different regions cease to be incommensurable particularisms. Measured de facto against the single standard of the 'common' language, they are found wanting and cast into the outer darkness of regionalisms, the 'corrupt expressions and mispronunciations' which schoolmasters decry. Reduced to the status of quaint or vulgar jargons, in either case unsuitable for formal occasions, popular uses of the official language undergo a systematic devaluation. A system of sociologically pertinent linguistic oppositions tends to be constituted, which has nothing in common with the system of linguistically pertinent linguistic oppositions. In other words, the differences which emerge from the confrontation of speech varieties are not reducible to those the linguist constructs in terms of his own criterion of pertinence. However great the proportion of the functioning of a language that is not subject to variation, there exists, in the area of pronunciation, diction and even grammar, a whole set of differences significantly associated with social differences which, though negligible in the eyes of the linguist, are pertinent from the sociologist's standpoint because they belong to a system of linguistic oppositions which is the re-translation of a system of social differences. A structural sociology of language inspired by Sausure but constructed in opposition to the abstraction he imposes, must take as its object the relationship between the structured systems of sociologically pertinent linguistic differences and the equally structured systems of social differences.

The social uses of language owe their specifically social value to the fact that they tend to be organized in systems of differences (between prosodic and articulatory or lexical and syntactic variants) which reproduce, in the symbolic order of differential deviations, the system of social differences. To speak is to appropriate one or other of the expressive styles already constituted in and through usage and objectively marked by their position in a hierarchy of styles which expresses the hierarchy of corresponding social groups. These styles, systems of differences which are both classified and classifying, ranked and ranking, mark those who appropriate them. And a spontaneous stylistics, armed with a practical sense of the equivalences between the two orders of differences, apprehends social classes through classes of stylistic indices.

In emphasizing the linguistically pertinent constants at the expense of the sociologically significant variations in order to construct that artefact which is the 'common' language, the linguist proceeds as if the capacity to speak, which is virtually universal, could be identified with the socially conditioned way of realizing this natural capacity, which presents as many variants as there are social conditions of acquisition. The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be listened to, likely to be recognized as acceptable in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak. Here, again, social acceptability is not reducible to mere grammaticality. Speakers lacking the legitimate competence are de facto excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence. What is rare, then, is not the capacity to speak, which, being part of our biological heritage, is universal and therefore essentially non-discriminative, but rather the competence necessary in order to speak the legitimate language which, depending on social inheritance, re-translates social distinctions into the specifically symbolic logic of differential deviations, or, in short, distinction.

The constitution of a linguistic market creates the conditions for an objective competition in and through which the legitimate competence can function as linguistic capital, producing a profit of distinction on the occasion of each social exchange. Because it derives in part from the scarcity of the products (and of the corresponding competences), this profit does not correspond solely to the cost of training.

The cost of training is not a simple, socially neutral notion. To an extent which varies depending on national traditions in education, the historical period and the academic discipline in question, it includes expenditure which may far exceed the minimum technically required in order to ensure the transmission of the strictly defined competence (if indeed it is possible to give a purely technical definition of the training necessary and sufficient to fulfil a function and of the function itself, bearing in mind that 'role distance'—distance from the function—enters increasingly into the definition of the function as one moves up the hierarchy of functions). In some cases, for example, the duration of study (which provides a good measure of the economic cost of training) tends to be valued for its own sake, independently of the result it produces (encouraging, among the 'elite schools', a kind of competition in the sheer length of courses). In other cases—not that the two options are mutually exclusive—the social quality of the competence acquired, which is reflected in the symbolic modalities of practices, i.e. in the manner of performing technical acts and implementing the competence, appears inseparable from the slowness of the acquisition, short or 'crash' courses always being suspected of leaving on their products the marks of 'cramping' or the stigmatas of 'catching up'. This conspicuous consumption of training (i.e.
of time), an apparent technical wastage which fulfills social functions of legitimation, enters into the value socially attributed to a socially guaranteed competence (which means, nowadays, one ‘certified’ by the educational system).

Since the profit of distinction results from the fact that the supply of products (or speakers) corresponding to a given level of linguistic (or, more generally, cultural) qualification is lower than it would be if all speakers had benefited from the conditions of acquisition of the legitimate competence to the same extent as the holders of the rarest competence, it is logically distributed as a function of the chances of access to these conditions, that is, as a function of the position occupied in the social structure.

Despite certain appearances, we could not be further from the Saussurian model of *homo linguisticus* who, like the economic subject in the Walrasian tradition, is formally free to do as he likes in his verbal productions (free, for example, to say ‘tat’ for ‘hat’, as children do) but can be understood, can exchange and communicate only on condition that he conforms to the rules of the common code. This market, which knows only pure, perfect competition among agents who are as interchangeable as the products they exchange and the ‘situations’ in which they exchange, and who are all identically subject to the principle of the maximization of informative efficiency (analogous to the principle of the maximization of utilities), is, as will shortly become clearer, as remote from the real linguistic market as the ‘pure’ market of the economists is from the real economic market, with its monopolies and oligopolies.

Added to the specific effect of distinctive rarity is the fact that, by virtue of the relationship between the system of linguistic differences and the system of economic and social differences, one is dealing not with a relativistic universe of differences capable of relativizing one another, but with a hierarchical universe of deviations with respect to a form of speech that is (virtually) universally recognized as legitimate, i.e. as the standard measure of the value of linguistic products. The dominant competence functions as linguistic capital, securing a profit of distinction in its relation to other competences only in so far as certain conditions (the unification of the market and the unequal distribution of the chances of access to the means of production of the legitimate competence, and to the legitimate places of expression) are continuously fulfilled, so that the groups which possess that competence are able to impose it as the only legitimate one in the formal markets (the fashionable, educational, political and administrative markets) and in most of the linguistic interactions in which they are involved. It is for this reason that those who seek to defend a threatened linguistic capital, such as knowledge of the classical languages in present-day France, are obliged to wage a total struggle. One cannot save the value of a competence unless one saves the market, in other words, the whole set of political and social conditions of production of the producers/consumers. The defenders of Latin or, in other contexts, of French or Arabic, often talk as if the language they favour could have some value outside the market, by intrinsic virtues such as its ‘logical’ qualities; but, in practice, they are defending the market. The position which the educational system gives to the different languages (or the different cultural contents) is such an important issue only because this institution has the monopoly in the large-scale production of producers/consumers, and therefore in the reproduction of the market without which the social value of the linguistic competence, its capacity to function as linguistic capital, would cease to exist.

**The Literary Field and the Struggle for Linguistic Authority**

Thus, through the medium of the structure of the linguistic field, conceived as a system of specifically linguistic relations of power based on the unequal distribution of linguistic capital (or, to put it another way, of the chances of assimilating the objectified linguistic resources), the structure of the space of expressive styles reproduces in its own terms the structure of the differences which objectively separate conditions of existence. In order fully to understand the structure of this field and, in particular, the existence, within the field of linguistic production, of a sub-field of restricted production which derives its fundamental properties from the fact that the producers within it produce first and foremost for other producers, it is necessary to distinguish between the capital necessary for the simple production of more or less legitimate ordinary speech, on the one hand, and the capital of instruments of expression (presupposing appropriation of the resources deposited in objectified form in libraries – books, and in particular in the ‘classics’, grammars and dictionaries) which is needed to produce a written discourse worthy of being published, that is to say, made official, on the other. This production of instruments of production, such as rhetorical devices,
genres, legitimate styles and manners and, more generally, all the formulations destined to be 'authoritative' and to be cited as examples of 'good usage', confers on those who engage in it a power over language and thereby over the ordinary users of language, as well as over their capital. The legitimate language no more contains within itself the power to ensure its own perpetuation in time than it has the power to define its extension in space. Only the process of continuous creation, which occurs through the unceasing struggles between the different authorities who compete within the field of specialized production for the monopolistic power to impose the legitimate mode of expression, can ensure the permanence of the legitimate language and of its value, that is, of the recognition accorded to it. It is one of the generic properties of fields that the struggle for specific stakes masks the objective collusion concerning the principles underlying the game. More precisely, the struggle tends constantly to produce and reproduce the game and its stakes by reproducing, primarily in those who are directly involved, but not in them alone, the practical commitment to the value of the game and its stakes which defines the recognition of legitimacy. What would become of the literary world if one began to argue, not about the value of this or that author's style, but about the value of arguments about style? The game is over when people start wondering if the cake is worth the candle. The struggles among writers over the legitimate art of writing contribute, through their very existence, to producing both the legitimate language, defined by its distance from the 'common' language, and belief in its legitimacy.

It is not a question of the symbolic power which writers, grammarians or teachers may exert over the language in their personal capacity, and which is no doubt much more limited than the power they can exert over culture (for example, by imposing a new definition of legitimate literature which may transform the 'market situation'). Rather, it is a question of the contribution they make, independently of any intentional pursuit of distinction, to the production, consecration and imposition of a distinct and distinctive language. In the collective labour which is pursued through the struggles for what Horace called *arbitrium et jus et norma loquendi*, writers – more or less authorized authors – have to reckon with the grammarians, who hold the monopoly of the consecration and canonization of legitimate writers and writing. They play their part in constructing the legitimate language by selecting, from among the products on offer, those which seem to them worthy of being consecrated and incorporated into the legitimate competence through educational inculcation, subjecting them, for this purpose, to a process of normalization and codification intended to render them consciously assimilable and therefore easily reproducible. The grammarians, who, for their part, may find allies among establishment writers and in the academies, and who take upon themselves the power to set up and impose norms, tend to consecrate and codify a particular use of language by rationalizing it and 'giving reason' to it. In so doing they help to determine the value which the linguistic products of the different users of the language will receive in the different markets – particularly those most directly subject to their control, such as the educational market – by delimiting the universe of acceptable pronunciations, words or expressions, and fixing a language censored and purged of all popular usages, particularly the most recent ones. The variations corresponding to the different configurations of the relation of power between the authorities, who constantly clash in the field of literary production by appealing to very different principles of legitimation, cannot disguise the structural invariants which, in the most diverse historical situations, impel the protagonists to resort to the same strategies and the same arguments in order to assert and legitimate their right to legitimate on language and in order to denounce the claims of their rivals. Thus, against the 'fine style' of high society and the writers' claim to possess an instinctive art of good usage, the grammarians always invoke 'reasoned usage', the 'feel for the language' which comes from knowledge of the principles of 'reason' and 'taste' which constitute grammar. Conversely, the writers, whose pretensions were most confidently expressed during the Romantic period, invoke genius against the rule, flouting the injunctions of those whom Hugo disdainfully called 'grammattists'.

The objective dispossession of the dominated classes may never be intended as such by any of the actors engaged in literary struggles (and there have, of course, always been writers who, like Hugo, claimed to 'revolutionize dictionaries' or who sought to mimic popular speech). The fact remains that this dispossession is inseparable from the existence of a body of professionals, objectively invested with the monopoly of the legitimate use of the legitimate language, who produce for their own use a special language predisposed to fulfill, as a by-product, a social function of distinction in the relations between classes and in the struggles they wage on the terrain of language. It is not unconnected, moreover, with the existence of the educational system which, charged with the task of sanctioning heretical products in the name of grammar and inculcating the specific norms which block the effects of the laws of evolution, contributes significantly to constituting the dominated
uses of language as such by consecrating the dominant use as the only legitimate one, by the mere fact of inculcating it. But one would obviously be missing the essential point if one related the activity of artists or teachers directly to the effect to which it objectively contributes, namely, the devaluation of the common language which results from the very existence of a literary language. Those who operate in the literary field contribute to symbolic domination only because the effects that their position in the field and its associated interests lead them to pursue always conceal from themselves and from others the external effects which are a by-product of this very misrecognition.

The properties which characterize linguistic excellence may be summed up in two words: distinction and correctness. The work performed in the literary field produces the appearances of an original language by resorting to a set of derivations whose common principle is that of a deviation from the most frequent, i.e. 'common', 'ordinary', 'vulgar', usages. Value always arises from deviation, *deliberate or not*, with respect to the most widespread usage, 'commonplaces', 'ordinary sentiments', 'trivial' phrases, 'vulgar' expressions, 'facile' style. In the uses of language as in life-styles, all definition is relational. Language that is 'recherché', 'well chosen', 'elevated', 'lofty', 'dignified' or 'distinguished' contains a negative reference (the very words used to name it show this) to 'common' 'everyday', 'ordinary', 'spoken', 'colloquial', 'familiar' language and, beyond this, to 'popular', 'crude', 'coarse', 'vulgar', 'sloppy', 'loose', 'trivial', 'uncouth' language (not to mention the unspeakable, 'gibberish', 'pidgin' or 'slang'). The oppositions from which this series is generated, and which, being derived from the legitimate language, is organized from the standpoint of the dominant users, can be reduced to two: the opposition between 'distinguished' and 'vulgar' (or 'rare' and 'common') and the opposition between 'tense' (or 'sustained') and 'relaxed' (or 'loose'), which no doubt represents the specifically linguistic version of the first, very general, opposition. It is as if the principle behind the ranking of class languages were nothing other than the degree of control they manifested and the intensity of the *correctness* they presupposed.

It follows that the legitimate language is a semi-artificial language which has to be sustained by a permanent effort of correction, a task which falls both to institutions specially designed for this purpose and to individual speakers. Through its gramarians, who fix and codify legitimate usage, and its teachers who impose and inculcate it through innumerable acts of correction, the educational system tends, in this area as elsewhere, to produce the need for its own services and its own products, i.e. the labour and instruments of correction. The legitimate language owes its (relative) constancy in time (as in space) to the fact that it is continuously protected by a prolonged labour of inculcation against the inclination towards the economy of effort and tension which leads, for example, to analogical simplification (e.g. of irregular verbs in French — *vous faites* and *vous dites*). Moreover, the correct, i.e. corrected, expression owes the essential part of its social properties to the fact that it can be produced only by speakers possessing practical mastery of scholarly rules, explicitly constituted by a process of codification and expressly inculcated through pedagogic work. Indeed, the paradox of all institutionalized pedagogy is that it aims to implant, as schemes that function in a practical state, rules which grammarians have laboured to extract from the practice of the professionals of written expression (from the past), by a process of retrospective formulation and codification. 'Correct usage' is the product of a competence which is an *incorporated grammar*, the word grammar being used explicitly (and not tacitly, as it is by the linguists) in its true sense of a system of scholarly rules, derived ex *post facto* from expressed discourse and set up as imperative norms for discourse yet to be expressed. It follows that one cannot fully account for the properties and social effects of the legitimate language unless one takes account, not only of the social conditions of the production of literary language and its grammar, but also of the social conditions in which this scholarly code is imposed and inculcated as the principle of the production and evaluation of speech.

### The Dynamics of the Linguistic Field

The laws of the transmission of linguistic capital are a particular case of the laws of the legitimate transmission of cultural capital between the generations, and it may therefore be posited that the linguistic competence measured by academic criteria depends, like the other dimensions of cultural capital, on the level of education (measured in terms of qualifications obtained) and on the social trajectory. Since mastery of the legitimate language may be acquired through familiarization, that is, by more or less prolonged exposure to the legitimate language, or through the deliberate inculcation of explicit rules, the major classes of modes of expression correspond to classes...
of modes of acquisition, that is, to different forms of the combination between the two principal factors of production of the legitimate competence, namely, the family and the educational system.

In this sense, like the sociology of culture, the sociology of language is logically inseparable from a sociology of education. As a linguistic market strictly subject to the verdicts of the guardians of legitimate culture, the educational market is strictly dominated by the linguistic products of the dominant class and tends to sanctify the pre-existing differences in capital. The combined effect of low cultural capital and the associated low propensity to increase it through educational investment condemns the least favoured classes to the negative sanctions of the scholastic market, i.e. exclusion or early self-exclusion induced by lack of success. The initial disparities therefore tend to be reproduced since the length of inculcation tends to vary with its efficiency: those least inclined and least able to accept and adopt the language of the school are also those exposed for the shortest time to this language and to educational monitoring, correction and sanction.

Given that the educational system possesses the delegated authority necessary to engage in a universal process of durable inculcation in matters of language, and given that it tends to vary the duration and intensity of this inculation in proportion to inherited cultural capital, it follows that the social mechanisms of cultural transmission tend to reproduce the structural disparity between the very unequal knowledge of the legitimate language and the much more uniform recognition of this language. This disparity is one of the determinant factors in the dynamics of the linguistic field and therefore in changes in the language. For the linguistic struggles which are the ultimate source of these changes presuppose that speakers have virtually the same recognition of authorized usage, but very unequal knowledge of this usage. Thus, if the linguistic strategies of the petite bourgeoisie, and in particular its tendency to hypercorrection – a very typical expression of 'cultural goodwill' which is manifested in all areas of practice – have sometimes been seen as the main factor in linguistic change, this is because the disparity between knowledge and recognition, between aspirations and the means of satisfying them – a disparity that generates tension and pretension – is greatest in the intermediate regions of the social space. This pretension, a recognition of distinction which is revealed in the very effort to deny it by appropriating it, introduces a permanent pressure into the field of competition which inevitably induces new strategies of distinction on the part of the holders of distinctive marks that are socially recognized as distinguished.

The petit-bourgeois hypercorrection which seeks its models and instruments of correction from the most consecrated arbiters of legitimate usage – Academicians, grammarians, teachers – is defined in the subjective and objective relationship to popular 'vulgarity' and bourgeois 'distinction'. Consequently, the contribution which this striving for assimilation (to the bourgeois classes) and, at the same time, dissimulation (with respect to the lower classes) makes to linguistic change is simply more visible than the dissimulation strategies which, in turn, provokes from the holders of a rarer competence. Conscious or unconscious avoidance of the most visible marks of the linguistic tension and exertion of petit-bourgeois speakers (for example, in French, spoken use of the past historic, associated with old-fashioned schoolmasters) can lead the bourgeois and the intellectuals towards the controlled hypocorrection which combines confident relaxation and lofty ignorance of pedantic rules with the exhibition of ease on the most dangerous ground. 26 Showing tension where the ordinary speaker succumbs to relaxation, facility where he betrays effort, and the ease in tension which differs utterly from petit-bourgeois or popular tension and ease: these are all strategies of distinction (for the most part unconscious) giving rise to endless refinements, with constant reversals of value which tend to discourage the search for non-relational properties of linguistic styles.

Thus, in order to account for the new style of speaking adopted by intellectuals, which can be observed in America as well as in France – a somewhat hesitant, even faltering, interrogative manner ('nort?', 'right?', 'OK?' etc.) – one would have to take into account the whole structure of usages in relation to which it is differentially defined. On the one hand, there is the old academic manner (with – in French – its long periods, imperfect subjunctives, etc.), associated with a devalued image of the professorial role; on the other, the new petit-bourgeois usages resulting from wider diffusion of scholarly usage and ranging from 'liberated' usage, a blend of tension and relaxation which tends to characterize the new petite bourgeoisie, to the hypercorrection of an over-refined speech, immediately devalued by an all-too-visible-ambition, which is the mark of the upwardly mobile petite bourgeoisie.

The fact that these distinctive practices can be understood only in relation to the universe of possible practices does not mean that they have to be traced back to a conscious concern to distinguish oneself from them. There is every reason to believe that they are rooted in a practical sense of the rarity of distinctive marks (linguistic or otherwise) and of its evolution over time. Words which become
popularized lose their discriminatory power and thereby tend to be perceived as intrinsically banal, common, facile— or (since diffusion is linked to time) as worn out. It is no doubt the weariness deriving from repeated exposure which, combined with the sense of rarity, gives rise to the unconscious drift towards more ‘distinguished’ stylistic features or towards rarer usages of common features.

Thus distinctive deviations are the driving force of the unceasing movement which, though intended to annul them, tends in fact to reproduce them (a paradox which is in no way surprising once one realizes that constancy may presuppose change). Not only do the strategies of assimilation and dissimilation which underlie the changes in the different uses of language not affect the structure of the distribution of different uses of language, and consequently the system of the systems of distinctive deviations (expressive styles) in which those uses are manifested, but they tend to reproduce it (albeit in a superficially different form). Since the very motor of change is nothing less than the whole linguistic field or, more precisely, the whole set of actions and reactions which are continuously generated in the universe of competitive relations constituting the field, the centre of this perpetual movement is everywhere and nowhere.

Those who remain trapped in a philosophy of cultural diffusion based on a hydraulic imagery of ‘two-step flow’ or ‘trickle-down’, and who persist in locating the principle of change in a determinate site in the linguistic field, will always be greatly disappointed. What is described as a phenomenon of diffusion is nothing other than the process resulting from the competitive struggle which leads each agent, through countless strategies of assimilation and dissimilation (vis-à-vis those who are ahead of and behind him in the social space and in time) constantly to change his substantial properties (here, pronunciation, diction, syntactic devices, etc.), while maintaining, precisely by running in the race, the disparity which underlies the race. This structural constancy of the social values of the uses of the legitimate language becomes intelligible when one knows that the logic and the aims of the strategies seeking to modify it are governed by the structure itself, through the position occupied in the structure by the agent who performs them. The ‘interactionist’ approach, which fails to go beyond the actions and reactions apprehended in their directly visible immediacy, is unable to discover that the different agents’ linguistic strategies are strictly dependent on their positions in the structure of the distribution of linguistic capital, which can in turn be shown to depend, via the structure of chances of access to the educational system, on the structure of class relations.

Hence, interactionism can know nothing of the deep mechanisms which, through surface changes, tend to reproduce the structure of distinctive deviations and to maintain the profits accruing to those who possess a rare and therefore distinctive competence.