

Conflict and collaboration – a sociology of knowledge production in the field of Indigenous Studies.

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Abstract: In this paper I seek to introduce Bourdieuan field theory (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990, 2000) and Legitimation Code Theory (e.g. Maton, 2000, 2004; Moore & Maton, 2001) into the field of Indigenous Studies. I use these theories to analyse the relationship between different discourses in Indigenous Studies and compare the field theory approach to understanding academic discourses to the more popular 'paradigms' approach. It is argued that a critical and sensible awareness of our own position within the field is essential if we, as researchers and teachers, wish to produce constructive research and avoid inadvertently contributing to the colonial domination of Indigenous peoples.

It should no longer be controversial to say that research has a troubled relationship with Indigenous peoples. This is particularly the case where research informs policy (CRAH, 2008). Part of trouble can be attributed to history - the anthropological work of Sir Baldwin Spencer in early 20th century, to use a more dramatic example, informed the policy of child removal in the Northern Territory (McGregor, 1997, pp. 71-100). Tension between research and Indigenous peoples is not confined to the past. Linda Tuhiwai Smith sums up the relationship between Indigenous peoples and research in the opening to her (1999) seminal book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*:

From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary (p. 1).

History is not the sole cause of tension between research and Indigenous peoples, nor does it perpetuate that tension. If our goal is to improve the relationship so that research can be of benefit to Indigenous peoples then the first step is surely to gain an understanding of where we stand as researchers, be we non-Indigenous or Indigenous. This means investigating the structure of the intellectual field wherein knowledge about Indigenous peoples is produced. The last three decades has seen the emergence of a vast body of literature analysing the power dynamics of the relationship between academic discourses, pedagogy, research and Indigenous peoples (e.g. Battiste, Bell, Findlay, Findlay & Henderson, 2005; Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006; Foley, 2003; Kincheloe & Steinburg, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2004, 2006; Smith, 1999; Swadener & Mutua, 2008). This important literature has made many insights but to date there have been few analyses of *how* knowledge about Indigenous peoples is produced. In this essay I seek to analyse the dynamics of the cultural field wherein knowledge about Indigenous peoples is produced. In so doing I hope to show that a critical awareness of our own position as researchers is necessary if we wish to avoid inadvertently reinforcing and participating in colonial domination ourselves.

Intellectual fields and languages of legitimation

In the last 30 years a number of Indigenous intellectuals have begun active research careers in the human sciences. Many of these Indigenous academics have been working to create a 'space' within the academy where Indigenous knowledges can be accorded respect, developed,

and employed in the service of social justice and positive outcomes for Indigenous peoples (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006). The academy, however, is a colonial institution constructed and dominated by the colonisers. The intellectual field of the human sciences – conceived in the Bourdieuan sense as a set of relationships, rules, rituals, procedures, conventions and discourses – at present functions to segregate and subjugate Indigenous attempts to bring Indigenous knowledges into the field. This is primarily achieved by the use of particular ‘languages of legitimation’ which are employed for the purpose of attracting status for particular claims to knowledge and ‘truth’ (Maton, 2000, 2004; Moore & Maton, 2001).

Bourdieuan ‘field theory’ (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990, 2000) and its extension in ‘legitimation code theory’ (Maton, 2000, 2004; Moore & Maton, 2001) can offer insights into how the segregation and subjugation of Indigenous knowledges has been playing out in the human sciences. Simply stated, Bourdieu’s field theory conceives late modern society as comprised of a series of inter-related and overlapping cultural fields wherein actors manoeuvre to increase or retain their share of various forms of capital (i.e. status and resources). Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) summarise:

A cultural field can be defined as a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities. But it is also constituted by, or out of, the conflict which is involved when groups or individuals attempt to determine what constitutes capital within the field, and how that capital is to be distributed (pp. 21-22).

Bourdieu’s idea of the ‘cultural field’ works in partnership with his concept of the ‘habitus’ – a term denoting the way cultural and sub-cultural environments create “systems of schemes of perception, appreciation and action” enabling people to understand and respond to the world and themselves (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 138).

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT; Maton, 2000, 2004; Moore & Maton, 2001) builds on the ‘field theory’ of Pierre Bourdieu and the ‘code theory’ of Basil Bernstein to construct an approach to analysing knowledge claims in academia.

The organisation of knowledge within an intellectual field is not simply the way in which previously produced knowledge is arranged into some kind of order . . . It is characterised by a *principle* that also regulates the manner in which new knowledge is produced and its form. As this principle differs, so will the organisation and, crucially here, the *mode of production* of knowledge within the field. In other words, any specific intellectual field is organised in such a way as to make certain things visible as potential objects for knowledge, and other things invisible within its current field of vision (Moore & Maton, 2001, p. 157).

LCT is premised on the simple observation that every claim to knowledge is *about something* and *by someone*. From here LCT distinguishes between the “epistemic relation” and the “social relation” of knowledge. The “epistemic relation” is between knowledge and the part of the world that it purports to explain, while the “social relation” is between knowledge and the subject(s) making the claim to knowledge. The concept of ‘languages of legitimation’ is central to LCT. Languages of legitimation constitute the unwritten rules within a discipline or field of inquiry for distinguishing what makes someone or something different, special and worthy of distinction (Carvalho, Dong, & Maton, in press). The underlying structuring principles of languages of legitimation are conceptualised as legitimation codes. Different (sub)fields employ different legitimation codes that may emphasise the social relation, the epistemic relation, neither, or both. Figure 1 outlines these four modalities.

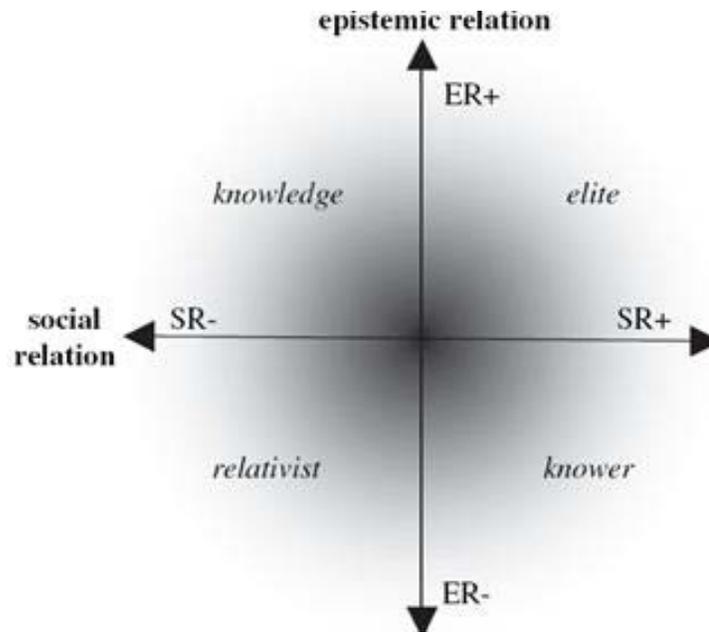


Figure 1
Legitimation codes of specialisation Source: Maton (2007:97)

What Maton (2000) has called the 'knowledge code' emphasises the epistemic relation (ER+) relative to the social relation (SR-). This is exemplified by the field of mathematics, where the proclaimed basis of legitimacy in the field is the possession of legitimate (mathematical) procedures more so than any characteristics (social, experiential, insight, etc.) of the actors themselves. The 'knower code' of legitimation emphasises the social relation (SR+) relative to the epistemic relation (ER-). Here an example is the field of cultural studies, where claims to knowledge rest on the ability of the 'knower' to see that knowledge (insight) more than on the following of rigid procedures (Maton, 2000). For the 'elite code' the epistemic and social relations are both strongly emphasised (ER+, SR+). This is best exemplified by 'traditional' Aboriginal knowledge systems, where knowledge is carefully managed and distributed (Horstman, 2001; Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holms & Box, 2008; Rose, 1996). Finally, a weak emphasis on both the epistemic or social relations to knowledge (ER-, SR-) would result in a form of relativism where the legitimacy of knowledge claims is not contested.

The field of Indigenous Studies (i.e. the intellectual field of research involving or about Indigenous peoples) is clearly divided by competing languages of legitimation, with research employing a knowledge code occupying a dominant position within the field. The main body of research employing a knowledge code of legitimation can be loosely termed 'Western empiricism' (sometimes called 'positivism' by critics), while the main body of research employing a knower code is often called 'cultural studies'. In the remainder of this section I seek to demonstrate this point by reference to a few local examples that focus on the legitimacy of social scientific knowledge.

Critical Whiteness Studies is a fair exemplar of the way a knower code is employed in the field of Indigenous Studies. Here I will take as a representative example Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (2004) article 'Whiteness, epistemology and Indigenous representation'. In this

relatively influential article Moreton-Robinson argues that Western knowledge claims (and traditions) cannot be separated from the race, culture and power relations with which they are bound. By claiming universality for their knowledge system and seeking to be 'objective', White academics reinforce claims to White racial and cultural superiority and thereby relegate conflicting Indigenous knowledge claims to an inferior status (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). In her own words:

Whiteness as an epistemological *a priori* provides for a way of knowing and being that is predicated on superiority, which becomes normalised and forms part of one's taken-for-granted knowledge . . . within whiteness's regime of power, all representations are not of equal value: some are deemed truthful while others are classified fictitious, some are contested while others form part of our commonsense taken-for-granted knowledge of the world. Imbued with a power that normalises their existence, these latter representations are invisible, unnamed and unmarked (Moreton-Robinson, 2004, pp.75-77)

Moreton-Robinson's (2004) claim here – and that of Critical Whiteness Studies more generally – can *only* use a *knower* language of legitimation. The 'epistemic relation' is relatively weaker because the thesis itself questions the legitimacy of the procedures by which claims to knowledge are validated. The legitimacy of Critical Whiteness Studies then, depends on the ability of its authors and readers to 'see' the applicability of the thesis to the world. As such, the social relation is emphasised in determining the legitimacy of knowledge. In 'Whiteness, epistemology and Indigenous representation', to continue the example, Moreton-Robinson (2004) laments Bain Attwood, Stephen Muecke, Andrew Lattas, and Barry Morris's "resistance to naming whiteness" (p. 82). Their error is that they either cannot or refuse to see the existence and influence of whiteness. Because they have not demonstrated appropriate characteristics (i.e. an ability and willingness to name whiteness), the legitimacy of their claims to knowledge is contested.

University textbooks on social scientific research methodology are perhaps the purest representative of the knowledge code in the field, and here I take Sotirios Sarantakos's (2005) *Social Research* as a local and representative example. His chapter on 'principles of social research' opens:

Regardless of its diverse and pluralistic nature, structure and process, social research is generally expected to adhere to certain standards and principles. The nature of these standards and principles may vary, but their presence and necessity are taken for granted. For most researchers, this is a reflection of the nature of social research, which requires it to be based on sound and reliable criteria (Sarantakos, 2005, p73).

For Sarantakos (2005) 'objectivity' is essential. On the relationship between knowledge and politics, the only real issues are intentional bias and falsified data (Sarantakos, 2005, pp. 11-16).

Sarantakos's (2005) textbook clearly employs a knowledge code of legitimation. He states that "subjectivity distorts the process of discovery of objective truths and must be excluded from research" (Sarantakos, 2005, p.93). Here Sarantakos advocates a relatively weak social relation to the subject. He also advocates a relatively stronger epistemic relation to the object of study: "*methodology* is a research strategy that translates ontological and epistemological principles into guidelines that show how research is to be conducted" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 30, emphasis in original).

Moreton-Robinson (2004) and Sarantakos (2005) employ knower and knowledge languages of legitimation respectively, and have very different views on the legitimacy of social scientific knowledge. The use of different legitimation codes within an academic field can lead to a 'code clash' – where actors in the field can't even agree on the grounds for debate (Carvalho, Dong, & Maton, in press). In such cases the field becomes fragmented and sub-fields emerge that

are disengaged from each other. This has to some degree been the case in the broad field of Indigenous Studies, where scholars who are more aligned with Cultural Studies (knower code) have been claiming and calling for a new 'paradigm' while those more aligned with Social Policy (knowledge code) seem to have missed the significance of Indigenous critiques of ethical and methodological procedures. In the final section of this article I seek to demonstrate that these different approaches represent different positions in the intellectual field rather than mutually exclusive 'paradigms'.

Positions and interactions within the field

Languages of legitimation need not be mutually exclusive. That is, discourses employing knower and knowledge codes of legitimation can and do interact. The popularity of Kuhnian 'paradigm' theory within the field of Indigenous Studies (e.g. Foley, 2003; Ladson-Billing & Donnor, 2008; Smith, 1999; Walker, 2001) is, however, in some ways a hindrance to such interaction. Briefly, Kuhn (1970) argued that paradigms represent "universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners" (p. viii). Paradigms are argued to constitute a relatively closed system of puzzles to be solved. "A paradigm can, for that matter, even insulate a community from those socially important problems that are not reducible to puzzle form, because they cannot be stated in terms of the conceptual and instrumental tools the paradigm supplies" (Kuhn, 1970, p.37). The concept of paradigms is inviting for many in the field of Indigenous Studies, especially those employing a knower code of legitimation, because it allows for the legitimate existence of multiple (and possibly contradictory) knowledge systems. Knowledge claims may be 'true' in an Indigenous knowledge system but not in a 'positivist' scientific knowledge system and vice versa. The concept of a paradigm also offers to explain why Indigenous knowledge claims are excluded from the Western (White colonial) intellectual field. At the same time Kuhn's (1970) explanation of paradigm shifts – revolutions in science – offers the possibility of change.

Bourdieuian field theory and LCT offer a more constructive way to understand the conflicts that arise within the field of Indigenous Studies. Rather than conceiving knowledge systems in the Kuhnian sense, as closed puzzle-boxes, field theory allows for the interactions that do in fact occur between Indigenous and White (Western, positivist) knowledge systems in a postcolonial environment. LCT is useful because it emphasises that there are always knowledges and knowers – it is what is emphasised that characterises the legitimation code. LCT also argues that intellectual fields can overlap the regions of the graph (figure 1) and that arguments may employ knowledge and knower codes at different times. Field theory offers insights into the domination, conflict and change that occur in and between various cultural fields. Within the field of Indigenous Studies, as noted above, research that employs a knowledge code of legitimation occupies a dominant position. The dominance of discourses employing a knowledge code of legitimation in this field is tied to the fact that such language is highly compatible with that of the more established, prestigious and profitable intellectual field of the natural sciences. No less important is the compatibility of the knowledge code – with its stronger epistemic relation and weaker social relation – with the logic of bureaucracy. The structuring influence of bureaucracy on academic fields is wide-ranging but beyond the scope of the present article. At the same time there is still a (albeit dominated) place within the field for a growing body of discourse employing a knower code, much of which is openly hostile to 'positivism'.

Research aligned with Cultural Studies has not been shy in utilising the discourses of research employing a knowledge code (e.g. from the disciplines of Social Science and Social

Policy) and is not structurally disinclined to do so (because its relatively weaker empirical relation does not discourage the integration of 'outside' discourses). Because research aligned with Cultural Studies emphasises the social relation between the knower and knowledge, it is within this discourse that Indigenous knowledges most often enter the academic field of Indigenous Studies (e.g. Martin, 2003; Smith, 1999). It is worth noting here that the Indigenous knowledge in the field most often takes the form of Indigenous critiques of academic procedures for validating knowledge and of research ethics (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006; Foley, 2003; Kincheloe & Steinburg, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2004, 2006; Smith, 1999; Swadener & Mutua, 2008). Once formally in the field of Indigenous Studies – in the form of publications and conference presentations – Indigenous knowledges have the potential to infiltrate those areas of the field that are closer to informing social policy and political action. These critiques are active attempts to change what constitutes capital within the field.

By using the procedural language of the knowledge code, Indigenous critiques are beginning to have an influence on the more dominant end of the field. This is happening at both bureaucratic and knowledge production levels. By translating critiques into procedural ethical guidelines, issues raised at the dominated (knower code) end of the field have the potential to influence the structure of the entire field. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS, 2000) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2005) have both recently published guidelines for ethical research involving Indigenous peoples that address many of the issues raised in the literature. Both guidelines promote the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in formal academic research.

Acknowledging and respecting Indigenous knowledge systems and processes is not only a matter of courtesy but also recognition that such knowledge can make a significant contribution to the research process. (AIATSIS, 2000, p. 3)

Another example of interaction between languages of legitimation within the field is the increasing utilisation of Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies. With its emphasis on the human relationships involved in research, on the expertise of research 'subjects', and locatedness of particular research enterprises, PAR is able to employ 'knower', 'elite', and 'knowledge' codes without encountering a 'code clash'. Much of the discourse on PAR is explicitly concerned with outlining procedures for generating knowledge that is both contextualised and valid (eg CRCAH, 2008; Henderson, Simmins, Bourke & Muir, 2002; Tchachos & Vallance, 2004; Tsey et al, 2004; Wand & Eades, 2008). This discourse attempts to influence what constitutes capital within the field by employing the kind of procedural logic that is familiar to the dominant (knowledge code) end of the field of Indigenous Studies. While much of the discourse on PAR methodology calls for a dramatic 'paradigm shift' – implying the absolute dismissal of knowledge code ("positivist") research (e.g. Foley, 2003; Ladson-Billing & Donnor, 2008; Smith, 1999; Walker, 2001) – it is more sensible to understand PAR as incorporating and promoting types of symbolic capital that have previously been undervalued by researchers. The language of Kuhnian paradigms can only serve to fragment the field of Indigenous Studies and this is antithetical to the spirit of negotiation and relationship building that is central to both PAR and the AITSIS (2000) and NHMRC (2005) ethical guidelines.

By analysing White and Indigenous knowledges and the field of Indigenous Studies in terms of Bourdieuan fields rather than Kuhnian paradigms we are able to maintain the claim that there are different criteria of truth in different intellectual or cultural fields without being lured into the trap of thinking that different knowledge systems are closed off from each other. We need not

await a revolutionary paradigm shift before we can engage in discussion from different positions within and between cultural fields. At the same time we are encouraged to be aware of power relations and differences in symbolic capital. Perhaps most importantly, field theory recognises the importance of human relationships in (re)structuring cultural fields. By cultivating genuine relationships between and across fields (e.g. Cultural Studies, Social Sciences, Indigenous cultural fields) we can work together to foster an improved relationship between research and Indigenous peoples. An improved relationship can only promote better outcomes for Indigenous peoples and is a necessary first step in decolonising the human sciences.

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