

# Open Access Publishing and University Researchers' Agency Towards Reshaping the Publishing Habitus

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## Abstract

Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus, this qualitative study adopted a multiple-case design to investigate how university researchers exercised their agency as they engaged in actions of open access publishing, and how such actions influenced the researchers themselves and the university as an institution. Guided by a four-dimensional approach to agency as the conceptual framework, the study unveiled the complex processes by which university researchers played agentic roles in open access publishing and reshaped their own publishing habitus. They utilised various kinds of personal and social resources to mediate their agentic actions for the purpose of producing intended outcomes as institutionally recognised achievement. As their agentic actions influenced the university as institutional structure in terms of policy reformulation, they also reshaped university researchers' habitus in an incremental manner as their habitus was augmented to include a new form of recognised action. The study also revealed the duality of discourse, which, conforming to institutionality, both enabled and constrained researchers' agentic actions.

**Keywords:** open access publishing; university researcher; habitus; agency



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## Introduction

Publishing only matters when it exempts the researcher from the jeopardy of perishing, or when it endows their life with esteem. (Liang)

The quotation above is from an interview with a participant in this study. It eloquently articulates the pressing realities of publishing as a means of survival in universities. For most researchers in higher education institutions, the tearing choice between “publish” and “perish” has been so long-standing as to be taken more or less as self-mockery. Although many university researchers take the initiative to publish as their responsibility, their continuous pursuit of publishing has also in large part been motivated by or associated with the university as structure (Giddens 1984), the institutional intentions of which both derive from the general aim of academic research and reflect the specific way publishing rules are framed.

At the same time, the global spread of English has made it the dominant language in a large variety of fields, including academic publishing (Hyland 2015). This seems to have further made the university aspire to a good record of English publishing by its faculty, particularly when pressurised by a governmental drive for building world-class universities, as is the case in China (Li and Xue 2021). The research excellence evaluation entailed in global university rankings, which is largely based on English publishing, also impacts academic publishing (Gao and Zheng 2020). In other words, the dominance of English as a global hegemony in academic publishing has been retained, if not strengthened, by the enterprise culture in the university (Li and De Costa 2021).

The emergence and expansion of open access publishing in recent decades, however, seem to have caused both researchers as agents and the university as structure to adapt and re-adapt to the changing dynamics within publishing as a field of actions (Huang et al. 2020). Open access publishing, as opposed to traditional subscription models, is the digital publishing of articles and books that offers free access to the public. The cost of publishing is covered not by the consumers of the produced knowledge but by its producers. Open access publishing not only provides the readers with free access to new knowledge, but also opens up a new channel for university researchers to publish their research. Tension seems to have arisen: supporters of open access publishing contend that it promotes knowledge dissemination and increases the visibility of both individual researchers and their universities; the opponents are concerned about compromising researchers’ integrity in the process of “paying to publish” (Eaton and Hughes 2022). Against the backdrop of such a context of tension, the influence open access publishing has on the interaction between researchers and the university is worthy of more meticulous investigations, particularly how researchers engage in open access publishing as they reconcile with or counteract the convention of “publish or perish”.

This study draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of field and habitus to elucidate the complex interaction between researchers and the university as they co-construct

publishing as a field of actions and shape the publishing habitus, which is greatly affected by cultural capital (Jin and Ball 2021). As field encompasses both actions and rules that intend to retain preferred actions (Bourdieu 1977), it serves as a useful conceptual tool to capture the backdrop against which habitus is shaped and reshaped. On the other hand, habitus, as an “open system of dispositions” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 133), can best reveal the dynamics in actions that result from disjunctions between the existing habitus and the changing field (Dai, Lingard, and Musofer 2020). These two concepts are most suitable for enquiries into the complex interaction between the publishing field, as it changes with increased actions of open access publishing, and the publishing habitus, as it is reshaped by actions of open access publishing catalysed by the agency of university researchers as agents, that is, their “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001, 112). The current study aims to unravel how university researchers play agentic roles in open access publishing and hence reshape their own publishing habitus.

### Publishing as a Field of Actions

As publishing can be viewed as a field of actions, it is vital to examine what roles power plays in formulating and imposing rules for individuals’ actions. The existing literature seems to have addressed this issue focusing primarily on university policies as the most direct demonstration of power (Bufrem 2009), particularly when such policies are intimately associated with the internal governance of the university (Wang, Liu, and Chen 2022). Specifically, previous research has examined the various points of impact publishing policies produce at universities. Most importantly, policies direct value orientation with regard to what kinds of research are published and what kinds of journals are identified as offering significant knowledge contribution (Jeater 2018). This inevitably leads to inequalities, because university researchers who represent less institutionally valued scholarship are prone to being marginalised (Xu 2021). Such an institutional value orientation, as is imposed or even enforced, is often made operationally effective via policy documents such as journal rankings. Consequently, how premier journals should be identified within a particular academic discipline and the influence of such identification on university researchers as stakeholders have been much investigated (Holsapple 2008).

The university, as a source of power, also reinforces the effects of its publishing policies by allocating funding to support certain kinds of research engagement. For instance, some universities adopt Article Processing Charge (APC) subsidy policies to encourage open access publishing (Shin 2014), and some even have mandates for open access publishing (Mering 2020). Many governmental bodies or associations of universities are also negotiating with major publishers for open access publishing. In certain contexts, such as China’s mainland, funding is also more covertly allocated in the form of monetary reward for research published in particular journals (Quan, Chen, and Shu 2017). To summarise, the university designs and carries out publishing policies as an institutional means to direct value orientation and promote preferred publishing

behaviours. This has obviously made publishing at university a field of actions, which is characterised by overt and covert rules developed by a powerful body or co-constructed by the university and its researchers.

The exercise of institutional power in the field of publishing has massive influence on university researchers' publishing engagement and their professional development. To gain institutional recognition for publications in indexed journals, the majority of which publish research in English, researchers are encouraged or compelled to write in English (Lee and Lee 2013). English writing has thus become indispensable, even for multilingual researchers in the discipline of foreign languages, which is an inherently plurilingual discipline (Fuentes and Soler 2018). Mediated by their effects on such behaviours as academic writing, the influence of publishing policies even reaches the affective aspects of researchers' professional experience. For instance, Lu and Zhang's (2021) study reveals that university researchers experienced wide-ranging and diverse emotions at various levels of research, and displayed different attitudes towards the research policy at their university. In short, publishing policies influence university researchers' publishing engagement in both behavioural and cognitive terms. Hence the policies show typical features of rules in a power-permeated field (Chahal, Rodriguez, and Schneider 2019). Oftentimes in such a field, researchers as individuals, particularly young or junior researchers, need to contend with tremendous pressures to survive and excel (Tian and Lu 2017). But researchers are by no means passive recipients of the policy-induced pressures. It is thus important to examine how researchers play agentic roles as they make intentional efforts to cope with such pressures derived from the publishing field. The lack of such research endeavours to date has created an evident research gap.

### Agency as Manifested in the Field

University researchers, or more precisely teacher-researchers, exercise their agency by assuming agentic roles through developing work practices, negotiating professional identities, and having an influence at work (Vähäsantanen et al. 2020). Previous studies have examined how teacher-researchers agentially navigate contextual and personal factors to behave in certain ways in their professional practice (Hinostroza-Paredes 2021). For instance, Xu (2021) identifies the diverse manifestations of teacher-researchers' agency as they conceived and utilised professional resources in different ways in the work context. Similarly, Yuan (2021) reveals how teacher-researchers exercised agency in adapting their publishing practice as they responded to different university requirements. When there are discrepancies between institutional requirements and their actual performance, teacher-researchers also play agentic roles to engage in intentional efforts to enhance their work effectiveness (Ruan, Zheng, and Toom 2020). In short, teacher-researchers exercise agency as they plan and produce different professional practices in response to changing contexts.

Agency that affects work practices also contributes to the dynamics of professional identity negotiation, that is, teacher-researchers' agentic roles can lead to both

professional practice transformation and professional identity construction (Tao and Gao 2018). Teacher-researchers' identity negotiation takes place in specific contexts where they engage in particular activities. The institutional nature of such activities often brings about confrontation, and thus identity negotiation mediated by teacher-researchers' agentic roles as they seek to understand and become reconciled with their surroundings (Yang and Clarke 2018; Yuan, Liu, and Lee 2019). Applying a model of legitimisation from an ecological perspective, Bowen et al. (2021) further reveal the complexity and fluidity as teacher-researchers negotiate their identities, which show how their individual positioning and the common goal intended by the university are reconciled. In short, there seems to be no shortage of research that investigates how teacher-researchers' identities are negotiated and transformed as a manifestation of the exercise of their professional agency.

However, scant attention has been paid to teacher-researchers' agentic roles in terms of having an influence at work (Vähäsantanen et al. 2020), that is, how teacher-researchers exercise agency to influence others and even the institution as structure. The studies reviewed above shed much light on how teacher-researchers' agentic roles enhance professional practices, which are mostly institutionally valued, and promote identity negotiation, which is equally inclined to result in individuals' conformity with the institutional configuration. They do not seem to have fully uncovered the hidden realities that teacher-researchers may also struggle to make changes to and reshape the university as an institution, for instance, with regard to how open access publishing is perceived and received. Individual actions that aim to co-construct and reconstruct the power-permeated structure, and thus reshape their own habitus in the field, should be of both interest and pertinence to higher education research. The current study aims to fill in this research gap by attempting to answer the following research questions:

- What agentic actions do university researchers engage in open access publishing?
- How do such actions influence researchers themselves and the university as an institution?

## Conceptual Framework

Because this study intends to comprehensively investigate how university researchers exercise and manifest their agency as they engage in open access publishing, a versatile conceptual framework of agency is needed. Tao and Gao's (2021) four-dimensional approach is adopted, which conceives agency as individuals' intentional acts, socioculturally mediated capacity, temporal and situated achievement, and discursive practice. Individuals produce intentional *acts* to make things happen as they seek self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal (Bandura 2001, 2). Such intentional acts are enabled by individuals' socioculturally mediated *capacity* (Ahearn 2001, 112), which connects individual development with structure (Tao and Gao 2021, 6). The individual development promoted by intentional acts is seen as *achievement*, which is fundamentally temporal and situated due to its close connection with structure as an

activity system (Eteläpelto et al. 2013; Priestley et al. 2012). As can be seen, individuals' use of capacity to perform acts for achievement constitutes a chain of agentic dynamics. To enable this chain, however, individuals need to be assigned a certain position (Tao and Gao 2021, 10). This position is one that both enables and constrains individuals' discursive practice (Davies 1990). In a specific context, what and how an individual speaks may reveal both their freedom to do so and their inability to do otherwise. Hence the discursive practice, which is termed *discourse* in the current study, reflects the presence or absence of certain circumstances that affects how an individual's agency is manifested and exercised.

Informed by this comprehensive framework featuring the interplay between acts, capacity, achievement, and discourse, this study examines university researchers' agency by first illustrating their acts during open access publishing. Their capacity as revealed in such acts and their achievement owing to them are further analysed to illustrate the chain of agentic dynamics. Discourse is then incorporated in the analysis to shed light upon how researchers' agentic moves are influenced by the institutional context that surrounds them.

## Methods

### Research Design

This qualitative study adopted a multiple-case design to address the research questions. The case study approach fits the current study as it can be best used to investigate issues that the researcher has little assumption about or control over (Yin 2013). Specifically, this study involved via purposive sampling four teacher-researchers from different universities as research participants, all of whom had experience of open access publishing in journals indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) in the past two years. The study drew on multiple sources of data such as individual interviews and written protocols to analyse participants' agentic roles in their work fields as well as the results such roles yielded.

### Participants

The four participants were purposively selected, considering their gender, seniority, and region. This was intended to make the sample more reliably representative of the group of teacher-researchers in focus. Searches were conducted within the Web of Science to identify potential participants who published in open access journals in the past two years. The researcher then contacted them via email and invited them to participate in this study, to which the four participants formally consented. They also gave consent to the researcher's use of all of their data. The study was approved by the ethical review committee at the researcher's institution.

The four participants, two females and two males, were all university teacher-researchers in disciplines related to foreign languages. Liang (pseudonym), a male lecturer with seven years of work experience in a university in Central China, published

16 research articles in open access journals, 10 of which were SSCI-indexed. His major areas of interest include positive psychology in language learning, language policy, and language teacher education. Most recently, his papers also appeared in SSCI-indexed journals that publish in the subscription model. Liang did not have a PhD degree, which he always talked about as his “shortcoming”. Lu, female, had been a lecturer of applied linguistics in a university in North China since she obtained her PhD degree from a university in England. She first published two research articles in the field of curriculum studies in traditional SSCI-indexed journals, and then “ventured”, in her own words, into open access publishing. By the time of this study, she had published two research articles in the field of language teacher education in the same open access journal, making her SSCI-indexed publications total up to four during the first five years of her career.

Unlike Liang and Lu, who were both junior researchers in their universities, Guan (male, from South China) and Wang (female, from East China) already had a senior academic title (i.e., associate professor or full professor) with more than 15 years of work experience when they began to publish in open access journals. Guan was later promoted as full professor of applied linguistics, because he had published more than 30 research articles in the field of language testing and assessment in SSCI-indexed journals, only two of which were not open access. Wang’s bibliography included 24 indexed journal articles, and this seemed to be a balanced record of publications in both traditional journals (11 articles) and open access journals (13 articles). Specifically, most of her research articles in the field of pragmatics were published in traditional journals, while those in the field of language teaching were in open access journals.

Table 1 below shows a summary of the participants’ vignettes:

**Table 1:** Participants’ profiles

Name	Gender	Degree	Title	Teaching Experience	OA publications
Liang	Male	MA	Lecturer	7 years	16
Lu	Female	PhD	Lecturer	5 years	2
Guan	Male	PhD	Professor	16 years	30
Wang	Female	PhD	Professor	15 years	13

### Data Collection

Data was collected via individual interview and written protocols. The researcher conducted two interviews in Chinese with each of the four participants. The lengths of the eight interviews ranged from 23 minutes to 55 minutes, totalling up to 353 minutes. All the interviews were conducted and audio-recorded, to which the participants had consented, via Tencent Meeting, an online conferencing service widely used in China. In the first interviews, the researcher aimed to get to know each participant’s general

trajectory of open access publishing by asking questions that encouraged storytelling. Below are a few examples of questions asked during the first interviews:

Can you talk about your first experience of publishing a research paper?

When did it occur to you that you could also publish an article open access?

Can you tell me how you planned your project and wrote the paper which was later published in an open access journal?

Data was analysed immediately after the first interviews were conducted. I then sorted out questions to ask the participants during the second interviews, which happened approximately two weeks later. These questions were mostly intended to seek elaboration and clarification from the participants regarding events, thoughts, and feelings they had mentioned in the first interviews. Hence questions for the second interviews were highly contextualised for each participant. Examples of the questions during the second interviews are as follows:

What special resources, funding for instance, did you use for publishing your articles open access? (interview with Liang)

Why do you feel that open access publishing is a way to broaden the vision of the institution? (interview with Lu)

What do you plan to do now that your university does not reward open access publishing as before? (interview with Guan)

What kind of policy do you think best balances traditional publishing and open access publishing? (interview with Wang)

The researcher also collected from the participants 16 pieces of written protocols, including four paper drafts that were later revised and published in open access journals, two emails to journal editors, three emails to deans and university administrators (in Chinese), and seven entries of reflection journals (in Chinese). These written protocols served as an important supplement to interviews as the major data source.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis generally followed the principles suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020). Specifically, three methods were utilised to inform the three rounds of data analysis, that is, describing, ordering, and explaining. In the first round of analysis, the researcher employed the biographical method to describe each participant's trajectory of academic publishing, including their open access publishing experiences (Johnson and Golombek 2002). This helped the researcher gain an elaborate life portrait of each participant based on their publishing narratives. In the second round of analysis, the researcher used the conceptual framework to identify, in each event of the

participants' narratives, (1) their *acts* of open access publishing, (2) *capacity* for doing so as revealed by corresponding acts or subjectively expressed by themselves, (3) *achievement* via acts that was acknowledged by themselves, their colleagues, and their institutions, and (4) *discourse* they produced and encountered that pertained to their acts of and achievement in open access publishing. Afterwards, the four categories were ordered in terms of relationship and importance, respectively, that is, how acts, capacity, achievement, and discourse interacted, and which one or ones among the four categories played a more prominent role in shaping and reshaping participants' publishing habitus in the field. In the third round of analysis, which focused on more in-depth explanation, the researcher drew inferences based on the observed phenomena from the previous rounds of analysis to probe into and delineate the complex interplay between participants' agency and the power of the institution as structure.

## Findings

In this section, each participant's case report will be presented guided by the conceptual framework. Interaction between participants' agentic roles and the institutional structure will be highlighted.

### **Liang: From the Mentored to the Mentoring**

Liang has worked in the university since graduating from it with an MA degree in applied linguistics. When he applied for doctoral programmes at a couple of universities, he was told that he first needed to publish a few papers in prestigious journals to demonstrate his potential. He thought, "This is just a kind of refusal in disguise. ... If I were able to publish, I would have had very strong research abilities, and wouldn't have to do the PhD" (Liang, first interview). Then he began to seek opportunities to get published:

To publish a paper in a Chinese journal is too difficult. There are only half a dozen journals in my field of research interest, but there are more than ten thousand people submitting manuscripts every year. ... Fortunately, I got to know Professor Liu [pseudonym] in a symposium. She was co-editing a special issue for an SSCI-indexed open access journal. ... I told her the teacher education project I was working on at the time, and she encouraged me to contribute a paper. ... She actually mentored me, from positioning my argument to proofreading for style. (Liang's reflection journal)

Liang's acts of writing to publish in the open access journal, mediated by Professor Liu's mentoring, were rewarded by recognition from his colleagues, including the dean, which was a kind of achievement (Eteläpelto et al. 2013; Priestley et al. 2012). "The dean asked me to organise workshops to mentor colleagues who were willing to try publishing in open access journals. The dean hoped that this could boost the publishing performance of the faculty" (Liang, first interview). He organised a few workshops, and helped five colleagues publish in open access journals. In an email, he thanked the dean for "not assuming a biased attitude towards colleagues who do not have a PhD degree, nor towards publications in open access journals".

Besides institutional recognition, Liang's achievement also involved his increased capacity for research:

I've become more experienced in finding the research gap. ... Open access journals seem to be more open to various kinds of research gaps, instead of gaps that are confined to a particular line of research. ... I've been increasingly aware of the importance of collecting multiple sources of data. With multiple data sources, you will be able to better substantiate your argument. (Liang, second interview)

Obviously, Liang developed his abilities to do research and write research papers through his experiences with open access publishing. Later, he began to write for and publish in traditional SSCI-indexed journals, as "decisions to accept your papers are by and large based on similar criteria ... [and] this has very little to do with whether the journal is open access or traditional" (Liang, second interview).

According to Liang, his colleagues gradually realised that open access publishing is an important means for foreign language teachers to get published. "A colleague told me that it was always a good thing to have more opportunities, especially when there were already precedents [referring to Liang's publications] that they did not find unworthy of recognition" (Liang, first interview). Such discourse was quite encouraging to Liang and his colleagues alike as they pursued professional development and institutional recognition.

As can be seen, Liang's agentic acts of open access publishing contributed to his own academic performance as achievement, promoted by his enhanced capacity for academic research (Ahearn 2001). His agentic acts of mentoring his colleagues also contributed to a more positive attitude his colleagues assumed towards open access publishing. Obviously, his exercised agency reshaped the discourse that in turn influenced the institutional recognition of open access publishing.

### **Lu: From a Shortcut to an Expedient**

Lu completed her dissertation in curriculum studies and obtained a PhD degree in applied linguistics from a university in England. Then, based on her PhD dissertation, she co-authored with her advisor and published two articles in traditional SSCI-indexed journals, both of which have been ranked in the first quartile (Q1). Hence, she thought she "[has] the ability to publish, unlike some of [her] colleagues who seem to be seeking a shortcut to publishing via open access journals" (Lu, second interview). In a reflection journal, she explains why she felt suspicious of open access journals and viewed them as providing a shortcut:

Many procedures seem to be simplified. The review time for external reviewers can be as short as a few days. Consequently, review reports can be as short as a few lines, half of which are formality sentences that summarise the reviewed article. Revision time is likewise much shorter. ... This kind of shortcut is made available by cutting everything short.

Obviously, Lu did not seem to have a favourable opinion about open access publishing. However, she realised its usefulness when she had to publish articles in open access journals in her third year of working in the university:

I participated in a two-year project on teacher education which required each participant to publish an article every year. So I had to get one paper published prior to 31st December, and one more prior to 31st December of the next year. ... I was quite stressed. Then it occurred to me that I could try an open access journal. ... It is indeed a shortcut, as it always is. ... Anyway, you can't expect the fast food to taste as good as an elaborately cooked dish. But it serves the same purpose as a meal, or as an expedient. (Lu, first interview)

Pressured by the institutional demand for rapid research production, Lu engaged in acts of open access publishing, thereby meeting the institutional requirement. Such acts were supported by her research capacity, which was evident in her earlier publications in traditional journals. Lu considered her success in meeting the task requirement an achievement (Eteläpelto et al. 2013; Priestley et al. 2012), albeit via open access publishing. "That was obviously an achievement because I would otherwise be disdained as I, honestly, sometimes disdain others who can't meet a requirement" (Lu, second interview). As can be seen, Lu tried to avoid the failure to meet a requirement that may provoke negative discourse among her colleagues (Davies 1990).

In sum, Lu exercised her agency by acts of utilising open access publishing for more rapid publication in order to meet the institutional requirement as an achievement. Given Lu's existing research capacity for high quality publications, it was the institutional requirement as well as her intention to avoid unfavourable discourse that directly motivated her acts of seeking open access publishing.

### **Guan: "My pay-off has shrunk"**

Guan began publishing in open access journals when he was already an associate professor. He confessed that his primary motivation to publish was not promotion but the handsome monetary reward, because "every paper published in an SSCI-indexed journal would mean a bonus of 10,000 CNY [approximately an equivalent of 1,500 USD]" (Guan, first interview). Once he received a sum of 130,000 CNY for the 13 papers he published in a year, which "aroused a mixture of envy and admiration among [his] colleagues" (Guan, first interview). He explained how he had managed to do so in the second interview:

It seems more like a kind of operation, a kind of production line. I produce papers. I collaborate with my master's and doctoral students. More accurately, I co-produce papers with them. I initiate by thinking of a topic and constructing the outline, and they collect data and write the first draft. ... I am also responsible for getting the fund to pay the APC. ... The production of a paper published in an open access journal takes an average of six weeks or so.

Obviously, the production of a paper, in Guan's words, refers to the whole process from conceiving a topic to having an accepted paper published online, rather than the work undertaken by the production team of a journal. Such acts of fast production of research papers (Bandura 2001), as facilitated by open access journals, provoked much controversy among Guan's colleagues. "[His] colleagues gossiped enthusiastically about [him], and some of them even took the time and trouble to examine if [his] papers were to be accused of plagiarism. ... Of course, their efforts were made in vain. [Guan] *produced* papers, but [he] didn't *steal*" (second interview; italics for Guan's own emphasis by intonation). Only a few colleagues acknowledged that Guan had the "capacity for research, otherwise [he] would not have been able to publish so many papers" (Guan, first interview).

Surrounded by such discourse of suspicion, Guan felt indignant. In his email to the deputy dean in charge of research, he argued:

Publishing more papers is not a crime. Publishing in open access journals is not a crime, either. ... Why don't they read my papers, and try to learn something from their merit? They are not interested in how to publish papers in SSCI-indexed journals. They are only interested in how others should not be allowed to publish if they themselves are unable to do so.

However, Guan's argument did not seem to have much effect on the unfriendly discourse. More sadly for him, the university later decided not to reward open access publishing if the APC was covered by the university fund. In response to the policy change, Guan tried to submit papers to journals whose APC charge was less than 10,000 CNY, the amount of the bonus per paper. In so doing, "when [he] got the bonus, there was still a trade surplus ... but [his] pay-off has obviously shrunk" (Guan, first interview).

Guan's agentic acts of prodigious open access publishing led to a massive amount of bonus, which he valued as a kind of achievement. Nonetheless, his capacity as demonstrated in the publishing acts did not seem to be acknowledged by his colleagues who instead constructed much discourse of disapproval. His university also changed the bonus policy to discourage such acts.

### **Wang: "Like second-class papers being recycled"**

"Actually, I don't have to publish open access to meet the publishing requirement at the university." These were the very first words Wang said in our first interview. Since she was promoted to full professor, she has kept publishing one or two high quality papers in flagship journals in the field of pragmatics every year, which "was far more than the university's requirement" (Wang, first interview). It is interesting to further inquire into her motivation to publish articles in open access journals, which accounted for almost half of her SSCI-indexed publications. Her motivation seemed to be two-fold:

Sometimes I would be invited to give talks on language teaching. ... Occasionally I would write up my presentations. ... Because I am not quite familiar with the literature in language teaching, I don't think I will stand a good chance to get published in traditional journals. So I submit such presentation-based papers to open access journals. They seem to be more open and inclusive. ... It's very much like second-class papers being recycled. (Wang, second interview)

As professor, I often feel the urge to contribute more. ... The more papers individual faculty members publish, the higher the performance indicator the Faculty would receive in institutional evaluations. (Wang's reflection journal)

As these extracts show, Wang's acts of open access publishing were primarily intended to increase productivity by publishing in open access journals papers which were less easily publishable in traditional journals. Such acts contributed to both personal and institutional achievements, as she clearly played an agentic role in utilising her capacity for publication: Wang's open access publishing doubled her SSCI-indexed publications, and in the meantime raised her faculty's publishing profile. Besides the aforementioned achievements, Wang thought that her acts of open access publishing also contributed to an upbeat attitude among the full professors at the faculty that senior faculty members should set a good example of publishing more:

Full professors should publish more. Full professors shouldn't stop publishing once promoted. ... I often openly express my willingness to publish more at faculty meetings. ... Some of my colleagues, who have been full professors for years and haven't published ever since, have already begun writing and trying to publish again. (Wang, first interview)

As can be seen, Wang's acts of open access publishing as well as her contribution to the publishing discourse (Davies 1990), particularly concerning full professors, reflect her capacity for research and her influence as a senior faculty member, and made notable achievements in both personal and institutional terms.

## Discussion

So far, each participant's case has been presented and analysed focusing on their agentic actions and the influence of such actions on themselves and their surroundings as a field. All the participants drew on various kinds of personal and social resources to mediate their agentic actions for the purpose of producing intended outcomes as institutionally recognised achievement. They used their own capacity for research, sought mentoring from experts, and enlisted the help of their students. Such actions as well as the underpinning agency of the university teacher-researchers seem to have also been documented in existing literature (e.g., Ma and Cai 2021). Likewise, the findings of the current study regarding the outcomes of individuals' exercise of agency corroborate many previous studies, which examine how individuals engage in agentic actions to enhance their own abilities and to promote policy changes (e.g., Holquist and Walls 2021; Paphitis and Kelland 2016). In the current study, the teacher-researchers such as

Liang developed their abilities to conduct research, such as identifying research gaps and collecting multiple sources of data; they devoted themselves to publishing research findings more rapidly; they pushed themselves to write up presentations whose contents might have otherwise been unknown to people other than the originally intended audience. In short, teacher-researchers' agentic actions of open access publishing were primarily conducive to their own professional development. On the other hand, their agentic actions turned out to be deeply influential to the university as institutional structure. For instance, their actions of open access publishing received open institutional recognition via administrators' acknowledgement and encouragement. Conversely, in another case, that is, Guan's encounter with decreased "pay-off", such actions evoked reformulation of a university policy that seemingly intended to discourage excessive open access publishing. Interestingly, the university seemed to assume a more favourable attitude towards teacher-researchers' open access publishing as long as it was associated with their academic performance and professional development, rather than with an increase in their financial returns.

While the current study shared much with previous research that also investigated individuals' agentic actions, what existing literature has rarely revealed is the nature of the habitus as it is affected and changed by the complex interaction between individuals' agentic actions and the institutional response. The findings of the current study seem to indicate that for the university as structure to respond positively to teacher-researchers' open access publishing, as is shown in Liang's case of institutional recognition, the agentic actions need to effectually add to institutional performance, for example, leading to an increased number of SSCI-indexed publications. This has, consequently, made the actions of open access publishing additive in nature. In other words, open access publishing becomes an added source of contribution to the university's indexed publications, the original source being traditional publishing. Therefore, when teacher-researchers exercise their agency to engage in open access publishing, their existing habitus of academic publishing is not replaced or transformed. Rather, it is augmented—teacher-researchers reshape their habitus in an incremental manner.

Another contribution of this study may be that it has revealed the duality of discourse, which presumably derives from the duality of its structure (Giddens 1984). In the field of open access publishing, discourse can both enable and constrain agentic actions that teacher-researchers engage in. In most cases of the current study, discourse served as the catalyst to promote open access publishing in the field as it gradually gained institutional recognition and favour; in one particular case, nonetheless, discourse obviously made the conditions prevail that discouraged, downplayed, and marginalised open access publishing. In either function it served, discourse conformed to institutionality (Wustefeld 2018), which also characterised the reshaping of teacher-researchers' habitus.

## Conclusions

Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus, this qualitative study adopted a multiple-case design to investigate how university researchers exercised their agency as they engaged in actions of open access publishing, and how such actions influenced the researchers themselves and the university as an institution. Guided by a four-dimensional approach to agency as the conceptual framework, the study unveiled the complex processes by which university researchers played agentic roles in open access publishing and reshaped their own publishing habitus. They utilised various kinds of personal and social resources to mediate their agentic actions for the purpose of producing intended outcomes as institutionally recognised achievement. As their agentic actions influenced the university as institutional structure in terms of policy reformulation, they also reshaped university researchers' habitus in an incremental manner as their habitus was augmented to include a new form of recognised action. The study also revealed the duality of discourse, which, conforming to institutionality, both enabled and constrained researchers' agentic actions.

This study also carries some practical implications for higher education as well as for further research into open access publishing. Universities and other higher education institutions alike may need to be better aware of open access publishing as an increasingly recognised venue for knowledge dissemination, and hence for the spread of their academic and professional impact. As researchers worldwide jointly engage in open access publishing and thus reshape their collective publishing habitus, tension will inevitably arise if the publishing policies remain unchanged in defiance of new agentic actions that mount up in the field. As the habitus pertaining to open access publishing is incremental in relation to traditional publishing, it requires much wisdom to balance and even reconcile the two models of publishing. Thus far, research into open access publishing does not seem to have received due attention from higher education researchers, which obviously calls for more research endeavours.

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