



**A critical hermeneutic phenomenology of adult migrant language learners' experience of social class in London: struggles for value and values and the potential transformative impact of the language classroom**

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## Abstract

Using critical hermeneutic phenomenology, this study investigated adult migrant language learners' experience of social class and their struggles for value and values in London. Data were collected from eight participants from diverse backgrounds and migratory trajectories in the form of written lived experience descriptions and phenomenological interviews.

In order to capture some of the more subtle processes of inclusion and exclusion, power struggles and inequalities of different kinds, this study employs a Bourdieusian approach to social class. The role language plays in these processes as a marker of distinction that forms and shapes class positions and relations is of particular interest. To supplement Bourdieu's framework, the study also draws on Skeggs' model of person value, which adds a dimension of social values. This facilitates a better understanding of the social class experiences of adult migrant language learners, whose lived realities are often marked by a loss in value of their capitals and/or linguistic 'lack' and 'deficiency' and who are thus living the condition of devaluation.

This study finds that social class, migratory experiences and SLA are thoroughly intertwined. The research highlights the potential transformative impact of the language classroom as a site where learners not only have the chance to accrue value, for example, in the form of validated cultural capital and bridging social capital, but where experiences of devaluation can be counteracted, thus increasing learners' agency. An understanding of the social class dimension of language learner's experiences calls for a critical, nuanced, and 'class' sensitive pedagogy to meet the needs of a diverse student body. It would thus also allow for a more socio-politically oriented field of SLA equipped to engage with the realities of a 21<sup>st</sup> century globalized world.

*Keywords:*

critical hermeneutic phenomenology, social class, language learning, adult migrants

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### *Data Transcription Conventions*

The following conventions were used for the transcription of data extracts from audio-taped interviews:

... a pause in the flow of speech

[...] an omission of text

\_\_\_\_\_ indicates stress or emphasis

{xxx} unintelligible utterance

(( )) transcriber's comments, not transcriptions

## Preface

‘Charles Dickens: Writer and Campaigner’ was the title of a lesson in the new course book that we had started to use in the Adult ESOL class I was co-tutoring a couple of years ago. Charles Dickens was introduced to students as the greatest writer in the Victorian era and his works as providing a social commentary of the time, not holding back with critique of the attitudes that were common among the middle classes. It was a video lesson portraying how his experience of his family’s extreme downward mobility in his childhood influenced his work as a writer and social activist and I expected it to be quite interesting for my students. However, I did not expect to what extent they engaged and how this opened up possibilities to give them a voice, particularly when we discussed the potential relevance of his work today. By the end of the lesson, I had witnessed lively and very honest discussions of students sharing their own experiences, struggles, and often difficult and ambivalent situations. On the board was a plethora of new vocabulary, such as stratification, social activism, social class, upward/downward mobility, social justice, equality/inequality, human rights, exclusion, self-worth, dignity, respect, etc. Students actively voiced their appreciation for this opportunity to share their experiences and discuss critical issues that were so prevalent in their lives. Many came to me to express how empowered they felt before heading to the library to borrow a Charles Dickens graded reader. As a practitioner, this experience was eye-opening in many ways and made me re-think my practices and re-evaluate my own stance and beliefs. As an academic and researcher, I was once again made aware of the potential significance of including a social class dimension when conceptualizing second language acquisition. Embarking upon this project now a few years later had me go back to this lesson several times in my mind and many of the issues raised by my students during the lesson back then (and in many subsequent lessons and discussions) are reflected in this research.

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

The field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has witnessed a growing interest in investigating second language learning as a social process. However, within this development social class has for a long time remained an under-researched topic and only recently attracted more scholarly attention. A social class perspective is increasingly seen as offering crucial insights when investigating learners' social actions on the one hand, and critically exploring the role social structure plays in second language learning processes, on the other hand (Block, 2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2015; Collins, 2006; Vandrick, 2014).

### **1.1 Research focus and aim**

This study seeks to contribute to the literature in this area by looking at adult migrant language learners' experience of social class – a pressing concern, particularly in a time when neoliberal forces of globalization produce an ever growing flux of migration<sup>1</sup> whilst increasing stratification, social inequality, and unequal power relations. How these complex dynamics are at play can be particularly well seen in London, with its global status and super-diverse reality, which this study argues is in turn reflected in the diversity of adult migrant language learners' experiences and in language classrooms. In order to be fit for the demands of current challenges, the field of SLA has to be able to account for these complexities. Hence, this study has potential to open avenues for a more socio-politically oriented SLA pedagogy equipped to engage with the realities of a 21<sup>st</sup> century globalized world.

To gain an understanding of the social mechanisms at play when learners not only cross geographical borders but also traverse social space, this study employs Bourdieu's framework (1977; 1984; 1987; 1989), focusing on his key concepts of *habitus*, *field*, and *capital* and their

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<sup>1</sup> International migration is generally defined as 'the movement of people across borders, both by choice and under economic and political forces, which involves stays of over one year' (Jordan and Düvell, 2003, p. 5). Global migration has continually been on the rise. Approximately 244 million international migrants were living in the world in 2015 (United Nations, 2015).

interlocking nature in the transnational sphere<sup>2</sup>. His model of class is based on the ability of social agents to accrue different forms of capitals which determines their position and possibility for movement through social space. By emphasizing social hierarchies and power differentials among different agents/resources/networks/groups as well as their exclusionary aspects, his dynamic and relational framework yields fruitful in capturing some of the more subtle processes of inclusion and exclusion (Cederberg, 2012), and inequalities of different kinds, e.g. how social agents get to occupy dominant/dominated positions. As this study looks at adult migrant language learners, the role language plays in these processes as a marker of distinction that forms and shapes class positions and relations is of particular interest. The focus of this study is thus the intersection between adult migration, social class and second language learning.

Although useful, Bourdieu's framework, with its emphasis on exchange and accrual of value in the form of different types of capital, is limited in providing explanatory power for the experiences and nuanced practices of those who are restrained by structural barriers from doing so. As a result, they do not operate from a dominant position and are living the condition of devaluation. This study argues that this is the case in the adult migrant language learner experience, which is often marked by a loss in value of their capitals and/or linguistic 'lack' and 'deficiency'. This research therefore also draws on Skeggs' model of person value (1997; 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2014) to understand the experiences of adult migrant language learners. Her gaze uses Bourdieu's model as a starting point but also includes a dimension of use or social values to account for the experiences of those who have been forced to inhabit social relations differently, making it possible to consider both exchange value and social values.

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<sup>2</sup> It is generally assumed that migrants maintain a wide range of affective and instrumental relations spanning borders (e.g. familial, economic, social, religious) and as such operate in transnational spaces, that is in 'social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement' (Basch *et.al.*, 1994, p. 27).

The study contends that in order to be able to meet the needs of a diverse student body, an understanding of the social class dimension of adult migrants' language learning experiences is crucial and highlights the potential transformative role of language classrooms in counteracting inequalities and negative affect and increasing learners' agency. To this end, a more critical, nuanced, and 'class' sensitive pedagogy is required.

## **1.2 Research context**

London, which provided the context and setting for this research, attracts a large number of different types of migrants. This is to a large part due to its rise to global-city status propelled by global neo-liberal economic management which has continuously created both the desire and necessity for people to migrate (Wills *et.al.*, 2010). On the one hand, there are 'privileged citizens', mainly professionals and investors brought by transnational corporations or drawn by the career opportunities the service industries in these cities afford them. On the other hand, the presence of these privileged citizens also requires and attracts less skilled and other service-giving people, such as waitresses, chauffeurs, cleaners, etc. in order to make sure that all the demands of the global city are met (*ibid.*; Getahun, 2012). Regarding this research, the fact that these complex developments have led to increased stratification, new patterns of inequality, prejudice, segregation, and class divisions is of relevance as they are reflected in the lived realities of adult migrant language learners and in language classrooms.

## **1.3 Research questions**

This study was driven by a strong interest in the lived experience of adult migrant language learners, particularly in providing a rich and in-depth description of their experience of social class. The following questions guided the inquiry:

RQ1: How do adult migrant learners experience existing stratified settings and classed processes?

RQ2: How do these impact on their perception of their place in the wider social context and their sense of self?

RQ3: What role do language, linguistic capital, and instructed settings play in these experiences?

In order to answer these questions, a dynamic interplay between the lived experience of adult migrant language learners and theory to help make sense of these experiences within the wider socio-political and socio-cultural context was sought. To this end, critical hermeneutic phenomenology, which starts from the lived experience to generate or inductively develop a pattern of meaning, was chosen as a strategy of inquiry. This was deemed to be the most appropriate, taking into consideration both the research interest and intent as well as the limited time frame. As such, the research was not theory driven in the sense of setting out to support an *a priori* theory or to coerce phenomena into categories that conform to the theory (Polkinghorne, 1989). However, existing theory was used to provide a critical framework to reflect upon the lived experience at the later stages of data analysis and to make suggestions as to how the reported experiences can inform our understanding of learning as well as SLA pedagogy, practice and theory building.

#### **1.4 Thesis outline**

This thesis will firstly conceptualize social class by introducing Bourdieu's theory of practice and his approach to social class. This is followed by an examination of social class in the transnational migration experience, teasing out crucial aspects of transnational social positioning and mobility, as well as internal struggles inherent to these dynamics, migrants'

strategies and self-organizational skills, and the role of language and language learning. In order to be better able to account for the lived realities of adult migrant language learners, Skeggs' extension to Bourdieu's work on person-value will be briefly sketched out. This adds a dimension of social values to the exchange value prevalent in Bourdieu's framework. Chapter four will introduce the methodology. The findings will be presented and discussed in chapters five and six respectively before finishing with concluding remarks in chapter seven revisiting the research questions and discussing implications of the study for the field of SLA.

## **Chapter 2 The concept of social class from a Bourdieusian perspective**

*'Analysis of class should therefore aim to capture the ambiguity produced through struggle and fuzzy boundaries, rather than to fix it in place in order to measure and to know it. Class formation is dynamic, produced through conflict and fought out at the level of the symbolic. To ignore this is to work uncritically with the categories produced through this struggle, which always (because it is struggle) exist in the interests of power. Class (as a concept, classification and positioning) must always be the site of continual struggle and re-figuring precisely because it represents the interests of particular groups' (Skeggs, 2004a, p. 5).*

Social class can be conceptualized and operationalized in different ways. As this project's interest lies in the subjective experience of class as opposed to objective measures of for example one's relation to the means of production, it uses Bourdieu's dynamic and relational perspective. Key elements of his theory are his three main interlocking 'thinking tools' *habitus*, *field*, and *capital*. After a brief introduction to his approach to social class, these elements will be looked at in more detail and particular attention will be paid to the notion of linguistic capital, given the fact that language plays a crucial role in the context of this research.

### *Bourdieu's approach to social class*

In his approach to social class, Bourdieu asserts that all agents within a particular society have an objective position in social space as a consequence of their capital portfolio - a particular amount or volume of capital with a particular composition. Individuals who share a similar position in social space also share, because of this, many of the same conditions of work, lifestyles, dispositions, and outlooks. Their proximity in social space tends to generate a degree of interpersonal proximity which, in turn, results in certain types of group (class) formation, e.g. they are more likely to live and socialize in the same places. As such, the location in social space shapes an individual's experiences, life chances, giving rise to a tacit 'sense of place', that is class *habitus* (Crossley, 2014). Social agents meet the possibilities for changing their class position in the sense of upward social mobility by increasing their overall

value through acquisition, conversion, and accrual of different forms of capitals as they move through social spaces. If their capital portfolio decreases in value, they are prone to experience downward social mobility. As such, Bourdieu's linking of the objective structure and the subjective experience and his metaphoric model of social space 'in which human beings embody and carry with them the volumes and compositions of different capitals [...] makes it possible to develop a clear approach to different types of values and mobility' (Skeggs, 2004b, p. 21).

### Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' in detail - habitus, field, and capital

Asking how social structure and individual agency can be reconciled, how the 'outer' social and 'inner' self shape each other and how social facts become internalized, Bourdieu introduces the concept of *habitus*. Habitus is 'a socialized subjectivity' and 'the social embodied' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127f). Bourdieu defines habitus as a property of social agents that comprises a 'structured and structuring structure' (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 170). This 'structure' encompasses systems of dispositions which generate and organize perceptions, appreciations and practices (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). The term habitus refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences. It is 'how individuals embody, in the form of dispositions, the marks of social position and social distance' (Skeggs, 2004c, p. 84).

A second key concept is *field*. Bourdieu understood the social world as being divided up into a variety of distinct arenas or 'fields' of practice, e.g. art, education, religion, law, etc., each with their own unique set of rules, knowledges, and forms of capital (Thomson, 2014). Field is the social space in which interactions, transactions and events occur. It 'contains people who dominate and people who are dominated [and] constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space (Bourdieu 1998, p. 40). Each social field of practice



(including society as a whole) can be interpreted as a competitive game or ‘field of struggles’ with its own distinctive ‘logic of practice’ in which social agents strategically act in their pursuit to maintain or improve their position. ‘At stake in the field is the accumulation of capitals: they are both the process within, and product of, a field’ (Thomson, 2014, p. 69).

For Bourdieu the relationship between habitus and field is central. When the structuring of the habitus does not match that of the social field it comes to a field-habitus clash or mismatch, a disjuncture, e.g. in a social situation where a person feels awkward or out of their element, like a ‘fish out of water’, what Bourdieu calls the ‘hysteresis effect’ (1977). That person may decide not to go asserting that it is ‘not for the likes of me’, or (if there already) find an excuse and leave. Conversely, in situations when the habitus matches the logic of the field and a person is attuned to the unwritten ‘rules of the game’, the underlying practices within that field, they feel comfortable, at ease, like a ‘fish in water’ (Maton, 2014). ‘The habitus as the feel for the game’, Bourdieu argues, ‘is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature’ (1994, p. 63). When playing the game, language plays a crucial role, it is deployed according to function and situation in form of a linguistic habitus (Grenfell, 2012).

The third key concept is *capital*, which forms the foundation of social life and dictates one’s position within the social order - the more capital one has, the more powerful a position one occupies in social life. Bourdieu (1986) extends the concept of capital into the more symbolic realm of culture and nominates four forms: economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. Economic capital includes economic resources such as cash, credit, and other material assets. Social capital includes resources one achieves based on group membership, networks of influence, relationships and support from other people. Cultural capital is any advantage a person has that gives them a higher status in society, such as education, skills, tastes, posture,

clothing, mannerisms, credentials, etc. that one acquires through being part of a particular social class. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital comes in three forms - embodied (long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body, e.g. an accent), objectified (in the form of cultural goods, e.g. a luxury car or record collection), and institutionalized (e.g. credentials and qualifications such as degrees or titles symbolizing cultural competence and authority). Once different types of capital are recognized as legitimate they take the form of symbolic capital, that means they carry high exchange value and are ascribed symbolic power. Before different forms of capital can be capitalized upon, e.g. in the sense of securing advantage, privilege, access, etc, they have to be considered legitimate. However, what is important to note is that capitals are context specific (Skeggs, 1997) which means that if the context changes, their value and weight will be reassessed (i.e. in the process of transnational migration). The different types of capital are interconnected, as one form can be transformed into another. Together, these various forms of capital constitute advantage and disadvantage in society in the sense of determining one's class position (Moore, 2014).

Sharing similar forms of cultural capital with others creates a sense of collective identity and group position ('people like us') but it is also a major source of social inequality. Certain forms of cultural capital are valued over others, and can help or hinder one's social mobility just as much as income or wealth. Bourdieu (1984) argues that cultural and educational institutions 'reproduce culturally' social class inequalities through the 'symbolic violence' of imposing the dominant culture, e.g. what the dominant classes label as the most valued cultural capital (symbolic capital), on those who are outside the dominant symbolic. As such, education plays an important role in Bourdieu's view (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), which needs to be borne in mind in the context of this research when assessing the role educational settings play in the adult migrant learners' experience of social class.

### Linguistic capital

Linguistic capital is a form of embodied cultural capital defined at the level of the individual (Bourdieu, 1977). This denotes the process by which prestigious accents or dialects and ways of speaking can lend more credibility or legitimacy to its speaker e.g. the ‘legitimate language’. For Bourdieu, language is of central importance regarding symbolic power as he sees it as ‘one attribute that is especially important in marking ‘distinction’ across all formal social spaces’ (Puwar, 2004, p. 111). On a national level, the acquisition of the ‘national language’ or ‘state language’ is thus absolutely key as it becomes ‘the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 45). De Swaan (2001) extends this rationale from the individual level within a language to the level of assessing the position of entire languages in the global economy by assessing their ‘Q-value’, their communicative value, e.g. a global language like English has high Q-value as it is spoken by so many people and carries economic benefit. Thus it also carries high symbolic power internationally. The notion of linguistic capital on the individual as well as international level will be key for providing explanatory power to shed light on the transnational experience of migrant language learners in this research as it helps to understand hierarchies and struggles on the linguistic level.

### Conceptualization of social class

Drawing on Bourdieu’s theoretical approach, this study thus conceptualises social class subjectively, relationally and dynamically. Going well beyond outward manifestations of social class such as occupation to include field-habitus disjuncture, social hierarchies and power differentials, as well as struggles over various forms of capitals, and symbolic violence, his approach facilitates a more profound understanding of the lived experiences of the participants.

### **Chapter 3 Social class and the transnational migrant experience**

*'To immigrate means to immigrate together with one's history (immigrations itself being an integral part of that history), with one's traditions, ways of living, feeling, acting and thinking, with one's language, one's religion and all the other social, political and mental structures of one's society – structures characteristic of the individual and also of society, since the former is no more than the embodiment of the latter – or, in a word, with one's culture.'* (Sayad, 2004, pp. 3-4).

Migration denotes far more than a crossing of geographical borders. It also means the transition between societies or social fields with inherent subfields facilitating wide ranging transmissions and transformations in social, economic, and cultural terms. Recently, Bourdieu's theory has been increasingly used for researching transnational migrants and social fields. Looking at cultural processes and the reproduction of class positions in transnational migration shows that 'the field of the possibles' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 110) is always limited by structures, dispositions (habitus) and capital (Oliver and O'Reilly, 2010). This section will firstly look at these aspects in order to gain a better understanding of adult migrant language learners' experience of social class, in terms of possibilities and limitations for social positioning and social mobility, teasing out the accompanying struggles, internal and external conflicts, as well as possible counter-acting strategies. The role of language as a marker of distinction and language learning will then be examined in order to gain a better understanding of the struggles for cultural linguistic/symbolic capital. Finally, Skeggs' person value model will be introduced. This framework specifically focuses on people outside the dominant symbolic who experience devaluation and exclusion. As such, it helps to shed light on the experiences of migrant language learners and specifically how their experience of classed processes impacts their perceptions of their place in the wider social context and their sense of self.

### **3.1 Transnational fields and habitus**

Undoubtedly, migration accelerates thoroughgoing changes of one's self, it raises considerations that reach beyond who one is and includes questioning where one fits and what present and future positions and roles are possible within the new society (Gold and Nawyn, 2012). However, within the transnational migration experience, new patterns of inequality, prejudice, and segregation arise which confront migrants with structural barriers (Anthias, 2012). It is characterized by different social hierarchies, on the one hand within the migrant population itself which is a hierarchy of nationalities, whilst on the other hand migrants are also in a social hierarchy in the society in the country of settlement as a whole in relation to the native population (Sayad, 2004). These stratifications and hierarchies mediate the complex process of migrants' transnational positioning (Anthias, 2012). To this end, the opportunities migrants can forge for themselves in transnational spaces and local settings like London and the way structural barriers play out in their lived realities differ greatly on the individual level. As a result, they often occupy irregular spaces and segmented positions.

As migrants are challenged to negotiate and adjust ingrained life scripts whilst navigating their complex migratory processes, their sense of self is put on the line. They are forced to 'reconstruct and redefine themselves, both for their own sense of ontological security (Giddens, 1991) and the positions ascribed to them by others in their new surroundings' (Block, 2014a, p. 91). However, the quest for ontological security is in reality often met by insecurity that unequal relations produce (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012) resulting in internal struggles over redefining who one is and where one belongs. In Bourdieu's theory, instead of a model of the self, the habitus is proposed as an 'internal organizing mechanism which learns, as a result of social positioning, how to play the game' (Skeggs, 2004a, p. 145). In the transnational field, the question of habitus adjustment is a key consideration. To what extent this is experienced as a smooth process or whether a field/habitus disjuncture occurs impacts

on migrants' ability to exercise agency. This can lead to different outcomes and influence the way migrant language learners perceive their place, their class position, in the wider social context. This study aims to achieve a deeper understanding of these issues by exploring the lived experiences of adult migrant language learners. Their narratives shed light on how their migrations have impacted their social position and feel for the game as well as how this has in turn affected their sense of self. A further important aspect of this relates to the question of transnational capital validation, particularly institutionalized forms of cultural capital which will be examined in the context of social mobility in the next section.

### **3.2 Social mobility and the struggle of validating capital**

Social mobility describes the movement or opportunities for movement between different social groups and class positions. There are many disadvantages and structural barriers migrants are prone to experiencing in terms of establishing a position in society, particularly in highly stratified and unequal settings like London. To this end, migrants are often faced with initial downward mobility and for example carrying out low-skilled work for a much lower salary. With upward social mobility, however, they can counter-act this dynamic and gain social and economic benefits.

A key reason for downward social mobility is the loss of value of cultural capital. One example of this is the fact that many times migrants' prior degrees are not recognized or the occupational systems in their countries of origin and settlement are not compatible. In order to be able to work in their professions, migrants are often required to undergo additional training and/or exams to have their professions re-accredited (Eich-Krohm, 2012). As this can entail considerable money, time, pressure and is often linked to high scores in gate-keeping language exams (for example IELTS), many migrants never work in their professions again. There has been a growing recognition of the importance of accounting for transfer and

validation of cultural capital within transnational arenas of practice (Erel, 2010; Nohl *et.al.*, 2006). The role of the loss of cultural capital, in particular the invalidation of institutionalized capital, in the way that migrants experience social class, will be further examined through the concrete experiences of the participants. In order to negotiate access and to validate one's cultural capitals (or as a result of exclusion) migrants employ various strategies and skills, as will be discussed further below.

### **3.3 Social capital as a resource? Migrants' strategies and self-organizational skills**

Trying to counteract barriers, to be better equipped for struggles of various kinds and to create opportunities to exercise agency when settling and integrating in their new surroundings, migrants often employ their 'self-organizational skills' (Nohl *et. al.*, 2006). One key strategy is to engage in migrant communities in the country of settlement, i.e. in co-ethnic social networks or communities. These provide a space with a sense of community and security for its members in the sense of 'bonding social capital' within their close-knit groups (Gilchrist, 2004, p. 6), giving them an opportunity to reproduce their cultural and linguistic heritage and capital (Cederberg, 2012). As such they can play an important part in counteracting a field/habitus disjuncture within the country of settlement as they can provide a field where migrants feel like 'a fish in water' due to the habitual similarities within them (*ibid.*).

In addition, migrant communities provide practical and emotional support as well as access to social information and to further networks and opportunities (e.g. employment) with the aim of facilitating social mobility (*ibid.*). As such, they can play a crucial role in terms of accruing and accessing 'bridging and linking social capital' by reaching resources outside their normal circles (Gilchrist, 2004, p. 6) and the possibility of converting these resources into other resources or capitals with the effect of securing advantage or overcoming

disadvantage. However, Cederberg (2012) points out that it is important to consider how these co-ethnic communities are located in the wider social context and in relation to other social networks and critically raises the issue of the ‘isolating effects co-ethnic engagement may entail’ (p. 63) in the migrant experience. This is of importance to bear in mind when theorizing about the experience of migrant language learners who are often dependent on co-ethnic ties, particularly due to a lack of the ‘right’ linguistic cultural capital, which they experience as hindering them in their ability to exercise agency, claim legitimate membership and forge a desirable position in the society of settlement. It can also offer insights when theorizing about the potential role instructed settings play for adult migrant language learners in terms of providing bridging and linking social capital. As such, migrant language learners’ engagement with and experiences within these collectives are relevant when trying to understand their experience of social class processes in the wider social context.

### **3.4 Language and language learning – struggles for symbolic capital**

Language is a basic element for participation and integration in new social spaces and as such for how migrants experience social class and furthermore plays a crucial role in terms of social mobility. Research has shown that both English proficiency and the ability to learn it quickly are of prime importance in the transfer of existing human capital and also boost success in the labour market. The ‘right’ linguistic competence is a key factor that accounts for migrants’ disparities in terms of educational attainment, earnings, and social outcomes in terms of social positioning, e.g. whether they experience inclusion or exclusion in various social fields in their new surroundings (Adsera and Pytlikova, 2012). Language as symbolic power is of prime importance in the experience of struggling for a desired social position in the society of settlement and, as a key marker of distinction, forms and shapes class positions and relations. However, many migrants experience a language barrier due to insufficient



linguistic skills, e.g. their diminished ability to articulate the ‘legitimate language’. This language barrier often reinforces the structural barriers they are confronted with in the society of settlement as discussed above. Migrants ‘thus acutely feel the weight of their “language problem” in everyday life and work’ as they face the challenge of learning the dominant or legitimate language of their new society, ‘to make a living and make a life for themselves and the ones they support’ (Han, 2014, p. 222).

To overcome their “language problem” and to acquire new linguistic competencies in order to be better equipped for the symbolic struggles they are confronted with, many adult migrants find themselves as language learners in a variety of settings and contexts. Some in order to improve their general communication and language skills, others to gain specific skills or improve in a particular area, such as Business English, and others because they need to gain accredited language certificates for study or work purposes, to get previously attained qualifications validated (institutionalized cultural capital), or to be able to take on British citizenship. This has led to an array of language teaching provision catering for a diverse student body with different needs reflecting the diverse and stratified nature of the global and local realities as discussed above. Given the fact that language plays such a crucial role in the experience of social class position and social mobility, language learning denotes an integral part in influencing the social trajectories of adult migrant language learners. A particular focus on migrant language learners can be found in Darvin and Norton’s work (2014). Drawing on Bourdieu’s troika of field, capital, and habitus, their comparative account of the language and literacy practices of two 16-year-old Filipino migrants of contrasting social and economic backgrounds - Ayrton who is from an affluent and privileged family and John who is in a marginalized position – shows how social class is inscribed in their different social and learning trajectories offering them different (i.e. unequal) opportunities. The study highlights the key role language plays in marking distinction as in the case of Ayrton or deficit as in the

case of John and how this fosters or impedes their negotiation of social class, and as Darwin and Norton assert, in becoming entrepreneurs of themselves.

This study can be seen as following along a similar line. However, the distinct setting that London provides with its own distinctive logic of practice facilitates the construction of a more nuanced and dynamic account of the mechanisms and powers at play in social class processes within a diverse adult migrant language learner population. On the one hand, this can be seen in regards to the validation and recognition of different types of capital and thus social mobility. On the other hand, this can also be seen regarding adult migrant language learners' ability to successfully play the game or the possible occurrence of a field/habitus disjuncture with its struggles and inclusionary/exclusionary effects. This study will also address the notion of social capital as part of a potential solution for adult migrant language learners in helping to overcome these issues. These complex processes decide whether adult migrant language learners can secure advantage or overcome disadvantage in their social and symbolic struggles and how they experience their class position in the wider social context.

Furthermore, this study also seeks to go beyond the logic of capital prevalent in Bourdieu's framework by not only conceptualizing learners as 'entrepreneurs of themselves'. As such, it seeks to be better able to engage with the realities of migrants, who often find themselves struggling to accrue or exchange value, whose experience is marked by various disadvantages and deficits including a linguistic deficit and who are thus exposed to struggles and inequalities of different kinds (as can be seen in the example of John in Darwin and Norton's study). It is for this reason that Skeggs' person value model, which will be introduced briefly in the following section, is applicable, particularly when looking at what the language classroom can mean for adult migrant language learners confronted with the issues outlined in this chapter.

### **3.5 Skeggs' person-value concept**

Skeggs contends that Bourdieu's model, with its emphasis on exchange, accrual and interest, ignores a significant amount of social life. 'Values such as altruism, integrity, loyalty and investment in others are all missing [...] the use-values that we have in everyday life are of minimal value to Bourdieu's analysis', but 'these non-accumulative, non-convertible values are central to social reproduction' (Skeggs, 2004b, p. 28f). In her view, Bourdieu's analysis is useful in particular to understand how the dominant symbolic operates and is put into perspective, how interests are protected and pursued and how authorisation occurs, but it fails to account for the nuanced practices and experiences of those who do not operate from a dominant position, those who are excluded and cannot access the 'right resources, convert, exchange or accrue value for themselves' (Skeggs, 2012, p. 5).

She therefore looks beyond the gaze of Bourdieu and the notion of exchange value by introducing the notion of use-values, which characterize different value systems that are outside the dominant symbolic. To explore how use-values are experienced as an alternative value system, Skeggs examines affect (the circulation of feelings), e.g. through emotions such as pain, frustration and fear as experienced in daily life, carefully contained or expressed as anger and resentment towards symbolic violence. These negative affects can be produced by those who have been forced to inhabit social relations differently or are subject to devaluation (economically and symbolically) and are living the relations of injustice and inequality. However, they can be turned into action. In addition, there are also more positive, non-utilitarian affects of care, such as loyalty and affection, offering us 'a different way of being in the world, relating to others as if they matter, with attentiveness and compassion, beyond exchange' (Skeggs, 2014, p. 13). Therefore, she proposes a more general model of 'person value' (2012) which includes the capitals described by Bourdieu but also includes social values 'as a more general ethos of living, for sociality, and connecting to others, through

dispositions, practices and orientations' (p. 5). This more comprehensive approach to social class is highly relevant for adult migrant language learners, many of whom, as migrants, are situated outside the dominant symbolic. It serves as a useful framework to understand their lived experiences, which reach well beyond the mere accumulation of various forms of capital. It will also be used to frame the classroom as a potential network for the circulation of positive affects as well as turning negative affects accompanying the trajectory of migrant language learners into action.

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

With the aim of investigating adult migrant language learners' lived experience of social class as conceptualized by Bourdieu/Skeggs, this project did not set out to report on participants at the level of statistical aggregates and fixed categories or produce quantifiable outcomes. The study is therefore subject to limitations, mainly with regard to how generalizable, externally valid, and applicable its findings are to other contexts. However, its strength can be seen in its focus on the particular and the constructed meaning-making of the individual which renders valuable insights into research participants' perspectives in the specific research context.

The research employed a constructivist epistemological stance combined with an interpretivist framework for data analysis. Cresswell (2014) defines the basic ideas of such a position as believing that 'individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work' (p. 8). Whilst doing so, 'individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas' (*ibid.*). A qualitative research design was applied in order to enable the researcher to uncover these complex and multidimensional contextual realities as well as to provide a platform for critical dialogue (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The strategy of inquiry, critical hermeneutic phenomenology, will be discussed in more detail in this section, including the role of the researcher, participants and sampling, data collection and analysis procedures, as well as issues around validity and generalizability and ethical responsibilities.

### **4.1 Strategy of inquiry: Critical Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Critical hermeneutic phenomenology made it possible to pursue the strong interest in participants' lived experience characterizing this research whilst adhering to the limits this

study was subjected to regarding the available time frame and scope. This strategy of inquiry ties two strands together – phenomenology and critical hermeneutics. Phenomenology focuses on experiences prior to any interpretation; it is concerned with the ‘study of experience, particularly as it is lived and as it is structured through consciousness’ (Henriksson and Friesen, 2012, p. 1). Hermeneutics is ‘the art and science of interpretation and thus also of meaning’ (*ibid.*) with meaning denoting something that is continuously open to new insight and interpretation rather than being final and stable. In short, hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of lived experience - the ‘lifeworld’ (Husserl, 1970) or our ‘being-in-the world’ (Heidegger, 1962) - together with its meanings. Within the hermeneutic or interpretative tradition in phenomenology, critical hermeneutics is a specialized approach. It involves an analysis of the historical, social, and political forces that shape and organize experiences to elucidate issues of power, privilege, and injustice. In this way, it seeks to give a voice to those who might be marginalized or are not members of privileged groups by investigating their experiences (Lopez and Willis, 2004, p. 729). It was therefore a useful strategy to investigate the inclusionary/exclusionary aspects of adult migrant language learners’ lived experience of social class outlined in the literature review. As such, the study sought to obtain idiographic knowledge to capture the super-diverse nature of London’s adult migrant language learner population under investigation and to open up the experience with all its ambivalences, dissonances, and struggles.

#### **4.2 The role of the researcher**

Paying attention to the role and stance of the researcher was key throughout the research. In phenomenological research this is generally achieved through the ‘epoché’ or ‘bracketing’ by means of ‘the phenomenological reduction’ (Husserl, 1969) which refers to the process of setting aside all previous understandings, experience, past knowledge and assumptions. However, the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology questions whether this is something

that can be absolutely achieved. As the researcher, I was well aware of the fact that my own experience and positioning as an adult migrant as well as my teaching involvement in the adult migrant context were to a great extent responsible for my interest in this project and thus held potential for shaping my interpretations and the meanings I would ascribe to the data. It certainly made me prone to holding certain biases or may have affected my openness during the research process. Therefore, I could not assume that I could be a complete *tabula rasa* and rather pursued a ‘hermeneutic reduction’ or ‘reductive openness’ by both restraining and using my preunderstandings (Finlay, 2012, p. 25). Keeping a detailed research diary was particularly useful in this process as well as asking self-scrutiny questions<sup>3</sup>, as suggested by Dahlberg *et.al.* (2008). These strategies aided me in keeping a stance of critical self-awareness, reflection, and reflexivity. In addition, I actively sought to counteract biases by sharing ideas, ‘hypotheses’, etc. with other researchers who were not involved in the process and could mirror a more ‘neutral’ stance. This alerted me to my own assumptions which could then be modified. Through this my own position as well as my understandings were not static but rather developed dynamically together with the project resulting in many unexpected insights and surprises.

### **4.3 Participants and sampling**

The participants were ‘co-researchers’ throughout the project, working alongside the researcher in investigating their migratory and language learning experience. Their role was of paramount importance. In total, eight adult migrant language learners took part<sup>4</sup>. They were recruited from language classes in the ESOL department and the EFL language school

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<sup>3</sup> Questions that were asked included: What has been my experience of this phenomenon? What do I know or do not know about it? In what way do I understand this? Am I too quick in making decisions about what I see? Do I see nuances or the broad outline? Is it hard for me to be surprised? (Dahlberg *et.al.*, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> In phenomenological studies, the sample size can vary greatly depending on the complexity of the phenomenon as well as the skill of the researcher to gain rich data. It is often between 5 and 15 (Cresswell, 2013.). Dahlberg *et.al.* (2008) argue that ‘the question of variation is more important than the question of number’ (p. 175) in order to be able to obtain rich data.

at a further education institution in West London. The site was chosen because of the access the researcher already had due to prior professional involvement, who at the time of data collection still was a member of staff, however, not actively involved in any teaching commitment. Permission to carry out the research was granted by the managers responsible for the departments. My identity as a teacher at the institution helped me to establish trust throughout the research process, both with other members of staff and my participants. To recruit participants, I contacted some of my former students and also went to language classes taught by my colleagues informing their students about my project. Those interested in participating were given more information during an initial one-on-one meeting where their suitability for the project was also assessed. In order to recruit suitable participants, a criterion sampling strategy<sup>5</sup> was employed. The following criteria were set:

- Participants should have been living in London for a minimum of one year in order for them to be able to provide a rich account of their experience.
- They needed to have sufficient language skills to express themselves relatively freely in English in oral and written form as the research was conducted in English

To this end, the participants were learners from Entry 3 and Level 1 classes in the ESOL department and an Intermediate/Upper Intermediate<sup>6</sup> class in the EFL department. To better canvas diversity in the experience, care was taken as much as possible to ensure a spread of different backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, gender, occupation, length of stay in the UK, etc. The following table provides an overview of relevant background information on the research participants. All names are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants.

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<sup>5</sup> In criterion sampling the researcher sets a criterion and chooses cases that meet that criterion (Cresswell, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> These are both equivalent to an independent user (B1/B2) as described by the Common European Framework (CEFR).



*Table 4.1: An overview of relevant background information on the research participants*

<b>Name / Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Length of stay</b>	<b>Educational / Occupational background</b>
Karam (male)	36	Syria	1.5 years	Currently not working, former businessman and then English Language and Literature student
Hakim (male)	29	Eritrea	2 years	Works as a carer, started as leaflet distributor and warehouse labourer in London, trained nurse and midwife
David (male)	46	Afghanistan	5 years	Works in a chicken shop, former Engineering student and was also working for government department
John (male)	28	Iran	3 years	Works as a Software developer (BSc degree in computing), started as shop assistant in London
Cara (female)	48	China	3 years	Just recently sold her furniture factory in China, former international businesswoman and designer
Ana (female)	49	Poland	8 years	Kitchen porter / cleaner, former archivist, currently taking some graphic design courses
Gabriela (female)	24	Brazil	6 years	Housekeeper in hotel, came to London after finishing college, wants to become a nurse
Maria (female)	59	Ecuador	16 years	Currently not working due to health issues, former teacher in Ecuador and in London

The research was entirely conducted in English as due to limited resources it was not possible to give participants a choice of language and to work with translators. The professional background of the researcher as a language teacher helped to cope with arising language barriers – which only happened in rare instances. The distinct nature of the phenomenological interview tapping into the lived experience rather than eliciting opinions or attitudes was seen as particularly useful in minimizing the effects of a ‘language problem’ as it helped the interviewees to engage subjectively and on a very personal level which resulted in them rendering fluent accounts of their lived realities. Therefore, overall, conducting the research

in English was not experienced as significantly impeding the flow of the conversation and the richness, breadth, and depth of the experience the participants were able to convey. Only in one instance (when interviewing Gabriela) did the limited linguistic ability seem to constrain the participant's ability to communicate her thoughts and interpretations effectively at certain points during the interview. The need to select students with some degree of proficiency in writing limited the range of people I could choose from inasmuch as they had to be enrolled in higher level classes. However, due to the size of the institution there were still plenty of potential participants and therefore this was not considered as impeding the research.

#### **4.4 Research methods and procedures**

After a pilot study, the data were collected between mid-April and mid-May 2016 in two consecutive steps by means of written lived experience descriptions (LEDs) and one-on-one phenomenological interviews. This was considered as maximising the depth of exploration of the phenomenon of interest.

##### **Pilot study**

Before the actual data collection process, a pilot study was carried out with two learners studying at the same institution. Through this it was possible to refine the data collection instruments, particularly the interview guide and to raise awareness of emerging themes that seemed to be of central importance in the participants' experience and which had not been given adequate attention before, e.g. the role of kinship, social networks, and co-ethnic communities. The pilot study also reiterated the importance of giving a clear brief regarding the LEDs in order to assure that participants knew what to write about. It also further highlighted that I had to take an open and supportive stance during the interview which often included very personal experiences. At times, this can as Dahlberg (2008) points out, stir up

‘memories and emotions that informants did not even know they had’ (p. 203), which both the participants and I had to be able to deal with.

### Lived experience descriptions

The participants were given a writing task (see Appendix 1) which they were asked to do at their own time and pace within a week. It can be argued that the method of written descriptions poses a potential difficulty as participants might find it difficult to write down their thoughts on paper (van Manen, 1997) which in the ESOL/EFL context can pose an even greater limitation as the difficulty extends beyond the conceptual to the linguistic level. As a whole the task was welcomed by the participants as an incentive to get additional writing practice, particularly by those who were preparing for a writing exam in June and this was therefore not experienced as a limitation to the project. However, as mentioned above, it was important to communicate that participants were expected to write down descriptions of their lived experience. The participants were encouraged to write a minimum of about 500 words with no upper word limit; the individual accounts that were collected ranged between 450 and 3,500 words.

### Phenomenological interviews

Through the LEDs, initial themes were identified which prepared the researcher for the interviews. Generally, there was an interval of about a week between collecting the LEDs from the participants and the interview, as suggested by King and Horrocks (2010). The participants were given the choice of time and location for the one-on-one interviews and mostly opted for my office on the research premises. A copy of the LED was taken to the interview which acted as a springboard for further conversation. The interviews lasted for about 1 to 1.5 hours and were characterized by open and reflective dialogues seeking to

engage the interviewee subjectively – the focal point was ‘what and in what way the interviewee experiences the phenomenon and expresses its meanings’ (Dahlberg *et.al.*, 2008). As such, the questions asked were meant to open up these experiences and meanings in order to gather detailed experiential accounts instead of simply eliciting participants’ opinions which would not be considered as appropriate data to inform phenomenological research (van Manen, 2014). The interview guide that was used can be found in Appendix 2; the questions were centred around three topic areas: the experience of migration, the experience of learning and using English, and a look to the future. As much as possible the participants’ own words were used when asking follow-up or probing questions, when asking to give specific examples of feelings mentioned, or when seeking clarification (van Manen, 1997; 2014). Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim as quickly as possible, usually on the same day and prior to interviewing the next participant. This allowed the researcher to engage in ongoing initial analysis and was useful to inform the following interview as part of the emergent design. In order to put the participants at ease and allow for further personalisation of the interview process, participants were given the opportunity to share photographs, diaries, artefacts, etc. which some of the interviewees were very happy to do. At times they also showed me teaching material they had liked very much or found particularly useful, for example worksheets discussing human rights and issues of social justice. After each interview, notes were made to capture contextual details, such as signs of reluctance, nervousness, the use of gestures, etc.

#### **4.5 Data analysis and writing up**

The data were analysed in two stages. The first one followed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, characterized by its inductive nature and openness. In order to explore the accounts of my participants’ life-worlds I used van Manen’s (1997)

phenomenology of practice and his fundamental existential themes and guided inquiry as the method of interpretation during this reflective inquiry process. This elucidated my participants' experiences along the following axes: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), lived human relation (relationality or communality), lived things (materiality), lived language (discourse), and lived mood/feelings (atmosphere). The unit of analysis was the individual learner. In order to stay with the data and not import theoretical ideas at this stage, Finlay's lifeworld orientated questions were also useful to take a step back (see Appendix 3) whilst I engaged in the iterative analysis process, by means of the 'hermeneutic circle'. This meant repeated independent reading of the data, both at the macro level (whole texts) and the micro level (parts and sentences) as well as dialoguing between an interview/LED script among several.

A critical lens was then employed during the second stage of data analysis in accordance with the premise of critical hermeneutics to be able to report on participants' lived experience of social class as conceptualized within the work of Bourdieu and Skeggs, using the 'toolkit' introduced earlier. This made it possible to elucidate the social context in which the experiences are embedded and to convey structural relations at various levels within the social phenomenon under investigation including inclusionary/exclusionary aspects and different inequalities. The finding section represents the results of this stage of analysis by presenting the constituents of the participants' experience, along with accompanying supporting quotes.

The writing process meant synthesizing the data in such a way as to adequately re-present participants' voices and to open their experiences up for the reader, with all their complexities and ambiguities. It also meant representing the social space as a series of fields with their own logic of practice and inherent value system and opening up the structure, the

processes within a field, the relations between fields, and the habitus of the agents within them. As such, the writing process turned into a complex process of re-writing, re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing (van Manen, 1997) resulting in a rich, multi-layered and multifaceted description of the constituents which considered altogether help explain adult migrant language learners' struggles for value and values in their experience of social class.

#### **4.6 Reliability and validity**

Finlay (2011) states that 'qualitative researchers require evaluation criteria quite distinct from those of quantitative investigators: criteria that are responsive to our particular values and goals' (p. 261). In particular, phenomenological inquiries need to be assessed in a way that pays attention to their distinct nature. To this end, she suggests to evaluate reliability and validity in phenomenological studies in terms of four R's: rigour, relevance, resonance, and reflexivity and sets out their aim and purpose specifically for phenomenological studies. The table below shows the steps taken in this research to engage with each criteria:

*Table 4.2: Steps taken to strengthen reliability and validity, adapted from Finlay (2011)*

<b>Evaluative criteria</b>	<b>Aim and purpose</b>	<b>Steps taken in this study</b>
Rigour	Assesses the competent management, systematicity, and coherence of the research; the clarity of the report as well as its openness to external audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• keeping a research diary</li> <li>• member checking</li> <li>• peer debriefing</li> <li>• provide a systematic description of the analytical process and tools</li> <li>• provide quotes of participants</li> <li>• triangulation of data by using two data sources, LEDs and interviews</li> </ul>
Relevance	Assesses the applicability of the research and its contribution to knowledge relating to a concern of social life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discuss its impact on theory and practice</li> <li>• locate the study within the current debate in the field</li> <li>• discuss its relevance for tackling current global and local challenges</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>empower the participants and/or the readers by providing an opportunity to reflect upon lived realities<sup>7</sup></li> </ul>
Resonance	Assesses the way in which findings are presented and the effect they have on the reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>write in such way that the report opens up the experience for the reader</li> <li>provide quotes of participants</li> </ul>
Reflexivity	Assesses the extent to which the researcher is self-aware and open to the research process and acknowledges possible limitations, e.g. with regard to findings or the knowledge claimed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>acknowledge my own positioning as a researcher</li> <li>adhere to keeping an open and a phenomenological reflective attitude</li> <li>consider limitations and discuss them sufficiently</li> <li>keeping a research diary</li> </ul>

The study still has limitations which need to be acknowledged. One of the main limitations of the project is certainly the fact that it relies solely on participants' accounts. On the one hand, this is in line with the premise of phenomenological studies and as such makes it possible to provide a rich description of their lived experience and an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study which is then opened up for the reader. On the other hand, it limits the validity inasmuch as it does not include any naturally occurring language-in-use data, e.g. recordings of participants' experiences in their day-to-day life or classroom interactions as an additional data source. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to the limited scope of this project, but will be borne in mind for possible further investigations. In addition, the nature of the study and the particular research setting limit its generalizability which can be seen as part of restraints qualitative inquiries are subjected to *per se* as they do not provide statistically significant results or quantifiable outcomes and are context and setting specific.

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout the research my participants expressed their appreciation for being able to share their lived experience and the meaning they attribute to it. Many of them noted that they had never spoken to anybody about the often very personal issues raised before. They frequently made comments that reiterated the empowering and liberating effect this had on them as well as the hope that sharing their experience might 'help others'.

#### **4.7 Ethical responsibilities**

In order to fulfil ethical responsibilities in relation to all individuals involved in the research, sound research practices were employed throughout the process. To this end, the research was conducted according to the ethical guidelines for educational research laid out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). Formal ethical clearance was obtained by means of the research ethics review checklist from the Faculty of Education prior to recruiting participants for data collection. In order to adhere to ‘ethical practice’ and to act with ‘integrity at all stages of project design, implementation, and dissemination’ (Given, 2015, p. 29), I tracked my research decisions throughout the entire research process in my research diary. One key ethical responsibility to the participants and the institution where the research took place, was to build rapport and maintain good interpersonal relations, whilst keeping my professional integrity, both as a member of staff and a researcher from an outside institution, and ensuring ethical rigour throughout. My position as a teacher made me an ‘insider’ and helped to build a relationship of trust and I did not experience any conflict between the roles of teacher and researcher.

From the start, I ensured that my participants understood the implications of taking part in the study, particularly regarding what would be expected from them in terms of the writing task and interview. I also raised awareness of the fact that the research involved communicating information of a very personal nature, which could be experienced positively but can also have negative effects. I also communicated clearly how their data would be stored, analysed, and used (now and in the future). To this end I used a participant information sheet (see Appendix 4) and had individual briefing meetings with my participants. I obtained consent by asking participants to sign a consent form (see Appendix 5) which was affirmed throughout the project to ensure that my participants remained comfortable with their decision to engage in the study. All participants had the right to withdraw at any time without stating a reason.



Participants were made aware how their privacy and confidential details would be treated. This was of particular importance as the data is very personal, including details of participants' lives. Participants' identities were anonymized and protected by assigning pseudonyms as well as by changing or omitting any potential identifying information in the transcript. Consent forms, data and other research materials were stored password protected. Consent forms (the only documents with participants' real names) were stored separately from other datasets.

The question of how findings and participants' voices would be represented was a further key consideration. In order to give voice to the participants and to increase their control over how their information would appear, I checked my findings with them.

## **Chapter 5 Findings**

This section will present the findings along four key constituents or dimensions that emerged when the critical lens was applied as hermeneutic device to interpret my participants' life scripts:

1. 'Being out of place' - the experience of traversing transnational social space
2. 'Becoming language-less' - the experience of English, linguistic capital and multilingual realities
3. 'Language is your dignity' - living the condition of devaluation
4. 'Transformation and empowerment?' - the experience of language learning and instructed settings

These constituents will elucidate my participants' lived experience of class as approached by Bourdieu and Skeggs, the struggles for value and values they engage in as part of their migratory and English learning journeys, and point to the transformative potential of the language classroom in addressing these issues. This provides answers to the research questions guiding this inquiry, in light of the theoretical underpinnings discussed previously.

### **5.1 'Being out of place' - traversing transnational social space**

This constituent is about how adult migrant language learners experience their position in the wider social context when they are traversing transnational social space, which is often a matter of feeling or being out of place. After briefly mapping out the diverse migratory trajectories, it will present findings regarding the struggle to adjust embodied cultural capital (one's habitus) and to validate institutionalized cultural capital (e.g. qualifications) – denoting internal and external struggles, as well as the question of accessing social capital as a strategy to be better equipped in these struggles. Advocating the position that class matters inside and

outside the language classroom, this elucidation of the dynamics at play within the larger social context in which the experiences of adult migrant language learners are embedded is seen as crucial. Inextricably intertwined with how the participants perceive and experience their place and their sense of self, it also provides the necessary backdrop against which the role of language, linguistic capital and their classroom experience will be assessed subsequently.

### *Diverse migratory trajectories*

The migratory patterns of the participants displayed great diversity. In their respective homelands, each of my participants originated from different positions within the social structure. Some of them had experienced considerable social mobility throughout their lifetimes, others have held a more stable position throughout their life. Their migratory experiences of what can be classified as an instance when the effects of one field – the social field/s in their homeland - cease and another field, the ‘migration specific field in the local context’ (Erel, 2010, p. 655) in London takes over, differed on the individual level. The modes of exit and entry, e.g. ranging from refugee, low-skilled worker, EU economic migrant, to high-skilled individual or affluent lifestyle migrant, played a substantial role in these processes. The following table provides an overview of the key aspects of the individual migratory experience.

*Table 5.1: Overview of research participants’ migratory trajectories*

#### **Karam (36, Syria)**

Karam was a successful businessman who had decided to take on a new entrepreneurial challenge. In partnership with a friend he had secured a lucrative contract with the Damascus Historical Museum to open an ‘outstanding and glamorous café’ (Karam, LED) designed to be a prime tourist destination. However, the war in his country brought this to an end and for him this also meant substantial financial loss. To keep himself busy, positive and ‘to do something meaningful’ (*ibid.*), he decided to invest more in his cultural and linguistic capital and took up English Literature studies at Damascus University where

he was very well respected by the academic staff and his fellow-students. In his interview he described his time at the university vividly to me, the joy of being intellectually stimulated by discussing Shakespeare and most of all Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe in his drama lectures. He was a member of the British Council library well acquainted with the staff at the British Council. He came to London as a refugee about one and a half years ago describing how he experiences himself as being at the lowest end of the social spectrum. A state he is determined to turn around.

**Hakim (29, Eritrea)**

Hakim came to London 2 years ago with the hope for a better life. Originally from a rural area in Eritrea he managed to be upwardly mobile through studying hard and training as a nurse and midwife. However, his qualifications are not recognized in the UK which meant for him to start as a leaflet distributor for an Ethiopian restaurant, moving on to some factory work. Currently he is employed as a carer. He is hoping to be able to work in a hospital again and to forge a more desired position in the UK.

**David (46, Afghanistan)**

David had to interrupt his Engineering studies when the Taliban closed all universities twelve years ago and after some time working for a government department fled to Pakistan. From there his family came to London. He reunited with them five years ago. He is currently working in a Pakistani owned chicken shop. He reflected on his experience ‘In my country I had good life, good position. In my country you know study Engineering is very good, like law or medicine is very good [...] everyone respect me I had many opportunities, we had a decent life [...] here is different, very different, here you have to start again from beginning, here you are low [...] I used to be up, but now I am down ((indicating the trajectory with his hand))’ (David, Interview).

**John (28, Iran)**

Attracted by the career opportunities the global city London provides, John came about three years ago as a highly skilled migrant with the hope of furthering his career as a software developer in one of the many transnational companies. However, quite unexpectedly he encountered difficulties with validating his degrees and qualifications and had to accept lower-skilled work as a sales assistant in Primark whilst trying to build up business contacts through freelance work. Only recently he secured a position in his profession which he is very pleased about as it also allows him to reproduce his old life-style to a greater extent, as he put it ‘now I feel like I can live again, before I only existed’ (John, Interview).

**Cara (48, China)**

Cara whose decision to migrate reflects a more culturally informed lifestyle choice is best understood as an instance of lifestyle migration. An affluent interior designer and successful businesswoman from China, she immigrated through an Investor visa<sup>8</sup> with her son who now attends one of the UK’s top public boarding schools. Although her orientation is at the moment clearly towards the British social space where she embarked upon her self-realization project for her and her son, her life spans across borders. Having already been placed in a top position in China and the international world of interior design

<sup>8</sup> In order to be eligible to apply for an Investor visa a person must have access to at least £2,000,000 in investment funds.

and business, her new position in social space provides her with even more opportunities, advantages, and options – both for her and her son, e.g. in the form of access to top education, culture, etc.

**Ana (49, Poland)**

Ana came to London as an Eastern European migrant worker eight years ago with her children. Her husband had already been here for two years. Both had been driven to leave Poland by the economic situation which meant that although they were both working full-time they could not sustain a proper life for their family. Her little knowledge of English meant that she had to accept lower-skilled work as a kitchen porter and cleaner which she commented on as follows ‘Of course you don’t speak the language you have to do any job, that is normal, but when I improve English I find better job’ (Ana, Interview).

**Gabriela (24, Brazil)**

Gabriela’s migratory trajectory was mediated by her aunt and the Brazilian community when she came six years ago. She was ‘neatly slotted’ into the low-skilled service sector in London becoming one of the migrants who make the global city London run by providing cleaning, housekeeping, catering and similar services, as she described ‘In Brazil after I finish school I help my mum. I want become a nurse but is difficult in Brazil, you need lot of money or need be very good in school. I was good but not good enough for study. I stay home and help my mum [...] my aunt say my mum to let me come to London. She is in London nine years [...] so I come here. I know nothing about London, nothing [...] I come here help my aunt. After one week she say ‘Do you want to work? You can work as cleaner.’ So I start [...] they are all Brazilian in the company, we all clean offices together (Gabriela, Interview).

**Maria (59, Ecuador)**

Maria came to London 16 years ago in order to secure better treatment for her sick son. Originally she had only planned to stay for a few months, however, the health condition of her son required them to stay on. As a well-educated teacher from Ecuador, she had the possibility to secure a respected teaching position in a bilingual educational establishment within the Latino community. However, her involvement with the Latino community isolated her from forging ties into the new society. Her experience in this regard is marked by great ambivalence. She is thinking about opening up her own bilingual nursery.

Overall, the experiences shared with me by my participants and the trajectories of their movement through social space reflect the super-diverse nature of London’s migrants involving a variety of people in disparate political, economic, social, and cultural contexts. What showed clearly in my participants’ accounts is that traversing social space is a dynamic, ongoing, and complex process facilitating wide-ranging transmissions and transformations and impacting greatly on the individual experience and lived realities. Of particular

importance in these processes are the question of adjusting embodied cultural capital (habitus) and validating institutionalized cultural capital and the notion of social capital, which will be looked at one by one now.

### *The habitus or (re-)constructing who I am and where I belong*

Whether one's habitus (embodied cultural capital and dispositions), which is acquired through long socialization and educational processes and therefore cannot so easily be changed, matches the new field is crucial for the experience of one's self and one's place in the wider social context and the possibility of playing the game successfully in the new field. Lusis and Kelly (2006) observed various possibilities regarding the transnational experience of one's habitus. On the one hand there is the option of a seemingly unambiguous transnational experience meaning that an 'individual could occupy multiple habitus simultaneously' (*ibid.*, p. 846), thus adjusting or 'transnationalizing' their practice depending on the rules of the game and the evaluation of capitals in different contexts. On the other hand, it is possible that a migrant's practical sense or feel for the game is disrupted, leading to a field-habitus disjuncture which then needs to be dealt with. (*ibid.*). This can cause feelings of loss, ambiguity or ambivalence resulting in various dynamics of internal and external struggles and can lead individuals to withdraw. In the language learner migratory journey, the notion of linguistic habitus is a crucial aspect of this. All of my participants reported on the challenges they faced adjusting their habitus and practices. Cara stated:

'Starting the life in London was hard and inconvenient [...] I was like a child and I have to learn every tiny things. I have to learn everything again because everything is new. The most difficult problem was speaking English.' (Cara, LED).

Here Cara describes how she could not rely on her embodied cultural capital anymore and had to re-learn everything, adjusting her habitus was experienced by her like becoming a child again. Specific reference to their linguistic habitus were made by several participants pointing out feelings of becoming ‘mute’ which can mean that ‘you can’t do anything’ (Hakim, Interview), thus feeling excluded. Or as John put it:

‘You feel disabled, it’s ... it’s not only that you can’t speak ... you... you can’t be yourself ... you only ... you only exist, you don’t really live’ (John, Interview).

Here John explains how he at the beginning perceived himself as disabled. He could not rely on his habitus (including his linguistic habitus) anymore which he had acquired throughout his life. For him that meant only existing instead of living. Feelings of dislocation are further elucidated by Maria’s experience:

‘... it change everything, your physical, mental, emotional state ... your feelings, your self-esteem ... I’m not the same person anymore – my personality, my life-style... everything change ...it’s not easy... no, it’s really not easy... I have mixed feelings ... sometimes... sometimes I don’t know who I am anymore ... or where I belong ...’ (Maria, Interview).

Here Maria explains how the migratory experience can be a rather complicated process with inherent struggles, dissonances, and ambivalences which are reflected in complex perceptions of her place in the wider social context. Her intimate thoughts evoke Sayad’s (2004) depiction of migrants as ‘displaced persons’ – a portrait of those ‘who have no appropriate place in social space and no set place in social classifications’ (Bourdieu, 2004, xiv) and reiterates the observation discussed in the literature that migrants often occupy segmented places and irregular positions.

### *Validating capital and position-taking in the new field*

A key aspect of the way social class pans out in the migration experience is whether one's capital portfolio can be transnationally validated. If someone cannot validate their capital, they may experience social exclusion and be faced with symbolic struggles over the assessment of their capital. Nohl *et.al.* (2006) point out that institutionalized cultural capital (such as degrees, certificates, etc.) usually loses value and relevance through migration, however, this depends on the profession, particularly among the highly skilled as they have more opportunities to validate their credentials in transnational companies.

My participants were made aware of this reality particularly as their capital was subjected to reassessment and validation which in turn mediated their position-taking (Bourdieu, 1977) determining to a great extent whether they can forge a similar position in London to the one they occupied before or whether they experience downward mobility. The latter was at least initially the case for all of them, except Gabriela whose albeit rather low position in her native Brazil which did not involve any degree validation, was reproduced as she started to become a member of the 'Brazilian workforce' serving the global city London. Downward mobility meant for example in the case of Hakim, a qualified nurse and midwife in Eritrea whose qualifications were not accredited in the UK, that he had to start as a leaflet distributor for an Eritrean restaurant, moving on to factory work and now working as a carer (with the hope of embarking on a nursing qualification in the UK to one day be able to work in a hospital again). Or in the case of David to take up work in a Pakistani run chicken shop instead of pursuing a career in Engineering, or for John to become initially downwardly mobile by taking up a position as a sales assistant whilst contemplating whether he would need to take an additional MSc degree (for which he had an offer from a university) in order to validate his BSc degree from his native Iran. The fact that this was linked to passing an IELTS exam however, put additional pressure on him. In the end, after struggling for about



two years he has just recently managed to gain a sought-after position as a software developer and is upwardly mobile at last:

‘You know coming here is really difficult ... I didn’t know it is so difficult... so many problems and different things give you headache all the time... sometimes I think why I come here... you fight so much... sometimes you win sometimes lose... it is difficult [...] for me now is better ... after two years ((laughs))... now I have good job again like in my country ... my life is better again... I can find better place to live ... have contact with new people [...] socialise with others like my colleagues [...] it is difficult journey [...] but now I feel it’s...it’s going up ... finally ((laughs))’ (John, Interview).

His reflections on the difficulties and problems are a poignant description of the symbolic struggles that accompany the migratory experience in the quest of counteracting downward mobility and facilitating the possibility to be upwardly mobile and securing a desired class position in the new surroundings. Overall, some participants were better able to validate and strategically employ their capitals and mobilize their resources than others. However, due to the problems with validating their capital portfolio, the experience of ‘declassing’ (Block, 2014a) to a greater or lesser extent, downward mobility, exclusion, and devaluation of one’s capital portfolio was a recurring trajectory in my participants’ experience.

### *Struggle for social capital*

Social capital in the form of access to social networks and social information is a key component of the migratory experience. These valuable resources can positively influence migrants’ position-taking and provide leeway in symbolic struggles. As discussed in the literature review, relying on or engaging with co-ethnic communities is a strategy and part of migrants’ ‘self-organizational’ skills (Erel, 2010) thus playing an integral part in

counteracting downward trajectories. However, what is important is that co-ethnic communities and social networks function as bridges or links into the majority society (providing bridging and linking social capital) and do not facilitate exclusion by hindering their members from making connections with/in the majority society, for example through ‘lack of encouragement and social knowledge’ (*ibid.* p. 65). The importance of accessing social capital was agreed upon by all participants. Nonetheless, the type of networks and thus the type of social capital my participants could access differed markedly. As such, the effects this had on their lived realities also varied greatly. Co-ethnic communities played a role firstly in accessing employment opportunities as in Hakim’s and David’s cases or in Gabriela’s initial position as a cleaner mediated by her aunt and the Brazilian community, as discussed earlier. Secondly, my participants also explained how these communities offer the possibility to reproduce their cultural and linguistic capital and the opportunity to counteract a hysteresis effect (Bourdieu, 1977). On the other hand, accounts of such instances generally revealed that the community involvement is experienced as a source of ambivalence:

‘When I come here I involve in the Latino community ... it is the big mistake [...] your community help you but ... but also hold you back... when you there you feel confident and .... and strong... you do everything ... you’re the real you ... everybody know you and respect you .... but when ... when I am outside I feel like in the middle of a big ocean’ (Maria, Interview).

What Maria describes here is a typical ‘fish in water’ experience within the Latino community in contrast to the ‘fish out of water’ experience she is subjected to outside, in the wider social field in the country of settlement. Her assessment of her involvement in it as a big mistake shows how in the long run these communities can have an isolating effect, thus hindering integration into the country of settlement.

The importance of having access to these social networks was also reported by Cara who employed her social ties to the ‘Chinese Investor visa group’ (Cara, Interview) network to get important information and in particular to a Chinese real estate agent in order to aid her to ‘get right house in right area’ (Cara, Interview), thus helping her to reproduce her affluent position and life-style and mark her with distinction through her choice of dwelling. However, she was very cautious ‘not to get too involved’ and to be seen as ‘one of Chinese ladies who just go shopping and show other their expensive handbags and not learn speak English’ (Cara, Interview). Her privileged position allowed her to forge herself a different position in the new society by becoming a member of one of the country’s most noted and established private health clubs with an international clientele, where her dispositions mediate a feeling of entitlement and belonging as she noted:

‘We are all same people ... and is easy make new friends and find something talk about ... our children go the same schools and we have same lifestyle ... everything same [...] no, language is no problem because you can always chat something ... we are same people ... we know same things ... everything normal ... you just chat about your life ... is easy... no problem...’ (Cara, Interview).

As her statement reveals, her membership provides her with a field where she feels she belongs as an international business woman, where she experiences habitus similarity with the other members. It also provides her with the possibility to accrue the type of cultural and symbolic capital she so desires to have and could not access in her native China and to continually ‘surpass herself’ (Cara, Interview) in her pursuit of happiness and self-realization. Something only she was able to express out of all of my participants.

What these experiences show is the importance of social networks to be able to reproduce one’s class position and class habitus. However, this is often accompanied by struggles for

legitimacy and if not successful increases feelings of not belonging and dislocation. More privileged individuals are presented with more choice and individual agency in negotiating their involvement with social networks of different kinds and are generally better equipped to secure bridging and linking social capital.

## **5.2 ‘Becoming language- less’ - English, linguistic capital and multilingual realities**

This constituent will look at the change in assessment of linguistic competence triggered by movement through social space which often results in ‘becoming language-less’ due to the fact that what was valued as linguistic capital previously loses value in the new setting. It will shed light on the perception and experience of the role of English, linguistic capital and multilingual realities in the social dynamics adult migrant language learners are caught up in. By elucidating linguistic hierarchies, it will reveal the various struggles and experiences of devaluation on a linguistic level that can be part of adult migrant language learners’ experiences in their new surroundings.

### **English – language of dreams made and dreams shattered**

On a global scale, English is often perceived and experienced as the language of success, carrying high symbolic power. However, migrating to the UK, an English speaking environment, can lead to experiences of devaluation as previous success cannot always be validated and reproduced. This can be especially difficult for those who spoke English well relative to their countrymen in their country of origin, since the change in relative position makes their experiences of devaluation all the more poignant. The world-wide spread of English, bound up with economic and political interests, has reinforced the high Q-factor (De Swaan, 2001) and symbolic power English possesses on a global scale (Pennycook, 1997). This reality was agreed upon unanimously and very uncritically by my participants. This

became evident in statements such as ‘It’s the international language everybody needs to know’ (John, Interview) or ‘English is most important language’ (Cara, Interview). David noted:

‘English ... English is the international language ... in the world is most important...everybody must learn now [...] now my children they ... now they speak English well... I’m happy ... I think is very good... is very important... they speak English always now [...] at home they speak English ... only talk with me speak Deri [...] when you speak English you can do everything... you have no problem’ (David, Interview).

In this quote, David agrees with the importance of the English language and assesses his children’s future as bright mainly due to the fact that they are now fluent English speakers; unlike him, they possess linguistic capital that can be of value everywhere. For him, like for all other participants, English promises individual success and is perceived as powerful to make dreams come true on a global scale – ‘when you speak English you can do everything’. However, the migratory experience often means that these dreams suddenly undergo a reality check, particularly in the experience of participants who had the possibility to learn English well in their homelands or even study for their degrees in English. This is well-illustrated by Karam whose knowledge of English during his time as a successful business entrepreneur in Syria made him a valued and much wanted business partner and subsequently allowed him to forge a position as a well-respected intellectual at the university, the British Council, and other cultural institutions in Syria with access to valued cultural capital (e.g. Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, BBC and Queen’s English were mentioned by him frequently during his interview). He explained how his dreams got shattered when he came to London:

‘I could still remember when I came to UK; I was spiritually full of energy as I arrived to the land of education and knowledge. But then I realized that things are very different here and I started to have many problems. These problems led to have some symptoms which was really annoying, as I felt I did not know English at all, when I wanted to express myself or ask for something. I could remember when I try to speak, it was not easy for me even to make a simple sentence, and I forgot about the grammar too. [...] When I wanted to express myself I feel shy and afraid of saying something wrongly pronounced, because of the accent, the words limit, or making grammar mistakes’ (Karam, LED).

During his interview he added:

‘You know... I was always dreaming of coming to England ... the land of education ... I want to see theatre shows and visit museums and galleries ... and to learn more about this beloved language and culture ...I adore English language... but look at me now, I haven’t been to a theatre or anything and I can’t even do a GCSE course because when I asked about it the man said to me ‘I’m sorry, you can’t do it because of your accent’ (Karam, Interview).

As he explains here, through his migration, he came geographically closer to the valued linguistic/cultural capital but socially more distanced from it due to his migratory status and his inability to successfully validate his previously acquired linguistic capital. This elucidates that the assessment of competences and what counts as linguistic capital or not changes by migrating to a new field as the new field has its own sets of rules which determine what is of value and what is not. When migrating to London where English as the national language is the ‘legitimate language’, my participants experienced that their previously acquired English is not seen as the right resource in the new field: ‘the right English’. In the UK, the same

English when considered as foreign or non-native loses value and symbolic power and is considered as 'lack'. The aspect of value regarding other languages besides English will be highlighted by the findings in the following sub-section.

### *Linguistic hierarchies and the experience of multilingual realities*

One of the key aspects of adult migrant language learners' experience of stratified settings and their position in the wider social context are various linguistic hierarchies and multilingual realities they find themselves embedded within. As outlined in the literature review, on a global scale, different languages index different value and Q-factor (De Swaan, 2001). In addition, the local context or social field with its own interests and valuation practices acts as an agentive force in the assessment of value and thus the degree of symbolic power ascribed to different languages. To this end, the linguistic world my participants are immersed within was described as highly stratified and hierarchized, shedding a critical light on London's multilingual reality. The native languages of the participants varied widely, as such, their reports of how they experience the value of these languages in their lives demonstrated great heterogeneity.

Talking about his mother-tongue Tigrinya and describing linguistic hierarchies, Hakim stated emphatically:

'I hate my language, it is of no use to me here, it is only useful in one small place in this world that is back home in my country, but nowhere else... I mean there are other languages that can be of use for you in London for example Italian or Arabic, you have to speak it if you want to work in an Italian or Arabic restaurant because nobody use English there... but my language is useless... and because it is so different from English it makes even harder for me to learn proper English...' (Hakim, Interview).

For him English is the internationally powerful language against which he assesses the value of his own, which he sees as useless in his new field. As such, he has negative feelings towards his own language, and his low perception of it is further tainted by the fact that he feels its difference to English as an additional obstacle in his learning English. His observations reveal that different languages do not only index different levels of symbolic power but that there are complex power dynamics at play between them, which is experienced as either advantage or disadvantage.

David is also aware of the low value his home language, Deri, has in London. Working in a Pakistani owned chicken shop with all of his colleagues being from Pakistan or like him from Afghanistan he said:

‘We use Deri in the kitchen in the back but you can’t use it in the front of the restaurant or outside – nobody wants to hear Deri here ...’ (David, Interview).

He clearly identifies the spatial constraints in which Deri has any potential use at all – the back of the chicken shop where he, a former Engineering student and government employee in his native Afghanistan, is currently employed.

On the contrary, for Cara, her native Chinese is seen as a valuable linguistic resource, particularly in her field where people are involved in international business relations. She can deploy the high Q-value attached to Chinese (De Swaan, 2001) to her advantage by engaging in language tandems and exchanges, which also provides her with ample opportunities to widen her circle of social contacts, thus accruing social capital and gaining access to the native population. Out of all my study participants, she was the only one who shared such experience. All of the others reported on the usefulness of their native language(s) - if they ascribed any use to it at all - solely within their families or co-ethnic communities, which was often mixed with ambivalent feelings as they were well aware of the fact that this to a certain



extent isolates them from the wider society, which was for example the case in Maria's and Gabriela's accounts. In summary, these findings show that while London is certainly one of the most multilingual places, multilingualism itself is hierarchized, which is experienced positively by some but rather painfully by others. Whilst some can use their language as an additional resource, others experience it as a hindrance in their symbolic struggles.

Overall, the observations presented in the two sub-sections in support of the second constituent show that in the adult migrant language learner experience, symbolic struggles are often fought out at the linguistic level and thus 'linguistic struggles' are a common part of the migratory experience. Particularly Blommaert's (2007) assertion that 'articulate, multilingual individuals could become inarticulate and "language-less" by moving from a space in which their linguistic resources were valued and recognized into one in which they didn't count as valuable and understandable' (p. 2) resonates well with my participants' experiences.

As we have seen thus far, in transnational migration, the capital portfolio cannot always be validated in the new surroundings and is often subject to losing value. My participants discussed experiences of devaluation as a result of being unequally positioned in relations of symbolic power, including towards English language with its dominant status. These experiences occurred to a greater or lesser extent in their everyday realities. Those who are better equipped to mobilize their resources and to strategize have the opportunity to balance these experiences out more, as it is most evident in the case of Cara's affluent lifestyle migrant trajectory. However, devaluation on a linguistic level was experienced by all of my participants in a very similar way, which will be looked at in the following section.

### **5.3 ‘Language is your dignity’ - the experience of living the condition of devaluation**

This constituent examines in more detail what it means to live the condition of linguistic devaluation in the adult migrant language learner experience and the negative affects these experiences are prone to generating. Being outside the dominant symbolic and as such not seen as legitimate is most prevalent in terms of linguistic competence, e.g. linguistic capital and habitus. To this end, all participants articulated that they have a ‘language problem’. The weight of this ‘lack’ or ‘deficiency’ is felt - more or less acutely - in their everyday realities and produces negative affects (e.g. of devaluation and lack of respect). This is revealed by the following statements:

‘Many times people don’t want understand ... they decide not understand you... they don’t respect you’ (Maria, Interview).

‘without the proper language you are put down so much ... it really makes me angry... you are so devalued’ (Hakim, Interview).

To my surprise, Cara, by far the most privileged participant in my sample and as we have seen already in the best position to mobilize resources and forge a high position in her new surroundings, shared several experiences along the same lines. One instance had just happened a few days prior to our interview when she was talking to the receptionist at a private dental health clinic which she attended with her son:

‘And then she say to me ‘Your English is terrible – let your son talk’ ... I feel horrible’ (Cara, Interview).

A particularly poignant example was shared by Karam, who was so excited to come to England as ‘the land of education’, but when he tried to enrol in a GCSE course:

‘He told me I can’t do it because of my accent ... I felt so terrible ... I went home and cried... and then a few days later I saw a TV program about how people help animals ... they love them so much ... and then they had this little bird and they tried to resuscitate it ... when I saw how they cared about this bird I felt so despised ... like nothing’ (Karam, Interview).

What is quite striking is the prevalent theme of devaluation that accompanies the language problem and the choice of words to express the affective reactions to this, e.g. ‘lack of respect’, ‘makes you angry’, ‘feel horrible’, ‘terrible’, ‘despised’. The above accounts reveal that my participants frequently encounter instances when they are positioned as language-less subjects, which for them equals being worth-less or value-less subjects. How powerful language is perceived to be in everyday processes is best summed up by the following statement ‘Without the language you are nothing ... language is your dignity’ (Maria, Interview).

To sum up, the shared experiences and perceptions of my participants in these encounters on the one hand reflect the stratified and unequal settings and inequitable operations and relations of social class that adult migrant language learners find themselves within. On the other hand, they also imply struggles over respectability, self-worth, validity, and integrity – as such, they denote both internal and external conflict and struggles for value and values. This section has highlighted that the conflict and struggles can include negative emotional and affective dimensions of classed experiences and processes that those who are outside from what is seen as legitimate or dominant can be exposed to. This leads us to Skeggs’ (2004c) questions who asks, regarding people who live the condition of devaluation, ‘How do we represent them with value? And how do those trapped within the negative symbolic ever forge value for themselves?’ (p. 87). These issues will be picked up in the next constituent

which looks at the experience of instructed settings in relation to her comprehensive model of person-value which includes Bourdieu's exchange values but adds a dimension of use-values.

#### **5.4 Transformation and empowerment? - the experience of instructed settings**

This constituent will look at how instructed settings, which play an integral part in learning trajectories, are experienced by adult migrant language learners caught up in the struggles revealed thus far. Within a Bourdieusian framework, the language classroom can be seen as a social sub-field and as such the role it plays in social reproduction and change is of interest. In addition, in Bourdieu's theorizing language, symbolic power plays an integral part in determining one's position in social fields, as has already been elucidated in the previously presented findings. As such, the language learning experience is intertwined with the ability and possibility to change one's position.

##### **The classroom and accruing exchange value**

At the core of adult migrant language learners' experience of the language classroom lies its role as a valuable resource in accruing exchange value – social, cultural and economic capital along with the possibility of legitimizing all this in the form of symbolic capital. All the participants agreed on the importance of instructed settings, first and foremost to have access to 'learning all the grammar and the tenses' which is seen as an important feature of 'proper' English in terms of one's linguistic habitus as well as the dominant cultural/symbolic capital. This was stated as important for the following reasons: primarily for the sake of better employment opportunities to be upwardly mobile, as well as to be successful in gate-keeping language exams or tests at significant transitional stages in their migratory experience, e.g. to be able to validate one's nationally inflected cultural capital, such as degrees and certificates, to be accepted on vocational or other training courses, or for citizenship. By enabling students

to learn what they see as ‘the proper English’, the language classroom provides an opportunity to get closer to what in Bourdieusian terms is denoted as the ‘legitimate language’. As such, it makes it possible to accrue symbolic capital, to be better equipped for the symbolic struggles and gain a more advantaged position in the symbolic power-relations adult migrant language learners are engaged in. Accruing valuable cultural and symbolic capital also means that this can be transformed into other forms of capital, mainly economic capital in securing better employment.

Hakim who had to interrupt his language classes recently in order to attend to some unforeseen circumstances pointed out:

‘I don’t like I can’t come to class at the moment ... you have to come to class to learn the proper language ... so now I can’t really make any progress... I mean you speak English at work but that’s different ... it’s not proper ... it’s important to learn all the grammar and the tenses ... otherwise you can’t make any progress and move on’  
(Hakim, Interview).

This statement reiterates the importance of formal classroom settings as a place where crucial interactions and transactions regarding improving one’s exchange value occur, thereby denoting advancement in the social trajectory – to make progress and move on.

In addition, his statement is also an example of my participants’ awareness of the right linguistic capital as a tacit requirement particularly for success in the labour market. Puwar (2004) notes that although, ‘today different languages and accents from around the globe slide past and into each other on the streets of Western métropoles, [...] in the higher echelons of social life, in professional occupations [...] a specifically classed form of speaking [...] what Bourdieu has incisively coined the ‘legitimate language’ is a requirement. It is ‘intrinsic to the somatic norm in the professions’ and a ‘key tacit

requirement<sup>9</sup> (p. 109). This became evident throughout and is well illustrated by the following statement:

‘Maybe if you’re rich and you don’t need work you don’t need to speak proper English ... but if you have to work you have ... I mean... now at work I always speak English because we are from everywhere ... but we don’t speak the proper English, we just speak our own English ... to communicate ... but our supervisors and managers speak better ... so if you want better position you need to learn the proper English’ (Hakim, Interview).

Asked whether this for him means native-like English he stated:

‘No, you don’t have to speak like native speaker ... but you have to speak proper English ... that is different from what we speak ... that’s why we have to learn all the grammar and the tenses’ (Hakim, Interview).

His statement clearly reflects the upward trajectory that is associated with acquiring more of the ‘proper’ English. Although the native speaker ideal is absent in his perception, for him different Englishes index different positions in the socio-economic hierarchy. Overall for my participants, language classes act as a self-making opportunity to change their position in social space and be upwardly mobile. This is particularly relevant for those who had to accept lower-skilled employment or who shared experiences with me like ‘I used to be up but now I am down’ (David, Interview) due to a lack of linguistic competence.

Another aspect of accruing exchange value was highlighted by Gabriela, who is currently in the process of emancipating herself from her co-ethnic ties and extending her social network beyond the Brazilian community. For her, the cultural capital she can gain in the language

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<sup>9</sup> Regarding processes of inclusion and exclusion, there are ‘tacit requirements’ in all social worlds, which operate as ‘real principles of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated’ (Bourdieu 1984, p. 102).

classroom in the form of knowledge about English history and literature is crucial, as is the possibility to convert it into social and symbolic capital. She is trying to forge contacts and relations that will help her to leave behind her days as one of the manifold Latinos who serve the global city by cleaning offices and hotel-rooms and to pursue her dreams of becoming a nurse. Her relationship with her current boss plays an integral part in this. She explained:

Now my boss she is English ... she from Jamaica but live here always ... she know how do things here she always live here ... and she have son ... her son really good ... he have good job [...] I like learn about English history and like literature ... then because ... then I go work I tell my boss and tell her ... and we speak ... sometimes ... sometimes she say 'Ah I don't know this ... this is interesting... this what you learn... ah good' ((laughs))... is good I can talk to her ... and she can help me [...] for me ... for me she is like my mum' (Gabriela, Interview).

This experience shows that on the one hand, the classroom provides legitimized cultural capital which can be converted into social capital outside the classroom walls. This raises the prospect of overcoming the restraints of segmented and segregated spaces and irregular positions that are so common in the migratory experience. On the other hand, the fact that the classroom plays a role in accruing valuable social capital with the prospect of transferring it into other forms of capital in the wider social field is another important aspect. In this sense my participants voiced their expectations and hopes for the language classroom to play an integral part in their social relations and to better learn how to play the game in their new field, mainly in accessing valuable information and advice, and increasing their social network. David stated the following:

'Sometimes I'm not happy in class ... because teachers just want to pass time ... they just want to talk about easy topics and do ... and do ... superficial stuff ... but for us

the class is really important ... it ... really important ... we need ... we come to class to help us ... not only learning language but ... but for information and ... and ... advice' (David, Interview).

Slightly puzzled by my question regarding what it meant for him to come to class, he leaned forward and looking firmly at me stated:

'You know ... in my country sometimes you need cross a river but you ... you don't have stones to put in the water ... then you can make a hard ball with sand and use it ... but ... but you can only use it once ... it don't last like stones... but better is build a bridge ... you can use it again, again, and again...' (David, Interview).

This statement points out that instructed settings are expected to make a lasting, holistic, and transformative impact on learners' agency which in turn would enable them to forge a better position in society – to provide them with the material to build bridges and empower them to actually do so as opposed to providing sand by doing 'superficial stuff'. What becomes evident in all these accounts is that in the adult migrant language learner experience, instructed settings are connected with the possibility of learning and getting attuned to the rules of the game and adjusting one's habitus as well as to positively adding to one's capital portfolio. The composition of which to a great extent determines one's position in social space. A more highly valued capital portfolio denotes greater power in the competitive game taking place in the field of struggles.

#### *Inclusionary/exclusionary aspects of the classroom experience*

Looking at the classroom as a social field in Bourdieusian terms means that it denotes a space which is characterized by relationships of inequality and a dominant/dominated dichotomy. To this end, the actual execution of language classes is met with some reservation by most of



my participants and their accounts included experiences of unequal power relations and positioning as well as instances of symbolic violence, revealing inclusionary/exclusionary aspects of the language classroom. This became particularly obvious in statements that showed how they experienced being unequally positioned towards materials:

‘The books ... the books and our life ... is very different’ ((laughs)) (Hakim, Interview).

‘I mean sometimes you don’t want talk in class... always traveling to exotic places and spend lot of money ... that’s not our life [...] I think is better we can bring what we talk about and the teacher make connection and explain grammar ... we don’t need the books...’ (Ewa, Interview).

These statements reveal that the lesson content, particularly when determined by course books, often does not reflect the lived realities of my participants, and that this can cause a sense of exclusion. This is particularly true for those learners who occupy more lowly social positions in the wider social context in London. For them, the struggles they are engaged in outside the classroom are often reproduced inside due to the fact that the dominant symbolic is imposed on them, subjecting them to symbolic violence in such a way that it causes them to not want to participate, although they know how important learning the language is for them.

The harshest experience was shared by Gabriela, who in the hope of forging ties that go beyond her family and co-ethnic community networks in London had enrolled in a beginners’ language course at a private English school some years ago but never went back after the first lesson (although she had paid a substantial amount of money for it). She described the following:

‘It is terrible ... not for me ... it was so English ... everything was so English, English, English ... so so so posh... the teacher, the class, other student ... it is not for me ... I don’t want go there’ (Gabriela, Interview).

Here she describes a clear feeling of being like a ‘fish out of water’ which was reinforced by the ‘posh’ dominant symbolic that was imposed on her and meant that she experienced the lesson as something that was ‘not for the likes of her’. After a while she then decided to attend a language course offered by a Brazilian community centre where her experience was markedly different as she explained ‘I feel better ... because the people are like me ... the teacher understand us... we can help other’ (Gabriela, Interview). This resulted in her being encouraged to continue her learning journey which she currently pursues at the institution where this research was carried out.

Together these examples reveal that the inclusionary/exclusionary forces that are often subtly at play in classroom relations and dynamics are potentially crucial for how learning trajectories develop in the adult migrant language learner experience. There is thus a danger that language classroom can reproduce the negative experiences of symbolic violence that adult migrant language learners undergo in the wider society. As will be discussed later, language classrooms actually have an important potential role to play in counteracting these experiences, for example through class-sensitive materials and classroom practices.

### *The classroom and person-value*

This section will look at the language classroom in the context of Skeggs’ person value concept. By adding the dimension of social values to the already discussed exchange value, Skeggs’ perspective can better capture the practices of those who are forced to live social relations differently and who do not operate from a dominant position. The participants’

experiences presented thus far show that their reality of being positioned outside the dominant symbolic, of being forced to live social relations differently and being exposed to devaluation of various kinds (e.g. embodied cultural capital, institutionalized cultural capital, linguistically) and inherent feelings of lack and deficiency are not only restricted to the lived reality outside the language classroom. On the contrary, they are something they are many times confronted with inside the classroom as well. The question of operationalizing use-values in the language learning experience develops along two strands. Firstly, by looking at an alternative value system in the form of positive affects such as loyalty and affection, offering ‘a different way of being in the world [...] beyond exchange’ (Skeggs, 2014, p. 13). Secondly, by examining how the experience of devaluation and expressions of symbolic violence generate affective responses, negative affects, and how they can be turned into action, for example into speech acts such as ‘just talk’, talk of fairness and kindness that glues people together and is based on values of care rather than exchange’ (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, p. 17). Both strands of enquiry were present in my participants’ accounts, particularly regarding the choice of lesson content:

‘Of course is important learn all the things about English culture and how things are here .... we need to know about this because we want improve our lives here... but you know for us it’s also different...what is important is different ... for us family and community are important... we help each other... yeah ...for us things are different [...] is good also talk about this...’ (Hakim, Interview).

In this statement two value systems are differentiated: ‘English culture and how things are here’ referring to the accrual and investment in exchange value in the sense of economic, symbolic, social, and especially cultural capitals. However, Hakim is very clear in his assessment that ‘for us it’s also different’ suggesting an alternative value compass reflecting

the positive affects mentioned above. These positive use-values were mentioned frequently and strongly emphasised by the research participants, often in relation with pointing out that this would mean that ‘everybody in class is equal’ (Karam, Interview) and the amount of exchange value someone can or cannot accrue does not matter or does not determine one’s position in classroom relations.

Instances of negative affects turned into action, or in the case of language learning, into talk or classroom participation and positive learning experiences were referred to as well and were suggested by my participants as something the language classroom could capitalize more upon. In particular things like discussing human rights, social justice, or their own frustrations, pains, anger, and resentments towards inequitable operations were salient themes throughout and more emphasized by those who had been subjected to greater devaluation and felt more marginalized or out of place. Maria reported a particular instance of great importance for her. It happened about nine months ago – sixteen years after she came to live in London. They were talking about social justice and equitable education in one lesson - topics that stirred up something in her and gave her courage to speak up:

‘I feel like ... like ...something in me ... like ice ... melted... before... before I am frozen but when we talk about this I forget everything... I just talk ... with passion ... and then all in class say ‘You are so different... we never see you like this [...] I never feel like this before in class...I am different person... I am so happy...I just talk and don’t think...’ (Maria, Interview).

This poignant account of her experience is an example of the potential effect of turning negative affects that had made her frozen inside into action: confident and fluent classroom participation. During the interview she went on to explain that this was very strongly felt by her and the whole class a little while later when they were given the opportunity to discuss

the impacts of the recently implemented funding cuts to their language provision with the local MP who had been invited to the institution. Again, she stood up and passionately spoke out against this perceived injustice together with her classmates turning negative affects into action.

These examples show that adult migrant language learners are aware of a different value compass from the one suggested by the dominant symbolic and that they do not want to be subject to constant devaluation. Being given the opportunity to express positive affects as well as changing negative affects into articulations of 'just talk' can denote an empowering and transformative learning experience. This in turn can have wide-ranging internal and external effects and let language learners not only be successful in their struggles for exchange value but also for social values.

## **Chapter 6 Discussion**

The findings highlight that social class in the migrant experience is a complex phenomenon characterized by its malleability for the individual prior to and following their migration (Yakushko, 2013). The way adult migrant language learners experience social class processes and dynamics is very complex and can at times be rather ambivalent, accompanied by the experience of devaluation and involving external and internal struggles for value and values. The participants' experiences have been further elucidated by Bourdieu's view of language as a key marker of distinction carrying symbolic power, which individuals employ to gain advantage in field contexts and also to exhibit their feel for the game in the sense of a linguistic habitus (Bourdieu, 1991). Such view of language is markedly different from Chomsky's formalistic and context free paradigm for linguistics, which puts grammatical competence at its heart and has to a great extent impacted the field of SLA and our understanding of second language learning. The findings draw particular attention to the relevance of the following issues, which will be discussed below: learners as social agents; the classroom as a social field; and nuanced, critical, and 'class' sensitive teaching practices. These can inform our understanding of language learning as a social process as opposed to being a mere cognitive activity.

### **6.1 Learners as social agents**

The findings discussed in the previous section help to better understand and conceptualize learners as social agents immersed in various social relations, fields, and networks. According to the view that language denotes symbolic power, it therefore plays a crucial role in determining whether someone can occupy a dominant or dominated position. For the participants, learning English is thus far more than a cognitive activity they engage in. The findings show clearly that learning the language is an integral part of their lived realities in

social space. The cognitive dimension certainly is there and was referred to by the participants in the sense of ‘learning all the grammar and the tenses’ or the ability to be successful in high-stake language tests. However, all this serves a purpose in the wider social context which makes up the lived reality of the learner and which, as the findings show, is multifaceted and multi-dimensional. For them, acquiring the ‘proper language’ means to be better equipped for symbolic struggles, to be able to turn disadvantage into advantage or move from exclusion to inclusion by gaining linguistic competence that is deemed as legitimate in the new field. It reveals how the dynamics and many times unequal symbolic power relations learners are subjected to in the wider social context shape what they bring to and expect from the classroom and why they engage with learning processes the way they do or do not.

Furthermore, the social class lens employed sheds particular light on the interplay between structure and agency as well as aspects of inclusion and exclusion. The findings reveal that there are different options available for different learners, and not all of them have the same access to the same resources in the same way. Particularly, the findings regarding the negotiation of the habitus and capital validation in transnational spaces show that individual class experiences in the adult migrant language learner context are very varied, resulting in different options and limitations on the individual level. As can be seen, the migratory experience is intertwined with the language learning experience and as such it is important to gain an understanding of how these experiences intersect as well as influence each other.

In addition, Skeggs’ gaze reiterates the importance of not only looking at language learners from an exchange value perspective, but to not forget that social values are central for social reproduction and lived social realities. Her person-value model can help us understand the notion of affective factors in language acquisition and the possible dynamics attached to them

in a new way, and how they can foster or impede language learning processes. As such, it can provide key insights into the potential transformative and empowering effect of instructed settings.

## **6.2 The classroom as a social field**

One thing that became evident in the findings section is that for participants, the classroom denotes far more than a place where cognitive activity occurs. Although they clearly highlighted the importance of ‘learning all the grammar and the tenses’ in their pursuit of getting closer to the ‘proper language’, what became evident throughout the accounts is that instructed settings are seen as an integral part of the social space adult migrant language learners are embedded within. In Bourdieu’s view, education in general plays a crucial role in social reproduction and change. His framework also emphasizes the role of language as a marker of distinction as a key element for social agents’ lived realities. Within the language classroom, these two aspects intersect, which makes the classroom experience a potentially crucial force in adult migrant language learners’ social and learning trajectories. In the migration specific field in the local context, the language classroom denotes a sub-field - a social field that needs to be seen on the one hand in relation to the dynamics at play within it and on the other hand in relation to other social fields.

Concerning the class-based dynamics within the classroom, the findings have made obvious that there is a danger of subjecting the learners to instances of symbolic violence by imposing the dominant symbolic on them in various processes. Gabriela’s case (who never went back to the ‘posh’ language class) was one of the examples which highlighted this – the dominant symbolic was mediated by the teacher, the other students, the class content – all of which resulted in her feeling excluded and therefore made her retract to the Brazilian community



instead. Other findings revealed the unequal positioning towards classroom material which often uncritically mediates affluent life-styles which are generally not the lived reality of adult migrant language learners and are only reserved for the privileged few. As a solution to this exclusionary aspect and to make the language classroom more inclusionary instead of reproducing inequalities of the wider social context, my participants proposed to not use any books but to let learners bring what they deem as useful material. This would mean that the dynamics in the field would be determined by those who are meant to benefit from it, resulting in more equitable social relations within the classroom with the prospect of overcoming the dominant/dominated dichotomy. The findings also show that the classroom field offers ample opportunity to be an empowering and transformative space where feelings of ambivalence, loss, dislocation, and ambiguity can be successfully counteracted, as was made evident for example in Maria's experience of 'melting inside' when given the opportunity in engaging in 'just-talk' about fairness and equity in education. As such it can play a prominent role in adult migrant language learners' coping patterns when dealing with classed processes inherent to their experiences when traversing transnational space.

In addition, when the classroom field is seen in relation to other fields, its functions can be compared to the ones observed for co-ethnic communities in providing bridging and linking social capital. Classrooms thus have the potential, on the one hand, to foster adult migrant language learners' strategies and self-organizational skills beyond their own communities and on the other hand, to facilitate integration, inclusion into the new surroundings and community cohesion within the society as a whole and to provide manifold learning opportunities for adult migrants.

### **6.3 Nuanced, critical and ‘class’ sensitive teaching practices**

Of crucial importance in mediating the relations and dynamics within the classroom field are both educators and materials. This has been highlighted by my findings, particularly through the assessment of how my participants feel positioned towards teaching material. During the interviews, most of the participants also referred to specific teachers who they had positive experiences with in terms of how they felt they understood their situation and were able to provide them with a positive and encouraging learning experience. The findings that were presented in relation to the experience of instructed settings lead to questions such as: what kind of person is imagined in classroom and test material, what ways are offered for learners to imagine their personhood by teachers, what is focused on in the language classroom, what perception of the dominance of English and the value of other languages or multilingual realities are mediated, etc. Regarding course books, the perceptions of my participants are in line with research suggesting that there is a focus on middle-class culture (Gray and Block, 2014) often uncritically promoting the logic of capital and global dynamics without paying attention to inequality or stratification, evoking the idea that everybody has access to the same resources in the same way without the mention of any structural barriers or unequal distribution of symbolic power. The promotion of neoliberal thought in the globalized ELT culture has been under critique for some time in the field (Block *et.al.*, 2012, Gray, 2012, Gray, 2010a; Gray, 2010b) and more critical voices have called for new approaches to teaching material (Gray, 2013), pedagogy and practice, e.g. by foregrounding participatory approaches and critical multicultural education (Bryers *et.al.*, 2013; May and Sleeter, 2010). These suggestions would definitely be supported by my findings.

In this study, Bourdieu's gaze helped to understand classed processes in the adult migrant language learner trajectory in a dynamic way, for example how the dominant symbolic operates and is put into perspective, how interests are protected and pursued and how

authorisation occurs (Skeggs, 2012). This is particularly well reflected in the way my participants experience the validation processes of their cultural capital in the new field or the way language requirements are often rather arbitrarily imposed and additional pressure is put on them by demanding high scores in gate-keeping exams, such as IELTS as was elucidated in John's experience. This project also reiterates that in order to provide an equitable learning experience for all and to avoid reproducing the social inequalities of the wider society, it is important to go beyond the value domain and include social values. Skeggs' more comprehensive model of person value has proven crucial in accounting for the experiences, practices, and perceptions of my participants, which is reflected in the findings dealing with their experiences of devaluation and their quest to forge respect inside and outside the classroom. As such, it can be argued that language teaching should be about creating spaces that open up critical dialogue where social privilege, inequalities, and responsibility are discussed and where one's own experiences can be critically reflected upon. It is also about affording equitable shared experiences and fostering an emotional, affective engagement where positive affects circulate and negative affects can be turned into action, e.g. into learning engagement and opportunities, and where learners can forge a subjectivity for themselves that goes beyond being subjects of value situated in neoliberal discourse. Of course, language education is crucial in accruing cultural, social, and symbolic capital with the possibility of converting it into economic capital and becoming upwardly mobile. Thus it is also important to provide a space where learners can get attuned to the rules of the game and develop a practical sense and a feel for the game in order to play it successfully in their new surroundings. This has been highlighted by my participants throughout and is particularly evident in the constituent that discusses the experience of instructed settings. However, as we have seen, adult migrant language learners are often caught up in ambivalent processes on the way, are exposed to devaluation in one way or another and are caught up in

internal and external struggles. For them acquiring the language does not only denote potential economic success, but is crucial for their self-worth, respect, and validity – language is their dignity. To this end, more nuanced, critical, and ‘class’ sensitive teaching practices can provide them with a dignified and ultimately more effective learning experience.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion**

Prompted by the research gap in SLA literature concerning the notion of social class, this study set out to enrich the field by investigating the relationship between the language learner and the social world. In particular, it employed a Bourdieusian lens to look at class as lived social relation whilst also taking into considerations the dimension of social values his conceptualization cannot account for as proposed by Skeggs. This gaze offers a fresh perspective to SLA research in the context of migration by understanding both the structure of social space and positions within it as well as the dynamics of (re)-creating divisions and ways of inclusion and exclusion inside and outside the language classroom. The external and internal struggles for value and values accompanying this and the key role of language as an important marker of distinction or - if not validated as legitimate – of deficit have been highlighted throughout. What stood out clearly was the potential role of instructed settings in terms of providing a transformative and empowering space to increase learners' agency.

### **7.1 Research questions revisited**

The first research question regarding the way adult migrant language learners experience stratified settings and classed processes revealed that the complexity of the individual's experience and lived reality in many ways reflects the complexity of interconnected global and local structures characterized by hierarchies, inequalities, and different power relations within and between them. The way in which these social mechanisms play out in terms of opportunities, possibilities, available options, and barriers and as such in the lived reality of the trajectories of adult migrant language learners is greatly diversified. Nonetheless, a clear trend of downward mobility (to a greater or lesser extent) became evident, coupled with the experience of devaluation. This is probably particularly true in London which is characterized

by its highly hierarchized, stratified, and super-diverse nature that accompany its global-city status.

The second question regarding the experience of adult migrant language learners' perception of their place in social space and their sense of self showed that the position-taking is most of the time not a straightforward process and takes place in irregular spaces. This often causes feelings of dislocation, ambivalence, insecurity, and devaluation. Particularly the latter underpins the importance of adding a dimension of social values so that adult migrant language learners who inhabit social relations differently can forge a sense of self that goes beyond being a legitimate subject of value solely defined by the possibility to accrue various forms of capitals. The more comprehensive view of person value is crucial in terms of respectability, self-worth, dignity, and validity.

The third research question elucidated the key role language, language learning, and instructed settings play in these processes. Language as a key marker of distinction is very much intertwined and interconnected with the experience of social hierarchies, stratification, and inequality, and the experience of devaluation. Therefore, the learning process and instructed settings provide an excellent opportunity for counteracting such trajectories and turning negative affects into action or in the context of this research empowering and transformative learning experiences.

## **7.2 Implications for the field of SLA**

This thesis shows how more emphasis on the subjective experience of class can make a valuable contribution to a more socially oriented field of SLA. However, the approach taken in this study and the focus on social class call into question whether the multidimensional and generally not straightforward realities can be adequately captured within the current

theorizing in the field. A lot of the work looking at the social dimensions of language learning and intersections between how learners experience their sense of self and language learning is carried out within the identity framework in SLA, favouring notions of multiple transnational or hybrid identities and emphasising learners' agency whilst neglecting to cast a critical eye on the complex social realities individual action is embedded within. The research at hand calls for a change in this approach, thus echoing Block (2015) who has recently pointed out that identity research in SLA is challenged to rethink the relationship between structure and agency as most of its work sees learners as 'free agents [...] making their way through life against whatever obstacles life throws at them' (p. 34). In addition, the gaze employed in this research revealed complexities inherent to global and local forces and super-diversity and various migratory patterns. The question is how these realities can be captured and theorized in SLA and how research in the field can be operationalized in a way that appreciates complex interlinkages and contingencies as well as accounts for ambivalent realities.

Regarding SLA practice, the social class dimension applied in this project calls for a more explicit engagement in critical class-sensitive pedagogies and teaching practices as well as for a critical scrutiny of teaching materials and curriculum by paying attention to both value and values. One way of responding to this need for an increased social values dimension in the classroom is Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth perspective which challenges traditional interpretations on cultural capital by focusing on the achievements of ethnic minorities in the context of the US educational field. Her aim is to challenge the notion that socially marginalized groups come to the classroom with cultural deficits and to focus on and learn from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by these groups. This lens enables a strength-based perspective instead of a deficit view of those who

find themselves outside the dominant symbolic and can thus prove a powerful tool in empowering adult migrant language learners in the classroom.

One aspect this research highlights throughout is undoubtedly the distinctiveness of the individual experience. Although there are similarities and common threads running through the accounts of the participants, which are also reflected in current theorizing about migration in general, they are also characterized by their diverse nature. One aspect that is really striking in this study is the diversity of participants. This diverse reality accentuates Blommaert and Rampton's (2011, p. 1) assertion that 'the predictability of the category of 'migrant' and of his/her sociocultural features has disappeared', which is as a result also reflected in the reality of language classrooms. Employing a social class lens has accentuated that this might be ever more so in a super-diverse, yet highly stratified environment of a global city like London. As such, this study is very context-specific in its nature. The field of SLA would certainly benefit from more comparative investigations as different settings offer different opportunity structures available, different migrant patterns, a different spatial distribution of migrants, and different labour market opportunities channeling migrants into complex scatterings of socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, different political cultures are more or less successful in creating an environment of legitimacy and respect for migrants (Meissner, 2015).

### **7.3 Concluding remarks**

By revealing the complex and many times not straightforward reality behind individual experiences, this project can act as a catalyst for more specific investigations. Although without doubt, this project is limited in scope and generalizability as was discussed earlier, it provides ample opportunities to build upon, add to and extend the enquiry into the intersections between migration, social class and SLA. As international migration continues,



it will continue to change. The field of SLA needs to be flexible and to keep an open stance. It also needs to be critical in order to be able to engage with issues of social justice within the complexities of a 21<sup>st</sup> century globalized and ever diversifying world. One way in which this could be achieved is by seeking for more collaborative work with other disciplines and by so doing, furthering the cross-fertilization of ideas in order to address new developments and challenges successfully. This project tried to achieve just that by taking a more sociologically inspired approach and benefit from insights rooted in social theory, which I would like to argue proved successful. In this way, this project does not only make a valuable contribution to the current state of the field but also opens up avenues for further research. It calls for the field of SLA to be even more ‘expanded and enriched’ and more socio-politically oriented in order to be equipped to successfully engage with pressing concerns of current realities that impact our learners’ lived realities and are present in language classrooms.

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## List of Appendices

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## Appendix 1: LED writing prompt

Please write a description of your life in your country before you came to the UK and your life in London. You can include as much detail as possible, for example, you can write about your lifestyle, your work, your home, your free time, your activities, your relationships with other people, etc. You can describe particular experiences or events and how these made you feel.

It would be good if you could write a minimum of about 500 words – there is no upper word limit, please feel free to write as much as you like.



## Appendix 2: Interview guide

### Experience of migration (to follow up on the pre-writing task)

Can you tell me about your experience of coming to London? What was it like for you?

What did leaving your country mean for you?

What did coming to London mean for you?

What does it mean for you to live in London?

What is a typical day/ a typical week like for you?

### Experience of learning/using English – participants' learning journeys (e.g., participants' learning experiences and the events, people, and situations that impact(ed) on their learning)

Questions to lead back to the level of concrete experience (in case participants start to generalize): Can you give an example? What was it like?

What does it mean for you to learn English? How do you feel about learning English?

What does it mean for you to speak/use English? How do you feel about it?

What does the English language mean to you? How important is it in your life? How important is it for you to know English?

What does it mean for you to use your first language? How do you feel about it?

Can you tell me about your experience of learning English? What do you find easy/difficult about it?

What does coming to English classes mean to you? How do you feel about it?

Can you recall the first English class you had and describe it for me? What was it like? How did you feel?

Can you remember a time when you were very happy/weren't very happy with your learning?

Can you describe it for me?

Can you remember a time when you were very happy/not very happy in class? Can you describe it for me? What was that like?

Can you describe your learning journey so far?

Is there anything that had an impact on your learning? Can you describe this for me?

Do you remember a situation you think was important for your learning experience? Can you describe it? How did you feel?

Can you remember a situation when using English made you very happy? Can you describe it for me? What was it like?

Can you remember a situation when using English didn't make you happy, was difficult? Can you describe the event for me?

### Look to the future

What do you think your life will look like in the future? Can you describe it for me?

How do you feel about the future?

### Appendix 3: Lifeworld questions

Finlay's (2011, p. 230) lifeworld orientated questions to aid data analysis:

- What does it mean to be this person? Who does s/he think s/he is?  
What does s/he think about? (self-identity)
- What is his/her subjective sense of embodiment? (embodiment)
- Where does he/she experience his/her day? Are some places safer than others? Does he/she feel closed in? Is there a feeling of 'insidedness'/'outsidedness'? (spatiality)
- How does s/he experience his/her day? Is it pressured, rushed and speeding by?  
Boringly slow and endless? Discontinuous? (temporality)
- How does s/he experience relating to others? Who are the significant people involved and how are their relationships impacted? (relationships)
- What drives the person? What motivates them? What gives their life meaning?  
(project)
- Is there any discourse/language being used that seems significant and reveals either personal or shared cultural meanings? (discourse)
- Is there a mood/tone attached to the phenomenon? What background 'existential feelings' are being expressed such as 'feeling distant', 'fretful', 'fulfilled', 'cynical' or 'yearning'? ('mood as atmosphere')

## Appendix 4: Participant information sheet

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of my student project. I am currently studying for a MA degree in [name of degree and university]. I have also been working at [name of institution] for a few years as a teacher.

My project is about language learning experiences of adult migrants in London. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

#### **Who will conduct the research?**

I will conduct the research myself. Nobody else will be involved.

My contact details are: [name; email address]

My office is in room [room number]

#### **What is the aim of the project?**

The aim of the project is to help us understand better how different factors can influence the language learning experience of people.

#### **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

You would be asked to provide a written account of your experience before and after coming to London. After that you would be asked to participate in an interview to tell me more about your language learning experience. The interview will probably last for about an hour and you can decide where you want it to take place, for example at college or somewhere else. It would be good if I could record the interview so I can listen to it again afterwards and transcribe it.

#### **What happens to the data collected?**

I will use the data to write my thesis. This will be read by my supervisor and examiners at university. If everything goes really well, I might have a chance to publish an article in a journal later or do another project in the future where the data might be useful.

#### **How is confidentiality maintained?**

All information you give will be treated confidentially. Your name will not appear in the study and you will not be identifiable. I will also give you a summary of my findings, or you can read the thesis if you like.

#### **What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

#### **What will be the benefits?**

You will have a chance to share and talk about your experiences. By doing this you will help find better ways of teaching English to people who come to this country like you.

## Appendix 5: Consent form

### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I have read the information sheet about this project</li><li>• I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this project</li><li>• I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions</li><li>• I have received enough information about this project</li><li>• I understand that I am free to withdraw from this project:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ At any time</li><li>○ Without giving a reason for withdrawing</li><li>○ Without affecting my future with the college</li></ul></li><li>• I understand that my research data may be used for a further project, but I am able to opt out of this if I so wish, by ticking here. <input type="checkbox"/></li><li>• I agree to take part in this study</li></ul>	
Signed (participant)	Date
Name in block letters	
Signature of researcher	Date