

LINGUISTIC CAPITAL IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Do Thu Hoa¹, Do Thi Bích Dao², Luu Thi Huong¹

Abstract: *The concept of linguistic capital is pivotal within the sphere of sociolinguistics and has significant implications for the language learning process. Originating from Bourdieu's broader sociological framework which delineates various forms of capital—economic, social, cultural, and symbolic—linguistic capital specifically refers to the mastery of and facility with language that confers power and status within a given social sphere (Bourdieu, 1991). The article initially explores and has an overview on linguistic capital, its relevance and application within the context of language learning and the importance of linguistic capital in learning, especially a foreign language. It also proposes strategies to exploit this form of capital to improve language acquisition and pedagogical outcomes.*

Keywords: *language learning, capital, linguistic capital*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, language has become a vital aspect of communication and the ability to speak multiple languages is increasingly important. The concept of linguistic capital has gained increasing attention in recent years as an important aspect of foreign and second language learning. Linguistic capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities that an individual possesses in a particular language, which can greatly influence their opportunities and success in both personal and professional spheres. The concept of linguistic capital occupies a central role in the interdisciplinary field of sociolinguistics, bearing profound implications for understanding and improving the process of language learning. In foreign and second language learning, linguistic capital is essential as it helps individuals to navigate different cultural contexts and engage with people from diverse backgrounds. This is particularly important in today's globalized world, where cross-cultural communication and collaboration are becoming increasingly common. Within the ambit of Pierre Bourdieu's expansive sociological framework, which categorizes capital into economic, social, cultural, and symbolic forms, linguistic capital emerges as a particularly nuanced construct. It encompasses the mastery and proficiency in language use, not merely as a medium of communication but as a potent instrument of power and social elevation within a given community or social sphere (Bourdieu, 1991). The essence of linguistic capital lies in its ability to confer upon its holders a distinct advantage, enabling them to navigate social landscapes more effectively, access

¹ Hanoi Pedagogical University 2

² University of Commerce

privileged networks, and ultimately, secure a more favorable position in the social hierarchy.

The significance of linguistic capital extends beyond the realm of theoretical discourse, finding practical application and relevance in the domain of language education and acquisition. This article aims to delve into the multifaceted nature of linguistic capital, unpacking its theoretical underpinnings, and examining its implications for language learning. In doing so, it seeks to illuminate how linguistic capital can be consciously developed and utilized as a strategic asset in the language learning process, potentially leading to more equitable educational outcomes and a deeper, more nuanced engagement with language pedagogy.

By exploring the dynamic interplay between linguistic capital and language learning, this article addresses a range of theoretical perspectives and put the concept of linguistic capital within a sociolinguistic and educational discourse of higher education.

2. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1. Theoretical framework

Linguistic capital is a subset of cultural capital, where language functions as a medium of social transaction and symbol of cultural competence. In essence, it encompasses the competencies, proficiencies, and dialects that individuals possess, which in turn grant them a certain status, authority, or advantage in social interactions and institutional settings (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The value of linguistic capital, however, is not universal but is contingent upon the social context, including the power dynamics and cultural hierarchies that predominate within any given society.

Bourdieu's (1991) concept of the linguistic market underpins the notion that the value of linguistic capital varies across different social spaces. In this market, the 'exchange rate' of linguistic capital is determined by the social context, implying that the same linguistic competencies may be valued differently depending on the setting and audience. This framework elucidates how linguistic practices are imbued with power and ideology, often serving to reproduce social inequalities.

To delve deeper into the theoretical underpinnings of linguistic capital, it is essential to situate the concept within Pierre Bourdieu's broader theory of social fields and forms of capital. Bourdieu (1986) introduces the idea that capital can exist in several forms: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic, each with its distinct properties and the potential to be converted from one form into another. Linguistic capital is considered a form of cultural capital, yet it is unique because it permeates all social fields and acts as a medium

of communication and power (Bourdieu, 1991). This section will expand the discussion on the theoretical framework of linguistic capital by exploring its dynamics within sociolinguistic and educational contexts, drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital conversion.

Habitus and Linguistic Practices

The concept of habitus plays a crucial role in understanding how individuals acquire and use linguistic capital. Habitus refers to the system of durable, transposable dispositions that individuals develop through their life experiences (Bourdieu, 1984). It shapes individuals' perceptions, thoughts, and actions, including their linguistic practices. Language choices, preferences, and competencies are influenced by one's habitus, which in turn is shaped by the social conditions of its acquisition, including one's class, education, and cultural background. This internalization of social structures influences how individuals perceive the value of different languages and dialects, thereby affecting their investment in acquiring linguistic capital.

Linguistic Capital in the Field

Bourdieu's notion of the field further contextualizes the concept of linguistic capital. Fields are structured social spaces with their own rules, norms, and hierarchies (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Each field has its specific form of capital that holds value and grants power within that domain. Linguistic capital's value, therefore, varies across different fields: the linguistic capital valued in academic circles, for instance, may differ significantly from that valued in the digital media space or within a local community. This variability underscores the contextual nature of linguistic capital and the importance of understanding the specific linguistic market when assessing the value of particular linguistic competencies.

The Conversion of Capital

One of Bourdieu's key contributions to understanding linguistic capital lies in his concept of capital conversion. Bourdieu posits that different forms of capital can be transformed into one another under certain conditions, albeit not without effort and loss (Bourdieu, 1986). This notion of conversion is pivotal when exploring linguistic capital within an educational framework, as it reveals the pathways through which linguistic skills can be translated into social and economic gains, and vice versa. For instance, mastering a language that holds significant cultural and economic sway (such as English in the global context) can lead to enhanced economic capital through better employment opportunities in multinational corporations or higher education institutions. Conversely, individuals or groups with substantial economic capital can invest in acquiring linguistic

capital by accessing high-quality language education or immersion experiences in target language environments.

Power, Symbolic Capital, and Legitimation

Linguistic capital is closely linked to power dynamics and the concept of symbolic capital, which Bourdieu describes as any form of capital when perceived by social agents as legitimate and worthy of recognition and respect (Bourdieu, 1989). The struggle for linguistic legitimacy is evident in the way certain dialects or languages are valorized over others within specific fields, reflecting the power relations inherent in the social structure. This process of legitimation often marginalizes minority languages and dialects, reducing their perceived value as linguistic capital in formal and institutional settings, despite their potential significance in community and identity formation.

The role of the education system in this process of linguistic legitimation cannot be overstated. Schools often serve as battlegrounds for linguistic hegemony, where the language of instruction and the linguistic norms valorized within the curriculum reflect and reinforce the distribution of linguistic capital in the broader society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This dynamic has profound implications for language learners from marginalized linguistic backgrounds, whose linguistic habitus may be devalued within the educational field, affecting their access to opportunities and resources for acquiring valuable linguistic capital.

Linguistic Market and the Economy of Linguistic Exchanges

The concept of the linguistic market extends Bourdieu's framework to the realm of language use and exchange, emphasizing the economic analogy in linguistic interactions (Bourdieu, 1991). Just as goods and services are exchanged in economic markets, linguistic exchanges occur within social spaces where certain languages or dialects are traded for social advantages, such as prestige, authority, or economic benefits. The rules of the linguistic market are determined by the dominant social groups, who define the relative value of different forms of linguistic capital. This market metaphor underscores the competitive nature of linguistic exchanges and the strategic acquisition of linguistic capital by individuals and groups aiming to maximize their social returns.

In sum, the theoretical framework of linguistic capital, drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, capital conversion, symbolic capital, and the linguistic market, provides a nuanced understanding of the social dynamics underlying language learning and use. It highlights the interplay between language, power, and social structure, offering critical insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by language learners in navigating the complex landscape of linguistic capital. This theoretical lens urges

educators, policymakers, and language practitioners to critically examine the role of language education in perpetuating or challenging social inequalities and to adopt practices that foster linguistic diversity and equity.

The concept of linguistic capital, within Bourdieu's broader theory of capital, posits that language is not merely a tool for communication but a medium through which power is negotiated and social structures are maintained (Bourdieu, 1991). The valuation of linguistic capital is intrinsically tied to the authority of the dominant social group, whose linguistic norms and practices are considered the most legitimate and thereby the most valuable. This dynamic is evident in the global predominance of certain languages, such as English, which accrues significant linguistic capital on an international scale due to economic, political, and cultural hegemony (Phillipson, 1992).

Moreover, the acquisition of linguistic capital is markedly influenced by one's habitus, a concept Bourdieu uses to describe the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals develop through their life experiences (Bourdieu, 1984). Habitus shapes individuals' linguistic practices and their perception of the value of different languages and dialects, which in turn affects their investment in learning and using certain languages over others (Norton, 2000).

2.2. Linguistic capital in language learning: pedagogical implications

In the context of language learning, linguistic capital pertains to the acquisition of linguistic competencies that are deemed valuable within specific social or professional domains. Language learners strive to accumulate linguistic capital by mastering not only the grammatical and lexical aspects of a language but also by adopting the linguistic norms and practices that are valorized within certain communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The concept of linguistic capital has profound implications for teaching methodologies and curriculum design in language education. Educators are encouraged to adopt a sociolinguistically informed pedagogy that recognizes the diverse linguistic resources students bring into the learning environment and aims to equip them with the linguistic capital valued in their target linguistic markets. This approach entails a focus on practical communicative competencies, sociolinguistic awareness, and the cultivation of an ability to navigate various linguistic and cultural contexts effectively.

The implications of linguistic capital for language education are manifold. Firstly, the concept challenges educators to critically reflect on the linguistic norms they valorize in their teaching practices and the potential exclusionary effects these norms may have on learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This reflection necessitates a pedagogy

that values linguistic diversity and promotes an inclusive approach to language learning, where all students' linguistic resources are recognized as valuable forms of capital (Cummins, 2000).

Secondly, the recognition of linguistic capital underscores the importance of teaching language as a social practice, not just a technical skill. This approach involves integrating socio-cultural elements into language teaching, thereby preparing learners to navigate the social dimensions of language use effectively. For instance, teaching scenarios that simulate real-life social interactions can help learners understand the pragmatic aspects of language use, such as register, tone, and politeness strategies, which are crucial components of linguistic capital in real-world settings (Kramsch, 1993).

Lastly, the focus on linguistic capital highlights the need for language education policies that prioritize multilingualism and the development of plurilingual competencies. Such policies recognize the value of learners' first languages and other linguistic resources they bring to the learning process, advocating for pedagogical approaches that build on these resources to facilitate the acquisition of additional languages (Council of Europe, 2001).

Multimodal Learning Experiences: Leveraging technology and multimedia resources can provide learners with rich, authentic language exposure. Online platforms, social media, and virtual reality environments offer opportunities for immersive language learning experiences that can significantly enhance learners' linguistic capital by exposing them to a variety of linguistic registers and dialects within authentic cultural contexts (Godwin-Jones, 2018).

Interdisciplinary Approaches: Integrating language learning with content from other academic disciplines, such as history, literature, and social sciences, can enrich learners' understanding of the cultural and historical contexts that shape language use. This interdisciplinary approach not only broadens learners' cultural knowledge but also enhances their ability to engage with complex texts and discourses, further accruing linguistic capital (Met, 1998).

Community-Based Learning: Engaging language learners in community service or project-based learning activities within communities where the target language is spoken can provide meaningful opportunities for language practice and cultural immersion. Such experiences not only facilitate the application of language skills in real-world contexts but also foster a sense of social responsibility and global citizenship, aligning with the broader educational goals of cultivating linguistic and cultural capital (Perren, 2003).

Authentic Language Exposure: Immersing language learners in environments where the target language is actively used in real-life contexts can significantly enhance their linguistic capital. This exposure facilitates the acquisition of colloquial expressions, idioms, and pragmatic nuances that textbooks often overlook.

Cultural Competence Development: Understanding the cultural underpinnings of language use is crucial for accruing linguistic capital. Incorporating cultural studies into language education can enable learners to use language more appropriately and confidently in diverse contexts.

Social Interaction and Networking: Encouraging learners to engage in social interactions within communities of the target language can foster the practical application of linguistic skills and increase their social linguistic capital. This approach aligns with the notion of learning through legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Critical Language Awareness: Developing a critical awareness of the power dynamics associated with language use can empower learners to challenge linguistic inequalities and advocate for more inclusive language policies and practices.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Linguistic capital, as a form of cultural capital, plays a crucial role in the language learning process, influencing not only the acquisition of language but also the social opportunities and access that come with language proficiency. Understanding and leveraging linguistic capital can significantly enhance the effectiveness of language education, promoting not just linguistic proficiency but also sociolinguistic competence. As language educators and learners navigate the complexities of the linguistic market, a critical and context-sensitive approach to language learning can facilitate the accumulation of valuable linguistic capital, empowering individuals to navigate the intricacies of global communication landscapes more effectively.

Given the increasing globalization and interconnectedness of societies, proficiency in foreign languages opens doors to various opportunities in academia, employment, and personal growth. Below are some proposed practical strategies for students in higher education to effectively exploit their linguistic capital in learning foreign languages.

Firstly, students should try to maximize their exposure to the target language. Recent studies such as Dewaele and Li Wei (2019) emphasize the importance of exposure in language acquisition as well as highlight the role of social interactions and immersion experiences in enhancing language proficiency. Therefore, students should immerse themselves in the target language environment through various means such as attending

language clubs, cultural events, or engaging with native speakers either in person or through online platforms.

Secondly, technology should be utilized during the learning process. Recent research by Li et al. (2020) underscores the effectiveness of mobile applications and online platforms in supplementing traditional classroom instruction. Students can access a plethora of resources ranging from language learning applications like Duolingo and Rosetta Stone to online language exchange platforms such as Tandem or HelloTalk, facilitating interactive and personalized learning experiences.

Thirdly, recent studies like research by Kramsch and Whiteside (2019) advocate for the integration of language learning across academic disciplines. They emphasize the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration and experiential learning in fostering linguistic and cultural competence. Collaborative projects, interdisciplinary seminars, or study abroad programs provide students with opportunities to apply their linguistic skills in real-world contexts, enhancing their overall language proficiency and cultural awareness.

Fourthly, the cultivation of a growth mindset is also crucial for language learning success. Recent research by Blackwell et al. (2017) suggests that individuals who embrace challenges and view mistakes as opportunities for growth tend to outperform those with a fixed mindset. Therefore, students should adopt a positive attitude towards challenges and setbacks, recognizing them as integral parts of the learning process.

Finally, promoting learner autonomy should be paid serious attention during the process of teaching and learning. Learner autonomy plays a significant role in enhancing motivation and engagement in language learning. Providing resources for independent study, setting personalized learning goals, and encouraging reflective practices empower students to take ownership of their language learning journey, leading to more meaningful and sustainable language acquisition.

In essence, the investigation into linguistic capital and its implications for language learning presented in this article serves as a bridge connecting sociolinguistic theory with educational practice. It offers a comprehensive overview of the concept, its theoretical foundations, and its practical significance, paving the way for a more informed and nuanced approach to language education that recognizes and capitalizes on the power of linguistic proficiency as a form of social and cultural capital.

REFERENCES

1. Benson, P., & Reinders, H. (2019), *State-of-the-art article: The state of autonomy in language learning*, *Language Teaching*, 52(2), 237-252.

2. Blackwell, L. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Dweck, C. S. (2017), *Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention*, Child development, 88(5), 1869-1884.
3. Bourdieu, P. (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press.
4. Bourdieu, P. (1986), *The forms of capital*. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258), Greenwood Press.
5. Bourdieu, P. (1989), *Social space and symbolic power*, Sociological Theory, 7(1), 14-25.
6. Bourdieu, P. (1991), *Language and Symbolic Power*, Harvard University Press.
7. Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1977), *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Sage.
8. Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992), *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, University of Chicago Press.
9. Council of Europe. (2001), *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*, Cambridge University Press.
10. Cummins, J. (2000), *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*, Multilingual Matters.
11. Dewaele, J. M., & Li Wei. (2019), *Attitudes towards code-switching among adult second language learners in foreign language classrooms*, International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 22(1), 66-83.
12. Godwin-Jones, R. (2018), *Emerging technologies: Mobile-assisted language learning*, Language Learning & Technology, 22(3), 1-17.
13. Kramsch, C. (1993), *Context and culture in language teaching*, Oxford University Press.
14. Kramsch, C., & Whiteside, A. (2019), *Language ecology and language ideology: Towards a sociolinguistic agenda for language learning motivation research*, In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 31-47). Multilingual Matters.
15. Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991), *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*, Cambridge University Press.

16. Li, L., Wang, Y., & Wang, H. (2020), *The application of mobile assisted language learning (MALL) in the construction of a college English language teaching mode*, International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning, 15(3), 224-237.
17. Met, M. (1998). Curriculum decision-making in content-based language teaching. In J. Cenoz & F. Genesee (Eds.), *Beyond bilingualism: Multilingualism and multilingual education* (pp. 35-63), Multilingual Matters.
18. Norton, B. (2000), *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*, Pearson Education.
19. Perren, J. (2003), *The role of e-learning in the teaching of social work: A case study*, Social Work Education, 22(5), 467-478.
20. Phillipson, R. (1992), *Linguistic imperialism*, Oxford University Press.

VỐN NGÔN NGỮ TRONG VIỆC HỌC NGÔN NGỮ

Đỗ Thu Hòa, Đỗ Thị Bích Đào, Lưu Thị Hương

Tóm tắt: Trong bối cảnh ngôn ngữ xã hội học, vốn ngôn ngữ đứng như một khái niệm trung tâm, thể hiện tầm quan trọng đối với quá trình học ngôn ngữ. Dựa trên khung lý thuyết xã hội học rộng lớn của Bourdieu, vốn ngôn ngữ được định nghĩa là khả năng sử dụng ngôn ngữ một cách thành thạo, giúp cá nhân đạt được quyền lực và vị thế xã hội (Bourdieu, 1991). Bài báo bước đầu tìm hiểu, tổng quan việc phân tích vốn ngôn ngữ, khám phá sự liên quan và ứng dụng của nó trong lĩnh vực học ngôn ngữ, tầm quan trọng của vốn ngôn ngữ trong học tập đặc biệt học ngôn ngữ và từ đó đưa ra một vài đề xuất về các phương pháp khai thác loại vốn này để nâng cao chất lượng học tập và giảng dạy ngôn ngữ.

Từ khóa: giảng dạy ngôn ngữ, vốn, vốn ngôn ngữ

(Ngày Tòa soạn nhận được bài: 11-4-2024; ngày phản biện đánh giá: 26-4-2024; ngày chấp nhận đăng: 15-5-2024)