



'SYMBOLIC POWER' IN THE OFFICIAL COVID-19 FIELD AND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The covid-19 pandemic caused countries around the globe to take measures, and to construct a specific set of language to talk about the virus. The present discussion paper aims to unpack this language based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of 'symbolic power', and social observations. The analysis indicates that the covid-19 field was formulated where an official language was produced, including scientific, war, enforcement and censorship linguistic practices. The paper discusses why there is not one covid-19 field and linguistic practice, causing a diversity of understanding the pandemic. The paper opens new directions in studies of language on public health threats.

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Introduction

A new coronavirus, named as SARS-CoV-2 resulting in covid-19 disease, was identified in China in November 2019 and ever since it spread all around the globe. At the time this article was submitted, about 250 million people had contracted the virus and more than five million had died. At the beginning of 2020, a few countries which faced the consequences of the virus first started taking measures which were later implemented in many more countries affected by covid-19, which was declared a pandemic by WHO in March 2020. The measures that most countries took were quite quick and stringent and they involved bans, lockdowns, physical distancing, closure of services, and others. The presented aim at a global level was to control the spread of the virus, protect the vulnerable groups (i.e., the chronically ill and the elderly) and safeguard the health care systems from work overloads. Governments recruited scientists, such as epidemiologists, immunologists, virologists, biologists, and medical doctors to consult and made decisions about how the spread of covid-19 should be managed. Therefore, the global approach was to control covid-19 by monitoring the population based on expert opinion. In order to achieve this, governments needed a specific official language to describe the situation to the people and guide them through the measures necessary for controlling the spread of the virus.

The language or discursive representation of infectious diseases is not new in the published literature (Mabhala et al, 2020; Kothari, 2016; Lean, 2007; Wallis and Nerlich, 2005). For example, Mabhala et al.'s (2020) critical discourse analysis focused on how infectious diseases, such as emerging infectious diseases (e.g., Ebola, coronavirus diseases), neglected tropical diseases (e.g., Trachoma, Leprosy) and vector-borne infections (e.g., Rift Valley fever, Lyme disease) were represented in the literature. The study showed that the dominant discourse encompassed "heroes" and "victims" working against the "enemy" (the disease). The authors highlighted the need that the discourse on infectious diseases should aim more at targeting social inequalities and ways for reducing infection among vulnerable groups.

Along the lines of Mabhala et al.'s conclusion about the dominant discourse, it seems that the war metaphor has been quite common in the discursive representation on infectious diseases by media sources. More specifically, Lean's (2007) critical discursive analysis of how the international TIME magazine portrayed AIDS between 1983 and 2005 showed that AIDS was equated with death, fear, and contagion. AIDS was also linked with immorality because it was infected primarily through sexual intercourse, and with stigma and marginalized people. Kothari's (2016) analysis of media language about AIDS in Tanzania revealed a similar metaphor of war and the battle against the enemy. Interestingly, Wallis and Nerlich (2005) study of SARS's (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) representation in the UK media indicated a different direction than the one identified in AIDS discourses. That is, the dominant metaphor was not that of war, although it encompassed elements of warfare, such as fight and killer. SARS was largely presented as an autonomous entity. The authors attributed the absence of a strong war metaphor in the UK media to the lack of familiarity with the condition and with its epidemic nature. Such conclusion was further reinforced by other words used by the UK media to describe SARS such as "superbug," "super-disease" and "superflu." Moodley and Lesage's (2020) study of Ebola discourses in South African newspapers between 2014-15 revealed that Ebola was portrayed as a threat to humanity, a predator, an invading entity, and fabricated. Moodley and Lesage explained that although South Africa was not at high risk of Ebola infection, such media discourses caused fear to people and overshadowed problems in health-risk communication and management. In line with Moodley and Lesage's conclusion on overshadowing governmental weaknesses, a study of the representation of avian influenza (2011) in Chinese media indicated the intersection of the media with government for a gradual construction of discourse, starting with reassuring messages and gradually incorporating words such as, "threat" or "deadly." However, these messages were largely referring to areas outside China, while domestic discourses focused more on government's competence to control the virus.

Considering the attention on discursive representation of infectious diseases, it would be interesting to discuss how covid-19, a new virus and pandemic, has been officially talked about. The production of official language during the covid-19 pandemic reflects Pierre Bourdieu's theory of language and symbolic

power (Bourdieu, 2000; 1991; 1990; 1984), which constitutes the main focus of this paper. Before I describe in more detail the conceptual framework of the paper, it is imperative to briefly discuss how the covid-19 pandemic and Bourdieu's work captured the attention of other researchers and academics. For example, Graham (2020) used Bourdieu's term *hysteresis* to understand the implications of a disrupted field and habitus caused by covid-19. More specifically, Graham discussed changes in workplaces and the change from work environment to online work from home, social inequalities, and diversity. Graham pointed out the importance of studying the changes occurred in people's lives due to the covid-19 pandemic. Bourdieu's term *habitus* was the basis of Blume's (2020) study of the reasons why German teachers were not well prepared for a change in digitizing education. Another Bourdieu's term, *social capital*, has been explored in relation to covid-19. That is, Bian et al. (2020) and Wu (2020) concluded that enhanced social capital was associated with better compliance with covid-19 measures and improved quality of life.

Reflecting the wealth of research in the discursive representation of infectious diseases, the use of some Bourdieu's concepts in covid-19 studies, and Graham's call for more inquiry into the implications of the covid-19 pandemic, this paper aims to relate Bourdieu's theory to the official covid-19 language based on social observations and opportunistic ethnography and open new directions in research. To the best of my knowledge, Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic power and language has not yet been used to discuss how covid-19 has been talked about at a global level. It is not under the scope of the paper to present or apply Bourdieu's theory in detail or unpack its various terms or to evaluate and criticize the official responses to covid-19. Also, the paper does not aim to discuss the diverse official responses across the countries but to explain the overarching covid-19 linguistic practice in relation to Bourdieu's theory. The analysis in this paper should not be understood as accusatory to politicians, scientists, and the media in terms of the language they have used to present covid-19. Instead, it aims to discuss how language can be used as a tool to help governments create meaning around covid-19 and exercise power so that people apply the appropriate measures to meet the target of controlling the spread of the virus and protecting the vulnerable groups in society. Before analyzing the production of official covid-19 language, I discuss below the conceptual and empirical framework of the paper.

Conceptual and empirical framework

This is a theoretical and discussion paper and not a research article. The framework for the analysis in this paper consists of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power and social observations. Bourdieu's theory was read multiple times to extract several key words, which would be for understanding social observations. For example, symbolic power, discourse, language, habitus, field, capital, censorship and so forth. These words were used for deductively organizing (Green and Thorogood, 2018; Bowling, 2014; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) social observations regarding covid-19 between February 2020 and January 2021 when the pandemic was at its peak, strict measures were adopted by most countries, some countries started experiencing a reduction in the daily incidents when the pandemic was relatively under control, but rates increased again during the summer and early autumn and surged during the winter. The social observations, which included information given largely by politicians and scientists through the media in various countries (i.e., China, South Korea, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Austria, Sweden, Israel, and south Europe: Greece, Italy, Spain, and Cyprus), were made based on Bird's (2003) "opportunistic ethnography" which refers to the observation and recording of spontaneous moments or cases which relate to the aim of the project. As it was not possible to visit various countries to do deep observation and field ethnography, the ethnographic observations for this paper are therefore opportunistic and have derived from following politicians' and scientists' statements through the media. Opportunistic observations have been acknowledged as an acceptable context of understanding and discussing social phenomena (Munhall, 2012; Gerard, 2010; Luders, 2004). Because of the opportunistic nature of social observations, this is largely a theoretical paper for application of theory, understanding the production of covid-19 language, and opening new directions in research, rather than a research article.

In order to successfully relate social observations with Bourdieu's concepts, the key terms from Bourdieu's theory were identified as early as possible and before gathering all information from opportunistic ethnography. Bourdieu's terms were only used as general frameworks of understanding the language governments constructed to respond to covid-19, and the social observations were organized accordingly. The aim was not to organize social observations per country or compare responses between countries but to identify the overarching official covid-19 language. Bourdieu's concepts have been incorporated in the analysis and in relation to the social observations. From organizing the general social observations, two main areas of analysis derived, namely "the official covid-19 field and symbolic power," and "the linguistic practices in the official covid-19 field." These are analyzed below as sections.

The official covid-19 field and symbolic power

Bourdieu used the term *field* or *market* metaphorically to explain that a field is a type of social terrain where social positions are structured. Inside the field there is interaction between these positions constructing interrelations. However, the interrelations are actually shaped by the possession and distribution of "capital." A field, therefore, is the place where individuals struggle to keep or redistribute capital. According to Bourdieu, there are three types of "capital," namely economic (i.e., wealth), cultural (i.e., knowledge and skills), and symbolic (i.e., prestige and honor). Such struggle within the field captures Bourdieu's important concept of *symbolic power* or *symbolic violence*. *Symbolic power* is not a specific type of power, such as physical force or disciplinary, but it takes a symbolic form to make specific practices more legitimate. In *Logic of Practice* Bourdieu (1990) wrote that symbolic power is "gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such, chosen as much as undergone, that of trust, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, debts, piety, in a word, of all the virtues honored by the ethic of honor" (p. 127). Bourdieu clarified that symbolic power is basically invisible in the sense that it is not recognized as real power. This means that even those who are subjected by power they tend to understand it as legitimate and not as social construction. As a result, in a field there are many symbolic language exchanges that take place and may enhance the cultural and symbolic capital more for some groups than others who engage with these exchanges. Bourdieu (1991) captured the relationship between the field, capital, and language by explaining that: "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" (p. 57).

In the case of the coronavirus pandemic, the covid-19 field is the symbolic space where the virus is talked about, where specific language has been produced to give meaning to this new virus and provide a set of understanding to people. Interestingly, this space is structured. That is, the parameters of the covid-19 field include the target of controlling the spread of the virus, protecting the elderly and the vulnerable groups, and safeguarding the healthcare systems. So, this covid-19 field is the official field in the sense that it is monitored by governments which have undertaken the task of informing and protecting people. In addition, it is not only what is said but by whom and who is expected to use this language for changing people's mindset. There are various groups involved in the covid-19 field, such as politicians, scientists, the media, and lay people. In the covid-19 field, a specific official covid-19 language has been produced by politicians and scientists, reproduced, and disseminated by the media and expected to be adopted by lay people. In other words, the official covid-19 language has been produced by those with increased cultural and symbolic capital and has mirrored the parameters of the constructed field. Such linguistic practice is unpacked below.

The linguistic practices in the official covid-19 field

Based on Bourdieu's theory, in any field or market specific linguistic utterances or expressions are produced as part of symbolic power or violence. Bourdieu's explained that linguistic expressions are not

random, but they largely derive from the relationship between the “linguistic habitus” and the field. Linguistic habitus, according to Bourdieu, is a component of the wider concept of *habitus*, which refers to “dispositions” that urge people to behave and think in certain ways. These dispositions derive from individuals’ experiences in a structured world, and it is a gradual process initiated from one’s early life. Linguistic habitus, therefore, is a smaller set of dispositions which urges someone to use language in certain ways and in certain social structures. As Bourdieu wrote (1991):

On the one hand, there are the socially constructed dispositions of the linguistic habitus, which imply a certain propensity to speak and to say determinate things (the expressive interest) and a certain capacity to speak, which involves both the linguistic capacity to generate an infinite number of grammatically correct discourses, and the social capacity to use this competence adequately in a determinate situation. On the other hand, there are the structures of the linguistic market, which impose themselves as a system of specific sanctions and censorships (p. 37).

As an example of the linguistic habitus, according to Bourdieu, different social groups have different accents which are not only attributed to the way the tongue and lips are moved but also to “the socially structured character of the habitus” (1991, p. 17). As Bourdieu explained, the linguistic habitus produces dispositions of talking, but the talking style or practice is determined by the characteristics of their field; i.e., the social structure where the linguistic practice is taking place. This combination (ways of talking in accordance with the structure of the field), according to Bourdieu, is what makes a discourse. Bourdieu (1991) clarified: “What circulates on the linguistic market is not 'language' as such, but rather discourses that are stylistically marked both in their production, in so far as each speaker fashions an idiolect from the common language, and in their reception, in so far as each recipient helps to produce the message which he perceives and appreciates by bringing to it everything that makes up his singular and collective experience” (p. 17).

Interestingly, in the case of covid-19 the various positions (politicians, scientists, the media, lay people) possess their own linguistic habitus and they generate linguistic expressions in a specific field, that of covid-19. However, this has been coordinated by governments with the help of science and the media to produce an official language aiming to align with people’s habitus and eventually achieve a collective response to the pandemic. This official discourse consists of specific “linguistic practices” which reflect the objectives of the covid-19 field (highlight the danger of covid-19, control the spread, protect the society and the vulnerable, safeguard healthcare systems). Below the various linguistic practices in the official covid-19 field are discussed.

Linguistic practices of science

The language produced around covid-19 was scientific and largely aimed to inform people with valid information about the existence of the virus, what it does, how it spreads and how it can be handled. Scientific language has been used in many ways to achieve this. Firstly, numbers and statistics were presented daily in the form of graphs and percentages to inform people about the number of new cases, the percentage or indicator of spread referring to it as R_t , the distribution of news cases per area or city, the number of hospitalized people, those who were in the intensive care units without the need for oxygen, those in intensive care units with oxygen, and the number of deaths. The main function of these statistics was to make an invisible enemy, as usually described, measurable which meant detectable; hence, visible, and controllable. The language used to present the daily statistics by both politicians and the media carried emotional clout, such as “covid-19 causes terror,” “covid-19 is not stopped,” “death toll never stops,” “covid-19 shows no mercy,” “tragic consequences from covid-19” etc. In addition, the statistics were sometimes used differently when the message needed to be stronger. More specifically, more emphasis was given on milestone numbers. For instance, more emphasis was placed, and more emotionally loaded words were used when countries reached 10,000 covid-19 cases than when they had, for example, 9,823 cases. Also, emphasis or more emotionally loaded words like “striking news” or “covid-19 hits young people too,” were used when younger people were hospitalized. Such use of language stated

that covid-19's danger was becoming grater as it was affecting more and more people. Consequently, such language was likely to cause fear, anxiety, and uncertainty and thus people might have been keener to comply with governmental decrees.

Secondly, the following terms were systematically used for informing the public: covid-19 specimen, host cells, contacts tracking, social distancing, viral load, R_t , spread indicator, clusters, chains of spread, asymptomatic carriers, negative room pressure, new normality, flattening the curve, bell-shaped curve, invisible enemy, peak of the curve, need to fight the virus and flatten the curve, cumulative incidence, new variant and so forth. What is important here is not so much the words themselves but the social position of those who are using them. Scientists and politicians used these words systematically and due to this, these words become legitimate knowledge disseminated in the society. Interestingly, this scientific language was on repeat through the media and resulted in institutionalizing the official meaning around covid-19 as the only true and objective meaning. Therefore, people were expected to adopt this language and take all relevant measures to protect themselves and others.

Thirdly, the language about the upcoming vaccines placed the grounds for trusting the governments and scientists even further. The language was formulated in such a way as to help people visualize an end of the covid-19 era and the problems and deaths the pandemic had brought. The expressed words by both politicians and scientists focused on the effectiveness and importance of vaccination, the evidence-based and robust scientific processes involved, the need to vaccinate the entire or the biggest part of the population to ensure that immunity was achieved, and that covid-19 vaccination was humanity's ultimate weapon against the virus. However, the language about vaccination was not about substituting the language on the covid-19 danger and the measures of protection. That is, until vaccination was completed, which would take several months, people had to follow the existing measures of protection. In other words, the scientific language prevailed the explanations for protection against covid-19 and the importance of vaccination.

Linguistic practices of "war"

The language used by politicians, scientists and the media about covid-19 was that of war. A language of a war would cause people to better visualize covid-19 as an external threat, realize the danger of the virus, the seriousness of the situation and the need to take actions at a collective level, as a war does not require individual response but group or national/ international response.

Thereafter, covid-19 was presented as a hostile enemy which aimed to attack as many people as possible, it attacked or spread quickly, it came in waves and unexpectedly, it was invisible and it preferred specific groups, i.e., the vulnerable (the elderly and the ill). Interestingly, this invisible enemy was not the only agent in the language of war. That is, the "allies" of the enemy, the "victims" and the "guards" or "heroes" were also at play. The allies of this enemy were all the agents which helped it spread more quickly; hence, made it more dangerous. These agents referred to the people who did not comply with the measures and were characterized as anarchists, lacking social responsibility, not understanding the risk, and not respecting authorities. Moreover, sociality was another ally in the sense that people had to reduce their sociality to beat the enemy. When the new covid-19 variant was discovered in the UK during autumn 2020 and spread in many other countries, the language used was sending the message that the enemy was becoming stronger and that more variants might emerge if spread continued. Therefore, sociality was further presented as covid-19's ally causing governments to enforce stringent measures; for example, discouraging or even banning leisure traveling abroad (e.g., in Belgium). Hence, the term of *social distancing* was used a lot to capture and minimize the danger of sociality. Another phenomenon which was presented as an ally of covid-19 was the *pandemic fatigue* which referred to feelings of tiredness after having to take protective measures against covid-19 for a long time. So, people were given scientific information about the pandemic fatigue clarifying that it was a natural outcome of pandemics, and the language was shifted towards encouraging people by highlighting that a little more patience was necessary for battling the enemy.

The enemy was presented as attacking innocent people who were the victims, and these were largely the vulnerable groups in the society, name the elderly and the ill. The victims were presented as being at most risk, as having the least effective weapons (i.e., immune system) to battle covid-19 and they should be protected either by preventing measures or treatment. More language was used to highlight the danger of the virus, such as images of people in intensive care units, coffins for and burials of people who succumbed to covid-19, and descriptions such as "x lost the battle with the invisible enemy." Emphasis on the invisibility of the enemy caused more uncertainty about what the enemy could do and highlighted the need for people to integrate with each other, collaborate with the authorities and eventually to protect themselves even better.

The victims, however, were not left alone. There were the guards or protectors and those were the politicians who made the decisions about the various measures and the scientists, including the healthcare professionals. As a result, heroic terms, such as "exceeded themselves," "overworked," "sacrificed," "deprived of their families," "put themselves at risk of contracting the virus," "utilized all weapons they had" and so forth were systematically used to describe the contribution of these agents in handling the pandemic and protect the potential victims. Those who fought the enemy, which was essentially the whole society, needed weapons. The weapons authorities and scientists presented were social distancing, stay home, "fortification" of hospitals and nursing homes, proper use of a mask, antiseptic use to clean hands, disinfection, testing, tracking of contacts, self-isolation, medical treatment, bans, and lockdowns.

The language of war discussed above shows how governments can construct a specific language around covid-19 to direct people's attention and mindset in such a way as to collectively respond to a threat to so many vulnerable people.

Linguistic practices of enforcement

Endorsing scientific and war language to help people understand covid-19 and take preventive measures could not be enough for handling the pandemic effectively. Governments had to make sure that the measures would be followed by people, and enforcement could ensure this. Formal enforcement included decrees and regulations, frequent checks by the authorities, fines, and imprisonments. Such enforcement was very powerful not only because it could be implemented by authorities but because it made the news very frequently. In other words, it was officially talked about. That is, numbers of people or organizations who were fined because they had violated decrees were announced very often. Such publicity of the punishment of non-compliance did not merely inform people but caused all other sets of the official covid-19 language to acquire even more legitimacy in the sense that non-compliance, a covid-19's ally, should not be tolerated to ensure the safety of the entire society. Along similar lines, protests were talked about in certain ways. That is, those protesting against governmental decrees and measures were described as the few or a small group of people, differentiating them instantly from the respectful and the compliant, and that the police took immediate actions to re-establish social order. The linguistic symbolism, however, was not the re-establishment of the social order *per se* but the reaffirmation of the governmental correctness about covid-19 decisions; the reaffirmation of the official covid-19 field.

Enforcement took an informal form too. Apart from the formal ways of punishing non-compliance, those who were not following the government's instructions, caught or not, were labelled as covid-19 deniers, irresponsible, conspiracy believers, anarchists and so forth. Such labelling further instilled the legitimacy of the official language around covid-19 that should be adopted by all lawful citizens to overcome the pandemic. Unofficial language by people who adopted the official discourse frequently used the term *covididiots* to insult and blame the non-complaints for the uncontrolled spread of the virus, the deaths, and the stringent measures government had to take to manage the pandemic.

Apart from the formal and informal language about enforcement of the measures, enforcement took place indirectly by using such language to imply that people had to be sensible in order for the governments to relax the restrictions. Language such as "we have to assess the country's epidemiological profile," "the number of new cases has to go down to safety levels," and "the number of hospitalized

people and deaths has to decrease," in relation to the language presented previously about the allies of covid-19, indicated that lifting the measures depended on obedient behavior by people.

Linguistic practices of censorship

Censorship is an interesting term that Bourdieu has used, and it is not referring to any attempts to repress or prevent other people or organizations to speak. Instead, it is about constructing a specific discourse or way of talking about something to reflect the structure and the objectives of the field. In other words, the field can determine what should be said and how it should be said. More specifically, Bourdieu wrote (1991):

Discourses are always to some extent euphemisms inspired by the concern to 'speak well', to 'speak properly', to produce the products that respond to the demands of a certain market; they are compromise formations resulting from a transaction between the expressive interest (what is to be said) and the censorship inherent in particular relations of linguistic production (whether it is the structure of linguistic interaction or the structure of a specialized field), a censorship which is imposed on a speaker or writer endowed with a certain social competence, that is, a more or less significant symbolic power over these relations of symbolic power. (pp. 78-79)

In the case of covid-19, as previously presented in this section, a specific set of language was constructed to meet the objectives of the covid-19 field which was to control the spread of the virus by controlling human behavior. This means that covid-19 was officially talked about in a specific way through the language of science, war and enforcement as presented earlier in this paper. However, the way covid-19 has not been talked about is actually part of the official language and discourse. In other words, what has not been said is equally important. More specifically, consequences of the lockdowns, cases of death due to delayed screening and early diagnosis, drug overdose and suicide ideation during lockdowns, unemployment and mental illness, domestic violence and divorces have never been part of the official language of covid-19, although acknowledged as possible problems. Information about the number of people who fully recovered from covid-19 or went through the disease with mild or no symptoms never prevailed the scientific, political, or media language. The deaths of some older people in Norway in January 2021 after they had been vaccinated were merely mentioned in the media, unlike the deaths caused by covid-19. Inviting scientists or politicians who disagreed with both the official political response to covid-19 in their country and scientific explanations was not common. Finally, no acknowledgement of possible mistakes by the governments was really made.

Discussion

Based on Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power and social observations, this paper discussed how governments created the covid-19 field with the objective to manage the spread of the virus and protect the society. Reflecting this field, a specific official language was constructed and used systematically to exercise power over people and ensure a collective response to a threat. At the same time, through this language, people were empowered to better understand the threat of covid-19 and protect themselves adequately. By using language of science, war, enforcement and censorship, people's attention and understanding were directed and empowered, resulting in largely complying with governments' restrictions and measures.

However, what Bourdieu's theory could not capture adequately is that there has not been one covid-19 language field. Such limitation reflects Lahire's (2003) criticism of Bourdieu's work, although Lahire acknowledged the usefulness of the theory and essence of the concepts used by Bourdieu. Lahire basically criticized Bourdieu for a rather narrow use of the concept of *field* in the sense that people are much more than merely actors in a field and that many other practices are going on at the same time than just what is happening in a field. On this basis, this essentially means that there could be many relevant parallel fields informing and influencing each other in covert or subtle ways. Bourdieu's *field* has been criticized by other

scholars for his narrow description of it as a fixed socially structured terrain. For instance, Rocamora (2002) explained that Bourdieu's work could not account for the complexity of the fashion field, Petrikas (2019) maintained that the field of theatre has subfields, while Buchholz (2016) stressed that Bourdieu's conceptualization of the field should be expanded beyond the nation state. Despite the criticism, Bourdieu's basic conceptualization of a field is very useful for understanding the interconnected actions in the covid-19 field or fields.

Echoing the criticism above and considering the essence of Bourdieu's concept of the field, this paper highlights that there have been many covid-19 fields which were at play at the same time, such as those of the social media, daily-life social talks, academic publishing etc. Multiplicity and diversification of language might have caused many people not complying with the measures, eventually resulting in failure to effectively control the spread of virus in many countries. For example, social media is a main parallel field, which very often stood against the official covid-19 field and language. In the social media, where a different moral of responsibility and accountability is established and everybody easily expresses an opinion, a very diversified language has been created from language resembling the official covid-19 expressions, to denying the existence of covid-19; criticizing the governments for controlling people; violating human rights; showing mistrust to politicians and scientists; publishing and reproducing false information about both covid-19 and vaccines, and so forth. As a result, the UN Secretary General called for attention to the *pandemic of misinformation* (Harvard Gazette, 2020). The language produced in the field of social media and how it can potentially influence people's mindset needs to be further explored scientifically.

The question is what might have caused such diversity of fields and language. This might be answered by Bourdieu's term *habitus* as presented earlier in this paper. This means that the various social positions initially found in the official covid-19 field had different *habitus*es, which derived from prior experiences and well ingrained cultural and symbolic capital. As a possible result, the official covid-19 language did not seem to be aligning with all *habitus*es, leading to the formulation of varied linguistic practices which needed different fields to find a new but also nourishing home. More specifically, and using again the example of the social media, expressing a different approach to governmental discourse and disagreement with decrees and restrictions would not be welcomed in the official covid-19 field because the objective for collective response to the pandemic by following scientifically informed measures could not be achieved. Thereafter, these different linguistic practices were hosted, nurtured, and flourished in parallel covid-19 fields, such as that of the social media.

In Bourdieu's terms, governments would achieve alignment between their official language and human behavior if people were previously immersed into a context of empowerment with scientific knowledge from early age in order for them to create a *habitus*, which would urge them towards actions reflecting the objectives of the official covid-19 field. It might be the case that in areas such as Taiwan, the governmental objectives and people's *habitus* were better aligned, which resulted in quick response to the pandemic by both people and the authorities (Lo and Hsieh, 2020). That is, the use of masks for other infections, the experience of other pandemics such as SARS, and social trust of authorities have contributed to such a collective response to covid-19 which resulted in managing the pandemic better than most countries (Lo and Hsieh, 2020).

The political and power response to covid-19, as discussed in this paper, has been explained by other theories, such as the "risk society" (Constantinou, 2020; Giritli and Olofsson, 2020; Matthewman and Huppertz, 2020) and "biopower" (Constantinou, 2021; Davis, 2021; Um, 2020). In addition, the linguistic practices identified in this paper reflect findings from other studies. More specifically, metaphors of war, intrusion, predator, threat, control, death and so forth have been identified by other studies (Mabhala et al., 2020; Moodley and Lesage, 2020; Kothari, 2016). Interestingly, the discussion of the social observations in this paper, in light with some other studies of the discursive representation of infectious diseases, shows that the discourses are not accidental, but they are contingent upon the nature of a virus (e.g., how threatening it is to the whole society) and governmental objectives (e.g., show evidence of their competence to control the virus). On this note, this conceptual paper opens new directions in research.

First, a systematic study and analysis of official covid-19 language and what has been the impact on people's understanding of the situation is more imperative. Such knowledge would help governments better organize and formulate language for effectively communicating health risk in future pandemics. Second, the systematic study of language representation of covid-19 could take many forms such as content analysis of texts and political speeches, critical discourse analysis of newspapers and TV channels, phenomenological exploration of social media language, and so forth. Third, it would be interesting to unpack the comparison of the construction and distribution of covid-19 language across countries to better understand the genealogy of it and the political circumstances affecting its content and the techniques employed. For example, has the metaphor of "war" been used in all countries? Have there been techniques of censorship beyond Bourdieu's use of the term? Fourth, a systematic study of the covid-19 language produced and distributed in the social media is imperative, especially when debates are not hosted by the press and TV channels and different opinions are largely nourished in the daily social life. Such research would also shed light on how the official and social media languages inform and influence each other. Fifth, it would be interesting to explore whether there have been any other socially structured fields (e.g., family, work) where covid-19 has been talked about and what their impact has been on other fields such as the official and the social media, and on the habitus.

Conclusion

This paper relied on Bourdieu's theory and social observations to describe the overarching official covid-19 field and language practices for achieving a collective response to the pandemic and successfully controlling the spread of the virus. The analysis of the social observations indicated that the official covid-19 language practices related to science, war metaphors, enforcement, and censorship. The paper also discussed the diverse *habitus*es causing the production of different linguistic practices and the creation of parallel fields and opened new directions in research. Based on the discussion in this paper, political responses to future pandemics need to consider the existence of various *habitus*es, various social positions and capitals and attempt to ensure a better alignment between an officially constructed discourse and the habitus in a dynamic field where synergies between all positions could create a productive climate.

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