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## **An Analysis of Bourdieu's Philosophy of Language and its Contemporary Value**

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**Abstract.** *Purpose of research:* All of Bourdieu's philosophical theories and ideas are based on practice. As has been recognized by the philosophical community in recent years, the understanding of language should not be separated from social practice. In this paper, we try to sort out Bourdieu's philosophical view of language in order to enrich the philosophical theory of language as a whole. It also explains the dynamics of language transmission based on Bourdieu's philosophy of language, in order to highlight the practical significance of this paper.

*Research Questions.* What is Bourdieu's philosophy of language? What are the particularities of Bourdieu's philosophy of language? What are its methodological values?

*Research Methods.* This paper is based on an inductive analysis.

*The Materials.* Bourdieu's writings and the literature on the analysis of Bourdieu's view of language.

*The Results.* Language is intrinsic to Bourdieu's theory of social practice, and he re-examines phenomenology from a new theoretical perspective. This paper argues that Bourdieu's understanding of language is based on a series of ontological presuppositions about language, including three characteristics: social practice, symbolic power, and capital. Bourdieu's philosophical thought on language is valuable for contemporary research on the dynamics of language transmission and language choice. This is because Bourdieu's presupposition of the social practice of language reveals the practical nature of language communication, and language choice is the pursuit of the non-economic and economic value of language.

*The Scope of the Results and Research Prospects.* This result has value in the context of philosophy of language, sociolinguistic theory, language and culture policy, and language teaching theory. It also requires necessary complementary research in these disciplinary spaces.

**Keywords:** *Bourdieu; philosophy of language; social practices; symbolic power; linguistic capital; language transmission; language choice*

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## Анализ философии языка Бурдьё и ее современное значение

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**Аннотация.** *Гипотеза исследования: все философские теории и идеи Бурдьё основаны на практике. Как было признано философским сообществом в последние годы, понимание языка не должно быть отделено от социальной практики. В данной работе мы пытаемся разобраться с философским взглядом Бурдьё на язык, чтобы обогатить философскую теорию языка в целом. Также объясняется динамика передачи языка на основе философии языка Бурдьё, чтобы подчеркнуть практическую значимость данной работы.*

*Вопросы исследования: что такое философия языка Бурдьё? В чем особенности философии языка Бурдьё? Каковы ее методологические ценности?*

*Методы исследования: данная работа основана на индуктивном анализе.*

*Материалы: труды Бурдьё и литература, посвященная анализу взглядов Бурдьё на язык.*

*Результаты: язык является неотъемлемой частью теории социальной практики Бурдьё, пересматривающего феноменологию с новой теоретической точки зрения. В работе утверждается, что понимание языка Бурдьё основано на ряде онтологических предпосылок о языке, включающих три характеристики: социальная практика, символическая власть и производство капитала. Философская мысль Бурдьё о языке представляет ценность для современных исследований динамики передачи языка и выбора языка. Это связано с тем, что предпосылка Бурдьё о социальной практике языка раскрывает практическую природу языковой коммуникации, а выбор языка — это стремление к неэкономической и экономической ценности языка.*

*Сфера применения результатов и перспективы исследования: результаты исследования значимы в контексте философии языка, социолингви-*

*стической теории, политики языка и культуры, теории преподавания языка, что не исключает необходимость дополнительных разысканий в этих дисциплинарных пространствах.*

**Ключевые слова:** Бурдьё, философия языка, социальные практики, символическая власть, лингвистический капитал, передача языка, выбор языка

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**Introduction:** Since the 20th century, western philosophy has returned to the discovery and reflection of language itself, and the "linguistic artifacts" that have permeated the ontological philosophy of ancient Greece to the epistemological philosophy of the modern post-Descartes period have been criticized, and the abused "humanistic self" and "instrumental rationality" have been criticized. The abused "humanistic self" and "instrumental rationality" were abandoned, and language became the fundamental dimension for thinking and exploring truth, human existence, and human-social relations. Bourdieu's language thought was born in the context of this "linguistic turn" (Rorty 1969, p. 2), and was deeply influenced by Saussure's linguistics and Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology. Despite his origins in structuralist linguistic thought, Bourdieu did not focus on language in isolation; he advocated the examination of language in the broader social context of real speech, paying attention to the close relationship between language and social life, especially language and power<sup>1</sup>. It is generally accepted that Bourdieu's understanding and thinking about language originated and was subordinated to his sociological research, a social--theoretic approach to language (Aburous, & Kamla 2021; Salö, 2019; Badwan 2020), yet they <sup>are</sup> not sociolinguistic in the usual sense, just as his soci-

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<sup>1</sup>Just as the French version of Outline of a Theory of Practice and the English version of Outline of a Theory of Practice are quite different in terms of content and structure. Similarly, the English version of Language and Symbolic Power and the French version of What Words Mean: The Economy of Linguistic Exchange are almost two different books, although the English version is formally translated from the French version. The English version of the book, compiled by Thompson, includes several key essays not found in the French text, which help the reader to clearly understand Bourdieu

ology extends beyond the generally observed limits of that discipline (Joseph 2020, p. 108–122). This view "ignores the symbolic and verbal nature of Bourdieu's linguistic analysis," and we must recognize the connection between Bourdieu's linguistic thought and contemporary linguistic philosophy (Devyatko 2004, p. 50-58), since the understanding of language occupies a significant part of Bourdieu's work. Bourdieu's understanding of language is based on a series of ontological presuppositions about language, which can be considered as Bourdieu's "philosophy of language" (Susen 2013, p. 215). There is a relative lack of research on Bourdieu's philosophy of language, and the literature on the extension of Bourdieu's language thought and its contemporary value is relatively limited. In view of this, this paper attempts to sort out Bourdieu's philosophical thought on language and analyze its important influence on contemporary studies of linguistic and cultural communication. Language, the world and people are inextricably linked. The traditional philosophy of language sees language as an instrument for expressing, carrying and conveying ideas and concepts, and as a tool for referring to things. With the development of Western philosophy, in the context of the "linguistic turn," philosophy returned to the discovery and reflection of language itself, and the linguistic artifacts that have permeated the ontological philosophy of ancient Greece to the epistemological philosophy of the modern era after Descartes were criticized. The fundamental latitude of language as social existence emerges.

Bourdieu has written extensively on language, focusing mainly on language and practice, language and power, and linguistic strategies. He uses linguistic reasoning to elaborate on broader sociological concepts such as habitus, field, capital, and symbolic power, which help him identify a range of universal features of language and provide a philosophical tool for understanding its nature. Bourdieu's thinking about language is based on universal assumptions about the nature of the sign (Susen 2013, p. 323), exploring philosophical propositions about language, people and society at the macro level and language, language users and the power relations between them in a socio-cultural context at the micro level. For Bourdieu, sociality is the fundamental property of language. According to this essential characteristic of language, Bourdieu makes a socio-ontological presupposition of language, which can be summarized as: social praxis, symbolic power and capital.

## **I. Bourdieu's ontological presupposition of language**

### **1. The logic of language-social practice**

Bourdieu begins his philosophical study of language with a critical structuralist view of language. The structuralist linguists, represented by Saussure, distinguished between language and speech. Structuralism believes that (Langue) is a grammatical system and a symbolic system for expressing concepts in the form of a collective statute and a social system, which is the social part of speech activity and has its own unique grammatical units and rules; while (Parole) is the speaker's combination for expressing personal the parole is a combination of the speaker's personal thoughts, the personal part of speech activity, and is characterized by concreteness. Language, thus, is defined as a closed system, and the relationship between grammatical rules and practical use is severed — language is not seen as a tool for human thinking and communication, and the role of social variables in language use is severely neglected. Bourdieu was influenced by Wittgenstein's late philosophical idea of the "language game" and saw Saussure's view of language as detached from reality and as the illusion of linguistic communism, which severed the internal and external factors of understanding language (Hasan 1999, p. 35), he therefore fundamentally rejects Saussure's dichotomous division of language at the purely linguistic level. He rejects Saussure's view that the only, real object of linguistics is language and the study of language for language's sake (Saussure 1980, p. 232). According to Bourdieu, all social practices are linguistic practices, and "language itself cannot be fully understood without placing linguistic practices in the complete world in which events coexist." (Bourdieu, & Wacquand 1998, p. 197)

Bourdieu calls for the study of language to be situated in a social field, and for the social practice properties of language to be taken seriously. Within this logic, language is both socially constructed and acts on human society. This property is more explicitly expressed in his theory of the language market. This theory can explain a number of propositions about the motivation, scope, and modalities of language practices. To discuss more specifically the social use of language, Bourdieu introduces the concept of the language market. Language practice can be understood as the product of the interaction between the linguistic habits of an actor who possesses a certain amount of linguistic capital and

the language market. The speaker's speech activity is guided by linguistic habits, which, as a system of bodily qualities or dispositions, are subject to the value expectations of linguistic practices, which depend on the profitability of the linguistic product in other domains, i.e., language use and exchange are choices and trade-offs that people make in order to compete for profit. Here "profit" is a "quasi-material feeling based on the reality of objective relations" (Bourdieu 2005, p. 69). In this way, language becomes essentially an action in the context of social practice.

## 2. Language-symbolic power

Cassirer's genetic philosophy of symbolic forms' is the main inspiration for Bourdieu's potent concept of symbolic power. In Bourdieu's theory of social practice, the realization of the social-practical function of language In Bourdieu's theory of social practice, the realization of the symbolic function of language depends on its symbolic value: language is the main source of human representation, the 'home of meaning', and its symbolic nature is a precondition for the reproduction of social meaning. The maintenance or subversion of various (including dominant) relations in the social sphere of life is achieved through the symbolic exchange of linguistic communication. The definition of linguistic meaning depends on the shaping of the linguistic market, and the interpretation of linguistic meaning depends on the examination of the interaction between linguistic behaviour and social power. The definition of linguistic meaning depends on the shaping of the linguistic market, and the interpretation of linguistic meaning depends on the examination of the interaction between linguistic behavior and social power. relations are the relations of symbolic power through which the relations between speakers and the groups to which they respectively belong turn out in a metamorphic form" (Bourdieu 2005, p. 69). The process of language use becomes a process of comparison of forces and competition for power between languages. The process of language use becomes a process of comparison of forces and competition for power between language users and the social forces and social relations behind them. By choosing the most appropriate discourse strategy, social power is brought into play through the strategies of language expression. With regard to the use of strategies in linguistic exchange, as Bourdieu puts it: "It is from the objective linguistic power relations that exist in practice between the various languages (even or especially

when French is absent) that the strategy of condescension derives its profit by the symbolic exclusion of this power relation (that is, the hierarchy between languages and the hierarchy between the people who use them). Profits."At the same time, Bourdieu profoundly interprets the confusing nature of language and the coercive nature of power, reveals the nature of language as a symbolic resource for the representation of social power and the mechanisms of complicity in the realization of the symbolic efficacy of language, and creatively exposes the problem of how symbolic violence strategically influences the shaping of social structures of domination (Jiuan 2018, p. 115–123). "The horror of symbolic power is that the dominated stand unaware of themselves and subscribe to the logic of domination of the ruler and constitute an important part of the basis of domination" (Bourdieu 1991, p. 106].

### 3. Language as a kind of capital

Concerning the nature of language, Comte has used a metaphor to illustrate it. He argues that language is a treasure that constitutes a kind of property that can be used by all people at the same time without any diminution of its reserves. Saussure, Chomsky, and Habermas followed this fetish of "linguistic wealth", which sees language as a collective wealth: it is not distinguishable, and it is not a luxury.

But Bourdieu, in his construction of an economic theory of linguistic exchange, highlights the capital-producing nature of language. In his essay "Forms of Capital", Bourdieu elaborates on the different types of capital. He argues that in modern society there are at least three types of capital that cannot be ignored: first, economic capital. This type of capital can be immediately and directly transformed into money, and it is institutionalized in the form of property rights. The second is cultural capital. This capital can be transformed into economic capital under certain conditions, and it is institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications. Third, social capital, which is formed in social ties and can also be transformed into economic capital under certain conditions, is institutionalized in the form of a social status title. In addition, he defines the above-mentioned recognized forms of capital as symbolic capital.

Bourdieu considers language as a special kind of cultural capital, and he distinguishes it from other kinds of cultural capital by calling it linguistic capital in order to emphasize the special role of language in

the market. Bourdieu elaborated on the notion of linguistic capital, examining how language is a function of power relations that are established in society." (Bourdieu 1991, p. 14). The distribution of linguistic capital is closely related to the appropriation of social, economic, and cultural capital by individuals in social space, because "the social functions of various capitals and their effects in society must be socially recognized through the legitimation process of symbolic structures" (Gao Xuan Yang 2005, p. 331). It thus appears that not every actor in a linguistic community enjoys equal linguistic capital, not as linguists see individual discourse as a specific appropriation of shared linguistic wealth. One's linguistic habits are permeated by the influence of one's position in the social hierarchy, and thus language is shaping, reproducing, and marking the actors (Zhang Yi 2005 p. 114–115). The operation of linguistic capital with carrier properties in the linguistic market requires compliance with market rules, i.e., dominant social statutes and social institutions representing institutional interests, to accomplish the symbolic exchange of various relations within the social field. On the one hand, the linguistic value realized by language capital implicitly realizes the symbolic power of social subjects, thus promoting dynamic changes in social field relations and contributing to the reproduction of social hierarchies; on the other hand, language capital as a symbol in cultural practice promotes the unification process through the legitimation mechanism, realizes the maintenance of the dominant. On the other hand, linguistic capital as a symbol in cultural practice facilitates the process of unification through the legitimization mechanism, realizing the maintenance of authority over the dominant player in the field and completing the reproduction of social and cultural privileges.

The intrinsic characteristics of language, such as "social, dialectical, symbolic, a priori, discursive, justifiable, contestable, commodity properties, the ideological and symbolic power nature of language" (Susen 2013, p215), constitute the subject of Bourdieu's social ontological presupposition of language, contributing to "expose the profound social significance of linguistic exchange in social life and social activity, the nature of symbolic power implied and expressed by linguistic exchange in society, and the various extremely complex, tortuous and covert strategies adopted by social power and social activity through linguistic exchange" (Gao Xuan Yang 2004, p. 173). Bourdieu's ontological under-



standing of language is grounded in real speech situations and is a social ontological realist view of language.

## **II. The value of Bourdieu's philosophy of language to the study of language communication**

Bourdieu examines language from a social perspective. Such rethinking and critical studies break with formal linguistic analysis and move away from metaphysical studies of the philosophy of language (Jiuan 2018, p. 115–120). The social practice, symbolic-symbolic and capital-producing nature of language determines the participation of language as an actor into the field of activity as a capital in the symbolic practice, in accordance with the rules of operation of the language exchange market, advancing the reproduction and redistribution of social power, which implies the value dynamics of language communication. Ultimately, language transmission must be realized as a choice for language receivers to learn and use a language (Crystal 2003, p. 26; Kaplan 2001, p. 3–26; Spolsky 2004, p. 219), language choice in language learning is based on certain needs of interest and value choices, i.e. mainly on the basis of language values. In terms of Bourdieu's philosophy of language, language choice is an exchange of capital that involves power. Although all human languages are essentially equally capable of expressing the thoughts and emotions of their users, the linguistic market formed in a given communicative space is necessarily divided into hierarchical levels, and the different levels of the market in turn give different values to the different languages used in the different markets, thus giving different levels of symbolic capital between languages. The more domains a language has, the higher the status of the institutions that use it, the stronger the language and the higher its linguistic value.

First, Bourdieu's presupposition of the social practice of language profoundly reveals the practical nature of language communication, which is fundamentally a choice of different languages and language variants and belongs to individual acts of language practice. The practical nature of language communication determines that it is necessarily a product of the interaction between the language market and language habits. Thus, on the one hand, the linguistic status quo is driven by dominant social interests; on the other hand, the linguistic habits of the sub-

jects of the status quo have a certain degree of dynamic effect on social structural relations.

Second, Bourdieu's presupposition of the linguistic symbolic capital of language and the capital-producing nature of language can be described as a unification of the non-economic (including political, emotional and cultural values, etc.) and economic values of language. The non-economic value ultimately needs to be realized as a concrete economic value. Bourdieu distinguishes the symbolic capital of a language according to the amount of economic capital that people possess, and the larger the amount of economic capital, the larger the corresponding symbolic capital and the higher the economic value of the language, and vice versa. It can be seen that the symbolic capital (non-economic value) of a language is a dynamic and relative concept, and that the economic and non-economic values of a language are also very closely interrelated. More importantly, the functional allocation of language can empower its users, and this power is the ability of users to control the unequal distribution of dominant linguistic resources (Rosendal 2009, p. 14). Theoretically, a language can have all of these values at once, or it can have only one of them. Why a language has the function of satisfying the subject's needs and how well it does so depend on the social and historical status of the language's owner (Yuming Li 2007, p. 1–3). When a language's adopter is politically and economically dominant, then the language's function of satisfying the political and economic needs of the language's adopters is also greater. Conversely, when the language host state is in a marginal position that does not have a significant economic role, the function of that language in meeting the economic needs of the actors is generally smaller. This does not mean, however, that the relatively weak language does not have any value in satisfying the actors' linguistic needs; on the contrary, the affective value of the identity of the language is often the motivation for the actors to choose it in terms of its non-economic value.

### **Conclusion**

Bourdieu's philosophy of language is a reflection on the nature of language based on real speech contexts. He places language in the context of practice and illustrates the substantive relationship between language and practice, language and power. He criticizes the structuralist "pedantic fallacy" view of language, the purely formal analysis of lan-

guage and the metaphysical logic of language philosophy, and constructs his unique sociological view of practical language on the basis of his inheritance and transcendence of the later Wittgensteinianism view of language games. The main point is that Wittgenstein's view of language is not only epistemologically reflective but also methodologically relational. He focuses on the relationship between language and symbolic power, pointing out that language itself is not violent, but only the social and political power and statutes reflected behind language embody violence. Thus, Bourdieu's ontological presupposition of language reveals the social practice, symbolic-symbolic and capital-producing nature of language, a "social ontological realist view" of language. Of course, like all masters and their theories, Bourdieu's theory of linguistic practice is far from infallible. Bourdieu plays the role of a more objective, value-neutral analyst, but while he emphasizes the dominance of the upper and middle classes in the mastery of language and criticizes the unequal distribution of linguistic capital, he ruthlessly denies the lower classes the opportunity to exercise linguistic power.

Of course, it cannot be ignored that Bourdieu has important academic value and practical significance and has had a profound impact on important approaches and hot issues in contemporary language studies, such as language communication studies. The influence of Bourdieu's philosophy of language on the study of language communication is evident in the fact that it helps to reveal a series of core propositions such as the nature of the social practice of language communication, the ideological role of language choice, and the mechanism of cultural and privileged reproduction. Bourdieu's philosophy of language is a problem-solving toolbox that researchers can borrow to carry out their research, providing new options for theoretical accumulation and research paths in the philosophy of language.

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