

Playing in the academic field:

Non-native English speaking academics in UK business schools

Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between English language competence and the ability of an individual for whom English is a non-native language to function in UK academia. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of academic field and habitus and based on interviews with 54 non-native English speaking academics employed in UK business schools, we discuss the ways in which working in English as a non-native language influences foreign academics' performance of academic habitus and the level of their symbolic capital necessary for the achievement of success within UK HE. Our findings point to advantages and disadvantages associated with being a non-native English speaking academic, to strategies deployed by individuals as they strive to enhance their linguistic competence, and to the importance of language not merely as a tool of communication but as a key factor enabling individuals to perform academic habitus in the UK academic field.

Keywords: academic habitus; Bourdieu; business schools; language; non-native academics

Introduction

The global significance of the English language, both historically and at present, has been analysed and assessed by scholars from different disciplines. Among extant writings, there is a strand of literature focusing on the use of English in contemporary organizational contexts (e.g. Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 2002; Ehrenreich 2010; Lauring and Selmer 2010;

Nickerson 2005; Tietze 2008a). Empirical studies conducted to date have typically addressed the role of the English language in multinational settings outside locations in which English is the dominant native language (e.g. Barner-Rasmussen 2003; Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen and Piekkari 2006; Poncini 2003). However, little is known about the use of English by native speakers of other languages in workplaces based in English-speaking countries and where the majority of the employees are native English speakers.

An example of this kind of organisational environment is UK academia which, for a number of years now, has seen a steady growth in the proportion of non-national academic staff (HEFCE 2010). This has been partially motivated by an active choice by academic institutions to implement the strategy of internationalisation as a means of generating income and improving their international league table positions. Moreover, in the British context, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) constitutes a ‘market-framed research competition’ (Kim 2009, 396), which additionally contributes to the drive for internationalisation.

Motivated by the need to secure a high ranking in the REF, UK higher education institutions (HEIs) recruit research active staff beyond the national boundaries. The employment of non-UK nationals can in some cases also be encouraged by international accreditation bodies, as, for example, is the case within business and management education, where business schools aspiring to receive the sought-after EQUIS (The European Quality Improvement System) accreditation are, among other criteria, assessed on the basis of the extent of internationalisation of their staff. As a consequence of these changes, according to recent data, 25% of academics employed in UK HE are non-nationals (HEFCE 2012).

Against this background, the employment of non-native academics has attracted a certain amount of research interest (e.g. Archer 2008; Baruch and Hall 2004; Jiang et al. 2010; Kim 2009; Luxon and Peelo 2009; Pherali 2012; Richardson 2008; Tietze 2008b; Tietze and Dick 2009). However, as Jiang et al. (2010, 155) observe, within the studies conducted to date,

‘little attention has been paid to the *experiences* of international academic staff’ (emphasis added).

With this paper, we contribute to the so far sparse body of empirical work on foreign academic staff at UK HEIs. Our focus is on a particular aspect of functioning in the British academic environment, namely the fact of working in English as a non-native language and the influence of the use of English both upon academics themselves and upon the academic field. Conceptually, we draw on the writings of Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. 1977, 1986, 1988, 1993, 2002), in particular his concepts of field, habitus and capital, combined with insights from extant literature on the role of language within the organisational setting of higher education (Curry and Lillis 2004; Jiang et al 2010; Luxon and Peelo 2009; Pherali 2012; Tietze 2008a, 2008b). We argue that a high level of linguistic competence constitutes a key aspect of academic habitus (Bourdieu 1988) within the context of UK HE. At the same time, we see the increase in numbers of non-native academics – a previously marginal group within the UK academic environment – as a potential trigger for changing the field and the power dynamics within it. Throughout the paper, we thus explore the role of the English language as pertaining to issues of domination and power within the UK academic field.

Following from the above, the specific empirical questions we address in this paper are:

- In what ways is English language competence a factor in individuals’ becoming part of the UK academic field?
- How does working in English as a non-native language influence foreign academics’ performance of academic habitus and the level of their symbolic capital necessary for the achievement of success within UK HE?

Our theoretical interest, on the other hand, is guided by the following questions:

- What is the importance of linguistic capital within the academic field in the UK?
- What are the possibilities of changing the field through the entry into it of a previously marginal group?

The remaining parts of the paper are structured as follows. In the next section, we explain our theoretical framework, making a link between English language competence and an individual's ability to belong to the academic field in the UK. We then introduce the methodology underpinning our empirical study, reflecting in particular on issues related to conducting qualitative research in a language that is non-native for both the participants and the researchers. From there, we move on to analyse the results of our empirical research, using the conceptual framework outlined earlier. The concluding discussion addresses the theoretical and empirical contribution of our study to the understanding of the phenomenon of increased employment of non-native English speaking academics in UK HE seen as a social field.

English language competence and belonging to the UK academic field

To discuss the implications of using English as a non-native language by individuals employed in UK academia, we draw on several concepts found in Pierre Bourdieu's writings. Through explaining the relationships between notions such as habitus, field and capital, a Bourdieusian analysis allows for integration of a theory of the individual with a theory of social structure and a theory of power relations (Dobbin 2008).

To start with, we see the UK academic environment as a *social field* characterised by 'its own logic' (Bourdieu 1988, 53), a game with its own set of rules, different from the rules found in other fields. Moreover, we consider those who belong to it as sharing a specific system of perception, thought, evaluation, feeling, speech and behaviour, i.e. *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977;

2002). Fields are sites of power struggles over the delineation of their boundaries and determination of who is entitled to enter them. The social field and the habitus of individuals within the field are closely connected: it is necessary for all participants to share a belief in the game and its rules, and to value the rewards the game has on offer. As Bourdieu (1993, 18) explains, individuals invest in being part of a given field:

Investment is the disposition to act that is generated in the relationship between a space defined by a game offering certain prizes or stakes (what I call a field) and a system of dispositions attuned to that game (what I call a habitus) – the ‘feel’ for the game and the stakes, which implies both the inclination and the capacity to play that game, to take an interest in the game, to be taken up, taken in by the game.

For the success of those who belong to academia, then, it is vital to acquire and perform a particular habitus, rooted in the shared assumptions, beliefs and behaviours in relation to the meaning of scholarly activity.

Within each field, there are dominant and dominated actors, all of whom act so as to accumulate the *capital* that will enable them to maintain or strengthen their power in that field (1977, 1980). Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between three basic forms of capital: economic (e.g. money), social (e.g. connections, group belonging, relationships) and cultural (e.g. academic degrees, competences, cultural products). He conceptualises social capital as referring primarily to networks of social relations, whereas economic capital as denoting the material wealth accumulated by an individual. Cultural capital encompasses various forms of cultural differentiations, from educational qualifications to cultural dispositions, the knowledge of cultural institutions, and language (Bourdieu 1987). Within each social field, the most valuable combination of these three basic types of capital will be recognised as socially legitimate *symbolic capital*. The positions of actors in the field are unequal: those

who have attained the highest levels of symbolic capital as defined and valued in a given field – i.e. those who are most strongly established, who have the best connections and who have managed to accumulate the most favourable combination of capital – are advantaged and powerful.

UK academia, as a particular type of a ‘game’, requires from those who want to become its members and to progress within it that they abide by the rules of the game. The process of becoming an academic and socialising into the academic habitus involves the internalisation and acceptance as ‘normal’ of academic conventions and values (Bauder 2006). What follows is that as a result of the acquisition of a certain habitus, the individual will be more likely to act in ways consistent with the field’s values and norms, thus acting ‘intentionally without intention’ (Bourdieu 1990, 12). Such processes of academic reproduction, on the other hand, lead to solidifying the hierarchies and power structures existing in the academic field. This makes it difficult to create conditions for changing the rules of the game, especially as those in the position of power in the academic environment have a vested interest in perpetuating the *status quo*.

The use of language constitutes an important aspect of the academic’s ability to conform to the rules of the game operating in the academic field and to acquire the habitus of an academic. This is because one factor underpinning an academic’s ability to accumulate symbolic capital that is valued in academia, and at the same time one way in which the symbolic capital of an academic manifests itself, is through her or his linguistic ability in a ‘practical sense’, i.e. in relation to the ‘capacity to produce expressions which are appropriate for particular situations’ (Thompson 2007, 7) within a given ‘linguistic market, dominated by the official language’ (Bourdieu 1991, 45), in this case, English. To Bourdieu, the official language of a linguistic community constitutes the theoretical norm, imposed within the linguistic market as the only legitimate one, a benchmark for language usage against which

different ways of expression, for example by individuals from various class or ethnic backgrounds, are measured. Moreover, as a result of the relations of power between speakers and hearers, the linguistic capital of a speaker depends not only on her or his ability to articulate grammatically correct sentences, but also includes the capacity to make oneself heard; to create an impression of credibility and authority. All communicative situations require the speaker to ascertain her or his right to speak and the hearer to consider the speaker as deserving to be listened to, and hence are inherently enmeshed in struggle and conflict.

Following from the above, we can see that when considered as an element of cultural capital, which is used by actors to maximise their symbolic capital and hence strengthen their power position in a social field – including that of academia – language emerges as much more than just a means of communication in a purely instrumental sense. As Curry and Lillis (2004) point out, all dimensions of academic literacy and knowledge construction, such as reading, writing, and other aspects of communication constitute activities that are of a fundamentally social nature. In order to have the capacity to compete within academia, the individual has to be able to interact with others according to the prevailing norms and conventions of communication and knowledge production, beyond the mainly technical mastery of the language. ‘The art of applying knowledge’, says Bourdieu (1988, 57), ‘and applying it aptly in practice... is inseparable from an overall manner of acting, or living, inseparable from a *habitus*’. For a non-native English speaking academic at a British university, the use of the English language will therefore influence not only one’s ability to carry out professional duties, but the overall construction of one’s identity and hence the ability to enact the *habitus* shared by the community of British academics. To quote Tietze and Dick (2009, 119-121), language

is not a mere descriptive system of signs and syntax, but exercises considerable performative power in the world where, rooted in cultural traditions and power

relations, it shapes social practices as well as flows of knowledge... [Therefore] individuals need not only to master the language conventions that characterise [the communities of practice they belong to], but also to learn and negotiate the participation rules that govern conduct and identities, as well as the power relationships that typify a given community.

The dominant language used in academic institutions in the UK, i.e. a particular type of English conforming to the conventions of expression used by the members of the organisations, in particular for the purposes of research publication, belongs to what Bourdieu (1991, 57) refers to as ‘a sub-field of restricted linguistic production which derives its fundamental properties from the fact that the producers within it produce first and foremost for other producers’, i.e. other academics in the field. Here, Bourdieu emphasises the need to distinguish between the level of linguistic capital that enables the speaker to produce ordinary speech and that required to produce a written piece deserving of being published. In this way, the ability to generate a written discourse in the form of an academic publication constitutes one aspect of linguistic capital that can put the individual in an advantageous position within the academic field.

Tietze (2008b) specifically points to the ability to use language in an appropriate way as a key factor in socialising into the academic community, or, in a Bourdieusian sense, in developing the academic habitus, and that it influences the career success of an academic. Empirical evidence shows that for non-native English speaking academics it is more laborious than for native English speakers to engage with English language texts (Lillis and Curry 2006a) and thus to contribute to knowledge production within a given discipline. In addition to the difficulties with producing knowledge in English, non-native English speakers are confronted with the challenge of knowledge dissemination, whereby the ability to disseminate their scholarly work, and hence to progress with their career, is linked to their

access and participation in particular – English language-based – knowledge networks (Lillis and Curry 2010; Tietze 2008b).

Commenting on the role of English for the transition of staff of Chinese origin to the UK university system, Jiang et al. (2010) state that both in regard to communication with colleagues and students, as well as the delivery of teaching, the English language could constitute an obstacle. In a similar vein, Archer (2008) reports on how, for a junior academic, insufficient perceived competence in English can contribute to her or his feelings of professional ‘inauthenticity’, and Luxon and Peelo (2009) highlight how English language competence affects the experienced level of comfort in teaching, and generally adjusting to UK pedagogic practices. Also focusing on the UK sociocultural and professional academic context, a recent study by Pherali (2012) draws on Bourdieu’s forms of capital to analyse the lived experiences of integration by international academic staff. Specifically in relation to language, the author contends that international academics working in an English-speaking context may experience challenges both at a professional and sociocultural level as they negotiate their position in the new field, with the cultural nuances of language being ‘a key barrier to integration’ (p. 323).

For all the aforementioned studies the starting point is one of adaptation into an existing system and developing proficiency in the dominant language, explaining how non-national academics draw on various strategies for social, cultural and linguistic integration. While our study is situated in a similar empirical context, we also wish to discuss the possibilities of changing the field. With an increasing number of non-national academics being employed by UK higher education institutions, it is worth considering what the effects on the field dynamics might be.

Before moving on to a discussion of the experiences of non-native English speaking academics at UK universities, drawing on Bourdieu's view of language as an aspect of an individual's cultural and symbolic capital, and a source of power within a social field, in the following section we present the methodology underpinning our empirical study.

Methodology

The data analysed in this article come from empirical research conducted for the purposes of a broader study of experiences of foreign academics employed in UK business schools. The study was funded by the authors' respective institutions. In total, 54 semi-structured interviews, including 31 with women and 23 with men, were conducted with foreign academics employed at 19 business schools across the UK. Participants were initially identified and recruited through a combination of personal contacts and 'cold-calling' based on searches of university websites. Subsequently, the sample was built using a snowballing approach. All interviews were carried out by the authors. Being non-native English speaking academics working in the UK ourselves, we acknowledge our personal and professional interest in the subject and take our cue from Holvino's (2010, 249, quoting Bannerji 1992) view that 'there is no better point of entry into a critique or reflection than one's own experience'. While we do not claim to have privileged access to the participants' experiences, we believe that the existing commonalities allowed us to establish a degree of rapport. At the same time, we were aware of the possibility that interviewing our peers potentially meant that the participants would wish to project a high level of professional standards whereas we as the researchers would be unwilling to engage with the findings in a critical manner (Welch and Piekkari 2006).

In choosing the participants, we employed the following criteria: being non-UK born, not having English as a first language, and being in full-time academic employment. The sample consisted of participants from 22 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America representing all academic levels from Lecturer to Professor, spanning both research- and teaching-focused business schools. The interviews were carried out between 2010 and 2012. They lasted between 46 minutes and two hours, were recorded and subsequently transcribed. At the time of the interviews, the participants were between 29 and 50 years of age.

[insert Figure 1 approx. here]

Interview questions covered a range of topics related to the participants' professional experiences in the UK. In particular, a section of the interview focused on experiences and implications of working in English as a non-native language. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, their names have been replaced with pseudonyms, and throughout the analysis no references to their specific academic institution or nationality have been made. There was a sense among the participants that, even with the increased number of foreign staff in UK business schools, it would still be easy to identify individuals should their country of origin combined with their position be disclosed. On two occasions a felt risk of exposure was referred to as the reason for non-participation.

The interview process was piloted by means of the authors interviewing each other prior to arranging interviews with the research participants. This allowed for a modification of the interview guide to ensure that all key topics were addressed and that the interviews would flow naturally. Moreover, the experience of being interviewed provided both authors with the opportunity to reflect on the extent to which language influences all aspects of performing one's work as an academic.

An important issue we reflected upon while collecting and analysing the data was the fact that English was a non-native language for both us and for our participants. We approached the data we gathered as inter-relational (Kvale 1996) and contextually grounded (Mishler 1986), produced jointly by the participant and researcher during the interview. We were conscious that language had an impact on all stages of the research process. As Chapman et al. (2004) suggest, there is a relationship between the phenomena studied and the research questions formulated on the one hand, and the language skills of the researcher on the other. In preparing the list of interview questions, we paid particular attention to their wording and made sure that both of us had the same understanding regarding their meaning. Moreover, as Marschan-Piekkari and Reis (2004) argue, in the case of conducting interviews in a non-native language, issues such as diverse accents of the parties involved in the interview process, the use of idioms and a variety of challenges related to differences in levels of linguistic ability influence the interview process. In such situations, therefore, there is a greater potential for interviewer and response biases, misunderstandings and neglect of information provided through non-verbal communication (Punnett and Shenkar 1994; Ryen 2002). We tried to minimise this through rephrasing questions where they seemed to be misunderstood and asking for clarification in situations where we were unsure about the accuracy of our understanding of the answers. Also, the fact that English was a non-native language for all parties involved might have provided a source of advantage. As Ghauri (2004) states, the employment of a non-native language in the research process leads to simpler expressions and a more direct and straightforward communication. Moreover, as pointed out by Marschan-Piekkari and Reis (2004), using a non-native language allows for reducing the degree of power inequality within the interviewer-interviewee relationship resulting from different levels of linguistic competence in comparison with a situation where the interview is conducted in either the researcher's or the participant's native language.

More significantly, we were aware that the content of the responses was also to an extent influenced by the fact that they were given in English: the language used influences the way we think and when we say something in a given language, the content of our statement will be coloured by the cultural values associated with it (Wright 1996). However, as we had no means of checking whether our interviewees would have given us exactly the same answers had the interviews been conducted in their native languages, our analysis is based solely on what our participants told us in English. At the same time, since English is the language in which the research outputs resulting from our study have been produced, for the purposes of the analysis it was a convenient language to use in the interviews.

The initial analysis of the data consisted of a close reading of the interview transcripts. This led to identifying a number of key themes, as well as similarities and contradictions within them. In writing up the discussion we paid attention to retaining the diversity and richness of the empirical material gathered.

Empirical analysis

In our analysis we address the research questions posed at the outset, focusing on how and if language is experienced as a distinguishing factor for performing in the academic field. We specifically draw on instances where the participants refer to language as enabling or encumbering their professional performance, and the circumstances in which that is said to happen. Moreover, we are interested in how the participants construct their own position and prospects within the field based on their level of linguistic competence. We view this competence in terms of the ability to communicate effectively, but also in terms of the extent to which they can ‘make themselves heard’, that is, the extent of symbolic capital that is accumulated. To examine the effects of the entry of international staff into UK academia, we

start by discussing how the linguistic ‘rules of the game’ are observed and articulated by participants.

Language and distinction within the academic field

Following Bourdieu we view UK academia as a social field, governed by a set of rules and expectations that control entry to the field, and regulate behaviour and power relations within it. Among the research participants there is a general understanding that academic success is linked to possessing the necessary characteristics for performing in one’s area of specialism, that is, understanding and reflecting ‘the rules of the game’. In the interviews, language appears as one crucial factor through which participants conceive that positions within the field are constituted. As Simon, a Lecturer, explained:

You can’t help but notice that [native speakers] have a much finer grasp of English than you do. Those things that are said in very subtle or very circumscribed ways... You try to figure out what sort of function that has in a social setting and what sort of acts they perform. Just particular discourses, mobilising them to do particular things.

The grasp of English Simon refers to is not one of mastery of vocabulary or grammar, but a way of communicating that only those of native speaking status seem to achieve. Two key issues arise here: greater language proficiency is associated with a more powerful position, and there is a recognition of the performative power of language in terms of its consequences beyond the surface meaning of utterances.

Having established that language produces social stratification on a subtle level, there are examples of how that stratification is also linked to audible differences in speech. A number of participants state that the most obvious distinguishing feature of the spoken language is the

accent, since '[people] know exactly that I'm a foreigner. As soon as I open my mouth, it's clear' (Lena, a Lecturer). To Bourdieu, the difference in the modes of expression, denoted, for example, by accent, between members from different ethnic backgrounds carries with it a hierarchical distinction, with superiority attributed to ways of speaking by members of majority groups. A foreign accent, however, is not necessarily perceived by participants as a disadvantage in the workplace, especially in a classroom situation where the diversity of both teachers' and students' accents undermines the relevance of a distinction between 'majority' and 'minority' accents. Emma, a Senior Lecturer, for example, comments on being conscious of speaking with a foreign accent and on not viewing it as a problem in comparison with the accents of some of her native English speaking colleagues:

Sometimes, some of your colleagues that are British have strong accents themselves: they are from Scotland, or Wales, or from the north of England. They can have strong accents which are stronger and less audible for the students. Especially having many overseas students. At least [non-native English speakers] try to make an effort, we try to speak clear, we try to go slowly, make sure they understand. So it could be an advantage for the students.

The accent is recognised here as a distinguishing feature for both native and non-native speakers, but according to Emma non-native speakers are more aware of this and adjust their speech accordingly.

A foreign accent can also be drawn on by others to appeal against undesirable results, as in the case of David, a Lecturer:

I'm not a native speaker. It might happen that I don't understand something that people say. It might equally happen that they don't understand what I say because of my accent, for example, and I had complaints... my students were unhappy

with the results [of a module]. One of the complaints was that the teacher speaks with huge accent, with a very strong accent: 'I don't understand the teacher'. I don't believe it. I know some other people who have a stronger accent than I have.

David refutes the claim of the students by referring to colleagues with stronger accents who by this logic should have produced similar student reactions. As such, David sees the reference to the accent as an excuse that students invoke for their poor academic performance. While one cannot say for certain to which extent the accent affected the outcome of the module, the fact that it provides a means through which the effectiveness of a faculty member can be questioned is significant.

The ability to read and write English language academic texts is central to being able to carry out one's work according to expectations, and it also highlights differences in linguistic competence between native and non-native speakers. The written text presents a non-native speaker with a greater degree of 'foreignness' than for the native speaker (Kramsch and Lam 1999), thus demanding more time for processing. While in Bourdieu's terms, a lower level of fluency in reading texts is a sign of a lower level of linguistic capital of an individual and therefore puts her in a disadvantageous position within the linguistic market of the academic field, in the context of our research, specific individuals do not necessarily regard it as a problem. Lena, for instance, reflects on her slowness in reading in positive terms:

When I read a paper, I can see that some of my British colleagues are much quicker at reading and I'm slower. So probably that's making my work slower... Because there is a lot of reading to do for academic papers. But in a way I don't care. For me it's more important to retain information than to read quantity. It's quality that matters to me. I prefer to read maybe less but retain what I have read.

Lena thus acknowledges a difference based on a linguistic aspect, but she does not present it as putting her in an inferior position. Related to academic writing, another Lecturer, Andrew, on the other hand explains that his level of language proficiency affects the quality of his work to his disadvantage:

I am confident enough to submit [papers], but at the same time, I acknowledge my limitations. I can definitely acknowledge that my paper would be much, much better if English was my native language. In terms of uses of vocabulary, sentence making, in terms of even comprehending what someone else has written. It's not whenever I write, but also when I read other people's work, it's much more difficult for me to absorb it really as opposed to someone whose English is their mother language.

The interviews demonstrate how language constitutes an important factor both as a general feature of differentiation in terms of delivery and style, and also in determining the ability of an individual to successfully perform with the academic field.

The sentiment that the difference in language competence between native and non-native English speaking academics works to the detriment of the latter does not, however, result in an expectation that this should be addressed by anyone other than the non-native academic. Rather, there is a strong sense of responsibility for the individual's development of linguistic competence. Here, we find confirmation of Bourdieu's (1993) thesis that individuals invest in belonging to a given field and are inclined to make an effort to conform to the rules of the game that govern it. Below, we discuss the strategies employed by individuals in the process of working towards improving their linguistic competence in English, thus increasing their symbolic capital within the field.

Playing by the rules of the game

The awareness that the level of English language competence of non-native English speakers may differ from that of native English speaking academics motivates individuals to attempt to improve, for professional purposes, their standard of English. This is because, for almost all of our participants, linguistic competence is understood as integral to their overall ‘statutory competence’ (Bourdieu 1991) as academics, and therefore – as discussed in the previous section – as impacting their ability to accumulate symbolic capital within the academic field. The interviews suggest that there are broadly two approaches to improving one’s standard of English: an ‘overt’ and ‘covert’ one. As far as the former is concerned, for example, in relation to academic writing, some participants rely on the help of ‘literacy brokers’ (Lillis and Curry 2006b) – either professional proof-readers or native English speaking colleagues to ensure the quality and correctness of their texts. The quotes below illustrate this point:

What I find very valuable is the fact that since I started using proof-reading services, when I get my reviewers’ comments, they’re never complaining about the language anymore... If it wasn’t for the problem with language, it would be so much easier, but you need to recognise your weak points and try to improve, which I’ve done... [The proof-reader] gives me the feedback and I look at the mistakes and try not to make the mistakes again... It’s very helpful to know that at least language-wise, the papers are ok. That reflects on your work and makes it look better (John, Senior Lecturer).

When it comes to proofreading I draw on my professional network and my collaborators; they are all British, they’re all from the UK. (Phil, Professor)

Phil’s statement regarding how he mobilises support for his writing exemplifies how access to, and membership of, relevant academic networks is important for one’s professional development (Lillis and Curry 2010). The belief that the position of an academic within an

English-language context must be paired with linguistic competence and styles of expression not different than those of native English speaking academics also leads to more covert strategies of ‘playing by the rules of the game’, stemming from the conviction that there could be

a potential stigma attached to seeking support [since] the expectation in the field is that once the people have passed the level of PhD, then they are sufficiently versed in the English language, and that they can find their own way around the block. (Phil, Professor)

In this context, modification and censorship of speech are commonly mentioned tactics mobilised by foreign academics. For example, one of the recurring points made by the participants referred to the conscious change of their spoken language in communicating with others in a professional setting. Here, the competence in English is not equated with knowing the correct vocabulary, but rather with conforming to the norms of expression characterising British English.

Liz, a Lecturer, recalls that she ‘had to learn to be a bit more diplomatic and convoluted in [her] way of expressing [herself] so the students wouldn’t think of [her] as rude’. Similarly, in commenting on her interactions with fellow academics, Julia, also a Lecturer, states that:

There is always this kind of internal censorship on the grammatical, on the vocabulary level, not on the content of what I say, but on the correctness of it.

Which I think I’m pretty in control of. It’s not paralysing my communications but it’s some kind of ‘oh, I shouldn’t be saying that, what a basic error that was.’

This strategy of self-censoring the way one uses the English language in the academic setting can be understood in the context of Bourdieu’s (1991, 78) contention that ‘the

effort to “correct” a devalued pronunciation in the presence of representatives of the legitimate pronunciation and, more generally, all the corrections which tend to valorize the linguistic product by a more intense mobilization of the available resources’ stem from ‘the practical cognition and recognition of the immanent laws of a market and the sanctions through which they are manifested’.

Most participants have the sense that regardless of how competent in working in English they might become, there will always be some aspects of their use of the language in which they will be weaker compared with other areas. For example, Sylvia, a Reader, admits that, to her, administrative language use remains a weakness:

I think that [to successfully carry out administrative duties] you really have to be aware of yourself because a majority of academics are British, it is a British environment... I think that the administrative language you have to master in a particular way... I have not thought about it and have not acquired those skills and I don't think they could naturally come to me, either.

This sense of weakness is articulated as measured against the linguistic norms legitimate within the UK academic environment, associated not with the language used by native English speakers in general but specifically by those whose prior educational trajectory equipped them with a linguistic competence commensurate with the requirements of a successful performance of academic habitus. This can be seen in Val's, a Lecturer, expression of her belief that she will ‘never write like someone who's been to a *good school* [emphasis added] here’. Therefore, for an understanding of what enables the acquisition of linguistic capital within the UK academic field, an awareness of class-related factors is necessary, something which we return to below.

As can be seen from the above, the awareness of the stratification that occurs by linguistic means leads participants to pursue various strategies to adapt to the linguistic expectations of

the field. Partly, these are on the level of more concrete issues such as awareness of the role of accent and reflecting on one's comparative capabilities regarding reading and writing when it comes to native speakers. Partly, these strategies are on a more symbolic level where expressions of speech are modified to better suit what is perceived as the expected norm of communication, with the aim of becoming a more successful player in the field.

Language, habitus and power in the academic field

As stated in the introductory section to the analysis, there is recognition that language operates on a symbolic level which is not easily discernible, but which produces social stratification. In this section, we will discuss this aspect of language further.

Two of the 54 academics interviewed – both of whom have lived in the UK for many years and have achieved Professorial titles – consider their linguistic performance as equally excellent in all areas of professional activity, as illustrated by the following quote from Cecilia who states

I think in English, I dream in English, my first reaction would be in English.

Language stopped being a problem quite a long time ago.

For the remaining 52 participants, however, the role of linguistic competence in performing academic habitus and thus, in 'making oneself heard' (Bourdieu 1991) in particular instances will vary depending on the audience. Julia, for example, is confident about the standard of her spoken English in the teaching context but still sometimes finds it problematic presenting her research to other academics:

[When teaching] if I don't pronounce something the way it is supposed to be pronounced and it's still understandable, I don't fuss about it. But sometimes, perhaps,

if I'm presenting a paper, and I'm using one of those multi-syllable words and put accent on the wrong syllable, that's when I get self-conscious.

Julia's awareness of the different audiences in her professional setting and the particular attention she pays to her linguistic performance in English when presenting her research to other academics confirms Bourdieu's contention that the conditions of reception, including who the receivers are, affect all verbal expressions. Realising that utterances are subject to evaluations by their receivers, individuals try to maximise the symbolic profit they are able to draw from their linguistic practices. Here, there exists a hierarchy of audiences corresponding to the power hierarchy within the academic field. Being judged by other academics as linguistically sophisticated and competent – also in a phonetic sense – in using academic terminology in English constitutes for non-native speakers an important aspect of success in performing the academic habitus, whereas the judgement of students, as less powerful receivers, is of lower significance. Therefore, amongst her native English speaking fellow academics, Julia sees her English pronunciation as a crucial element of her linguistic capital.

As Bourdieu (1991) argues, linguistic competence is gained within particular social contexts and through performance in those contexts. This means that, in practice, it is impossible to separate the proficiency in language usage from the competence in assessing and dealing with situations that require a particular way of using the language. How the social context in which language is used affects the individual's experience of their own position within that context is exemplified by Yvonne, a Lecturer:

I don't think there is a big problem with me writing in English, so that's fine.

Yes, sometimes, I do get the odd mistake, but I think everybody does, even

British people, in terms of grammar... But if you go to meetings at Faculty or

University level, then I usually find myself at first... sitting just listening, and I

don't feel like I want to speak up, or say anything. Sometimes if I comment on

anything, everybody will think, oh, that's a stupid comment. So I'd rather keep quiet. Even though I have been here 15 years but I still think this is not long enough... Oh, maybe somebody is saying, oh, this stupid woman, she didn't understand what we are saying. I feel I'm gonna be seen as stupid. And then I find somebody else saying the same comment, and then you realise it's not that stupid, to say it.

To Yvonne, then, her lack of confidence about her level of understanding of the English language spoken in meetings results in her not feeling entitled to speak her mind. In the context of a meeting at University level, where according to Yvonne, who is a non-native, non-white woman, other participants tend to be 'all white British men', her perception that she has not mastered the legitimate language spoken by the dominant majority makes her own potential contributions to meetings seem illegitimate to herself – hence, she opts out of offering her input. Bourdieu (1991, 55) explains how speakers who lack the expected level of competence in using the legitimate language in particular social domains are excluded or 'condemned to silence' in situations where such usage of language is required. While this does not mean that they lack the capacity to speak *per se*, in practice they do not participate in verbal exchanges with competent users of the legitimate language, and their practical relation to particular markets – such as, in Yvonne's case, her behaviour in Faculty- and University- level meetings is marked by a lack of confidence and a low sense of her 'own social worth' (Bourdieu 1991, 82). Also, the fact that Yvonne conflates her ability to follow what is spoken in meetings with the assessment of her intelligence shows how to individuals, their perceived linguistic capital actually influences their evaluation of their overall competence as academics. Yvonne's example also points to other embodied aspects that make up the habitus and which constitute markers of the norm, in this case nationality, race

and gender. The assertiveness with which a speaker can make him- or herself 'heard' is tied to social markers other than language. Tracy, also a Lecturer, explains how she felt after an appraisal meeting with her British line manager, who she said 'came from Cambridge':

I didn't understand what the guy was talking to me. I could understand his English, but there was a lot of coding behind what he was saying. I did not respond well to it...

When I came out of the meeting, I felt very upset. Because of more or less what he did, with his fantastic English... Language becomes a weapon. It's not any more a communication tool... I went there to ask him a question, to communicate a message, but he used the language to put me in my place. And he succeeded... But if I knew the code a bit better, I wouldn't have allowed him to do that.

For Tracy, the power relations in the meeting, apart from the formal positions of her and her manager, were constituted through an asymmetrical access to linguistic capital, to the 'code'. However, she also alludes to class through her reference to the manager having a Cambridge background, thus implying that there is also an unequal distribution of other aspects of cultural capital. Similarly, Simon gives an example of how language and class are mutually implied in establishing social hierarchies:

Students make fun of other students who clearly have working class or very regional accents... Those things catch me by surprise because I don't know the context for them. I've had a case, for example, where GTAs [Graduate Teaching Assistants] have been made fun of because they had a northern English accent. That means that there is a certain culture among undergraduates... which I hadn't really picked up on. In a way, I guess what I unknowingly rely on is being a foreigner and being outside of that system... I can't be classified in terms of their class system.

Reflecting on how he has become more ‘clued up’ regarding how class and language are mutually implicated, Simon makes the proposition that he, as a non-native speaker, evades classification according to established rules, thus potentially giving him more room for manoeuvre within the field. On the other hand, it also potentially denies him possibilities of playing the field as a full member of it.

Concluding discussion

In this paper we have contributed to the current debate about higher education as a social field by addressing the phenomenon of increased numbers of non-native English speaking academic staff at UK HEIs, particularly in business schools. Specifically, we have focussed on the importance of working in English as a second language. We have linked notions of linguistic proficiency in English to the performance of academic habitus and the accumulation of symbolic capital within the academic field. While we don’t claim that the issues highlighted by foreign academics are exclusive to this group, our findings demonstrate that there are qualitatively significant ways in which being a non-native English speaker can affect the accumulation of this capital.

Our findings suggest that, regardless of their country of origin, non-native English speaking academics see a difference between themselves and their native English speaking colleagues in terms of acquiring the appropriate habitus of a UK academic and accumulating symbolic capital within the UK HE system. While this is not always presented in negative terms, it certainly affects the process of successfully competing within the field, most notably through making it slower and more demanding. In order to cope with the linguistic demands of their professional settings, individuals make efforts to improve their level of English language proficiency, for example, through drawing on help from native English speakers, or through

monitoring and modifying the style and grammatical correctness of their English language expression.

Despite the various strategies used to improve their level of English language proficiency, for most non-native English speaking academics, their degree of ability to use English differs depending on the aspect of their work and the audiences they interact with. In this context, two features of becoming a 'player' within the UK academic field need to be highlighted.

First, it is an unevenly unfolding process, whereby it is possible, for example, to have a sense of a high level of competence as a lecturer, but a lower one as a researcher. Second, this acquisition of a credible academic habitus emerges in a relational manner, as socially constructed and negotiated by the individual in question and, for example, her students, managers, and other researchers in her area. In the case of those professional relationships where one does not consider oneself to be a sufficiently competent 'player', it is possible for non-native English speaking academics to develop a sense of inadequacy and intellectual inferiority compared with their native speaking colleagues.

The narratives of our participants also point to a positive side of the process of acquiring linguistic capital in UK academia. For example, the development of linguistic competence is accompanied by a growth in self-confidence, since the acquisition of linguistic capital is associated with the attainment of a certain level of professional seniority and status.

Interestingly, from the point of view of our research, those who feel that they have mastered the language are also those who have accomplished the most professionally. Arguably, their linguistic capital has enabled them to achieve academic success, but also perhaps professional progression and the accumulation of symbolic capital through promotion to a high position within the hierarchy of academic posts has allowed them to become confident about the fact that their level of English language competence is sufficient for them to build a successful career in UK academia.

While focusing on the language and its impact on the performance of academic habitus by non-native English speaking academics, we have been aware of the fact that both we as researchers and our research participants sometimes recognised the difficulty of disentangling the influence of language from other factors determining the individual's position in the social field of UK academia. Especially, in relationships with others – students, peer academics, superiors at the university – language is only one of the aspects which, along with, for example, gender, age, ethnicity and class play a role in how an individual is perceived by others. As one of the interviewees points out:

It's very difficult to simply create a distinction between the language and everything that comes with what you are supposedly representing as a member of [a given] culture... It isn't only the matter of language. (Dimitra, Senior Lecturer)

What further complexifies our research participants' understanding of their location within the academic field of UK business schools is the inseparability of their position within the professional context as determined by their qualifications from that within the labour market understood more broadly, whereby in addition to being non-native English speakers they are also transnational workers. While language has been the focus of our discussion throughout the paper, the interviews also provide evidence that individuals compare their position within UK academia with that of their native colleagues not only on the grounds of their linguistic competence, but also through referring to gender, race, class and aspects of appearance associated with religion, for example, wearing a hijab. As Bourdieu (1991, 89) points out, 'linguistic features [are] never clearly separated from the speaker's whole set of social properties (bodily hexis, physiognomy, cosmetics, clothing)'. Differences in linguistic performance, as manifested through accent, pronunciation and grammar used by particular speakers need to be understood as reflecting a whole range of social differences. As we have

discussed throughout the paper, language does, however, constitute a crucial aspect of successfully performing academic habitus and belonging to the academic field.

How, then – if at all – is the UK academic field changing as a result of the increased presence within it of non-UK born academics and, in particular, the fact of their professional functioning in English as a non-native language? As our study indicates, an obvious change that has taken place has been in the composition of the field's 'players'. With the increased employment of non-UK born academics, there has been a shift in British higher education towards becoming more nationally, ethnically, racially and linguistically diverse. In other words, the notion of who is allowed to occupy a place 'in the social space' (Bourdieu 1999, 82) of UK academia has become more accommodating. As such, notwithstanding our participants' claims that, compared to UK-born ones, it's difficult for foreign academics to accumulate the symbolic capital necessary to become a player within the field, our study shows that, especially at a junior level, the cultural capital of a non-UK born academic, as manifested primarily through qualifications, is sufficient for her or him to enter it. The boundaries of the UK academic field, therefore, should be seen nowadays as permeable and not nationally restricted, although depending on the region of origin stratifications are produced through for example visa regulations.

Nevertheless, despite the field's increasingly international composition, language remains an important factor of distinction, whereby a mastery of the dominant language constitutes a source of power within the field. Based on our findings, there is no evidence of an openness towards varieties of English in UK academia. The most powerful players, i.e. those with the highest amount of symbolic capital, are identified as proficient in a particular type of the English language, one that is associated with native speakers, who have been educated in prestigious British institutions, and whose expression isn't characterised by a regional accent. Hence, the 'norm' of which non-UK born academics are aware and to which they aspire if

they wish to progress, has not only strong national connotations but also class-related ones. As non-native speakers position themselves vis-à-vis this image of a homogeneous 'native English-speaking' norm, they contribute to reproducing extant power relations in the field, even if the boundaries of the field appear to be dissolving and the field itself is becoming more inclusive.

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