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“Choosing the right word for the right occasion”: Language Practices of Poor Youth in Turkey

The field research findings of the study conducted with 65 urban poor youth between the age of 14-29 and living under the limit of poverty in Ankara- Turkey, manifested that these young people judge their linguistic development and skills as “incompetent” compare to the dominant modes of speech and they are very sensitive to the social exclusionary processes produced by their own linguistic practices. These young people are aware of the many ways in which linguistic exchanges can express relations of power; the conditions of the linguistic market and the role of the linguistic capital in the social classification schemas. Based on the utterances of youth, it would be argued that they differentiate themselves from other agents of different social strata with their linguistic practices besides other forms of symbolic capital; interpret social hierarchies in the context of linguistic competences and adopt various linguistic strategies in order to “conceal” or “improve” their positions in social space. The linguistic strategies are generally built on the assessment linguistic market conditions and produce linguistic expressions which are appropriate to these conditions and match the image of dominant linguistic codes. Modifying linguistic expressions in terms of altering the tone of voice, stress, accent or politeness and tactfulness; choosing the right word for the right occasions, turn out to a form of a “defense medium” which can be used in encounters with agents from different social strata.