

IMPACT OF POWER NEGOTIATIONS ON THE OUTCOME OF INTERCULTURAL GATE-KEEPING INTERVIEWS

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Abstract. The focus of the present paper is on power dynamics and factors affecting the outcome of gatekeeping interviews. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, capitals, and symbolic power is at the core of the theoretical framework. Using discourse analysis, communicative behaviour of the participants of three gatekeeping “mock” scholarship interviews was analysed at macro and micro levels. The results revealed that power dynamics and dispositions of the *habitus* mainly determine the outcome. Power in discourse and over discourse is dynamic, constantly negotiated, and formed based on the *habitus*. Thus, absolute objectivity in a gatekeeping interview is unachievable due to the essence of human nature and the bias of any judgement, no matter how it is framed. However, sufficient value should be ascribed to all the factors and the highest achievable degree of objectivity should be opted for by involving several interviewers and developing specific criteria to frame their judgement.*

Keywords: communicative behaviour, *habitus*, power dynamics, power over discourse, English, Estonian, Russian

1. Introduction

In the contemporary intercultural world, encounters among representatives of different cultural groups occur regularly, often in professional environments, and can be characterised as front-stage high-stakes events, of which a gatekeeping interview is an example. The aim of the research is to show that the outcome of an intercultural front stage event, “mock” gatekeeping interviews, is affected by the communicative behaviour of the interlocutors, power dynamics, and success of power negotiations. Gatekeeping interviews structurally involve power relations, as the gatekeeper by definition has the power and obligation to choose one of the candidates as the one whom he or she “lets through the gates”. However, regardless of the apparent clarity

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in the distribution of power, gatekeeping situations are characterised by constant power negotiations affecting their outcome. The paper explores the factors influencing the outcome by analysing the behaviour of all the participants at macro and micro levels using discourse analysis techniques.

2. Theoretical background

Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) theory of *habitus*, capitals and symbolic power and their role in communication are at the core of the theoretical framework. Additionally, at a discourse level, the analysis of communicative behaviour involves Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and the concept of face, which is related to communicative, pragmatic, or politeness strategies employed to succeed in communication.

According to Bourdieu, *habitus* is a combination of all the person's identities that have validity, either conscious or subconscious, at a certain period of time and in a certain context. The *habitus* is formed via education and upbringing. All decisions, both conscious and subconscious, are formed based on its dispositions. These govern our choices of communicative strategies and it is only the awareness and willingness of the agents to compromise that may help avoid conflicts and achieve success in communication. The practices are thus governed by the metaphors of the *habitus*, on the one hand, and constraints and demands of the social field, on the other. The relations between the *habitus* and the field create the basis for the expectations the agents form about the latter, and determine the strategies they use for their actions. (Bourdieu 1991: 81).

The *field (champ)* is a social context where *habitus* is realised. People are the agents "playing" according to the rules on numerous fields and constantly moving from one field to another (Bourdieu 1991: 14, 215–217). The basic aim of the agents is to acquire a better position in the field or gain power using capital. Social fields are multi-dimensional, therefore it is not only the amount of capital that matters but also the combination of various capitals, as each of them has a relative value in a field at a certain moment in history.

Cultural capital is the amount of knowledge the agents have acquired through education and experience. Linguistic and communicative competencies are the most valuable forms of cultural capital, as they are involved in power relations, and power negotiations are held using them. (Bourdieu 1991: 57)

Discourse is "meaningful symbolic behaviour" (Blommaert 2005: 2–3), oriented on structuring social reality. Discourse is manipulated at societal and individual levels. The aim of verbal expression is to maximise symbolic profit, therefore any utterance is subconsciously oriented to the public and exposed to appreciation (Bourdieu 1991: 76–77). The agents structure their discourse taking into consideration the relation between the *habitus* and the field.

The symbolic capital of the speaker is composed of individual and collective symbolic capital. The combination of these two gives the speech its power (Bourdieu 1991: 111). Power is, thus, based on the speaker, context, and the audience as well as recognition of the legitimacy of the three.

Politeness theory and the concept of face have been in the focus of both intercultural communication and pragmatics for several decades (e.g., Brown, Levinson

1987, Leech 1983, 2003, Watts 2003). Face is defined as “interpersonal identity of the individuals in communication” (Scollon, Scollon 2000: 44) and has two sides: positive and negative (Brown, Levinson 1987). Positive face is intended to sustain interaction, whereas negative face is aimed at preserving independence.

The Scollons (Scollon, Scollon 2000) add distance (D), power (P), and rate of imposition (R) as parameters framing communication. Distance is horizontal distance between interlocutors, the degree of familiarity. Power describes vertical, hierarchical distance between interlocutors. Rate of imposition evaluates the degree of involvement of the participants of a communicative event. These parameters are essential to assess validity and appropriateness of the politeness strategies.

In communication, interlocutors use positive and negative politeness strategies (Brown, Levinson 1987) depending on which face they address. Strategies are subconsciously selected in any face-threatening act (FTA) and aim at fulfilling the wishes of the interlocutor’s face and minimising the extent of FTA for one’s own face. Any interaction among people is called “relational work” or the effort agents invest in negotiating their relations throughout communication and interaction (Locher, Watts 2008: 78). Successful communication is based on the appropriateness of the assumptions about face of the participants.

Any communication is multi-faceted, occurs simultaneously at so many levels, and involves numerous criteria. All those factors have an impact on the discourse and thus, differences in those factors create variation in discourse and make communication intercultural.

3. Methodology and data

The present paper uses a qualitative approach to study communicative behaviour in natural settings via discourse analysis as well as ethnographic observation and interpretation of non-verbal behaviour. Three corpora of “mock” scholarship gate-keeping interviews, with English used as a lingua franca, were analysed. English was the native language for the interviewers and a foreign language for interviewees. The interviews were held with ethnic Estonians, native speakers of Estonian residing in Estonia, in 1996, ethnic Russians, native speakers of Russian residing in Moscow Region in the Russian Federation, in July 2006, and ethnic Russians, native speakers of Russian residing in Estonia, in October 2007. For the purposes of the present research and restraints imposed on the length of the paper, one interview with most evident power dynamics and negotiations was chosen from each corpus and analysed.

All the interviews were organised according to the same scenario. The small talk phase at the beginning of each interview had an open framework chosen by an interviewer. The length of the phase was limited to two or three minutes. During the main part, the interviewees were asked five questions.

1. Why are you applying for the scholarship?
2. Does your transcript accurately reflect the efforts you have put in your studies?
3. What difficulties do you foresee in studying during the programme?
4. What contribution do you expect to be able to make to the programme?
5. What questions do you have about the programme?

The questions dwelled upon issues discussed during a scholarship gatekeeping interview, involved sensitive issues, and contributed to escalation of power dynamics. The uniformity of the questions made it possible to compare communicative behaviour and techniques used in power negotiations.

The participants of the interviews were all university students representing the University of Tartu, Estonian University of Life Sciences, and Moscow Regional Pedagogical University. Their linguistic competence was relatively uniform and sufficient to hold a topic-oriented conversation in English. The pragmatic competence was relatively homogenous and limited to personal observations and occasional comments of their lecturers. Students' encounters with representatives of English-speaking countries were either non-existent or limited. The interviewers were professional interviewers, native speakers of North American English with an impressive intercultural background.

All the interviews were video recorded and later transcribed. The length of the interviews varied from 5–20 minutes. Both verbal and non-verbal behaviour was analysed. The analysis proved that during the interview, the participants only concentrated on the interviewer and role-play with no attention paid to the camera. Their body language was relaxed and addressed only to the interviewer. Interviewees and the interviewer maintained eye-contact. Oral informed consent was given to the authors by all the participants to analyse and publish the transcripts of the conversations and written correspondence.

In order to increase the validity of the research, the video recordings of the interviews were subsequently shown to the interviewer, independent evaluators, native speakers of North American English, and independent evaluators, residents of the same country of the participants or speakers of the same language. The range of evaluators raised the emic validity of the research. All evaluators were asked to evaluate and comment on the performance of each interviewee and rate them according to a scale where the number 1 means the person should get the scholarship.

The data were subjected to detailed discourse analysis. The authors concentrated on the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies and the development of power negotiations. Among non-verbal characteristics of communicative behaviour, the focus was on communicative body movements, proxemics, or the use of space, and timing. These particular aspects of behaviour were chosen as they are most evident in intercultural encounters.

4. Discourse analysis of the data

The three interviews selected for the analysis are similar in several aspects. They were highly evaluated by interviewers and evaluators and discourse analysis of the transcripts revealed extensive power negotiations. Limitations to the length of the article made it impossible to include entire analyses of all three interviews.

4.1. Beginning of the interviews

4.1.1. Greeting phase and small talk

Power negotiations started from the beginning of the interviews. Interview 1996 started by the the interviewer's greeting phrase "Hello". Interviewee 1996 responded by quickly approaching the interviewer, even coming too close, and thus violating the personal space, highly valued in both American and Estonian cultures (cf. Hall 1996), and actively shaking hands with the interviewer. Such behaviour was conscious and related to power dynamics.

Interviewee 1996 accompanied her behaviour with a greeting phrase "Good afternoon", which slightly differs from the register of the phrase used by the interviewer. Therefore, the interviewer has to greet the interviewee again using the slightly more formal "Good afternoon" as well. The advanced level of linguistic and communicative competence proves that the register switch was not related to lack of knowledge but to initiation of power negotiations. By using the greeting phrase of a higher register, the interviewee changes the "rules" and shifts the value of P in her favour. It is important to realise that here, when discussing power, we do not merely refer to the P dimension in Brown and Levinson's terms, but meta-power or "power over all other types of power" (Bourdieu 2015: 367), including power over discourse, its structure, themes, turn distribution, etc. (cf. Pitsoe, Letseka 2013)

Interview 2006 also starts with a greeting phase.

- (1) Interviewer: Hello!
Interviewee 2006: Nice to meet you!
Interviewer: Nice to meet you, too. (*Eye-contact, smile*) I'm A.
Interviewee 2006: I'm N.
Interviewer: Very nice to meet you N.
Interviewee 2006: Nice to meet you, too.

Positive politeness strategies and *rapport building* techniques are the key descriptors for this part of the interview. Firstly, the interviewee is aware of the expectations of the interviewer for a polite opening phase of the event and caters to these assumptions. Currently, she is playing by the rules without being too pushy or too modest. This is revealed in the interviewee's quick reaction to all the interviewer's turns, with no pauses between turns: this part of the conversation is like a ball game, where both players are throwing a ball to each other and doing it rhythmically and quickly, not to lose the game. Scollon and Scollon (2000: 88–90) describe a similar phenomenon, particularly on the part of the person introducing the topic – the interviewer. This interlocutor intentionally shortens the inter-turn pauses, which force the other participant of the conversation, in this case the interviewee, to quickly adjust to this alteration; if this does not happen, the topic introducer gets the floor more often and turns the dialogue into a monologue. However, in the present case the interviewer's "attempt" does not succeed, as the reaction of the interviewee is instantaneous.

The interviewer continues the small talk by asking the interviewer about her status at the university.

- (2) Interviewer: Are you a student here?
 Interviewee 2006: **No, I have graduated from this university this year.**
 Interviewer: Congratulations! (*Really encouraging smile*)
 Interviewee 2006: Thank you very much!
 Interviewer: That's a big and exciting event! (*Laughing*)

The interviewee provides a *negative response to the question*. Negative responses to questions are considered to be dispreferred and are usually more elaborated. Whether the response is preferred or dispreferred depends on the characteristics of the faces of the agents and the communicative situation. Dispreferred responses are more face-damaging, as they prove the interviewer's assumption wrong. The situation is more complicated in an asymmetric encounter. With no delay, she negatively replies to the question and adds a self-praising comment aimed to demonstrate that her actual status is higher and the amount of capital she possesses is greater than assumed by the interviewer. The interpretation of the response as self-praise is based on prosody of the utterance (elevated pitch and tone of voice) and interviewee's non-verbal behaviour: evaluative facial expression, for instance. Culpeper et al. (2003: 1574–1575) defines elevated pitch as a “face attack” or “counterattack”, which correlates with the impression formed on the basis of the video.

The mere mechanical analysis of the length of the turns during the warming up phase of the interview shows how the interviewee already starts gaining power: her turns are considerably longer than the interviewer's. Additionally, at the beginning of the conversation, the interviewee's gestures are relatively reserved and the eye-contact not constant, further she starts employing more relaxed gestures, her facial expression becomes more excited, and she raises her pitch, revealing her feeling less constrained and more confident. The assumption is grounded in the amount of different types of Bourdieuan capital the interviewee not only possesses but sees herself as possessing, primarily cultural and social capital.

Interviewee 2007 is the first to start with a greeting in Estonian *Tere* 'Hello' (translated by Author 1) followed by the response of the interviewer.

- (3) Interviewee 2007: Mhm... ***tere.***
 Interviewer: Hello. Please, sit down.
 Interviewee 2007: **Yes**, thank you.
 Interviewer: So... J.?
 Interviewee 2007: **Yes.**
 Interviewer: So my name is D. So you study... Veterinary Medicine?
 Interviewee 2007: **Yes.** Third course already.
 Interviewer: And that is not at this university, it's at the...
 Interviewee 2007: **Yeah... õige**... Maaülikool.

The small talk part of the interview lacks polite remarks, the turns of the interviewer are limited to posing questions to which Interviewee 2007 responds with short affirmative answers *yes* (the same response was repeated three times during three turns, and was softened by a polite *thank you* only once, during the first turn – cf. Example 2, text in bold), *yeah*, and even a slightly evaluative response *õige* 'correct' (Estonian, comment by Author 1). The interviewee switches to Estonian when uttering the evaluative comment. It is important to underline the fact that code

switching is not related to insufficient linguistic competence.¹ The code switch is intentional and demonstrates an aggressive attempt to shift the distribution of the P value in discourse, change the rules and, thus, exercise power over discourse, or meta-power. The interviewee is perfectly aware of the interviewer's low or non-existent competence in this language.

The interviewee continues her battle for power over discourse and shifts values of both P and D, by inappropriately rudely answering a low face-threat question about her choice of speciality.

(4) Interviewer: Yeah... Ok... And why do you study veterinary medicine?
Do you like animals?

Interviewee 2007: **It's a stupid question... Yes, of course I like animals.**

Interviewer: (*Laughs*) But I mean is that that made you choose...

Interviewee 2007: No, actually my mother is a veterinarian, so I kind of saw that from five years...

The analysis of non-verbal behaviour of the interviewee during this part of the conversation did not reveal any signs of stress or nervousness that in other cases induce rude and inappropriate behaviour. She is positively polite, her posture is relaxed, she maintains constant eye-contact, accompanies her speech with gestures. Thus, the only interpretation is the attempt of the interviewee to grab power over the discourse. However, due to the fact that this attempt was not properly introduced, as in the case of previous interviewees, it was perceived as *impoliteness* by the interviewer and other American evaluators and had a dramatic effect on the outcome of the interview. They all mentioned that Interviewee 2007 *started poorly, her performance was off register, she was harsh, very sharp, and too abrasive.*

(5) Interviewer: Yeah... so, all those things were really good in the sense **I thought that would be someone who would take advantage of the experience, ...** but the problem was... Eee... When I asked the first question, she said to me "it's a stupid question", and the **tone was really rude in a way, I mean, maybe she didn't mean it to be.**

Researcher: Ok.

Interviewer: But unfortunately, from then on, I couldn't really... **it just... You know, it was a really, it was a big mistake.**

Researcher: Yeah, certainly.

Interviewer: Eee...

Similar remarks were made by the other two American evaluators.

(6) Evaluator 1: She began rather poorly ("That's a stupid question."). I can't imagine someone saying that to an interviewer.

Evaluator 2: Her register sometimes seemed off ("That's a stupid question!")

On the other hand, *impoliteness* remained unnoticed by Russian and Estonian language speaking evaluators. The reason for that is introduced by Wierzbicka (2010: 54–58), who writes that making critical remarks about somebody with

¹ The interviewee's knowledge of English was tested during a routine Welcome test conducted by the Estonian University of Life Sciences Language Centre and proved to be at B2 level.

whom you are in a conversation is not acceptable in Anglo cultural scripts but is in Russian, Polish and some other East-European cultural scripts, including Estonian as well.

It is the interviewee's self-identification and opinion about the amount of capital she possesses and therefore, the power over the encounter she is allowed to exercise, that induced this type of behaviour: Interviewee 2007 assumed that she possessed a substantial amount of power compared to the interviewer and the discourse system they operated in was symmetrical.

This short introductory part of the interview already reveals the difference between the interlocutors' assumptions about the symmetry of their encounter: the interviewer ascribes herself more power than the interviewee recognises as ascribed. Bourdieu (1991) wrote that symbolic power over discourse has to be recognised to be executed, which is seen as not happening on the part of the interviewee in the present encounter. Additionally, all interviewees more or less successfully attempt a power shift.

4.1.2. The beginning of the actual interviews

Thus, by the beginning of the actual interviews, *the power has shifted* already towards the interviewees. This is discursively realised in the fact that interviewers justify themselves for asking the questions of the main part of the interview, i.e. doing their job.

- (7) Interviewer 1996: Well, I've seen your application, R. ...and have a few questions for you (*Meanwhile the interviewee arranges her long hair in an elegant manner.*) While we are making our final decisions here...eee...the first question is, **maybe a rather obvious one** is, why would you like to study in the US? What do you see as a possible benefit of spending a year in the United States?

The discourse of all the three interviewees remains "individualistic" and "personalised", "self-centred" with the prevailing use of the pronoun "I".

- (8) Interviewee 1996: Well, first of all, I've never been to an English-speaking country for an extended period of time and having studied English for such a long period... 17 year I think already...

Interviewer: Mhm

Interviewee 1996: I... feel I should get into... natural language environment... Also, as American studies is **my** minor field of study, it's **quite an obvious choice**, also United States has such a wonderful educational facilities as libraries and professors and such kinds of things and I think that they would help **me** in **my** further study...

- (9) Interviewee 2007: Well, I'd like to see another country because I haven't be far from Estonia: only Sweden and Finland... and I want to get new experience and... because I am very active in **my** act... in **my** university, I think I can offer a lot to this American university, as we can exchange our knowledges and our experience... and views as we may have different views.

Interviewer: Mhm... You said you are active in your university; you mean student organisation?

Interviewee 2007: Yeah... **I** am on the student board... **I** am the head, and **I** am also in the university board and... Well (*smiles*) **I** am class... or... course...

The frequent use of the pronoun “I” by Interviewee 1996 and Interviewee 2007 in the syntactic function of the subject and, thus, at the beginning of the sentences continues through their turns. *Positive politeness strategies* in the form of self-praise, and compliments prevail in the answer to the question. However, Interviewee 1996 does not abandon her struggle over power, which can be seen in her use of such an evaluative adjective as “obvious” (Example 8: “it’s quite an obvious choice”) when commenting on the possible outcome of the interview. The use of this adjective provides her with more power as it explicitly demonstrates her self-perception as a person with a significant amount of Bourdieuan symbolic capital (1991).

When Interviewee 2007 constantly repeats and accentuates the personal pronoun “I”, she shifts the focus of the whole turn over to herself. She explicitly highlights her cultural capital, dwelling on the amount of her knowledge and experience. She speaks about her numerous social roles and activities to explicitly demonstrate the amount of social capital she possesses. She does not merely talk about herself as an individual, but as a representative of an institution – *her* university – thus by transferring the capital from the institution, institutional power, over herself, she further enhances her social and possibly symbolic capital.

Interviewee 2007 refers to the concept of *inequality of opportunities*, explicitly underlining the fact that despite being a successful student, she has not had an opportunity to explore new and particularly distant countries like the USA.

4.2. The possible difficulties of the programme (question three)

The interviews proceed with the question about the possible difficulties of the programme. For instance, Interviewee 1996’s answer to the question about difficulties provides discursive proof of the fact that the interviewee employs *the positive politeness strategies* consciously and is perfectly aware of the rules of the format.

- (10) Interviewee 1996: Well, being in any foreign country indefinitely poses some **problems**, ... and... Well, United States is a very different country from Estonia, so... there might be some *obvious*(1) cross-cultural **problems** with Americans being such an out-going nation and Estonians being such a reserved one, so I suppose that there might be **some conflicts, not conflicts** I mean, but... some **problems** on that basis. Also, our educational system is so different that, *let’s say* (2), our schools have mainly lecture types of classes and in the United States, I understand, *you have more seminar style discussion thing?* (3).

Interviewer: Mhm...

Interviewee 1996: This sort of, well, fair... demand a lot of aggressive behaviour in classes... might maybe **proble**... prove **a difficulty**, but

I personally, well, consider myself, quite communicative, so I hope to overcome that one.

At the beginning, the interviewee employs the word “problem”, in a certain way “taking it with her” from the question and while talking about the “obvious cross-cultural problems” in general. When dwelling on the issue, she uses a word with stronger negative connotation “conflicts”, which she cautiously hedges with “some”. However, being aware of the general interview requirement of being positive, she substitutes “conflicts” with the noun “problems”. Furthermore, while referring specifically to herself, the interviewee is no longer satisfied with the word “problem” and substitutes it with “difficulty”. Thus, the interviewee clearly demonstrates pragmatic awareness of the interview format and behaves respectively.

She additionally *builds rapport* (Spencer-Oatey 2000) with the interviewer by requesting the confirmation of her opinion (cf. Example 10, italics 3) and involving him into her turn of the conversation (cf. Example 10, italics 2). Building rapport is more natural in a symmetrical relationship with low values of P and D. The interviewee again employs the evaluative adjective “obvious” (cf. Example 10, italics 1) to describe the problems one may encounter residing in a foreign country. All of this again confirms the interviewee’s battle for power and certain “victory” in this battle.

Her non-verbal behaviour is relaxed and gestures are open to the point that even the interviewer starts mimicking them. This signals a turning point in power negotiations as the less powerful interviewer starts applying the non-verbal prompts of the, at that moment, more powerful interviewee, who actually sets even the non-verbal context of the interaction. According to Culpeper et al. (2003, 2005), the dominated agent in the conversation usually has to adjust and “tune” his behaviour in relation to the behaviour of the dominant one, and that occurred during the interview.

The interviewee maintains eye contact with the interviewer throughout the interview and keeps smiling. However, at this point of the interview when the verbal struggle for power becomes more explicit, her smile becomes slightly ironic and more evaluative, which correlates with her use of more evaluative discourse.

4.3. The contribution of the applicants (question four)

The final question of the interview about the contribution of the applicants to the programme deserves attention. When answering this question, Interviewee 1996’s language reveals a lack of confidence, possibly rooted in the complexity of this question. The lack of self-confidence can be seen through the abundance of hesitation pauses and the use of the pause filler “well” (highlighted). Additionally, the interviewee aims at concealing this by employing “whatever” (cf. Example 11, italics 1), meaning “I do not feel like searching for a better way to express myself” – this carelessness is interpreted as a defensive reaction and a way to seem more assertive than she really is.

- (11) Interviewee 1996: **Well**, first of all, I think I have not only good academic record up now, but also... eee... a good record of extra-curricular ac... activities.

Interviewer: Mhm.

Interviewee 1996: **And so... mhm...** I've been.... the... *whatever* (1), student representative for years at our department and I don't think that this sort of ... **well...** post has... **Well...** shown me from an angle different from a usual student's one, in sense that I've been acting as... **well**, a connecting link between the department and the students, also... **well**, my peers have considered me quite an outgoing type, who has not only helped them, you know... who has helped them in actual study situations.

Interviewee 2006, on the other hand, continues gaining power by using symbolic capital, or to be exact, by transferring the symbolic capital of the whole country, in this case – Russia, onto herself and, thus enhancing her own symbolic capital and increasing power.

(12) Interviewer: Mhm... ok... ok... And what contribution do you think you could personally bring to this programme?

Interviewee 2006: Eee... (*smiles*) **personal...** eee... I am a patriot of our country so I will tell the American students a lot about **our** country, about **our** culture, **our** traditions and... eee... I think I **will motivate** them to learn **Russian, the Russian language, and the Russian culture**, and then.

She repeatedly uses the pronoun “our” and, thus, identifies herself with the country, and transfers its symbolic capital over herself. The absence of hedging or hesitation pauses, as well as transparent straightforward structure of the sentences indicate the interviewee's self-confidence, the fact that she by no means sees this question as an FTA, differently from the other interviewees. The dynamics continues by the interviewee comparing herself with the interviewer and by saying: “well... you know that you are also Russian...yeah... we will see” – through this “brave” assumption, the interviewee places the interviewer and herself at the same level and decreases both P and D values (Brown, Levinson 1987, Bourdieu 1991).

The further power shift in favour of the interviewee may be proven by the non-verbal behaviour of the interlocutors – for instance, the interviewer limits the eye contact with the interviewee while the latter develops more relaxed and constant eye contact with the interviewer. Both the vocabulary and syntax of the interviewer's speech grow less and less confident, with numerous instances of hedging and more prolonged (compared with the beginning of the conversation) hesitation pauses within and between turns, for instance. The interviewee, on the other hand, becomes more and more evaluative, which emerges particularly in her non-verbal behaviour: nodding accompanied by an evaluative smile of a mentor. Her high opinion of her abilities is revealed in the following question she poses the interviewer at the end of their conversation.

(13) Interviewee 2006: For example, I am Russian, and I studied for one year, and is it possible to find a good job there, quite a well-paid one?

The transition of a symbolic capital of a group over individual occurs: the interviewee considers her Russian ethnicity a valuable asset sufficient for getting a *quite well-paid job*. It is essential that the interviewer answers the question without any reference to the inappropriateness of such a question during a scholarship interview.

The answer to this question places a further focus on the process of *self-identification*. Interviewee 2006 sees this question as an opportunity to enhance her personal symbolic capital by transferring the symbolic capital of her ethnic culture on herself and thus incorporating collective identity into her individual identity.

Interviewee 2006's non-verbal behaviour is negatively polite: she is reserved, holds permanent control not only over her body, by sitting really straight, but also over her facial expression. Even at times, when the interviewer heartedly and sincerely smiles or even laughs, the interviewee responds with a reserved and, at times, evaluative smile of a person who is aware of her strengths, is self-confident, and holds constant control over the whole situation. The interviewee's reserved non-verbal behaviour can hardly be interpreted as shyness or lack of self-confidence. Both the analysis of her discourse and the evaluations given to the interviewee by both Russian and American evaluators prove this. Such adjectives as *reserved*, *distant*, *proud*, *self-confident*, and *equal* were used to describe the interviewee. Here is an extract for a comment by one Russian speaking evaluator, for example.

(14) ...на первое место можно было бы поставить Н. (3), эээ... я думаю, что это речь зрелого достаточно человека, ... эээ... по... об этом свидетельствует и её поведение, и её манера держаться, определённая сдержанность такая интеллигентная, правильная речь и достаточно интересные вопросы, **такое было впечатление, что она чувствует себя равной с человеком, который проводит с ней интервью, и это очень радует.**

'I think that the first place can be awarded to N., eee... I believe that this is the speech of a mature person, ... eee... which is revealed in her behaviour, fairly **reserved** and **refined** manners, correct/appropriate speech and fairly interesting questions. **I am under the impression that she feels equal with the interviewer, and that really pleases me**' (translated from Russian by Author 1)

Bourdieu (1991: 70) writes that non-verbal properties of discourse, e.g. social markers like clothing or the use of titles, or even more controlled body language, contribute to structuring power relations. This is exactly the case in this interview: the interviewee behaves in this way because of the amount of symbolic capital and power she attributes to herself. The perception is recognised and explicitly highly praised by the Russian evaluator (cf. Example 13, bold text).

Interestingly, Interviewee 2007 does not employ symbolic capital transfer. The behaviour of this interviewee may serve an illustration to what Elkind (1990) defines as "patchwork identity" realised in the limited ability of the agent to organise the values along a certain unifying core. In case of this interviewee, it is revealed, for instance, in the language code switches at the beginning of the interview (the use of Estonian – see Example 2) and the fact that although both her and the researcher's mother tongue is Russian, she still chooses to use Estonian in answering the questions of the latter during the post-interview.

Interviewee 2007 is more relaxed non-verbally and keeps smiling, at times ironically during the interview – it may be interpreted as either a defensive reaction

or an inflated sense of the amount of capital and power she thinks she possesses. Again, very little of this self-identification was realised in her verbal behaviour and could have been the reason for “losing” power negotiations.

5. Results and conclusion

In sum, the results of the analysis reveal that power dynamics and characteristics of the *habitus* of all the participants play a decisive role in the outcome of the interview. Success in a gatekeeping interview is obtained by a participant with the most diverse *habitus* enriched with the most various and suitable scope of capitals, enabling them to hold the most persistent and successful power negotiations and thus to acquire the most meta-power. Factors affecting the behaviour of the agents are either entirely out of their conscious control or are psychologically between conscious and unconscious.

The first factor is the *habitus* of all the participants of a communicative event. All the decisions of the participants of all the experiences, both conscious and subconscious, e.g. stereotypes and generalisations were formed based on the dispositions of the *habitus*. The dispositions of the *habitus* of any two agents differ as the background and experiences where the dispositions are rooted can hardly ever fully comply. In intercultural encounters, the diversity is even greater. The dispositions of *habitus* vary more considerably and thus it is more complicated for the participants to bridge among them. Naturally, those whose *habitus* is better formed and whose range of dispositions is more diverse are more flexible in adjusting to an alien field, and thus, diminishing the occurrence of misunderstandings or any communicative challenges. However, due to subconscious nature of the *habitus*, it is impossible to eliminate the possibility of miscommunication or misinterpretation of the behaviour or intentions of the interlocutor.

The second factor influencing the outcome of a gatekeeping interview is related to the amounts of various types of capital the participants possess: economic, cultural and symbolic. The participants with greater amounts and diversity of capital had an advantage in achieving better results in the interview. Additionally, the suitability of the types of capital to a particular context, in the present case a scholarship interview, and the general compatibility of the capital of the participants played a significant role.

Power in discourse and over discourse, or meta-power, that the agents possess in an encounter is dynamic and formed based on the dispositions of the *habitus* and the capital. Power is constantly negotiated and persistence in negotiations and their success play a decisive role in an intercultural front-stage event. Meta-power, power over all powers, power over discourse, shapes the event: the interlocutor who has acquired more power over discourse via successful persistent power negotiation receives an opportunity to restructure the course of the interview, the rules the participants follow to be successful in an event. On the other hand, an agent has to preserve the balance of power distribution and not to become too aggressive in contesting the power of the currently dominant interlocutor.

Furthermore, expectations of the participants about an event are an important factor determining the outcome: this particularly refers to the expectations of the

more powerful agent, the one eligible to decide on the outcome of the event in general or evaluate the performance of a participant.

Several factors that are considered either minor or unimportant have revealed themselves in the results of the present analysis. For instance, the emotional and psychological state of the participants depending on various characteristics of the context, i.e. the timing, the degree of stress during the course of the interview, the personal bias of any of the agents toward one another, etc. play a crucial role in the outcome of the event. Thus, it is important to realise the degree of responsibility of a gatekeeper, and the involvement of several interviewers into the procedure is recommended. However, even in this case, their judgement may be lacking in objectivity due to power relations and negotiations. Additionally, the gatekeepers should be provided with specific and explicit evaluation criteria in order to create a certain framework for their judgement and channel it according to the purposes of the interview. Apart from the factors already described above, there exist numerous others, and their list is infinite depending on the situation or context.

Naturally, absolute objectivity in a gatekeeping interview is unachievable, due to the essence of human nature and the bias of human judgement, no matter how it may be framed. Anyway, the organisers of any intercultural high-stakes gatekeeping event should be made aware of the factors described above and opt for the highest achievable degree of objectivity. The possible ways of diminishing the subjectivity of gatekeeping interviews may involve participation of several interviewers. It is crucial to realise that all the factors affecting the outcome of the interview itself may also play a role in shaping the relations among interviewers: power negotiations, variability of the disposition of the *habitus*, diverse capitals. The development of specific criteria that would channel and frame the judgement of the gatekeepers may also help increase the objectivity of a gatekeeping interview.

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LÄBIRÄÄKIMISED VÕIMU ÜLE JA SELLE MÕJU MITMEKULTUURILISTE VALIKUTEGEMISE INTERVJUUDE TULEMUSTELE

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Artikkel käsitleb eestlaste, venelaste ja Eestis elavate venelaste vestluskäitumist inglisekeelsete valikutegemise (mängu)intervjuude käigus. Töö fookuses on võimudünaamika ja tegurid, mis mõjutavad intervjuu tulemust. Teoreetilises osas tutvustatakse Pierre Bourdieu *habitus*'e ja võimudünaamika teoreetilisi aluseid ja tagamaid, sealhulgas kapitalide ja sümboolse võimu teooriat. Artiklis analüüsitakse kolme korpust (mängu)intervjuudest ülikooli stipendiumisaaja valimiseks. Kõikides intervjuudes kasutati inglise keelt *lingua franca*'na. Analüüsitakse tegureid, mis mõjutavad intervjuu tulemust, lahates sündmuses osalejate vestluskäitumist mikro- ja makrotasandil, kasutades sealjuures diskursuseanalüüsi tehnikaid. Kõikide katsete analüüs näitab, et võimudünaamika ja *habitus*'e printsiibid avaldavad mõju intervjuu tulemustele. Faktorid, mis mõjutavad vestluses osalejate käitumist, on kas täielikult või osaliselt alateadlikud ega allu kontrollile, ja selle tõttu pole võimalik möödarääkimisi ja väärnimõistmist täielikult elimineerida. Võim diskursuses ja diskursuse üle on moodustatud *habitus*'e printsiipide põhjal. Võimu üle peetakse vestluses pidevalt ja järjekindlalt läbirääkimisi ning just viimaste edukus mängibki kõige olulisemat rolli mitmekultuurilisel eeslaval toimivas sündmuses. Kokkuvõttes võib öelda, et vaatamata kriteeriumitele ja raamistikule on absoluutse objektiivsuse saavutamine valikutegemise intervjuus võimatu juba inimloomuse subjektiivsuse tõttu. Sellegipoolest peaks iga eeslaval toimuva sündmuse organiseerija võtma töös kirjeldatud faktorid arvesse ja püüdma otsuste objektiivsust maksimaalselt tõsta. Erinevate intervjuueerijate kaasamine ja täpselt ning konkreetselt sõnastatud hindamiskriteeriumid on kõige tõhusam viis selle saavutamiseks.

Võtmesõnad: vestluskäitumine, *habitus*, võimudünaamika, võim diskursuse üle, inglise, eesti, vene keel

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