Chapter 5
English as an Alternative Cultural Capital for University EFL Students in Morocco

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Abstract The status of the English language within the multi-linguistic landscape in Morocco has not yet been clearly defined. There is, nevertheless, a general consensus on the importance of this language for socioeconomic mobility at national and international levels. An evident reflection of such interest in the language is the growing demand for decent levels of English proficiency in various sectors in the Moroccan society and the marked increase in enrolment in English studies departments at Moroccan universities. Current EFL theory and research have focused on psychological factors explaining EFL students' motivations as inner drives, responses to social pressures, or, more recently, identity formation. Such treatise, however, is limited to micro-level identification processes and fails to pay tribute to larger macro-level processes that operate on the EFL students' choice and motivations. Critical and sociocultural accounts, in this regard, provide a more viable approach to language and identity; it views learning of a (foreign) language as an identification process through which learners construct various positionings within fields of conflicting ideologies competing for recognition. Referring mainly to Bourdieu's (Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education. Greenwood Press, New York, pp. 241–258, 1986) concept of cultural capital and based on a series of semi-structured interviews with 30 EFL university students, the present study sought to investigate English language learning motivations situating them within operating social macro-processes. A critical discourse analysis of the students' narratives indicated that Moroccan University EFL students perceive English as a cultural capital reflecting a cultural alternative for identification, recognition, and voice within the context of ideological and discursive struggles.

Keywords English as a foreign language · Cultural capital · Linguistic hegemony · Motivation

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5.1 Introduction

The present research departs from the idea that English as a foreign language is changing its status in the Moroccan society mirroring to a large extent the globalization processes operating at the international arena where the American culture holds the lion's share. In fact, there is wide-ranging consensus that English has become the world's first language of international and intercultural communication; it is the de facto means of communication of business, science, technology, politics, and above all, the virtual world (Crystal, 1997). As no exception to this trend, the English language seems to have gained significant currency in most sectors in the Moroccan society (Zouhir, 2013). Some of the tangible manifestations of these changes are the increasing number of enrolments in English Studies departments in all Moroccan universities, the creation of new departments and programs offering B.A. and M.A. degrees in English Studies, the integration of English in private schools as a subject in lower levels with increasing demands from parents to target even lower levels, the mushrooming language centers offering language courses in English for general and specific purposes, the rising daily presence of English in diverse Moroccan cultural artifacts, and the increasing identification with the American culture and language (Afro-American culture, pop culture, etc.).

This domineering status of English in the world tends to paint interesting shades of symbolism other than the much criticized linguistic, and cultural, hegemony (Phillipson, 1992). As a symbol of social mobility and freedom, represented in the American ideal of "you can be whatever you wish to be," the English language tends to provide an earthly quintessence of an alternative to subvert inequitable social structures, and hence tends to be liberating and empowering (Alexander, 2003). For Moroccan youths aspiring for a more promising social reality than the traditional options which have been fashioned within the Moroccan social context for decades, learning English may open large alternative venues for self-fulfillment, identification, and voice.

The present paper starts from the idea that English provides a cultural model of social success alternative to traditional normative models persisting in the Moroccan society. Learning English as a foreign language reflects gains in the cultural capital of learners and promises an escape from the socially structured system of opportunities that tend to disfavor these learners. This framework seems to hold promising potentials to explain the intricacies of such as a complex and multi-faceted construct as motivation for learning for EFL learners in Moroccan.

5.2 Cultural Capital Theory

The concept of *capital* originates in Bourdieu's (1986, 1991) sociological work on culture and society. Capital refers to assets that have marketable value, which can be owned and disowned, and which can differentiate among individuals in a specific

community. The appropriation of such assets is part of a socialization process with multiple pathways, each culminating in different position within the social structure. In addition to the more commonly known economical capital, Bourdieu distinguished among three interrelated types of capital: social, symbolic, and cultural. Cultural capital refers to the nonfinancial assets. Bourdieu (1986) explains that the concept denotes "instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed" (p. 73). Similarly to other types of assets, cultural capital serves defining one's position within the social structure. The term capital was coined to describe one major aspect of habitus, the semi-instinctive skills, and strategies that individuals develop through and for the interaction with their social environment.

According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital consists in embodied, objectified, and institutionalized forms; in other words, cultural capital defines an individual by her/his embodied, objectified, and institutionalized assets. The long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body are the embodied form; they are the ways people interact with their social milieu; their language including accent and other idiosyncratic features, ways of greeting, dressing, eating, walking, etc. The cultural goods, objects, and artifacts are the objectified form; these include pictures, monuments, folklores, names, etc., objects that have symbolic meaning of members of the same community. The educational and professional qualifications are the institutionalized form of capital; these are all types of credentials that are social accepted as a guarantee of competence and skills in functioning in positions at various levels. Degrees, diplomas, and certificates are examples of institutionalized cultural capital.

Bourdieu was particularly interested in how school grants institutionalized qualification, which serves future social inclusion and exclusion in society. Since education is considered the gatekeeper for economic and social attainment, the models of success that schools perpetuate tend most of the time to set high standards privileging certain profiles, as they are favored in the job market in specific societies. These profiles tend to be deeply sedimented in the cultural representations of the people and develop and maintain accordingly high culture. Students with different learning profiles, who may equally be important in other settings, are often pushed to either conform or get stigmatized with failure. This, Bourdieu (1991) claims, results in an unbalanced distribution of cultural capital in a society where upper-class families have inherited and pass on their cultural capital to their offspring securing a stronghold over socially privileged social, political, and economic positions. This is done through providing easy access to formal and informal institutional qualification opportunities in diverse domains that enable them to develop and possess much cultural capital compared to lower classes. Such discrepancy in cultural capital possessions explains the reasons why some students are successful both in access to educational settings and in their academic achievement, while others are not (Lareau, 1989). Indeed, both family origin and education have been found to predict social mobility; students belonging to high culture families tend to seize more favoring educational options that allow them access to higher education (Kingston, 2001; Sirin, 2005). Students, lacking either inherited cultural capital or favoring conditions, would drop out even though they have managed to access higher education

institutions; the causes include making the "wrong" choice, the feeling of isolation or hostility in academic culture and a lack of preparedness for academic challenges (Connor, Tyers, Modood, & Hillage, 2004).

In fact, the main thrust of the cultural capital theory is that education as an institution is not a neutral setting created to provide equal opportunities to students, but is rather a perpetuator of social inequalities (Devine, 2008). Munk and Krarup (2011) contend that "the strength of cultural capital theory is first of all in its perspective that conceptually and empirically permits analysis of the structured construction and complex quality of the social circumstances, differences, and inequalities" (p. 4). Bourdieu (1986) used cultural capital theory to explain how the social structures of a host society perpetuated themselves and how social class was reproduced through the acquisition, accumulation, and intergenerational transmission of cultural capital.

5.3   Language a Cultural Capital

Language is part and parcel of the cultural capital of individuals in a society. Part of the embodied cultural capital, knowledge, and skills consciously acquired and passively inherited through socialization, is the linguistic knowledge and skills that constitute an individual's means of communication and self-presentation (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). It is very important for the appropriation of symbolic capital, which bestows value on the language speaker within his/her social milieu. Bourdieu (1977) explains that the dominant habitus is transformed into a form of cultural capital that schools take for granted and which acts as a filter in the reproductive process of hierarchical society. Cultural capital is made up of familiarity with and skill in the use of the dominant linguistic habitus in a society; in other words, it refers to the ability to understand and use "educated" language that corresponds with demand of the formal and public market. This match is the foundation of the fluency and self-confidence that the dominant class has and through which its members gain symbolic power simply because they speak that way. Harrison (2009) adds that the value of language derives not only from its place in the linguistic market, or field using Bourdieu's term, but also from the status of the individuals speaking it. Considered as a social process, language provides more insight into the production and maintenance of power relations (Blackledge, 2005).

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1984) contends that middle and low-class individuals often try to own the palpable features of the dominant cultural capital, on top of which is language in addition to dress style, taste, and other objectified forms; they use them as cultural signifiers as they seek to identify themselves with those who are "above" them on the social ladder, and to show their difference from those who are "below" them, though this identification may not be successful quite often. Adopting the linguistic capital of the dominant cultural capital is sought mainly because it opens doors both academically and professionally. For instance, Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) investigated how a student with desired types of cultural

(and linguistic) capital in a school transforms this capital into social capital (instrumental relations) with institutional agents; the latter can transmit valuable resources to him/her, which will allow him/her to make further gains in academic achievement. Similarly, showing expertise in the use of valued forms of discourse during recruitment interview may set the balance in favor of the interviewee, compared to someone who is less familiar with the "jargon" of the field. Mastery of language, as an embodied cultural capital, can be very detrimental in securing privilege in society.

5.4 English as a Cultural Capital

Thanks to globalization, the English language has gained vast fields of use and comfortably secured a position as the de facto international language of communication today (Crystal, 1997; Friedman, 2003; Graddol, 1997, 2006; Hjarvard, 2008; Jenkins, 2007; Johnson, 2009; Ostler, 2010). It has dominated communication in all sectors, entertainment, education, business, politics, and world diplomacy.

In addition, other researchers pointed out to the fact that some basic knowledge in English has become necessary for functioning in diverse contexts around the world (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 2006; Pennycook, 1994). In fact, English has been associated with increased opportunities of social mobility. Murcia (2003) argued that globalization and the global market have imposed English as the main means of communication. People around the world tend to learn English for a number of reasons, the most important of which is increasing professional prospects; English grants access to internationally recognized education, well-paying careers, and networking at a global scale. Yong and Campbell (1995) accurately label English as a "social and economic mobilizer" (p. 384).

Having been crowned the world's first language, English knowledge can be considered as a cultural capital regarded as a socially, economically, and symbolically valuable quality in most countries of the world, though in different ways and degrees. English competence is now the "hard currency" cultural capital (Murcia, 2003) that guarantees successful integration in the academic and professional world (London, 2001).

5.5 Language and Cultural Capital in Morocco

The Moroccan context is no exception to this global trend; the English language is gaining ground within a multi-linguistic scene in Morocco (Zouhir, 2013) displaying an array of local and foreign languages including Arabic, Amazigh, French, etc. French in particular, as the language of the former colonizer, has long entertained a very privileged and complex status in the Moroccan society; it has been the de facto language of administration, education, and economy despite the fact that the Moroccan constitution acknowledges only Arabic and Amazigh as official

languages (Boukous, 2009; Ennaji, 2005; Marley, 2004). French is the medium of instruction in most, if not all, regulated access educational institutions, which are considered as leading to most prestigious careers in the job market, and hence are seen as elitist. People from all social strands tend to regard French as a gatekeeper (Zakhir & O'Brien, 2017) and to encourage their children to enhance their French competence. The French language, being neocolonial, constitutes a strong cultural capital that upper classes utilize to ensure dominance over and regulation of decision-making positions in the society (Bullock, 2014; Ennaji, 2002). Individuals with no or low competence in French are inevitably at a great disadvantage when competing for academic and professional opportunities with their peers who inherited and were enabled to own a French cultural capital. They are structurally prevented from opportunities of effective social mobility. The French language then constitutes in effect the strongest form of cultural capital for young Moroccan students simply because it is the societal norm acting as a measuring stick (Bourdieu, 1991).

Nevertheless, this privileged status of French is being seriously challenged by English. Deriving its hegemonic power from its global dominance, the English language is gaining ground in domains previously dominated exclusively by French. There are tangibly increasing demands on English use in sectors as diverse as business, trade, diplomacy, engineering, medicine, etc. One particularly significant sector where English is being introduced gradually is the education sector. Now English is one important subject in almost all schools at all levels; more and more content courses and whole programs are offered with English as a main medium of instruction; and enrolments in English departments in Moroccan universities are soaring with hundreds of students per department. Even though French still dominates the job market, at least people's cultural representations seem to be gradually changing in favor of English; people have stated considering English as an important asset in Morocco.

Students in English departments across Moroccan universities, and similar to all other open access departments, generally belong to mid-lower to lower socioeconomic classes (Mhamed, 2004). They most often lack competence in French and have had little chance to join regulated access colleges; their motivation to do English Studies either is haphazard, as they have not been able to make better choices, or reflects an intrinsic love for the language and its culture. Generally, humanities and languages as majors at the university in Morocco are considered as a last choice as they are often associated with limited career opportunities and low prestige. The English language then may constitute for these young people a way for proving their existence, which might explain the rising interest in and motivation for English studies as a major at university. As Lamont and Lareau (1988) claim, within the structural reproduction framework of cultural theory, there is room for personal agency that allows for variation in the acquisition and use of cultural capital. Moroccan EFL learners may sustain and enhance motivation for learning English because it represents for them an alternative cultural capital that would allow them social recognition and some form of rewarding social mobility.

In the light of the Moroccan linguistic situation and the theoretical framework adopted, the present study then purports to investigate the extent to which English

forms an alternative cultural capital for Moroccan students. The following research questions are posed accordingly:

- How do University EFL learners perceive English as an academic choice?
- How do they redefine its role and status in Morocco?
- How do they self-identify with reference to the English language within the context of hegemony and conflicting ideologies?

5.6 Methodology

The method of data collection adopted is the semi-structured interview. This was justified by the need to allow ample freedom for the participants to voice their experiences, concerns, and feelings as openly as possible while at the same time maintaining focus and reflexivity. The participants are 30 EFL students majoring in a three–year B.A. program in English Language and Literature. The choice of participants followed mainly the purposive sampling technique and was on a voluntary basis. Students were informed of their right to withdraw from participation if they did not feel comfortable completing the interview.

I opted for Semester 6 students to ensure enough experience in learning English and enough language competence to allow a more reflective treatment of the research issues. The data collection took place around the mid-semester period where there is usually more regular class attendance, and hence, a larger number of students to approach. Accordingly, the students were approached individually or in small groups and were requested to participate in the research project. I informed them about their rights and duties with regard to the research stressing the voluntary and unanimous nature of their potential participation. The interviews started with general demographic questions to serve both as icebreaker and elicitation of background information. I mainly resorted to probing and prompting techniques and limited my own participation to the strict minimum. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed shortly afterwards.

The focus of analysis was directed mainly to the discursive ways in which the participants created understandings; to this end, the study resorts to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992, 2003). The latter engages the text critically and aims at uncovering the wider societal discourses and orders of discourse a text instantiates, the hegemonic relations that are being sustained or opposed, and the ideological effects in terms of systems of knowledge and belief, social relations, and social identities (Blackledge, 2005; Fairclough, 1992).

Accordingly, the analytical strategy within the emergent design that the present research adopts consisted in a close interaction among the data, the literature, and the research questions going through identification of first-order themes, refinements of higher order themes, and co-constructions of meanings, understandings, and realities. This process resulted gradually in defining the motivations of university EFL learners for the English language though bringing to light their cultural representations of this

language as they are being created through discursive practices within macro-contexts of power and hegemony.

5.7   Results and Discussion

5.7.1   Early Motivations for and Representations of English

The study of English in the public sector starts from the third year in junior high school. In the private sector, English subjects start in the primary level years depending on schools; so by the time Moroccan students reach the university they will have studied English as a required subject for at least four years; a minority will also have studied English in language centers alongside their regular courses at school. Apart from the formal education settings, the students encounter English in diverse contexts in their daily lives; the World Wide Web and satellite channels of course remain the main media through which the present time youth are exposed to the English language and culture (movies, series, videogames, songs, chat rooms, electronic search engines, etc.). Regardless of whether they have some level of proficiency in English, the ordinary Moroccan youth are already well acquainted with the language and its people and culture, have already developed representations and attitudes toward them, and have already cherished more or less clear prospects of future learning experiences in this language.

This is expressly true for almost all the interviewees; when asked about their perceptions of English during the preuniversity period, they most noted that this language has a great value both locally and globally; examples from the data include:

> Before I had the chance to take university courses, English represented to me a language and a culture to explore. (Ahmed)

> English represented a language of opportunities and a door to the western world and people (Hanae).

This reflects positive cultural representations in Moroccan EFL learners even before they major in English Studies at university, which indicates a strong motivational drive. Some of the interviewees showed even more enthusiasm when talking about their fascination with the language and its culture:

> The reason why I chose English is that I like that language for what it represents. Simply put, the culture it brings really fascinates me, especially music and cinema. (Manal)

> Before university, English was one of my favorite subjects and I had that feeling of pride when speaking it. (Mohammed)

> English symbolized to me my personal space. I used to watch English videos and read English articles instead of French. I found myself in the English culture of science, communication, open-mindedness and sharing. (Rania)

The students' perceptions of English are embedded within global and local discourses about the dominance of this language worldwide.

For a few other participants, the love of the English language has been instigated by an admiration of their English teachers: "I was inspired by my ex-teacher, and I enjoyed learning English and attending my classes" (Imane); and "I loved my English teacher, and he always encouraged and pushed me to work hard and do my efforts." (Ahmed).

Teachers seem to provide a tangible role model of a member of the Moroccan English community who manages to win the admiration of her/his students as well as societal approbation. In such cases of the influence of a positive role model, students feel encouraged to dive into an academic path leading most probably to a teaching career.

Sometimes, the influence of the role model intersects with very positive attitudes toward the English language and culture deriving primarily from discourses of globalizations:

> … my English teacher used to do her best to teach us, and we had a lot of respect for her, she taught us about the culture of English, not just the language, and English is a world language; it's the langue of international communication. (Imane)

In another instance, the teacher of English as a role model stood in sharp contrast to teachers of other subjects: "she (English teacher) was cool and fun, not like other teachers; she used to greet us and brings us sweets; and we really enjoyed her class." (Said). This reflects a symbolic opposition between two representatives of different communities within the same society that the students socially constructed and reproduced to make sense of their admiration for English teachers.

In other cases, a simple "love" for the language seems to provide the main motivation for the choice: "I love English; all my favorite activities are related to English, like watching movies and series in English" (Said). Beyond academic or professional prospects, self-satisfaction may be the sole motivator; the American movie and series culture in addition to videogames seem to exert a strong influence on the young generation tastes, preferences, and general life choices. This particularly true with EFL learners who have developed "new" interests reflecting their familiarity and adoption of "prestigious" cultural identity and practices; holding such interests seems to promote feelings of distinctiveness and pride, an alternative way that these students adopt to position themselves socially among their peers.

While the discussed factors seem to impact the students' choice, it is very difficult to attribute the choice of English to a simple motivational influence; the students draw on a large array of interweaving factors interacting in multiple ways and reflected in their constructed discourses to make sense of their actions. This leads us to the conclusion that as early as this phase in their lives, EFL learners have already appreciated the symbolic value of the English language within the Moroccan society and in relation to their academic and professional aspirations.

5.7.2 *Motivations for and Representations of English During University Years*

As discussed in the preceding section, the choice of English as a major here does not by far reflect a rational bid; it rather involves a more intuitive and emotional turn of the mind influenced by multiple factors leading to diverse motivational profiles. During the university years, nonetheless, the picture does not appear to be any different. The students maintained and developed further their interest in studying English. Their motivations derived from diverse influences such as long exposure to the language, intrinsic interests in the cultural products, positive cultural representations, etc.

Describing his changing perception of the English language during the university year, Fatima stated that:

> It has changed in a very positive way; I discovered new branches related to the English language which I become eager to learn and dig deeper into. I become motivated to it further to the highest level which is beyond that literal use of the English language. I started to read more and in different fields as long as I understand the language. I fell in love with this language I sat up plans to make use of what I learnt and invent more.

Here the person expresses a strong commitment to the academic path she chose, i.e., English Studies; her expression "beyond that literal use of the English language" symbolizes a strong agency enabled by her rising proficiency in the language and resulting in great emotional value attached to it. Similarly, Yassine voices such heightened sense of self-fulfillment that academic achievements grant him; he states: "My university period of studying English raised my motivation toward English due to the success I have and the support gained from my university professors." He continues later as: "I was motivated to study because I was doing something I love; my professors were awesome and made me love it even more." Furthermore, the global status of English still informs momentously the cultural representations of EFL learners. For instance, Ahmed notes that: "I really like to learn English because of its reputation and as an international spoken language." On a similar note, Said states that "We all know the importance of English globally; it's the language of technology, development, communication …" In effect, such positiveness toward the English language and culture even significantly increased during the university years. Imane mentions that her perception "has changed positively. I developed positive attitudes about the English language and its culture, especially after learning more about the British and American cultures." English does indeed enjoy a great symbolic value for Moroccan EFL learners as reflected in the high interest and motivation they show.

Another theme that was recurrent in the narratives of the interviewees is the role of English as *the main* means of self-expression. The learners highlighted the fact that English adequately serves their communication needs at various levels; they use it for both academic and personal purposes alike, and find it easier to interact in it, as argued by Rania and Oumaima, respectively: "I would say just the fact that the majority of my friends are English speaker and that we use English a lot shows to what extent I care for English."; and "It's my first language; I study in it; and I chat and read in it; I watch American movies and listen to American

singers …; that's why I feel comfortable expressing myself in this language." Many others expressed their dependence on English not only for communicational purposes but also for artistic expression in the form of poetry, short stories, music lyrics, etc. Intrapersonal communication is also done mostly in English in the form of diaries, freewriting, and personal thoughts. Being able to satisfy all these communicational needs, Moroccan EFL learners at university have developed an emotional connection with this language enhancing its symbolic value for these young people.

The main addition that the university experience makes to the motivations of the EFL learners is the distinct and fully conscious appreciation of English that they have developed aligned to a stronger and more stable commitment to the English language culture, to their academic path, and to their future prospects as professional English users. This is clear in the interviewees' own words describing their motivation for and perception of English:

> First, my motivation for studying English was mainly intrinsic. I had a passion for the English language but during my studies I developed some sort of instrumental motivation. I want to learn English to use it for studies and research and to teach it as well. (Aziz)

> I realized it can shape my professional career and make me a living. My love to the language also grew during the process after going through all the aspects of it. (Meryem)

> it was changed, but not radically. This was because of the stress of the exams and presentation that made me think that English is not only for movies and free conversation but it is something serious that specifies my future. (Said)

The students seem more interested in the English language not just for its self-expression role, but also for the relative guarantee it provides of "making a living" in the future.

The discursive practices the interviewees engage in reflect to a high extent the significant symbolic value that they ascribe to the English language. Their interest in and motivations for this language lie at the intersection among socially constructed representations of the language and its culture that come to align quite conveniently with socially constructed needs, desires, and priorities.

5.7.3 Constructed Identities and Belonging

Having strong motivations for English Studies does in fact reflect a sense of belonging to an imagined community, a term that was introduced by Anderson (1991) to denote feelings of nationalism and can be extended to cover all types of communities that people socially construct and claim belonging to them. These communities are qualified as imagined to reflect the assumption that boundaries are rather blurred and unstable and thus do not correspond to any fixed geographical or other category. An imagined community is instantiated at a local as well as a global level, and moves most often across cultural and sociopolitical boundaries. An imagined community combines people with common interests and discursive practices; while the specific meanings that members ascribe to objects and practices might be as varied as the

members themselves, there is still a pseudo-consensual agreement embedded within feelings of belonging and identity that are constructed primarily intra-personally at the individual level. As such claiming membership is a form of identification with the community and depends on personal choices and preferences, which are, nevertheless, largely predisposed socioculturally, a good example of agency within structure (Giddens, 1984). Identifying with a community is positioning oneself in a network of socially distinct, like-minded individuals who share similar discursive practices, inhabit the same discursive world, and possess similar discursive strategies; the latter, in particular, endow them with cultural, social, economic, and political advantages, what Bourdieu calls cultural capital.

In our present case, the English speaking community can be construed as an imagined community to which Moroccan EFL learners claim belonging. In effect, throughout all the interviews, the notion of an imagined community has been omnipresent; however, the concept of a community has ranged in scope and nature. A participant was very specific and defined the community as "Moroccan English speakers"; such a community would include EFL learners and users within and outside the academic domain in the Moroccan society. Another is more expressive when discussing her belonging:

> I see myself now as a prospective English language speaker and I surely feel distinguished from other students studying other majors, for it is becoming the world language and it always makes me happy when I see that I can speak, write, read in English, I can communicate with foreigners without feeling oppressed or ashamed rather confident and most of all because it allowed me to discover new fields. (Rania)

This student, like many others, describes a strong sense of belonging to the English community distinguishing herself from students doing other majors at the university; she also notes the pride and confidence she has in her belonging and her possessing the discursive practices that identify the community. Such discursive strategies enable her to engage in conversations with fellow members and open up to new horizons.

A similar opinion is voiced by Manal in the following:

> I do have a strong belonging to the English community, yes Arabic is my mother tongue language but it is always way more cheerful and motivating whenever I am talking English, attending an event or even virtually speaking to a foreigner. It makes me say "this is where I belong." (Aziz)

Other interviewees prefer to stress the global dimension of the English community and the markers of belonging: "I have a strong sense of belonging to the English community; this is manifested through social interaction among the English community members." (Ahmed)

Similarly, Mohammed highlights his world citizenship stating that:

> I consider myself as a citizen of the world because all what happens on the global scale somehow affects my life, be it financially or culturally or politically wise. Moreover, I consider myself lucky since I have a certain mastery of English which of course allows me to stay in touch with every event that happens in the world.

Meryem further notes the global dimension and highlights social recognition in the virtual world; for her, possessing discursive practices allows her to be recognized as a

member of the English community; she says: "In society in the virtual world, people view me as a member of the English community." Said sates the same: "Virtually, native speakers of English think I am a native English speaker."

As mentioned earlier, the imagined community is characterized by a cultural capital; acquisition of such a capital entails acquiring the most distinctive discursive feature, which is competence in the English language. Instances of the discursive practices cited by the interviewees include competence in language skills, pronunciation and accent, and the use of the American slang, in addition to personal interests in clothing styles, music genres, and movies, etc., all of which form the embodied and objectified form of cultural capital.

5.7.4 Competing Hegemonies and Alternative Cultural Capital

In the cultural representations of the Moroccan EFL learners at university, the languages in use in society range from low to high status. As discussed in Sect. 5.4 above, the French language is hegemonic in Morocco and competence in it is considered as the strongest cultural capital; fluent speakers of French tend to be recognized socially as belonging to, or at least related in a way or another to, the high class; they are perceived as worthy of respect and are privileged in the job market (Bullock, 2014; Zakhir & O'Brien, 2017). These cultural representations were echoed in the narratives of the interviewees. Aziz, for instance, mentions that: "I think French is still somehow dominating in Morocco; everything is in French; we are going to be teachers of English and still required to write our CVs in French." This language serves clearly a gate-keeping function and ensures access to the job market. Similarly, "French is still considered as the main foreign language of the country" (Mounir), it "has a huge importance in our educational system since it was the language of the colonization," and it is "still very important in our country and this is obvious in media, administration, etc." Comparing the two languages French and English, Ahmed states: "In terms of its importance, English comes second after French", and Mohammed confirms that saying: "No one can deny that English is the language of commerce, communication, research etc. still in morocco there is an intention to make French the first language. Most Moroccans, whether Amazigh or Arab, use only French." French is indeed a very influential language in the Moroccan context; it provides its users with cultural capital translated into social and economic privilege, most often in the form of highly paid positions and prestigious social status; it is then in their best interest to make use of this capital in maintaining this symbolic source of power, similarly to what Giddens (1984) calls "duality of structure," referring the reflexive relationship between social structure and discursive practices.

Nevertheless, there is a sort of unanimity among the interviewees on the growing importance of English in Morocco. Yassine states: "I can see it becoming the country's second language as a lot of people are showing interest to learn it, and

also many political and academic measures were taken to enhance the position of the language in different fields." Imane hopefully calls for a change in the language policy of the country: "English should be given much more importance than the one given to French. I personally think that it should be the first foreign language in Morocco." Yassine further explains the reason for such shift as: "I think English will take over … the English language and English culture are powerful politically and economically which gives English speakers a powerful position." English derives its power from its domination at a global scale; because of globalization of the media and the blurring of cross-state boundaries, the hegemony of English is imposing gradually its structural configuration within the Moroccan society. More and more people are altering their cultural representation of English; in this regard, the interviewees, Meryem, Rania, and Said state, respectively: "English is a world language; it's the language of communication; it's the language of the elite," "it symbolizes prestige," and "it's a very important language nowadays, it's a language that open various avenues in my future." They refer to the growing symbolic value of this language and the social advantages of possessing such a cultural capital; Aziz claims: "I feel distinguished because I see myself being able to communicate in the world's most privileged language, the lingua-franca."

One last comment made by one of the interviewees reflects an even stronger motivation for the appropriation the cultural capital endowed by the mastery of the English language:

> I certainly feel different. I am able to communicate with people from different countries, learn more about cultures; I think that being able to speak English in a country that gives a huge importance to French is a privilege. (Yassine)

Yassine's voice reflects a macro-level competition taking place within the Moroccan context over dominance: the French language representing the ruling elite and the English language providing potential alternatives for oppressed classes. At a micro-level, this reflects a strong desire in Moroccan EFL learners to position themselves as worthy individuals in the society and to make achievements at different levels. Identifying with the English language has become thus a sort of resistance to coercive discourses stifling alternative voices and monopolizing social mobility and self-fulfillment opportunities. The fact that most of the interviewees are welcoming the shift toward the English points to the main postulate of the present research; this is a conscious preference for one of two discursive practices in the multi-linguistic scene in Morocco over dominance and symbolic power. This is nicely formulated in the comment of Zineb: "English was a choice and was not imposed on me like French." English can thus be considered as the alternative cultural capital that Moroccan EFL learners aspire to acquire for better future prospects.

5.8 Conclusion

The present study set out to investigate the extent to which the English language provides an alternative cultural capital for Moroccan EFL learners at university to explain the motivations for English study. The results point to the fact that the English language in Morocco seems to manifest all the elements of a potential cultural capital for Moroccan EFL learners. The participants' narratives have revealed that the English language and culture have a very important symbolic meaning for them as part of their socially constructed cultural representations. In the process of learning this language, they acquire the three forms of cultural capital identified by Bourdieu (1984): embodied forms (language skills, accent, and behaviors), the objectified forms (cultural products, music, clothes, nicknames, etc.), and the institutionalized forms (B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. degrees in English Studies or related fields). This cultural capital promises potential academic gains (Sullivan, 2001; Willms & Tramonte, 2010) and social and economic profits (Phillipson, 1999; Park & Abelmann, 2004). It also signifies potential social recognition in a social milieu that is largely dominated by Francophone ideologies (Bullock, 2014; Zakhir & O'Brien, 2017; Zouhir, 2013). The EFL learners' choice and motivation for English study reflects their attempt at subverting the dominance of the elitist French language, traditionally hegemonic in the Moroccan society, by constructing discursive practices drawing upon sources of symbolic power already available at a global level and within the battlefield of warring languages and ideologies (Lefevre, 2015). Such an understanding of students' motivations can only be reached through a strictly macro-level perspective. Quoting Bourdieu, Harrison (2009) states that discursive practices cannot be understood "separate to the broader sociocultural and politico-economic milieus in which they are embedded" (p. 1083).

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