

## **Bourdieu: ally or foe of discourse analysis?**

Andrew Sayer

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### **Abstract**

Bourdieu has an interesting and potentially fruitful relation to discourse analysis, even though, or perhaps because, he demotes the role of discourse in social practice, is critical of discourse analysis, and is more interested in the power effects of discourse in particular contexts and instances than discourse as such. I shall explain the relevance of his work for understanding language and politics by introducing the main concepts through which he interprets practice: habitus, field, capitals, the scholastic fallacy and symbolic power. I end with a brief assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of his contribution.

**Key words:** language, habitus, field, market, struggles, symbolic power.

**Structure:** Introduction, key concepts, symbolic power and the struggles of the social field, and concluding assessment.

### **Bio**

Andrew Sayer is Professor of Social Theory and Political Economy at Lancaster University. His publications have been in the areas of philosophy of social science (e.g. *Realism and Social Science*, 2000, Routledge), ethics and social science (*Why Things Matter to People*, 2011, Cambridge University Press), class (*The Moral Significance of Class*, 2005, CUP) and political economy (e.g. *Why We Can't Afford the Rich*, 2014, Policy Press)

### **Introduction**

More than anything, Pierre Bourdieu's work was concerned with power. He was particularly interested in the 'soft forms of domination' that operate largely unnoticed and without coercion, and through which, in his view, many inequalities are reproduced. Discourse is a medium of such power, and his interest in language was primarily concerned with this aspect, for he considered it rare for language in everyday life to operate purely as a means of communication. His social theory of action emphasized embodied dispositions and semi-conscious practical skills and tendencies rather than discourse and conscious reasoning, know-how rather than knowing-that, and he continually attacked the academic or 'scholastic' tendency to reconstruct action in terms of reason, and indeed to reduce action to understanding, or discourse. For Bourdieu, much of what influences us does so below our reflexive radar, and is all the more powerful for that. Not surprisingly, his analyses are marked by a hermeneutics of suspicion rather than a hermeneutics of sympathy that affirms peoples' self-understanding. The result is a series of powerful, stinging critiques

of domination, including that exercised unknowingly in the educational field by academics.

Although Bourdieu's writing contains examples of analyses of discourse – most formally in his studies of teacher-student interactions in schools and universities, and more informally in his discussions of political discourse, he was a fierce critic of 'discourse analysis', and of what he saw as excessive and misplaced emphasis on discourse in some parts of social science (Bourdieu 1991, p.28). His own use of language has received much comment, particularly regarding his use of unusually long sentences with multiple subordinate clauses – a practice he defended, in somewhat paranoid manner, as necessary for pre-empting any possible mis-readings, especially where critics quote his work. Linguists might be tempted to dismiss Bourdieu for all these reasons. But it would be a grave mistake, for his work is immensely useful for anyone interested in discourse, particularly critical discourse analysis and socio-linguistics, and indeed for anyone interested in language and power. He was a formidable and remarkably perceptive writer. One can hardly read his most famous work, *Distinction*, one of the most important books in 20<sup>th</sup> century social science, without being struck by his command of the language of critical description in his analyses of everyday actions and ideas, and his ability to name normally hidden forms of domination (Bourdieu 1986).

To understand Bourdieu one has to grasp his key concepts – particularly habitus, field and capital – and how they complement each other in the study of social life. Yet he always emphasized that they could only be assessed when put to use in studying the social world. Bourdieu's researches were always much more than a 'naming-of-parts' through the deployment of these terms; by engaging with the content of the practices and discourse in their social context he produces interpretations of striking critical power. I recommend, for example, his brilliant analyses in *Language and Symbolic Power* of condescension, euphemism, working class masculinity, and the silencing power that legitimate language and its users can have over others, and of political discourse (Bourdieu 1991).

So I shall first outline his primary concepts of habitus, field and capital, and his critique of what he called 'the scholastic fallacy' in interpreting the role of discourse in social life. I shall then show, via examples relating to language, how he combined these to analyse symbolic domination and the struggles or competitions of the social field, and then conclude with a brief evaluation.

### **Habitus**

Habitus, Bourdieu's most famous concept, refers to the set of durable dispositions that individuals acquire through socialisation, particularly in early life, and which orient them towards the social and physical world around them. Given that these dispositions are acquired and embodied through repeated involvement in social relations and practices of the kinds peculiar to their situation, Bourdieu argues that there is a rough fit between the habitus and the individual's habitat, between their dispositions and their social positions. These dispositions in turn give rise to behaviours which tend to reproduce the very

conditions in which those dispositions were formed. The dispositions are semi-conscious, involving a kind of 'feel for the game' that can neither be reduced to discursive knowledge nor adequately explained by it. The expert tennis player can return the ball skilfully without thinking about it or being able to offer a good explanation of how she does it. The dispositions are acquired *semi-consciously*, partly with awareness, partly without, and they involve comportment and ways of using the body, including in speech. We know so much more than we can tell, and are affected by so much more than words and other influences that we are aware of. We have a feel for the game of talking in familiar situations, but feel awkward and 'don't know what to say' in a situation to which our habitus is not adjusted.

The different habitus of working, middle and upper class speakers involves not only different vocabularies and ways of speaking, but different relations *to* language. In France, among the educated classes, articulacy and command of language are highly valued, whereas it is less so among the equivalent class in the United States, as research by Michèle Lamont – inspired by Bourdieu - shows (Lamont 1992). In the UK there is often a certain disdain among working class people for such articulacy, indicating a mistrust of those whose command of language indicates not only a different social class but a removal from the world of work and necessity, and possibly lack of appreciation of it. Being a man or woman 'of few words', and 'just getting on with it' implies strength and solidity, down-to-earthness, and has greater value for them. Those in the middle, the petty-bourgeois, tend to develop a habitus characterised by social anxiety in relation to the dominant classes – through fear of being 'found out', and fear of slipping down into the working class or being mistaken for them. Linguistically, this comes out in self-consciousness, hyper-correctness and affectation ('commencing' work, instead of starting it). (These are, of course, general observations made by Bourdieu from his researches, and there are of course many exceptions - for a host of possible reasons, mostly to do with particularities of socialization.)

Linguistic capacities are *embodied*, most obviously, in the way the mouth is used when speaking. Compare the loose, free speech of many working class people with the precise, measured, drawn-in, 'tight-lipped' talk of some members of the dominant classes, suggesting mastery, carrying the threat of a precisely aimed put-down, but also inviting suspicions of coldness, misanthropy, and lack of generosity ('tight-arsed'). Since the habitus is classed and gendered, so too are ways of talking and writing, but always in relation to and in distinction from others. Addressing this relation requires the next key concept.

## **Fields**

Individuals, organisations, practices (including uses of language) and objects are located within *fields* of relationships to other individuals, organizations, practices and objects, and their behaviour can only be understood by reference to those fields. Within the general social field there are local fields specific to major activities, such as the fields of politics or education. The concept of field involves a triple metaphor: a space in which action and actors take place, a magnetic field

of forces, and a battlefield – an arena of competition and struggle for power. The behaviour and fortunes of a particular university, for example, can only be understood by reference to its position in the national or international university field, itself part of the educational field and social field. What my own university does and does not do, for example, depends on how it relates comparatively and competitively both to Oxbridge and a small number of other universities traditionally favoured by the British elite, and to new, less prestigious universities recently created from former colleges and polytechnics. What a person can say, and with what effect, depends on their position within the social field relative to others. The ability of the army officer to order the private to clean the latrines, and the consequences of any attempt by the private to tell the officer to clean them himself, are a product of the inequalities and power relations of the social field. The tendency of the same speech behaviour to be regarded as ‘assertive’ in men and ‘strident’ or ‘bossy’ in women is also a field effect.

Bourdieu repeatedly criticizes ‘interactionist’ approaches that abstract discourses and interlocutors from the fields in which they exist, and thereby ignore the power relations within which speakers, writers, listeners and readers are located; they reduce relations of power to relations of communication (Bourdieu 1977; 1991). What words mean depends on location within the field – what is valued by some may be an object of scorn for others - not just because of different ‘values’, but because of the objective differences in their position within the social field which give rise to different dispositions or habitus.

At times, Bourdieu uses the metaphors of ‘games’ or ‘markets’ to characterise fields. Each game/field has its own rules and goals: the rules of the art game, of producing, selling, acquiring and displaying art, are different from those of the science game, or the political game. Referring to fields as markets, hence, ‘the linguistic market’, allows Bourdieu to emphasize their competitive character and the differences in power of the players, and the stakes over which they compete. Particular speech acts have ‘prices’ determined not only by their linguistic content but by the speaker’s position in the social field relative to interlocutors and observers.<sup>1</sup> Thus, as Johann Unger shows, Scots language speakers are aware that their language has different ‘prices’ in different markets, being valued positively in some, and negatively in others (Unger 2013). And of course there are linguistic sub-markets or fields such as those of education, politics, socialising, sports or entertainment. Bourdieu use of this and other economic metaphors – ‘capital’, ‘symbolic profit’ – leads him to develop accounts which give a predominantly instrumental character to action, albeit one which is less a matter of actors’ intentions or reasons than unconscious or semi-conscious strategies that are already inscribed in the habitus.

Thus, one chapter of his *Language and Symbolic Power* is entitled ‘Price Formation and the Anticipation of Profits’ (Bourdieu 1991). The latter refers to the way in which speakers have to anticipate the reception of their words in

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<sup>1</sup> For a critique of Bourdieu’s use of economic metaphors with regard to language, see Grin (1994).

order to communicate as they intend; this involves an awareness (or feel for the game) of the field in which their words are produced and received, and what is safe or risky. Again as Unger's study of Scots shows, as a language which is widely spoken but only rarely written, it cannot generally be used in formal situations. For those in a subordinate position, communicating with those above them often requires accepting and attempting to reproduce styles of speaking and writing approved by the dominant groups. This generally fails because although they can *recognize* 'legitimate language', their position in the social field means they are unlikely to have acquired the appropriate habitus and hence the ability to use it. Bourdieu et al's *Academic Discourse* shows how this applies to students with different class backgrounds (Bourdieu et al. 1994). The field thus exerts a kind of censorship on discourse via agents' dispositions and their grasp and expectations of the form in which it will be acceptable.

"Any kind of discourse, whatever it may be, is the product of an encounter between a *linguistic habitus*, i.e. a competence that is inextricably both technical and social (both the ability to speak and the ability to speak in a certain socially marked fashion), and a *market*, i.e. a system of price formation that contributes to give linguistic production an orientation in advance. (Bourdieu 2008, p.133)

In the case of strongly unequal fields, the inability of those in subordinate positions to speak in the form that is deemed legitimate by the dominant can condemn them 'to either silence or shocking outspokenness.' (Bourdieu 1991, p. 139)

This combination of an instrumental view of action with downplaying of conscious reasoning makes Bourdieu extremely sceptical about assumptions that some kinds of reason or action are 'disinterested'; for example, the art collector's professed belief to be interested only in the art itself, not its economic or symbolic value, is likely to increase their value (Bourdieu 1993b).

## **Capital**

Bourdieu's analysis of inequality and domination is distinctive in that it goes beyond differences in economic capital to differences in social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986b). Social capital refers to connections and networks that give agents advantages vis-à-vis others, while cultural capital derives from possession of and involvement in the practice and enjoyment of cultural goods that are highly valued within the social field through association with dominant classes. Cultural capital is partly embodied – involving a certain disposition towards the goods in question, so that, for example, the relation of the bourgeois to opera might be one of entitled ease, and of the petit-bourgeois anxiety to be accepted as knowledgeable of and comfortably familiar with it. As such, the latter risks being found out by trying too hard, appearing pretentious, lacking an effortless ownership of the art form that characterises the dominant classes' relation to the most prestigious goods. Cultural capital is not just a matter of knowing about or liking particular valued cultural goods, but of one's whole relation to them. Educational capital (qualifications) and linguistic capital, are varieties of cultural capital, and they exhibit the same general features in that they are *relational* insofar as their 'price' depends on the valuation of the whole

field and the position of the agent within the field relative to others - superior, equal or inferior - and embodied, and, like the habitus, *embodied*. Although each field is different, there are often homologies between them. So those that are in a dominant position in one field, say the arts, are likely to share a similar mix and volume of capital and tastes and dispositions to those in a dominant position in another field, such as education.

Bourdieu argues and demonstrates that the relation between different tastes and ways of acting and speaking of agents and their location within the relevant fields are not arbitrary, but betray their relation to the world and to the field. Underlying oppositions between refined or distinguished v vulgar or common, is a distinction between the *distance from necessity* that marks the lives of the dominant classes and the closeness to necessity of the subordinate classes. Thus, as regards taste, the dominant have time and leisure and can enjoy superfluity in such forms as abstract art, poetry, classics and history, while the subordinate expect art to be representational, education to be functional for making a living. This is evident in language too, where superfluity (or less charitably, verbosity), carefully measured words, slow delivery and freedom from the fear of interruption suggest superiority and a confident command of the listener's attention. At a largely pre-reflexive level, this not only expresses dominance but confirms it to both speaker and listener.

Having introduced these concepts, we can now proceed to show how they are applied, though we must first apply them to the position of academics themselves in order to combat a common fallacy.

### **The scholastic fallacy**

Bourdieu did not exempt the academic world from his critiques of social practices (Bourdieu 1988, 1994, 1996). While he devastatingly analysed the class coordinates and traits of academia, his most fundamental critique of academia concerned its methodology – its susceptibility to ‘the scholastic fallacy’, This involves the tendency of academics to project (unknowingly) the perspective and dispositions of their peculiarly contemplative relation to the social world onto those whose relation to the world is primarily practical. Habermas's treatment of ‘communicative reason’ is taken to task for this as an extreme example, but the fallacy is much more pervasive (Bourdieu 2000). It allows actions to be treated not merely as meaningful but as always consciously intended, and in so doing it misunderstands the nature and ‘logic’ of the practice and the position of those who do not share the contemplative stance of academics. It is closely associated with ‘the interactionist fallacy’, in which conversations or discourses are examined in abstraction from the position of the interlocutors in the social field, their capital and relative power, thereby ignoring their profound shaping of the communications, and their production and reception (Bourdieu 1977; 1991).

Of all the academic disciplines, philosophy and linguistics are most likely to be guilty of this fallacy. Along with it goes an implicitly classed hierarchy of mind (the professions, management) over body (manual work). It need not take a

rational choice form; ethnographic accounts that seek to render practices as texts, are also susceptible to the fallacy. The fallacy unknowingly reflects academics' distance from necessity, and the ease and time for reflection available to them.

The disposition towards reflection and scholastic reason are embodied capacities of the academic habitus which in its distance from practical necessity give it affinities with the habitus of the dominant classes, and this helps to explain the easy assimilation of students with high cultural capital into the academic field, relative to that of working class students. It's not only the latter's lack of familiarity with books and high culture, but their habitus, characterised by the dominance of practical necessity, and the need to take orders from their superiors rather than reason why, that impede them. Further, where social classifications and the contingent social divisions in which people live correspond, they are likely to become 'doxa' – taken for granted, self-evident, undiscussed; as Bourdieu puts it, it "goes without saying because it comes without saying" (1977, p. 167).

### **Symbolic power and fields of struggle**

Symbolic power is the target of much of Bourdieu's work, but again, despite the emphasis on discourse and imagery, knowledge and recognition, he argues that it operates substantially without 'intentional acts of consciousness.' It is generally not even recognised by the dominated as a form of domination, indeed dominant discourses and framings of issues may be accepted and affirmed by those who are its victims.

For Bourdieu, this acquiescence is less a product of ideology (a term he avoids), 'false consciousness' or even dominant discourses, than the facticity of the social world in which people act. It is primarily a product of habituation to subordinate positions and lack of experience of alternatives which produces a bodily attunement to them (2000, p.181). " ... of all the forms of 'hidden persuasion', the most implacable is the one exerted, quite simply, by the *order of things*." (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 168, emphasis in original). Recognition is less a matter of conscious assessment and deliberation than a product of "the set of fundamental, pre-reflexive assumptions that social agents engage by the mere fact of taking the world for granted, of accepting the world as it is, and of finding it natural because their mind is constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world." ... (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 168).

Likewise, hegemony is less imposed from above discursively than acquired semi-consciously from engaging in everyday life within unequal societies. The dominated may dream of coming into money and luxury, yet such dreams do not subvert the social field, but merely involving imagining occupying a different place within it, thereby confirming its legitimacy. Envisaging radical alternatives is easier for those whose position affords some distance from necessity.

This emphasis on practice rather than ideology is a powerful counter to those who imagine that only the artful and energetic production of 'ideological

discourse' by the dominant stops an imagined latent protest bursting out at any moment. Nevertheless, one has only to look at newspapers, TV and social media to see that there is a huge effort given to producing discourses that mostly affirm the dominant interpretations of the world.

For Bourdieu the nature and effects of discourse and other practices cannot be understood just at the semantic level but always require consideration of the field as a material as well as a semantic space. Symbolic power is always field-dependent: it depends not only on the powerful but the susceptibilities of others to their actions, intended or unintended. It is not a tautology to say that intimidating or stigmatising speech only works on those who are susceptible to them. In everyday life, language is rarely analysed as a linguist or philosopher might, for it operates partly below the level of consciousness, because the dominated accept and misrecognize the terms in which it is expressed. And the 'acceptance' comes not just from the words, but from the dispositions of deference, and felt sense of inferiority that have come to constitute their habitus, just as the complementary felt sense of entitlement, superiority and condescension are part of the upper class habitus.

"Symbolic violence is a violence practised in and through ignorance, and all the more readily in that those who practise it are unaware they are doing so, and those experiencing it unaware they are experiencing it."  
(Bourdieu 2008, p. 322)

So the submission of a woman to an order from a man doesn't come just from the words he uses or from what she understands them to mean, but from the respective habitus they have acquired through their gendered upbringings that already pre-dispose the one to defer, acquiesce, serve and appease and the other to command, lead and expect compliance. Of course, the ways of exerting this power vary with context, including not just the kind of situation but the positioning of the two within the social field, but again they derive more from habituation and a feel for the game acquired through practice than calculation or analytic understanding; and even to the extent that the words and actions are calculated they must take into account the relations and inequalities of the social field, so as to assess how direct or euphemized the requests or commands need to be. One might therefore expect that a woman who had encountered and accepted feminist discourses might nevertheless still find it difficult to override the tendencies of her habitus when faced with instances of masculine domination. Resistance has to be practised repeatedly to change the habitus and become second nature.

Symbolic violence is always most effective when the dominated share with the dominant the schemes of perception and appreciation through which they are perceived by the dominant (as inferior) and through which the dominant perceive themselves (as superior). This "knowledge and recognition have to be rooted in practical dispositions of acceptance and submission, which, because they do not pass through deliberation and decision, escape the dilemma of consent or constraint." (Bourdieu 2000, p.198). The critic who challenges the commonsense shared by the dominant and dominated can easily be dismissed by pointing to the acquiescence of the dominated as evidence of their being 'out of



touch' with those whom they claim to represent. Tabloid newspapers make money from selling stories of welfare 'benefit cheats' to people many of whom are likely to receive welfare benefits. Whereas mechanisms producing economic inequalities and physical coercion operate without consent, the use of elements of the dominant discourse by the dominated gives at least the appearance of consent and agreement, simply because communication requires the shared capacity to communicate in both parties. And each party has at a basic level to accept the other as an interlocutor. But what is shared ('accepted') may be a product of misrecognition. Symbolic violence therefore is a more hidden 'soft' form of power. Bourdieu argues that 'all power owes part of its efficacy – and not the least important part – to misrecognition of the mechanisms on which it is based.' (Bourdieu 1993a, p.14).

This misrecognition is compounded by those social scientists and philosophers who succumb to the scholastic fallacy. According to Bourdieu, their misrecognition of their own social position in relation to that of students of different classes is revealed in the nuances of condescension, scorn and praise to be found in their comments on students' work and the correspondences between these and students' class position (Bourdieu 1996). *Academic Discourse* argues that tutors typically fail to appreciate the nature of the power relations of the educational field which press students into writing what they don't understand - a kind of misrecognition of misrecognition (Bourdieu et al, 1994).

Fields (or markets) are arenas of struggle and competition in which among other things, symbolic power is reproduced and contested. The struggles of the social field are not to be reduced simply to randomly-located competing views and interests, but always relate to the competing positions and practices of those involved. The fields are always unequal but the dominant tend to represent the competitive struggles as taking place on a level playing field and without any shortages, so everyone can win, even though the prizes are few and monopolized by the dominant (Bourdieu 2000, p.225). This, for example, allows modern incarnations of the traditional distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor to emerge and to be mobilized against the losers.

The struggles have a three-fold character, involving:

1. competition *for* valued goods, practices and positions, for capital;
2. struggle over *what* is worthy of value, worthwhile, prestigious, and how things are to be named, particularly insofar as names secrete evaluations;
3. struggle over *who* has the authority to determine what is of value.

Language itself can be an object of struggle: there can be competition to acquire and use ways of speaking that are accepted as authoritative, 'posh' or 'cool' (1, above); struggles over *what* is legitimate language – often partly taking place through ridicule; for example, over which accents and kinds of speech or writing allow their producers to be taken seriously (2); and struggles (3) over *who* defines it: in the UK this usually involves references to 'the Queen's English', 'received pronunciation', and people who are 'well-spoken' (as opposed to 'rough spoken'), in which the class locations are unmistakable if not explicit.

Bourdieu analyses the struggles of the social field as 'strategies', though he applies this to cases where people are acting 'on automatic', spontaneously according to their habitus, rather than consciously. If we ignore the awkwardness of this use of a term normally implying conscious reasoning and planning for behaviour which does not (necessarily) involve them, certain typical patterns can be identified.

Those who are in dominated positions in the field often use 'strategies' of deference and compliance, accepting their place, and seeking confirmation of respectability from those above. As Bourdieu repeatedly notes, they tend to choose what is chosen for them, refusing what they are refused, as 'not for the likes of us' (e.g. Bourdieu 1986a, p. 374). This refusal is then open to being taken by those in more advantageous positions as confirmation of their inferiority, or a 'poverty of aspiration' as UK Prime Minister David Cameron put it. The dominant in politics can also reward this acceptance by the dominated of their inferior position and keep them in their place through reciprocal gestures of condescension, as when they refer to them as 'hard-working people'.

Frequently, these dominant ways of seeing are internalised by the dominated or used to condemn others: the American working class men studied by Lamont who blamed themselves for their lack of 'success' (Lamont 2000); the British people on welfare benefits who suspect their neighbours of being 'benefit cheats' and thereby seek to exempt themselves from the charge (Shildrick and MacDonald 2013); the young women who look down on those sisters who do not achieve the required feminine appearance, and mobilise a 'nice girl' / 'slag' distinction; the poor working class people in France, studied by Bourdieu and co-researchers, who direct their anger at their immigrant neighbours (Bourdieu et al. 1999). Often those who police these distinctions most avidly are themselves at risk of falling foul of them; where dignity and respect are in question small differences may seem to matter. These are horizontal deflections of symbolic violence.

In many cases the most dominated are *unable* to comply with norms of what is acceptable – because, for example, there are not enough jobs to go round, so they cannot be 'hard-working families' - and they often lack the economic, political, educational and linguistic resources to resist. Where they do resist, for example, by refusing to comply and by demanding *respect* on their own terms, rather than seeking *respectability* on the terms of the dominant (Sayer 2005), they open themselves to counterattacks. Those who do not or cannot comply with ways of life misrecognised as available and desirable are fully exposed to a more open kind of symbolic violence - what Bourdieu terms 'class racism' (Bourdieu 1986a, p.179) as 'chavs', 'trailer trash', 'scroungers', 'skivers', and as exemplified in the US and UK by TV programmes recently dubbed 'poverty porn', such as [The Jerry Springer Show](#), and [Benefits Street](#).

Whether resistance or compliance is involved, one has to appreciate the nature of the particular habitus of participants in discourse to understand what they say and how they interpret others. Thus in the UK, the common male working class disregard for and ridicule of correctness according to dominant, legitimate

language is a form of opposition to class position constructed via gender that defends a notion of masculinity based on toughness and refuses refinement and desire to please others as 'effeminate' (1991, p.100). What is going on here cannot be understood without reference to their habitus and the field or market in which they interact.

### **Political discourse**

Bourdieu's treatment of the discourse of politics is in keeping with this emphasis on the field and habitus, and his insistence upon going beyond the meaning of the discourse itself. For him, political discourse attempts to defend (or challenge) the correspondence between the ways in which people classify and categorize their world ('wealth creators', 'working people', 'scroungers', 'investors') and the objective divisions and practices which sustain and are sustained by current commonsense thought and which are reflected in the habitus. Oppositional political discourses attempt to break this pre-reflexive acceptance of the prevailing structures of the world ('doxa') and create a new commonsense. The power of naming<sup>2</sup> is central to this ('criminal immigrants', 'skivers', 'chattering classes', 'idle rich', etc.), and considerable political effort is devoted to manipulating such terms in the hope that they will resonate with or 'touch raw nerves' in others.

As always the likelihood of such discourse being produced and the particular way in which it is received or ignored depends on the structure of the field; in the case of oppositional discourse Bourdieu argues that it will have an effect only if there is also some (extra-discursive) objective crisis to which it draws attention. (We can of course add that it also depends on understandings of such words and the contexts in which they have been used before, but Bourdieu, wants to counteract the temptation to reduce reception simply to the level of discourse.) Political discourse involves a struggle to conserve or transform the social world by conserving or transforming the vision of this world and its systems of classifications and the objective 'di-visions' of the social world which these classifications sustain and reflect (Bourdieu 1991, p. 181). What he terms 'strong discourses' are backed by dominant social and economic forces; a contemporary example might be the discourse of austerity.

The discourse of politicians has to be seen in terms of the special relation of representation to supporters and the electorate, and the interests politicians have in the persistence of the institution and the specific profits it brings them. On the one hand, being invested with political powers by those they represent, this represents a concentration of the means of production of discourse and political acts. Delegates consecrate themselves as representatives of the group, usurping power by presenting themselves as their servants, while treating their own values as universal, whether knowingly or unknowingly. As Bourdieu said, "when it comes to the state, one never doubts enough" (1998, p.36).

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<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu's own concept of 'cultural capital' is a striking example of this power.

## **Evaluation and conclusions**

The occupational hazard of all academic disciplines is reductionism – the temptation to try to make the discipline’s defining objects and approaches do more explanatory work than they can. Linguistics’ occupational hazard is overextending the scope and influence of language in explaining social phenomena. The prevalence of the scholastic fallacy in social science increases this problem. It assumes that minds are independent of bodies and their social development. Developments in neuroscience are increasingly showing that the left-brain scholastic emphasis on analytical reason and language underestimates the importance of right brain pre-linguistic understanding and responses to the world, which have a gestalt, big-picture, and often emotional character, much of which does not get consciously registered, interpreted and articulated (McGilchrist 2010). Neuroscience and psychology provide evidence for something like the habitus, and for the lasting importance of social influences on dispositions and behaviour. Much goes on below the radar of linguistically constructed understanding, including where communication is involved, and this hidden surplus is inherently difficult to describe in words, thereby eluding formulation in given categories and analysis by breaking down wholes into parts, which is the method the scholastic standpoint values.

The critical reception of Bourdieu’s work has been dominated by debates about whether his work is excessively deterministic and pessimistic. The dominated classes seem doomed to accept their inferior position as a result of having developed a habitus adapted to it, and been subject to symbolic power operating pre-reflexively, so they make a virtue of what is actually necessity, and thereby reproduce their position. What anyone thinks, says or does is seen overwhelmingly as a reflection of their social position, and habitus (an internalisation of the social field); in effect, the explanation is ‘they would say that given their location and history’, which leaves little or no room for individual reflexivity and responses which might not be read off from their position in the social field. Luc Boltanski and Jacques Rancière, among others, have attacked the real or apparent fatalism in Bourdieu’s characterisation of the dominated, and his belittling of their ability to see their situation more consciously and critically (Boltanski 2006; Rancière 2010). At worst it involves sociological reductionism, and inverts the problems of interactionist approaches so that the content and meaning of discourse is treated as unimportant relative to its positioning with the social field and its ‘pre-reflexive’ reception. At the least this underestimates the endless possibilities for novel meanings to develop in discourse. Margaret Archer has countered Bourdieu’s fatalism both theoretically and through empirical research on reflexivity in everyday life, through attending to people’s ‘internal conversations’, and how they monitor and reflect upon the constraints and influences they encounter, and hence mediate their impact (Archer 2007). Although she rejects the concept of habitus, others argue we can acknowledge this lay reflexivity without abandoning it, as if nothing that influenced us escaped our awareness (Archer 2010).

Yet the concept of habitus is not wholly deterministic anyway, for it involves semi-conscious awareness and monitoring, indeed there would seem to be a

continuum from the unconscious reception through this awareness to careful, self-conscious deliberation. At times, Bourdieu defends his argument by saying he is 'bending the stick' as a way of correcting the opposite error of assuming all action to be based on universal, conscious deliberation.

Tendencies towards determinism and fatalism also beg the question of where resistance comes from. Bourdieu's main answer is that it is most likely to come from those who find themselves participating in a social field or location which differs from that to which their habitus has accommodated, or which changes more rapidly than they can adapt. Given its opposition to individualistic explanations, this is always the answer that sociological reductionism has to give to the question of sources of resistance. Yet it is simply false not only in ignoring individuals' reflexivity and capacity for critical thought, but also in implying that there are no habitats to which people cannot adjust through the acquisition of a habitus, and no difference between adjustments that are comfortable and others that are painful. Moreover, it ignores the extent to which discourse and practice are characterized by dilemmas and conflicting ideas and actions (Billig 1996).

Bourdieu is further limited by his disregard of emotions, both in terms of their cognitive content and their motivating power, for it ignores the emotional force of particular kinds of discourse. "When people speak of class struggle, they never think of the class struggles in everyday life, the contempt, the arrogance and crushing ostentation (about children and their successes, holidays and cars), the wounding indifference and injury, etc. Social misery and resentment – the saddest of social passions – arise from these everyday struggles, in which the issue at stake is dignity, self-esteem." (Bourdieu 2008, p.73) This statement – about everyday conversations - is full of terms that refer to moral emotions and dispositions and which presuppose reflexivity - yet they are not acknowledged as such theoretically by Bourdieu.

However, in his later, more political work, for example, *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al 1999), he does pay more attention to what lay people say, though retaining his primary emphasis on the hermeneutics of suspicion. And he also discusses the scope for politicisation, arguing that it depends on making connections that enable people to see that their problems are not merely individual misfortunes but consequent upon contingent social processes. His own energetic involvement in the struggle to politicise the public and foment resistance suggests a softening of his reductionism.

A less noted problematic feature of Bourdieu's work is his reluctance to acknowledge that communicative intentions and receptions can be non-instrumental, open, and involving judgements of the good that are not reducible to reflections of self-interest or the habitus. He therefore tends to portray all practices and struggles of the social field as a Hobbesian war of all against all, and to deflate any claims to disinterested goals, or divergence between commitments and self-serving beliefs. In so doing he generally fails to acknowledge that which acceptance of his own analysis presupposes, namely, that sometimes communication (including self-talk) is disinterested. (If we accept his approach, do we do so merely because our habitus disposes us to do

so and because doing so serves as a strategy of distinction in the academic world?; or do we accept it because we think it's right, useful, revealing?) He would probably have said that one needs to find out how far any communicative act is interested, how far it is conditioned by speakers' and listeners' position in the social field and the 'profits' available to them, in order to know how far it is *not* influenced in those ways. But the opposite also applies.

In bending the stick to correct for the interactionist error and the scholastic fallacy, in acknowledging the unconscious or semi-conscious part of communication, and the effects of the habitus and the social field on communication, it is important not to neglect the analysis of the meanings of the discourse. For example, how else can we understand why countries with similar inequalities and social fields produce different political responses? Why is anti-immigrant feeling strong in the UK but limited in Spain, despite the latter's much higher unemployment; why are French workers more politicised than US workers? Here, one has to look at the cultural and political histories of the countries and their *different* dominant discourses. To explain this one would have to take the *content* of discourses, and not only their situation in fields of power, into account.<sup>3</sup>

While Bourdieu's approach might seem to involve a sociologically reductionist treatment of language, his intent is clearly to find out what is communicated and with what effect. Academics unaware of their habitus and position within the social field and the scholastic fallacy, are likely to reproduce rather than avoid distorted communication. Bourdieu's scathing remarks about the scholastic fallacy and discourse analysis seem to assume that the latter must always abstract from social context and actions in which it is always embedded, and treat practical action as primarily communicative. Neither need be true, though these are dangers to keep in mind. His view of linguistics is partly unfair, particularly in representing it as looking for the meanings of words only in words, "where it is not to be found", (Bourdieu 1993a, p. 107), but insofar as it has some truth, his critique and his approach to language need to be taken seriously. Discourse is indeed a crucial form and mediator of power, so anyone wanting to understand it needs to consider his work.

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<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu does allude to this problem occasionally and acknowledge the remedy (e.g. 2000, p. 173). However, given that he mainly wrote either in general terms about symbolic dominance or through French examples, rather than comparative studies, like those of Lamont (1992; 2000), as far as I'm aware he did not provide the historical analyses of culture and politics that are so important for identifying the meaning and affective load of the particular terms used in political language, as analysed for example in Ruth Wodak's studies of right wing political discourses (Wodak 2015).

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