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## *Language as social capital*

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# Language as social capital<sup>1</sup>

*This article considers the proposition that language may be regarded as a mode, a form, a concrete reality of relations between people. In doing so, it addresses an ontological problem in the definition and theory of social capital. Whereas numerous commentators have addressed questions of the aetiology, cultivation, distribution, and effects of social capital, there is as yet no satisfactory explanation of what it is as such. If there is a substantial phenomenon called social capital, then one of its manifest forms is language. The main proof is that language descriptively conforms to the defining characteristics of social capital, which this article lists and discusses in detail.*

**Keywords:** language, sociolinguistics, social capital, cultural capital.

If social capital is fundamentally a metaphor reified, a heuristic device, then reconceptualising language as a form of social capital is something similar. It is using a novel lens to view a much-observed phenomenon. But if social capital is more than heuristic, if it has a coherent, distinctive, and independent form, that operates whether it is observed or not, then to argue for ‘language as social capital’ is to reconceptualise the relationship between linguistics and political economy.

That there is an important relationship between linguistics and political economy was clearly articulated many decades ago. Language is power (Malinowski 1934) and grammar is ideology (Voloshinov 1973). Somewhat more recently, Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of ‘cultural capital’ enabled us to regard language as a type – more precisely, a type of accumulation – of *wealth*, understood in materialist terms (we return to that notion below). This article is an attempt to reconcile language with the related but distinct notion of social capital, which has also been developed by Bourdieu (1986), among others.

To some extent, the view of language as a type of wealth-accumulation has already been revealed in the social capital literature – witness the critique offered by Smith and Kulynych (2002), for example – but I do not believe the function of language has yet been adequately grasped in theories of social capital. This article offers language as a concrete example of the *substance* of social capital. The essence of this argument is that language conforms to the definitional requirements of social capital, viewed no matter how finely. We can extend this argument further, by saying that all communication systems between people are forms of social capital. Semiotics in general submit to the generalisations made about language in this article.

Social capital is the productive value of relationships between people. It consists in the networks of relationship available to individuals and groups, such as families, friendships, work, clubs, religion, neighbourhood, political affiliations, and ethnicity. It also consists in the environmental and cultural conditions in which those networks operate, such as the strength of identification between a network and its members, the trust and/or sympathy that exist among them, and the norms of reciprocity within a network that may be inferred from the attitudes and behaviour of its members.

Field (2004) argues that social capital began its life as a metaphor, an adaptation of the notion of 'capital.' It treats sociological questions as if they were questions of political economy. He argues the reification of the capital metaphor has taken hold in sociological discourse because it is of more than heuristic value. It describes a phenomenon whose effects are significant in the analysis and practice of public policy. If that is true, then it leaves us an ontological problem: how do we describe what social capital *actually is*? What is its substance, its constitution, its concrete and manifest form?

Social capital is traditionally employed as a materialist concept. This is slightly paradoxical when we come to consider the notion of its intangibility (see below). Definitions of it have tended to follow Bourdieu, Coleman, or Putnam. Bourdieu's theory of social capital regards it, like economic capital, as the product of accumulation, while his empirical descriptions of it focus on its role in the creation of a class society. For Bourdieu, as for Marx, capital is power. Coleman and Putnam give somewhat less theoretical depth to social capital, while their empirical work revolves principally around the benefits of civic solidarity. For each of these approaches, use of the social capital concept is expressly an attempt to contemplate the value of socialisation as concrete,

more than the mercurial phenomenon for which other social theory approaches have allowed. Its appeal is to pragmatists rather than idealists. It is a disposition we may admire for its empirical specificity, and castigate for instrumentalising human relations, as we choose.

One obstacle impeding the development of a social capital ontology has been the question of measurement. While we can measure putative effects or indicators of social capital, we can do so only in relative and context-specific terms. Whereas economic capital can be measured significantly, if not always accurately, against a prevailing currency value, most forms of social capital cannot be submitted to such absolute measures. The social capital available to members of an amateur sporting club is not commensurate with the social capital available to members of a university, nor would either be commensurate with the ubiquitous solidarity among AUSLAN signers or among speakers of other marginalised languages.

It is easier to imagine language than social capital, but it is harder to define it. A language is much more than the assemblage of signs, grammars, and cultural idiosyncracies one might struggle to master in a language class. Because it includes all the past and future contexts of its use, a language is as vast and complex as lived experience. Because it changes inexorably across time and space, a language is necessarily as mercurial as society itself — thus it is necessarily an ineffable object of study to some extent. And because even the subtlest change in a language can affect as well as reflect the outlook of its users, the ineffability of language is intrinsic to its sociological importance. That said, the criteria for the present argument are the defining characteristics of social capital. We are examining how well the phenomenon of

language conforms to the definition of social capital, not *vice versa*. This we can do by listing the defining characteristics of social capital and examining how well language supplies them. A synthesis of social capital theory to date might suggest the following six:

1. Social capital is the productive value constituted in relationships between people.
2. Social capital is observed in networks of individuals and groups.
3. Social capital is also constituted in the environmental and cultural conditions in which those networks operate, such as the trust and reciprocity of their members.
4. Social capital reveals modes of relation such as ‘bonding’ capital (socially exclusive networks), ‘bridging’ capital (socially inclusive networks), and ‘linking’ capital (social networks with access to institutional power).
5. Being a type of capital, social capital is a subspecies of (accumulated) power.
6. Social capital seems ‘intangible.’

*1. Social capital is the productive value constituted in relationships between people.*

This postulate is central to the concept (and the name) of social capital. It can be observed in many ways. An obvious example is the extra babysitting opportunities that are available to parents who live near members of their extended families. The ‘Neighbourhood Watch’ scheme in Australia, and similar schemes around the world, is a recognition that crime rates are lower in communities where neighbours actively look out

for one another (and where potential criminals know it). We all have a sense of the improved labour market prospects for people with strong professional networks.

Of course, the fact that we call it a 'productive value' does not make it unambiguously beneficial. Field (1999) has shown how the strong social capital of a very solidary society, Northern Ireland, can produce disappointing results in tertiary education. Putnam (2000) notes Timothy McVeigh could not have carried out his terrible bombing in Oklahoma without the support of an extended network to provide him with the expertise and material resources that he lacked. The value or worth of social capital is very much in the eye of the beholder.

Being a value of relationship, social capital is necessarily a mediated phenomenon. No aspect of relation is free from mediation. No relational action is initiated or interpreted without some process of mediation. Here the argument for language as social capital makes its strongest claim. Human relations are incomprehensible without language. That is not to accept the positivist claim, after Chomsky (1972: 100-101), that languageless relations are somehow less than human. Rather, it is to acknowledge the linguistic basis of the human understanding of relationship. If 'social capital is the glue that holds society together' (Putnam 2000), then language must be a critical ingredient of the glue. If, as I see it, social capital is more like a diverse set of glues performing that one identified function, then language is one glue among many. Language is a mode, a form, a concrete reality of relations between people.

Social capital is a specific aspect of relationships, of course — just as we shall find it is a specific aspect of language. The pragmatic or instrumentalising potentialities of both are immanent in the natures of both. That is to say, relationships invariably have a

potential to become productive in some sense — of money, of company, of further relationships, and occasionally of babies. The same is true of languages, which invariably have a potential to produce coordinated activities, shared understandings, further language, and aesthetics — as well as money, company, further relationships, and occasional babies.

## 2. Social capital is observed in networks of individuals and groups.

Attempts to measure social capital, at least since Putnam's famous analysis of Italian civic society (Putnam 1993), have consistently involved some form of network mapping (eg. Grootaert 1998; OECD 2000; Stone and Hughes 2002; ABS 2004). This seems a very reasonable way to view the parameters of social capital. Networks do not simply wield value — their value is a consequence of a network's power to achieve. Thus Stone and Hughes (2002), for example, argue that the social capital value of a given network is a product of the resources available to that network.

A network's value is also a function of its power to coerce. Coleman (1990) notes that New York diamond traders exchange large quantities of extremely valuable material, yet they guard against fraud and theft in a very efficient manner, by trading entirely within a tightly defined network. The economically defined network of traders is also defined ethnically and religiously, as a subset of New York's Jewish population. If any individuals breach the accepted ethics of this network, they risk ethnic and religious sanctions to compound the risk of an economic sanction — like expulsion from the trade.

For this network, the processes of trade are concrete manifestations, as well as cultural modalities, of its social capital. The same applies for the processes or rites of religion that the network's members observe. Their political organisations and youth

groups also conform to this functional analysis. So do their collective relations with people outside the network. So does language. Moreover, language runs as a common element through all of these. There is a distinctive technical language of the diamond trade, which is not shared by the entire Jewish community of New York. There is a defined language of the faith – Hebrew – which is also the official language of the Jewish nation – Israel. The following sections bear out this analysis in greater theoretical depth.

*3. Social capital is also constituted in the environmental and cultural conditions in which those networks operate, such as the trust and reciprocity of their members.*

This formulation has become a broad consensus in the pragmatic ‘operationalising’ of the concept of social capital, although there are strong exceptions. Farr (2004: 10-11), for example, argues ‘sympathy’ is a preferable category to ‘trust.’ I am not convinced that the two are mutually exclusive. Farr’s argument deserves closer reading than this article can afford it. In summary, his preference for ‘sympathy’ has two grounds. First, he argues it is a richer concept ethically, because it delves into the subjective causation of our attitudes, meaning ‘trust’ is one of its outcomes rather than vice versa. Secondly, it highlights the contribution to the social capital literature made by Dewey, whose comments on social capital have barely been acknowledged to date (an oversight Farr attributes to a widespread failure to interrogate and advance Putnam’s historiography). Farr notes the debt of pragmatists such as Dewey to the enlightenment tradition of David Hume and Adam Smith, as well as Kant and Hegel. He also notes an important mention of social capital in the writings of Marx. His ‘conceptual history’ of social capital opens up a fascinating, historically elegant possibility: that social capital was a concept immanent in the development of enlightenment philosophy.

Fevre's outstanding theoretical contribution is to propose that we add 'identity' to the list of cultural conditions (Fevre 2000). His argument makes good sense, although few commentators have taken it up subsequently. Indeed, the more we think about such factors, the more they tend to proliferate. One rather popular response (among social capital commentators) to that proliferation has been the reductive effort to find a small number of indicators for the presence or absence – or the strength or weakness – of social capital within a given environment. This approach to theory is motivated by the imperative to measure rather than the curiosity to comprehend. An extreme illustration is the work of Fukuyama (1996; 1999; 2000), who posits just one factor, 'trust,' as an indicator of the presence of social capital. All empirical social capital research must adopt a somewhat reductive approach, since there are only so many factors that any one study can examine. One of the remarkable features of the Fukuyama analysis is its positivism: he rationalises the necessary limits to empirical research by arguing that a single factor is theoretically sufficient. Another remarkable feature is his seminal place in the neoliberal social capital literature worldwide. Fukuyama's writing is a demonstrable influence on the frameworks of many other writers.<sup>2</sup>

Aside from my scepticism about the reductive ideology in empirical positivism, the present article can afford to be more expansive. My aim here is to explain, not measure – to meet the demands of theoretical sufficiency rather than those of empirical necessity. There are good reasons for an inclusive approach in appraising various phenomena for their validity as factors influencing the accumulation and exploitation of social capital. Social capital is clearly a complex variable. It would be very hard to identify a phenomenon in society that makes no contribution to social capital.

This implies that language contributes to social capital, which may seem too convenient. Language does function in the establishment and maintenance of social capital, but my argument goes further than that. Language is also a viable delegate for social capital: it can stand as a synecdoche, because it can be used to represent an extremely broad range of relations between individuals and groups. Furthermore, by virtue of its modal function, language is a necessary condition for relationship: without language, as Helen Keller (1961: 38-40) was uniquely able to show, love is not conceivable. And further still, language *is* relationship. Every constitutive cultural factor that we identify as generating the value of social capital, we may identify also in the worth of language. Without trust, language turns to lies. Without sympathy, language becomes callous. Without reciprocity, language threatens to be defamation. Without identity, a language is culturally arbitrary, grammarless, not a language at all.

4. Social capital reveals modes of relation such as 'bonding' capital, 'bridging' capital', and 'linking' capital.

This analysis is an extrapolation from network theory. Sociologists such as Granovetter (1973) have noted the importance of differing kinds of networks for achieving different social functions. Putnam (2000) therefore posited two basic types of social capital, the inclusive network with loose membership ('bridging') and the exclusive network with a strong mutually supportive ethic ('bonding'). For the investment purposes of the World Bank, it made sense for Woolcock (2001) to theorise an additional type, or aspect, of networking: the network that enables its members to leverage institutional power ('linking'). A friend of my family was with a research team in a remote part of Papua New Guinea, when the local police arrested them in an attempted shakedown. One of the

team knew the telephone number of a minister in Port Moresby. The minister contacted a lawyer who had often represented PNG police in corruption trials, and whose fax message to the police station was enough to secure their immediate release. This ‘free’ representation saved the team’s members a very large amount of extortion money.

It makes sense to consider the affective and effective predispositions of networks when considering their social capital value. Although Putnam and Woolcock have to some extent conflated the attitudinal outlooks with the functional potentialities of their postulated network types – and although several writers have expressed concerns about such ‘circular reasoning,’ criticising a ‘confusion of causes and effects’ (eg. Portes 1998; Stone and Hughes 2002) – the end result appears to be an accurate picture. Affective and effective predisposition is pivotal to the significance of a network and to its utility. A school that encourages pregnant teenagers, students whose sexuality is openly queer, and students with learning difficulties to stay on and complete their studies is actively developing a social capital radically different from that developed by schools that would prefer such students to leave (Wilkinson *et al.* 2004).

If affective and effective predisposition, viewed from a utilitarian perspective, is the criterion for categorising a given network or cultural condition according to a social capital typology of this kind, we can expand the taxonomy further. If people can bond, bridge, and link – noting that each of these verbs is curiously indeterminate on the question of transitivity – they can also domineer, ingratiate, and pyramid-sell. The social capital typology we select consists of the functional imperatives our research serves. Putnam and Woolcock are empiricists with a similar aim – to uncover the civic foundations of cooperative action – hence the similarity of their typologies. Stone and

Hughes create quite a different typology, because they seek to explain a different problem – individual empowerment – through their social capital analysis. Fukuyama’s typology is as simple as his ontology, because his theoretical aims are reductive.

Language is amenable to analysis in similar terms. We can identify an affective and effective predisposition for any dialect, which may be explained by reference to the functional imperatives of its users. Socially exclusive and intimately supportive language, or bonding language, is a widely reported phenomenon. It has been observed in gang activity, schoolyard culture, membership of sporting teams, political factions, and so forth. It frequently employs obscure or heavily accented formulations that insiders can understand and outsiders cannot. It may be restricted to a small group of friends or it may extend to global economic sectors.<sup>3</sup> Socially inclusive language – bridging language – is also widely discussed, in the fields of law and social policy, education, mainstream culture, and political speeches, among many others. Language that leverages institutional power – linking language – is an example of Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital. The banality of some of its English language incarnations – overusing technical jargon instead of vernacular words, gruesome syntax, and extremely vacuous phrasing, all of which tend to become clichés – has come under ferocious attack. For example, Don Watson’s *Death Sentence* (2003) is a scathing critique of the managerialism that ‘anaesthetises’ the languages of business, sport, and politics. Watson has consciously adapted the anaesthetic metaphor from Orwell, who wrote about the decay of public language in England half a century earlier. Kafka appropriates the nineteenth century German Austrian equivalent in the language of his novels and short stories — sentences that go on forever, without any noticeable drama, any spark of enthusiasm. I am not sure whether

the banality of such language is a necessary feature, or of direct concern to the present article. For our purposes, it is enough to note the existence of clearly identifiable forms of language, which people can use to accumulate and exploit institutional power.

Close networks have distinctive ways of addressing members (often through nicknames), culturally familiar outsiders, and culturally unfamiliar outsiders. Each of these dimensions indicates a set of distinctive language forms shared by the network's members, which overlap, but are not wholly congruent, with the languages of people in other networks. A fundamental tenet of functionalist linguistic theory is that people's languages reflect their needs and experiences (Malinowski 1959). That is to say, a language is configured to produce and retain value for its users.

A final note on predisposition typology: we can also identify various analytical approaches to language, depending on the theoretical aims of the linguist. Chomsky's cognitive-normative approach is favourably predisposed towards cybernetics, for example, whereas the functional approach of sociolinguistics appears to yield its greatest benefits in linguistic pedagogy. All linguistic theory since Augustine has treated language as a social resource, as well as a socialising ideology to some extent. That view of language is deeply compatible with its function as social capital.

5. Being a type of capital, social capital is a subspecies of (accumulated) power.

Bourdieu begins his treatise on 'the forms of capital' by observing capital is a species of power, and the original power of capital is its capacity to generate worth or value (Bourdieu 1986: 241):

The social world is accumulated history, and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who

are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital and with it, accumulation and all its effects. Capital is accumulated labor ... which, when appropriated on a private, ie, exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor.

Social capital is capital – hence, the concept of social capital is vindicated – to the extent that individuals and groups are able to draw productive value from the networks to which they have access, given the cultural contexts of those networks. Language meets this criterion, viewed both ways. On the one hand, as we have seen, language allows people to draw productive value from their networks (one of which is the network of people who use a particular language), given the cultural contexts of those networks (one of which, again, is their language or languages). On the other hand, as we have noted, language is (a species of) power. It harnesses the specific powers of persuasion, literacy, poetic charm, a sense of community, and so forth — on top of its original power, to establish meaning.

An example may help to illustrate the social capital power that is at stake in the sphere of language. In 2003 a well-known backbencher from the Australian Labor Party, Mark Latham, publicly criticised the Australian prime minister as an ‘arselicker,’ and his cabinet ministers as ‘a conga-line of suckholes,’ for what he saw as their sycophantic attitude towards the foreign policy of the United States (he was particularly referring to the war in Iraq and the legally ambiguous detention of two Australian citizens at Guantanamo Bay). The result was to create a sharp division of opinion in Australia. On the one hand, many middle class ‘small-L’ liberals, who agreed with his analysis, were

appalled by his uncouth language. On the other hand, many working-class nationalists, who suspected Labor was 'soft on terror,' loudly applauded his straight talking. The salient value of Latham's comments was that Labor seemed to have found a way to re-establish its connection with the latter group. These people have traditionally been a Labor constituency in Australia, but, like the 'Reagan Democrats' in the United States, have become increasingly aligned with the cultural agenda of conservative politics over the last generation. By his brash use of swearwords and derogatory sexual imagery, Latham was expressly seeking to communicate with a very large section of society in Australia that prides itself on such uncensored language. He was rebuilding the labour movement's relations with the *hoi polloi*.<sup>4</sup>

Such a striking illustration of the convergence of power, value, and communication lends itself to analysis using Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. He develops this theory to consider how economic and political hierarchies in any given society are defined as well as exemplified, by aesthetic 'distinctions' (Bourdieu 1984). Those aesthetic distinctions are internalised by individuals as well as being reflected in official structures (Bourdieu 1986: 243).

Bourdieu's model of cultural capital is profoundly hierarchical. Cultural capital is a positional value, meaning some always have more than others. This can lead to an assumption that cultural capital is a one-dimensional phenomenon. An alternative (to my mind, preferable) view is that there are numerous forms of cultural capital, whose value depends very much on the context of their exploitation.

One obvious marker of cultural capital is language. This is a point related to the political and economic content of what sociolinguists have called 'register.' It is a

recognition that we use language differences as a technique for identifying the socioeconomic class background of people around us. In Australia, although most citizens believe it to be a relatively classless society, the accent of Adelaide's patrician families is generally recognisable. Meanwhile, the public use of swearwords and 'politically incorrect' language is generally (although not particularly accurately) identified with masculine working class culture — in a similar vein to drinking cheap beer or purchasing general admission tickets to cricket and football games.

Latham's choice of language was a salient example of a strategy employing 'forms of capital.' He drew on a form of cultural capital (power as authority) with a view to accumulating social capital (power as connectedness) both for himself and his party. That is, Latham sought a revitalised political understanding between the labour movement and a politically disaffected social stratum – the labour movement's original constituency – through the appropriation of an affective disposition that he reckoned the people of this stratum would be likely to appreciate.

Drawing on the accumulatory nature of capital, if language is a form of social capital then we can extrapolate some relevant principles about semantics and grammar. A vocabulary is the accumulation of generations of language activity. A system of grammar, as a form of ideology, profoundly reflects the established (that is, accumulated) paradigm for people's ownership and exploitation of language. The rules of courtesy and deference that languages develop, and which ultimately become indistinguishable from grammar,<sup>5</sup> show the inherent inter-relatedness (that is, the socialised nature) of this paradigm for ownership and exploitation.

## 6. Social capital seems 'intangible.'

Two quotations help to illustrate this notion:

Physical capital is wholly tangible ... human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual; social capital is even less tangible, for it is embodied in the *relations among* persons (Coleman 1990: 304).

Social capital retains many interpretations and expectations – unlike financial capital or physical capital. It remains hard for policy analysts to grasp; government and the private sector often struggle to see it as part of core business; measuring social capital requires sophistication and flexibility; and a service delivery culture in many agencies and businesses struggles to incorporate it.

Much of this is due to the very nature of social capital. It is necessarily intangible, often has indirect benefits and outcomes, rarely involves a clear cause and effect, and doesn't suit traditional performance indicators and measures of inputs and outputs (Cavaye 2004: 2).

By way of background, in the 14 years that elapsed between publication of the first and second quotations, social capital underwent its explosive transformation from an occasionally mentioned phrase to an extraordinarily prolific topic of theory and research in the social sciences. We can see how Cavaye's point owes its intellectual roots to Coleman — and yet, how it has advanced beyond Coleman's point. What Coleman has argued in relative terms, Cavaye proposes as absolute. Coleman's social capital is *even less tangible*, whereas Cavaye's is *necessarily intangible*. Coleman assumes that social

relations are light-on for concrete form, but Cavaye holds they have none whatsoever.

Tangibility is a contestable notion: one person's experience may be another's scepticism. Regarding social capital as an intangible good stems from a view that it lacks fungibility. All the theorists have acknowledged the fungibility of social capital is problematic. Still, the terms of commensurability between social and physical (and human and cultural) capital must be more equal than Coleman and Cavaye have described. Capital of all sorts, after all, is 'embodied in the relations among persons.' If economic capital is tangible, then surely we can say the same for social capital. If we are looking for material relics only, why distinguish between a sausage machine and a club membership badge? Or between a telephone and an address book?

In the search for concrete manifestations of social capital, we come once again to language. Language in its textual forms – books, newspapers, audio and video recordings, and so forth – is an accumulated repository of communications between people. In a library, on a shop display, or in a letter, the text is a vessel that holds many of the most important connections between us. It is also a vessel for the many new connections we would like to establish (reading 'to know we are not alone,' for example, after C.S. Lewis). When Coptic monks razed the great library of Alexandria, they severed the coming medieval world's potential connections with thousands of ancients and their knowledge. Something comparable may have happened 1,610 years later, when the museum of Baghdad was ransacked.

Language, in its more basic physical forms, as the sounds and symbols by which people purposively exchange meaning, is a manifestation of matter and energy. It can be boosted and diminished by physical means (a glass of water can help the speaker, just as

it can spoil the ink). It is also a product of accumulation, in the sense that it has been developed and maintained by its community of users continuously throughout its history.<sup>6</sup>

A text or a language act is concrete in the way of any transaction talisman. True, its importance is much more than what is tangible. Its value as social capital reaches far beyond the concrete — but we can say the same for the *cultural* and *physical* capital values of language. Indeed, we can say the same for any other form of capital whatsoever.

### Conclusion.

In analysing how language conforms to the defining characteristics of social capital, we have also observed that, in many ways, language supplies them. The substance of social capital is frequently to be found in the language acts or texts that exist so appreciably between people. In some situations, the only evidence of social capital is linguistic data. Reductive empiricists could do a lot worse than look to language as a unique and unifying indicator of the distribution of social capital. It stands up to scrutiny more robustly than ‘trust.’

Reductive factor analysis is not my recommended course of research, however. The social capital project requires theoretical depth and empirical breadth to achieve the task for which it was initiated – namely, to reconcile economic theories of productive value with the productive value that is intrinsic to human relations, and *vice versa*. To confine the theory of social capital within a narrow range of factors or indicators is to let bean-counters kill the concept.

As it is, I imagine some people will be horrified by the idea of an economics of language. Doubtless it will add to existing suspicions that social capital represents a

Trojan Horse, used by neoclassical economists to colonise all the social sciences.<sup>7</sup> In some degree of sympathy with such fears, I want to stress that language is not confined to the field of social capital by this argument. Instead, we see that social capital is one of the aspects of language. It is an aspect of *all* language, but it is not all the aspects of *any* language.

This article has touched on, but not really explored, an argument that cuts two ways: the transactions and capital formations of a given economy serve to remind us of the nature of life in a given language community, and *vice versa*. On the one hand, there is a disquieting persistence to the unresolved question of fungibility: by what medium or standard does the productive worth of language submit to our evaluation? It is a question worthy of more expert and detailed examination than I can offer. On the other hand, the mutual comparability of language and physical capital is an important clue for the validity of the view that language is a form of capital – more precisely, a form of social capital. As Watson (2003) argues, we greatly affect the civic foundations of our own governance through our language practices.

### Epilogue.

In attempting to explain language as social capital, I am mindful of the limit-case of talking to oneself. Picture a bleary-eyed 31-year old sharing a few quality moments with a mirror after brushing his teeth:

Good morning old friend! It's many hours since last we spoke together. How did you find last night's dream?

This quotation, for whose accuracy I can vouch, shows pure dialogism. According to

Bakhtin (1981), every voice in any text can be said to comprise several voices. A monologue is always the superficial manifestation of some deeper dialogue. This quotation reflects our tendency to regard ourselves through the functions of language — that is to say, we regard ourselves socially:

1. We engage the reflected self through seductive language – language that is consciously poetical and courteous;
2. We recognise and acknowledge the reflected self through a form of greeting;
3. We sympathise – and appraise the current state of relations – with the reflected self, through a narrative recapitulation of shared experiences; *and*
4. We understand the perspective of the reflected self through a process of interrogation.

To socialise with the self is like regarding one as a prime number. It conforms to all the criteria of prime numbers, other than the rather dissatisfying criterion that a prime number cannot be the number one. Here we have all the conditions for socialising, other than the presence of a second person. Is there capital to be unlocked? Yes — to the extent that the interior dialogue enables one to accumulate and exploit capital resources available to the reflected self. But it is not social capital, of course. In the end, we have to talk to others as well.

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1                   This article has benefited from the comments and questions of colleagues at the Faculty of Education at Monash University (Australia), where it was originally presented to a seminar on education and social capital. I am particularly indebted to Anna Clark, Julie Connolly, and Leesa Wheelahan for a number of helpful suggestions about the manuscript. I should also warn that this article is rated ‘M,’ for mature audiences. It contains some *adult language*.

2                   Fukuyama’s account is both stimulating and frustrating. His clarity of composition and expression helps us to grasp the neoliberal approach to this topic much more deeply than we otherwise might. Compared to a certain writer, who defines social capital as ‘a predisposition to rely on cooperative strategies when faced with prisoner’s choice dilemmas,’ Fukuyama’s prose is like cold water on a burn. On the other hand, his decision (deliberate or inadvertent) not to investigate the psychology and phenomenology of trust in any theoretical depth – oversights that strike me as typical of empirical positivist literature – is philosophically frustrating, for all the clarity with which they have been omitted from his account.

3                   In a letter to *The Australian* (2 June 2004, p.35), Paul Kunino Lynch illustrates two examples with his brief (but otherwise quite Bourdieuvian) second paragraph: ‘Academics, just like the criminal classes, recognise their private languages and need them as their admission rites.’

4                   The episode had an equally revealing reprise later in 2003, when Latham was elected the federal parliamentary leader of the Australian Labor Party. One of his first actions as leader was to forswear using such ‘colourful language’ to advance his Party’s cause from then on.

5                   Think, for example of the confusion that has grown up around the formulation ‘... and I,’ as in ‘Peter and I have an attitude.’ This word order was developed for reasons of courtesy, apparently within the French royal court. In English, the polite form in the subjective case is taught to children as one of the governing grammatical principles — so that its usage as a formula overrides conflicting rules of syntax. It is a normal usage for Australia’s Prime Minister to discuss the grammatically incorrect ‘Peter and I’s attitude,’ for example. A grammatically correct (if somewhat clunky) version of this phrase might be ‘Peter’s and my attitude,’ but correcting such a malapropism is generally taken to indicate pedantry.

6                   Think, for example, of how vocabulary and pronunciation change from generation to generation — yet we still draw predominantly on forms centuries or millenia old.

7            This question is reviewed in detail by Spies-Butcher (2002). A strong argument for the ‘Trojan Horse’ critique is Fine (2001).