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## FOUCAULT'S DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

Cultural theory in recent years has attracted a good deal of in-depth critical analysis; a lot of critical work has been done on the theories and methods developed by Michele Foucault as well. As a result, a considerable body of critical work exists on Foucault's work as his philosophical interpretations have been analysed and examined by using several critical techniques and tools. The present paper undertakes a study of the term discourse in Foucault's body of work as he interprets history, not in the conventional sense but as an 'archeology' or the 'genealogy' of knowledge production. This paper discusses in detail upon the question Foucault discusses of how discourse has shaped and created meaning system and gained the currency of 'truth' and how individuals organize and express themselves in the social system. In doing so, Foucault expresses the conception of power and knowledge in terms of formation of identities and practices related to the functions of specific discourses and alternative discourses. It is evident that the alternative discourses in cultural practices are marginalized and subjugated, and that they offer the possibilities resistance or challenges to the hegemonic practices.

**Keywords :** discourse, identity, society, culture, discursive, exclusion, inclusion etc...

#### Introduction :

Discourse is one of the influential and the basic terms in Foucauldian analysis of power and knowledge. Generally, discourse is used to point out the forms of representation, codes, conventions and habits of language that produce specific fields of culturally and historically located meanings. Marianne Jorgensen and Louise Philips define discourse as;

“ 'discourse' is an idea that language is disciplined in accordance with different patterns which people's utterances follow when they take part in various fields of social life, e.g. 'medical discourse' and 'political discourse'. Discourse analysis is concerned with the analysis of these patterns (Jorgensen, 2001, P. 1).”

The concept discourse has several definitions and perspectives. Literature available on discourse notes that in the study of language, discourse refers to the speech patterns and usage of language, dialects, and acceptable

statements within a community. It intends to study people who live in a specific areas and share related speech conventions. In Sociology and Philosophy term “discourse” refers to the conversations and the meaning behind them by a specific group of people who perceive certain ideas in common.

Historically the concept “discourse” originates from Latin “discursus”, which means “running to and from”, and generally refers to “written or spoken communication”. So discourse is conversation or information. For Foucault, we (human beings as social beings) are created through discourse (through knowledge) that; and that discourse links power and knowledge, and its power (the power of discourse) follows from our casual acceptance of the “reality with which we are presented” (Foucault, 1977). But if power is casually accepted on grounds that it is being good then how power is perceived as good, what makes it accepted

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are the questions that need urgent answers. Foucault elaborates power that it (power) does not only weigh on us as a force, it traverses and produce things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge and produce discourse. It forms a productive network which runs through the social body without having repression as its function (Foucault, 1980, p. 119).

### **Discourse in Foucault's Interpretations :**

Discourse is interwoven with power and knowledge to constitute the oppression of those “others” in our society, serving to marginalize, silence and oppress them. They are oppressed not only by being denied access to certain knowledge, but by the demands of the dominant group within the society that the “other” shed their differences (in essence, their being, their voices, their cultures) to become “one of us”(Pitsoe, 2012). Discourse as social construct is created and preserved by those who have the power and means of communication. For example, those who are in control decide who we are by deciding what we discuss. It is through this analysis of discourse, Foucault claims that truth, morality, and meaning are created where power acts as relations, a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations (Foucault, 1980, p.198).

Michel Foucault's early writings especially *The Order of Discourse* (1971) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) were influential in this. His work give rise to terms 'discursive practices' and 'discursive formation' towards the analysis of institutions and their ways of establishing orders of truth, or what is accepted as a discourse in the society. In this context discourse can be seen as procedure of how what counts as truth depends on conceptual system of operations (Grocock, 2008).

An established discursive formation is defined by the complementary discourses it contains. Foucault's work suggests that the members of society, including its intellectuals, are implicated in discourse and in the systems of power and regulation which give them their livelihoods and definition. And hence, one cannot stand outside such systems. But at the same time it has been seen that, since discourse and power are anonymous and without center or single agency, the political role of the

critical intellectual is in question. Hence, it can be said that Foucault contributes towards strengthening the micro-basis for action of the method together with understanding of the processes of institutionalization (Peci, 2009).

Foucault's work offers a model of the intellectual as a historian of modes of thought and as a cultural analyst. Peter Broker states in his *A Concise Glossary of Cultural Theory*(1999) that discourse;

“in its general use, both in academic work and elsewhere it can be used variously to denote the modes of thought and words determining the institutions, domains of culture or cultural practices (law, medicine, the BBC, information technology, cinema, haute couture, skateboarding, wine tasting etc.); an intellectual mode or tendency (psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, postmodernism etc.); to distinguish different fields of study (theory, philosophy, sociology, literary, film or media study etc.); or to identify the language of different social groups or occasions (the language of management and workers, interviews, weddings, etc.)(Broker, 1999, P. 87).”

However, in an essay *Order of Discourse*(1971), Foucault explains discourse as the rules, systems and procedures which constitute our behavior towards 'will to knowledge' (Pasquin, 1986). Moreover, discursive production and effects of power lead one to formulate truth or falsehood so as to control or conceal the truth as will to knowledge which serves as both their support and their instrument (Foucault, 1978, p.11-12)

But as a matter of fact these rules, systems and procedures comprise an abstract realm of discursive practices. Hence, the *Order of Discourse*(1971) provides a conceptual framework of rules in which knowledge is formed and produced in the given discourse.

Indeed, these discursive rules are particularly linked to the exercise of power (Miller, 1990). The discourse itself is both constituted by and ensures the reproduction of, the social system, in terms of forms of selection, exclusion, and domination. In every society, the production of discourse is at once “controlled, selected, organized and redistributed” by a number of measures whose role is to protect against its powers and

dangers, and to gain supremacy over its chance events, to elude its ponderous, formidable materiality (Foucault, 1981, p. 52).

#### **Exclusion in Discourse :**

Foucault is engaged in an agreed attempt to bring back the materiality and power to the linguistic concepts of discourse. But later on, he focused the analysis of discourse within the field of political activity. As a matter of fact he believes in exclusion and choice in terms of inhibiting the productive ways of the discourse (Foucault, 1981, p. 51-78).

Hence, these processes of formation and constraint, production and exclusion cannot be separated from one another so far as the discourse is concerned. Moreover, they both are complimentary and constitutive to one another. And so the discourse is formed and exists through the mutual constitution of production, constraints and exclusion. Foucault draws two processes of exclusion based on the procedures of selection, redistribution and control of discourse; an external system of exclusion and internal system of exclusion.

#### **External Systems of Exclusion :**

Foucault deals with the external system of exclusion as a 'social procedure of exclusion which corresponds chiefly to taboos, rituals and authority of the speaking subject. (Foucault, 1981, p. 52)''These forms of exclusion and prohibition are fairly straightforward. Foucault does not elaborate them much.

To connect with the banned speech of politics and division of sexuality and rejection (Foucault, 1981, p. 53) a form of exclusion is used. However, it is not a straightforward prohibition but more of a division and a rejection. It is the difference between madness and reason. Foucault, in the *Order of Discourse* (1971), claims that the speech of the mad is still considered as 'a noise to discourse' that may preserve the capacity of truth. However, the structure of knowledge and the network of institutions and qualifications allow the doctor or psychologist to be able to listen, to the aspects of truthfulness within the speech of the madman.

One of the major exclusions operating in terms of the order of discourse is the rivalry between true and

false. (Foucault, 1981, p. 54) Our sense of 'the true', our 'will to truth', is, something; "like a system of exclusion, a historical, modifiable, and institutionally constraining system." (Foucault, 1981, p. 54) The example he uses to explore on a historical sense of the truth is the Greek poet, for whom truth is something that;

"Inspires respect and terror, that to which one submit to because it is ruled, that which is pronounced by men who speak of right and according to the required ritual. (Foucault, 1981, p. 54)." This is the discourse; "it allows justice and gives everyone their share; the discourse in terms of prophesying the future is only about announced what is going to happen but also about help to make it happen. (Foucault, 1981, p. 54)"

Our will to truth is a system of exclusion. It is contingent. This contingency is available particularly in "the identification of institutional supports and the practices that enforce the production of truth". (Foucault, 1981, p. 55)

These institutions, social structures and practices limit and confine the free flow of discourse; these institutions can reinforce and renew it, provided that they take their rightful places within a thorough analysis of the power of discursive practices.

Further, Foucault claims that the strongest discourses are those which attempt to acquaint themselves on the natural, the sincere, and the scientific level. In short, they fix themselves on the level of various associations of true and acceptable. Foucault suggests that truth is relative, in the real sense of the term, where all available truth-conditions are equal. These truth conditions are controlled by the interpretative or context perspective in which they occur. Because Foucault views truth-conditions as extremely stable and secure which give rise to the order of discourse. Hence, a suspicion of truth adjusts not to a 'baseless' relativism, but to a carefully defined set of conditions of possibility under which statements come to be meaningful and true. By 'conditions of possibility' here Foucault refers to the materialist conditions in terms of their historically specific and contingent nature, rather than in any 'transcendental' way.

#### **Internal Systems of Exclusion :**

There are other exclusions which work internally to discourse. The major amongst these are the discipline, the author and the commentary exclusions. Each of these generates the possibility of new discourses although within certain limits of constraint. In terms of the commentary, Foucault speaks about the discourses based on the major fundamental narratives of society, and the exchange between this primary (foundational religious, juridical or scientific texts) and secondary cultural texts (commentaries). (Foucault, 1981, p. 57) The forms of commentary exclusion obey the principle order of recitation. They give us the opportunity to speak something other than the text itself. But they do so with a condition, that it is the text itself which is uttered. Foucault suggests here that we over-play the importance of originality and freedom in everyday discourse. However, it appears that much of what is spoken in the society is already the product of repetition or discursive re-appearance of the discourse. By playing up the 'finitude of discourse', Foucault makes us realise about the realization of the limits of which we speak. E.g. the questions of innovation, novelty, our presumed ability to utter whatever we will, refers not merely to what is said, but instead to the reappearance of what has been said before.

Theyet another complementary principle of internal exclusion is the author. Foucault uses the term author in terms of a principle or grouping of discourse, a focus of coherence, a unity and origin of meaning. The author limits the element of repetition through the identity of individuality and the self, although the principle of the author is not all the time to be found in each instance of discourse. Actually, it is a crucial point of the quality of certain statements.

In the Middle Ages, for example, a proposition was considered as drawing its scientific value only with reference to its author. It is the author who is asked to carry the 'authentication of the hidden meanings passing the texts belonging to his/her name.' Foucault explores these views later, in *What is an author?* (1977); he asserts the 'author-function (Foucault, 1981, p. 58)' not as a creative, originating capacity, but rather a complex and

flexible discursive function which links to the existence of various groups of discourse (associated with the author in question). This function affirms their status within a given society.

The discipline is also an internal principle of discursive limitations. An acceptable disciplinary statement is linked with the variety of situations. Foucault reminds us, on the appropriate domain of objects, theories, methods, propositions, rules, definitions, techniques and instruments in terms of the situations. In this sense, statements made from within a discipline need to fulfill certain situations that happen to be more complex than pure and simple truth. However, at the same time, disciplines consist of both errors and truths.

### **Conclusion :**

Foucault engages us with a cluster of un-resolving cultural questions, tempting us to scrutinize the discourses of power latent in the very structure of the society. It is through an organized discourses that the individuals seems happily given to the social/ cultural system without any idea of the fact that the institution they are readily subscribing to is positioning them in a way they willingly cooperates in their own subordination. Moreover, resistance appears to be co-extensive with power, specifically as soon as there is a power relation; there is a possibility of resistance. This resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power, should it be said that "one is always "inside" power, there is no "escaping" it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned...their existence depend on a multiplicity of points resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network." ( *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (1978) P-95). Thus knowledge and truth are the integral components of power and domination as far as discourse is concern and it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise.

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