
Discourse Analysis and the Study of Communication in LIS

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ABSTRACT

A considerable portion of the work that is done in library and information science (LIS) can benefit from discourse analysis as a research method. The two major families of discourse analysis are linguistic-based analysis (such as conversation, which could be applied in any setting where information professionals mediate between the universe of information and information seekers), and culturally or socially based discursive practices (along the lines of the analyses that Michel Foucault has conducted). The potential of both families for LIS inquiry, along with examples of both, are discussed.

TWO VARIETIES OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Version 1. I want you to believe me. For you to believe me, I have to be credible to you. To be credible to you, I must speak in lexical terms that are familiar to you; I have to be understood. The lexical comprehension is one part of understanding; I also have to communicate in ways that fit your knowledge base, that will have a context within your mind. Understanding is one path to belief; it is necessary, but it is not sufficient. Your belief in what I say is also dependent upon your acceptance of what I say. I have to persuade you that what I say is correct; I must employ rhetoric as a means of setting you on a path of agreement that will culminate in your belief in what I say. At any point in our exchange you might reject what I say; you might disagree, perhaps strongly enough that you immunize yourself against all rhetorical strategies and tactics I can muster. In short, your belief in what I say may be hard-won, may be given, may be tenuous, may be impossible. Your belief in what I say is based in a complex array of discursive events—what we say to one another, what has been said to you

in the past (directly, as in conversation or presentation, or obliquely, as in your reading of previously written texts), what you have thought, and what you have said.

The foregoing can describe, among other things, a reference interview in a library. If you are a student or a community member asking a question, the above conditions tend to apply in a discursive exchange. Further, the facets of the exchange can be examined rigorously so as to fix the locus of success or failure in such an exchange.

Version 2. I want you to believe me. I still have to be credible to you. In order to accomplish this credibility I will call upon traditions, customs, sources, powerful institutions, and other necessary social relations. I will ensure that you believe me by making it impossible for you to disbelieve me. What I say will build upon a substantial accumulation of discourse that has been established as authoritative. You believe me because you believe that set of discursive practices. The practices are not a continuous line from the past, although they have roots in the past. Their history has been disjointed, but it has managed to gain acceptance over, and through, time. All of your affiliations influence your belief structure—your education, your political party, your geographic location, your religious views, your occupation, your family, your friends, and your economic status.

This version is no less complex than the first; the main difference is that these discursive practices are not usually individual, dyadic, or engaged in by small groups. The practices in the second version are usually formal, whether written or spoken. They tend to be actions in the forms of making speeches, writing articles and books, issuing proclamations, and publishing results of inquiry. All disciplines engage in these practices, including library and information science (LIS). It is also possible to examine our own discourse rigorously and according to exemplars of analysis.

A few things must be mentioned at the outset of this article. The first is that, while there are many ways to study discourse and many purposes of each study, the focus here will be on two families of discourse analysis. The first is the more traditional, linguistic-oriented examination that can be framed as a form of applied semantics. Conversational analysis is an example of this type. The thrust, simply put, is investigation into what people say as part of efforts to be understood by, and to understand, others. The second family attends more to social, political, and other aspects of communicative practice. The aim is frequently to place discourse within a context or milieu, seeking to explicate not merely surface meanings of statements but possible structures into which utterances may fit. For both of these families, discourse is language beyond the clause or sentence level; discourse is a larger linguistic unit (Stubbs, 1983). The two families will be examined in some detail, with examples of analyses offered. This article will not be based in an independent analysis of discourse or discursive practice (that would narrow the scope and potential utility severely); it will present ways

of engaging in discourse analysis, reasons why it can be a fruitful method, and what we can learn as a result of it.

DISCOURSE AND LANGUAGE

The first family of discourse analysis (illustrated in Version 1 above) centers principally on what Brown and Yule (1983) call “transactional language.” Language used in such a situation is primarily “message-oriented.” “In primarily transactional language we assume that what the speaker (or writer) has primarily in mind is the efficient transference of information” (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 2). Conversations are the most frequently occurring kinds of this language use. For the most part, conversations are structured by both (all) speakers so that they can be taken literally. There may be additional conceits, such as sarcasm or irony, but even those are context bound so that they can be readily understood. Suppose two people are conversing and a portion of their exchange is as follows:

A: Did you hear what he said?

B: Yeah, but I don't buy it.

A: I don't know; he seemed to know what he's talking about.

B: Yeah, right.

It would be difficult for native English speakers in today's American society to assume that B is actually agreeing with A. At work is what Grice calls “conversational implicature” (1989, p. 26); the conversational context determines the meaning of some words, so “Yeah, right” in the above example is not taken as literal information.

No paper on discourse analysis can ignore the distinction presented by Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) in his *Course in General Linguistics*. He points out that there is a functional difference between *langue* (the linguistic system that provides the structure for any utterance) and *parole* (the real utterances spoken by people within particular situations). Language, says Saussure, “is a self-contained whole and a principle of classification. As soon as we give language first place among the facts of speech, we introduce a natural order into a mass that lends itself to no other classification” (1959, p. 9). Even if we take Saussure's definition of language at face value, its utility in discourse analysis is questionable since the classification he speaks of is less ordered and law driven than he supposes. Saussure's distinction provides a grounding for the applied sociolinguistic analysis of discourse, even when theorists and researchers have disagreed with some fundamental tenets of his theory. The difference between what *could* be said and what *is* said is at the heart of much contextual examination of conversations and other dyadic communication exchanges. Saussure's program, in short, involved attempts to derive formal laws of language based on linguistic structures manifest in speech (which he privileged over writing). He considers speech

(*parole*) to be authentic and writing to be artificial. While his structuralist approach attracts researchers from several disciplines, his fundamental thesis can be found somewhat wanting.

In Saussure's semiotics (or semiology), the sign is the combination of a signifier (a sound-image, or speech sound intended to represent something) and a signified (a concept or thing represented). The sound "dog" signifies the four-legged mammal of the genus *canis*. In French "chien" is the signifier of the same four-legged mammal. For Saussure the sign is arbitrary; nothing, in fact, determines or requires the signifier to be a certain sound or to have an a priori relationship with a thing signified. As John Gumperz explains, "While all information on language ultimately derives from speech, the assumption is that the raw information collected in situ must first be sifted and recoded in more general form before it can be utilized in the linguist's generalizations" (1982, p. 11). Structural linguistics is based on the assumption that speech (*parole*) is to be explained by systems of rules that have functional relationships. For many sociolinguists the foundation of rules of speech may be acceptable but nondetermined relations of signifiers and signifieds may not be.

Semiotics since Saussure presents an even tighter connection between language (in the Saussurean sense of the whole) and discourse. For one thing, critiques of the immutability of language's structure argue that it is *parole* (speech) that should have priority over *langue* (language) in inquiry. Vološinov refutes a central premise of Saussure's theory: "The sign may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse (seeing that the sign is part of organized social intercourse and cannot exist, as such, outside it, reverting to a mere physical artifact)" (1973, p. 21). The middle ground is perhaps the most effective for a linguistics-based discourse analysis. The sign is not wholly a part of (determined by) the language system; the sign is also not wholly a social construction. It contains elements of both. If it were not *part* of the language system there could be no shared meaning; if it were not *part* of social intercourse there could be no metaphor, simile, metonymy, or—for that matter—poetry or irony. These kinds of speech may be used frequently in exchanges like reference interviews. A librarian might employ similes to enable an information seeker to connect the familiar with the unfamiliar. For example, an undergraduate or high school student may say to a librarian, "I have to write a 500-word paper interpreting what T. S. Eliot might have meant by the line, 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons'" (Eliot, 1971, p. 5). The librarian could illustrate that the line is not to be taken literally and may refer the student to works that speak to ways of stating certain thoughts, perhaps including someone saying that he or she can mark the last several years of life through the seasons of *Friends*.

The linguistics-based discourse analysis in general draws heavily from a background in the examination of speech acts. J. L. Austin (1975), more

than anyone else, gives the theory of speech acts legs. The theory is elaborated upon by John Searle (1969), whose work will inform this article's look at discourse analysis. We must remember that analysis (of anything) is a formal act that relies on clear and agreed-upon definitions and methods of study. Searle helps provide essential definitions that are integral to discourse analysis. Anyone can appreciate that speech consists of uttering words (or morphemes, to break the unit down even further) that are intended to have meaning. Usually, but not always, the words are strung together in sentences. In events such as reference interviews the speech has another character—it may assert something, or ask a question, or give instructions or commands, or make promises, etc. A single query, such as “Where can I find a biography of Mark Twain?” exhibits this kind of character and is called an *illocutionary act*. A reply such as “You can search the library's online catalog by ‘Mark Twain’ as a subject” is also an illocutionary act. A reference interview is intended to have some effect; both the questioner and the librarian want the questioner to find a useful biography of Mark Twain. In other words, the set of illocutionary acts that make up the reference interview have an effect on the questioner. The intended effect in this case may be an increase in the questioner's awareness of the details of Mark Twain's life. The increased awareness is called a *perlocutionary act*. These elements, according to Searle, apply whether the utterances are spoken or written, although details of analysis should be sensitive to both means of uttering something.

Applied Analysis and Information

Applied discourse analysis of the type we are focusing on here is, perhaps first and foremost, *not* an idealization of human behavior. Also, it is not a retrospective account by the agents themselves (although such a methodological twist has potential usefulness). It is an examination of actual conversational behavior. As a method in our field, this kind of discourse analysis includes not merely *what* is said but also *how* it is said. The “how” entails the utterances themselves (the words as they are put together in speech), other phonetic sounds that accompany utterances (uh, er, hmm, etc.), and the spaces between utterances. Suppose a teenager approaches a reference desk in a public library and asks, “Do you know where I can find medical books?” The librarian may respond, “Are you looking for something on anatomy, on diagnosis, on diseases and treatments. . . ?” There is a pause of a few seconds and then the teenager says, “Uh, well, I guess I'm looking for books on human reproduction.” The pause, plus the “uh” and the “well,” carry import and meaning in this kind of exchange. While the foundation of the study of such discourse is linguistic, it would be more correct to say that it is sociolinguistic. The social situation, which both affects, and is reflected in, the exchange, includes the psychological dynamics of the agents. In the above example the librarian will attend to

the pause as well as to the utterance. The analyst will also take note of the pause and include it in the investigation of the exchange of utterances.

The complexity of the analytical element of this discourse analysis necessitates very careful procedural preparation and execution by the analyst. The analyst cannot rely on reports of discursive exchanges by any of the agents involved; their recollections will not reflect either the linguistic or nonlinguistic occurrences with sufficient accuracy. Taping the exchanges will lend a higher degree of fidelity to analysis. A detailed transcript that includes all phonemic and phonetic sounds as well as the timing between the sounds is vital to full examination. Conventions of transcribing exist so that pauses, breathing patterns, simultaneous speaking, and other things can be clearly recorded. The questions, responses, pauses, interruptions, etc., that typify exchanges thus become components of the analysis. Robin Wooffitt observes:

whereas intuition fails the analyst, recordings of actual events, and detailed transcriptions of them, permits capture of the detail of participants' conduct. The analyst is relieved of the near impossible task of trying to imagine what goes on during the interaction: the analyst can actually find out by careful listening to the tape, and investigation of the subsequent transcript (2001, pp. 50–51).

The discourse, as it exists, is not reducible to abstract linguistic analysis. Tapes and transcripts provide empirical data that can then be interpreted. Discourse analysis can enable a rich and deep examination of how information seekers ask their questions, as well as how librarians answer. One goal of the analysis is the improvement of the quality of public services in all information agencies.

Mediation between Information Seekers and Librarians

Conversational analysis may be infrequently used as an explicit methodology in library and information science, but the ideas that underlie this family of discourse analysis are certainly present. A few examples amply demonstrate both the use and the utility of an understanding of the particular discursive practice of the reference interview. Catherine Sheldrick Ross (2003) summarizes some research findings. She relates one specific interaction:

In the library visit study, a user who had asked for books about Richard Wagner returned to say that none of the books on Wagner contained the desired information. At that point, the librarian discovered belatedly that the user needed a plot synopsis for all of Wagner's operas and recommended an opera guide. The librarian admonished, "You could have saved a lot of time if you had just asked for that initially"—a good example of blaming the bad-guy user. (p. 40)

Ross provides a snapshot of a conversational analysis, a snapshot that probably would not have been possible had there not been a substantially accurate record of the transaction.

Sarah Anne Murphy (2005) offers a perceptive examination of reference exchanges as narrative texts. A combination of the patron's narrative (query), the librarian's efforts to clarify the patron's narrative (what she calls the "professional text"), and translation of the query into a systemic strategy (the "institutional text") embodies a hermeneutic event. Again, the examination relies on a record of high fidelity. This kind of discourse analysis frequently (and certainly in the case of the reference interview) has a practical focus, an aim of improving communicative effectiveness. Murphy says that "An awareness of the interactive texts exchanged during the reference narrative may also assist librarians in steering patrons away from a false-focus" (2005, p. 251). There can, then, be an educational benefit to such analysis. What Murphy finds carries implications for others studying reference interviews. Melissa Gross (1999) points out that, especially in educational settings, a patron's query may actually emanate from someone else. The imposed query may be a teacher's assignment, for example. An interview is needed for the imposed query to be correctly identified. While she does not advocate it directly, a discourse analysis of this exchange can help us understand questioners' articulations and ways librarians identify and respond to imposed queries. The interpretive examination of such queries can be very informative.

Many librarians are using technology to make reference services more accessible, and some of the services emulate real-time chats. Discourse analysis can be employed to examine these kinds of exchanges, but since they are not oral, there are differences that should be accounted for. For one thing, the computer-mediated communication that typifies online reference services may be a hybrid of spoken and written language. Discourse analysis of online reference services is simplified somewhat by the fact that exchanges tend to be dyadic. If one were to examine multi-user chats it would be difficult to follow some paths, since one person's response to a posting may be separated from the original by one or more other postings. In a traditional reference interview a librarian would have the benefit of nonverbal, as well as verbal, cues. Hesitation, apparent reluctance or confusion, and other phenomena might be communicative. In the absence of the nonverbal and the other oral aspects of messages, an analyst is left with a textual record of an exchange. Online reference services are becoming sufficiently common that careful examination of this form of communication is warranted for two basic reasons: (1) effectiveness of the service depends on a full understanding of the efficacy of the exchange (are the agents comprehensible to one another; is the medium adequate to the task of communicating questions and answers of all types; are responses accurate and complete), and (2) the nature of discursive patterns may present some particular challenges (the time required to type questions and responses may affect the cognitive-linguistic structures; the shortcuts that some people may take in their messages may necessitate longer series of questions and answers to insure clarity). Online exchanges share some characteristics

with telephone conversations but include differences in kind that render analysis unique. Jana Ronan (2003) provides a succinct illustration of some of the challenges that online reference presents from a discursive point of view. She recognizes the limitations to any conversational analysis of online transactions given the nonoral and nonaural restrictions. Her recommendations are primarily prescriptive, but an analysis could be employed to examine specific opportunities and inhibitors in an online exchange. She says, "Chat interviews often take longer, because questions that would be ambiguous at the reference desk may be even more confusing online, and there are no visual cues to add understanding" (p. 46). This phenomenon in particular is amenable to discourse analysis.

DISCOURSE AS SOCIAL ACT

The second family of discourse analysis—the one that embraces the social, cultural, political, and other communicative acts as shown in Version 2 above—is also of importance to library and information science. Norman Fairclough offers a simple (possibly too simple) description of this family: "Critical approaches differ from non-critical approaches in not just describing discursive practices, but also showing how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants" (1992, p. 12). Michel Foucault is the theorist most frequently associated with this family of discourse analysis. Throughout the course of his life and work his ideas transformed a bit; I will address some aspects of both his archaeological and genealogical premises. These treat discourse first in the context in which it occurs and, second, with regard to more specific purposes. In his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault articulates a key question that situates inquiry: "The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?" (1972, p. 27). The question highlights a concern of Foucault's that distinguishes his work from traditional intellectual history—that history tends to be sweeping and tends to embrace the totality of what is said on a topic or at a time. The archaeological process encompasses a focus on particulars. An archaeologist working on a dig examines not simply everything that can be found at a location but each artifact (including where it is found, how old it is, what is found near it, what might its uses have been and by whom, and other aspects of the artifact). Foucault expresses the difference between an archaeological approach and traditional intellectual history: "The analysis of the discursive field is oriented in a quite different way; we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statements it excludes" (1972, p. 28).

Creating Relations and Ideologies

One of the things that distinguishes Foucault's approach is the promise that discourse not only reflects social relations and social action; it contributes to the construction of them. This second family usually examines formal discourse—texts, speeches, arguments, etc. Given these objects of study the second discourse analysis constitutes a study of ideologies (with “ideology” used not necessarily in any pejorative sense but as a formal articulation of a set of ideas or propositions and the rhetoric used to express them). This is one of the differences between the archaeological approach and intellectual history. The latter seeks to identify contradictions that can be resolved through unifying discourse. Archaeological analysis examines contradictions as they occur and as they are and not as problems to be solved or obstacles to be overcome (see Foucault, 1972, p. 151). Archaeological discourse analysis is not intrinsically concerned with what ought to be, in the sense of reaching the ultimate resolution to a puzzle; it is concerned with discursive practices as they are at a point in time. That point in time does have a past that has influenced the practice of the present. Also, that point in time is likely not to be unified; discursive practices may compete with one another, seek acceptance (some might say dominance), and embody the wills of the speakers. As Foucault points out in the “Discourse on Language,” the competing practices, to be successful, rely on the nondiscursive actions typical of institutions:

It is both reinforced and accompanied by whole strata of practices such as pedagogy—naturally—the book-system, publishing, libraries, such as the learned societies in the past, and laboratories today. But it is probably even more profoundly accompanied by the manner in which knowledge is employed in a society, the way in which it is exploited, divided and, in some ways, attributed (1972, p. 219).

Library and Information Science and Discursive Practice

At this point the work of Foucault probably sounds unendurably abstruse and abstract. He does, though, apply archaeological (and later his modified genealogical) analyses in specific environments—the prison, the hospital, science, and others. Moreover, Foucault's structures of analysis have been applied in library and information science. One specific application may clarify the use of Foucault's ideas in an analysis of our field's discourse. Bernd Frohmann (1992) employs discourse analysis to investigate writings advocating the cognitive viewpoint in library and information science. Frohmann draws explicitly from Foucault and incorporates an archaeological approach in his examination. His debt to Foucault is apparent in his article; he urges that “we shift our focus away from disputes over the truth or meaning of theoretical proposals, towards the *existence* of LIS theoretical discourses, treating as data for investigation and analysis the ways in which key theoretical ideas are talked about. Such a shift would involve pursuing implications of the fact that theory itself is a social practice” (p. 367).

Frohmann also uses Foucault's later genealogical approach as well. Archaeology and genealogy are certainly not mutually exclusive; they do, however, exhibit somewhat different focal points. The genealogical approach more explicitly examines the ways that discourse tracks not merely objective knowledge claims but the social relations based in power that define "objectivity" and attempt to legitimate knowledge claims. As is discourse itself, power is imbedded in and imbued with social relations that exercise a formative force. Power, its use, and those who exist within power relations are all evolving products of a historical complex of social interaction and definition. One of the institutions Foucault studies, the prison, did not spring *sui generis*; it has been based in theories of discipline, punishment, and (much later) rehabilitation. The individual—in this case the prisoner—is an object of study, an object observed while the observer is unseen. Foucault uses Jeremy Bentham's diagram of the panopticon (a design that enables guards to see in all directions without themselves being seen) as a model of disciplinary structure. The model for the ideal prison is, on its face, far removed from the ideal library, but the panopticon is not only a design for prisons:

The Panopticon . . . must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men. . . . [T]he Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building; it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; . . . it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use. (Foucault, 1977, p. 205)

Within the context of the panopticon we can revisit the discourse surrounding library building design, perhaps the designs of Carnegie libraries in particular.

Foucault's work is not without its problems, and some of the difficulties are evident in uses of his work in library and information science. One of the most important challenges in his writings is the claim, more prevalent in his earlier books, that he is doing excavation rather than interpretation. That is, Foucault has said that his program involves detailing what is said and where it comes from (historically). The goal is not without interest, but interpretation inevitably enters into analysis. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (1983) describe the problem of both the archaeological and the genealogical approaches. They say, "This oscillation between description and prescription has revealed an even deeper instability concerning the status of serious meaning. . . . When viewed from this perspective, Foucault's methodological problems bear a suspicious similarity to the tensions he finds in the anthropological doubles" (pp. 90–91). The act of examining involves some interpretation. Foucault himself realizes the need for interpretation as he delves deeper into institutions that were the focal point of his early work. The second major challenge that Foucault presents is his assertion that knowledge, since it is inherently a function of power, does

not really have any objective existence. As he states, if historical consciousness “examines itself and if, more generally, it interrogates the various forms of scientific consciousness in its history, it finds that all these forms and transformations are aspects of the will to knowledge: instinct, passion, the inquisitor’s devotion, cruel subtlety, and malice” (1977, p. 162). This reductive claim, if true, would require that only power be analyzed; nothing else has meaning.

Even with the shortcomings, some of what Foucault has articulated is very useful for analysis of discourses that are not conversational. Official documents, speeches, etc. are public and accessible and, by their nature, they speak to large audiences. In Version 2 above the purposes of persuasion or of presenting a notion that can be accepted are expressed in brief. A complicating factor, acknowledged by Barbara Johnstone (2002) and indicated earlier, is that discourse is both a product of social relations *and* produces social relations, is both a product of language *and* gives form to language (p. 9). This factor is at the heart of a problematic that Foucault described:

“Words and things” [the original French title of *The Order of Things* is *Les mots et les choses*] is the entirely serious title of a problem; it is the ironic title of a work that modifies its own form, displaces its own data, and reveals, at the end of the day, a quite different task. A task that consists of not—of no longer—treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. (1972, p. 49)

It should be clear from the foregoing background on this family of discourse that this conception of discourse analysis is not the same as content analysis. Differences should not be construed as superiority per se; each method has strengths and weaknesses and each can be used to address particular questions regarding particular works. Content analysis relies on categorizations—usually a combination of a priori and emergent categorization—as an analytical tool. Content analysis also tends to focus on texts (or sometimes images) as they are, without extensive historical situating. In many cases the intent behind the use of content analysis is to provide a current state, or snapshot, of a set of works (for example, violence in young adult books or favorable/negative editorial responses to political action). Both the archaeological and the genealogical approaches of Foucault point to a central difference between discourse analysis and content analysis: discourse analysis addresses more than an utterance. It is aimed at speech (*parole*), inasmuch as speech is historically situated, occurs at a point in time, and is engaged in by numerous individuals. Speech, therefore, embodies epistemological, rhetorical, communicative, obfuscatory, political, cultural, and other intentions. These intentions are essential to discourse analysis, and specific speech may simultaneously embody multiple intentions. This

speech, to borrow partially from Foucault, addresses matters of knowledge (in a generic sense). That is, the speech is aimed at what we know, what we think we know, what we can know, what institutions want us to know, etc. The connection to knowledge is of special importance to us in library and information science, since both professional practice and disciplinary inquiry are concerned with knowledge (how it is constructed, recorded, communicated, and preserved).

LIS, POWER, AND THE SHAPING OF DISCOURSE

The second family of discourse analysis has clear utility for us, and it has been employed by some researchers to address specific matters in our field. Some examples of application can help illustrate the strengths of discourse analysis. The examples also point to the most persistent and least overt challenge relating to discourse analysis—discourse analysis is, itself, discourse. It is also a discursive practice that can be subject to all of the analytical apparatus that it employs. A challenge for any analyst is to recall the imbeddedness of the speech employed with the speech that is studied. We can begin with a paper entitled “Public Space, Public Discourse, and Public Libraries” by Colleen Alstad and Ann Curry (2003, sec. 3, para. 1). The topic they address includes several intentions and is amenable to a discourse analytical approach. In their abstract they write: “The traditional mission of the public library—supporting the self-education of the citizenry in order that they may become fully participating members in a democratic society—has been devalued of late in favour of popularizing the library to attract more users.” This statement is knowledge-based in that it articulates a specific position regarding what the public library mission should be and what it has become. This is historically situated speech that has cultural and political intentions. Their abstract continues: “By supporting public discourse, the public library can begin to reinvigorate both the quality of public discourse and its traditional commitment to democratic ideals.” The statement is prescriptive, indicating that what is to follow in the paper will be a strategic discursive practice.

This is not to say that there is no analytical purpose to their paper, but it is not archaeology in the Foucauldian sense. The genealogical approach of Foucault, however, and the ideas of the will to knowledge and power are present in their analysis. What is said about technology, for instance, indicates that there are a couple of effects on public space: “The first is the ‘virtualization’ of the public sphere that is best exemplified by online discussion groups but also occurs on radio and television. The second is the manipulation of public discourse by mass media and its reconfiguration as an entertainment commodity.” Alstad and Curry use themes from a conference to show that attention is on helping public libraries discover “what library customers want,” understand “customers’ interests,” and develop a “strategy for marketing our products” and “our competitive edge.” The

discourse, they aver, is imbued with a questioning of the public-ness of the public library: "By treating the library as if it were just another commercial enterprise, the popularization movement dismisses political, social, and moral values in favor of economics." The authors do not cite Foucault, but they do mention Jürgen Habermas, who has repeatedly argued for a normative, rather than an analytical, approach to discursive practice.

Another example of this kind of discourse analysis is an article by Siobhan Stevenson (2001). She draws most heavily from the theoretical and methodological work of Fairclough, which focuses on the social uses and social effects of discourse that have political and ideological elements. Stevenson says, "The three dimensions of this ideologically oriented model include text, discourse practice, and social practice" (2001, p. 53). She then offers a close analysis of some key documents emanating from the Canadian government that led to the establishment of some "Community Information Centres." Here analysis finds an underlying articulation of a societal shift through the government reports that is sufficiently critical and formative to suggest a change of direction for Canadian government policy. She reports that, "In such a world, there is no need for social action or social change. Social concerns are reconfigured as individual problems requiring individual solutions" (p. 70). Her work, as is the case with Alstad and Curry, cannot help but be a part of an "order of discourse" (see many of Foucault's works). The emphasis here must be on *an* order of discourse. Stevenson's analysis fits into what has become an institutionalized set of practices. Fairclough offers a particular point of view on orders of discourse: "the structuring of discourse practices in particular ways within orders of discourse can be seen, where it comes to be naturalized and win widespread acceptance, as itself a form of (specifically cultural) hegemony" (1992, p. 10).

Herein is a major challenge to the second family of discourse analysis but not an insurmountable one. Bernd Frohmann (2001) stresses Foucault's observation on the materiality of discourse (as recorded communication). His emphasis on this aspect of discourse is important; it reminds us of the existence of a statement, a claim, an utterance, an argument as it becomes material at a point in time. That material statement both cannot be removed from that time (inasmuch as it was articulated then) and exist at subsequent points in time. Foucault's archaeological approach eschews interpretation of statements in favor of the examination of the material circumstances of their existence (and Frohmann reiterates this position). The material nature of discourse is, of course, essential to analysis—statements say things in specific ways as part of a social structure and have historical and rhetorical functions. For example, a theoretical statement (that is, an articulation of a theory about a certain thing) is situated in the history of prior theoretical statements and embodies an effort to persuade that this statement is in some way superior to its predecessors. A community within a particular academic discipline may assess the theoretical statement

according to its explanatory and predictive merits; the discourse analysis examines it in the context in which it is produced (and can include the community's assessment). To be more specific, the scientific statements of Trofim Lysenko would not be analyzed according to their empirical efficacy but according to the social state (Stalinist Soviet Union) that enabled them to be produced and employed.

Frohmann's work illustrates the challenge. In examining the theoretical role of the cognitive viewpoint he asks, "If we take [Alvin] Schrader's notion of linguistic fashion to heart, are we then not challenged at least to investigate the possibility that fashions in LIS theory are perhaps as firmly grounded as the mutations of cultural taste?" (1992, p. 367). By way of a methodological answer he suggests that "we shift our focus away from disputes over the truth or meaning of theoretical proposals, towards the existence of LIS theoretical discourses, treating as data for investigation and analysis the ways in which key theoretical ideas are talked about. Such a shift would involve pursuing the fact that theory itself is a social practice" (1992, pp. 19–20). So far, there is an analytical problem; "fashions" (which are social, political, ideological, etc.) can be examined for what they are, and the historical situatedness of discourse can be studied. At the end of his paper Frohmann writes:

The conclusion of the analysis presented here is that the "user-centric" promise of the cognitive viewpoint is compromised by the ways in which its discursive resources are mobilised to integrate users firmly within a market system of information consumption as much outside their control as any other highly monopolised system of consumer product production and exchange. (1992, p. 384)

His statement about the mobilization of resources to loci within a market economy stems from the discourse analysis itself. But how is the promise of the cognitive viewpoint compromised? What strictly material facets of the discourse render the conclusion plausible? Stated differently, how is his conclusion possible without interpretation? I am by no means denigrating Frohmann's work; I am merely pointing out the scope of the challenge that discourse analysis faces.

INTERPRETATION

Now, how might we respond to this challenge? For one thing, we should follow Foucault in examining instances of discursive practice as events occurring at points in time. This applies to Foucault's own writings as well. While he did say that discourse should be studied as it is and without interpretation, he did, in fact, engage in interpretation. At the very least, discursive practice is connected to institutions and systems of knowledge, and those connections must be discerned and described. If there exists a will to knowledge, the will has some rationale, is instituted in some way, and is simultaneously reproduced and exercised. Following Frohmann,

if the cognitive viewpoint can be said (by anyone) to be *the* fundamental theory of information science, then it must have become institutionalized somehow. The uncovering of how such a thing occurred is interpretive, is achieved by examining who said what when, and determining how competing discursive practices were not successful in creating a sustainable will to knowledge. Within professions, discourse is (as Foucault repeatedly observes) controlled by an array of institutional procedures, many of which are sub rosa and not accessible for analysis. It is possible, as the authors mentioned here demonstrate, to examine public statements for the purpose of exposing discursive structures that tend to dominate communication in a field. What is *not* accessible, however, is what is not public. For example, we have no way of analyzing papers submitted to journals but not published. We do not know what peer reviewers had to say about those rejected papers. By default, analysis is limited to what, by institutional and procedural practices, become public utterances.

The connection between discourses and institutions has been addressed briefly in library and information science. Mark Day (2002) examines discursive “fashions” in library and information science management-related literature. He describes a land of iterative relationships that leads to what may be called a helical phenomenon. He writes, “Management discourse, in addition to defining the nature of its core concepts such as the consumer, employee, manager, and professional, also defines the basic nature of the corporate capitalist environment within which these social roles are enacted” (p. 235). The definition of concepts and environments turns on itself and contributes to a definition of discourse, and so on. Ron Day also provides a description of the complicated interrelations of discourse and institutions: “The alliance between professional discourses and often conservative and dominant ideological and cultural forces is not just a result of . . . accidental class alliances. . . . Critical studies of professions need to reach out to a broader social and cultural context in order to understand professions as products of social forces other than themselves” (2000, p. 471). Both of these observations echo a statement by Foucault, which, while possibly extreme, indicates a defining characteristic of our discursive lives: “The fundamental codes of a culture—those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices—establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home” (1970, p. xx).

To repeat, Foucault’s words are extreme to the point of threatening determinism. Softening his stance, we can more readily agree that part of our identities is socially influenced. That influence extends to our discursive practices in different social situations. One is likely to speak differently in, say, a committee meeting than in a casual conversation with a colleague. The influence further extends to the language that is likely to be deemed

appropriate to certain settings. The specific setting may reflect fairly clearly defined power relations. The classroom may be one such power-laden setting. The teacher may speak from the authority of the position (which includes deciding who among the students may speak) and the authority of knowledge (which usually means that the teacher is more learned than the students). An examination of the discourse that occurs in a classroom would have to acknowledge these relationships (see, for example, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1994). Of course, the preceding example does not describe all of the discursive practices that occur in educational settings. A graduate seminar is based on a different assumption of power relations that allows for greater freedom, openness, and candor. An analyst is required to recognize the different situations in which discursive practices are enacted. The admission of the influences of the social situatedness on identity and the ways identity is expressed is another way to respond to the challenge of interpretation. The will to knowledge is manifest in institutions, but it is not reified in the institutions; examination of educational settings demonstrates variability within institutions.

SUMMARY

The discussion here focuses on two families of discourse analysis; the families are different in kind and in purpose. There are, as has been noted, similarities between the two families. In each the emphasis is on discourse *analysis*—the examination of discourse as it occurs. In each there is an attempt to study the effects of the discourse—what it means within the context in which it occurs. The effects of the discursive practices are also a matter of interest. With the first family a purpose is to gauge the efficacy of linguistic exchanges aimed at accomplishing particular objectives (such as locating relevant information in a reference transaction). A part of that purpose extends to assessing the understandability of exchanges (whether one person understands what the other is saying). That objective may be achieved by examining the discourse to see if the participants demonstrate understanding or by examining actions that can reflect understanding of what is said. With the second family a purpose is to study the circuitous routes taken by what is said. Everything said exists within the entire body of what has been said and responds to, refutes, borrows, opposes, adopts, manipulates, ignores, appropriates, and buries what has been said. For this family of analysis, Foucault provides a guide by not providing a guide. That is, he does not offer an explicit method of study; he does, however, present a way (his own way) of digging through what has been written and said, observing practices that exist in the company of other practices.

As is true of anything that could be called a methodology, discourse analysis offers a way of seeing things, of envisioning what is happening and what has happened. Each family of analysis proposes a set of eyes and ears so that we may see and hear some particular things that we are looking and

listening for. The examination of a reference exchange in a library is possible if the analyst comprehends the situation of the exchange. A question comes from somewhere; it has a genesis and an evolution that continues until it is spoken. What the analyst hears is that last state, the moment the question is asked of a librarian. This is what the librarian hears as well. The analyst can then examine whether the librarian takes the question as it occurs in that last state or attempts to extract its source and development. The inquiry's results can be descriptive, but they can also contribute to a normative practice. The examination of discursive practice is possible if the analyst comprehends the situatedness of the practice, the arrangement of the practice in time, place, etc. As Radford reminds us, "like any statement, whether it be a book on the library shelf or a single sentence within this article, historical documents do not speak for themselves. Their significance lies in their place within a greater discursive formation, that is, in the ways they are combined and arranged with other documents/statements" (2003, p. 14). Both families of discourse analysis offer possibilities for understanding; neither offers a mere mechanism, a simple blueprint to follow. As is true of any fruitful method of study, discourse analysis enlightens through creativity and is anything but a hammer in search of a nail.

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