Edited by Michael Grenfell and Frédéric Lebaron

Bourdieu and Data Analysis

Methodological Principles and Practice

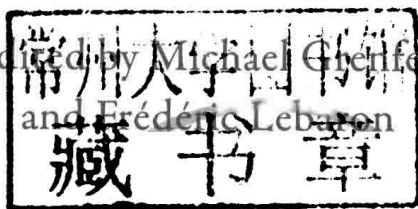# Bourdieu and Data Analysis

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PETER LANG

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Many of us who have been working with the ideas and work of Pierre Bourdieu for some time believe the next significant advances in

Bourdieusian applications must come through methodological advancement and integration. I need to offer my thanks and gratitude to all of the contributors to this volume for the part they have played in developing methodological uses of Bourdieu.

— MICHAEL GRENFELL, October 2013

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MICHAEL GRENFELL AND FRÉDÉRIC LEBARON

Introduction

Interest in the work of the French social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, has continued to grow since his untimely death in 2002. At this time, Bourdieu had risen from being a relatively obscure French sociologist in the 1960s to an intellectual star of international repute. He had long since been acknowledged in the principal fields of his research – Algeria, Education and Culture. However, since his death, as well as continued extensions and applications of his work in these areas, it is now not uncommon to discover major discussions of his ideas in such diverse disciplines as theology, geography, media and journalism, the arts, language, economics, politics, history, and philosophy. Of course, some of these fields were indeed discussed by Bourdieu himself, sometimes as preliminary remarks, sometimes more extensively. However, many remained undeveloped by him. Subsequent researchers have then been able to develop his initial ideas more comprehensibly. In other areas, bringing a Bourdieusian lens to traditional preoccupations has required a whole new conceptualization from a perspective derived from his theory of practice. Here, we are able to observe the potential of Bourdieu's approach to elucidate a wide range of themes and topics within the social sciences. Much of the work presented in this book is of this type.

Bourdieu was probably the most 'empirical' of the celebrated intellectuals of the late twentieth century. Work across his career is often exemplified with copious analyses collected in field contexts and analysed from various directions. However, Bourdieu was, of course, first a philosopher, since he was trained in that subject discipline, and even taught it at the early stages of his career. The brutal experience of living and working in Algeria at the time of the war of independence there in the 1950s then contributed to his re-orientation to anthropology and then sociology, which he further

developed in studies of education, culture and the local environs of his home community in the Bearn, France. This work shows Bourdieu's early commitment to 'make sense' of real, living, practical contexts. He seems to have adopted sociology as the best means to uncover the generating processes of social situations and to 'restore to men the meaning of their actions'. But, unsurprisingly given his background, his was a very particular form of sociology; one heavily accented by philosophical considerations. Key themes implied epistemological and ontological questions, which he answered by proposing a new view of the social world. Bourdieu himself termed this viewpoint 'structural constructivism' or 'constructive structuralism' and, in so doing, highlighted its two-way *structured-structuring* nature. By 'structure' Bourdieu intended the ordering, relational, principled processes – both material and phenomenological – that generated social activities.

He presented this perspective through a series of epistemological 'breaks' – from empirical sense experience, from subjective knowledge and objective knowledge, and through the analysis and elucidation of voluminous amounts of data gathered in field studies. This engagement necessitated the development of a particular form of language – articulated through Bourdieu's *key concepts*. These concepts were intended as instruments or techniques used to frame data analysis. Terms such as *habitus, field, capital* have now become synonymous with work approaching the study of any aspect of the social world through a Bourdieusian viewpoint. As well as enhancing many discussions in a range of associated fields en passant, these concepts have themselves given rise to in-depth and detailed debate, and many books have appeared which explore and express the nature of this way of seeing the world, along with its methodological implications. The majority of these works are discursive rather than analytic, however, theoretical rather than practical. The current publication differs on both counts.

What follows in the next three parts of the book is concerned almost entirely with methodological and practical exemplification and application. We take Bourdieu's philosophy, theory of practice and consequent concepts as axiomatic and concern ourselves with how to carry out research from such a perspective. We begin with laying some methodological foundations

in PART I. Here, we consider the whole relationship between theory and practice, and indeed the role that Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts have in mediating the two. We explore what this approach means in terms of the various stages of research practice; for example, the whole *construction of the research object* in the first place, and the key components of a *field analysis*. Bourdieu often approached his research by conceptualizing social space in terms of 'fields', which were then analysed as structural relations – inside of fields, between fields, and of those who occupied positions in them. For Bourdieu, reflexivity was also a chief feature of his work, and he argued that the scientific worth of any research might best be evaluated to the extent that the researcher was able to develop this dimension of their work. Reflexivity, or *participant objectivation*, is, therefore, also discussed in PART I.

PART II then deals with qualitative research. Here, we see a range of researchers pursuing studies through the deployment of traditional modes of qualitative data collection and analysis: interviews, questionnaires, observation, focus groups, diaries, and documentary analysis. Topics include school inclusion, language education, the artistic avant-garde, and higher education. These chapters are introduced through a brief consideration of their content and the style of research this approach gives rise to. We take up similar points in the conclusion to PART II in order to emphasize the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the consequence this has for outcomes.

Qualitative research was, of course, a feature of Bourdieu's own work throughout his career, and all of the techniques used in PART II were, to a greater or lesser extent, employed by Bourdieu himself. However, and again from his earliest work, we see how he extended his analyses through the use of quantitative methods; most noticeably in a range of statistical analyses in the 1950s and 60s. Increasingly, though, he adopted a form of 'quantitative' method that allowed him to graphically demonstrate the form of structural relations evident in any given data sample. Termed Geometric Data Analysis, or Multiple Correspondence Analysis, these procedures allow the researcher to correlate 'clouds' of individuals in terms of a range of connecting relational features. The chapters in PART III almost exclusively adopt this approach, and our aim is to show, again, how such

techniques can enhance our understanding of a range of social contexts and synergize with the epistemological perspective offered by Bourdieu. Topics covered here include the education and economics fields, language, politics, and even video games.

We are not presenting any of the chapters as 'ideal' in terms of approach or method, and there are questions raised by each of them. Neither are we implying that quantitative is better than qualitative, or vice versa. However, as noted above, discussion of Bourdieu has hitherto been preoccupied with theoretical issues. These chapters show those theories in practice. The researchers here represented form part of a group who are increasingly looking to use Bourdieu in practice; indeed, we might say that the future worth of this approach depends on such applications. For our purposes, and to focus the narrative, we have selected investigations, which tend to adopt either a qualitative or quantitative approach. However, we must stress that Bourdieu's best studies were perhaps achieved when he adopted both, and we would finally urge any would be researcher to act in a similar way.

As we have observed, Bourdieu's sociology had the ambition to see the world in a new way. However, we need the instruments to aid us to this end. The theoretical tools to conceptualize research in this way are now well elucidated. This book aims to provide methodological exemplification more on the practical front. Our final conclusion will take up this theme again in considering the salient methodological principles for a Bourdieusian social science and the kind of knowledge it gives rise to.

Bourdieu and Data Analysis

MICHAEL GRENFELL

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> Those who classify themselves or others, by appropriating or classifying practices or properties that are classified and classifying, cannot be unaware that, through distinctive objects or practices in which their powers are expressed and which, being appropriated by and appropriate to classes, classify those who appropriate them, they classify themselves in the eyes of other classifying (but also classifiable) subjects, endowed with classificatory schemes analogous to those which enable them more or less adequately to anticipate their own classification.
>
> — BOURDIEU 1984a: 484

Introduction

This chapter offers a conceptual introduction to Bourdieu and data analysis. It sets out key stages in approaching any research topic from a perspective developed from his theory of practice. Behind this perspective lay Bourdieu's vision to build a 'new social gaze' on the social world, what he referred to as a *metanoia*. Key components in this approach are how we *construct the research object* and the place that *participant objectivation* plays in research. The chapter considers these as elements in a three-stage methodology, which also includes at its core *Field Analysis*, itself explicated in terms of three levels – of a field with respect to the field of power, the structure of the field itself, and the habitus of those occupying positions within that field. These stages and levels are discussed later in the chapter. First, however, we consider Bourdieu's conceptual thinking tools; not so much in terms of their full range and meaning, which is already accomplished

elsewhere (Grenfell 2012), but by focusing on the relationship between data and the language used to explain and interpret it. Any question of data analysis within a Bourdieusian frame will inevitably raise issues of the quantitative versus the qualitative; a dichotomy which is also often erroneously referred to in terms of the tensions between subjectivity and objectivity. Both these pairs are similarly associated with different data sources and analysis thereof; for example, the quantitative is implicated with statistical analysis and the qualitative with ethnographic and more naturalistic approaches. It is probably worth emphasizing that Bourdieu employed both approaches extensively throughout his empirical studies. His earliest field work in the Bearn and Algeria was both statistical and ethnographic; indeed, the combination of the two is precisely what makes these studies so powerful (see Bourdieu 1958, 1961, 1962a, 1962b, 1963, 1964). Of course, Bourdieu was a philosopher first, and then a would-be anthropologist. No surprise, therefore, to read him warning against the way statistics can be used to 'crush one's rivals'.

Nevertheless, as noted, he himself used statistics extensively in these early works, and extended their applications to Multiple Correspondence Analysis/Geometric Data Analysis (MCA/GDA) in later works from the 1970s onwards. Parts II and III of this book deal respectively with what is termed the 'qualitative' and the 'quantitative', and offer a number of studies using a variety of statistical and non-statistical techniques. The main point behind these separate studies is that both imply the same issues in terms of data collection and analysis, of theory and practice, of explanation and interpretation, of research construction and conduct, and this is a theme the various contributors to this book develop across its content. Approaching the analysis of data through MCA and GDA requires as much sensitivity, care, and understanding as any ethnographic study, and vice versa. Issues particular to each will be raised in the individual parts. Here, we consider the epistemological and methodological principles underlying the various techniques employed.