

Local Creativity in the Face of Global Domination: Insights of Bakhtin for Teaching English for Dialogic Communication

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BAKHTIN IN HIS HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FREEDOM OF CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH CARNIVAL LAUGHTER

Contemporary readers of Bakhtin may be surprised at his optimism about the possibility of freedom of consciousness, and the possibility of liberation from ideological hegemony of dominant discourses, especially when one notices that Bakhtin was writing, theorizing, and living under one of the most authoritarian regimes in Russian history, when both the everyday world and the intellectual world were dominated by absolute discourses of political ideologies; when heteroglossia in the way he envisioned it seemed most unlikely to happen in his contemporary social, academic, and political scenes; and when his own doctoral thesis and writings were denigrated and prevented from free public circulation by various political and ideological censorships and/or life mishaps. One can perhaps only conclude that it is the extreme material and ideological conditions of monoglossia and public

intellectual closure that had infused this great writer; thinker; and researcher of human discourses, folk literature, and literary genres with the greatest hope and belief in the invincible human potential to achieve freedom of consciousness, creativity, innovation, and cultural and ideological change through what he believed to be the inherent dialogic open-endedness of human utterances. His lifelong fascination with the novel as an open-ended genre and discursive space for the free juxtaposition and fruitful dialogic interaction of diverse voices (or social languages, styles, ideologies, and different consciousnesses); his detailed research of Medieval satirical literature and Russian novels; his exposition of folk humor and carnival laughter as not merely individual reaction to some isolated “comic” event but public, collective practices of social and ideological critique; and his theory of language as dialogic interaction all point to his immense passion for and belief in the potential liberative power of human agency and local creativity even in the face of absolute ideological domination and official closure. Bakhtin’s greatness cannot be fully appreciated without reading him in light of his historical and sociopolitical context and in light of how his theories and analyses provide the greatest hope and insights for others who find themselves in contexts where ideological and linguistic domination (both explicit and implicit) is an everyday reality with which one must live and struggle.

GLOBALIZATION, GLOBAL CAPITALISM, AND THE GLOBAL DOMINATION OF ENGLISH

The late 20th and early 21st centuries have curiously and increasingly witnessed the juxtaposition of the seemingly disparate yet historically intimately linked processes of global capitalism on the one hand and processes of de- and neocolonizations on the other. Although often seen in separation, the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic links of these two sets of processes render it more instructive to treat them as (analytically different) aspects of a complex network of interlinked, simultaneously symbiotic and conflictual processes that attend the new global capitalist, technological, political, social, cultural, human labor, and semiotic formations. As if Janus-faced, this “complex” (for want of a better name) is paradoxically invested with often-contradictory forces: both de- and neocolonizing energies, globalizing and localizing tendencies, multiculturalism and national culturalism, transnational organizations, and competing particularisms. In short, the world seems to have become increasingly intelligible only as highly complex interlinked networks of border-crossing identities, bodies, and capitals as well as cultural and semiotic formations *without any fixities guaranteed and without a linear, progressive, universal, teleological history as Hegel or modernism has it*. Capitalist globalization can bring about neocolonization in the form of mega-cor-

porate monopolizing of markets around the world and relentless and borderless exploitation of human physical and cultural/semiotic labor on an even greater scale than in 19th century colonialisms. Communicative globalization can, however, also open up possibilities for transnational solidarities, transcultural–transethnic hybridized identities; erasure of center–periphery/master–slave/civilized–uncivilized binaries; and perhaps even hopes of a global, utopian, intercivilizational alliance against institutionalized suffering (Gandhi, 1998). Capitalist globalization can bring about cultural and ideological homogenization and domination just as it can bring about the particularization of cultures to feed the desires of a growing global tourist industry for the exotic and the multicultural (Robertson, 1995). Given its possibilities for both plenitude and impoverishment, homogenization and proliferation, solidarity and fragmentation, happy dialogic hybridization and ugly unilateral linguistic and ideological domination, understanding and dealing with the consequences of both capitalist globalizing processes and local particularizing practices becomes an important and daunting task.

One entry point for tackling this task is to examine the often tension-filled, conflictual activities attending *English in education* in post/neocolonial contexts, where the domination of English has gained forceful renewed legitimacy when any possible postcolonial critique of English dominance can be powerfully neutralized by the hegemonic discourses of global capitalism. Hong Kong is a case in point for a good illustration of the continuous domination of English in education in the so-called “post-colonial” era. Hong Kong schoolchildren are now expected by the official authorities to emerge from the school with fluency in both English and Putonghua (the national standard Chinese language, which is linguistically related but quite different from most Hong Kong children’s own native tongue, Cantonese). For instance, the most recent language education policy document released by the Hong Kong government (Standing Committee on Language Education and Research, 2003) draws heavily on the hegemonic discourses of global capitalism. In the document, English is highlighted side by side with “Chinese,” which is taken to mean the standard national Chinese language (as reflected in later parts of the document) rather than the local people’s native language, Cantonese. There is a double domination faced by the local people and schoolchildren. Cantonese, the local tongue, can never be expected to be valued—not in education, or in society, albeit always with an invisible taken-for-granted existence in the background. The global language of English and the national language of standard Chinese are placed at the top of the linguistic hierarchy constructed and legitimized through global capitalist discourses. Elsewhere in the policy document, employers’ demands are cited as the driving force for improving schoolchildren’s “language standards,” which refers to proficiencies in English and Putonghua. A labor production driven model

of education is highlighted. The document also calls on universities to ensure the enforcement of a high English language requirement for university admission: Grade C or above in the General Certificate of Education (GCE) O-Level English examination or Band 6 in the International English Language Testing System. The consequences of the domination of English in education might be comprehended by the English-speaking North American readers by imagining the imposition of a GCE O-Level Grade C French (if not Russian) language requirement for admission to college (no matter what courses one chooses) in the North American context. The medium of instruction of all universities in Hong Kong (except the Chinese University of Hong Kong) has continued to be English, and there is pressure to convert the Chinese University of Hong Kong into an English-medium university, where the professional disciplines, such as medicine and computer science, have already long been taught in English.

What is the relationship between the global domination of English and the production of the subjectivities of many students in Hong Kong? Cultural studies researcher Stephen Chan, for instance, presented in a seminar the following perspectives:

Critical stance on the question of Hong Kong subjectivity:

Hong Kong as a community of needs, aspirations and solidarity could not have taken the form of the dominant culture of modernity we see today without the substantive rule by the British colonizers, especially during the post-War period.

In conclusion, colonial rule was not simply about political domination but a persistent rhetoric of colonial dominance that has grown with capitalist modernity itself. This is a situation we may investigate via the case of the global popular in Hong Kong, asking whether colonialism is in effect a complex modern regime of culture, a dynamic mechanism of control in which *power is meant not to prohibit but to produce subjectivity* [italics added] (Chan, 2002).

If “colonialism is in effect a complex modern regime of culture, a dynamic mechanism of control in which power is meant not to prohibit but to produce subjectivity” (Chan, 2002), then one should also ask the questions of whether and how the English-dominant language-in-education policies and schooling practices are part of that dynamic mechanism of neocolonial control and what kinds of subjectivities are being produced under that mechanism. Little work from this perspective has been done so far, and what follows is a preliminary exploration of the issues from this perspective. First, from the available data it seems that a deep sense of a “subaltern subjectivity” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998) is being felt by working-class

schoolchildren located in socioeconomic positions that are not provided with family and community capital for the acquisition of English:

You want to know why I don't pay attention in English lessons? You really want to know? Okay, here's the reason: NO INTEREST!! It's so boring and difficult and I can never master it. But the society wants you to learn English! If you're no good in English, you're no good at finding a job! (Original spoken in Cantonese by a 14-year-old schoolboy in an informal interview; from Lin, 1999, p. 407)

What this schoolboy is expressing seems to be a deep sense of anger, frustration, and yet almost helpless resignation to the recognition that he is condemned both to a current identity of school failure and a future identity of social failure. The power of the dominance of English in the education system and the society and his own painful vision of himself never being able to master English illustrate well the role played by the English language in a neocolonial, complex, modern capitalist regime of culture that is "meant not to prohibit but to produce subjectivity," in this case, a subaltern subjectivity (Ashcroft et al., 1998) in which the individual perceives him- or herself as without any hope for social mobility. Students' creative, subversive practices in the classrooms (see classroom excerpts, presented later) show us how local classroom participants sometimes resist and contest the production of such subaltern identities by engaging in practices that contribute to the building of alternative counteridentities, perhaps similar to those found in McLaren's (1998) analysis of students' countercultural practices in the inner city schools of North America:

The major drama of resistance in schools is an effort on the part of students to bring their street-corner culture into the classroom it is a fight against the erasure of their street-corner identities students resist turning themselves into worker commodities in which their potential is evaluated only as future members of the labor force. *At the same time, however, the images of success manufactured by the dominant culture seem out of reach for most of them* [italics added]. (p. 191)

For the majority of working-class Cantonese-speaking children in Hong Kong, English remains something that is beyond their reach. Unlike their middle-class counterparts, they typically live in a lifeworld where few will (and can) speak or use English for any authentic communicative or socio-cultural purposes. To most of them, English is little more than a difficult and boring school subject that, nonetheless, will have important consequences for their life chances. Many of them have an ambivalent, want-hate

relationship with English. Although they accept the dominance of English and recognize that English is very important for their future prospects, they also readily believe that they are no good in English; for instance, this is expressed in the words of a working-class adolescent girl (G) to an ethnographic fieldworker (F) in Candlin, Lin, and Lo's (2000) study (p. 33, original utterances in Cantonese):

- F: Yes, yes, and you, do you have any aspiration, what do you want to do?
 G: I want to be a teacher.
 F: Teacher (chuckling), Miss Chan (playfully addressing the girl as a teacher), it's good to be a teacher, it suits you well. At this moment it seems to suit you.
 G: Don't know if it will change in the future.
 F: You have to be patient, you have to proceed gradually.
 G: I have to meet the requirement, my English is poor.

This exchange shows the working-class adolescent girl's lack of confidence in fulfilling her dream of becoming a teacher in the future because of her own self-image as someone with "poor English." Her resigned acceptance of both the importance of English for her future and her poor status in terms of her English ability led to her indication of a lack of confidence in fulfilling her aspiration, despite the fieldworker's encouraging remarks. Such low self-esteem, which is a result of their sense of failure in mastering English, makes English a subject highly imbued with working-class students' want-hate desires. English plays a chief role in constructing these students' subaltern identities and their own (self-limiting) understanding and perception of themselves in relation to others and their subaltern position in the society.

The English-dominant education system seems to have produced an elite bilingual social group whose cultural identities are constructed through their successful investments in an English-medium education, a mastery of the English language, and their familiarity with and membership in English-based modern professional institutions (e.g., the various English-based professional associations of accountants, lawyers, doctors, engineers, and English-mediated professional accreditation mechanisms). At the same time, alongside the production of these English-oriented successful modern professional, cosmopolitan subjectivities, the English-dominant education system also seems to be producing another, much larger group of subalterns, whose own understanding of themselves and their future life trajectories are greatly delimited by a neocolonial, complex capitalist modern regime of culture that seems to have almost stripped them of any possibility of constructing a valuable, legitimate, successful self with

other non-English based cultural resources (e.g., mastery of the Chinese language and membership in Chinese cultural institutions, or mastery of Cantonese streetwise tactics and Cantonese popular cultural identities, e.g., through participating in underground Canton-pop bands). The post-1997 years have so far not seen any significant changes in the English-dominant education system and society (see previous discussion in section 2), and the dominance of English in post-1997 Hong Kong seems to be even more steadfastly maintained by a neocolonial, complex modern capitalist regime of culture, now that any public criticism of English linguistic dominance can be powerfully neutralized by the neocolonial globalizing capitalist economic and technological discourses. In Hong Kong, we seem to inhabit a world where increasingly if one does not find oneself an English-conversant, upwardly mobile cosmopolitan, one is very likely to find oneself a limited- or non-English-speaking parochial subaltern located in the lower end strata of the society.

The important question for English language education researchers to ask is: How do English language teaching practices in Hong Kong schools both reflect and enact the ideological domination of English and the labor production driven model of education? What kinds of teaching practices are witnessed that seem to contribute to the reproduction of these global capitalist forces of turning students into worker commodities in which their potential is evaluated only as future bodies of the labor market answering to the dictates of capitalist employers? How do students resist this monoglossia through the penetration of their indigenous popular language, styles, and cultures into the English lesson discourse, thereby hybridizing and dialogizing it and deridingly laughing at it? How do students achieve their dialogic discursive freedom with persistent local creativity and parodic laughter that serves almost as implicit ideological critique of the alienating situation in which they find themselves? In the rest of this chapter, we shall conduct a fine-grained discourse analysis of two excerpts of classroom interactions that were video-recorded in two secondary schools in Hong Kong. Both of them are quite typical of the majority of secondary schools in Hong Kong: The majority of students have come from working-class, Cantonese-speaking communities where English plays few or no communicative and sociocultural roles in their lifeworlds. In the first excerpt, we see how a textbook driven curriculum has constructed English lessons as uncreative parroting sessions for students. In the second excerpt, we see how students insert their local Cantonese jokes and language styles into an English dialogue creation task orchestrated by a liberal native English teacher (recently imported by the Hong Kong government to improve the language standards of local students under the Native English Teacher Scheme) who could, however, have been more familiar with the local languages and cultures to be able to fully capitalize on the students' local linguistic and cultural resources. In the last part of the chapter, we dis-

cuss how insights from Bakhtin can help English language teachers to reflexively analyze and understand the ideological nature of their own teaching practices, and to appreciate the nature and possibility of dialogic communication, as well as to start thinking about how teachers of English as a second and foreign language can possibly work on re-creating their practices to achieve dialogic communication with students, through dialogizing English with students' local language styles, social languages, and creativity.

PARROTING ENGLISH TEXTBOOK DIALOGUES AND STUDENTS' ACCENTUATION PRACTICES

The intensification of teachers' workload has made many Hong Kong teachers highly dependent on commercially produced English course-books in secondary schools in Hong Kong. The main interest of these textbooks is in fulfilling the syllabus requirements of the Education Department (e.g., covering all the functional and structural topics listed in the syllabus). They tend to be reduced in both language and content and to prescribe exercises and tasks that are operations oriented, often requiring the parroting of second language structural items in mechanical ways (e.g., pronunciation drills of isolated lexical items; prescribed dialogue drills; decontextualized grammatical exercises; unimaginative/uninteresting reading passages; and superficial, factual, uncritical reading comprehension exercises). These textbooks can bias teachers toward engaging in discourse practices and activity organization that are geared toward linguistic drills and not meaning sharing or communication. To get a sense of what such classroom practices and activities are like, we present a Form 2 (Grade 8) English lesson excerpt, documented in Lin (1996). The teacher is getting the students to parrot a textbook dialogue belonging to the service English register (or social language for service workers; students in Hong Kong seem to be being implicitly constructed in schools as future service workers expected to discipline themselves in the voices of service workers); the textbook exercise encourages students to substitute given items (e.g., sweater, camera) into the set dialogue in a role-play task. The underlined words are words read aloud from the textbook. A key to transcription terms and conventions is presented in the Appendix.

Excerpt 1

- 1 T: Well, here, here're three pictures. Mrs Wu is complaining to ... the assistant, she's complaining about the.. sweater. Okay, let's practice saying the.. dialogue, and then ... I'll explain again. Are you ready? Are you ready?
- 2 B1: Yeh!

- 3 T: When we want to say something, want to make a complaint, what do we say first?
- 4 B2: (eh.. ? ?)
- 5 T: Excuse me, yes, good. Would you please say after me, let's practise saying this. Excuse me,
- 6 Ss: Excuse me, [The boy in the back corner next to the researcher said this in a playful exaggerated tone, but this was picked up only by the researcher's camcorder and not the walkman-recorder the teacher was carrying, so, it was probably unavailable to the teacher.]
- 7 T: I would like to make a complaint.
- 8 Ss: I would like to (make a complaint). [some students not finishing the last part of the sentence, and different students speaking at different rhythms and paces]
- 9 T: Please say after me. Excuse me, I would like to make a complaint.
- 10 Ss: Excuse me, I would like to make a complaint. [different students speaking at different rhythms and paces, finishing at different times]
- 11 T: Okay, good. Yes, Madam?
- 12 Ss: Yes, Madam?
- 13 T: I bought this sweater last week.
- 14 Ss: I bought this sweater last week. [different students speaking at different rhythms and paces, finishing at different times]
- 15 T: What's wrong with it?
- 16 Ss: What's wrong with it?
- 17 T: I'm afraid it's shrunk.
- 18 Ss: I'm afraid it's shrunk.
- 19 T: I only washed it once.
- 20 Ss: I only washed it once.
- 21 T: and look at it.
- 22 Ss: and look at it.
- 23 T: A child of five couldn't wear it- a-
- 24 Ss: A child of five couldn't wear it.
- 25 T: Okay, good, say it again, a child of five couldn't wear it.

This example is not an isolated one; similar operations-oriented classroom practices are commonly found in other classrooms (see Lin, 1996). However, we urge readers to withhold judgement of the teacher. The unimaginative textbook, heavy teaching load, and the lack of professional development opportunities for teachers in Hong Kong must also be considered when we try to understand the origin of operations-oriented, meaning-reduced classroom practices.

Notice how a student (turn 6) resisted this mindless parroting practice by superimposing his playful, ironic accent onto the English dialogue. He was made to repeat after the teacher, but he managed to *populate* this utterance of an “*other*” with his own accent—a playful, ironic accent, an accent which in Bakhtin’s terms (Bakhtin, 1994) serves as an implicit social and political commentary on the utterance that he was made to repeat verbatim after the teacher as well as on the situation in which he found himself (i.e., made to parrot the *voice* of an *other*). He has populated the *other*’s utterance with his own *voice* and his own political commentary. This accentuating practice is frequently found in English lessons in Hong Kong, especially when students are made to parrot prescribed English dialogues as a “dialogue practice,” which is commonly found in Hong Kong English classrooms, especially in working-class schools.

OPENING UP SPACE FOR CREATING “INDECENT” DIALOGUES AND CARNIVAL LAUGHTER

There were other parodies in Latin: Parodies of debates, dialogues, chronicles, and so forth. All these forms demanded from their authors a certain degree of learning, sometimes at a high level. All of them brought the echoes of carnival laughter within the walls of monasteries, universities, and schools ... during carnival there is a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions ... Verbal etiquette and discipline are relaxed and indecent words and expressions may be used. (Bakhtin, 1994, p. 203)

The classroom excerpts discussed in this section were taken from a larger pool of data collected from a secondary school in Hong Kong situated in a low socioeconomic area. The class was split into two groups (each having 20 students) for every English lesson. The excerpt happens to be from one of these groups. It is interesting that this group consisted of all boys. According to the teacher (Ms. Berner, a pseudonym), who is a native English-speaking teacher (NET), the pupils in her group were identified to be stronger in English than the other half of the class. This arrangement was made to ensure that the pupils have reached a threshold level of proficiency in English to benefit from the teaching of the NET.

Ms. Berner is an experienced NET in that school. She has a degree in German and French and has ample experience in teaching these two languages. Ms Berner was interested in learning Cantonese, and at the time of the observation she was eager to tell the researcher (Jasmine C. M. Luk) that she was taking a course in Cantonese. She believed that some knowledge in Cantonese would enable her to understand the pupils better and narrow the distance between herself and the pupils.

The class was described by Ms. Berner as her “fun” class. The boys, in her opinion, were lively, responsive, and willing to talk in English but sometimes too talkative, naughty in manner, and imprecise with grammar. The excerpts were taken from what she called an “activity lesson,” and it took place in the English room. To create a better English learning environment in schools, the Hong Kong government has granted each secondary school funds for setting up an English corner or an English room. Most of these English rooms are like English learning resource centers; some of them also provide audio–visual equipment, such as computers, tape recorders, and televisions, for self-access learning. After the English room was set up, Ms. Berner proposed that every class should do some English lessons in the English Room so that they would have a better idea of what was available there.

In the double lessons from which the excerpts were taken, Ms. Berner played two games with the students. The activity lesson was conducted by Ms. Berner and one male English Language Teaching Assistant (ELTA). ELTAs are native English-speaking pre-university teenage students recruited by certain cultural exchange organizations to assist English teaching in some Hong Kong schools. With the assistance of the ELTA, Ms. Berner was able to conduct the games with a group of about 10 students, all boys, seated around a large table. Such games would be quite difficult to conduct in a normal class of 40 students handled by one teacher.

The first game in the lesson was a simple story composition game. Students took turns putting down on a strip of paper one piece of information, which may be time, the place, the names of one male and one female, and what each of them says. This is a game commonly played among Chinese children, too. Every time, the student puts down only one item, and then he or she folds the paper to cover the information and passes the paper to his or her neighbor, who puts down another piece of information without looking at what comes before. The final product will be a creative story very often with funny characters and an unexpected and nonsensical combination of events. When the activity was conducted the first time, some of the students were reluctant to write anything on the paper even though what was required was only simple words such as a name or a place. After the first-round stories were read aloud by the teacher, the whole group got a good laugh at some of the funny outcomes. When the activity was done the second time, there was an obvious change in the students’ behaviors. They became more involved and took the initiative to ask what should be put down next. Some would speak out in English what they intended to write down. Most of the pupils’ suggestions were infused with sexual connotations. They usually aroused roars of laughter from the group, and sometimes the teacher too. Therefore, when the second game was introduced, it is by no means exaggerating to say that the group was in high spirits, with their minds filled with sex-related, or what mainstream adults might call “indecent,” fun. The fol-

lowing excerpt shows this animated, indecent fun that the students enjoyed through creating dialogues that spring from their adolescent fantasies.

Excerpt 2

The group is looking at a set of nine cartoon pictures with captions underneath each picture. Ms Berner asks the boys to write down what the cartoon characters on the pictures are saying in the form of speech balloons. In this excerpt, she comes to a picture with “babe magnet” as the caption.

- 1 T: ... [in raised voice] how about? number six, a babe magnet. do you know what a babe magnet is? (.) a babe is a girl. do you know what a magnet is?
- 2 B: (Mr Pig)=
- 3 T: =a magnet attracts metal, yes? (..) you know //errrm aah
- 4 B1: //ngaa-caat aa,
zik-haai? <toothbrush, that is?>] (.)
- 5 T: this is (..) a magnet and it //attracts things
- 6 B2: //gung-lei aa? <kilometer?> =
- 7 Ss: (to themselves) =**ci-sek** <a magnet>, n //and e
- 8 B2: //ngoo, kau-lui aa?
[colloquial Cantonese] <oh, courting girls?>
- 9 T: yeah, so a babe magnet is someone who //locks woman, (??)
- 10 B3: //kap-jan aa? <to
attract?>
- 11 B4: yes
- 12 Leo¹: **kau-lui aa?** [Cantonese slang expression] <courting girls?>
- 13 B3: **kap-jan aa?** <to attract?>
- 14 [Ss laugh]
- 15 T: **SO** cool, very cool, yes ^
- 16 B: cool man.
- 17 T: English cool, not Chinese cool, very cool, what’s he saying then? What’s the babe magnet saying?
- 18 Ss: Hello ^ [laughs]
- 19 B: [in sexy tone] Hi baby ^ [laughs]
- 20 T: [imitating the voice of the student, sexy tone] Hi baby ^ [laughs] yeah, a balloon, [in a male voice] Hi, baby ^ [returns to normal voice] okay, write it down, the balloon, [in a male voice] hi, baby? [laughs]

¹It’s easy to recognize Leo, as he spoke with a hoarse voice at a relatively higher pitch than the other boys.

- 21 Bs: **waa!** [an exclamation] **Jay Jay** [seems to be somebody's nickname] (someone seemed to have said Jason)
- 22 B3: **kau-lui tin-wong lei gaa-ma:::** <it's the king/expert in courting girls>, //**kau-lui tin-wong dou m-zi hai bin-go?** <you don't even know who's the king/expert in courting girls?>
- 23 T: [laughing] //you want to see me later?
- 24 B3: Can I love you [Ss laugh]? (..)
- 25 T: See you in Kowloon Tong?
- 26 [Ss laugh]
- 27 B3: see you in my room?
- 28 B2: see you in my bed?
- 29 [Suddenly students from the other group laugh loudly. Those in Ms Berner's group then join in and laugh even louder.]

It is interesting to notice that the students actively engaged in a negotiation of meaning with the teacher (turns 1–13) and, in a collaborative effort, the students were successful in guessing the meaning of the term *babe magnet* and offered Cantonese expressions for a similar concept: *kau lui* (to court girls, turn 12) and *kau-lui tin-wong* (king/expert in courting girls, turn 22). As soon as they understood the meaning of *babe magnet*, they started to create an imaginary dialogue between the babe magnet and a prospective babe: “Hi baby!” (turn 19). The kind of English discourse on which they drew (e.g., “cool man” in turn 16) appears to be familiar to them through their exposure to adolescent hip hop culture, especially the kind of discourses they come into contact with through basketball magazines; gangster movies; and Black hip-hop culture and songs, which have found a transnational market and circulation even in non-English-speaking societies (Ma, 2002). The everyday lifeworld discourses and social languages of the students situated in Hong Kong were infused into their “English” dialogues in the English lesson, for example, Kowloon Tong is a place in Hong Kong famous for “love hotels.” These students managed to have a carnival type of laughter through creating “indecent” English dialogues within the school walls—it is no less significant than the kind of carnival creativity Bakhtin (1994) discussed. Through populating the English language with their own local social languages and voices, they have appropriated English for their own purposes. Unlike students parrotting textbook dialogues (see Excerpt 1), they have become owners and authors of the English dialogues that they created through drawing on multiple social languages available to them in English and Cantonese (e.g., Black hip-hop discourses, Hong Kong Cantonese talk show jokes). The teacher's apparent liberal stance (mentioning “Kowloon Tong” herself and thus starting students creating the dialogue in that direction) has helped to create a space for students to engage in such carnival creative work and laughter. Next we look at one more excerpt from the same lesson.

Excerpt 3

This excerpt was taken right after Excerpt 2. The group is looking at a big poster with several pictures on it. Each picture shows two to three people. Ms. Berner assigns one picture to one pair of students and asks them to invent some dialogues between or among those characters depicted in the picture. At the beginning of the excerpt, Ms. Berner is illustrating how to create a dialogue for the characters on one of the pictures. She then invites the students to act out the dialogues.

- 1 T: //yeh? I hate garlic, and the other one says we always know who has had garlic for dinner. So look at your picture, and decide who you are going to be, for example, you could be Clinton, and you could be, is that Mr. Jiang [Mr. Jiang is the former President of the People's Republic of China]? (..) what are they saying? what is Mr. Clinton saying? alright, so I'll give you two minutes to think about it.
- 2 B1: **mat-shui aa? Daai-lou?** [colloquial] <who's that? big brother?>
- 3 B2: Ms. Berner, who is he? [ending in an exaggerated rising tone]
- 4 T: it doesn't matter who it is.
- 5 B2: [in playful tone] **gaa-gi-naang** [In Chiuchausee, a Chinese dialect, meaning *people of our own kind*] [B2 chuckles]
[Ss continue talking and joking in Cantonese, unintelligible to an outsider]
- 6 T: it doesn't matter
- 7 {...}
- 8 T: you first, you start here, [T sounds a bit angry] come on (..) okay, here, they got a picture of Mr. Jiang and Mr. Clinton, =
- 9 B1: =**ngoo! Hak-zai aa?**= <Oh! "Clink-boy"?> [Clink-boy is the nickname of Bill Clinton used by HK people]
- 10 T: =shaking hands?=
11 B1: =**Hak-jam-deon aa?** <"Clink-sleazy-ton"?> [the nickname of Bill Clinton used in Hong Kong media, referring to his indecent sexual behavior with his female subordinate] [B1 chuckles]
- 12 T: so what is Mr. Clinton saying?
- 13 Leo: **Kei-wan-si-lei** ("Kate Winsley" [Winslet], the female lead character of "Titanic," but Leo probably means Monica Lewinsky, the female intern of Bill Clinton)
- 14 Tom: hello!
- 15 T: okay hello, Mr. Jiang, that's not really exciting, okay, hello, Mr. Jiang, what's Mr. Jiang saying?
[some are making suggestions in English, inaudible on the tape]

- 16 Tom: your hand is very big
 17 T: your head is very big [other boys laugh hearing this]
 18 B?: **zek sau hou-daai** !<*the hand is very big!*> [laughing]
 19 T: [in an amused tone] okay, Mr. Clinton says, hello Mr. Jiang, and Mr. Jiang says, your head is very big (.) [Ss are talking and joking among themselves all along while the T is talking, indistinct while the T is talking] (..) alright, let's have a look at yours, what have you got (.) right, two men whispering and laughing together, what do you think one is saying?
 20 B?: kiss you ^
 21 B?: hello, where are you boy? [Ss laugh]
 22 T: alright, he said [Ss laugh], //shh! shh!
 23 B: //bin dou aa lei? <*where are you?*>
 24 T: he says, have a look at this picture, yeah, one man is saying, can I give you a kiss, the other one saying, okay, be quick, yeah? what do you think, they are saying?
 [many Ss are laughing and chatting, unintelligible on the recorder]
 25 B?: hello, where are you?
 26 T: hello, who- who are //you?
 27 B: //where are you
 28 T: [rising tone over "you," sounds doubtful] where are YOU?
 29 B: yeah! [chuckles]
 30 T: [in a different tone, rising over "are"] hello, where ARE ^ you?
 31 Leo: I'm forty.
 32 B1: where do you come from?
 33 T: I'm what?
 34 Leo: I'm forty. [others laugh]
 35 T: [sounds confused] forty?
 36 B?: [laughs] Chai Wan forty [Chai Wan is a place near the students' school]
 37 B?: **caai** ^ **waan** ^ [anglicized Cantonese of Chai Wan] forty, of Chai Wan
 38 T: [asking another boy sitting on the other side] what have you got over there?

Ms. Berner showed difficulty in making sense of some of the utterances from the pupils. Someone who is not familiar with Hong Kong working-class youth culture would find it difficult to understand some of the students' utterances. The sex scandal in which Mr. Clinton was involved was popularized in Hong Kong media and a hot issue around the time when our classroom audiotaping was conducted in 1999. The sleazy nicknames of

Clinton (turns 9, 11) were widely known in Hong Kong at that time. The name mentioned in turn 11 was coined creatively by changing the middle character, *lam* (literally meaning “a forest”), of the three-word official Chinese translation of *Clinton*, “haak lam deon,” into a rhyming counterpart *jam* (literally meaning “sleazy”). With only limited Cantonese, Ms. Berner failed to catch this deriding Cantonese joke made of Clinton’s name.

Clinton’s sex scandal had given most people the impression that he was a person with strong sexual desires. It could be very natural for boys in Ms. Berner’s class to imply masturbation, an act of deriving sexual pleasure often with one’s hands. As the picture shows the two men shaking hands, it is highly likely that the image of “hands” had aroused their association with sex.

When we presented the case to a young teacher currently teaching secondary students of similar backgrounds, what she spotted was not the image of “hands” but “head.” She told us that many male students coming from working-class backgrounds often joked about the male sex organs, and one such organ involves the use of the Cantonese word for “head.” Ms. Berner’s mishearing of the pupils’ “hand” as “head” (turn 17) might have instigated some more sexual insinuations from the pupils, as evident in their laughter.

The questions “Where are you?” (first appearing in turn 21) and “Where do you come from?” (turn 32), suggested by the pupil(s) in a playful manner, is evidence of their infusing the gang culture and gangster talk in Hong Kong into what can be a most mundane kind of greeting exchange between two people as shown on the picture (turn 19). Asking someone (usually on the first meeting) “Where are you from?” is a way to “state their allegiance” to and membership of triad gangs (Bolton & Hutton, 2002, p. 159). Such a greeting/first-meeting practice of members of the triad societies in Hong Kong often appears in local Cantonese gangster movies. The students’ mentioning of “Chai Wan forty” further supports our interpretation. There is a well-known triad gang called “14K” that has branches in different districts. Chai Wan (a pseudonym) is the district in which the school is located, which also means the place where most students resided and hung around. It is also a common pronunciation feature of many Cantonese pupils to mix up *fourteen* and *forty*. Therefore, Leo’s “I’m forty” might actually mean “I’m from the 14K.”

With the indulgent encouragement of the teacher (partly due to her liberal stance, and partly due to her unfamiliarity with Cantonese slang and so she would not be easily offended), the students occupied this discursive space and populated them with their own meanings, their own preferred social languages and voices, and their own deriding jokes and parodies. It seems perfectly natural for students to make what is alien and boring to them (e.g., greetings between two remote world leaders) into something that is familiar, funny, movielike, or fantasylike. This seems to be an example of carnival laughter and of joking about the name of a powerful world

leader, in an otherwise somewhat boring lesson task of learning to parrot the social languages of powerful groups in the society, languages that are remote and alien to them and yet without mastery of which they will become marginalized in the society in their future (see discussion in the previous section). Notice that the teacher's liberal stance (e.g., building on a boy's contribution "kiss you" [turn 20] and suggesting that one man wants to kiss the other man in the picture [turn 24]) also seems to have indulged the boys in creating funny, "indecent" dialogues.

BAKHTIN'S INSIGHTS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH FOR DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

Language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have a "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions ... Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated, overpopulated—with the intentions of others. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 273–274)

The students' accentuation and dialogizing practices in the lessons impressed us with the resilience of human agency and creativity, the human need to go beyond monoglossia, that is, the types of social languages imposed on them in school and society, the drive to turn them into future worker commodities, disciplining them in the social languages expected of them in the adult worker world, forcing them to parrot service worker languages (e.g., see Excerpt 1 above), and constituting their voices for them. Even in such a situation, some students did not fail to accentuate the parroted utterances with their own voice and accent, attaching to the prescribed utterances their own implicit social and political commentary and meanings (e.g., the boy using a playful ironic tone when made to repeat the set dialogue in the previous section). The relatively more liberal stance of the English teacher in the Excerpt 2 provided students with a space to slip in their street-corner topics and adolescent sexual fantasies, and to coconstruct their dialogues with the teacher, while populating them with their own preferred social languages and voices.

Bakhtin (1981) differentiated between two kinds of discourses: (a) *authoritative discourse* and (b) *internally persuasive discourse*. *Authoritative discourse* is language or discourse imposed on a person—but for one to really accept, acquire and *own* a language or discourse, it has to become an *internally per-*

suasive discourse, hybridized and populated with one's own voices, styles, meanings, and intentions:

Both the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be united in a single word—one that is *simultaneously* authoritative and internally persuasive—despite the profound differences between these two categories of alien discourse. But such unity is rarely a given—it happens more frequently that an individual's becoming, an ideological process, is characterized precisely by a sharp gap between these two categories: in one, the authoritative word (religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.) that does not know internal persuasiveness, in the other internally persuasive word that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public opinion, not by scholarly norms, nor by criticism), not even in the legal code. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342)

Internally persuasive discourse—as opposed to one that is externally authoritative—is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with “one's own word.” In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes mass of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts The internally persuasive word is either a contemporary word born in a zone of contact with unresolved contemporaneity, or else it is a word that has been reclaimed for contemporaneity. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 345–346)

With Bakhtin's insights on the need for heteroglossia and local creativity even in the face of imposed monoglossia (e.g., imposition of whether global or national languages and certain speaking styles), we suggest laughing with students, cocreating heteroglossic, internally persuasive dialogues of interest to students so that English can become a language populated with students' own voices and become a tool that students can use to construct their own preferred worlds, preferred identities, and preferred voices. Only in this way can English change from an authoritative discourse to an internally persuasive discourse in Bakhtin's (1981) sense. This has to begin with a deeper understanding of the students' preferred worlds, cultures, identities, and voices on the part of the teachers. Teachers can engage themselves in what Bakhtin (1981, 1986, 1990, quoted in Hall, 1999, p. 144) has called the process of *transgression*, that is, the ability to step outside some existing practices and analyze from a vantage point the socio-cultural sources and resources that constitute our own and others' actions. It

is through a sensitive understanding of *what* students preferred and why they preferred certain voices and identities that teachers can capitalize on the local resources of students to build bridges between students' world and what is required of them in the school world.

It is therefore also recognized that at some point in the curriculum students need to be provided with access to the social languages preferred and prescribed by school and the mainstream adult society. Care must be taken to prevent school education from simply reproducing the underprivileged lifeworlds of some lower social class students by reinforcing their restrictive discourses. Although we should laugh with students and accommodate heteroglossic voices in the classroom, we may not want language learning activities to be completely unorganized and non-goal-directed. Students need to acquire specific types of communicative competencies in English that will enable them to enhance their life opportunities. We propose explicitly discussing these issues with students and engaging students in a critical discussion of the existence of different social languages and the imposed hierarchy of different social languages in the society. The aim is to create heteroglossia in the classroom and to heteroglossize English and to change English from an authoritative discourse to an internally persuasive discourse to the students, to allow them the space to make English a language of their own by populating it with their own meanings and voices. When students have appropriated English as a communicative tool of their own, it would not be impossible to help them to also master the other social languages of English that they would need to survive and compete in the adult world and in the globalized economy. From this perspective, many of the TESOL canons and pedagogies of teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) need to be reimagined and reconstituted if the globalization of English is also to mean the dialogization and heteroglossization of English. For example, formal dialogues might not necessarily be taught through a dialogue between two world leaders, and even when such a scenario is used students can be encouraged to think of fun topics in the dialogues of these leaders that may not necessarily be about formal political topics. If students seem to be more interested in some popular cultural issues about popular stars, teachers could capitalize on this interest as a motivating topic to turn some authoritative, formal English into internally persuasive English. Local creativity need not be ad hoc and impromptu. Students could be engaged in systematic and teacher-guided but student-autonomous preparation work. For example, the teacher could create an imaginary context in which students are interviewing one of their favorite soccer stars, such as Beckham (if that is what they enjoy outside school). Students could work in pairs and be assigned different roles. Before role playing the interview, students can access print and electronic media resources to collect relevant information and language they would use in the interview. Students could also be encouraged to critically ex-

amine the ways in which popular culture encourages consumerism and how the sport of soccer has become commodified and turned into a global money-making business. Teachers and students can use both their imagination and critical-thinking skills to enrich the learning of English as a language for globalized communication and for interrogating both local and global cultural issues revolving around the differential roles and statuses of different ways of using English in our world. Such critical practices will help students develop critical linguistic awareness about English and about how they can expand their own repertoires of different social languages of English for a plurality of purposes.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions

<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
T	The teacher.
B1, B2, ...	Different male students in consecutive turns, distinguishable from their voices.
B?	An unidentifiable male pupil.
Ss	A number or the whole class of students.
faat ming	Transcription of Cantonese utterances followed by free English translation <To invent>.
[]	Researcher's comments.
(XX)	Uncertain hearing.
(???)	Indecipherable utterances.
.	Falling intonation followed by noticeable pause (as at the end of declarative sentences).
(..)	Short pause.
(...)	Medium pause of up to 5 seconds.
(0.6/7/8,...)	For wait times longer than 5 seconds, the pause will be represented by figures showing the number of seconds involved. Wait times longer than 1 minute will become (1.0), and so on.
,	Continuing intonation.
?	Rising intonation; may or may not be a question.
^	High-pitch utterances, as used when the students anglicize the Cantonese words.
:	Lengthened syllable (usually attached to the vowels); extra colon indicates longer elongation.
-	Self-halting, or abrupt cutoff.
CAPS	Emphatic and strongly stressed utterances.

(continued on next page)

<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
XXX	Words read aloud from texts, including textbook materials, or students' written works.
=	Contiguous utterances or latching.
//	Overlapping utterances.
<XXX>	Utterances made with greater voice volume compared with that of the preceding and following ones.
A-B-C-D	Sounding out the letter names of a word.
{....}	Untranscribed section of the excerpt.
