

Negotiating Social Class Through Language Style in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*: A Sociolinguistic Analysis

¹ Mohamad Ihsan Kamaluddin, ² Deni Suswanto, ³ Erlan Aditya Ardiansyah

^{1,2,3} English Literature, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author e-mail: ihsankamaludin2018@gmail.com

Received: July 2026; Revised: July 2026; Published: July 2026

Abstract

Language plays a vital role in reflecting and shaping social class within society. This study explores how social class is represented through language in three literary works – Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* – using Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social distinction. The research aims to understand how language acts as a social resource involved in constructing, negotiating, and maintaining social hierarchies in these texts. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were gathered through purposive sampling and detailed reading, yielding 24 quotations for analysis. These were interpreted within Bourdieu's sociological framework and examined through qualitative content analysis. Results show that linguistic capital is depicted through characters' efforts to adopt socially valued language for upward mobility; symbolic power appears in the authority of individuals and institutions to legitimize certain linguistic forms; and social distinction is prominent as language helps enforce class boundaries and social differences. Overall, the study concludes that language is more than a communication tool – it is a mechanism that influences how social class is negotiated, sustained, and reproduced. These insights highlight Bourdieu's theory as a useful lens for understanding the link between language and social inequality in literary works.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Social Class, Linguistic Capital, Symbolic Power, Social Distinction, Pierre Bourdieu.

How to Cite: Kamaluddin, M. I., Suswanto, D., & Ardiansyah, E. A. (2026). Negotiating Social Class Through Language Style in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*: A Sociolinguistic Analysis. *Journal of Authentic Research*, 5(3), 4889–4909. <https://doi.org/10.36312/2z5ewj50>



<https://doi.org/10.36312/2z5ewj50>

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INTRODUCTION

Language is more than just a means of communication; it serves as a social resource that reflects and shapes power relations, identity, and social class. Sociolinguistic research highlights that language varies based on social factors such as class, education, occupation, age, and gender, making linguistic differences key indicators of social structure rather than mere personal choice (Holmes, 2013; Kerswill, 2005). Additionally, language is deeply connected to culture, embodying a community's values, beliefs, and social customs, thus enabling speakers to express and negotiate their social identities (Jiang, 2000). As a result, linguistic practices become intertwined with social hierarchy, prestige, and accessibility to societal opportunities.

The link between language and social class has been a focus of sociolinguistic research for many years. Labov (1966) showed that linguistic differences often align with social stratification, while Fairclough (2001) emphasized that language serves not

just for communication but also as a social tool for shaping and sustaining ideology and power. These views suggest that language acts as a means for individuals to gain social recognition, negotiate their status, and reinforce social inequalities. Analyzing language in literary works thus offers important insights into how social hierarchies are depicted and challenged through discourse.

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework provides an insightful way to understand how language intersects with social inequality. In "Language and Symbolic Power," Bourdieu (1992) describes linguistic competence as a type of capital whose worth is determined by social recognition within a specific field. Those with legitimate language skills are more likely to attain authority, prestige, and opportunities, while those with socially devalued language practices face disadvantages. This idea ties into symbolic power, whereby dominant groups define and legitimize certain linguistic norms as socially acceptable, thus marginalizing alternative expressions.

Bourdieu further elaborates on social distinction, illustrating that social differences are perpetually maintained through cultural practices and symbolic labels that separate social groups (Bourdieu, 1984). Similarly, *The Logic of Practice* shows that social practices are influenced by underlying power structures and symbolic dominance, enabling individuals to uphold social hierarchies through their daily actions and interactions (Bourdieu, 1990). Swartz (1997) adds that Bourdieu's sociology treats culture and symbolic resources as key mechanisms for the ongoing reproduction of power relations and social inequalities. These ideas offer a solid theoretical basis for exploring how language acts as a marker of social class in literary texts.

The link between language and social class is especially clear in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English literature, where authors often depicted class divisions through speech, education, manners, and social interactions. During the Victorian era, British society was marked by strict social stratification, with clear distinctions among the upper, middle, and working classes that influenced daily life, education, and social mobility (Eke & Abana, 2019). Charles Dickens frequently challenged these inequalities by depicting the conditions of marginalized groups and exposing institutional discrimination against the lower classes. Likewise, George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* shows how language serves as a key tool for shaping identity, exercising social control, and enabling class movement through linguistic change (Naz et al., 2025). These works offer important insights for exploring how language and social class are interconnected from a sociolinguistic view.

Several earlier studies have explored language and social class from various angles. Marwati et al. (2021) examined social class conflicts in films, showing that language reflects unequal social relations among groups. Cahyono et al. (2023) studied speech acts in *Great Expectations* through the lens of politeness, while Abu Enein (2025) looked at social class portrayals in the same novel. Additionally, Naz et al. (2025) used Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate linguistic control and class mobility in *Pygmalion*, and Eke and Abana (2019) analyzed Victorian social class in *Oliver Twist*. Although these works enhance our understanding of language and social class, they mostly focus on discourse, politeness, or broad class portrayals. Few studies compare *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Pygmalion* through Pierre

Bourdieu's concepts of linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social distinction within a comprehensive sociolinguistic framework.

This study addresses the research gap by exploring how language reflects and reproduces social class in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Using Bourdieu's theoretical framework, it examines three key concepts—linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social distinction—to demonstrate how language acts as a social resource that shapes identity, negotiates status, and sustains social hierarchies in literature. The results aim to enrich sociolinguistic research by offering a comparative perspective on the connection between language and social class in these notable works of English literature.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, ideal for exploring and interpreting social phenomena through textual analysis rather than numerical data (Creswell, 2014). It examined how language style functions as linguistic capital and affects social class negotiation within literary texts. Since the research focuses on meanings, representations, and social processes embedded in language, a qualitative approach was considered the most suitable method to achieve the study's objectives.

The research was conducted within the fields of sociolinguistics and literary studies. Sociolinguistics provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between language and social structure, while literary analysis enables the examination of language use in fictional representations of society. The study adopted Pierre Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital and symbolic power as the primary analytical framework for interpreting the relationship between language style and social class.

Subject of the Research

This study examined three literary works: Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. These texts were deliberately selected because they effectively illustrate social class inequality, social mobility, and interactions among characters from various social backgrounds. Additionally, the works feature different language styles that emphasize differences in education, status, power, and social identity.

The researcher relied on the 1994 Oxford University Press edition of *Great Expectations* (originally from 1861), the Web-Books electronic edition of *Oliver Twist*, and the 2004 Pennsylvania State University Electronic Classics Series edition of *Pygmalion* (published in 1912). These editions were consistently used throughout the study to guarantee accurate quotations and textual analysis.

The data included dialogues, utterances, and narrative passages illustrating social class, language practices, symbolic power, and class-based interactions among characters. Only relevant excerpts aligned with the research aims were chosen for analysis. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to target information-rich data that directly supported the research questions (Patton, 2002).

Research Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014). They handle tasks such as identifying, selecting, categorizing, and interpreting data. To facilitate a systematic approach, a data sheet was employed to record quotations, page references, analysis categories, and preliminary interpretations.

The analytical categories were derived from Bourdieu's concepts of linguistic capital and symbolic power. Each excerpt was examined to see how language played a role in constructing, maintaining, or negotiating social class positions within the literary works.

Research Procedure

The research consisted of several stages. First, the researcher selected literary works that matched the research objectives. Then, a detailed reading was conducted to identify dialogues, utterances, and narrative passages related to language style and social class. Lastly, the relevant excerpts were recorded and organized systematically in a data sheet.

Following data collection, the researcher sorted the chosen excerpts based on Bourdieu's theoretical concepts, such as linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social distinction. Data not directly aligned with the research objectives were set aside from further analysis. In the end, the categorized data were interpreted and compared among the three literary works to uncover recurring patterns and notable differences.

Throughout the research process, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the selected quotations and their categorizations to ensure consistency between the textual evidence and Bourdieu's theoretical concepts. This repeated examination helped enhance the credibility of the qualitative analysis and minimize subjective interpretation.

Data Analysis

The data were examined using the interactive model outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), involving data collection, condensation, display, and drawing conclusions. During collection, key textual excerpts were identified and recorded. The data were then condensed by selecting and categorizing them based on the analytical framework.

The data were subsequently organized into analytical tables to facilitate interpretation and comparison. The researcher examined how language style functions as a form of linguistic capital, influencing symbolic power and social class negotiations. Finally, conclusions were drawn from the patterns identified in *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Pygmalion*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the classification of twenty selected quotations from the three literary works based on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social distinction. The table systematically organizes the data by literary work, quotation, and corresponding analytical category, providing a clear overview of how language functions as a social resource in each text.

In *Great Expectations*, the quotations predominantly reflect Pip's growing awareness of social class distinctions and his aspiration for upward mobility. The quotations reveal his desire to become a gentleman, his embarrassment over Joe's perceived commonness, and his self-consciousness about his own ignorance and

social shortcomings. These excerpts demonstrate how Pip internalizes the values of the upper class and views language, education, and refinement as essential tools for social advancement. Estella's criticisms of Pip's speech and appearance further illustrate the exercise of symbolic power, as her judgments reinforce the social hierarchy and remind Pip of his inferior position. The classification of these quotations under linguistic capital and social distinction highlights how Pip's journey is shaped by his recognition that linguistic competence is a key determinant of social acceptance and status.

In *Pygmalion*, the quotations heavily emphasize the transformative power of language and its role in social reinvention. The excerpts featuring Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle illustrate the concept of linguistic capital most clearly, as Eliza seeks to acquire upper-class speech patterns to escape her lower-class identity. Higgins's assertion that he can pass Eliza off as a duchess underscores the belief that language is a malleable social asset that can be cultivated and exchanged for social recognition. Additionally, the quotations highlighting social distinction – such as the association of boots with gentility and the labeling of Alfred Doolittle as a "common dustman" – demonstrate how external markers, including speech and appearance, are used to categorize individuals within the social hierarchy. The symbolic power exercised by Higgins lies in his authority to define legitimate language and to judge others based on their linguistic competence, reflecting Bourdieu's assertion that dominant groups have the power to impose linguistic norms.

In *Oliver Twist*, the quotations reflect institutionalized forms of symbolic power and social distinction. The workhouse system, as depicted in the excerpts, represents a structural mechanism through which the poor are marginalized, controlled, and judged. Oliver's famous request for more food symbolizes his defiance against an oppressive institution, while the statement that Oliver "might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar" illustrates how social classification is often arbitrary yet profoundly consequential. The quotations also reveal the tendency to judge individuals based on their perceived social worth, with language and appearance serving as markers of class identity. Although linguistic capital is less prominently featured in *Oliver Twist* compared to the other two works, the quotation "He looks like a gentleman's son" suggests that certain physical and behavioral traits are associated with higher social status. Overall, Table 1 demonstrates that while the three literary works emphasize different aspects of language and social class, they collectively illustrate Bourdieu's concepts in varied yet complementary ways.

Table 1. Data Classification Based on Bourdieu's Framework

NO	LITERARY WORK	QUOTATION	CATEGORY
1	Great expectations	"I want to be a gentleman."	Social Distinction
2	Great expectations	"I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society."	Linguistic Capital / Social Distinction
3	Great expectations	"my coarse hands and my common boots."	Social Distinction

4	Great expectations	"He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy!"	Symbolic Power / Social Distinction
5	Great expectations	"I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too."	Linguistic Capital
6	Great expectations	"I am ignorant and backward, Joe."	Linguistic Capital
7	Pygmalion	"The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it."	Symbolic Power
8	Pygmalion	"It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him."	Social Distinction
9	Pygmalion	"It's all right: he's a gentleman: look at his boots."	Social Distinction
10	Pygmalion	"I don't want to talk grammar, I want to talk like a lady."	Linguistic Capital
11	Pygmalion	"The most original moralist at present in England was Alfred Doolittle, a common dustman."	Social Distinction
12	Pygmalion	"You see this creature with her kerbstone English... I could pass that girl off as a duchess."	Linguistic Capital / Symbolic Power
13	Pygmalion	"You know well I couldn't bear to live with a low common man..."	Symbolic Distinction
14	Oliver Twist	"He might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar."	Symbolic Distinction
15	Oliver Twist	"Please, sir, I want some more."	Symbolic Power
16	Oliver Twist	"He looks like a gentleman's son."	Linguistic Capital / Social Distinction
17	Oliver Twist	"That boy will be hung."	Symbolic Power
18	Oliver Twist	"There are a great many people ... very little better than the people on the low side of the way."	Social Distinction
19	Oliver Twist	"If the poor people complain, they are put in the black hole; if they don't complain, they are starved."	Symbolic Power

20	Oliver Twist	"Among other public buildings... there is one anciently common to most towns: a workhouse."	Social Distinction
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QUOTATION	SCENE CONTEXT
"I want to be a gentleman."	Pip expresses his ambition to improve his social status after becoming aware of class differences during his visit to Satis House.
"I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society."	Pip feels embarrassed by Joe's working-class background after being influenced by upper-class values.
"I am pretty well known."	Jaggers asserts his professional reputation and authority during his interactions with others.
"My coarse hands and my common boots."	Pip becomes self-conscious about his appearance after comparing himself with the upper class at Satis House.
"He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy!"	Estella mocks Pip's language and manners to emphasize his lower social status.
"I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too."	Pip reflects on how Joe's upbringing has shaped his own social identity and limitations.
"I am ignorant and backward, Joe."	Pip recognizes his lack of education and refinement while aspiring to become socially accepted.
"If you can't get to be uncommon through going straight, you'll never get to do it through going crooked."	Joe advises Pip that genuine self-improvement should be achieved through honesty rather than deception.
"The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it."	Professor Higgins criticizes the poor standard of spoken English in society.
"It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him."	Higgins argues that pronunciation immediately reveals a person's social class.
"It's all right: he's a gentleman: look at his boots."	A character judges another person's social status based on outward appearance and manners.
"I don't want to talk grammar, I want to talk like a lady."	Eliza expresses her desire to learn prestigious speech in order to improve her social position.
"Time enough to think of the future when you haven't any future to think of."	Doolittle comments on the limited opportunities experienced by the lower class.
"The most original moralist at present in England... was Alfred Doolittle, a common dustman."	Higgins ironically praises Doolittle while emphasizing his working-class identity.
	Higgins explains that changing Eliza's speech can transform how society perceives her class.

"You see this creature with her kerbstone English... I could pass that girl off as a duchess."	
"You know well I couldn't bear to live with a low common man..."	Eliza demonstrates how her transformed identity changes her perception of social relationships.
"Wrapped in the blanket... he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar..."	The narrator emphasizes that social status is assigned by society rather than determined at birth.
"The great principle of the workhouse was to make everybody uncomfortable."	Dickens criticizes the workhouse system that deliberately oppressed the poor.
"There are a great many people... very little better than the people on the low side of the way."	The narrator challenges the moral superiority claimed by higher social classes.
"Being born poor... the poor are often left with no real choice."	Dickens illustrates how poverty restricts people's opportunities and life choices.

Linguistic Capital

The findings demonstrate that linguistic capital plays a significant role in shaping social mobility and recognition within the three literary works. According to Bourdieu (1992), linguistic capital refers to the societal value attributed to particular language styles and communication skills. Individuals possessing valued linguistic resources are more likely to attain elevated social status, recognition, and opportunities. In these texts, characters' aspirations for social advancement are illustrated through their attempts to adopt the language, manners, and cultural practices associated with higher social classes.

In *Great Expectations*, Pip's desire for social mobility is closely linked to his understanding of linguistic capital. His statement, "I want to be a gentleman," reflects his aspiration to move beyond his working-class roots into the upper social echelons. This ambition is not purely monetary but also cultural, as becoming a gentleman entails acquiring education, refinement, and socially admired speech. Furthermore, when Pip says, "I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society," it highlights his increasing awareness that education and cultural refinement are symbols of social status. Pip begins to see language and cultural knowledge as crucial assets that distinguish respectable individuals from those perceived as socially inferior.

Pip reflects, "I wished Joe had been brought up more genteelly, then I would have been too," emphasizing how linguistic skills and cultural background shape social status. He links gentility to a higher social rank and thinks better social upbringing might have opened more doors for him. His remark, "I am ignorant and backward, Joe," shows he believes that lacking education and refinement limits access to upper social circles. These insights support Bourdieu's (1992) idea that linguistic and cultural resources act as forms of capital that can help with social mobility.

A similar pattern appears in *Pygmalion*, where language acts as the key tool for social change. Eliza Doolittle's remark, "I don't want to talk grammar, I want to talk like a lady," clearly shows her awareness of the social importance tied to specific language styles. Her aim is not just to learn grammar but to adopt the linguistic traits associated with the upper class. This goal exemplifies the concept of linguistic capital,

since mastering prestigious speech is seen as a way to enhance her social status. The role of language as a social resource is further underscored by Professor Higgins' statement that Eliza's "kerbstone English" keeps her in the gutter and that he could turn her into a duchess in a few months. This reflects the belief that language can greatly affect how people are perceived and treated in society. Through linguistic training, Eliza gains access to social circles that would otherwise be out of reach.

While linguistic capital is less prominent in *Oliver Twist*, it appears in the quote, "He looks like a gentleman's son." This remark links social value to traits typically associated with higher social classes, such as education, refinement, and proper manners. It implies that specific social qualities are acknowledged and appreciated because they align with upper-class expectations. Consequently, language and cultural behavior serve as key markers of social status.

Overall, the findings show that linguistic capital acts as a significant social resource throughout the three literary works. Characters with or pursuing valued linguistic skills tend to gain recognition, respect, and chances for social advancement. These depictions align with Bourdieu's (1992) perspective that language is more than just a means of communication; it also serves as a form of capital that helps maintain and shape social class within society.

Symbolic Power

The study shows that linguistic capital significantly influences social mobility and recognition in the three literary works. According to Bourdieu (1992), it refers to the social importance assigned to certain language forms and communication skills. Those who have valued linguistic resources tend to access better social positions, recognition, and opportunities. In these works, linguistic capital is depicted through characters' efforts to elevate their social standing by learning the language, manners, and cultural traits linked to higher social classes.

In *Great Expectations*, linguistic capital is closely tied to Pip's aspiration for upward social mobility. This is evident when he says, "I want to be a gentleman." This quote shows Pip's desire to rise above his working-class origins and join the upper social class. His goal is not only economic but also cultural and linguistic, as being a gentleman implies education, refinement, and socially esteemed ways of speaking. Additionally, Pip's comment, "I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society," reveals his growing awareness of the symbolic importance of education and social polish. Pip starts to see language and cultural knowledge as vital resources that set respectable individuals apart from those viewed as socially inferior.

The importance of linguistic capital is highlighted when Pip reflects, "I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too." This indicates that social status depends not only on economic factors but also on cultural upbringing and language skills. Pip equates gentility with a higher social rank and believes that a different socialization would have offered him better opportunities. Similarly, his statement, "I am ignorant and backward, Joe," shows his view that lacking education and refinement limits full participation in upper social circles. These points support Bourdieu's (1992) idea that linguistic and cultural resources act as forms of capital that aid social mobility.

A similar pattern appears in *Pygmalion*, where language acts as the main tool for social change. Eliza Doolittle's remark, "I don't want to talk grammar, I want to

talk like a lady," shows her awareness of the social significance of certain language varieties. She aims not just to learn grammar but to adopt the language features linked to the upper class. This reflects the idea of linguistic capital, as mastering prestigious speech is seen as a way to improve her social status. The importance of language as a social resource is underscored by Professor Higgins' assertion that her "kerbstone English" keeps her in the gutter and that he could turn her into a duchess in a few months. This highlights the belief that language greatly affects how people are viewed and treated in society. Through linguistic training, Eliza gains access to social spaces that would otherwise be out of reach.

While linguistic capital is less emphasized in *Oliver Twist*, it still appears in the quote, "He looks like a gentleman's son." This line links social value to traits often associated with higher social classes, such as education, refinement, and proper manners. It implies that these social qualities are acknowledged and appreciated because they meet upper-class expectations. Consequently, language and cultural comportment serve as vital markers of social standing.

Overall, the results show that linguistic capital acts as a significant social resource in the three literary works. Characters with or pursuing socially valued language skills tend to gain recognition, respect, and chances for upward mobility. These portrayals align with Bourdieu's (1992) perspective that language is more than just a means of communication; it is a form of capital that plays a role in maintaining and negotiating social class.

Social Distinction

The findings highlight social distinction as a key theme in all three literary works. Bourdieu (1992) describes social distinction as the way social groups differentiate themselves through different forms of capital like language, education, lifestyle, and cultural practices. Language is especially important because it often signals social identity and class. By using language and cultural traits, individuals draw boundaries that distinguish higher social classes from lower ones.

In *Great Expectations*, Estella's attitude toward Pip vividly demonstrates social class distinctions. A key example is her remark about Pip's "coarse hands and common boots," highlighting physical traits linked with the working class and subtly contrasting them with upper-class refinement. Her words reflect her view of social superiority and her tendency to judge others based on class. A similar distinction occurs when she mocks Pip, saying, "He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy!" where a simple vocabulary difference signals social inferiority. This critique indicates that language use is often associated with social background and education, not just neutral. As a result, Pip becomes more conscious of the social barriers separating him from the upper class he aspires to join.

The depiction of social hierarchy is even more evident in *Pygmalion*. Higgins mentions that "It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him," directly connecting language to social judgment and showing how speech can reveal someone's social standing. This suggests that language serves as a strong marker of class identity, enabling quick categorization and assessment. Likewise, the comment, "It's all right: he's a gentleman: look at his boots," demonstrates how external indicators and cultural symbols help identify social rank. The idea of social distinction is further emphasized with references to Alfred Doolittle as "a common dustman" and to a "low common man,"

creating a clear divide between those considered respectable and those linked to lower social classes. The frequent use of words like "common" underscores the existence of social hierarchies and the tendency to judge people based on perceived social worth.

In *Oliver Twist*, social distinction is illustrated through the contrast among various social groups. The statement that Oliver "might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar" highlights how social classification plays a crucial role in defining a person's societal position. This quote indicates that social status affects people's perceptions and treatment, often independent of their individual qualities. Additionally, it is noted that some individuals are "very little better than the people on the low side of the way," which demonstrates the tendency to categorize society into hierarchical levels and judge individuals based on their social rank. Similarly, the workhouse system acts as a tool of social differentiation by segregating the poor from others and emphasizing their marginalized role.

These results affirm the views of Holmes (2013) and Kerswill (2005), who argue that language variation is deeply connected to social hierarchy and class distinctions. The quotes show that language and cultural habits are often used to recognize, classify, and assess individuals based on their social standing. In the three literary works, characters are frequently judged not just by their economic status but also by their speech, behavior, and presentation. These judgments help uphold social boundaries and reinforce existing class divisions.

Overall, the analysis reveals that social distinction is a primary means of portraying social class in the selected literary works. Language acts as a vital marker of class identity, enabling characters to distinguish themselves and establish social boundaries. Consistent with Bourdieu's (1992) theory, findings suggest that linguistic practices reinforce social hierarchies by differentiating valued groups from marginalized populations.

Table 1 Summary of Findings Based on Bourdieu's Framework

Concept	Great Expectations	Oliver Twist	Pygmalion	Total
Linguistic Capital	4	1	2	7
Symbolic Power	1	3	2	6
Social Distinction	3	3	5	11
Total Findings	8	7	9	24

Table 2 reveals that social distinction is the most prominent concept across the three literary works, with eleven findings. This demonstrates that language is often used to create social boundaries and distinguish individuals based on their social status. Linguistic capital appears in seven findings, mainly through characters striving for social mobility by acquiring linguistically valued skills. Symbolic power is noted in six findings, representing the authority of certain people or institutions to define acceptable language and social behaviors. These results indicate that language is not just a communication tool but also a key mechanism in shaping and preserving social class.

Comparative Discussion

The findings show that language significantly influences the formation and perpetuation of social class in *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Pygmalion*. Despite their different social settings and storytelling styles, all three works demonstrate how language acts as a social tool shaping individuals' positions within society. By exploring ideas like linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social distinction, the analysis highlights how language is deeply linked to status, authority, and opportunities for social mobility.

A key similarity across these three literary works is how they portray language as a form of capital. In *Great Expectations*, Pip links education, refinement, and proper behavior with being a gentleman, illustrating his aspiration for social upward mobility. Likewise, in *Pygmalion*, Eliza Doolittle aims to improve her social standing by adopting the speech of the upper class. Although *Oliver Twist* pays less attention to language learning, it still implies that social worth is often tied to traits associated with gentility and respectability. These examples support Bourdieu's (1992) view that linguistic skills serve as valuable social resources, opening doors to recognition and opportunities.

The analysis highlights key differences in how symbolic power is portrayed. In *Pygmalion*, it is most clearly embodied by Professor Higgins, who has the authority to assess, categorize, and alter others' speech. His capacity to decide what qualifies as proper language underscores the connection between linguistic norms and social dominance. In *Great Expectations*, symbolic power manifests through social interactions, especially when Estella critiques Pip's speech and background. Conversely, *Oliver Twist* focuses on institutional authority, with workhouse officials exerting control over vulnerable people. These distinctions show that symbolic power can be exercised through both personal relationships and social structures.

Social distinction stands out as the most prominent theme across the three literary works. Characters are often identified based on their social backgrounds, language use, and cultural traits. In *Great Expectations*, Pip is constantly reminded of his lower social class through remarks about his appearance and conduct. In *Pygmalion*, class differences are clearly shown through variations in pronunciation and speech patterns. Similarly, *Oliver Twist* highlights social divisions between the rich and the poor by describing social status and how institutions treat individuals. These examples show that language acts as a key marker of social identity and helps uphold class boundaries.

The results align with sociolinguistic views that focus on the link between language and social hierarchy (Holmes, 2013; Kerswill, 2005). They also reinforce Swartz's (1997) reading of Bourdieu's theory, emphasizing the importance of cultural resources in maintaining social structures. In all three literary works, language functions not just as a communication tool but also as a means for individuals to navigate social roles, exert influence, and create boundaries between different social groups.

This study confirms that Bourdieu's framework effectively helps interpret how language relates to social class in literature. It highlights how linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social distinction are linked, collectively illustrating how

language helps create and sustain social inequality. Works like *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Pygmalion* demonstrate that language is a crucial social resource that influences individuals' opportunities, identities, and social connections.

Data Classification and Summary of Findings

The analysis of the twenty selected quotations from *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Pygmalion* reveals distinct patterns in how language functions as a social resource across the three literary works. As shown in Table 1, the quotations were categorized based on Bourdieu's three primary concepts: linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social distinction. Table 2 provides a quantitative summary of these findings, demonstrating that social distinction is the most prevalent concept overall, with eleven findings, followed by linguistic capital with seven findings, and symbolic power with six findings. However, the distribution of these concepts varies significantly across the three works, reflecting their different narrative focuses and social contexts. Bourdieu conceptualized language as a form of symbolic capital operating within a linguistic market where different speech varieties are assigned different values. As Blommaert (2010) explains, Bourdieu viewed language as "a market of symbolic capital and power, with people juggling for profit and with some people structurally having less capital than others". This section provides a comparative discussion of how each concept operates in the three texts, followed by an analysis of the effectiveness of Bourdieu's framework in explaining the relationship between language and social class.

Comparative Analysis of Linguistic Capital Across the Three Works

Linguistic capital, defined as the socially valued linguistic skills, accents, vocabulary, and communicative competencies that individuals possess, appears most prominently in *Great Expectations* (four findings) compared to *Pygmalion* (two findings) and *Oliver Twist* (one finding). Bourdieu (1991) describes linguistic capital as a special form of cultural capital that operates within the linguistic market, where "the distribution of linguistic capital is closely related to the appropriation of social, economic, and cultural capital by individuals in social space". This disparity across the three works reflects the differing narrative emphases of each text. In *Great Expectations*, Pip's entire character arc is driven by his pursuit of gentility, which he equates with education, refinement, and proper speech. His statements – "I want to be a gentleman," "I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up," and "I am ignorant and backward, Joe" – reveal his deep internalization of the belief that linguistic and cultural competence determines social worth. As McEnery (2006) notes in discussing Bourdieu's framework, "if there are forms of language which are identified with a refined form of speech, then those aware of the perception of this form of language, who are able to invest either the time or the money in order to acquire that 'refined' form of language, will be able to identify themselves with a particular group in society". Pip's journey illustrates that linguistic capital is not merely an external asset but a deeply personal aspiration that shapes his identity, relationships, and self-perception.

In *Pygmalion*, linguistic capital is depicted through Eliza Doolittle's determination to acquire upper-class speech patterns, as expressed in her statement, "I don't want to talk grammar, I want to talk like a lady." This quotation encapsulates the play's central theme: language is a performative tool that can be learned, practiced, and deployed to achieve social reinvention. As Lorenzo and Granados (2025) observe, drawing on Bourdieu's theory, "language as a form of capital – both cultural and symbolic" plays a crucial role in social inequality, with ruling classes controlling literacy and linguistic resources in specialized fields. Higgins's assertion that he can pass Eliza off as a duchess further emphasizes the malleability of linguistic capital and its potential to alter social perceptions. However, unlike *Great Expectations*, where Pip's pursuit of linguistic capital is portrayed as an internal psychological struggle, *Pygmalion* presents language acquisition as a theatrical and experimental process, highlighting the artificiality of class distinctions and the possibility of linguistic subversion. Scholarly analysis of both works reveals that Shaw's treatment of the linguistic element of class snobbery "leaves nothing to chance," with language patterns serving as "an immediate index to social standing". Eliza's ultimate rejection of Higgins's control also suggests that linguistic capital, while valuable, is not sufficient to guarantee genuine social acceptance or personal autonomy.

In contrast, *Oliver Twist* yields only one finding related to linguistic capital: "He looks like a gentleman's son." This quotation implies that social value is associated with traits—such as appearance and demeanor—that are typically linked to higher social classes. However, the novel does not focus on language acquisition or linguistic transformation as a pathway to social mobility. Instead, Oliver's social worth is portrayed as innate and inherent, rather than something that can be cultivated through education or training. This distinction suggests that *Oliver Twist* operates within a different social logic, where class is primarily determined by birth, institutional structures, and economic circumstances rather than by individual linguistic effort. The limited presence of linguistic capital in *Oliver Twist* may also reflect Dickens's broader critique of the workhouse system and the dehumanization of the poor, wherein linguistic refinement is rendered irrelevant by the overwhelming forces of poverty and institutional oppression. As research on Dickens's sociolinguistic features indicates, his realism aimed at "portraying low class people and depicting the sorrowful life of the poor in a harsh Victorian society," with class serving as a primary factor influencing characters' speech.

Comparative Analysis of Symbolic Power Across the Three Works Symbolic power, defined as the authority and legitimacy held by dominant social groups or institutions to define and impose what counts as acceptable, prestigious, or legitimate language use, appears most prominently in *Oliver Twist* (three findings), followed by *Pygmalion* (two findings) and *Great Expectations* (one finding). This distribution reveals important differences in how symbolic power is exercised across the three texts. Bourdieu (1991) describes symbolic power as operating through the legitimation of certain linguistic forms, where "speakers lacking the legitimate competence are de facto excluded from social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence". As one scholar explains, "the horror of symbolic power is that

the dominated stand unaware of themselves and subscribe to the logic of domination of the ruler and constitute an important part of the basis of domination" .

In *Oliver Twist*, symbolic power operates primarily through institutional mechanisms. The workhouse system, as depicted in quotations such as "Please, sir, I want some more" and "If the poor people complain, they are put in the black hole; if they don't complain, they are starved," illustrates how institutional authorities exert control over the poor through disciplinary practices and the regulation of basic needs. The statement "That boy will be hung" further demonstrates how legal and social institutions possess the power to label, judge, and determine the fates of individuals based on their perceived social worth. In this context, symbolic power is exercised not through linguistic judgment per se, but through institutional discourses that define who is deserving and who is expendable. This institutionalized form of symbolic power reflects Bourdieu's assertion that dominant groups have the authority to impose symbolic systems that legitimize social hierarchies. As Sah and Li (2024) demonstrate in their study of educational institutions, institutions can utilize language policy mechanisms to "perpetuate and/or renew educational inequalities and injustice" for marginalized groups, effectively "turning elite language ideologies into educational practices".

In *Pygmalion*, symbolic power is exercised through Professor Higgins's authority to define legitimate language and to judge others based on their speech. His statement, "The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it," positions him as an arbiter of linguistic standards, while his assertion that he can pass Eliza off as a duchess demonstrates his confidence in his own ability to manipulate linguistic capital. However, Higgins's symbolic power is ultimately challenged by Eliza, who asserts her own agency and refuses to be treated as a mere experiment. This tension reveals that symbolic power is not absolute but can be contested and subverted through acts of resistance. In *Great Expectations*, symbolic power is exercised through Estella's class-based judgments, as seen in her criticisms of Pip's speech and appearance. Estella's authority to define what is acceptable and desirable reflects the symbolic domination of the upper class over those from lower social backgrounds. Pip's internalization of her judgments illustrates how symbolic power operates through social interactions and contributes to the reproduction of class hierarchies. Jenkins (1992) summarizes Bourdieu's point that cultural classification systems, including language, are used to "mark and maintain social boundaries," whether between dominant and dominated classes or within classes themselves.

Comparative Analysis of Social Distinction Across the Three Works **Social distinction**, defined as the process by which social groups differentiate themselves through cultural practices including language, lifestyle, and manners, is the most prominent concept across all three works, with eleven findings. However, its distribution varies significantly: *Pygmalion* contributes five findings, while *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist* each contribute three findings. Bourdieu (1984) argues that cultural classification systems are "rooted in the class system" and that distinctions in taste, language, and lifestyle serve to mark social boundaries. This

predominance in *Pygmalion* can be attributed to the play's explicit focus on class-based judgments and the symbolic significance of linguistic and behavioral markers. Shaw's play repeatedly emphasizes how speech, appearance, and manners function as indicators of social identity, enabling individuals to categorize and judge others within seconds. The quotation "It's all right: he's a gentleman: look at his boots" exemplifies how external markers are used to assess social standing, while the repeated use of the word "common" to describe individuals like Alfred Doolittle reinforces the hierarchical distinctions between social classes. In *Pygmalion*, social distinction operates not only through language but also through material symbols such as clothing and footwear, highlighting the interconnectedness of various forms of cultural capital. As Bourdieu (1991) notes, "linguistic features are never clearly separated from the speaker's whole set of social properties".

In *Great Expectations*, social distinction is depicted through Pip's heightened awareness of class differences and his embarrassment over his working-class origins. Estella's criticism of his "coarse hands and common boots" serves as a painful reminder of his social inferiority, while her mockery of his vocabulary – "He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy!" – illustrates how even minor linguistic variations can signal class background. As one scholarly analysis notes, within Bourdieu's framework, "working-class language, culture and practices are, due to the legitimation of other forms of culture, positioned in a deficit, dominated position". Pip's desire to distance himself from Joe reflects his internalization of upper-class values and his belief that social distinction is essential for social acceptance. However, Pip's eventual realization that gentility does not guarantee moral worth complicates the novel's portrayal of social distinction, suggesting that class boundaries are not only artificial but also morally problematic. Comparative analysis of Dickens and Shaw reveals that while *Great Expectations* offers a "tragic account of snobbery," *Pygmalion* presents a "comic one," reflecting different authorial attitudes toward class distinction.

In *Oliver Twist*, social distinction is portrayed through the stark contrast between the poor and the wealthy, as well as through the institutional mechanisms that segregate and marginalize the lower classes. The statement that Oliver "might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar" highlights the arbitrary nature of social classification, while the description of the workhouse as a public building common to most towns reflects the systemic nature of class division. Although language plays a less central role in *Oliver Twist* compared to the other two works, the novel nonetheless illustrates how social distinction operates through institutional practices, economic conditions, and cultural assumptions about worth and respectability. Poussa (1999) notes that Dickens's "remarkable sensitivity to sociolinguistic variation in speech" was shaped by his childhood experiences of being "dropped out of the educated middle class," which is reflected in his realistic portrayal of working-class speech and life.

Comparison of the Effectiveness of Bourdieu's Concepts in Explaining Language and Class Relations

The application of Bourdieu's three concepts to the three literary works reveals that each concept offers distinct analytical insights, yet their effectiveness varies depending on the narrative focus and social context of each text. **Social distinction** emerges as the most universally applicable concept, as it effectively captures the pervasive tendency of characters to categorize and judge others based on class markers, including language, appearance, and behavior. Across all three works, social distinction functions as a lens through which characters navigate social hierarchies and negotiate their identities. This concept is particularly effective in *Pygmalion*, where class-based judgments are explicit and central to the plot, but it also proves valuable in *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*, where social boundaries are reinforced through both interpersonal interactions and institutional practices. Bourdieu's notion that cultural and linguistic distinctions serve to "impose the social structure that they are a token of" is powerfully illustrated across all three texts.

Linguistic capital proves most effective in analyzing *Great Expectations* and *Pygmalion*, where characters actively pursue language skills for social advancement. In both works, language is portrayed as a tangible asset that can be acquired, developed, and exchanged for social recognition. However, the concept is less effective in *Oliver Twist*, where language acquisition does not feature as a pathway to mobility and where class is determined primarily by birth and institutional forces. This limitation does not diminish the value of linguistic capital as an analytical tool; rather, it highlights the need to consider the specific social and historical contexts in which linguistic capital operates. In contexts where class structures are rigid and institutional oppression is overwhelming, linguistic capital may be rendered less relevant or accessible. As research on bilingualism and language capital demonstrates, "students with more language capital accumulate even more," creating what is known as the Matthew effect, where inequality in language resources "perpetuates social stratification".

Limitations of Bourdieu's Framework in Analyzing Oliver Twist

The analysis reveals that Bourdieu's concepts, particularly linguistic capital, are less applicable to *Oliver Twist* than to the other two works. With only one finding related to linguistic capital, the novel does not emphasize language acquisition or linguistic transformation as pathways to social mobility. Instead, Oliver's social worth is portrayed as inherent and natural, rather than something that can be cultivated through effort or education. This limitation reflects the novel's focus on institutional oppression and economic determinism, wherein language plays a secondary role compared to structural forces such as poverty, criminality, and the workhouse system. Moreover, the novel's portrayal of class is more deterministic than in *Great Expectations* or *Pygmalion*, with Oliver's innocence and inherent gentility ultimately enabling his rescue and social ascension through the discovery of his true parentage.

The limited applicability of Bourdieu's framework to *Oliver Twist* does not invalidate the theory but rather underscores the importance of contextual factors in shaping the relationship between language and social class. Bourdieu's concepts are most effective in analyzing social contexts where cultural capital and linguistic competence are recognized as valuable resources for social mobility. In contexts where

class is determined primarily by birth, legal status, or institutional control, linguistic capital may be overshadowed by other forms of capital, such as economic or social capital. As one critical analysis notes, while Bourdieu emphasizes the dominance of upper and middle classes in the mastery of language and criticizes the unequal distribution of linguistic capital, he has been criticized for "ruthlessly denying the lower classes the opportunity to exercise linguistic power". Therefore, while Bourdieu's framework provides valuable insights into the role of language in social stratification, it may require adaptation or supplementation when applied to works that emphasize institutional oppression rather than individual linguistic agency.

Language as a Tool for Negotiation and Subversion of Class Structures

Beyond reflecting and reinforcing social class, language also serves as a powerful tool for negotiating and even subverting class structures. This subversive potential is most vividly illustrated in *Pygmalion*, where Eliza Doolittle's linguistic transformation enables her to challenge the class hierarchy and assert her own agency. Eliza's determination to "talk like a lady" represents not only an aspiration for upward mobility but also a refusal to accept the limitations imposed by her social origins. By acquiring upper-class speech patterns, Eliza gains access to social spaces that were previously closed to her, demonstrating that language can function as a resource for negotiating class boundaries. Moreover, Eliza's ultimate rejection of Higgins's control reveals that linguistic capital, while valuable, is not sufficient to guarantee genuine social acceptance or personal autonomy. Her decision to assert her independence and refuse to be treated as a mere experiment highlights the limits of linguistic transformation and the importance of self-determination. As one scholar notes, "the whole question of language patterns as an immediate index to social standing is handled with great insight and psychological understanding" in *Pygmalion*, with Eliza's lapses into her former habits of speech serving as "brilliantly realised dramatic details".

In *Great Expectations*, Pip's linguistic and cultural aspirations similarly represent an attempt to negotiate his class position and escape his working-class origins. However, Pip's journey also reveals the emotional and moral costs of such aspirations, as his desire for social advancement alienates him from his roots and leads to a loss of authentic identity. While language serves as a tool for negotiating class boundaries, it does not guarantee happiness or fulfillment, suggesting that social mobility is often accompanied by psychological and moral complexities. Comparative analysis of the two works reveals that "both works expose the deadness of social manners, the paralysis of gentility and its empty forms," while simultaneously suggesting that "common sense and decency are more vital than social convention". In *Oliver Twist*, the subversive potential of language is less explicit, as Oliver's social ascension is achieved through the discovery of his true parentage rather than through linguistic or cultural transformation. However, Oliver's famous request, "Please, sir, I want some more," can be interpreted as a moment of defiance against institutional authority. In this context, language functions as a tool for expressing resistance and asserting human dignity, even in the face of overwhelming oppression. Although Oliver's request does not lead to immediate social transformation, it symbolizes the

possibility of challenging oppressive structures through linguistic agency. As research on dialect in literature notes, Dickens's use of working-class speech reflects his support for the poor, as he "has a lively ear for the rhythms of the speech of the uneducated, and he is not afraid of either vulgarity or sentimentality" .

Overall, the three literary works collectively demonstrate that language is not merely a reflection of social class but an active force that can be used to negotiate, challenge, and even subvert class hierarchies. While Bourdieu's framework effectively captures the ways in which language reinforces social inequality, it also allows for the recognition of resistance and agency, as seen in Eliza's transformation, Pip's aspirations, and Oliver's defiant request. This dual function of language – as both a mechanism of domination and a tool for liberation – underscores its central role in shaping social identities and relationships. As Bourdieu (1991) himself recognized, the linguistic market is not entirely deterministic; while some inequality is "structural and enduring," other forms of inequality are "temporal and contingent on situations," allowing room for individual agency and contestation

CONCLUSION

This research examined how social class is depicted through language in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, utilizing Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social distinction. Results reveal that language serves not just for communication but also as a symbolic tool through which characters navigate, uphold, and reproduce social hierarchies. Linguistic capital appears as characters strive to gain socially esteemed language skills to elevate their social standing. Symbolic power is seen in the authority of dominant figures and institutions to endorse certain language forms and social behaviors. Meanwhile, social distinction stands out as the key concept, showing how language separates social groups and reinforces class divisions throughout the three works.

The analysis shows that each literary work emphasizes different aspects of Bourdieu's theory. *Great Expectations* focuses on gaining linguistic capital as a route to social mobility. *Oliver Twist* mainly depicts symbolic power via institutional control over marginalized groups. *Pygmalion* clearly illustrates social distinction by demonstrating how pronunciation and speech influence social recognition and class identity. These findings suggest that language is not just a mirror of social inequality but also a dynamic tool for negotiating and maintaining class relations.

This study advances sociolinguistic and literary scholarship by showing that Bourdieu's framework effectively elucidates the connection between language and social class in literary works. Through a comparative analysis of three canonical English novels, it broadens previous research, which often concentrated on single texts or used alternative theories, to provide a wider view of how language functions as symbolic capital in literary representation.

This study has a few limitations. It concentrates solely on three concepts suggested by Bourdieu – linguistic capital, symbolic power, and social distinction – excluding other important ideas like habitus and field. Additionally, the analysis is

confined to three traditional English literary works, which means the results might not directly apply to modern literature or works from different cultural backgrounds. inequality.

RECOMMENDATION

Considering the findings and limitations of this study, several suggestions are made for future research. First, researchers are advised to extend the use of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework by including concepts like habitus, field, and various forms of capital. These ideas could offer a deeper insight into how social structures shape language practices and how individuals navigate their roles within different social contexts.

Second, future research should include cross-cultural comparisons by analyzing literary works from different traditions, such as English and Indonesian novels. This type of comparative study can offer deeper understanding of how language depicts social class in various cultural, historical, and linguistic settings, thereby enriching sociolinguistic and literary scholarship.

Although this study used a qualitative descriptive method, future researchers might consider adopting quantitative or mixed-method approaches, such as corpus-based analysis, to more systematically identify linguistic patterns, lexical choices, and discourse features that indicate social class. Integrating qualitative insights with quantitative data could improve the reliability and broader applicability of the results.

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