

Critical Review

Global Habitus: Multilingual Identity Differences Expressed through Cultural Capital

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Contextualization

In Malaysia, the English language has in the past been given priority as desirable over the Chinese language due to its *lingua franca* status. However, with the rise of cultural globalisation and China's global power (Shambaugh, 2015; Jacques, 2008), the Chinese language has experienced an increase in desirability. Thus a convergence of educational outcomes may appear in individual cultural capital. This study is conceived as an answer to the question of possible identity differences among Malaysian Chinese youth who experience different mediums of instruction in a multilingual context. While these differences have been widely acknowledged in the literature, there has yet to be an attempt to answer this research question using the framework of cultural capital. As such, the literature often highlights only objective indicators of identity differences between the two groups (those who choose Chinese medium of instruction and those who choose English), such as choice of spoken language and qualifications. We argue that subjective identity indicators such as consumption tastes also play an important part in explaining educational outcomes. We thus suggest a framework based on cultural capital, which has seldom been used to express educational outcome differences in bilingual and multilingual educational contexts.

Abstract: *The area of literature discussed in this paper is the use of cultural capital as an explanatory framework in comparing identity. The case study highlighted here is intra-ethnic diversity among the Malaysian Chinese. Two sub-groups of Malaysian Chinese are identified based on their experienced educational medium of instruction, which are the Chinese-medium and English-medium education systems. Identity differences between the two groups can be compared through the three forms of cultural capital which are the objectified, institutionalised, and embodied. This paper locates the study within the bulk of studies using the cultural capital framework, as well as the existing corpus of scholarship on Malaysian Chinese identity.*

Cultural Capital as a Framework in Measuring Stratification

One of the main goals of classical sociology was to measure and explain the reason for the existence and persistence of stratification (Giddens & Sutton 2013). The social conflict theorist, Karl Marx, had used the concept of social class to describe social inequality in terms of relations to the means of production (Giddens & Sutton 2013). However, the definition and operationalisation of social class continues to be debated, particularly where materialist and idealist factors are concerned. Block (2013), who has reviewed the various definitions of social class over the years, claims that Bourdieu is perhaps the social theorist who best captured the notion of class in the late 20th century because he included both material states as well as cultural activity. Social class may be made up of more than one type of capital, including cultural, social and economic capitals with a higher level of social class associated with higher cultural capital (Savage *et al.* 2013). Social class may also be measured through possession

of educational qualifications (Block 2013). As a socialisation agent, it also produces and reproduces social inequality.

Throughout the evolution of cultural capital as an explanatory device for social stratification in Europe, the element of language has always remained constant for all individuals involved. As a tool of communication, language is used and transmitted through education systems. While one's social class may be related to one's use of slang, such as the Eton-educated upper class accent versus working class accents in Britain (Tyler, 2008), we question if a complete difference in language education may also be measured. This review thus suggests that the cultural capital framework can be used in such a way.

Bourdieu (1984) first coined the term cultural capital to describe the worldview, life experiences, and lifestyle preferences of select groups of people demarcated by their relations to the means of production. Cultural capital includes three forms: objectified, institutionalised, and embodied. The embodied form is the *habitus*, or lived dispositions; the objectified form is the consumption of commodities; and the institutionalised form includes the legitimacy accorded to forms of cultural capital by social institutions such as education (Igarashi and Saito, 2014). Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital places great importance on identity, particularly where *habitus* as its embodied form is concerned (Langman, 2012). Bourdieu's concept became famous in English-language sociology from the late 1970s, after the translation of his manuscript *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* from French to English (Lareau and Weininger, 2003). Since then, many scholars have attempted to operationalise Bourdieu's cultural capital to explain differences in students' educational outcomes. The field of education has seen many studies conducted using this theoretical framework to establish links between students' cultural capital possession and their academic performance. Nonetheless, these scholars differ in their interpretation of how Bourdieu's concept should be applied and converted into researchable form.

Two Interpretations of Bourdieu: 'Wild' and 'Domesticated'

The three forms of cultural capital described by Bourdieu include both empirical and abstract elements. The objectified form includes consumption practices while the institutionalised includes educational qualifications. The embodied form meanwhile can only be interpreted in a phenomenological sense, as it refers to ambitions which require an interpretation of the way respondents create meaning.

The main debate within the application of the concept of cultural capital has been with its operationalisation. Some scholars believe cultural capital can be empirically described; others believe it is something that cannot be measured in a scale.

Goldthorpe (2007) summarises the divide among scholars of cultural capital, classifying their interpretations of Bourdieu into two camps: the 'wild' and 'domesticated' interpretations of cultural capital. The 'wild' form refers to an interpretation of Bourdieu in his original, unabridged meaning, where the abstract embodied form of cultural capital is acknowledged. The 'domesticated' form refers to an interpretation of Bourdieu in a way that converts the forms of cultural capital into empirical attributes. The main reason for this difference in interpretation is that it is almost impossible, according to scholars such as van de Werfhorst (2010), to operationalise the abstract embodied form of cultural capital into measurable data. The problem lies with constructing an appropriate research design.

The scholars who embrace the 'domesticated' interpretation of Bourdieu include in their analysis indicators of objectified cultural capital such as the respondent's possession of books (Graetz, 1988; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Sullivan, 2001; DeGraaf et al, 2000); and participation in cultural activities or *beaux arts* such as attending museums (Rosigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Katsilis & Robinson, 1990), theatre (Katsilis & Robinson, 1990), and art exhibitions

(Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997). The scholars who apply the 'wild' interpretation of Bourdieu include embodied cultural capital indicators such as attitudes to culture and familiarity with cultural variables (DiMaggio, 1982); and interest in politics, philosophy, and other cultures (DeGraaf *et al*, 2000). Most researchers also include the institutionalised aspect of cultural capital by asking for respondents' educational qualifications. Several also focus on the respondents' parents' level of education (DeGraaf, 1986; Robinson & Garnier, 1985; Jonsson 1987).

Goldthorpe (2007) insists that the 'domesticated' interpretation involves a radical misinterpretation of Bourdieu, so much so that it almost becomes a falsification of Bourdieu. This is because by doing so one ignores the importance of *habitus*, which delineates the phenomenological aspect of identity from other superficial accomplishments that the individual may have. Two people may have the same educational qualifications and amount of assets but display different ambitions and attitudes. This difference could amount to different life-chances, or opportunities for advancement. As noted by the Marxists, culture is an ideology grounded in the mode and means of production, and though abstract, serves to stratify the haves from the have-nots.

Lareau and Weininger (2003) claim that cultural capital is often 'arbitrary', in that there is no comparison between high and low amounts in a scale, while educational qualifications can be measured in a scale. Thus, to attempt to distinguish between students' cultural capital and their achieved school grades (DiMaggio, 1982) would be alien to Bourdieu's approach (Lareau and Weininger, 2003), as there would be no meaningful link to establish between the two variables. At the same time, Goldthorpe also claims that DeGraaf misunderstood Bourdieu by attempting to attribute educational affinity to *beaux arts* participation, and educational skills to family reading behaviour, establishing unreliable causal effects. Instead, in order to stay true to the 'arbitrary' sense of cultural capital, Lareau and Weininger (2003) insist that the 'wild' interpretation of Bourdieu should include the analysis of knowledge, skills, and competencies that parents and students are able to deploy in their interactions with teachers and administrators, in complying with institutionalised standards of evaluation. These indeed appear to be something which cannot be generalised and therefore need to be discerned using phenomenology.

Three major landmark studies are highlighted here to establish the way scholars have interpreted the concept of cultural capital and constructed a research design. In 2006, Bennett and Silva carried out a study on cultural capital and social exclusion, examining the relationships between economic, social, and cultural assets in the organisation of social stratification in the UK. Their findings confirm the relevance of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to explain social inequalities, as there were consistent and systematic correlations between level of cultural capital, measured by level of education, distribution of different kinds of cultural tastes and interest, and levels of cultural participation. In their survey, Bennett and Silva (2006) composed survey questions on eight cultural subfields to assess taste, participation, and knowledge – including questions on TV, film, music, reading, visual arts, eating out, and personal style embodiment.

In 2009, Noble and Davies investigated the reason why the effect of social class on students' attainment disappears only to be replaced by the effect of cultural capital. Their findings suggest that cultural capital affects participation in higher education independent of social class. Noble and Davies (2009) design their questionnaire to include items such as leisurely activities, regularly watched TV programmes, book preferences, family members lived with, parents' occupation, education levels, reading habits, common conversation topics and leisure activities.

In 2013, a major study on cultural capital and social class was conducted by Savage *et al*, namely the BBC-LSE's Great British Class Survey Experiment (GBCS). The study aims to

elaborate a new model of social class to show how measures of economic, cultural, and social capital could be combined to provide a powerful way of mapping contemporary class divisions in the UK. It establishes the links between class and specific occupational, educational, and geographical profiles. Savage *et al* claim that they are now entering the third phase of the analysis of social class, which differs from the first phase's six-fold approach, and the second wave based on occupation, which was developed in opposition to the former. Savage *et al* (2013) designed the GBCS to include questions on people's leisure interests, musical tastes, use of the media, and food preferences.

Similarities and differences exist between all three landmark studies. Cultural capital possession was found to have links to levels of cultural participation; participation in higher education; and specific occupational, educational, and geographical profiles. Thus cultural capital was found to influence people's life-chances. However, while Savage *et al* (2013) prioritise social class, Noble and Davies (2009) find its influence declining, and Bennett and Silva (2006) did not prioritise it. Arguably, social class might not be directly related to cultural capital, although it might influence the attainment of cultural capital. Bourdieu does not include social class as an aspect of cultural capital, nor does it translate into objectified, institutionalised, or embodied form. However, an individual may attain a high ability to consume, a high level of education, and lofty ambitions if their material possessions allow it. Because social class indicates a person's socio-economic background, it includes a material base. Although in most instances it is not directly separable from culture, it is not inherently the same thing. The similarity is that in all three studies, cultural capital can be used to express difference and to demarcate. More strikingly, the issue of language difference did not arise. This may be a gap which can be addressed by attempting to apply cultural capital as a framework to study differing outcomes of multilingual education.

Cultural Capital and Multilingual Education

Bilingual or multilingual education is a global concern, and is not limited to any one society or culture (Valdiviezo and Nieto, 2015). In their research, Valdiviezo and Nieto highlight that bilingual or multicultural educational policies historically have been "the result of the demands of indigenous minorities, whether in Europe, Africa, Asia or Latin America". The issue that arises from this is the possible prioritisation of one language over another, usually the language of the dominant social group. Mastery of this language then becomes the form of desirable cultural capital in that particular society (Valdiviezo and Nieto, 2015). Thus we would like to highlight the case of the Malaysian Chinese, who similarly experience the possibility of pursuing two different mediums of instruction in Malaysia.

The Case of Vernacular Chinese and English-Language Education in Malaysia

Here we introduce a case study that serves to highlight our argument of using cultural capital as a framework for measuring outcome differences in multilingual education in a multicultural nation. It is a historical overview of the mediums of education available to the Malaysian Chinese.

The Malaysian Chinese originally migrated to Malaya during the 1800s, at the height of Malaya's British colonial era, due to opportunities in tin mining. Even so, they maintained strong socio-cultural and economic ties with their kin in south China, their place of origin (Cheong, Lee and Lee, 2015). The aspect of imagined community was considered central to Chinese identity in Southeast Asia (Wang Gungwu, in Hirschman, 1988). 'Older' and 'modern' Chinese identities were separated, where the 'older' identities referred to nationalist identification with mainland China, and 'modern' identities referred to localised national identities (Wang Gungwu, in Hirschman, 1988). While some Chinese prioritised class identity, it did not override

'Chinese' identity (Wang Gungwu, in Hirschman, 1988). Carstens (2014) echoed this argument, saying that Malaysian Chinese identity is reflexive and subjective. Intergenerational socialisation was responsible for transmitting language, religion, values and beliefs (Hirschman, 1988).

The centrality of Chinese language to the formation of Malaysian Chinese identities indicates that Chinese language socialisation is of paramount importance (Tan, 1997). Education is the socialisation agent responsible for this. To understand this, it is necessary to delve briefly into the history of Chinese-language education and English-language education in Malaysia.

In the early 1900s, the Malaysian Chinese had two education options, which were Chinese-medium education and English-medium education (Purcell, 1948). English-medium schools were introduced by the British during the colonial period in Malaya, while Chinese-medium schools were formed by the migrant Chinese community in Malaya, inheriting the syllabus from nationalist China (Purcell, 1948). Tan and Santhiram (2010) chronicled the conditions of the Chinese-medium schools and English-medium schools. Chinese-medium schools were originally clan-based and private. They were formed based on the ideology of the triumphant nationalist party in China. The schools were small, containing twenty to thirty pupils, with one teacher who was usually a master of many other trades and considered a village elder. The syllabus was obtained from nationalist China, with the ruling party occasionally sending teachers over to Malaya to garner overseas Chinese support. It emphasised Confucian teachings, the knowledge of classical Chinese texts, calligraphy, skill with the abacus, and the ideology of Sun Yat-sen. Students were the children of Chinese migrants who believed strongly in the Kuomintang nationalist belief, and when they completed their education they regarded themselves purely as 'Chinese'. In the beginning, the British were content to leave them alone until their political activism threatened to overthrow the colonial law and order (Tan and Santhiram 2010).

English-medium schools, on the other hand were established by missionary bodies with grants obtained from the British Government. They placed an emphasis on literary aspects – focusing strongly on a strong humanities education. Students were groomed to enter local civil service. Although students were charged a fee, scholarships were provided. Students were prepared to sit for the Cambridge examinations, which then enabled them to either pursue clerical employment in the civil service, private firms, or even attend Raffles College to study medicine. This education system, according to Purcell (1948), 'did not touch the bulk of the Chinese' because migrant children were too old to enter the system. Also, the nationalist sentiment the Chinese possessed, ensured they opted for Chinese education rather than consider this alternative. Because they were prepared for civil service in Malaya, graduating pupils considered themselves as citizens of Malaya rather identifying with mainland China (Purcell, 1948). In short, the graduates of Chinese schools viewed themselves as an extension of their counterparts in China, while graduates of the English schools viewed themselves as part of Malaya (Tan and Santhiram, 2010).

Post-Independence Educational Reforms

After Malaysia achieved its Independence in 1957, the demarcation between Chinese-medium schools and English-medium schools shifted slightly, because of reforms in the overall national education policy.

Tan and Teoh (2014) chronicle the development of Chinese education in Malaysia from 1952 to 1975. This period begins with the British transformation of vernacular schools into English-Malay bilingual ones, and ends with the gradual replacement of the English medium with the Malay medium in national schools. In 1952, the British enacted the Education Ordinance with the publication of the Barnes Report. This established English-Malay bilingual primary schools, also known as national schools, to replace Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools, which the

British colonial officers initially supported but later viewed negatively in terms of achieving national unity. Many Chinese vernacular schools elected to switch to the national medium as well, in order to receive state funding. These were called National-Type Chinese Schools, or Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (SJKC). SJKC schools initially used the English-language medium of instruction, but switched to Malay ten years after Malaysia's Independence. Some Chinese vernacular schools however did not switch, and thus did not receive state funding. These were known as Independent Chinese High Schools.

Chinese educationists in Malaysia had throughout this time intended to uphold the Chinese language as the medium of instruction, together with an internal Chinese school culture. Helen Ting (2013) differentiates the remaining 'Chinese schools' from schools that were formerly 'English schools'. From between 1970 to 1982, the English-medium schools experienced a gradual transition into becoming Malay medium schools (Ting, 2013). Schools which had converted from the Mandarin medium were known as 'Chinese-conforming schools', while those which had converted from the English medium were called 'English-conforming schools' (Ting, 2013). Thus, a demarcation continues to exist between the two types of education systems, providing an opportunity for socialisation into different sets of values (Tan and Teoh, 2014).

One of the ways in which Malaysian Chinese individuals manifested their identify differences was through consumption preferences. Identity can be expressed through *habitus* by having either a collectivist or cosmopolitan outlook, where Chinese-language education tended to emphasise Confucianism and English-language education emphasising Western liberal democratic values.

An important element in the choice of consumption of products, whether goods or services, is language. In choosing which books to read, movies to watch, clothing brands to wear and institutions of higher education to enrol in, language considerations come into view. Yoshino (2002) wrote that globalisation in the form of Englishisation, or the spread of English, would surely continue to mark further gains in the time ahead. He cited the debate where the English-language expansion is referred to as 'linguistic imperialism' by the core nations to maintain dominance over peripheral nations (Chew, 1999, in Yoshino, 2002). While this was the case for most of the past century, a decade later, things appear to have changed. There are already questions as to whether China will provide significant contra-flows to the West (Hong Zhang, 2009) in terms of globalising mass media. However, there is no real evidence to show that the influence of the English language is waning, only that the use of Chinese language is increasing. In the globalised world, is it possible to have more than one dominant language? Appadurai (1990) claims that the current world is characterised by 'scapes', out of which certain languages might dominate across certain regions. It is possible that the stratification previously alluded to as an outcome of multilingual education systems on Malaysia is declining.

The Global Habitus: Cosmopolitan Cultural Capital

'Global habitus' (Illiouz and John 2003) refers to a new brand of cultural capital which is deemed desirable, indicating cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism refers to the worldview that embraces diversity, defined as an 'orientation of openness to foreign others and cultures' (Igarashi and Saito, 2014). Since the 1990s, sociology has moved towards the study of human behaviour in the globalised context (Langman, 2012). As a result, there has been a trend in the past few years within sociology to consider cosmopolitanism as desirable cultural capital (Igarashi and Saito, 2014). In fact, sociological research has begun to draw on Bourdieu's concept to examine how cosmopolitanism is implicated in stratification on a global scale (Igarashi and Saito, 2014). The desirability of cosmopolitanism is most succinctly expressed in the institutionalised form of cultural capital, namely through educational qualifications, issued by educational systems which demand such an outlook as demonstration of competence (Igarashi and Saito, 2014). Thus such a cosmopolitan outlook which does not prioritise

Chinese-medium education over English-medium education would be considered ideal in today's existing educational institutions of repute. Nonetheless, it would be a useful attempt to study the existing differential outcomes of education in both linguistic mediums to glean its benefits for individuals and society.

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