Symbolic Power in Interlevel Interactive Learning Culture at the English Institute

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ABSTRAK


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The exercise of power can occur in a communicative culture in education, for example in an interlevel communicative culture in an English department. Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic power should be followed normally and unconditionally and will have a positive impact on the social groups under the power’s control. The focus of this study was to use Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power to identify aspects of symbolic power through practices of habitus, capital, arena, and differentiation in cross-level dialogic learning cultures. This study was a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach. The locus of the study was the Department of English at LPBA Nurul Jadid. An interview with alumni was used to collect the data. Based on observations, cultural capital used as a guide by upper social groups could create a habitus in the elementary level. This habit was established from the time elementary level entered the institute. They were given guidelines to follow. They were also given the paradigm of being different from their seniors in terms of knowledge, education, age, and length of study. This study found a link between Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, arena, capital, and distinction and the process of adapting English learners to English proficiency promoted in the institute.

1. INTRODUCTION

Power is a term that continually creates various upheavals in everyday life. Power is a field where there are two sides that come together and carry out controlling activities and controlled activities. Firmanzah (2010) says that power comes from society and is above society, so it can be called a phenomenon involving those who control and those who are controlled. Certainly, this cannot be separated from a hidden goal in the strategy used in the ruler's attempts to dominate. The ruler (the person who controls) will use various methods which of course are different from others in terms of controlling a person or a group. Various methods are used to ensure the success of their power over the people who are controlled, so that they (the people who are controlled) recognize the existence of this power by accepting the presence of the system presented by the ruler. This is similar to Russell's explanation which states that power can take the form of wealth, military, civil authority and influence (Simanjuntak, 2001). These three models are characteristics of the form of power exercised.

Various conceptions of power began to be voiced by figures and experts in various scientific disciplines. Like Michel Foucault in his theory of power which says that power is not only exercised in prisons, but power also operates through social mechanisms built to guarantee knowledge, health and welfare (Haryatmoko, 2016). In other words, Foucault tries to lead a way of thinking about power which is generally identified with a form of oppression in prisons, where the police or prison guards have rights and power above the rights of prisoners, but power can also be exercised in social aspects, others in the name of social interests in general; such as welfare, health, justice, and so on.

A similar concept of power was also put forward by Antonio Gramsci in his theory called Hegemony. Gramsci's concept of power is similar to Foucault's concept of power. In Gramsci's hegemony, power is exercised by dominating various aspects and corners of the lives of the people being controlled through the help of moral and intellectual leadership which will give rise to a consensus from the party being dominated or controlled. Anom (2016) says that hegemony is a relationship of agreement through political leadership and ideology, so that a consensus is formed which means that the practice of power and domination exercised by the ruling party has positive implications, where the party being controlled or dominated accepts all forms of power practiced by the ruling party, and they of course they will admit that the authorities are a social group whose existence they must respect.

Hobbes and Locke (in Haryatmoko, 2016) emphasize that the existence or birth of power is not initiated by the practice of violence in social life, but rather by a series of actions that encourage other actions carried out through stimulation, seduction, coercion and prohibition. From this statement, a hypothesis can be drawn that power does not entirely stem from an act of violence against subordinates, but rather stems from a series of activities which are a stimulus for other activities that encourage the birth of power. Haryatmoko states that power is a complex strategy in social life with all forms of equipment, maneuvers, techniques and certain mechanisms (Haryatmoko, 2016).
Some of the aforementioned conceptions draw several portrays of the pattern of thinking about power. In Michel Foucault's concept of power, power is not only exercised repressively, but can also be exercised creatively and productively, namely through stimulation related to the formation of desires (Munti, 2005). This kind of thing goes hand in hand with Gramsci's concept of power, where power through domination will benefit those in power and will have positive implications for those who are controlled, even though these implications are not comprehensive. In other words, not all power practices carried out by those in power through domination seem comfortable for those who are controlled. There are several things or aspects that are still problems in the practice of power in Gramsci's conception of hegemony. As in interactional communication in rural Louisiana in the United States, where there are two kinds of tribes or races in that area: Blacks and Whites. Whites control and dominate aspects of black people's lives, but black people benefit from white people's domination, such as they have the opportunity to work in rice fields and/or plantations owned by white people for compensation.

From the explanation of the concept of power above, it can be concluded that power is often seen as something that is beneficial for those in power. With this characteristic, it can influence the way people view the process and impact or results of power which is also seen as a negative thing. Power, which was initially conceived as something that has non-equilibrium (unequal) goals, and can trigger the emergence of various critical paradigms in criticizing power that is practiced in various patterns and forms, will now be seen as something that also benefits those who are subjected to power. Therefore, this study tried to examine how far the power that existed in a communication culture in an institution controlled social interactions in that community in the view of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of power. However, in this case, power is seen as an arena where social relations and interactions occur between those in power and those who are controlled, but it will produce something that is also beneficial for those who are controlled. This means that power through the practice of domination carried out by those in power will have a positive impact on those who are controlled.

Pierre Bourdieu is a French thinker who is concerned with social space, especially the social structure of society and the changes that occur within it. The influence of the thoughts of Emile Zola and Jean Paul Sartre influences every social thought which aims to reveal the structure of economic domination and/or symbolic domination in a society. His thinking about social structure led him to the tradition of thinking about power as practiced in social life. His theory of structuration of power has been used quite often to reveal the meaning and domination behind a social movement. The concept of power developed by Pierre Bourdieu can be formulated as habitus, capital, arena, distinction, symbolic power and symbolic violence (Safitri et al., 2023).

The practice of power can occur in communication culture in the educational realm, such as in the inter-level communication culture at the English Institute, LPBA Nurul Jadid, is also visible. Even though power is identified with subjectivity which prioritizes personal profit and seems coercive (hard) and is closely related to politics. However, in the context of Bourdieu’s power, symbolic power will be seen as normal and something that absolutely must be followed, and will have a positive impact on the social groups subject to power.

Based on the background, this study was focused to identify aspects of symbolic power through the practices of habitus, capital, arena, and distinction in an inter-level interactive learning culture using Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power. This study communicated the integration of the concept of symbolic power with the English language learning context. The hope is that the concept of power is not always seen as something that is discriminatory, but needs to be seen as something that is innovative when used for certain interests and purposes - certainly those that are more mutually beneficial.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Habitus, Arena, Capital, and Distinction

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of power is a power paradigm that is often contested in various analyzes in several scientific disciplines. Bourdieu's view of power places power in the assumption that power is a cultural and symbolic form that is created and continuously legitimized through ongoing interactions between power agents and other supporting structures (Fiske et al., 2016). From this explanation, it can be said that Bourdieu views power as a cultural habit that is continuously validated in everyday life through a process of interaction between agents of power and supporting structures. Thus, the persistence of an act of power in a society is what Bourdieu calls a habitus.

Habitus is knowledge that refers to what becomes our routine every day (Vakalopoulos, 2022). Habitus is not only owned by one person, but can also be felt collectively in a community, so it can be said that habitus is a social world that is shared together. Wirawan (2016) stated further that habitus is the result of accumulated learning and socialization between individuals and groups, so that the influence of the past which is another form of habitus is considered as something natural and normal.

In carrying out a habitus, a field is needed where the habitus can operate. The term field in Bourdieu's theory of power is known as the Arena. Arena is a supporter of Bourdieu's conception of power. Arena tries to connect and stabilize the course of power in the form of habitus and capital. Bourdieu said that the arena is a place where the rulers or those in control struggle to exercise their power (Sjaf, 2014). The concept of arena initiated by Bourdieu strengthens the course of power and legitimacy regarding structured power, starting from habitus, capital and arena.

Apart from having an arena of power, the subject who controls it will have capital, which will be used as a tool, so that those who are controlled will be able to receive it. Capital and Habitus are very closely related in Bourdieu's Theory of Power. Because, with capital, habitus will work well, so that power can be exercised optimally. Definitively, capital is certainly a capital. However, if linked to Bourdieu's concept of power, capital can be defined as power capital exercised by the party in control (Nainggolan, 2016). More clearly, Bourdieu relates capital to the understanding that capital includes all goods that are material or symbolic, so that several categories of capital can be formulated which include economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital (Listiani et al., 2013; Vigerland & Borg, 2017).

Another effort in the success of power according to Bourdieu's view is the implementation of a distinction (Distinction). In the realm of Distinction, the behavior patterns of the dominant class usually differentiate themselves from small classes or other classes, so that by being able to differentiate them, labeling as an attempt to justify certain social groups in order to exercise power can be carried out truly. This act of differentiation allows the birth of different distances or spaces for communication or interaction and does not rule out the possibility of inequality in social relations (Haryatmoko, 2016).

2.2 Symbolic Power and the English Institute

Power cannot only be represented in one or two ways, but can be used in various ways according to the benchmark of power that you want to exercise. Symbolic power presents a different nuance, and is seen as a subtle and invisible form of power (Prastia & Suprijono, 2017). Symbolic power actually hides the imposition of domination into something that is accepted as something that is natural and should happen. Due to its unknown and intangible nature, the controlled party does not feel the action of control through an act of power. Almost not much different from the hegemony coined by Antonio Gramsci, with his concept of consensus hegemony which is also abstract in practice.

According to Bourdieu, symbolic power is used as a mechanism by elite groups in order to dominate the social structure, especially the lower classes, in order to impose a
habit in the form of ideology, culture, habits or lifestyle to be used and considered as a value by lower class groups. According to Bourdieu, symbolic power has a greater impact on the class or party being controlled than physical violence, because they tend to dominate and then blend with all forms of individual action and consciousness (Sukidin & Suharso, 2015).

The site of this study was English institute that applies student levels based on aspects of knowledge and language competence, which include Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced. Each level has its own linguistic scientific capacity which is of course different. The higher the level of a learner, the higher his linguistic knowledge will be, and he will have higher authority in his community. This language institute has a 24-hour learning system, so that teaching is not only carried out by teachers, but also by senior levels. The upper level (Upper Level) in fact has great responsibilities. The higher the level, the greater the responsibility.

With regard to the culture that exists in this Language Institute, this institution can maintain culture that has become a value from generation to generation, starting from the time this institution was founded until the time this study was conducted. The tutoring system is one of several cultures that can be seen at the locus of this study. The tutoring system is a learning activity where the upper level (Upper Level) provides direction, stimulus and knowledge to the lower level (Under Level). Tutoring is usually implemented by Intermediate and Advanced for Elementary.

In daily practice, Elementary becomes a center and separate group which is often subject to action by the levels above (Intermediate and Advanced). Elementary becomes an object of authority and/or law in this institution. Authority that is deliberately created by the top levels (Intermediate and Advanced). The upper level freely creates and establishes several regulations that are able to organize and control the world of inter-level communication. It is stated that Elementary is required to show its obedience to those at the upper levels. Every order and rule made must be carried out. If they violate, then punishment will be given by the upper level. In this way, the upper-level gains legitimacy for its dominance in communication and interaction practices within the institution, and Elementary accepts it as normal, even though in essence they do not really like this phenomenon. However, in essence, they must comply with the rules and norms created as an Elementary.

3. METHODS

This study was a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach. The approach was intended to understand a phenomenon based on the experience of particular subject (Guillen, 2019), along with a description of the theory that underlies the occurrence of these social phenomena, so that the data collection technique was carried out in the form of in-depth interviews with alumni at this institution. The focus of this study was from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu’s power. The analysis was carried out by involving Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of power against the locus – LPBA Nurul Jadid.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Habitus, Arena, Capital, and Distinction in English Institution

Educational institutions seem to be showing a new face that we can recognize in their daily lives. Educational institutions, which were initially known as institutions that have normative systems and norms, in fact contain an element of power when viewed from a critical theory perspective. Life in an educational institution cannot be separated from the culture that builds it, so that it is able to survive. The power that is exercised in an educational institution is power that is not known and it is not felt that it is truly a
mechanism of power that is operating. As in the case of the culture of communication and interaction in an institution, language also gives the impression of symbolic violence that is visible to human view.

Habitus is one of the components of power in Bourdieu's theory. In a culture, a social structure carries out a habitus in its power strategy over other social structures. In the case of the English institute, habitus is the habits and habituation processes that exist in the life of the English institute. The existence of habitus, of course, has its own goals for the dominant and powerful class. In this case, the dominant or powerful class in the English institution makes the Sub-ordinate (in this case Elementary) not feel the symbolic violence that is practiced in their daily culture of communication and interaction. Symbolic violence exists because of the existence of a social structure in the culture of communication and interaction that regulates it.

Habitus in this English institution takes the form of cultural activities and practices in daily life. Bourdieu states that habitus is a dispositional system of agency that lasts a long time and can be transferred through socialization or education (Mukarom, 2020). In its relevance to English language institutions, habitus is described as an awareness possessed by each level in the institution. This awareness means that they are a group of English learners who are differentiated or classified based on their level of knowledge and learning process, so that the Elementary level concept is understood as new learners accepted into the institution who will be sharpened and guided to master English by the upper level.

Meanwhile, Intermediate and Advanced are two levels that have equivalent knowledge and social status. However, these two levels are differentiated not only based on scientific level, but also the length of education at the institution. The Intermediate and Advance have high authority and policy over Elementary in everyday life. They can carry out and build a system and rules that Elementary must obey and carry out. Thus, this kind of thinking leads to habitus, where Elementary will be positioned as a social group that is the object of rules and systems created by the upper level.

Meanwhile, another concept in Bourdieu’s thinking about power is capital. Bourdieu groups capital into four types, namely economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital (Haryatmoko, 2010). In this case, the capital in this English language institution is in the form of cultural capital in the form of knowledge possessed by the Upper Level (Intermediate and Advanced). Capital, in Bourdieu's concept of power, linguistically means a capital – means of doing something. Capital used by power actors in the practice of their power over those controlled. Capital indirectly symbolizes a method or provision that power actors have in order to succeed in their power. Capital is closely related to the concept of habitus, where the ideology contained in a habitus can be used as capital for the dominant class to exercise its power over the lower classes. Thus, the scientific capital owned by the upper level will be used as a medium for their domination and power over the Elementary group.

Apart from habitus and capital, Bourdieu also put forward the concept of Distinction. Distinction is an effort where the dominant class will show its difference from other classes (Piroddi, 2022). The form of distinction in this English language institution is that there are distinctions based on the knowledge they have, namely Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced. This English Institute forms a learning pattern that is adapted to existing levels. These levels indicate the differences (especially in terms of knowledge) that are owned and obtained from the English language institution. The knowledge possessed by Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced is very different, due to the scientific composition and scientific capacity of each level.

Bourdieu’s components of power, which include habitus, arena, capital, and distinction, have a relationship that is bound to one another. These four components of power play a role in the success and achievement of the goals of power and domination of
a social group. Besides, these four components will provide a space for the implementation of a form of symbolic domination that contains an element of power.

4.2 Mechanisms for the Formation of Symbolic Dominance through Habitus, Arena, Capital, and Distinction in English Institution

Violence is actually always identified with a form of physical activity that harms someone. Violence is seen as a harsh practice, especially in plays of control. However, the birth of a new paradigm regarding symbolic violence, at least provides a new picture and perspective on power exercised through violence. Symbolic violence invites us to see violence that is not practiced through physical contact, but violence that is carried out subtly and invisibly to achieve power (Muri’ah & Giano, 2020). In Bourdieu’s view, as quoted by Haryatmoko (2016), it is said that symbolic violence is a model of violence that is invisible and which is not felt and is not seen as violence by the victims, but is seen and felt as something natural and normal for them to experience.

Bourdieu’s project on symbolic violence brings a discourse of violence into another dimension. Dimensions that must be realized and understood in the corridors of science. Symbolic domination invites us to understand how the ruling class exercises its power by carrying out several attempts at control. Symbolic domination also provides an illustration of how power operates and what its implications are for the group being controlled. In Bourdieu’s symbolic domination, this domination is seen as an attempt at power by the dominant group (Maretha, 2018). The controlled group unconsciously accepts the domination and power of the dominant group by considering it normal.

Symbolic domination is formed through the mechanisms of Bourdieu’s concept of power regarding habitus, capital, arena and distinction. These four concepts come together and carry out an objective relationship with each other to form a discourse on symbolic domination. The habitus contained in the English language institution plays an important role in the power project of the upper level towards the lower level. Thinking about their identity (Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced) as well as what is mandatory for them to do and not to do in the English language institution, becomes capital for the dominant class to dominate the subordinate class by carrying out and maintaining the existing habitus.

Indirectly, with the idea of Elementary as a level that should be used as an object in all activities in the English language institution, structuring them to be different and become objects of power. NAA – as an informant and also an alumni of this institution said that this institution was an institution that operated a seniority system, where there were regulations that were made specifically for Elementary. If one of them was proven to have violated these rules, then he would be punished according to the form of the violation they committed. She also added that there would not be a protest, because there were sanctions waiting when a protest in the form of resistance was raised. Certainly, they did not dare to fight back, because on the one hand, they were given guidance in English every day and all the time. This phenomenon has become capital in the dominant class project in this institution. They relied on their culture and scientific status in controlling Elementary at the institution.

The power project of the dominant group in this institution cannot be separated from the role of a system that has been built for a long time. The system built is a cultural system which explains that every new comer (Elementary) is an initial period where individuals will face a learning process and a binding culture. They will be guided and coached directly by their upper level. Initially, they will be given an introduction to the culture that applies at the institution. They inevitably have to follow the prevailing culture. The role of the management structure of this institution which includes teachers is very important in strengthening the existing culture and rules.
Borrowing Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, domination is exercised through moral and intellectual leadership. Hardiman (2010) says that moral and intellectual leadership will in turn generate support and approval in the hegemonic group, so that the dominance of the upper group (upper level) over Elementary will be accepted and approved by Elementary. The management of this institution has agreed on the culture and system that is implemented in this institution. The management also knows about the rules that have been made which place Elementary as a social group subject to power which leads to symbolic domination. Symbolic domination means that the domination exercised by upper social groups (upper level) is unconsciously considered and accepted as normal by Elementary. Precisely, this symbolic domination cannot be separated from the consequences that will be faced by those who violate these rules. Punishment is a consequence that must be faced in every violation, and of course this punishment strengthens the domination that is carried out, and will indirectly make the dominated group unable to do anything other than accept it as hidden and agreed violence.

Figure 1. Roadmap of power in the study site

5. CONCLUSION

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of power makes quite a contribution to the understanding of power in a cultural context, even culture in an educational institution. A series of power mechanisms which include Habitus, Capital, Distinction, and Arena can be found in a non-formal educational institution, such as the English language institution which is the object of this article. The symbolic power contained in the cultural activities of this institution apparently indirectly represents Bourdieu’s four mechanisms of power. These four concepts come together to create a culture and system that is able to organize and direct the group below it, namely Elementary. Cultural capital which was used as a guideline by upper social groups was able to create a habitus in the Elementary mindset. This habitus was constructed from the first time the Elementary entered the institution. They were presented with a guideline that they must follow. Also, they were presented with a paradigm that they were different from their upper levels in terms of knowledge, education, age and length of study. Finally, the upper level was able to create symbolic power through Pierre Bourdieu’s four mechanisms of power.
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