Mothers constructing six-year-olds: how ‘linguistic and domestic capital’ work through school–home correspondence, making ethnicity and social class visible

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Abstract

Research on ethnicity and social class in primary school has shown how school produces social inequality and seems to suffer from a lack of professional diversity competence. Less work has examined how a democratic, equality-oriented curriculum puts hierarchies and differences into play. Our study is based on an ethnographic text material in form of a home–school correspondence from two ethnically and socio-economically different parts of Oslo, Norway. We examine how families (children and mothers, as co-writers) portray their domestic family life. Our aim is to explore how ethnicity and social class become visible through what we call ‘linguistic habitus’, ‘linguistic negotiation’ and ‘domestic capital’ in an apparently conform school programme. Drawing on a Bourdieu-inspired focus on power in language use, we argue that this home–school correspondence functions as a linguistic market: a system of distinction, operating with internal rules regarding what to say, how to say it and what not to say. Building on 319 family entries from a home–school correspondence, this study demonstrates how a corpus of saturated and intertwined texts reveals hegemonic middle-class preferences, values and identities. Mothers from the middle-class areas, co-writing with their children, reap symbolic benefits more easily than mothers and children from socio-economical diverse areas, who lose ground in this linguistic market. Despite the fact that the majority of the entries are similar and conform to a standard, some counter-discourses emerge. The study identifies the development of three linguistic trajectories: *counteroffensive*, *rectifying* and ‘*hyper-correct*’ *deviance*. A central argument in this article is that this well-meaning home–school correspondence, which aims to be inclusive and democratic, demonstrates that access is socially skewed and that language capital is crucial. Our study reveals that the school system in Norway, situated in a very equality-oriented and strong welfare state, is based on two opposing ideologies, diversity on the one hand and sameness on the other.

Keywords Language · Power · Linguistic market · Diversity · Domestic capital · Educational governance

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Introduction: establishing school–home correspondence as a linguistic market

Norway is deeply committed to education, as demonstrated by its high level of public expenditure and the dynamic policy activity targeting education quality (OECD 2019). Norway is also considered to be one of the most equality-oriented nations in the world (Bendixsen et al. 2018). The term ‘unitary school’ was introduced in 1936 to describe the ideal of comprehensive universal primary school education in the Norwegian school system, and as recently as 2017, a white paper stated that Norwegian schools shall give all pupils equal opportunities (Ministry of Education and Research 2017). Still, Norway recognizes that it faces challenges in living up to this ideal and that there are differences in and between schools (OECD 2019). In this article, we argue that a specific democratic correspondence assignment bridging home and school in Norway is not as equal and inclusive as intended but rather unintentionally reproduces inequality.

In international school research, there has long been a debate over whether school contributes to the reproduction of social inequality or to social equalization. The question of how school contributes to social reproduction based on parents’ socio-economic situation has interested researchers (Boudon 1974; Bourdieu 1997; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Broady 1998; Willis 1977). In Norway, recent research on education shows that social inequality is increasing (Bakken 2009, 2014; Bakken and Danielsen 2011; Bakken and Elstad 2012; Ekhren 2014; Hansen 2014; Onstad and Grønmo 2013). Nordic research shows the importance of school as an inclusive and culturally responsive arena on the one hand (Lundberg 2019; Opheim, Gjerustad, and Sjaastad 2013; Sernhede 2009; Tanase 2020; Thomassen and Munthe 2020) and a civilizing and assimilating arena on the other (Gilliam and Gulløv 2017). Bakken (2009) asks whether schools can compensate for cultural and social inequality or simply reproduce it. His answer is mainly that the institution reproduces inequality. The unitary school is being challenged by a more diverse population while diversity has become a new ideal in the Norwegian school that puts equality under pressure (Lidén 2001; Røthing 2020).

Research on social inequality among families is inconclusive regarding the dominance of middle-class values. Some studies have found that middle-class ideals dominate upbringing strategies in school (Harman and Cappellini 2015; Lareau 2011; Stefansen and Aarseth 2011), while others have found that working class families develop strategies as a counteroffensive to institutional upbringing arenas (Lareau 2011; Stefansen and Blaasvær 2010). And finally, some studies have shown how different socio-economic cultures produce different moral and social understandings of the kinds of care that children need (Holloway 1998; Lee et al. 2020).

In Norway, there has recently been a debate over whether increasing economic inequality is an indication of a distinct and clear class society or not. This debate is characterized by different theoretical perspectives, one based on rational agency (Jansson et al. 2020) the other on cultural sociology (Flemmen, Jarness,

and Rosenlund 2019; Flemmen and Toft 2019). We contribute to the latter position. However, until recently, social inequality and class differences were rarely linked to questions of cultural inequality or ethnic diversity. Ethnic minorities are the ‘New Norwegian labour class’ (Andersen 2009; Andersson 2010; Vassenden and Jonvik 2019).

When it comes to measures implemented in school aiming to reduce social inequality and differences due to ethnicity, researchers have investigated and explored the effects of mother tongue teaching and bi/multilingual education (Daugaard 2020; Jaspers 2020; Salö et al. 2018). However, less attention has been given to how more an informal democratic equality-oriented curriculum puts into play hierarchies and differences, which is what this study aims to explore.

There has also been extensive research on home-school collaboration. Parents with more formal education participate more in school-home collaboration than those with less education (Bæck 2005; Epstein 2019). Mothers are more active than fathers (Kramvig 2007; Nordahl 2000, 2020), and co-operation between school and minority families is often problematic (Arneberg and Ravn 1995; Ericsson and Larsen 2000; Kileng 2007; Loona 1995). These findings are grounded in research investigating more formal collaboration between parents and school, such as parent meetings and conferences.

In our article we use a text-material to investigate a more informal exchange between school and home. We contribute to this research and these debates by examining how children and mothers (as co-writers) in particular negotiate their display of family life in a specific inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogical approach. This pedagogical approach rests on some linguistic premises that lead to display of cultural and social inequality. Although there is a lot of focus on language and language skills in school, there is little research on language as power. We address this gap by examining a specific pedagogic home-school collaboration established some decades ago. Inspired by a Bourdeusian perspective, we address this gap by examining a specific long-standing pedagogic home-school correspondence programme as a linguistic market, showing the effects of linguistic marginalization.

In 1997, a primary school reform was undertaken in Norway. One of the most significant changes was that children began entering school (i.e. first grade) at the age of six—one year earlier than before. Great emphasis was placed on preparations for schools to receive these younger children and for the children’s encounters with the school system. One measure put into place was for the six-year-olds to meet a class teddy bear upon their arrival, which would then go home with each student overnight or over a weekend, following a lottery draw. The class teddy bear was equipped with a travel diary, in which the student—with help from his or her parents—would write what the teddy had experienced during the home visit. The following day, the diary entry was read aloud during school hours and the teddy and the ‘teddy diary’ were put into the schoolbag of the next student. This arrangement of a class teddy bear who went on home visits with the first graders thus became a permanent feature at most Norwegian primary schools. As such, since 1997, nearly every six-year-old in Norway and their parents have ‘reported’ on their everyday life to teachers, classmates and classmates’ parents.

Our study emerges from this pedagogical project, examining how the authors of the entries display ‘doing’ family to a significant audience (Finch 2007; Morgan 1996). By analysing *what* mothers and children write about, and *how* they write, our aim is to answer the following questions:

- (1) What seems to be the ideal story—the master narrative—on the linguistic market?
- (2) How do both mothers and children use their linguistic habitus and produce subtle linguistic distinctions in educational texts that seem largely governed by a norm of equality and commonality?
- (3) How do they negotiate and handle the conflict between the two strong ideals on this linguistic market—equality on the one hand and autonomy and uniqueness on the other?

Symbolic power on a linguistic market: theoretical perspective

Bourdieu’s theories centre on social class, power and distinctions. He defines social class as a position defined in relation to another, arguing that there is an ongoing competition for different scarce resources, which he calls capital. The accumulation of different types of capital (social, economic and cultural) gives rise to symbolic capital, and symbolic power is exerted when the dominant classes define the world in ways that conceal and justify their arbitrary privileges (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). These concepts are all relevant to our study in general.

Specifically, we have chosen to focus on power in language use (Bourdieu 1991), looking at children and their mothers (as co-writers pretending to be six-year-olds). According to Bourdieu (1991), linguistic utterances or expressions are forms of distinguishing practice produced in particular contexts or markets. The linguistic products are given a certain value, and some products valued more highly than others ‘the practical competence of speakers is to know how, and to have the ability, to produce expressions that are highly valued on the market concerned’ (Thompson 1991, p. 18). Further, Bourdieu claims that linguistic competence is not uniformly distributed throughout a society. Different speakers possess different quantities of linguistic capital, and the capacity to produce expressions appropriate to a particular market is not equal. Communication between school and home is thus not neutral but a space that enables subtle language power where linguistic capital is unequally distributed. From the introduction in ‘*Language and Symbolic Power*’ Thompson (1991, p. 18) underlines how Bourdieu argues that the

distribution of linguistic capital is related in specific ways to the distribution of other forms of capital (economic and cultural etc.) which define the location of an individual within the social space. Hence, differences in terms of accent, grammar and vocabulary - the very differences overlooked by formal linguistics - are indices of the social positions of speakers and reflections of the quantities of linguistic capital (and other capital) which they possess. The more linguistic capital that the speakers possess, the more they are able to

exploit the system of differences to their advantage and thereby secure a *profit of distinction*.

As we will see, some of the mothers writing diary entries have a special linguistic capital via a negotiated narrative voice as a six-year-old. They produce symbolic power and thus rule the market.

Bourdieu argues that linguistic exchange is a mundane, practical activity like many other activities. Still, he claims that language use expresses and legitimizes symbolic power and is a product of a complex set of social, historical and political conditions of formation. Further, he theorizes that a completely homogenous language or speech community does not exist in reality; instead, language is considered to be ‘the illusion of linguistic communism’, an idealization of a set of linguistic practices that have emerged historically under certain social conditions of existence (Bourdieu 1991, p. 43). In this study, we focus specifically on how different social ethnic ‘trajectories and paths’ appear through linguistic negotiation between families, and between families and schools as the teddy diaries circulate. In our analysis, we draw upon Bourdieu’s definition of a social trajectory as ‘the series of positions successively occupied by the same agent or the same group of agents in successive spaces’ (1996, p. 258). This theoretical point is important for eliciting subtle power mechanisms in the diary entries. While school–home correspondence is intended to be a form of inclusive, equitable and equal communication, it was still possible to identify distinctions.

‘How,’ ‘what’ and ‘who’: methodology and analytical strategy

Sample and ethics

We received these already existing, anonymized teddy diaries from teachers who informed the relevant families that the diaries would be used for research purposes. The teachers ensured parents’ full confidentiality and informed us on delivery that the texts were written by children and mothers with children as co-writers.

While the diary entries were not meant to be private, and indeed were written for a local public audience consisting of teachers and other parents, all the texts have been further anonymized by changing the names of persons and places. In translating the texts from Norwegian to English, we have tried to preserve the original content as well as the writing style (including misspellings and childlike formulations) since we consider them to be significant analytical points in our findings.

The data in this article originally emerged from an international research project on teddy diaries. A team of five researchers collected diaries from first-grade classrooms in China, Norway, South Africa and the United States. The purpose of the larger study was to explore the norms, values and ideals connected to the everyday lives of children in different parts of the world. This study was conducted by two researchers and it is based on 15 travel diaries with a total of 319 family entries from the capital of Norway, Oslo. Five of the diaries come from a residential district in West Oslo primarily populated by middle-class people with

predominantly Norwegian ethnic origins. The other 10 come from an urban part of East Oslo, populated by ethnically and linguistically diverse working-class people. Of the 319 family entries, 53 are illegible because of handwritings. Of the 266 readable entries, 183 are from East Oslo and 83 from West Oslo.

By analysing the content and language used in the two samples of travel diaries, we compared socioeconomic resources and normative ideals among children's families. Although we do not have information about individual families, we do know the broader demographic composition of each area (Hansen 2014). We are familiar with Oslo's longstanding historical lines of socio-geographical differences and classed spatial divisions. The city has often been characterized by its clear social division between a wealthier west side and a poorer east side (Andersen 2014; Ljunggren and Andersen 2015; Myhre 2017). The city is also one of the fastest growing urban regions in Europe. It is currently undergoing major changes, partly because of a growing population of people with minority backgrounds. Oslo is the area of Norway with the highest proportion of people with an immigrant background. In 2020, immigrants accounted for 25.6% of the city's population. For Norway, the figure was 14.7% (The directorate of integration and diversity 2021). Oslo also has a greater proportion of residents with higher education compared to the rest of Norway. As such, Oslo is populated with both resource-rich and resource-poor inhabitants and is thus often referred to as 'a segregated city' (Ljunggren 2017).

Three analytical phases

Overall, the analytical strategy consisted of three phases. *The first* was an analytical description of the diary entries taken as a whole, revealing how the teddy diaries work as a linguistic market. Against this background, we analysed what kind of narrative is being produced as the 'master narrative', which consists of linguistic expressions that fulfil and thus reproduce the demands of formal markets.

The second phase was to reveal how both mothers and children used their linguistic habitus and produced subtle linguistic distinctions in the teddy diary entries. Our analysis made use of the distinction between the 'whats' and 'hows', following Holstein and Gubrium (2012). 'What' highlights the stories' content of personal narratives and is a kind of thematic approach. 'How' emphasizes the process of narrative production and underlines how inner life, everyday experience and social worlds are assembled and conveyed, focusing more on the stories' organization. In accordance with Holstein and Gubrium (1998, p. 165),

we rely upon a technique we call 'analytic bracketing' [...]. We may focus, for example, on how a story is being told, while temporarily deferring our concern for the various *whats* that are involved—for example, the substance, structure, or plot of the story, the context within which it is told, or the audience to which it is accountable. We can later return to these issues, in turn analytically bracketing *how* the story is told in order to focus on the substance of the story and the conditions that shape its construction.

NVivo12—a qualitative data analysis software program allowing both the counting of single words and the selection and categorization of blocks of text into themes—was used when analysing the texts. After reading all the texts carefully, we investigated what words were used frequently. The texts displayed several similarities, such as stories about meals, outdoor and indoor activities, going to birthday parties, going to bed and so on (Table 1).

Table 1 Family ideals

	Count
Visits/Birthday party	373
Bed/slept	194
Eating/breakfast/dinner	214
Home	354
Forest/Garden/Outside/Cabin/Boat/Tent/Ski/Bicycle/Walk	220
Shopping/Drive/Work/Doctor/Dentist/Hospital	91
Good/Enjoyed/Happy/Like/Great/Nice/Fun	460
Dances/Handball	22
Football/Ice hockey	31

Then we sorted the texts, investigating what families chose to present concentrating on the texts which did not ‘fit in’ or was ‘too different’ (Gullestad 2002, p. 47), and thus decided to investigate the subtle ways (both intentional and unintentional) in which mothers expose family norms, by analysing how they write (e.g. long entries, short entries, entries that contain typographical errors or a childish writing style) and about what (e.g. eating, playing travelling, going to church etc.). We found that ethnic minority mothers struggle to produce diary entries that are similar in content and form to those of ethnic majority mothers. This was evident in how the texts were written: for example, mothers writing in Norwegian rather than in their mother tongue. In the case of symbolic production, Bourdieu (1991, p. 77) claims that

the constraint exercised by the market via the anticipation of possible profit naturally takes the form of an anticipated censorship, of a self-censorship which determines not only the manner of saying, that is, the choice of language – “code switching” in situations of bilingualism – or the “level” of language, but also what it will be possible or not possible to say.

As a *third* analytical method, we drew on narratology (Genette 1980) and a concept-driven approach to coding (Graham 2007), using the concepts of class and ethnicity to investigate patterns of information given and information given off by classifying who is writing, what is written and how it is written. According to classical narratology, the author is the actual person who wields the pen and writes the narrative, while the narrative voice is the main voice in the narrative (Koven 2012). The narrative voice may assume a superior, all-knowing position and attach thoughts and statements to the various characters: for instance, ‘Teddy, Erik and Anna went to school’. Alternatively, the narrative voice can assume a position as the main figure and narrate in the first person: for instance, ‘Teddy, Erik and I went to school’. The

Picture 1 Child author **Picture 2** Non-ethnic Norwegian adult author

narrative voice can also assume other more hybrid forms wherein different narrative voices speak together: ‘We had breakfast before school’. Here, we analyse the different narrative voices in the texts, showing how they display age, ethnicity and social class in a subtle way.

In most of the entries, it is evident whether a child (see Picture 1, below), an adult or a non-ethnic Norwegian is the author (see Picture 2, below). This becomes apparent from the handwriting, as well as the content (e.g. misspellings, non-Norwegian names) and narrative style. For example, child authors are revealed through the naive form of the narrative and its simplistic content.

Irrespective of who the author is, the voice in the text is always that of a six-year-old. After all, the child is the one who will be responsible for the entry and stands behind the presentation in the classroom. In most cases, it appears as if the child and adult have co-authored the text (see Picture 3, below), having agreed on the content and the way of writing. These texts are both long and complex, even though they have been written in a naive and childish manner. In this way, the entries often comprise a hybrid narration style and reveal a negotiated child–adult voice, as if a ‘six-year-old adult’ is speaking. Picture 3 Co-authored text

In most cases, the texts are written in the first person. In 97 narratives, the ‘I’ voice is attributed to the teddy. In 49 narratives, there is an all-knowing, overarching narrative voice. In three narratives, the narrative voice glides between being the ‘I’ voice and the all-knowing voice; in four narratives, the narrative voice is consistently in the first-person plural (‘we’). All the ‘we’ narratives were written by children,

Picture 3 Co-authored text

while all but one of the all-knowing narratives were written by adults. A total of 194 narratives were written by adults, and 16 were assessed as having been written first by a child and then by an adult, or vice versa. Later in the article, we demonstrate how the author and narrator voices play an unintended but important role in expressing class and ethnicity. Symbolic power is manifested through the manner of narration and the ways in which the ostensible six-year-olds express themselves.

Analytical findings

Establishing the understanding of school–home correspondence as a linguistic market

The teddy diaries are intended to be a pedagogical method of offering first graders a chance to talk about themselves and their families in front of their class. From the school's perspective, this method is intended to ensure that children are seen and heard and to build bridges between the school and the home. An important aspect of this school–home correspondence is that the diary entries can be seen as a whole framework. The framework creates a linguistic market in which family ideals are negotiated through circulation. There is something about the correspondence that allows the dominant norm of equality to coexist with subtle differences. The correspondence works as a free market. A key feature of this free market is the absence of forced linguistic transactions. Indeed, the school gives few directives concerning the diary's narrative content. There is only a short introductory text written by the teacher, like the following:

Hello, my name is Teddy, and I am a special friend of your class. This is my travel diary. I would be very happy if you would write and draw a bit of what 'the two of us' have experienced together in your home. I'm sure that Mum or Dad will help you. Regards, Teddy.

Few steering intentions are present in this introductory entry. Rather, reflective control arises through market management. No pure free market actually exists; all markets are in some way constrained (Bourdieu 1991). The control objective is in the control mechanisms—the family receive a stuffed toy without ears and eyes, and a book with blank sheets with the possibility to write whatever they want. They are, however, obliged to write something, and they know it will have an audience (Bourdieu 1991). A 'teddy travel diary market goal' is thus set. When the teddy travels between the families, all the families know what others before them have written and that teachers and other families will read what they write. Thus, the teddy diaries can be read as a type of transaction of everyday ideals and a confirmation of family habits via negotiations between families and family members (Bourdieu 1991). Through this negotiation between the families via the school, the teddy diaries, intended to invite open correspondence between the children's families and the school, exert a guiding and regulatory side effect. Through the negotiations between families, the travel diary is continually

enriched and filled with norms and ideals. Indeed, the perceptions exchanged and reinforced are the most important content.

In every teddy diary, we find a localized negotiation effect. Narratives are not summaries of ‘what people generally do’, nor are they statements of moral rules about ‘what people should do’. Rather, they are stories through which people attempt to connect their own experiences, and their understandings of those experiences, to a more generalized pattern of social meaning. The texts cover many different issues and refer to the everyday lives of different families. Although the activities described may be different, the presentation and evaluation of home life are surprisingly similar. As Bourdieu (1991, pp 38–39) claims:

What circulates on the linguistic market is not ‘language’ as such, but rather discourses that are stylistically marked both in their production, in so far as each speaker fashions an idiolect from the common language, and in their reception, in so far as each recipient helps to produce the message which he perceives and appreciates by bringing to it everything that makes up his singular and collective experience.

In our particular linguistic market (i.e. the teddy diaries), we find some stylistically canonized narrative prototypes gradually emerging. Most of the texts begin by mentioning that Teddy is a very welcome guest and conclude by stating that Teddy enjoyed the visit, and further that the family members always have a good time during the visit. The following is an ideal-type story from a family in the middle-class area of Oslo and exemplifies the type of narrative that dominates the diaries:

I have waited a long time for this day that I finally could bring Teddy home with me. Friday, we went home with Elly and we ate sausages and pasta; afterwards we had ice-cream. We watched some children’s TV and then we played in Elly’s room. When my mum came to pick us up, I was very proudly showing her Teddy. Mum had been walking so Teddy could lie in the stroller together with my little sister Margrethe. They were warm and comfortable there. When we came home, we watched TV and ate popcorn. Teddy liked it but it got stuck in all his teeth. Later Teddy slept well in my arms. Saturday, we got up early and went out to jump on the trampoline. Later in the afternoon we got visitors and Teddy thought that was very exciting. Two boys came visiting, and we ate hot dogs and we got Saturday candy for watching children’s TV. That night we stayed up a little longer, but we got very tired. So on Sunday morning, we didn’t wake up before nine-thirty. Today we have been out walking in the forest. Teddy found a wooden stick similar to the letter Y. In addition, we found three orienteering posts. Teddy enjoyed walking and it was nice that both grandma and grandpa took part in the trip. Teddy thought the weekend went by quickly, he looks forward to the next time he will come home with me. Thank you for a good and cosy weekend! Hug from Josefine and Teddy.

This story is written in an advanced way, using a rather rich vocabulary and different narrative voices. Josefine is the ‘I’ voice; however, we also enter Teddy’s mind when he shares his thoughts and feelings. It thus becomes possible to assign

Teddy the feelings the family wants their overnight guests to have. It is impossible for a Norwegian family to say, without embarrassment, ‘We in this family make our guests enjoy themselves and they always look forward to coming to us, because we are so nice’ (Gullestad 1992). Using Teddy as a mediator, however, the statement does not come across as bragging or selfish. The cosiness of family life has subtly been conveyed through the teddy. According to Gullestad (1992), social interaction can be seen as negotiations about central identities, and sameness and modesty are examples of central values in Norway. Having a nice, cosy time is an important component in most of the texts, and in this way the families expose their most significant domestic practices. Witoszek (2009) sees ‘*coziness*’ as such an important cultural focal point in Norway. Bourdieu argues that: “The various practices, and through them the different lifestyles, all stand in a hierarchical relation to the legitimate culture—that is, (schematically) to the canonized culture” (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). This cultural code of ‘a nice and cosy time’ has also been highlighted in other research that focuses on sensitive, child-centred parenting using the modern, Western model (Lareau 2011). Prioritizing the child’s need for care, belonging and security over all other issues is, in fact, a Western educational standard (Bernstein and Triger 2011; Forsberg 2010; Shirani, Henwood, and Coltart 2012).

Child-centredness is also reflected in the activities presented in the diary entries. The weekend appears to be allocated for the child, involving eating popular foods like sausages and pizza, jumping on the trampoline, and watching television while eating ‘Saturday candy’ (*lørdagsgodt*). Nearly all the teddy diaries that contain information about Saturdays mention children’s television and Saturday candy; mentioning the latter signals a healthy practice in everyday Norwegian life, where the norm is for children to eat candy only on Saturdays. In a majority of the texts from the middle-class area of West Oslo, there were also some pedagogical and constructive elements. From the mention of the walk in the forest in the quote above, we can infer that the family is physically active. We obtain the picture of a sporty, attentive, curious and education-oriented family who, during their forest walk, stop and spend time finding sticks that look like letters. The text also refers to ‘we’; here, the ‘we’ involves grandparents. Social capital seems to be an important part of the authors’ domestic capital, since many of the texts frequently mention grandmothers, grandfathers, siblings and friends in everyday life, not only at formal occasions. Following Bourdieu (1984 [1979]), this signals the Norwegian value of social networks.

Negotiating cultural content as positive diversity

By comparing the previous example from a middle-class ethnic Norwegian family with diary entries written by ethnic-minority children and their parents—primarily mothers—we illustrate how family normative ideals are displayed through what they choose to present and how they communicate linguistically. As we will see, some of the entries display a way of making oneself visible as something culturally unabsorbed, while others are affected by linguistic power. Take, for example, the following entry (written by a child):

This weekend I [the teddy] went home with Shan. On Friday we sat and watched a Tamil film with Sutharshan's family. It was exciting and super cool! On Saturday we got up early to watch 'Digimon' and 'Johnny Bravo'.... Then Sutharshan took me with him to the library. We had to be pretty quiet there. Then we watched children's television and ate sweets and cake. On Sunday, I went with Sutharshan to the mosque. Afterwards we went to a party. There I met a lot of Sutharshan's friends. They played 'tag' We had fun!

The text shows that the child grasps the genre of the teddy diary, managing to describe a weekend routine similar to that of the majority of families. The common components (e.g. outdoor activities, children's television, sweets and cake, and the fact that things are cosy, fun and enjoyable) are all included and are, in turn, notions of 'Norwegianness' (Handulle and Vassenden 2020, p. 8). However, there is a distinction, an aspect that Sutharshan does not share with the canonical Norwegian narratives. The ethnic Norwegian narratives do not include activities like attending a religious service or viewing Tamil films, and they rarely mention a library visit. Sutharshan's, however, does. This can be understood in light of the fact that Norway, and Europe as a whole, has become a more secular society, of which 'empty churches and libraries' are signs (Lagerstrøm and Revold 2015; Taule 2014). By using positive diversity symbols, likely unconsciously, Sutharshan is marking an autonomous identity in a tacit way. We may see this as a contradiction to Bourdieu's (1989, p. 17) insistence that.

the dispositions acquired in the position occupied imply an adjustment to this position, what Goffman calls the 'sense of one's place'. It is this sense of one's place which, in interactions, leads people whom we call in French *les gens modestes*, 'common folk', to keep to their common place, and the others to 'keep their distance', to 'maintain their rank', and to 'not get familiar'. These strategies (it should be noted in passing) may be perfectly unconscious and take the form of what is called timidity or arrogance.

In the case of Sutharshan, this is a negotiation on the linguistic market—a timid counteroffensive.

Subject to symbolic power by linguistic misspelling

There are, however, other narratives written by mothers that exhibit ethnic marginalization and lack of linguistic capacity, notably by containing spelling mistakes:

Finly Usman got to take Teddy home. On Wednesday, Usman and Teddy played out in the school yard, then Usman and Teddy went home in the rane. On Thursday, Usman and Teddy played outside then we kame home. Usman and Teddy ate Pizza, and swets.

And this:

Shila's mom came to school. Has said hvat Tedi and little Tedi out Shila should do. Whi she was in Rema [a shop] and went shopping afterwards we took the tube to hoome.

These two narratives do not differ from other entries in terms of their content (i.e. references to playing outdoors, sweets and food). However, they are unique in that they contain several misspellings and are written by adults. They differ from the 'ideal-type' narrative, which presents playful, childish and naive descriptions and the charming goofy narratives that characterize six-year-old children, written by their mothers who consciously construct six-year-old narrative voices.

Usman's and Shila's narratives are written by adults who do not have the same control over the narrative voice because they are expressing themselves in a foreign language. They write shorter and more poorly constructed narratives than the other authors, and their narratives demonstrate less linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1991). Bourdieu argues that linguistic exchange is also an economic exchange between producers 'endowed with a certain linguistic capital' and consumers, 'which is capable of procuring a certain material or symbolic profit'. By this logic, utterances 'are not only signs to be understood and deciphered; they are also signs of wealth, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and signs of authority, intended to be believed and obeyed' (Bourdieu 1991, p. 502). The parents of Usman and Shila are made 'chess mats' in the teddy diaries, robbed by linguistic capital—or, as Bourdieu phrases it, 'like aces in a game of cards, in the competition for the appropriation of scarce goods of which this social universe is the site' (Bourdieu 1989, p. 17).

Teddy diaries are intended to be child-friendly, inclusive and democratic. The genre does, however, demand a particular form of cultural capital that is highly valued in schools: that of linguistic fluency and writing skills. The teddy diary therefore functions as a form of symbolic power, or even a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). These short entries make clear that some children have parents who have more mastery over the content and form of what they are being asked to produce in the written narratives, which in turn suggests that some children have access to more resources than others. Although both groups of mothers engage in the same practice and co-construct diary narratives with their children, the ethnic-minority mothers do not have the option to write in their mother tongue. This highlights their lack of linguistic fluency and suggests that there are limits to the kinds of educational support they can provide. As a result, a latent function of the school-home correspondence is that it contributes to the reproduction of inequality and exposes differences in family resources (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

An ethnic-minority child masters the genre: the 'feel for the game' on the linguistic market

Perhaps the most impressive narrative among the 266 entries is the one written by Abdullah. He is the only child author who uses an all-knowing, overarching narrative voice. His narrative is the 15th in his class's teddy diary, and it is evident from the entry's content and the way it is written that he has carefully studied the

preceding narratives in order to match the genre. Although the narrative has misspellings, it includes all the general aspects of genre and content on the linguistic market, such as watching television, sleeping and having meals. However, it is not a copy of anyone else's narrative: it is completely in accordance with and similar to the more advanced narratives written by adults. In the introductory instructions provided in the teddy diary, parents are encouraged to help their children. This author seems to be a tenacious boy, not asking for parental help but instead writing the narrative autonomously by himself:

Teddy with Abdullah. On Friday, Teddy and Abdullah and Khadija played. We played 'you're it'. Teddy won, afterwards we went to the store. There Teddy bought soda and chips. We saved it until Saturday. Then Khadija read a story about a witch, Teddy thought it was good. On Saturday Teddy woke, then Abdullah woke, then Khadija woke, then we watched TV. It was fun, said Teddy. Afterwards Mom said that we were getting breakfast. Then Mom asked shall we eat for dinner? What about fish? Afterward we played with Spider Man. Afterwards, Abdullah and Teddy and Khadija went out to swing. Teddy thinks they are fun, but after that then we went with dad to the shop. There we bought ice cream and soda and sweets and three lollipops and crisps. Then we came back, then we watched children's TV, after that then we ate fish, after that we played doctor, after that we had a cosy evening. We ate super, after that then mama said that we had to sleep, but Khadija read a story about a boy. Then Teddy woke, then Khadija woke, then Abdullah woke, then we went to the living room, then we watched TV. After that then dad woke, then we got breakfast, after that then we wrote in Teddy's book, then Teddy went home and then Abdullah went home and then Khadija. Hope that we get to have Teddy again. Regards, Khadija, Teddy and Abdullah.

In the above narrative, Abdullah uses Teddy as a mediator, mirroring the canonized ideal-type narratives written by mothers pretending to be six-year-olds. Abdullah also prospectively 'evaluates' the family and the visit. He uses the all-knowing, overarching narrative voice when he writes, 'after that we had a cosy evening'. Here, Abdullah is assuming an authorized meta-position, like the Norwegian middle-class mothers. He concludes that it is cosy in this family, and that this is not just a subjective opinion. Bourdieu (1989) argues that symbolic power is about having dominion over the categories of perception, and symbolic capital is the overall form of capital. In traditional societies, Bourdieu claims, honour is the most important symbolic capital, while symbolic capital in differentiated societies is field-specific (Bourdieu 1979, 1989). Holloway (1998) concept of 'local moral mothering' follows this same vein. Abdullah is exhibiting a local cultural competence. He understands what the local culture considers important in childhood. He knows what the local childhood morality is. He not only knows the important ingredients of a good childhood, but also the mental structures of how everyday life is evaluated and how a democratic child-centred upbringing is the ideal—following the Western modern model (Lareau 2011). Abdullah constructs a mother who asks the children if they should have fish for dinner, not a mother who authoritatively decides what they will have. 'Mentalization' has become a parenting mantra in contemporary Norway (Lorentzen 2019),

explaining the importance of having the ability to see other people ‘from within’ and to see oneself ‘from the outside’. How parents ‘mentalize’ and manage to put into words the child’s various mental states is central when it comes to their caring ability (Lorentzen 2019). Here, Abdullah’s description concerning their dinner is a clever trick. Not only does he let the mother see the child ‘from within’, but he also chooses fish—highly recommended in the standard Norwegian diet. In Bourdieu’s words, Abdullah shows a ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu 1998, p. 77).

The working-class timid counteroffensive: negotiating the rules on the linguistic market

As mentioned previously, the narratives of the teddy diaries have more similarities than differences. They all describe ordinary activities, such as eating, sleeping and leisure activities. However, there is an apparent difference between the texts from the two environments that seems to signal distinctions in social class background, and it pertains to parental divorce.

In the teddy diaries from the middle-class environment, the presence of parents is often only implicit in the narratives. However, we can assume that they are present when children describe activities and visits to places that they would likely not attend without an adult. For example, it is unlikely that a six-year-old would visit the supermarket or hike in the mountains alone. Some narratives only mention the mother, while others only mention the father. In some narratives, both parents are present, although separately. And, in some instances, they are mentioned together: for example, ‘[o]n Friday, mom and dad were away’ and ‘[w]hen we were going to sleep, we crept into Mom and Dad’s [room]’. The manner of description of the presence or absence of parents often makes it impossible to determine whether or not the parents are divorced.

This style of mentioning parents is also found in the diaries of the families living in the working-class area. However, in many narratives, a parent’s presence or absence is explicitly conveyed. The following two narratives provide an example:

This weekend I (Teddy) have been with Siri, at both her mom’s and her dad’s. On Friday, I was with the dad at McDonalds and gorged myself full of burgers and chips. Afterwards I lay in bed with Siri and listened to all the weird sounds that came from our stomachs! On Saturday, I went with Siri’s other family to a flea market and Easter workshop in the church. But there I mostly sat in Siri’s mom’s handbag, because Siri met someone she knew. On Sunday I sat on the back of Siri’s bike as she pedalled off. It went very fast! So Sunday night I was super tired and went to bed before everyone else. Even before Siri’s little sister! It was really quite lovely.

And:

On Monday, May 25th I (Teddy) went home with Ellen. Sarah was also with us. It was fun. When we were going to bed, I was allowed to sleep in Ellen’s bed. Ellen’s stuffed toy was also there. On Tuesday I went along to school; after school, we went on a long bike ride, Ellen, her mother and

me. I got to sit at the back. On Wednesday, Ellen was with her dad a few hours. We went to a company football game. Hm, that's a long word! The dad's team won. Tomorrow, I go back to school, unfortunately, because Ellen is going to [name of a place]. Thank you for this time, Ellen.

In both of these narratives, the mother is the author, while the narrative voice is Teddy's. It is apparent that the mother and father do not live together, since Teddy visits two homes. In the first narrative, the mother uses the author's power to give Teddy feelings and thoughts. Through Teddy, the mother conveys that the mother's home is more educational than the father's. Teddy is also allowed to eat as many burgers and chips as he wishes when he is with the father. However, while he is with the mother, Teddy is introduced to spiritual and recycling ideals. In the second narrative, the mother, as the author, uses the opportunity to reveal that the child spends the entire weekend with the mother and thus more time with her than with the father: 'Ellen was with her dad a few hours'. Both of these mothers, perhaps because they are divorced, are possibly demonstrating a more pronounced need to emphasize and display that they are worthy mothers with good parenting ideals (Finch 2007). According to Bourdieu, this is symbolic power, in the sense of a power of 'world-making': 'To change the world, one has to change the ways of world-making, that is, the vision of the world and the practical operations by which groups are produced and reproduced' (Bourdieu 1989, p. 23). These mothers show symbolic capital by confronting a taboo—divorce in this case—and thereby accrue credit. In other words, they turn a disadvantage into an advantage and impose upon others 'a new vision' of divorce.

In other narratives, such information is mentioned in passing: 'The next day, Lise's mom drove us to Lise's dad' or 'Teddy has been with Nils at his dad's this weekend'. Many narratives from East Oslo explicitly state that the parents are divorced. Few narratives from West Oslo reference divorce; divorce seems less acceptable to mention, and middle-class families from the West Oslo schools do not share divorce-related details in the teddy diaries, even though we know that these areas include divorced parents. In contrast, working-class families may find it more natural and acceptable to emphasize that the child has two homes. This may be attributed to self-conscious reporting on the part of West Oslo families, owing to a desire to present their family and domestic capital in such a way as to avoid stigma from their own social class (i.e. as a nuclear family). While the reason behind this type of indistinct reporting is unclear, it potentially signals a social distinction (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). According to Bourdieu, the experience of the particular social class condition that characterizes a given location in social space imprints a particular set of dispositions upon the individual. These dispositions amount to what Bourdieu sometimes calls a 'generative formula': 'an acquired system of generative schemes [that] makes possible the production of thoughts, perceptions and actions' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 55). In the socially diverse area of East Oslo, we find a generative scheme for expressing divorced families.

Discussion: Resistance, oppression and transgression

This article has sought to answer the following key questions: (1) What seems to be the ideal story—the master narrative—on the linguistic market? (2) How do both mothers and children use their linguistic habitus and produce subtle linguistic distinctions in educational texts that seem largely governed by a norm of equality and commonality (3) How do mothers and children negotiate and handle the conflict between the two strong ideals on this linguistic market—of equality on the one hand and autonomy and uniqueness on the other.

Domestic capital on a linguistic market: the ideal story

We find that all families, independent of social class and ethnic background, demonstrate having child-centred normative ideals. They present what they do in their everyday life and on weekends by writing about children spending time outdoors, being together and with siblings, having a ‘cozy’ time. Eating, sleeping, watching television and playing outdoors are mentioned in almost every entry; these entries thus display domestic capital, since all of these activities are related to hegemonic ideals of a good childhood in Norway. A constant repetition of these hegemonic ideals concerning what constitutes a good everyday childhood is established in and through the diaries.

The teddy diary is a linguistic market—a system of distinction operating with internal rules. There are rules for what to say and how to say it, and there are rules for what not to say. The stories describe different family activities, and they all refer to everyday life. Although the activities vary, they are almost always discussed and evaluated in the same way. For instance, most of the texts conclude with a statement that the members of the family enjoyed what they did while the teddy bear was visiting. There are also rules for expressing amusement. Not only do they have to have fun, but they also have to have a ‘cosy’ (*koselig*) time. Bourdieu often uses ‘games’ as an analogy for social life with ‘fields being the playing board.’ In this analogy, ‘dispositions provide the “feel for the game”, which cannot be explained wholly by the rules of the game. Crucially, Bourdieu [argues] that the feel for the game varies over social space’ (Bridge 2011, p. 77). We find this analogy useful for understanding the linguistic market. In our study, we found that some authors benefit from the rules on the market and others lose, but there are also those who challenge and transgress the rules.

Linguistic habitus: producing distinctions in educational texts

Mothers from middle-class families also unintentionally convey class and normative ideals by presenting *what* they do in their everyday life. By describing spending time with their children in the woods and finding sticks (as in one of the examples above), they present themselves as being healthy and pedagogical at the same time. Bourdieu (1991) argues that.

individuals from upper-class backgrounds are endowed with a linguistic habitus which enables them to respond with relative ease to the demands of most formal or official occasions. There is a concordance or congruence between their linguistic habitus and the demands of formal markets. It is this congruence which underlies the confidence and fluency with which they speak.... Hence, on most public occasions, they speak with distinction and thereby distinguish themselves from all those who are less well endowed with linguistic capital (Thompson 1991, p. 21).

It is reasonable to question whether a linguistic habitus is being expressed in these texts—one dominated by the middle-class mothers—or whether it is the teddy diaries genre that sets the premises. The narratives must be considered in the context of the school–home correspondence: they are simple, in part because they describe everyday events of a normal family that are meant to be enjoyable when read aloud to schoolchildren, and in part because they are a school assignment. It is also important to remember that the diaries are circulated among the families of the schoolchildren, giving the entries a repetitive format; the repetition of certain ideals indicates that these ideals are acceptable to most families. However, even if the teddy diaries set some unavoidable premises, the middle-class mothers, because of their linguistic habitus, are better positioned to more easily reap the symbolic benefits of this pedagogical programme.

Linguistic negotiation: mastering the conflict between ideals of equality and uniqueness

Bourdieu (1991) emphasizes the importance of seeing how systematic discrepancies may arise on the linguistic markets, and the forms of censorship associated with them, when individuals from differing social backgrounds relate to the market in different ways. He ‘illustrates this point by considering some of the typical speech practices of individuals from different class backgrounds when they find themselves in formal or official situations (e.g. interviews, classroom discussions and public ceremonies)’ (Thompson 1991, p. 21).

While our sample does not include official interviews and public ceremonies, it does include diary entries whose authors have censored themselves to minimize impactful transgressions and those who display oppression. We identified three trajectories negotiating the conflict between this linguistic market’s two strong ideals (equality on the one hand and autonomy and uniqueness on the other). *First*, we see some children mastering the genre, making resistance or ‘counteroffensives’ (Lareau 2011), breaking with the traditions of the majority culture on the market by bringing in elements of their own: mosques and Tamil films. *Second*, we have those oppressed who lose on the market by misspellings and grammatical errors reveal having less linguistic capital. Still, making an effort to adapt their linguistic expressions to the demands of formal markets. As we saw with the non-ethnic-Norwegian mothers trying to ‘rectify or correct’ (Bourdieu 1991) expressions to concur with dominant norms. *Finally*, we find those making ‘hyper-correct speech’ (Bourdieu

1991), shown by mothers displaying heavy burger meals and divorce. Each of these characteristics is, to Bourdieu ‘the sign of a class divided against itself’ (Thompson 1991, p. 21).

Conclusion: ‘Six-year-old’ middle-class mothers rule the educational linguistic market

We have shown how distinctive genre conventions develop and become a premise and an opportunity for negotiating family norms and ideals. Our analyses show differences despite a rather hegemonic text corpus displaying how the families’ everyday life is dominated by a sober, non-exaggerated writing style, as well as the description of ‘educational activities’ that are integrated into otherwise routine activity, such as picking up sticks shaped like letters during a walk in the forest. These activities appear to have multiple layers of meaning or purpose behind them. The children (six-year-olds) are communicating between themselves; however, their parents (especially their mothers) are also simultaneously communicating with other parents and teachers. A distinctive genre is thus created by the narration of activities by and for mothers pretending to be six-year-olds. In this social context, good parenting involves communicating with other adults in the voice of a child. However, as we have shown, this simultaneous communication on two levels is very complex. Adults who implicitly transmit norms and ideals to other adults using the language of a child must master this language to the fullest. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 127) claim that linguistic relationships always express symbolic power relations and that a crucial ability in all communications is to identify the right moment to say the right thing. The goal in this case is to be a ‘good, ordinary’ family. This requires the performance of activities and other methods of spending time together as a family. The assumption is that mothers possess this knowledge and the mastery to write about it, which the ideal story—the master narrative—on the linguistic market shows.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) also state that the dominant participant often lowers his level to that of his conversational partner. Nevertheless, the objective power relationship between the positions remains the same. The symbolic denial of their difference utilizes the fundamental strengths between them to create a recognition of it on another level. This is well-illustrated in the teddy-diaries, where we find that both mothers and children use their linguistic habitus and produce subtle linguistic distinctions in these texts, which seem largely governed by a norm of equality and commonality. The middle-class mothers manage to express their children’s voices in a way that a six-year-old child cannot. They write in the style of a children’s book: simply and understandable for the six-year-old, but in a linguistically elegant way. Their mastery of their mother tongue reveals a subtle class difference. However, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 129) also emphasize, the oppressed classes feel obliged to speak the language of the dominant class. As such, the linguistic capital of the oppressed is devalued and loses worth in certain settings, such as schools. Here, the arbitrary cultural and linguistic norms of the standard language of the middle class appear naturalized and unassailable.

We have shown that this well-meaning school–home correspondence, which aims to build a closer relationship between the home and the school in an inclusive and democratic manner, displays apparent differences. This article demonstrates that access to the hegemonic school domain is socially skewed and that language capital is thus crucial. Our study reveals that the school in Norway, a very equality-oriented and strong welfare state, is based on two opposing ideologies, diversity on the one hand and sameness on the other. Through written texts, families both negotiate and handle this conflict by showing equality on the one hand and autonomy and uniqueness on the other. School authorities should be more aware of these conflicting ideologies in their educational governance.

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Data availability The manuscript contains data that can be made available on reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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