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Language and Symbolic Power by Pierre Bourdieu; John B. Thompson; Gino Raymond;
Matthew Adamson

Review by: Michael Silverstein

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the rest of the Jews of France, do not support the state of Israel.

Thus, in relation to other Jews, they are distinguished both by a territorial "presence"—that of Lite—and by a territorial "absence"—that of Israel. These claims tantalize the reader who may want more on various issues than the book provides: How do the Jews of Middle Eastern origin (North Africa and Egypt) in the three groups understand their relation to Lite? How do the non-Zionist Jews position themselves in relation to the Zionist Jews? What do the study groups in the Lithuanian tradition, which engage their members so passionately, look like on the ground? From which tradition, and for what ends, does the assimilationists' desire to merge Enlightenment definitions of reason with the rational methodology of the rabbis of Vilna stem?

This absorbing book is a case study that raises questions of general concern for anthropologists interested in the relation between a nation-state and the national minorities within it. The sorts of issues for which I think the book provides compelling comparative material (and much food for thought) are: How much assimilation is demanded by the nation-state and with what consequences for the survival of minority cultures? How much toleration of difference is demanded by minorities and on what terms? Was the Enlightenment's assertion of the equality of all a mask for the intolerance of group difference? Or is the cultural relativism that has been a critical response to the Enlightenment a short-sighted refusal of those value distinctions that must be made for definitions of justice to have any meaning at all?

The people considered in this book move these questions beyond the superficial labeling of positions. They have chosen to balance ways of belonging with ways of not belonging. They have chosen to do battle on the fields of interpretation, and to oppose one set of authoritative texts—those of the Enlightenment—with another set of authoritative texts—those of Jewish tradition. While their predecessors were emigrants and then immigrants, these Jews of the generation of '68 remain in one place, but with a difference.

Language and Symbolic Power. PIERRE BOURDIEU. JOHN B. THOMPSON, ed. GINO RAYMOND and MATTHEW ADAMSON, trans. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991. ix + 302 pp., appendix, notes, index.

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This volume is a somewhat transformed version of Bourdieu's 1982 *Ce que parler veut dire* ("What speaking means/What it means to speak," published in Paris by Fayard), retitled with the former caption of the original second section. Deleting two chapters, the editor has compressed three sections into two and has added a whole new third section, "Symbolic power and the political field" (pp. 161–251), two-fifths of the resulting English-language text.

Like much of Bourdieu's work, the original was something of an antistructuralist, antistructural-Marxist fusillade, in which "language" is only the *pars pro tota* emblem in the line of fire to the targeted opposition (though—or therefore?—the name Lévi-Strauss, for example, does not occur even in the index of the original). Sensing perhaps that times have changed, editor John B. Thompson has reoriented this English-language version to those in British sociology and political science influenced by cultural studies' concern with "discourse," especially as applied to the study of modern, large-scale societies in democratic nation-states. Thereby attention is deflected from the richness of the once-Parisian intertext—the erstwhile reflexive practice of a player of market politics of science—no scholarly apparatus on which has been added by editor or translators.

For the uninitiated, one can say that this collection develops all of the major Bourdivine themes, though with inevitably inefficient partial repetitions. Only nominally focusing on language (rhetoric really), it can serve as an alternative introduction, shorter than *Distinction* (Harvard University Press, 1984), rarely as turgid as the *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), and less parochial overall than *Homo Academicus* (Stanford University Press, 1988), to cite some best-sellers. Signifying practices occur in "fields" or "markets" in which our symbolic behavior is actually motivated by the unconscious but structured tendencies ("habitus") toward the end of strategic accumulation of capital of all sorts. (Bourdieu names a distinct species of "capital" for virtually every different institutionalized "market" with social practices.) Any particular individual's inclusive social fitness is a multivariate function, based on exposure to and insulation from participation in differentiated fields. These "objective" demographics yield the input conditions on the agents in any particular market—all ultimately resting on the stratification of the economic market, which thus emerges as the *primus inter pares* of fields.

Thus empirical exhibit "A" in the first, theme-establishing section of the book (chapters 1 and 2, plus the appendix) is composed of Labovian indexes—in one's pronunciation of language, in one's lexical content, and so on—of one's "distinction" with respect to the system of well-developed stratified registers in languages such as French and English. Within such cultural orders of hegemonic standardization (with all the attendant paraphernalia of such), indexical expression of socioeconomic and social class, gender, regional affiliation, and ethnicity enacts these aspects of identity as potential transformations of each other through register-sensitive usage. One can talk, as even M. Jourdain long ago seemed to realize in his own currency, "like a million bucks," though perhaps not, ultimately, of the manor. But this one contact with empirical sociolinguistics in a very particular type and scale of linguistic community is pushed far beyond any evidentiary seemliness. Bourdieu sees it as the ultimate cross-societal organizing principle for understanding what linguistic "habitus" makes people mean when they speak.

Indeed, as Bourdieu presses on to argue in later sections, *all* discourse that even purports to sense-driven propositionality should be analyzed in the paradigm of asking, in effect, “Where’s the scam?” How does the very *form* of language (its “style,” in literary studies) reveal a market structuring through the “censorship” of everything communicated into channels of capital-seeking “euphemism?” Here are discursive structures of the *langue dorée*! And note how Bourdieu, in spite of himself, presupposes that there must be some asymptotically neutral, un-“censored” formulation, distinct from the “legitimated” norm (standard register) of the dominant groups. This asymptote is, of course, what Saussure was talking about in terms of *langue*. Thus Bourdieu mounts another suspicious attack on (mere) sense, propositionality, and truth, resonating with—and sometimes stylistically mimicking (for example, chapter 6 on Heidegger’s prose style)—the suspicion of deconstructionism, but delivered with economicist rather than belletristic “Gotcha!”

If ultimately ignorant of, or unconcerned with, the wider compass of types of speech community and of semiotic processes of discursive meaning, Bourdieu is at his most interesting in a second, ultimately very important post-Austinian direction, emphasized by the editor in his reorganization. The “performative” or, more broadly, “ritualized” character of various kinds of discursive practice—in language *per se* and beyond—emphasizes the *real* symbolic efficacy (no contradiction in terms!) of indexes of authority and of authoritative power to authorize, of institutional dominance and domination. As a reflexive sociologist of discourse, Bourdieu calls attention—almost ironically—to the “theory effect” (chapters 2, 5, and 11), in which descriptions (acts of discursive describing under proper conditions) appear to function as acts of performative nomination (baptism) of phenomena, in effect creating these phenomena as social facts. More generally, we can see here the Weberian turn, in that “performativity” is the semiotic mediator between the priestly charisma of incumbency and the institutional routinization of habitus-laden fields of strategic struggle in the market form (chapters 3, 4, and 7–10).

However, discovering that there is a “*je ne sais quoi*” about performativity, Bourdieu merely invokes but does not analyze it—particularly as it relates to his first theme. For performativity is, ultimately, the valorizing power—generally found in ritual, where Durkheim long ago pointed us—that seems to ground (mere?) tropes (transformations) in their presupposed essences based in a universe of “natural” and “objective” foundations (though these be forever resistant to demonstration through a stance of epistemological objectivity). Distinct “markets,” in other words, seem to be performatively constituted, as are distinct forms of “capital”—just as much as any other essential characteristic of social formations.

Hence, to follow out the dialectic of routines of constituted values (habitus) versus constituting valorizations of routine (performativity)—not always distinct in labeling to the naive, as Bourdieu’s acute testimony should warn us—would be to show what speaking, among social practices, really means and

why the power of language is more than merely symbolic. But this would necessitate going beyond an at best flat-footed metaphor of “markets” that does no useful work in a truly comparative way, being itself an unexamined commitment of its own kind of naturalizing essentialism.

***National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania.* KATHERINE VERDERY. *Societies and Culture in East-Central Europe Series, No. 7.* IRENE GRUZINSKA-GROSS and JAN T. GROSS, gen. eds. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991. xvi + 406 pp., notes, bibliography, index.**

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When I told Professor Emeritus John Murra, a Romanian by birth, that I had been asked to review Katherine Verdery’s book, he responded, “Oh, what a shame! It’s such a difficult book. They should have assigned it to someone else.” Undaunted, I asked his opinion of her thesis about the importance of Romanian intellectuals in propagating nationalist discourse. Murra agreed wholeheartedly with her:

“It’s true. My family is still in Romania.”

“And what have they done in the intervening years?” I asked.

“Nomenclatura, naturally,” he said.

“And today?”

“They’re doing well. I thought about sending my sister a copy of Verdery’s book, but then thought, ‘why bother?’”

Verdery’s book is definitely worth bothering about, particularly if one wants to understand Romanian intellectuals like Murra, who moved to the United States at the age of 18, fought in the Spanish Civil War, and later became a distinguished Andeanist. Verdery’s purpose is to map the space in which discourse about “culture” by Romanian “intellectuals”—the former term is conceived narrowly, the latter broadly—became talk about the essence of the nation. Relying on the theoretical armature developed by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, Verdery sketches the fields in which different academics (literary critics, historians, and philosophers) constitute an “all-embracing national discourse” (p. 45). By the turn of the century, she writes, this talk about the nation “was firmly lodged in representations of identity and political discourse” (p. 41). Moreover, after World War II, the “symbolic force” of national identity increased in intensity. For the Ceausescu leadership the nation became an instrument for legitimating its rule, not merely because the regime consciously manipulated nationalism, but also—Verdery makes the more radical claim—because national ideology has an “elective affinity . . . with certain inherent characteristics of Romanian socialism” (p. 122).

To substantiate this claim, she turns to the “ideology under [Romanian] socialism” and documents the field of strategies among postwar intellectuals (“westernizers,” “indigenists,” and “proto-orientals”) over competing representations of the nation.