



A Longitudinal Examination of Foucault's Theory of Discourse

Yin Zhiyi* 

Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia. Email: gs58502@student.upm.edu.my

Received 15 November 2022 | Received in revised form 20 January 2023 | Accepted 20 February 2023

APA Citation:

Zhiyi, Y. (2023). A Longitudinal Examination of Foucault's Theory of Discourse. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 9(1), 152-160.

Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.901014>

Abstract

Discourse theory has always played a significant role in Michel Foucault's larger theoretical framework. His discourse theories integrate language, power, and knowledge as to achieve the 'truth,' though there is a debate whether they are inherently linked. This paper explores the longitudinal evolution of Foucault's discourse theory from the external and internal aspects. It examined the evolution of Foucault's discourse theory through different stages, closely focusing on the efforts that he gradually made to perfect his discourse theory. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study established how language, power, and knowledge constituted three fulcrums of Foucault's discourse theory as it evolved. The findings indicate that Foucault introduced a novel concept into discourse theory when he established the internal relationship between language, power and knowledge and with insanity and sexuality as external aspects. His theories of madness (insanity) and sexuality did not so intellectually trigger the masses, but he succeeded in linking insanity and sexuality with language, power and knowledge, which are the center of Foucault's discourse theory. This evolution of the discourse theory is the evidence of the transformation and development of discourse production, power production, and knowledge production, which helped Foucault to establish his discourse theory. The study implies that knowledge is the link between Foucault's discourse analysis and power analysis and that Foucault's discourse theory is the representation of his core discourse thoughts placed among discourse, knowledge, and power.

© 2023 EJAL & the Authors. Published by Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics (EJAL). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Keywords: Foucault, discourse theory, truth, knowledge, power, history, sexuality

Introduction

Paul-Michel Foucault (1926–1984), a French historian and philosopher, contributed to both structural and post-structural movements with his original and controversial ideas on discourse (Young, 1981). Foucault defined discourse as a collection or group of "true" statements that do not exist but are simply created through discourse (Deleuze, 2006). These statements can be written or spoken, and contribute to constructing knowledge and discourses that shapes the structure of society. In his *Discourse on Language*, which appears later as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 1970), Foucault talks about control of discourse, suggesting the element of power in language that is used for communication and for constructing the truth statements. In his later work, *The Order of Discourse* (1971), Foucault adopted a genealogical approach to analyze his own much controversial archaeological approach to knowledge.

Historically, Foucault's discourse evolved from archaeological era of knowledge to the genealogical one (Määttä, 2022), wherein both periods mark the evidence of a shift in Foucault's focus from discourse to "power

* Corresponding Author.

Email : gs58502@student.upm.edu.my

<http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.901014>

and knowledge” (Foucault, 2019). Foucault challenged the earlier concept which considered “power and knowledge” as intrinsically separate and disengaged. He established an internal relationship between power and knowledge in his discourse theory. According to Foucault, discourse connects power and knowledge. The proposed conception of the intrinsic connection between power and knowledge can be considered a theoretical innovation of Foucault because according to the traditional view, power and knowledge are incompatible and sacrificing power is the prerequisite to acquire knowledge. However, Foucault identified that the occurrence and development of humanities are closely related to the operation of power and that “the humanities emerge together with the mechanisms of power” (Foucault, 1997). According to Foucault, a system of derivative relations exists between power and knowledge “whose basis is not in causes and effects, much less in sameness, but in conditions” (Foucault, 1997).

Foucault considers language in discourse only as a vehicle to construct statements from mental ideas or what Foucault calls “fragments.” (Foucault, 2005) Discourse thus becomes an outcome of linguistic “statements”, or “discursive facts,” which are semantically and lexically structured. At this stage, Foucault also differentiates between language and discourse (Foucault, 2023). Language, according to Foucault, is a “finite body of rules” capable of giving infinite performances; however, on the contrary, a discourse is always “finite and limited;” though it may be a combination of innumerable linguistic sequences or “statements” to form a “finite” grouping. Foucault thus argued that discursive statements do not exist in the same manner in which a language exists nor do both language and discursive statements exist at the same level. However, he questions about rules that should be used to build such statements; and what empirical evidences or signs are available to prove that language constitutes a discursive statement (Foucault, 2023).

This study examined the evolution of Foucault’s discourse theory through different stages, closely focusing on the efforts that he gradually made to perfect his discourse theory. It investigated how the three elements of discourse, power, and knowledge constituted three fulcrums of his discourse theory at a later stage. This evolution of the discourse theory is the evidence of the transformation and development of discourse production, power production, and knowledge production, which helped Foucault to establish his discourse theory. The dichotomy of language and discursive statements was also kept in mind during this study. The study implies that knowledge is the link between Foucault’s discourse analysis and power analysis and that Foucault’s discourse theory is the representation of his core discourse thoughts placed among discourse, knowledge, and power.

Literature Review

The writings of Foucault have evolved in multiple directions. What constituted his discourse theory were not just the abstract theories of philosophy or of historical change or about power and knowledge, but he also wrote about insanity, history, politics and cultural studies (Foucault, 2019). Foucault contributed substantially on topics like sexuality and gender, mental health and medical profession. He analyzed texts and images in all these domains and typically addressed each of these topics and left impressions of his scholarly wisdom to be explored by critics and experts across the domains of social sciences, humanities, medicine, and literature.

Foucault’s first published work was a preface written for Binswanger’s paper “Dream and Existence” in 1954 in which he articulated about his dream philosophy (Eribon, 1991). In the same year, he published his first full-length book, *Mental Illness and Personality* (Foucault, 1954), which was deeply influenced by the Marxist and Heideggerian philosophy but reflected critically about Pavlov and Freud on their psychoanalysis and conditional principles. This was the first occasion when Foucault brought the principles of cultural lineage into forming a personality (Macey, 1993). After the rejection of his doctoral dissertation in the University of Uppsala, Sweden on grounds of containing too many “speculative and generalizations” (Eribon, 1991).

Foucault’s literary career really began in 1964 with *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Foucault, 1988), which was based on his doctoral dissertation. In this book, he interpreted the meaning of madness in different cultures, and prepared a critique of the evolution of law, politics, philosophy, and medicine from the Middle Ages until the end of the 18th century, giving it a look more of a historical work than philosophical or psychological. However, this book used a language of phenomenology to draw inferences of insanity, and expressed his discourse of madness from the period of Renaissance to the modern era. He identified and pieced together fragments of events from a large amount of textual material for analysis. He stated that “My project, which is not to write a history of the developments of psychiatric science, but rather a history of the *social, moral, and imaginary* context in which it developed.” (Eribon, 1991) After analyzing “madness,” Foucault clarified that what modern people refer to as “madness” has not existed since ancient times and that “madness” is a constructed object formed in contrast with reason: “The history of the fate of ‘madness’ is in fact the history of integration into the ‘discourse of insanity’” (Wu, 2010) In other words, the “discourse of insanity” evolved out of the history of the construction of the object of “insanity”.

In the meantime, Foucault had completed his secondary dissertation which was a translation and commentary of Immanuel Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Kant, 2006). He defended

this thesis by evoking Nietzsche showing that it was not just a “conventional” version of history. Though he was awarded doctorate by a university in West Germany, but with reservations as the work was typed as containing “sweeping generalizations without sufficient particular argument” and full of “allegories” (Miller, 1993). Soon after he migrated to France where he published a sequel to *Folie et déraison*, titled *Naissance de la Clinique*, or *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*; which was a medical treatise focusing on the evolution of medical profession during the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Eribon, 1991).

Foucault not only translated this French epic, but also added his commentary. He analyzed the transformation from “categorical medicine” in the classical period to “clinical medicine” in modern medicine. He wanted the reader to view this book as part of the history of medicine; however, many literary theorists considered it insignificant and ignored it. However, a close examination revealed that Foucault did not examine the book in a purely medical-historical manner. He used the analytical method of intellectual archaeology to examine the formation of medical discourse and not just history. In his preface to *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, he stated “...it is a reorganization in depth, not only of medical discourse, but of the very possibility of a discourse about disease....It is a structural study that sets out to disentangle the conditions of its history from the density of discourse....What counts in the things...as that which systematizes them from the outset, thus making them thereafter endlessly accessible to new discourses and open to the task of transforming them.” (Foucault, 2003).

In other words, in *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, Foucault explored the process of formation and evolution of medical discourse, in which the kernel of discourse was different and fluid at different times due to changes in knowledge, and its extension was the form of objectification. The structure of the discourse system without words and composition represented a means of dividing and expressing things, as well as a means of organizing the external world, reflecting the function of the discourse.

In 1970, Foucault joined Collège de France as a Fellow, where his inaugural lecture *L'Ordre du discours* (The Discourse of Language) was published. Gradually his lectures became popular among students, a group of which coined itself as “Foucauldian tribe” and began to work with Foucault on his research. Foucault’s interest in European history led him to publish his next book, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*) in 1975. This book narrated the evolution of the penal system in Europe from corporal to capital punishment in both Europe and the United States since the 18th century.

On sexuality and mental health, in 1976, Foucault's *Histoire de la sexualité: la volonté de savoir* (*The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*) was published. This book explored Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis” which revolved around the concept of power, and rejected both Marxist and Freudian theories (Foucault, 1990). Though intellectually the book did not attract much attention as people misunderstood his hypothesis (Eribon, 1991), the book was Foucault's views on relationship between truth and sex (Tamm, 2016). It defined truth, power structures, and the relationship between truth and sexual discourses (Tamm, 2016). Foucault was severely criticized for this work and the reason for failing to get intellectual attention was that he favored extramarital affairs and homosexual behavior and believed that such sexual promiscuities produced the truth (Rosenkrantz, 2016) and that sex was not just a means of pleasure, but an encounter with truth, which delivered one from darkness to light (Weeks, 2005).

The longitudinal survey of Foucault’s principal works is an evidence that Foucault criticized all phenomena such as sexuality, madness and criminality as objects of self-understanding, and depended upon the understanding and equal involvement of others (Eribon, 1991). His main motive was to construct a discourse with different focuses and by dealing with different topics of life in the external world. Foucault was thus engaged consistently in integrating the internal concepts with the external ones, perfecting his own discourse theory. He succeeded in building a dynamic discourse which combined truth, power, and knowledge as three elements constituting three fulcrums of his discourse theory. Foucault’s discourse theory is the evidence of a transformation and development of the evolution of his discourse theory which carried history along with it, establishing Foucault both as a philosopher and a historian.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design to examine, understand and analyze the evolution of Foucault’s discourse theory. The qualitative research method particularly allows the research to delve deep into ideas, concepts, theories and experiences in order to build constructs and plan actions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Qualitative research methods also assist in precise and profound information processing, particularly when the topic of research mingles with philosophy and epistemology (Mohajan, 2018; Tetnowski & Damico, 2001). Discourse in the current study is presented as an integrated event amalgamating Foucault’s concepts of power, knowledge and language, rather than simply a rhetoric or a source of oral or written information. In this study, therefore, discourse is defined as a significant occurrence with long phases of messages, ideas, concepts and codes.

The data was collected from library archives through documentation research techniques, from both direct and indirect sources. Direct sources comprised mostly primary data from Foucault’s books and essays,

while the indirect sources were the secondary data retrieved from books, articles and research studies. The data was analyzed through a close reading method which allowed researchers to extract themes, codes and constructs required for conducting a structured analysis. This study therefore presented varied themes and constructs that Foucault's corpus consisted of including the themes of sexuality, madness, power, knowledge, and language.

Results and Discussion

- *Insanity and madness as external aspects of discourse*

Foucault argued that during the Renaissance, insanity maintained good boundaries with non-insanity and reason; insanity could exist and change independently. As a historian, Foucault observed that by the 17th century insanity had lost its original status due to the constant intrusion of reason. Insanity had ceased to be noticed and was instead considered a disguise and illusion. Thereafter, madness was no longer "independent" and was only a turn away from reason. Foucault believed that insanity was the contrast and appendage of reason and thus the "discourse of insanity" of the classical era had begun. In the classical period, insanity was no longer considered the criterion for judging insanity itself; instead, reason became the criterion for measuring insanity. After reason assumed hegemony over the criteria for judging madness, madness began to be completely subjected to the value judgment of reason. In the discourse on insanity in the classical age, passion provided freedom for insanity and was the basis for its formation, and the final truth of insanity was delirium. This is because that "this delirious language is ...the determining principle of all its manifestations, whether of the body or of the soul" (Foucault, 1988).

After analyzing the sources in the 17th and 18th centuries, Foucault mentioned two forms of delirium: one form was symptomatic, indicating that delusions such as depression exist intrinsically; the other form of delirium was intrinsic to the truth and did not necessarily manifest but was always present at the level of reality. The form of delirium was determined on the basis of a certain nature contained in the name of the type of delirium rather than on the basis of close observation. The formation of insanity was the product of the combination of the basic "passion" and the "delirium" of reality. Accordingly, the treatment for insanity generated "quality transformation" (the rules of reinforcement, purification, immersion, and movement) and "truth therapy" (awakening, dramatic realization, and return to reality). The rules of "quality transformation" are mainly directed at the physical body, for instance, by taking iron filings and injecting new blood to achieve a therapeutic effect on the physical body. "Truth therapy" is the use of discourse to treat truths and falsehoods from the perspective of truths and falsehoods. According to Foucault, the aforementioned therapies could not be simply classified as "physiotherapy" or "psychotherapy" because they were directed at the subject. In the 19th century, which marked the end of the classical period, a distinction was made between "physiotherapy" and "psychotherapy" with the invention of "moral therapy."

By the mid-18th century, insanity was no longer a phenomenon caused by the subject's own confusion but became a problem caused by external factors, at which point it became a disease. Furthermore, there was no longer an overlap between reason and irrationality, and these were no longer associated with truth and falsehood. Reason no longer tolerated irrationality, and reason, irrationality, and madness were separated. The character of the experience of the irrational was that madness was here its own subject; but in the experience that was taking shape at the end of the eighteenth century, madness became the object, and this is, on the contrary, alienation to itself. In addition, the sanatorium established under the pretext of medical treatment is the result of the production of knowledge.

The insanity discourse during renaissance regarded insanity as ultimate; the insanity discourse during the classical period regarded insanity as an arrogation of the rules of reason; and the insanity discourse in the modern period regarded insanity as the complete antithesis of total alienation from reason. Each period of insanity discourse has its own specific discursive characteristics, indicating the functionality of insanity discourse. Having a kernel of insanity discourse implies having an extension of insanity discourse, making the kernel more concrete. In addition, through the form of knowledge, the epiphenomenon wraps the kernel's discourse system in its entirety and establishes a form of dynamic discourse, thereby organizing the external world of discourse.

- *Discourse, Power, and Knowledge*

Foucault's examination of discourse, power, and knowledge constitutes a major part of Foucault's discourse theory. If the "insane discourse" organizes discourse from the outside of discourse, then the interweaving of discourse, power, and knowledge organizes discourse from the inside of discourse.

Knowledge and Discourse

In his reading of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Gilles Louis Rene Deleuze jokingly referred to Foucault as "A New Archivist," arguing that in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault is letting us "entering into a new domain, that of power and its relation to knowledge, which is to be explained by the sequel to

Archaeology." (Deleuze, 2006) In response to this comment, Foucault first introduced the analysis of power in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and stated:

On the contrary, I am struck by the difficulty that I had been formulating. When I think about it now I ask myself what I could have been talking about, in the *Histoire de la folie*, for example, or *Naissance de la Clinique*, if not power? Yet I am perfectly well aware that I practically never used the word and did not have the field of analysis at my disposal. This inability was certainly bound up with the political situation in which we found ourselves. (quoted in Sheridan (2005))

This citation clearly indicates that Foucault admitted to neglecting power relations in discourse analysis, which is clearly an implicit self-criticism of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. This was because Foucault was aware of the importance of power but did not comprehensively discuss it in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1970), a work that elaborates a "circuitous theory", and presented it in a more subtle form. This seems to be related to Nietzsche's genealogy. Foucault published *Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History* (Foucault, 1978), in addition, Nietzsche's approach was referred to in *The History of Madness* (Foucault, 2013), *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception* (Foucault, 2003), and *Words and Things*, and Foucault frequently referred to Nietzsche in his early writings.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, however, Nietzsche made only a few references. Although Foucault drew on Nietzsche's genealogical approach in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault clearly abandoned the question of power, an important component of Nietzsche's genealogy. The expression "abandoned power" implies concealed power, indicating that Foucault mentioned in the book that discourse has had power since its existence but did not further discuss the relationship between discourse and power. Although he did not comprehensively discuss about power in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault specifically discussed the concept of "knowledge." Foucault's documented that no knowledge exists without discursive practices and that knowledge determines each discursive practice.

Accordingly, knowledge is a space in which the subject can occupy a place to talk about the objects involved in the subject's discursive practices. Additionally, knowledge is a juxtaposed and subordinate range of statements in which concepts are defined, used, or transformed; finally, knowledge is determined by the possibilities of use and adaptation offered by discourse. "There are bodies of knowledge that are independent of the science..., but there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms" (Foucault, 2005). Thus, "knowledge" connects discursive practice and science in discursive practice—knowledge—science—the middle point of archaeological analysis.

Furthermore, science is an element of discourse formation and is based on knowledge. Science plays a role in different types of knowledge, "A role that varies according to different discursive formations, and is modified with their mutations" (ibid., pp. 203) Archaeology describes a different domain of knowledge rather than science in a particular structure; thus, the analysis of the formation and transformation of knowledge is closely related to the examination of the discursive practices formed therein. Although Foucault referred to the archaeological approach as the archaeology of knowledge and opined that the discourse is inextricably linked to knowledge that runs through the study on the archaeology of knowledge; therefore, at this level, the archaeology of knowledge can also be referred to as the archaeology of discourse.

Power and Knowledge

His next book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the prison* (Foucault, 1995) contains one of the most eye-opening scenes of Foucault's description of public physical torture. However, this type of shocking physical torture disappeared in the 1840s and replaced by a series of imprisonment institutions. Punishment became increasingly hidden at that time because the purpose of punishment was to change the mind rather than touching the flesh. This was the product of a change in goals rather than a conceptual, benevolent change. According to Sheridan (2005), "The shift away from overt punishment of the body to investigation of the criminal's 'soul' can only be understood by seeing the new penal methods and the social sciences that provide the 'knowledge' on which these methods are based as having a common origin." (pp. 136). For instance, the use of psychological methods to adjudicate depends upon the fact whether a criminal is insane or determine whether a sense of morality still exists. These forms of knowledge are likewise permeated by the relationship of power. In such case, the question arises: what is the connection between knowledge and the operation of power? For Foucault, "power and knowledge directly implies one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1995)

Does this imply the same relation between power and knowledge? Undoubtedly, the answer is "no." Thus, knowledge and power are not in the same relation. Foucault further explained that the relation between knowledge and power should be regarded as a dual process: "an epistemological 'thaw' through a refinement of power relations; a multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge" (Foucault, 1995). In hospitals, for instance, because of the corresponding disciplinary discipline, in any objectifying mechanism used as a means of subjugation, the growth of power can lead to a

certain kind of knowledge. Simultaneously, the formation of this knowledge, in turn, reacts to power and flourishes in disciplines such as clinical medicine and psychology, which are developed and rationalized. Thus, Foucault considered a mutually reinforcing effect between power and knowledge: “They attained a level at which the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process.” (Foucault, 1995)

Furthermore, Foucault emphasized that the analysis of “power–knowledge relations” should focus on the conjoined relations and historical processes of a change between power and knowledge, that is, “power–knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.” (Foucault, 1995) In *The History of Sexual Experience* (Foucault, 1978), Foucault further explained the following:

We must not look for who has the power in the order of sexuality (men, adults, parents, doctors) and who is deprived of it (women, adolescents, children, patients); nor for who has the right to know and who is forced to remain ignorant. We must seek rather the pattern of the modifications which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process. (pp. 99).

According to Foucault, the relation between power and knowledge exhibits a constantly changing state. The “distribution of power” and the “possession of knowledge” represent only a momentary segment of the relation between power and knowledge, and the change of their relation may be a process of accumulation of elements, a process of simultaneous growth, or a process of reversal of the relation. Therefore, the relation between power and knowledge is not a definite form of distribution but a “matrix of transformation.” However, the power–knowledge nexus cannot be truly effective if it is not integrated into an overall strategy and not explored in terms of subtle and explicit relations, such that a “double conditioning” exists between overall strategy and tactics, which is a strategy by the specificity of possible tactics, and of tactics by the strategic envelope that makes them work. (Foucault, 1978, pp. 100).

Dreyfus and Rabinow (2014) argue that Foucault’s analysis focused on the cultural practices in which power and knowledge permeate and “in which our current understanding of the individual, the society, and the human sciences are themselves fabricated” (pp.120). The formation of humanities exists and develops through a particular type of regulative power that incorporates knowledge relations into power relations, where an individual is constructed as a factor in relation to power and knowledge. This coexistence and interaction of power and knowledge provides humanities its historical possibility.

Power and Discourse

Foucault came to believe that the relation between discourse and power was crucial after the kind of reception he got for *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault learned from his painful experience and thoroughly used a genealogical research method in *The Order of Discourse* (Foucault, 1971), thereby adding the element of power to it and discussing the relation between discourse and power. In *The Order of Discourse* (Foucault, 1971), he was open and honest: “Discourse is not simply that which translates struggle or systems of domination, but is the thing for which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized” (Foucault, 1971). At this point, Foucault considered that the relation between discourse and power is based on the negation of power, that is, as a juridical mechanism. As Foucault said that “I accepted the traditional conception of power as an essentially judicial mechanism, as that which lays down the law, which prohibits, which refuses, and which has a whole range of negative effects: exclusion, rejection, denial, obstruction, occultation, etc.” (Foucault, 1980)

This mechanism was manifested in the manner through which power in the classical period was applied to epilepsy, such as the act of banishment of the insane. Foucault’s exposure to this penal system changed his thinking to one concerned with the techniques, tactics, and strategies of power because “not only are prohibition, refusal, and suppression far from being fundamental forms of power, but even they create limits to power, frustrate it, and take it to extremes” (Foucault, 1997). Thus, Foucault turned behind prohibition; in his historical examination of regulation, he found that power was not merely the negative force of repression. He observed that power can produce and that “it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse.” (Foucault, 1980) Therefore, we should not negatively describe the effects of power.

In his examination of the growth of sexual discourse since the 18th century, Foucault revealed that the mechanisms of power led to the growth and expansion of sexual discourse. Specifically, the state knew everything about the sexual life of the population, and the population was able to control the forms of its use, “Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue.” (Foucault, 1978) From this statement, we can infer that power produces knowledge and discourse. However, questions that need to be examined are: Is discourse only the result of the action of power? What is the relation between power and discourse?

Discourse is an “instrument of power.” Discourses of sexuality are instigated in a regular and varied manner, bringing sexual discourse within the realm of power and functioning as a means of power. Since the

18th century, for instance, educators, officials, doctors, and parents have talked about the sexuality of children and adolescents, and children's sexuality has been covered by a network of discourses that regulate who speaks and what is said, "sometimes address them, sometimes speak about them, or use them as a basis for constructing a science that is beyond their grasp." (Foucault, 1978) These discourses, at times, allow them to narrate, at times comment on things about them, at times force the acceptance of normative knowledge, and at times form knowledge from them that they have forgotten. Discourse is the "cloak of invisibility" of power, which provides freedom to talk about sex while avoiding it. "Around sex, a whole network of varying, specific, and coercive exist which transpositions into discourse." (Foucault, 1978)

Power produces discourse, and discourse is used by power and, in turn, produces power; however, the relation between the two is unstable. Power does not function in the same manner but as multiple forms of power technologies that emerge in fragments according to local conditions and needs and do not form a large and tightly knit whole. In addition, the internal distribution of power is uneven, and "these ensembles don't consist in a homogenization, but rather of a complex play of supports in mutual engagement, different mechanisms of power which retain all their specific character." (Foucault, 1980) Generally, discourse is not subservient to or supportive of power. Moreover, discourse, sometimes, exists as the backbone of power resistance, strengthening power while simultaneously weakening and hindering it. Thus, according to Foucault, "there is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it" (Foucault, 1978).

Based on the analysis, we understand the relation between discourse and knowledge, power and knowledge, and power and discourse. From *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault's focus shifted toward the relation between power and knowledge; however, discourse interacts with power and knowledge, which are interdependent and symbiotic, together forming a network of relations. In this network of relations, Foucault could rethink and reinterpret discourse. Power and knowledge are linked through discourse. He wrote, "There can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy." (Foucault, 1978) Thus, Foucault emphasized the "strategic" function of discourse and opined that we need to understand discourse as a series of discontinuous links, implying that the function of strategy is neither stable nor fixed.

In one interview, Foucault explicitly attempted to combine discursive and non-discursive practices by introducing the notion of the "machine." First, the "machine" is a radically heterogeneous combination of what is said and what is not said, and the "machine" is the system of relations built up by these elements. Second, in the machine, Foucault aimed to identify the nature of the association between heterogeneous elements, that is, "between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, these is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely." (Foucault, 1980) These interactions are differentiated. Finally, the "machine" represents the structures that developed at a particular time point in history and that respond to urgent needs. For instance, the control and repression of the mentally ill are required for strategic reasons. The "machine" is not only involved in the operation of power but also related to the positioning of knowledge. This knowledge is derived from the "machine" and constrains it in equal measure. Thus, the "machine" constitutes "strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge." (Foucault, 1980).

In *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 1970, 2002) and the *Order of Things* (Foucault, 2000), Foucault emphasized on "knowledge-based" by referring to the form of knowledge and discourse and mentioned that machines add plurality and heterogeneity to "knowledge-based" because they contain both discursive and non-discursive elements. Miller argued that the concept of "machine" was introduced mainly to transcend discourse (Gao, 2022). The aforementioned analysis indicates that Foucault's purpose of introducing the "machine" was not to replace or transcend discourse but to place discourse within a broad historical framework, which highlights a close connection between non-discursive and discursive practices.

Conclusion

The current study is the testimony of Foucault's growth as a philosopher, historian and psychoanalyst across the structural and post structural eras. His discourse theory is an outcome of a several stages of mental and intellectual discussions on various platforms. In short, Foucault's discourse witnessed both the archaeological era of knowledge and the genealogical one. This evolution marks a paradigm shift in Foucault's discourse and it integrated power and knowledge, as opposed to his earlier belief that both power and knowledge were intrinsically separate. Foucault established an internal relationship between power and knowledge as his discourse theory evolved. Thus, he challenged the traditional view that power and knowledge are incompatible and that power is the prerequisite to knowledge.

In his writings, Foucault did not focus much on the relation between discourse and power. However, in *The Order of Discourse* (Foucault, 1971), he presented power as negative and a limitation of discourse. He viewed power as prohibition; a negative force of repression. He further explained that the relation between

power and knowledge should be regarded as a dual process: “an epistemological ‘thaw’ through a refinement of power relations; a multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge” (Foucault, 1995). His main argument was that different powers result in different types of knowledge, though the same power can also produce different knowledge. Thus,

In his discourse on sanity and madness, Foucault argued that sanatoriums act as a barrier to knowledge, though they often act as knowledge institutions shaped to teach how to distinguish between rationality and insanity. Furthermore, with the establishment of sanatoriums, irrationality was completely rejected by reason and madness. However, in this structure, madness was imprisoned and constantly monitored by reason—a double movement of liberation and enslavement. There is class, domination, and dominated; thus, reason becomes dominant. Foucault gave the example of discourses on homosexuality and its variants that emerged in the literature on psychiatry during the 19th century. These discourses reinforced the social control of this perverse field, and contributed to a “compensatory” discourse, in which the homosexual community began using derogatory terms in the medical discourse while talking. For example, he argued that sexuality was not simply repressed in the 19th century. Rather, it was widely discussed in an expanding new scientific literature where patients were encouraged to talk about sexual experiences in clinical settings.

In this regard, the world of discourse should not be simply divided into dominant and subordinate discourses but reconstructed as a set of strategic elements in power relations, which function in different strategies. In response, Foucault highlighted the need to reintegrate the dimensions of strategic production of discourse (to ensure the effectiveness of the interaction between power and knowledge) and strategic integration (what forms of power relations are necessary for discourse to be utilized in times of conflict). In addition, Foucault integrated discursive and non-discursive practices.

References

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications. Retrieved from <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/qualitative-inquiry-and-research-design/book246896>
- Deleuze, G. (2006). *Foucault*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Retrieved from <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/foucault>
- Dreyfus, H. L., & Rabinow, P. (2014). *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*. University of Chicago press. Retrieved from <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/M/bo3638224.html>
- Eribon, D. (1991). *Michel Foucault translated by Betsy Wing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Retrieved from https://www.bibliovault.org/BV_book_epl?ISBN=9780674572867
- Foucault, M. (1954). *Mental illness and personality*. NY: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1970). The archaeology of knowledge. *Social science information*, 9(1), 175-185. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847000900108>
- Foucault, M. (1971). Orders of discourse. *Social science information*, 10(2), 7-30. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847101000201>
- Foucault, M. (1978). Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In D. F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca: Cornell, University Press. Retrieved from <https://philarchive.org/archive/FOUNGH>
- Foucault, M. (1980). Truth and Power. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings*. New York: Harvester Press.
- Foucault, M. (1988). *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York: Vintage Books Edition. Retrieved from <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/55031/madness-and-civilization-by-michel-foucault>
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. New York: Vintage. Retrieved from <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/55036/the-history-of-sexuality-by-michel-foucault>
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (S. Alan, Trans.). New York: Second Vintage Books Edition.
- Foucault, M. (1997). In Y. Bao, *The Eye of Power Y. Feng, Trans*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House.
- Foucault, M. (2000). The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences. In *Posthumanism* (pp. 27-29). Springer. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-05194-3_5
- Foucault, M. (2002). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Routledge. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203604168>
- Foucault, M. (2003). *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*. Routledge. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203715109>
- Foucault, M. (2005). The discourse on language. In *Truth: Engagements across philosophical traditions* (pp. 315-335). John Wiley & Sons. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470776407.ch20>
- Foucault, M. (2013). *History of madness*. Routledge. Retrieved from <https://www.routledge.com/History-of-Madness/Khalifa-Foucault/p/book/9780415477260>
- Foucault, M. (2019). *Power: the essential works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*. Penguin UK. Retrieved from <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/23075/power-by-foucault-michel/9780241435083>

- Foucault, M. (2023). Linguistics and social sciences. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 40(1-2), 259-278. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764221091549>
- Gao, Y. (2022). The Role of Russian Spatial Preposition Structure in Russian Language Teaching. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 28(3), 60–71. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17762/kuey.v28i03.471>
- Kant, I. (2006). *Kant: anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*. Cambridge University Press. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511809569>
- Määttä, S. K. (2022). Discourse and ideology in French thought until Foucault and Pêcheux. In S. K. Määttä & M. K. Hall (Eds.), *Mapping ideology in discourse studies* (pp. 21-44). De Gruyter Mouton. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501513602-002>
- Macey, D. (1993). *The Lives of Michel Foucault*. London: Hutchinson. Retrieved from <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2797336>
- Miller, J. (1993). *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Mohajan, H. K. (2018). Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 7(1), 23-49. doi: <https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v7i1.571>
- Rosenkrantz, M. (2016). Mark G.E. Kelly, Foucault's History of Sexuality Volume I; The Will to Knowledge (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), vi-ix, 1-150, ISBN 978-0-7486-4889-4. *Foucault Studies*(21), 262-266. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i0.5028>
- Sheridan, A. (2005). *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*. London and New York: Routledge. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203359211>
- Tamm, M. (2016). Sex and Truth: Foucault's History of Sexuality as History of Truth. *Cultural History*, 5(2), 153-168. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3366/cult.2016.0123>
- Tetnowski, J. A., & Damico, J. S. (2001). A demonstration of the advantages of qualitative methodologies in stuttering research. *Journal of Fluency Disorders*, 26(1), 17-42. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0094-730X\(01\)00094-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0094-730X(01)00094-8)
- Weeks, J. (2005). Remembering foucault. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14(1/2), 186-201. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.2006.0018>
- Wu, M. (2010). *A Probe into Foucault's Discourse Theory*. Beijing: Jiuzhou Press.
- Young, R. (1981). *Untying the text: A post-structuralist reader*. Routledge & Kegan Paul London. Retrieved from <https://philpapers.org/rec/YOUUTT>