus: Theory, method and reflexivity. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 42(1), 19-32. doi:10.1080/1743727x.2017.1420771
- Costa, C., & Murphy, M. (2015). Bourdieu and the application of habitus across the social sciences. In C. Costa, & M. Murphy (Eds.), *Bourdieu, habitus and social research: The art of application*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Duff, P. A. (2017). Social dimensions and differences in instructed SLA. In S. Loewen & M. Sato (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of instructed second language acquisition* (pp. 379-395). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- Flick, U. (2018). Doing qualitative data collection: Charting the routes. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection*. London, UK: Sage.
- Fujii, L. A. (2018). *Interviewing in social science research: A relational approach*. New York: Routledge.
- Gogolin, I. (2001). Linguistic habitus. In M. Rajend, & R. E. Asher (Eds.), *Concise encyclopedia of sociolinguistics*. Oxford, UK: Elsevier Science Ltd.
- Groff, C., Pilote, A., & Vieux-Fort, K. (2016) "I am not a Francophone": Identity choices and discourses of youth associating with a powerful minority. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 15(2): 83-99. doi: 10.1080/15348458.2015.1137476
- Ingram, N., & Abrahams, J. (2016). Stepping outside of oneself: How a cleft-habitus can lead to greater reflexivity through occupying "the third space". In J. Thatcher, N. Ingram, C. Burke, & J. Abrahams (Eds.), *Bourdieu: The next generation: The development of Bourdieu's intellectual heritage in contemporary UK sociology*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mahboudi, H. R., & Javdani, F. (2012). The teaching of English in Iran: The place of culture. *Journal of Language and Culture*, 3, 87-95. doi:10.5897/JLC11.041
- Mckenzie, L. (2016). Narrative, ethnography and class inequality: Taking Bourdieu into a British council estate. In J. Thatcher, N. Ingram, C. Burke, & J. Abrahams (Eds.), *Bourdieu: The next generation: The development of Bourdieu's intellectual heritage in contemporary UK sociology* (pp. 25-36). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Nasri, M., Shafiee, S., Sepehri, M. (2021). An investigation of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' L2 motivation and attitude in a computer-assisted language learning environment. *Issues in Language Teaching*, 10(1), 355-389. doi: 10.22054/ilt.2021.62359.614
- Noels, K. (2013). Identity theory. In P. J. Robinson (Ed.), *The Routledge encyclopedia of second language acquisition* (pp. 289-291) New York: Routledge.
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Bristol, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Piri, S., Pishghadam, R. & Rasekh, Z. (2021). New models of L2 achievement based on EFL learners' joint attention and their emotional, social, and cultural capitals. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 59(1), 31-54. doi:10.1515/iral-2017-0132
- Rawolle, S., & Lingard, B. (2013). Bourdieu and educational research. In M. Murphy (Ed.), *Social theory and education research: Understanding Foucault, Habermas, Bourdieu and Derrida* (pp. 117-137). London, England: Routledge.
- Schirato, T., & Roberts, M. (2020). *Bourdieu: A critical introduction*. London, England: Routledge.
- Thompson, J. B. (1991). Editor's introduction. In J. B. Thompson (Ed.), *Language and symbolic power* (pp. 1-31). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing: Biographic narrative and semi-structured methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wengraf, T (2011). *Short guide to BNIM interviewing and interpretation* [11.01b]. London, UK: London East Research Institute, University of East London.



Appendices

Appendix 1:

Table 4: An extract of the exemplary empirical indicators of the codes and their descriptions indicating the participants' need and search for certain forms of cultural capital and a more favorable social image

Code No.	Exemplary empirical indicator	Initial code	Focused code	Description	Category
20	<i>Certainly no one would like to have a bad image in other's minds. I studied this major aspiring to have a favorable image of myself in the minds of my friends & relatives whenever my name comes up. (PA)</i>	Valuing & looking for social status & respect	Seeking out social respect & status	Codes constructed under this category represented the participants' attempt to build up a better social image of themselves, & gain more social status & respect.	Exigency & quest for more cultural capital & a favorable social image
24	<i>Foreign language speakers see movies, listen to songs, & socialize with people who are good at the language. They learn from them & benefit from those who are also good at the language. I don't know, they pursue such activities happily, & I think they are successful. (PF)</i>	Considering foreign language speakers successful & happy	Developing a positive attitude toward foreign language speakers	Codes under this category were representative of the participants' description of their positive attitudes toward speakers of foreign languages, considering them happier & more respectful.	
25	<i>I would like to reflect the image of someone who has been successful in this major in other people's minds. (PB) English, as I said before, is a major language. Any language learner would like to demonstrate how their knowledge in such an important language gives them an edge over others. (PD)</i>	Aspiring to have competence in a foreign language for a more productive role or a desired social image			
37	<i>Learning English was an escape for me. I was tired of my field of study in high school. ... The only promising path ahead was the language. (PB)</i>	Making further promising progress in learning English	With a diminishing institutional capital, resorting to the socially secure & promising haven of foreign language learning	Codes constructed under this category indicated the participants' loss of interest & competence in their high school major while feeling disappointed about their chances of success in other fields.	

Appendix 2:

Table 5: An extract of the exemplary empirical indicators of the codes and their description indicating the participants' development of a more field-oriented habitus and strategic administration of the accumulated cultural capital (CC)

Code No.	Exemplary empirical indicator	Initial code	Focused code	Description	Category
54	<i>This has become a habit; I must see some movies every week. I also unconsciously get engaged with translation of parts of any English text I come across. (PB)</i>	Getting more engaged with extracurricular EFL materials	Investing the reinforced institutional & objectified capital in accumulation of more social capital in the field	Codes constructed under this category represented the participant's more consistent & productive engagement with the field contributing to their expansion of the social networks they belonged to, exchanging a form of their cultural capital (CC) for another.	Investing the reinforced institutional & objectified capital in development of more social capital
59	<i>For every exam I took, I used educational channels on Telegram, different websites, several books, from whatever sources I had access to. (PD)</i> <i>I often used the virtual social media to be exposed to the words or structures I had learnt. In return, it helped me with my computer skills. (PE)</i>	Cherishing the interaction with different modes of Internet/computer technology			
70	<i>Most people in these online gaming "communities" (switching codes) speak foreign languages, often English or sometime Russian, but rarely Farsi. To interact with them, to assign tasks, give commands, I needed the language. I felt excited to realize that there are foreigners who play the same game I do. (PE)</i> <i>I think they (foreign language speakers) can be socially more competent. When we went out with friends, to a café or something, & saw some tourists, we really wanted to approach them & communicate with them. (PD)</i>	Interacting with tourists, as well as online interaction with other nations	Cashing in their social capital toward active interaction with the field as well as developing interactions with other fields	Codes constructed under this category were associated with parts of the data where the participants talked about their extroversion & more effective communication with others, embracing new experiences & social interactions.	Cashing in the accumulated institutional & social capital toward accumulation of more CC