

## **Casting a ‘Sociological Eye’ over ESOL: The Quest for a Rupture with Scholarly Common Sense**

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This article offers an introductory discussion of how Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology is relevant for my research study based within a branch of adult English language teaching (ELT): English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in a UK setting. The main concern in the study will be to produce a thorough analysis of the social environment of ESOL in order to reveal how the “logic of practice” in that social space, or *field*, might impact on language learning. In addition, the analysis of the ESOL research context itself is seen as an integral and crucial part of the construction of the research object within ESOL. Using Bourdieusian relational concepts for the analysis, this article is intended to show that the pursuit of the necessary “sociological eye” via the “participant objectivation” of the academic research community in relation to the object of research is fundamental to the process of a rigorous construction of the research object.

### **1 Introduction**

The French social philosopher, Bourdieu, describes his understanding of reflexivity as a “sociology of sociology” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). He recognises that any research process is a product of particular epistemologies that have gained status over time within academic disciplines. It is thus necessary to question the acceptance of such a status, the presumptions about knowledge that an approach generates and the motivations behind the support for those epistemologies. Indeed, Bourdieu strongly criticises those academics who apply a narrow approach when conducting research and who consequently use only one method of data collection and analysis, even referring to them as “mono-maniacs” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 226). He argues that the language used to express an accepted view of knowledge must be deconstructed and analysed by the academic community as a way to understand the origins of particular epistemological approaches that have achieved acceptance within that community. In order to transcend the potentially false discipline-based boundaries of a particular academic field, Bourdieu argues that research methods should develop from a careful construction of the research object which in turn is dependent on achieving an epistemological rupture, or “new gaze” (Bourdieu

& Wacquant, 1992: 251) through his notion of reflexivity. The purpose of his conceptual tools as part of his Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1977) is therefore to help the academic community to analyse, and thus to break from, existing scientific traditions and language, in the process of constructing the object of the research.

This article offers an introductory discussion of how Bourdieu's conceptual tools for analysis might be relevant for my own area of research based within a branch of adult English language teaching (ELT), namely English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in a UK setting. Discussion will show that the main concern in my research project is to produce a thorough analysis of the social environment of ESOL and how the "logic of practice" in that social space, or *field*, might impact on language learning. Indeed, my emphasis on social context takes on a broader significance, as the analysis of the ESOL research context itself is seen as an integral part of the construction of the research object within ESOL. The strength of Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' lies in thinking relationally: "Seeing events in relation to people, organisations, time and place", and therefore understanding them "in terms of their location among a series of possible socially-positioned definitions and in relation to other definitions in use" (Grenfell 2008: 221).

Using Bourdieusian relational concepts for the analysis, this article is therefore intended to show how rigour without rigidity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 227) might be achieved in the research process, and that through the pursuit of the necessary "sociological eye" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 251), the hidden aspects of the every day "logic of practice" can be revealed. This paper will thus be organised as follows: The importance of reflexivity in research and the significance of Bourdieu's understanding of reflexivity will be considered first of all, followed by a descriptive explanation of Bourdieu's conceptual tools, before finally considering the construction of the research object and presenting a preliminary analysis of ESOL and ESOL research using Bourdieusian concepts.

## **2 The Importance of reflexivity**

It is inevitable that the research process - from the choice of topic to the design of the study to the interpretation and dissemination of the results - will be coloured by the researcher, who is, after all, the culmination of his/her lived experiences. In my view, this colouring cannot be ignored and the researcher must be acutely aware of what he/she is doing in the conduct of research and why. This seems particularly crucial when it comes to trying to understand human behaviour. As Woolgar and Ashmore state, "the production of social scientific knowledge about the world is itself a social activity" (Woolgar & Ashmore, 1988: 1). As our perceptions, thoughts and beliefs are bound up in our

every day practices, the meaning behind our own behaviour may well be hidden from our conscious selves while we nevertheless try to interpret the meaning behind the behaviour of others. As Bourdieu writes, "It is because we are implicated in the world that there is implicit content in what we think and say about it" (Bourdieu, 2000: 8).

Bourdieu's work has shown a consistent concern with how knowledge is produced and "whether, how, and to what extent a research process allows the subject of knowledge to grasp the object of his or her study in its essence" (Deer, 2008: 200). His understanding of reflexivity entails "objectifying the very conceptualisation and process of scientific objectification" (Deer, 2008: 200) in order to guard against the researcher failing to adequately take full account of the effects of his/her relation to the research object. The notion of reflexivity in Bourdieu's approach is therefore not something that is 'done' to the research but rather forms an essential part of the whole research process.

The premise for Bourdieu's reflexive sociology is the belief that social phenomena cannot be explained in isolation but need to be examined relationally in their social space. Thus as Thomson summarises:

According to Bourdieu, an analysis of social space meant **not only locating the object of investigation** in its specific historical and local/national/international and relational context, **but also interrogating the ways in which previous knowledge about the object under investigation had been generated**, by whom, and whose interests were served by those knowledge-generation practices. (2008: 67, italics in original; bold added for emphasis)

This means that the researcher deconstructs preconstructed scientific concepts, in order to allow for greater rigour in the construction of the research object in what Bourdieu calls the process of "participant objectivation" (please see for example, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 243- 244).

Bourdieu therefore criticises researchers who are under the illusion that by merely describing their feelings, he/she is able to reveal the full implication of his/her position in relation to the object of research. As Bourdieu states:

In order to free our thinking of the implicit, it is not sufficient to perform the return of thought onto itself that is commonly associated with the idea of reflexivity; and only the illusion of omnipotence of thought could lead one to believe that the most radical doubt is capable of suspending the presuppositions, linked to our various affiliations, memberships, implications, that we engage in our thoughts. (Bourdieu, 2000: 8)

The basis of this observation lies with Bourdieu's belief that personal experiences are not, in fact, unique but instead form part of social universals. As Wacquant states, "Bourdieu sees no need to make resounding private revelations to explain himself sociologically, for what happened to him is not singular: it is linked to a social trajectory" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 44). Therefore, Bourdieu's reflexivity does not take the form of "self-fascinated observation of the observer's writings and feelings", which results in researchers turning to talk "about themselves rather than about their object of research" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 72). Instead, he uses his conceptual tools to position himself as researcher in the academic field to which he belongs, and deconstructs the language and practices of that field in order to guard against what he calls the "scholastic fallacy" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 123). Bourdieu uses the notion of "scholastic fallacy" to refer to the mistaken idea that the academic community is somehow immune to the social conflicts and tensions within their social space that prevail in other social spaces across human society.

As Bourdieu argues, the scholastic view is, in fact, a peculiar point of view on "the social world, on language, on any possible object of thought" (1990: 381). It is characterised by a distancing from the world, which is actually only made possible by economic and social conditions that remove the "urgency of necessity" for members of the scientific community, giving them the freedom to undertake academic work (Bourdieu, 1990: 381). Consideration of how social positioning might impact on scientific work is key to potentially revealing socially constituted intellectual practices that would otherwise remain uncontested. Thus, without a reflexive sociology as understood by Bourdieu, there is a danger that philosophers, sociologists, historians and all other professions involved in thinking and speaking about the world will overlook "the presuppositions that are inscribed in the scholastic point of view" (Bourdieu, 1990: 381).

Bourdieu's "participant objectivation", which is integral to his notion of reflexivity, involves the application of his conceptual tools to the analysis of the research process and the scientific community in relation to the object of research, as well as to the construction of the research object itself. Section 3 will therefore describe these thinking tools in order to clarify his use of the principle terms, namely *field*, *habitus* and *capital*, before considering the construction of the research object in more detail in section 4.

### **3 Bourdieu's conceptual tools**

The type of analysis that Bourdieu advocates is a relational view of the world, where he uses the concepts of *field*, *habitus* and *capital* as an "inter-dependent and co-constructed trio...with none of them primary, dominant or causal" (Thomson, 2008: 69). Any field is a bounded and contested social space where

individual social agents compete for positions using their capital as bargaining tools to improve their status in the field. Each field has its own rules of conduct and measurements of what types of capital are most or least valuable in the perpetual competition for positions in the field. A useful equation to summarise the dialectical relationship of the trio is:

$$[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice (Bourdieu in Maton, 2008: 51)}$$

As Maton writes, “practice results from relations between one’s dispositions (habitus) and one’s position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field)” (2008: 51). Practices are thus shaped by the interrelationship of habitus, capital and field.

All three concepts find their meaning in relation to each other. This relational perspective is a way to overcome dichotomies such as the individual versus the social and subject versus object, by offering instead a dialectical analysis of the social environment. For example, habitus goes beyond the notion of the individual or a group of individuals sharing a social space in the sense that it rather refers to perceptions, thought and actions as they are both conditioned by and contribute to a field. According to his concepts, social reality exists in things and in the mind, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 127). Habitus is therefore best described as a subjective ‘disposition’ that is both structured by the objective conditions of the field as well as structuring practices and beliefs within the field. As Bourdieu writes, “[habitus] expresses first the *result of an organising action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates *a way of being, a habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*” (Bourdieu, 1977: 214).

Explaining the concept of field in more detail, a field may be defined as, “a network, a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 97). And these positions are:

Objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology etc.). (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 97)

As Grenfell points out, it is not surprising that the notion of a field as a network of dynamic forces means that the field is a site for struggle (2007: 55). There is a constant vying for positions within the field.

Bourdieu uses the analogy of a game to illustrate the interrelationship of his concepts. He describes players in a game as having 'stakes' in a game that are a product of the competition generated between players. These players have an 'investment' in the game when they concur that the game is worth playing, and have 'trump cards' that vary in value depending on the game in question. The value of trump cards changes according to the game being played, just as the hierarchy of capital varies across different fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 98). The rules of the 'game' constitute those practices that are seen as legitimate within the field, those practices that constitute the "logic of practice" or *doxa* of a field. These *doxa* of social actions are usefully summed up by Deer as follows:

*Doxa*...refers to the pre-reflexive, shared but unquestioned opinions and perceptions mediated by relatively autonomous social microcosms (fields) which determine 'natural' practices and attitudes via the internalised 'sense of limits' and habitus of the social agents of the field. (2008: 120)

It is therefore worth noting here that the notion of *doxa* as 'taken-for-granted assumptions' serves as a useful reminder of the importance of reflexivity in scientific endeavour, in order to reveal the hidden *doxa* of the scholastic field (Deer, 2008: 120), as well as those of the research object.

The character of a field is defined by the configuration of capital. For example, in some fields, economic capital might be seen as more valuable than cultural capital, yet in other fields it might be cultural capital that has a greater value (Grenfell, 2007: 60). The three main forms of capital are: economic, social and cultural. Moore suggests that capital can be put into two main groups to help clarify these concepts: economic and symbolic (2008). Economic capital is related directly to financial wealth, whereas symbolic capital includes the more abstract notions of social capital and cultural capital. Social capital, for example, is related to social network connections and institutionalised relationships, such as the connections that might be acquired in the workplace; cultural capital refers to cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences and scientific knowledge, and might include such 'trump cards' as educational background and qualifications gained. Symbolic capital can also be described as a type of capital that results from power that is perceived and accepted without question as part of what Bourdieu calls the 'misrecognition' of a naturalised yet arbitrary form of power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 119).

So far, discussion in this section has remained detached from my own research project, as clarification of terms is necessary, before possible applications of concepts can be explored. It is essential to note, however, that Bourdieu always intended his concepts to be used only as a device to help the researcher to understand the world, and the concepts are to be used first and

foremost empirically as a way of constructing the research object from the 'ground up'. His conceptual tools as part of his Theory of Practice are exactly that, part of a theory *of* practice (Grenfell & James, 1998), not to be abstractly used as a theory-bound framework removed from the everyday. Section 4 will now outline Bourdieu's three-part approach to the construction of the research object, before finally presenting a preliminary analysis of the field of ESOL and ESOL research in Bourdieusian terms.

## **4 The construction of the research object**

### **4.1 A three-part approach**

The main challenge in using a Bourdieusian approach (and the main strength!) is the closely intertwined relational nature of Bourdieu's conceptual framework wherein his conceptual tools develop the analysis of the research object, as well as developing the reflexive analysis of the research community in the research process. This means that the researcher is faced with the challenge of a research project that is not organised along clear sequential routes, but rather a project process that consists of closely interconnected components whose meaning is interdependent. The difficulty as researcher is then to design such a study and disseminate findings to others in a way that still demonstrates the integral nature of all the 'components' that form a comprehensive picture of a particular setting.

In order to help with this process, Bourdieu suggests that the research object can be rigorously constructed using a three-part approach. Bourdieu emphasises the importance of a rigorous construction of the research object: A process he believes is often neglected by scholars (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). However, this approach should not be seen as a linear activity: All three parts are rather to be viewed as "somehow co-terminus, they anticipate, assume, and acknowledge each other at one and the same time" (Grenfell, 2008: 227).

Bourdieu's aim in constructing the research object is to produce a relational topography of the object in order to break from the preconstructed, thus recognising the socially produced nature of the research object. It is through the construction of the research object that data collection methods are decided upon and may, as a result, include both quantitative and qualitative methods. It is therefore important to emphasise here that the construction of the research object is an on-going process within the research study. As Bourdieu states: "The programme of observation and analysis through which [the construction of the research object] is effected is not a blue-print that you draw up in advance, in the manner of an engineer. It is, rather, a protracted and exacting task that is accomplished little by little, through a series of small rectifications and amendments" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 228).

Bourdieu's three-part approach of constructing the research object is hence as follows:

1. To analyse the position of the field in relation to the field of power.
2. To map out the objective structure of relations between positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which the field is a site.
3. To analyse the *habitus* of agents; the systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a deterministic type of social and economic condition. (Grenfell, 2008)

As the rigorous construction of the research object via the relational topographical analysis suggested in his three-part approach is designed to break with the pre-constructed, it is essentially designed to make the everyday 'strange'. Bourdieu therefore encourages researchers to approach major objects, such as language, in an unexpected manner or to make socially insignificant objects into scientific objects, in order to help with the deconstruction and reconstruction process (Grenfell, 2008: 220). Bourdieu, for example, used "a very down-to-earth analysis" of certificates of illness to approach his study of the monopoly of the state over legitimised practices (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 221).

#### **4.2 ESOL in museums**

With reference to my own research, I have chosen to look at ESOL practices from a particular perspective. In order to better uncover the hidden *doxa* within the language education field of ESOL, I am exploring the recent involvement of museums in ESOL provision. By exploring the "logic of practice" that constitutes museum-based ESOL activities, I hope to highlight the social factors that influence both the policy and the delivery of language provision to immigrants in the UK.

The museum field is embedded with competitive practices to access funding from the field of power, namely government funding bodies, as well as other economic fields in industry. Understanding this dependency, particularly on the field of power (in this case the government), is crucial, as it highlights the possible motivations behind museums 'reaching out' to local communities with social inclusion programmes (including ESOL) in recent years. Government agendas have been focusing on education and 'social inclusion' since 1997 (Galloway & Stanley, 2004) and will therefore presumably be more likely to provide funding for museums whose programmes mirror their rhetoric. This, then, potentially flavours these social programmes, as museums are forced to comply with them in order to retain/enhance their positions in the museum field, yet possibly still perceive themselves ultimately as arbiters of cultural capital.



Indeed, my initial observations of the museum field have shown a possible area of tension between the way museum workers I have met speak about 'outreach' and ESOL as a totally natural part of museum life, in contrast to the intimate world of museums that is evident in, for example, the Museum Association Journal (Museum Association, 2008). Here, named individuals appear in the employment *Moves* section of the journal, giving the impression of a close-knit community where 'everyone knows everyone'. 'Outreach' and 'social inclusion' seem almost at odds with this 'in-group' identity.

These initial observations find resonance with Bourdieu's own work. Bourdieu himself argues as a result of his own research into the field of cultural production, that museums actually legitimate social and cultural *difference* whilst giving the illusion of equality, stating in reference to art museums in particular "that museums betray, in the smallest details of their morphology and organisation, their true function, which is to strengthen the feeling of belonging in some and the feeling of exclusion in others" (Bourdieu, 1993: 236). What processes of legitimation are evident in museum-based ESOL tasks? Davies suggests activities are useful for citizenship training (Davies, 2008: 43) – is the cultural knowledge production that is linked with this language provision therefore a way to affirm the value of certain cultural (and linguistic) capital, thereby also perpetuating the doxic practices of the ESOL field, museum field and the field of power – (in this case) the government?

Such questions with regards to museum-based ESOL activities are especially interesting due to the political nature of the ESOL field itself. ESOL in the UK is closely linked to the political issue of immigration, an issue high on the UK government agenda. As Rosenberg states, since the year 2000, ESOL has become an important government concern in connection with societal issues of social cohesion, identity and national security (Rosenberg, 2007: 261). This is reflected in government discourse: For example, the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills in January 2008 stated, "I believe good English language skills are critically important for life, work and social cohesion in this country" (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2008). Linking the notion of social cohesion to language learning is highly significant as it could suggest that those who fail to learn English are actually seen as responsible for social *in*cohesion. Clearly, a thorough investigation into the meaning and use of such concepts is necessary if the impact of these terms on language learning policy and practice is to be assessed.

To many it may seem to be a reasonable and common-sense demand that immigrants learn English when they come to the UK. However, this would suggest that for immigrants to learn English they simply need to show willing and make an effort. Public response to a perceived lack of effort on the part of immigrants to learn English can be seen in the media. For example, in a recent Sunday Times newspaper report, it was claimed that £50 million was being spent

on translators in the National Health Service, to help those immigrants unable to speak English to get health care in the UK (Watts, 2008). The ensuing readers' letters all reacted with strong indignation to the idea of wasting money in an area of public service already low on finances. One comment sums up the sentiments as follows: "Perhaps the do-gooders in this country should consider the wider implications and realise that by encouraging immigrants to learn English it would not only be to their advantage, but the health service could spend the money how it was intended - for healing people" (Dodd, 2008). The implication of this statement seems to be that somehow immigrants *need* encouragement to learn English and that without such encouragement they will take advantage of us and our services.

The idea that immigrants simply need to 'pull their socks up' and learn English is based, however, on the false assumption that everyone has equal access to language learning opportunities and that the process of language learning and use are themselves neutral activities. Bourdieu (1991) strongly criticises linguists such as Saussure for describing language in its idealised, standardised and abstract form and thus as "a self-contained system completely severed from its real uses and denuded from its practical and *political* function" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 141, emphasis in original). He argues that this perpetuates the myth that everyone has equal access to language as a 'universal treasure' and this therefore gives "the illusion of linguistic communism which haunts all linguistic theory" (Bourdieu, 1991: 43). The social nature of language means that, "speakers lacking the legitimate competence are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence" (Bourdieu, 1991: 55).

Norton (Norton, 2000; Norton Pierce, 1995) in fact draws on this idea to discuss the effects that learner perceptions of their 'right to speak' had on the language learning and language use of the ESL (English as a Second Language – the equivalent US and Canadian term for ESOL) students in her studies in Canada. She highlights the negative impact on language learning that a lack of opportunities to speak can have on learners: Opportunities dependent on gaining access to social networks. Grant and Wong (2008) also recognise the impact of social difference on language learning. They argue that differential treatment of immigrants according to gender, race and ethnicity results in inequality and thus could explain different outcomes for language learning and use. Indeed, Curry (2008) uses Bourdieu's conceptual framework to also trace the effects that previous educational experiences can have on learners in an ESL classroom in the United States. She found that differing previous educational experiences meant that learners were bringing different levels of cultural capital to the classroom. She uses the notion of cultural capital as institutional competence to explain how some learners could understand how to 'play the game' with regards to pedagogical practices that result in institutional success. Those with

less cultural capital took longer to understand the "logic of practice" of the classroom, and this in turn negatively impacted on their success in the college setting.

The study of teacher habitus in relation to the field, the capital teachers possess, their social trajectory and their assumptions about the "logic of practice" will also help to highlight factors that impact on language learning. For example, how might general assumptions about language learning and use impact on teachers' views of ESOL learners in their classrooms, and how might this further impact on language learning 'success'? Case studies of ESOL classrooms show that a significant number of teachers see the ESOL classroom as a safe haven away from the realities of everyday life and deliberately avoid topics that might upset learners, including topics such as 'family' (as they may be homesick or have lost loved ones, especially if they are asylum seekers) and 'shopping/money' (as learners are often poor and cannot afford consumer products) (Roberts, Baynham, Barton, & Pitt, 2004). In a sense, however, these teachers could simply be accused of policing what they deem to be socially and culturally acceptable for these adults. Indeed *not* equipping their learners for common topics used in everyday small talk interaction such as 'family', could be denying them the ability to access social networks in their neighbourhoods or in the workplace. Norton (2000) argues that our conceptions of immigrant language learners need to be rethought and she calls for more studies where immigrants are not seen as victims. There is no doubt that trauma has been suffered by a number of individuals in ESOL classrooms, but whether denying certain linguistic/cultural capital is beneficial for these individuals must be further explored.

Assumptions about language learning will also be evident in the materials available/made available for ESOL learners. In the related field of ESL research in the United States, Downey Bartlett (2005) argues that there are discrepancies between ESL books and the realities of workplace communication. In her study of coffee shop service counter interactions, she finds that the model dialogues in ESL textbooks are inadequate and do not meet learners' cultural communication needs at work. Holmes (2005), in the context of ESL in New Zealand, echoes these sentiments as she found that textbooks do not deal with the social small talk required in the workplace, yet finds that small talk is in fact crucial for successful interaction. Wallace's (2006) findings in the UK context concur with these studies of ESL materials. She criticises the 'safe texts' found in the textbooks used in UK ESOL classrooms as they represent an idealised and unrealistic world of English (Wallace, 2006).

Perhaps it is thus salient to consider the underlying logic that pertains to language learning goals in this context. Discussion so far potentially shows that a cultural and linguistic deficit model of ESOL education prevails in the UK. Immigrants are viewed as incomplete (until they learn English) and a strain on

resources, as well as a danger to the maintenance of cohesion in society. They must somehow be ‘encouraged’ to learn English but only the English we want them to learn and that we allow them to access via our chosen language learning materials and opportunities. As Auerbach states:

The day-to-day decisions that practitioners make inside the classroom both shape and are shaped by social order outside the classroom. Pedagogical choices about curriculum development, content, materials, classroom processes, and language use, although appearing to be informed by apolitical professional considerations are, in fact, inherently ideological in nature, with significant implications for learners’ socio-economic roles. (1995: 9)

What do museum-based resources reveal about beliefs with regards to language learning and culture? How might these resources contribute to the language acculturation of the learners?

The discussion so far has only offered a brief sojourn into my Bourdieusian research study and is intended merely to demonstrate how Bourdieu’s concepts can help our understanding of social contexts and uncover the hidden doxa of those spaces. Indeed, the reader will have noticed that Bourdieu’s three-part approach to a sociological analysis has only been lightly touched on through a consideration of the museum and ESOL fields in relation to the field of power, and a brief mention of habitus and capital in relationship to the fields in question. A detailed, fully relational analysis cannot begin until I am able to witness directly the fields in question and observe museum-based activities in action, in the true spirit of a Bourdieusian theory of *practice*. Nevertheless, the complexities of the social environment that constitute the research object have been highlighted and their impact on language learning implicated, and suggested questions for further investigation have been framed.

But what of the field of ESOL research? Concentrating on the UK ESOL research field for the purposes of this paper, it is interesting to note the small number of researchers involved in the published research reports. Six researchers seem to have the most involvement in a wide range of research publications (for example: Barton & Pitt, 2003; Baynham, 2006; Baynham, Roberts, & Cooke, 2007; Cooke, 2006, 2008; Cooke & Simpson, 2008; Pitt, 2005; Roberts, 2006a, 2006b; Roberts & Baynham, 2006; Roberts et al., 2004; Roberts, Cooke, Baynham, & Simpson, 2007). Two of these researchers, Cooke and Simpson, have just published a book for ESOL practitioners, using research drawn from the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) funded ESOL research projects from 2003 to 2007, as a basis for the contents of the book (Cooke & Simpson, 2008). In the book they reiterate the challenges of teaching ESOL, namely the diversity of the learners and the

political background to the teaching of ESOL. They use the term 'vocation' to describe the attitudes of teachers to ESOL work, stating that "many teachers have a well-developed political analysis of ESOL issues and express solidarity with their students, acting as advocates for them in their struggles outside the classroom" (2008: 40 - 41).

Therefore, worth investigating might be whether the "logic of practice" of the ESOL research field actually legitimates ESOL teachers as somehow 'other' to language teaching practitioners in general, thereby legitimating the position of ESOL teachers as something akin to social workers (a term actually used in the book (2008: 40)) rather than language 'professionals', thus placing them further to the periphery of the field of language teaching. Could it be that the lack of economic and social capital evident in the part-time nature of much of the work done by ESOL teachers (Cooke & Simpson, 2008: 40) is perpetually reproduced by rhetoric that actually reduces the power position these teachers could enjoy in the field of language teaching? The underlying sympathetic tone towards teachers and learners prevalent in such publications could, again, be legitimating social and cultural difference in Bourdieusian terms, rather than giving advantage to teachers and learners in their respective fields.

My position as researcher to the ESOL research field is as a total newcomer. I am not an ESOL practitioner and have not worked in the field of ESOL before. I am, however, a language teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) but have done so abroad, returning to the UK only last year after eight years out of the country. I am also a language teacher-turned-researcher and have not, in fact, taught language for a number of months now as I have taken on the role of researcher instead. How does this position me to the ESOL field of research? Clearly, I have an interest in language teaching and learning, and deliberately chose the ESOL context in which to conduct research due to the publicly contentious nature of this branch of teaching and learning English. However, I have no direct contact with the (small) cohort of researchers based at other universities. This means I carry little social capital in the ESOL research field, though on a wider scale, I do possess the necessary capital to be a member of an academic community at my own university.

My own social trajectory, possession of capital and teacher/researcher habitus has led to a pre-reflexive interest in the power relations that exist in the social spaces of teaching and learning. A thread that runs through much ESOL-related research is the call for a critical pedagogy to be introduced to the language classroom, where learners are encouraged to critically engage with texts as an act of empowerment (for an example, please see Cameron, 2002). This is a theme I would like to pursue in my own research as I now acknowledge a pre-reflexive instinct that questions the saliency of such an approach. My concerns are those echoed in the learner autonomy debates in applied linguistics literature, namely the danger of 'guiding' learners along ideologically Western

views of criticality (for an example discussion, please see: Pennycook, 1997). For example, ESOL literature already mentions the problems that a number of female ESOL learners face when they break with their own traditional cultural roles to attend class (Cooke & Simpson, 2008: 94). How might a critical pedagogy add to such cultural tensions? In practical terms, how would such activities be organised and who would choose the materials to ‘criticise’? How is the term ‘critical pedagogy’ being used by the research community?

These questions connect directly to my research project. Museums involved in museum-based ESOL activities seem to be aware of the potential dangers of enforcing particular cultural values. This sentiment can be seen in how activities are advertised in the museum field, i.e. as activities that involve the *critical* engagement with museums as institutions and their artefacts. For example, the pre-visit ESOL materials for the Victoria and Albert Museum in London includes the following question: “Should ‘Western’ museums return the valuable objects they have taken from other countries?” (David, 2006: 7). Therefore, the investigation and relational analysis of museum-based ESOL activities could eventually contribute to critical pedagogy debates, as I hope to reveal the “logic of practice” that underlies this aspect of ESOL provision and research.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to present the beginnings of a research study that aims to integrate a reflexive sociology along Bourdieusian lines. Bourdieusian concepts were explained to show the relational approach to research advocated in such an enquiry. Data collection methods have not been explicitly discussed, as the methods will form part of the on-going research process and were not within the scope of discussion in this article. The importance of a rigorous construction of the research object has nevertheless been highlighted, and such a construction therefore inevitably must also include the reflexive analysis of the research field in relation to the research object, in order to break with the presuppositions that exist in “scholarly common sense” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 247). Bourdieu does admit, however, that the process of “participant objectivation” that constitutes a reflexive sociology is “no doubt the most difficult exercise of all because it requires a break with the deepest and most unconscious adherences and adhesions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 253). Clearly, then, there is *much* more reflexive work to be done, with a need also to undertake a thorough analysis of the Bourdieusian framework itself. In a sense, therefore, my research journey will need to include an analysis of the analysis in terms of the Bourdieusian reflexivity outlined in this paper, with yet another layer of analysis pertaining to *that* analysis. I nevertheless see the “difficult exercise” ahead as a crucial one that is integral to the conducting of, in this case, educational research. As Bourdieu himself points out:

There is no risk of overestimating difficulty and dangers when it comes to thinking the social world. The force of the preconstructed resides in the fact that, being inscribed both in things and in minds, it presents itself under the cloak of the self-evident which goes unnoticed because it is by definition taken for granted. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 251)

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