



Abstract

Many ways of analyzing discourse based on the work of Michel Foucault have been developed. One way of organizing a discourse analysis is based on the work of Rawlinson.[1] An overview of the process of discourse analysis is presented and specific questions for each of the three parts of her proposed approach to discourse analysis are shown using the example of the discourse of advertising feminine hygiene products in women's magazines.

Key words discourse analysis, Michel Foucault, Mary Rawlinson

Rawlinson's Three Axes of Structural Analysis: A Useful Framework for a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

PENNY POWERS

Introduction

A discourse is a systematic body of text, speech and action regarding a specific subject area in the realm of human experience that mobilizes power in the form of productive knowledge in the social world. A discourse forms its objects in order to create a unique domain in human experience or to redefine one that already exists. For example, the discourse of psychiatry creates and controls psychiatric conditions by defining and treating them. This further

consolidates its power to do so.[2] Psychiatric knowledge thus relies on, and generates, power that undermines the ability of other discourses to speak the language, treat the patients, publish the research, join the associations, and have a voice in public policy. This does not mean that there are no other ways of speaking about human behaviours, but rather that there are dominant and resistance discourses locked in debate over definitions and authority. Discourses have a history, proceed in a systematic fashion, and serve to control a professional turf and defend it from other ways of having power in that realm of human experience.

Discourses co-exist in power-based relations that support particular ways of being and thinking about the world.[3] This makes any discourse a highly political entity. For example, punishment theories and medically-based physiological explanations for cancer exist at the same time.[4] In other words, there are dominant discourses and resistance discourses that co-exist within any field of study, such as medicine, history, physics, and education and they may conflict in their assumptions and implications. Discourses

are always in flux, evolving and changing in response to internal and external pressure, thereby continuously producing effects on their discursive subjects and objects. Such effects are, in part, dependent on whether a particular discourse is dominant or marginalized in a given socio-political context.

Power, money and prestige are all involved in creating and managing discourses to control a realm of human experience. Various analytical approaches have been devised in order to understand the way discourses emerge and produce effects in relation to a given phenomenon, such as feminine hygiene. For example, the discourse of feminine hygiene products in women's magazines has changed the way human beings think and act with respect to menstruation, and, by extension, to feminine reproduction and hygiene.[5] What has come to be understood as "feminine hygiene", then, represents one particular discursive field that lends itself to discourse analysis. In this paper, I will discuss one approach to a Foucauldian discourse analysis using Mary Rawlinson's[1] work, and propose some lines of inquiry that would allow one to dissect the discursive processes involved with regards to feminine hygiene products.

Discourse analysis

There are many ways of analyzing a discourse for its effects on power relations among groups of people. Some discourse analysts use the philosophical approach of Michel Foucault as a theoretical framework for their work.[6-10] There are several variants of Foucauldian discourse analysis, but all include the following: (a) A review of the history of the discourse in what Foucault first called archaeology (and the modified later version, genealogy), (b) an analysis of how the discourse functions presently, and (c) an analysis of the effects of the discourse on power relations. Archaeology was the original term Foucault used to designate a method used to describe discursive formations as they exist at one point in time.[11] However, the method could not account for the manner in which discourses evolve. Therefore, Foucault[12] modified the method in his work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* to include a way to analyze the way discourses emerge and change, and called it genealogy, following Nietzsche's[13] *On the Genealogy of Morals*. These two terms are sometimes mistakenly used interchangeably, when the proper term in a discourse analysis should be genealogy.[14]

These three parts of a discourse analysis can be presented together or separately. All three parts contribute to an understanding of *power*, and what Foucault referred to as

the *power-knowledge dyad*. Discourse analysis is especially useful in examining the work of large institutions such as governments in soliciting, producing, supporting, sorting and applying productive knowledge to address particular issues in the administration of public life.[15]

There are many possible interpretations of existing power relations. Foucault refused to privilege one interpretation over another because he was suspicious of displacing one kind of domination and implementing another. In his opinion, the privileging of one form of interpretation necessarily led to the reproduction of power relationships when substituting the domination of one discourse over another. Yet, he also conceived of discourse analysis as a "tool for radical political action".[16 p5] Whatever the effect, many ways of performing a discourse analysis have been developed.[17-23] Foucault was well known for his reluctance to delineate a definitive analytical method of discursive analysis. Several authors have thus endeavoured to articulate one such method that remains true to Foucault's ideas. Mary Rawlinson[1] has suggested a fairly simple approach to a critical discourse analysis that is consistent with Foucault. In describing Foucault's philosophical approach to medicine, Rawlinson observed that he believed:

truth is not so much discovered ... as [it is] produced according to regular and identifiable procedures that determine in any given historical situation what it is possible to say, who is authorized to speak, what can become an object of scientific inquiry, and how knowledge is to be tested, accumulated, and dispersed.[1 p373]

In analyzing Foucault's approach to discourse in medicine, Rawlinson sought to discern specific questions that could be asked by the discourse analyst. How did this discourse come to have the right to pronounce truth in some region of human experience? How does it function in the present? What power effects does it have? Following Rawlinson, useful questions can be generated to guide all three parts of the analysis. Not all questions will be relevant to all discourses under analysis, but most will be applicable to explaining their systematic functioning and their effects on power relations between people, and between people and institutions. As Rawlinson writes, "it can be determined how people came to think, talk and act in this way".[1 p376]

Terminology

Some definitions of relevant terms will support this discussion. The first part of a discourse analysis, the genealogy, explains the social circumstances of the origin of the discourse, the original power relations and how they were articulated or

altered in order to consolidate a way of addressing some realm of human experience.

The second part of a discourse analysis, the structural analysis, identifies the internal rules of the present discourse that govern the operation of the discursive processes on objects to create *subjects*. The *objects* of a discourse are entities external to the discourse that serve as the targets for knowledge generation and intervention. The *objects* of a discourse are acted upon by discursive processes to form its subjects, the internal concepts of the discourse that are used in a proprietary manner to pronounce truth. The *styles of statements* in a discourse are the various forms that meaningful statements are allowed to take.[14] The *theoretical strategies* are the specifically defined processes of the discourse used on the *objects* to create *subjects* and produce knowledge/power.[24] The processes of the discourse have rules for the construction of *subjects* from *objects* by defining the evidence for what counts as an object or a subject and what can be said about them, by whom, and under what conditions these knowledge claims can be made.

The *theoretical strategies* of a discourse create the *subjects* of a discourse from its *objects* using *surfaces of emergence*, *authorities of delimitation*, and *grids of specification*. [11] A *surface of emergence* can be thought of as the edge of an existing discourse that allows related discourses to grow from it. For example, the discourse of medicine arose on the *surfaces of emergence* called natural science and philosophy, and the *styles of statements* in medicine were based on the rules of empirical science. *Theoretical strategies* in medicine follow the process of empirical science and require strict research protocols in order to be counted as true within the discourse of medicine. Descriptions of how the discourse arose in this manner can be found in the genealogy. Descriptions of how the discourse functions in this manner can be found in the structural analysis.

An *authority of delimitation* is a set of rules that identifies the manner in which a discourse can identify objects that are available to be acted upon to become subjects of the discourse. For instance, an *authority of delimitation* of prison discourse is the legal and court systems because it is through and by them that discourses of delinquency, criminalization, and incarceration identify the *objects* (e.g. people convicted of crimes) they use to create *subjects* (e.g. inmates) which are the bodies upon which a prison discourse can make claims of power/knowledge. For nursing, one particular authority of delimitation is medicine, because through discourses of medicine, human beings (*objects*) become designated as patients, the *subjects* of nursing (and medical)

discourse. Nursing cannot in any official manner designate individuals as patients. This action is constrained by an authority of delimitation such as medicine. Once medicine has designated someone as a patient, then nursing discourse can act upon him or her.

A *grid of specification* is a systematic taxonomy of concepts constructed within the discourse that is used to place *objects* in an ordered hierarchy or table so they can become identified types of *subjects*. In psychiatry, a prominent example of a *grid of specification* is the DSM. This taxonomy orders the *subjects* of the discourse—in this case the physical and behavioural characteristics of human beings—into one category in the grid, say, depression or bipolar disorder. Individuals become discursive *subjects* constituted through and by an *authority of delimitation*. They can then be examined and, using *theoretical strategies*, be placed into one of the categories in the *grid of specification*. Now a person is a member of a discursive *subject category*, with a diagnosis, and may be treated by the correct authority in the correct manner, in the correct place. This identification and organization of bodies according to particular norms has given rise to numerous critiques in the way such processes perpetuate certain dominant discourses and disqualify others. In the fields of medicine and psychiatry, this process of categorization has been labelled the *medicalization* or *clinicalization* of social control because large scale social issues are transformed by well-established discourses into discipline-specific problems where discipline-specific terms such as *diagnosis*, *treatment*, and *expert* can be applied in discipline-specific locations such as hospitals or clinics. For example, it has been suggested that domestic violence should be a medical diagnosis so that it could be addressed by physicians.[25] Is domestic violence a social issue? A medical diagnosis? A moral issue? A psychiatric problem? What discipline will claim this issue as a disciplinary specialty? Are disciplines avoiding this issue? The process of defining social issues as belonging to a specific academic discipline works to co-opt the entire discussion of specific social questions and silence other ways of conceptualizing the situation. The resolution of the dispute over the “place” of domestic violence will determine its management or treatment: drugs, incarceration, counselling, visualizations, self-esteem or anger management workshops, and so on. The coexistence of conflicting discourses inevitably leads to tensions regarding grids of specification and authorities of delimitation. For instance, pharmaceutical discourse may propose one cause for anxiety, while social psychiatry proposes another. Tensions rise and fall continuously,

sometimes creating new discourses.

The third part of a discourse analysis is the power analysis, in which the effects of the functioning of the discourse on power relations are analyzed. This differs from genealogy in that the power analysis examines the functioning of the discourse on *present* power relations between populations, and between institutional structures and populations. Genealogy provides an analysis of the historical rise of the discourse and the power relations present at the development of the discourse, not the present version.

Now that terminology is briefly reviewed, we can move on to the examination of methodological aspects of discourse analysis based on Rawlinson's work.[1]

Genealogy

The first part of this form of discourse analysis is genealogy, an analysis of the historical context and the development of a particular discourse over time. Genealogy includes a discussion of the interests of proponents and opponents of a given discourse, and the way consensus and disagreements have played out. Key concepts of the discourse sometimes have a significant social history and their origin is discussed. Genealogy provides a picture of the way a discourse emerged from a specific historical context and in the presence of other related discourses, so as to construct its place among ways of thinking about a given phenomenon. How does a discourse harness the power to be heard? Rawlinson describes Foucault's genealogical approach in this way:

A genealogical analysis ...reveals that the epistemological and the political, knowledge and power, are ineluctably intertwined, so that truth is not so much discovered — as if it lay ready-made in an objective reality patiently awaiting the articulate voice of science — as produced according to regular and identifiable procedures that determine in any given historical situation what it is possible to say, who is authorized to speak, what can become an object of scientific inquiry, and how knowledge is to be tested, accumulated, and dispersed.[1 p372]

In analyzing the discourse of advertising feminine hygiene products in women's magazines, genealogy would examine the following questions:

1.What other discourses and/or events provided models or ideas that influenced the functioning of the discourse under analysis and in what ways? For example, were there any discourses that were used as models for the discourse of feminine hygiene products in women's magazines?

2.What words in the discourse have a linguistic and social history that is significant for assessing the role of the discourse

within current power relations? For example, words like *the curse*, *monthlies*, *crimson tide*, *menstruations*, *rags*, or *hygiene* carry particular meanings that mobilize certain understandings and behaviours in relation to feminine hygiene and associated products.

3.What historical context influenced the development of the discourse? What was happening at the time of the first discussions of feminine hygiene products that might have had an effect on the development of associated discourses?

4.What physical, bodily space was created by being described by the discursive practices of the discourse? For example, the space of the human vagina was suddenly available for description as never before.

5.What surfaces of emergence and conditions of possibility were acknowledged and appropriated and made visible by this discourse and by what means? Were there other discourses that were close to the discourse of feminine hygiene products that could have served as launching platforms for this kind of talk?

6.By what processes did the discourse construct the right to pronounce truth in some region of experience? How did the first instance of the discourse come about? Who performed this action? Why? What were some of the immediate consequences?

7.What other discourses were affected and how? What did the development of the discourse of feminine hygiene products do to the discussion in the letters to the editor section of magazines that carried the ads? Where else did discussion about the first ads take place?

8.What power struggles or turf battles occurred and what was the outcome? Was there competition among companies for control of the language of feminine hygiene products?

9.In whose interest was the social construction of this discourse? Who benefited from this discourse?

10.Whose interests were ignored and/or rejected? Who did not benefit from the discourse of feminine hygiene products?

Structural analysis

Following genealogy, the discourse analyst seeks to describe the current functioning of the discourse in a structural analysis. Rawlinson's approach is again very helpful by ordering the questions along three axes. She calls these axes *self-closed systems* because they are self-referential and presume exclusive structures for the functioning of the discourse. There are three axes along which to analyze the

discourse; the axis of knowledge, the axis of authority, and the axis of value or justification.

The first axis is that of knowledge. This axis describes systems of concepts and rules for the formation of statements, what determines the difference between true and false, what can be spoken about, and the rules of evidence. Truth is the central tenet of this axis, therefore it involves epistemological considerations. The specific questions that draw out the knowledge dimension are:

1. What are the objects and subjects of the discourse? What strategies were women using for menstrual flow before a discourse of feminine hygiene products emerged, seized the subject, and described it and which (hygienic) strategies for its management are acceptable?
2. What processes differentiate the subjects and objects of the discourse? How did the discourse on feminine hygiene products colonize the space in women's magazines?
3. What is it that guides this discourse? Why was this discourse created in the first place?
4. What regularities can be discerned? Are there any discernible discursive patterns in women's magazines?
5. What processes produce the physical space, the meaning, and the assumed truths of this discourse? Was the process all done by advertisements? Were there articles, letters, pictures, studies, testimonials?
6. What does the discourse do to the resulting subjects? How does the discourse organize its words and expressions in order to create desired particular effect?
7. What grids of specification are there? Are there any graphs, or tables? I have seen tables that direct women to choose the right product for the right flow. I'm not sure if such tables were used at the beginning of the discourse.
8. In the rules for the formation of subjects from objects, what and where do individual differences, deviations, and complaints emerge? How did the type of product multiply from one to many, depending on many things that the consumer has to know about?
9. How is it specified that these subjects are to be used on pre-existing surfaces, constructed spaces, or bodies? How are you supposed to buy these products? How are you supposed to use them? How are you supposed to discuss them? When are you old enough to use them? How is this information disseminated to women – product inserts?
10. What authorities of delimitation exist? The discourse

recommends, "See your doctor if..." under what circumstances?

11. What order governs the appearance, disappearance, replacement, and coexistence of the subjects, objects, concepts, styles of statements and theoretical strategies of the discourse? What associations are there for advertisers?? How do they share information?

12. What are the rules of evidence in the discourse? Where do the companies get their information? Studies? Customer feedback?

13. What order governs the multiplicity and diversity of the subjects, objects, concepts, styles of statements and theoretical strategies of the discourse?

Analysis in the second axis, that of authority, includes the rules for who is allowed to speak in this discourse, what systems are in place for education, reproduction and advancement of the discourse, and how the right to pronounce truth is managed internally. The questions answered on this axis are:

1. What are the rules for who is allowed to speak and who is not? Can anyone speak the language of feminine hygiene? Who is afforded legitimacy and authority, and on what grounds?
2. How is the discourse preserved, transmitted, disseminated? Are there industry standards for such advertisements?
3. What systems are allowed for education, association and advancement of members of the discourse? How do advertisers enforce their standards?
4. How is the right to pronounce truth preserved? How is the system of advertisers controlled?
5. What speaking positions are available to people within this discourse? What words can be used?
6. What speaking positions are not allowed? What words are not allowed?

Analysis in the third axis, that of value or justification includes the systems of regulation and the technologies of power, and how the deployment of the discourse on the bodies of actual human beings is justified. The questions answered on this axis are:

1. What social agents are mobilized in order to control the deployment of the discourse and how are they trained? How do advertisers train their ad writers?
2. How does the discourse justify the technologies of power that it constructs for its purposes? What do the advertisers say

to justify the way they talk about vaginas?

3. How does the discourse justify suppressing other discourses that challenge its dominance in pronouncing truth? Do advertisers dominate other ways of talking?

4. What justification is provided for the punishment of participants? How are advertising standards enforced?

5. How is the suppression of competing discourses justified?

6. What is the justification provided by the discourse for its position as a pronouncer of truth?

The power analysis

In the third part of a discourse analysis, the power analysis, the current relations of power between groups of people are analysed for potential to perpetuate or extend situations of domination. Some relationships of power may be supported or resisted by the discourse. Within the discourse, there may be found dominant discourses and alternate discourses that resist them. Resistance discourses are alternative speaking positions that provide ways of acting and speaking that do not support the dominant way of thinking and of conceptualizing particular subjects.[26] In naming and describing resistance to power, a discourse analysis can uncover a process of co-optation by dominant discursive entities so as to govern the level of resistance among participants. Marginalized voices may be raised and then attenuated or even silenced. Discourse analysis produces one possible understanding of the dissemination of power and privilege. In this regard, along with Foucault, Rawlinson emphasizes that the power of a discourse is productive rather than repressive.[1]

In the power analysis, the following questions can be raised:

1. In whose interests is the continuation of this discourse? Who benefits from this discourse?

2. Whose autonomy and responsibility are enhanced by this discourse?

3. Whose autonomy and responsibility are reduced?

4. What dominations are established, perpetuated, or eliminated?

5. What sub-discourses of resistance are present within the discourse? Are there competing ways of talking about the subject of the discourse? What responses from readers were received?

6. What mechanisms are in place for systematic co-optation of resistance discourses?

7. Whose voice is being heard? Do women have input into how their bodies are discussed?

8. Whose voice is being left out?

9. Do individuals feel constraints against speaking?

10. Are all voices equally informed?

11. What power relations exist between this discourse and others?

Conclusion

Taken all together, the three parts of a discourse analysis using these questions can provide a close view of where and how a discourse comes forth, how it functions, and how it affects power relations. A discourse analysis concludes with interpretive claims about the observations made from the data. These claims might give insight into the discourse to those immersed in it and those outside the discourse, looking in. For example, there might be some key insights to be gained from conducting a discourse analysis of advertising for feminine hygiene products in women's magazines with respect to societal views of women's bodies and self-concept. The answers to the questions proposed here could contribute to the body of knowledge on women's movements. Discourse analyses may generate various understandings of contemporary phenomena. Other interpretations are therefore made possible, discourses may change, contexts change, and further discussion is enabled.

References

1. Rawlinson MC. Foucault's strategy: Knowledge, power, and the specificity of truth. *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 1987; 12:371-95.

2. Roberts M. The production of the psychiatric subject: power, knowledge and Michel Foucault. *Nursing Philosophy* 2005; 6(1):33-42.

3. Pickstone JV. *Ways of Knowing: A New History of Science, Technology and Medicine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

4. Karim K. A grounded theory study of truth-telling in cancer: perceptions of white British and British South Asian community workers. Available from URL: www.dissertation.com/library/1121652a.htm Accessed 19 November 2012.

5. Hegarty ME. Patriot or prostitute?: Sexual discourses, print media, and American women during World War II. *Journal of Women's History* 1998;10(2):112-36.

6. Garrity Z. Discourse Analysis, Foucault and Social Work Research: Identifying Some Methodological Complexities. *Journal of Social Work* 2010; 10(2):193-210.
7. Hook D. Discourse, knowledge, materiality, history: Foucault and discourse analysis. *Theory & Psychology* 2001; 11(4):521-47.
8. Hunt A, Wickham G. Foucault and law: Towards a sociology of law as governance. London: Pluto Press, 1994.
9. Jansen I. Discourse analysis and Foucault's archaeology of knowledge. *International Journal of Caring Sciences* 2008; 1(3):107-11.
10. Kendall G, Wickham G. Using Foucault's methods: Introduction to qualitative methods. London: Sage Publications, 1999.
11. Foucault M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan-Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972.
12. Foucault M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by A. Sheridan. New York: Pantheon, 1977.
13. Nietzsche F. *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). Translated by Walter Kaufman. New York: Vintage, 1887.
14. Dreyfus HL, Rabinow P. *Michel Foucault, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
15. Foucault M. *The History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction*. Translated by R. Hurley. New York: Random House, 1978.
16. Bouchard DF. *Knowledge, Counter-Memory, and Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews of Michel Foucault*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell Press, 1977.
17. Wood LA, Kroger RO. *Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000.
18. Wodak R, Meyer M. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage, 2001.
19. Phillips L, Jørgensen MW. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage, 2002.
20. Fairclough N. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. New York: Longman, 1995.
21. Titscher S, Meyer M, Wodak R, Vetter E. *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* (B Jenner, Trans.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000.
22. Barker C, Galasinski D. Cultural studies and discourse analysis: A dialogue on language and identity. In Barker C, Galasinski D (eds). *Language, Culture, Discourse*. London: Sage, 2001;1-27.
23. Powers P. *The Methodology of Discourse Analysis*. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett, 2001.
24. Mish'alani JK. *Michel Foucault and philosophy: An overview*. Unpublished paper, University of Washington, Seattle, 1992.
25. Shea CA, Mahoney M, Lacey JM. Breaking through the barriers to domestic violence intervention. *American Journal of Nursing* 1997;97(6):26-33.
26. Foucault M. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Contact Information for Author:
Penny Powers, RN, Ph.D.
Professor
Thompson Rivers University
School of Nursing
900 McGill Road, P.O. Box 3010
Kamloops, British Columbia, V2C 5N3
Canada
Email: ppowers@tru.ca