

Abstract

Pierre Bourdieu is a French social thinker, sociologist and anthropologist who proposed a theory of practice in the early 1970s. This thesis is a study of "habitus", the key concept of his theory of practice, in the context of the development of anthropological theories.

Bourdieu divides anthropological theories into two types. The first one, oriented towards objectivism, considers outside structures as determinants of human behaviours and actions. The other one is oriented towards subjectivism and considers actors as independent from structures and determine structures. For Bourdieu, habitus represents one kind of abstract structure in the human body. Habitus is both structured structures and structuring structures, that is, on the one hand, it is structured by outside structures such as social structure, economic structure, language structure etc., on the other hand, it structures human practice. Therefore, habitus is the inner structure which shows that whereas human beings are determined by outside structures, they also determine their own practices.

This thesis describes structural-functionalism, structuralism and Marxism as examples of anthropological theories believing in the determination of outside structures; and ethnomethodology to represent anthropological theory believing in independence of actors. It then shows how Bourdieu argues with these theories through his concept of habitus.

Significantly, "habitus" indicates that there is a kind of knowledge which is learned by the human body, but this kind of knowledge is neglected by most intellectuals and anthropologists.