

Michael Grenfell / Michael Kelly (eds)

Pierre Bourdieu: Language, Culture and Education



Theory into Practice

Peter Lang

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Preface

The origin of this book was a shared interest in the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu. Both editors had previously worked with his concepts in their own research, and together they organised an international conference on Bourdieu, Language, Culture and Education, which was held at Southampton in April 1997. This volume collects together a selection of the papers which were presented at that conference, revised and edited for publication.

The editors would like to acknowledge the help and support they received from the University of Southampton, particularly the Centre for Language in Education and the School of Modern Languages. This support was most valuable in arranging the conference, and the editors would particularly like to thank Jean Watts and Karine Brissy for their material and moral assistance.

M. Grenfell and M. Kelly

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Editors

Michael Grenfell lectures at the University of Southampton. He is involved in teaching both undergraduate and post-graduate students, and conducts research on a range of educational and language related issues. He used Bourdieu's work extensively in his doctoral thesis and has published papers in such journals as the *Language Journal* and the *British Educational Research Journal*. He is a frequent contributor to conferences on educational and language research, a joint organiser of symposia on 'Bourdieu and Education' at BERA and ECER, and founder of an international network of scholars and researchers working with Bourdieu's ideas.

Michael Kelly is Professor of French at the University of Southampton. His research has centred on French intellectual and cultural history, with books on the Catholic thinker Emmanuel Mounier, on modern French Marxism, and on the reception of Hegel in France. He recently co-edited *French Cultural Studies: an Introduction* (OUP) and is Associate Editor of the journal *French Cultural Studies*. He is currently chairing a project on Intercultural communication within the European Language Council.

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Contents

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Preface..... | 5 |
|--------------|---|

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Notes on Authors | 7 |
|------------------------|---|

MICHAEL GRENFELL AND MICHAEL KELLY

Introduction:

| | |
|--|----|
| Bourdieu: Language, Culture and Education – Theory into Practice..... | 13 |
|--|----|

Part One: Language

MICHAEL GRENFELL

| | |
|--|----|
| Language: Construction of an Object of Research..... | 27 |
|--|----|

TREVOR JONES

Language Change and Social Change:

| | |
|---|----|
| Temptations of the Populist Fallacy | 41 |
|---|----|

INÈS BRULARD AND MICHEL FRANCARD

| | |
|---|----|
| To What Extent is the Linguistic Habitus of Francophone Belgian Speakers Reflected in their Linguistic Evaluations and Practices? | 51 |
|---|----|

FERNAND FEHLEN

| | |
|--|----|
| Pre-Eminent Role of Linguistic Capital in the Reproduction of the Social Space in Luxembourg..... | 61 |
|--|----|

ROBERT VANN

| | |
|--|----|
| An Empirical Perspective on Practice: Operationalising Bourdieu's Notions of Linguistic Habitus | 73 |
|--|----|

DAVID EICK

| | |
|---|----|
| Discourses on Language and Symbolic Power: Foucault and Bourdieu | 85 |
|---|----|

J. DANIEL SCHUBERT

| | |
|---|----|
| Anti-Habitus: Schizophrenia and Symbolic Violence | 97 |
|---|----|

Part Two: Culture

BRIDGET FOWLER

| | |
|---|-----|
| Some Critical Issues in Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture | 111 |
|---|-----|

CATERINA PIZANIAS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Considering the Prospects of On-line Fields of (Techno)Cultural Production | 121 |
|---|-----|

HENRY BARNARD

| | |
|---|-----|
| Regimes of Value, Cultural Goodwill and the Social Life of Books | 135 |
|---|-----|

DOMINIQUE PERRON

| | |
|--|-----|
| Societal Crisis and Social Representation in Colette's Work | 145 |
|--|-----|

RACHAEL LANGFORD

| | |
|---|-----|
| Writing and Resistance: Jules Vallès and the Language of Education | 155 |
|---|-----|

SARAH KING

| | |
|---|-----|
| Refractions through a National Prism: Bourdieu, Canadian Literature and the University English Curriculum | 167 |
|---|-----|

MICHAEL KELLY

| | |
|--|-----|
| Field and Habitus in Intercultural Communication | 177 |
|--|-----|

CHRISTIAN VERMEHREN

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Bourdieu and Media Studies | 187 |
|----------------------------------|-----|

KARL MATON

| | |
|---|-----|
| Extra Curricular Activity Required: Pierre Bourdieu and the Sociology of Educational Knowledge..... | 197 |
|---|-----|

Part Three: Education

RAJANI NAIDOO

| | |
|---|-----|
| Doors of Learning, Gates of Power: Struggle in the South African University Field..... | 213 |
|---|-----|

KENNETH EHRENSAL

| | |
|---|-----|
| Establishing Pedagogic Authority: Accreditation and Staffing of (US) University Business Schools | 235 |
|---|-----|

DAVID JAMES

| | |
|---|-----|
| Making the Graduate: Assessment Events as Social Practices | 247 |
|---|-----|

PHIL HODKINSON

| | |
|--|-----|
| Use of Habitus, Capital and Field in Understanding Young People's Career Decision Making..... | 259 |
|--|-----|

DIANE REAY

| | |
|---|-----|
| Making Contact with Teachers: Habitus, Cultural Capital and Mothers' Involvement in their Children's Primary Schooling..... | 271 |
|---|-----|

CARMEL DESMARCHELIER

| | |
|---|-----|
| Altered Habitus of Mature Aged Students | 281 |
|---|-----|

ROGER COOK

| | |
|--|-----|
| Towards a Sociosomatics of Art: Bourdieu's Reflexive Sociology, Contemporary Art and Education..... | 293 |
|--|-----|

ALEX MOORE

| | |
|--|-----|
| Unmixing Messages: A Bourdieusian Approach to Tensions and Helping-Strategies in Initial Teacher Education | 301 |
|--|-----|

Conclusion

DEREK ROBBINS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Bourdieu on Language and Education: Conjunction or Parallel Development? | 313 |
|---|-----|

MICHAEL GRENFELL AND MICHAEL KELLY

Introduction:

Bourdieu: Language, Culture and Education – Theory into Practice

This book presents and evaluates a number of the powerful conceptual tools which have been developed by Pierre Bourdieu. In particular, it seeks to show how his key concepts such as habitus, field or cultural capital can provide great explanatory power and help to elucidate a wide variety of issues in language, culture and education. However, the process of applying theory to practice is a complex one, and concepts need to be customised for the particular task. They have their limitations and may need to be modified or supplemented by other ideas. The aim of this book is therefore to explore the advantages and limitations of Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' when they are put into practice, showing how theory can inform practice and how each is in turn modified in order to attain a better understanding of the particular issue.

Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu is one of the best-known intellectuals currently writing in French. Primarily a sociologist, his influence can also be seen in such diverse disciplines as media studies, art history, applied linguistics, cultural studies, critical theory, literary studies and education.

Bourdieu's work began in the late 1950s, with field work and a series of publications on the sociology of Algeria (Bourdieu, 1962; Bourdieu, 1979a)¹. Both then and later, his work addressed a broad spectrum of

1 A useful bibliography of Bourdieu's writings, 1958-1988, is published in (Bourdieu, 1994). The most extensive bibliography is contained in Henry Barnard's

sociological and ethnological investigations, but it was as a sociologist of education that he came to prominence in the 1960s in France. And it was this area of his work that established his reputation internationally in the 1970s, through translations of books like *Reproduction* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), which shows how the education system reproduces social and cultural structures, *The Inheritors* (Bourdieu, 1979b), which examines the effects of social background and cultural inheritance on the careers of university students, and *Homo academicus* (Bourdieu, 1988a), which analyses the struggles for status and power within the University. These works are now widely regarded as classics, and have been followed by a substantial study of the French *grandes écoles* (Bourdieu, 1989). Bourdieu's incisive anatomy of the rules of the education game has entered into the common wisdom, and his own success in achieving the highest reaches of the French education system is frequently offered, perhaps enviously, as confirmation of the analysis.

Bourdieu's detailed work on Algeria and his native province of Béarn has led to increasingly probing reflections on the discipline of sociology. In particular, he has published a number of influential studies in both culture and language. In the sociology of culture, these include works on photography (Bourdieu, 1990b), on museums and art galleries (Bourdieu, Darbel, *et al.*, 1992), on Flaubert and 19th century literature (Bourdieu, 1992), and on taste, where his major thesis on *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984) is something of a summum of his thought. In some senses, the analysis of language and discourse runs as a thread throughout Bourdieu's work, from his analysis of Heidegger's philosophical use of everyday language (Bourdieu, 1988b) to his reflections on the discourse of sociology (Bourdieu, 1990a). The essays collected in his *Language and Symbolic Power* (Bourdieu, 1991) are therefore not only a radical critique of Chomskyan dominance in contemporary linguistics but also an excellent point of entry into Bourdieu's thought more generally.

Undoubtedly his work on language and culture has contributed to the perception of Bourdieu as a French intellectual in the Sartrean mould, combining complex and abstract thought with a partisan intervention in the culture of politics, or at least, in the politics of culture. For this reason, there is an assumption that he is primarily a theorist. Discussion often

focuses on where he is to be located in relation to this or that theoretical framework or school of thought: existentialism, Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism or post-modernism. Without denying the relevance or interest of these debates, this book takes a different approach and sets out to examine the practical value of Bourdieu's work. The various chapters explore ways in which his ideas can be put to work to clarify particular problems. In many respects, this is closer to Bourdieu's own strategy, since on the one hand he is notoriously uncomfortable with '-isms' and resists ideological labels offered to him (Bourdieu, 1990a: p.27) and, on the other hand, he repeatedly emphasises the pragmatic nature of his thought. He does not propose a closed theoretical system, but admits to using ideas drawn from a variety of writers in a pragmatic way, which he terms a 'conceptual *realpolitik*' (Bourdieu, 1990a: p.28), in the service of particular empirical investigations.

There are clearly dangers in such a re-application of ideas produced in one context to another. Bourdieu himself warns against this (Bourdieu, 1995) and recognises that his ideas, when undergoing such a transferral 'have little chance of being grasped without distortion or deformation' (p.1). The international import of ideas 'tears them from the constellation of which they are but elements' (*ibid.*). The worst outcome of such transformations is simply misinterpretation or elective fadishness. However, the fact that the authors in this book are willing to walk the tightrope between their own and Bourdieu's world is testament to the inspiration and richness they have found in his work. Our intention then has not been purist, and we have not sought comment from Bourdieu on the various work presented here. Much of it clearly goes beyond anything he has attempted himself. Rather, we aim to show how a Bourdieusian approach to a range of issues in the social sciences yields insights not available from conventional perspectives.

The book is divided into three parts, each presenting work in one of the three thematic areas: language, culture and education. Each part brings together a number of international scholars drawn from a wide range of disciplines, each of whom tests Bourdieu's concepts in a particular case study. The concepts are taken from various parts of Bourdieu's work, but the key terms recur frequently: habitus, field, cultural capital, and symbolic power. Readers who are not familiar with these notions will find useful characterisations of them as they arise, but would be well advised to refer to Bourdieu's own work for fuller explanations (e.g., Bourdieu and

Wacquant, 1992). The reader will often be presented with critical appraisals of the strengths and limitations of concepts in the light of the particular investigation. We hope the most valuable result of this approach will be to encourage readers to apply Bourdieu's ideas to other issues, drawing on the experience of the studies presented here.

Language

Part One recognises that much recent research and writing in the social sciences, arts and cultural studies has been shaped in response to a 'linguistic turn' which reflects preoccupations with the philosophy of language articulated especially in the structuralist, post-structuralist, and post-modernist traditions. At the same time, it recognises that the academic disciplines related to language, notably linguistics and sociolinguistics, have retained a strong empirical basis and sought to assert their scientific status. The studies in this part deal with both traditions.

In the first chapter, Michael Grenfell uses an analysis of the applied linguistics field to illustrate processes and operations in the way language is constructed as a research object. Applying Bourdieu's criticism of misrecognition in the social emergence of technical discourse, he suggests ways in which the dominant oppositions used in linguistic pedagogy might be reconfigured by changes in the practice of research.

In the first of four chapters on language politics in Europe, Trevor Jones examines the relationship of regional languages and accents to the dominant 'legitimate language' in France. He looks at the decline of the Occitan movement, particularly exemplified in the cases of Claude Duneton and Josette Rey-Debove, and suggests that though Bourdieu exposes the mechanisms of language hierarchy, he does not address the issue of how its more damaging consequences might be alleviated. Inès Brulard and Michel Francard examine the linguistic habitus of Francophone Belgian speakers, contrasting their actual linguistic practice with the low level of valorisation they typically give to it. They use Bourdieu's distinction between official and restricted language markets, and suggest that the education system has a crucial role in legitimising endogenous linguistic varieties. Fernand Fehlen considers the linguistic structure of