

Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse International Students in Open and/or
Online Learning Environments: A Research Symposium

**Bernsteinian Perspective on Further Marginalization of
International Students in Open and Online Learning Environment:
Pedagogizing Student Centric Approaches**

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Abstract

This paper attempted to explore the relevance of Bernstein's (2001) critical views on the marginalization of international students in the context of emerging online learning models. It also focused on the disengaged learning patterns of marginalized international students via Bernstein's (1990) theoretical lens of elaborated code and restrictive code, where Bernstein (2001) instructed teachers to play their vital roles in complex learning processes, which were heavy on teachers and students alike, to facilitate the healthy and successful learning trajectory. This paper used metadata via Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 2003) to construct themes from students' assignments, Flipgrid videos, and reading audios submitted for grading for their technical communication and English communication courses. The paper also discussed these three questions, such as 1) How can linguistically-challenged students feel left-out? 2) What language patterns do these international students use in the context of the sociology of education? Finally, 3) How can teachers play an instrumentally critical role in an online learning environment? The resultant social initiations of linguistically complacent international students have been treated as a problem for educators to upend the educational inequalities in the knowledge economy. The findings revealed that 21st-century knowledge production, distribution, and its adequate reproduction are in the hands of well-rounded knowledge consumers, and if the knowledge consumers are not well cognizant of their instrumental roles in the knowledge economy, social inequalities will quadruple exponentially. In addition, international students' poor language skills in online learning appeared to be a huge barrier in their roles as "woke consumers." Finally, Bernstein's (2001) totally pedagogizing society (TPS) might appear paradoxically preposterous at this stage; its judicious applicability is more than needed currently, in the aftermath of E-Campus Ontario's (2020) policy of up-credentialing, by asking post-secondary instructors/teachers to introduce micro-credentialing, especially in technical English, knitted around courses.

Keywords: International students, online learning, Bernsteinian, totally pedagogizing society, poor communication skills

Introduction

Canadian higher educational institutions accumulate annually, exponential dividends, by incorporating sizeable enrollments of international students (Statistics Canada, 2018; Rashed, 2017). Although international students are able to enter the workforce soon after graduation (Statistics Canada, 2019), they are not likely to start their desired jobs well past their work permits, when they are on the verge of being deported. Herein lies the critical issue, when international students' poor communication skills force them to do jobs other than their desired field of study—a loss to both Canada and a research-based knowledge economy. Students from China, India, Iran, and many other countries (MacLean's, 2013) have joined graduate programs, college diplomas, graduate certificates, and English language programs, but at the cost of innovation and research, which is a must for knowledge economy, like Canada. Similarly, despite international students' advance field-specific skills and competencies amassed in their home countries, they find it difficult to tap into the Canadian market for their ends. Furthermore, the root cause of this issue lies in the communication gap, and respective faculty's assumptions on the students' properly acquired communication skills. On the one hand, students are considered well-articulate and eloquent in their field of studies, due to their language assessment from the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language, Canadian Language Benchmarks Placement (CLBPT), and Duolingo; on the other hand, they are opposite to what the myriad of international language assessment bodies such as IELTS, TOEFL, CLBPT, and Duolingo have evaluated (Dehass, 2013). The purpose of this study is to help faculties across Canadian universities to understand the communication patterns of international students through the theoretical lens of Bernstein's (2001) elaborative code and restrictive code. Bernstein (2001) informs his readers of lingual limitations of the students. Even though Bernstein's theoretical framework of elaborative code and restrictive code (1960) appears non-generalizable in today's context, it is still an intellectual force to be reckoned with, in the aftermath of international students' marginalized employment opportunities. This study, through Bernstein's (1960, 2001) lens, will help higher-education faculties to better comprehend international students' language patterns, and inform practicing educators how to transform the communication challenge of non-native English students into an opportunity.

Research Problem

Too many international students in Canada are being marginalized by using online learning tools in the post-secondary educational system, with their inept technical communication skills. As a result, they are indirectly being marginalized from the mainstream job market.

I argue that international student's English-language skills are not technically strong, making them face hardships both academically and professionally. I also argue that the international testing system has some structural problems. Moreover, online learning has made, even harder, the lives of international students, who have poor technical-communication skills, which leaves them unable to adopt innovative ways to understand the knowledge economy.

Research Questions

1. How do international students write, speak, read, and listen to the technical communication in the context of the online learning environment?
2. What are the effects of these learning behaviours on the knowledge economy?
3. How can linguistically-challenged students feel left-out?
4. What language patterns do these international students use in the context of the sociology of education?
5. How can teachers play an instrumentally critical role in an online-learning environment?
6. What are the implications of these behaviours on higher education?

Literature Review

The importance of the English language cannot be denied, in an age of globalization (Sawir, 2005). The global education migration industry is tapping into the unprepared international students, who turn to international education providers, with the hope of finding better opportunities. In this regard, internationalization of higher education is in full swing and an integral part of institutional growth in Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2021; Quing, 2003). International students arrived in Canada with English language testing scores in their hands. Following the English-testing systems that evaluate international students, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Duolingo, Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and the Canadian Language Benchmark Placement Test (CLBPT), international students assume that they have reached an apex in their language skills, without knowing the harsh realities of cut-throat corporate economies. In addition, they may feel prepared, but are actually unprepared, as they may not be aware of their poor grammar, weak communication skills, and deficient networking abilities (Sawir, 2005). Students assume the role, like that of football players, who often get taken advantage of, for the purpose of profit, so too in the educational industrial complex, where these systems in technologically-advanced societies take undue advantage of international students.(Crayton, 2020).

Methods

Researchers employed Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 2003) as a method, so that they study the role of linguistics in society (Gavin, 2008). Some researchers explore social issues via CDA, others unearth power relations between groups, and a great many extrapolate narratives through employment of metadata and secondary data from nuances present in society and culture under the researcher's critical microscope (The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods, 2008). In this connection, the researchers have analyzed 50 students' assignments submitted on Flipgrid, Padlet, Blackboard, Microsoft Word, and Microsoft PowerPoint. The researchers kept the ethical considerations for this research via confidentiality and anonymity, by not linking any assignment or Flipgrid video footage to the study (TCPS, 2018). They also removed students' names from assignments, by randomly selecting names via multiple technologies and apps (TCPS, 2018- Chapter 5: Privacy and Confidentiality). The principal investigator was unable to see the names of students on the

assignments, so much so, that it provided an extra blind-study layer on metadata and its interpretation, through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis in this study.

Results

The researchers used critical discourse analysis for the analysis of data (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Flick, 2014) by employing Bernsteinian (2003) lens of elaborated code and restricted code. The findings reveal that international students' poor technical communication skills—coupled with deficiencies in writing, speaking, and reading—are a great matter of concern. It was also noted that international students are not fully aware of these facts: 1) Technical knowledge is different from cultural English; 2) Both cultural and technical communication skills are needed to survive in post-secondary tenure; 3) Competencies, such as the understanding of technical communication, assignments, email ethics and networking, are the most critical skills, other than academics, to survive in the competitive, higher-educational environment.

Writing:

Upon critical analysis of metadata, available through the writing assignments of international students, it appeared that they are unable to write technical pieces well, in a way that may expand their subject knowledge. In this connection, their grammatical structures, syntax, and comprehension skills are weak, so much so, that they are sometimes incapable of producing high-quality assignments. The following themes emerged from the analysis of the writing assignments:

- Inability to connect operations
- Weak cognitive structures
- Poor command over organization
- Inexplicably deficient in technical background
- Simple sentence structures

Speaking:

When writing is poor, the resulting impact will be on speaking skills, which are built upon language experiences slowly and gradually. The researchers evaluated Flipgrid's oral communication assignment through the lens of critical discourse analysis, and found that these students' background knowledge is insufficient, to a point where they exhaust all their articulatory channels, whereby their thoughts are either inconsistent, cursive, or baseless, leaving a huge gap to fill in their cognitive structures. In this connection, below-mentioned themes stemmed from the analysis of the Flipgrid assignments submitted for oral communication grades.

- Inept technical communication
- Lack of appropriate content
- Highly layman language
- Insufficient technical vocabulary
- Inability to understand technical nuances and subtleties
- Thought inconsistencies

Reading

The researcher applied a technique of self-evaluation and debriefing on international students' Flipgrid tasks, where students had submitted assignments by self-criticizing their homework. These recordings were listened to, to see the level of linguistic strength in their oral communication. The following themes came from the evaluation:

- Unfamiliarity with deep context
- Lack of metacognition
- Failure of knowledge

Discussion and Conclusion

Bernstein (1964) reveals that students with elaborated codes make longer sentences, use complex language, elaborate more, and plan circumstantially, whereas students with restricted codes have unplanned discourse, produce weak educational materials, lack background information, and are poor interlocutors. Keeping in view the challenges faced by international students in their online classrooms, the following recommendations appear to be of relevance:

- Specialized English pathways
- Specialized assessments for reading comprehension
- Fast-track micro-credentials to support specialized field knowledge
- Well-prepared student power for investment
- More exposure to technical knowledge
- Enriched reading programs
- More enhanced institutional engagement
- Higher-educational institutes engaging in micro-credentials geared toward technical knowledge
- Knowledge mobilization via E-campus Ontario Certification
- Certificated knowledge of subject matter

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