# Literature Review

## *2.1) Basil Bernstein: Elaborate and restricted code theory*

Bernstein’s theory of language codes states that each person upholds patterns of speech and language that are generated by their environment and the form of social relationship regulates how speech is expressed (Bernstein 1964, *Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences).* He further comments that language spoken is divided by 2 codes that depict the speakers proficiency in effective language use during conversation. One of these codes, labelled elaborate code, provides the speaker with a high range of syntactic alternatives and vocabulary; securing the speaker with a positive attempt to use words to imply purpose. In contrast, restricted code will not facilitate the verbal expansion of the speaker's intent.

Bernstein explains how social structure is the independent variable when social relationships are the cause of speech systems which are shaped by social structure. These coding vary in use depending on social interactions. For example, it can be well understood through language codes that those holding a middle class title can often code switch between restricted and elaborate code depending on who is being spoken to. However, those deriving from a lower SES are often limited to restricted code. Bernstein (1964) continues that those who speak restricted code rely on a local cultural identity and a system where individuals share the same expectations.

Bernstein comments on how he believes that the identity of a social structure can transmit comfortably onto a child through the involvement of linguistic codes (p. 57) and therefore, their social identity is constrained each time they speak or listen to others.

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Bernstein's works have not gone without critiques from various scholars such as Atkinson (1985) and Edwards (1987). Whilst Atkinson predominantly agreed with Berstein, he challenged the theory that schools foster elaborate codes which are associated with explicit communication and align with formal educational values. His perspective that classroom practice may contradict Bernstein's theoretical assumptions derive from his arguments that Bernstein's work has been used for debates which were not its primary discussion. For example, education. Edwards considers the language codes theory for understanding how instruction works in the classroom.

This brings forth the question as to why Bernstein's theory was misunderstood and was this the potential reason behind why the theory lost credibility in the field of sociological interests. This lack of contemporary discussion can be viewed as the gap in research and the topic which this dissertation aims to address.

## *2.2) Linguistic Accessibility and the Reinforcement of Social Inequality in Education*

A large theme running from the literature is the relationship between linguistic accessibility and the reinforcement of social inequality. Bernstein's theory holds great significance explaining the role of linguistic ability in reinforcing educational inequalities. This can be understood through Bernsteins (1967) elaborate and restricted codes. These codes highlight how linguistic practices as a consequence of social class influence educational outcomes

This theme threads well to the research questions as it illustrates how social inequality can be perpetuated through the linguistic barriers that are embedded within the frameworks of Bernstein's theory. The literature from Bernstein consistently portrays how linguistic accessibilities play a central role in academic success.

There are various scholars that might argue that the concepts of restricted codes underestimate the intellectual capacity of working class students. Edwards (1987.b) states that Bernstein’s vision of a gap between the linguistic experiences of working class pupils overestimates the quality of classroom environment and underestimates the abilities of children,

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## *2.3) Curriculum design and linguistic bias (190)*

Another key theme within this dissertation is the association between curriculum design and linguistic bias. In his article *‘Class, Codes and Control: Volume 2’* (1973), Bernstein argues that the structure of curriculums often amplifies class based linguistic practices. These often reflect speech patterns of the dominant class with the education system prioritising elaborate code.

This theme relates to the central question as it reveals how the curricula is designed in a sense that favoured middle class language codes and reinforced educational exclusion. However, the course of action taken towards eradicating bias is uncertain. Two possible solutions include the integration of restricted codes within the curriculum and altering methods of assessment to decrease linguistic bias.

Additionally, with the growing population of migrators, there may be other factors that contribute to linguistic bias, such as in the case of multilingual pupils where ethnic culture influences patterns of speech. (find reference)

Bernstein’s argument was written roughly 50 years ago and therefore deemed as outdated. Through the key theme of curriculum design and linguistic bias the research will attain another centre of focus in which the development of the contemporary curriculum will be examined.

## *2.4) Theoretical influences (150)*

Bernstein's theory can be identified within the works of cognitivism which attains emphasis on mental processes such as problem solving, thinking, language and the processing of information Ertmer and Newby (2013). The popularity of learning theories began shifting from behaviorism to cognitivism in the 1950’s; the focus on social interaction and the instructional system is one that is centrally correlated to the works of Vygotsky. A significant aspect of Vygotsky's perspective is the purpose of language and its dual roles. These are: transferring abstract concepts and logical reasoning, and facilitating social interaction vital for child development (Vygotsky 1962). Vygotsky emphasised how language allows individuals to communicate abstract ideas; fortifying the relationship between thought and speech. His constructivist stance aligns with his belief that the primary purpose of language is constructing meaning. Psychologists agree with this perspective by stating that meaning is fundamental to linguistic development (John-Steiner, 2007).

The concept of language as a mediator of cognitive development ties with Bernstein's idea that language codes shape social identity. Both theories imply how a child's ability to learn and adapt to educational settings are influenced by linguistic interaction. Through an educational point of view, it can be suggested that Vygotsky's theory supports methods that can decrease the gap between restricted code and elaborate code.

Whilst the first theory discusses the connection between language and cognitive development. This second theory highlights the effect language attains on class control. Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital provides a perspective for comprehending how notions of cultural capital have an impact on social mobility and perpetuate inequality (Bourdieu 1986). The three forms of cultural capital are: Embodied state (developed social through linguistics), Objectified state (tangible cultural goods) and institutionalised goods (educational qualifications). According to Bourdieu (1986) these forms converse with economic and social capital and therefore alter the opportunities available for each individual in society. The framework of this theory is linked to that of Bernsteins as it explores the influence that language and education attain in creating social inequality. Bourdiue explains how linguistic practices align with middle class cultural norms. Both theories view language as a form of control to withhold social classes. Additionally, the interlink with Bernstein's language codes theory brings forth a richer acknowledgement to the mechanism that unequal educational outcomes are an attribute of linguistic practices.

## *2.5) Literature review summary (37 more words)*

Bernstein's theory described how restricted and elaborated codes assist in sustaining social structure. Language codes can influence educational outcomes through student engagement with the curriculum linguistic code. Scholars debate whether the presence of a dominant code exists within schools. Through further contemporary research, the need to mitigate linguistic bias and create equity improvements can be highlighted. The two key themes, linguistic accessibility and curriculum linguistic bias, supply an understanding towards various systematic barriers that marginalized groups face which may pose a threat to academic success. Theories such as Bourdieu’s cultural capital compliments Bernstein's frameworks by strengthening current knowledge on how power dynamics are reinforced by the use of language. Similarly, Vygotsky’s theory displays a similar connection to that of language codes by explaining the influence that language attains on the cognitive development of children. Despite being outdated in nature, Bernstein's theory of language codes can be the foundations of modern research of education and linguistic accessibility in light of shifting social dynamics, evolving pedagogical methods and digital communication. Additional attributes such as multilingual education can be included in the study. Further research could also include aspects such as gender and how they may also affect language codes. In either perspective, Bernsetins theory could provide potential reasons in which educators must bridge language gaps.

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