

Discourse Analysis and Public Policy Research

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Centre for Rural Economy Discussion Paper Series No. 24

October 2009

Summary

There are many schools of discourse analysis which encompass diverse methodological approaches. Some analysts researching fields of public policy have developed modes of undertaking discourse analysis inspired by Foucault's ideas on discourse and power, as a way of understanding the dynamics of political processes. This paper briefly traces the different approaches that public policy analysts whose work is inspired by Foucault have taken, setting out the features that the approaches have in common and the important points of difference. The paper explores the implications of applying discourse analysis to research projects in the field of rural policy studies, to illustrate how new insights can be gained through a discourse analytical approach.

Introduction

The term 'discourse' is used in day-to-day language interchangeably with discussion or dialogue. The story of a discussion or dialogue is the object of discourse analysis. Such analysis aims to expose patterns and hidden rules of how language is used and narratives are created. Thus, discourse analysis is a research method which involves examining communication in order to gain new insights.

There are different traditions of discourse analysis which are derived from differing interpretations of the meaning of discourse (Mills, 1997; Torring, 2005). Linguistic traditions define discourse solely as the units of written and spoken communication under study and focus on the content of texts and conversations. Other social science traditions define discourse as being derived from and dependent on social practices –the complex mix of cultural norms, disciplines and rituals– which govern discursive formations (Hajer, 1995). Social practices form sets of rules which work together to construct discourses. A definition of discourse which encompasses social practices draws attention to how discourses are formed and shaped, and to the possibility of contrasting sets of influences producing divergent discourses.

The methodologies of discourse analysis have taken diverse forms in accordance with the definition of discourse adopted. Different disciplines have developed different modes of discourse analysis independently or through 'borrowing' across disciplines (Slembrouck, 2006) and, as a consequence, there are a multiplicity of approaches that can be described as discourse analysis. Psychologists and other researchers working in linguistic traditions use linguistic methods such as conversation analysis to derive meaning from spoken and written communications. Modes of 'narrative study' have developed within several disciplines such as literary studies and sociolinguistics (Slembrouck, 2006).

Traditions of discourse analysis have evolved that are grounded in a variety of social theories, such as those of Laclau, Mouffe, Bourdieu and Foucault. Foucault's ideas on discourse are employed by analysts from many different disciplines. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Fairclough (1995) and others (e.g. van Dijk, 1997) within the linguistic tradition of discourse analysis, understands discourse to be represented by text and spoken communication, whilst also recognising that discourse is shaped by social practices. In CDA, these practices are detectable in language, and thus methods are based on linguistic analyses, giving rise to the 'linguistic turn' in, for example, geography (Hastings, 1999) and political science (Carver, 2002). Discursive traditions which explore the connections between narrative, positions and identity, through an understanding of social practices which goes beyond units of text, are adopted by other researchers (e.g. Hajer, 1995). Discourse analysis in the discursive tradition also inspired by Foucault, places emphasis on his concept of power which is 'prior to language' (Hastings, 1999, p.10), so that power relations are reflected in language, but are not a consequence of language. This paper is

concerned with the discursive tradition of discourse analysis inspired by Foucault's concepts of knowledge and power, and draws on examples from researchers working in inter-related disciplines in the fields of rural, environmental and planning policy.

Social scientists inspired by Foucault typically present the discourses in their field of study and analyse them according to the power relations they have uncovered, giving valuable insights (Hajer, 1995; Richardson, 2000). However, the method of how to conduct a discourse analysis inspired by Foucault has received limited systematic attention (Howarth, 2005, p.316). As Hoggart, Lees and Davies (2002) have noted with reference to CDA, discourse analysis is "something like bike riding...which is not easy to render or describe in an explicit manner"(p.165), and the same observation applies to other modes of discourse analysis. Yet, if researchers are to employ discourse analysis, it is necessary to gain some appreciation of how to do it. However, to prescribe a methodology would be un-Foucauldian, as "to do so would afford a particular position the status of truth in a perspective where truth is always conditional" (Gilbert, Cochrane and Greenwell, 2003, p.792). This paradox means that there are many methods employed and at the same time no methods of discourse analysis. Truth is constructed within a discourse and, therefore, is relational to the knowledge and practices of that discourse. The relational nature of truth means that methodological choices made in any research project are driven by the problem at the centre of the research.

The absence of extensive discussion of methodological issues raises questions about how researchers can engage with the Foucauldian tradition of discourse analysis and the extent to which it is useful to researchers carrying out time-limited academic research. The position of the researcher, who defines the research problem in relation to the field of research, is another key question. Discourse analysis necessitates the researcher gaining a view of the problem from the 'outside' in order to recognise the hidden assumptions and practices that form the rules of discourse formation, as Hidding, Needham and Wisserhof (2000) have described it.

"Each of us –academics, policy makers, politicians– tends to think within a discourse. But we do not need to be imprisoned within it. Moreover, being made aware of what we have been taking for granted... can be liberating, academically and politically." (Hidding, Needham and Wisserhof, 2000, p.129)

Discourse analysis requires a deeply reflexive approach to recognise the rules of formation, and to understand the patterns of power relations, through 'self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny' (England 1994, p.82). The experience of doing so is worthwhile, as Hidding et al. (2000) and other analysts suggest. In order to interpret the research material, an appreciation of the embedded norms of social practices gained through being 'inside' the discursive field, is also required. The reflexive

nature of discourse analysis opens up methodological questions of how researchers can practice and demonstrate reflexivity.

The primary interest of this paper is to examine how Foucauldian discourse analysis can be conducted in fields of public policy and the extent to which it has utility for researchers. The first part explores the relevance of Foucault's ideas for public policy and shows how discourse analysis can be of value through providing a way of understanding the dynamics of public policy. The second part of the paper examines some studies of discourse analyses of public policy which take their inspiration from Foucault to illustrate the contrasting approaches adopted to different problems, and examines questions of how researchers can employ discourse analysis constructively. The paper concludes with an assessment of the implications of the reflexivity required to conduct discourse analysis.

Foucault's ideas and public policy research

The themes and issues of public policy embrace political, economic and social life, as well as the environment in which we live. Each field of public policy is a research arena in its own right. Nevertheless, there are some common features of conventional public policy research. In order to appreciate how Foucault's ideas inspire the application of discourse analysis to public policy, four features of conventional public policy research are set out followed by an examination of how Foucault inspires a contrasting approach.

The first common feature is that public policy brings to mind the actions of government. The role of the state has evolved through history as government has sought to intervene in various aspects of people's lives. An understanding of public policy requires an examination of the activities of government and those who govern. Researchers consider the ideologies of government and the bureaucracy of the state (Hill, 1993). A second feature of public policy research is concerned with questions of legitimacy of government to take decisions on behalf of their population, the operation of democracy, and the accountability of state actors. Elected politicians are described as those 'in power', and governments take actions on behalf of all, or groups of, the population that they govern. Research examines questions of policy decisions and the exercise of control over policy processes. Thirdly, public policy is often described as a process which is dynamic and continuous, and involves many elements (Jenkins, 1993). Researchers acknowledge that the process is complex and that policy decisions can be contradictory or have unforeseen results (Hill and Hupe, 2006). Nevertheless, analysts seek to examine elements of the policy process, such as policy formation, implementation, and evaluation. Finally, actions of the state are implemented through increasingly complex sets of institutions. Organisations and structures provide the framework around which policies are defined and policy decisions are made. Public policy researchers draw on organisational theory and organisational sociology to understand these structures (Hill and Hupe, 1993, p.297). Theorists examining how society is governed in the last few

decades have developed concepts of governance defined by Rhodes (1997, p.53) as 'self-organising, interorganisational networks'. The complex webs of dependencies have prompted research into the operation of governance structures.

These common features are present in much public policy research. Researchers examine the role of the state and public administration. Or they may study policy making processes, their implementation and impacts, as well as organisational management within the institutions of government. Aspects of the operation of governance structures have spawned fields of research, such as multi-level governance, partnerships and central-local relations. The description of the features of public policy implies a research focus on state institutions, the laws and other forms of regulation implemented by the state, the actions of political and institutional actors, and the elements of the policy making and implementation processes.

However, the impact of public policy goes far beyond the institutions of the state. Policies often seek to target groups of people, for instance home owners, employers or employees, parents, those living in poverty, and many other groups. There are positive or negative impacts on people's lives, such as changes in the price of goods as a consequence of industrial or agricultural policy. In addition, public policy is not isolated from the rest of society. Cultural norms and trends, and the reactions of citizens and media to public policies will influence the course of public policy. Events of local, national and international significance will impact on the activities of policy makers.

A way of thinking about policy research which is not centred on institutions, structures and procedures, government publications and policy officials, but which encompasses the inter-relations and connections involved in governing, opens up the possibility of fresh insights into public policy. Foucault's ideas on the production of discourse raise questions about the practices of government and how public policy is formed, shaped and reshaped, as opposed to institutional histories. Analysis of discourses has the potential to show the link between political rhetoric, and how discourses are created and maintained. Foucault's concept of power acknowledges the diverse influences of social and political relations on policy, beyond the immediate political arena. As Foucault observed:

"... there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse." (Foucault, 1980, p.93)

The appeal of discourse analysis inspired by Foucault is as a way of making sense of the struggles of discourse, and of the operation of power and social practices which shape discourses.

Four strengths of Foucauldian discourse analyses of public policy can be discerned. First, it illuminates the mechanisms of government, institutions and governance without making any assumptions about institutional boundaries and the roles of actors located within these institutions. Foucault's ideas prompt questions about how the actors engage and interact, rather than what they are doing or seeking to achieve (Dean, 1999). Questions of who does what in which institution and the legitimacy of their actions are replaced by a focus on engagement and interaction, through examining questions of how actors form and implement policy (Foucault, 1982). Rose and Miller, in their analysis of political power which is based on Foucault's ideas of power, assert that:

“Through an analysis of the intricate inter-dependencies between political rationalities and governmental technologies, we can begin to understand the multiple and delicate networks that connect the lives of individuals, groups and organisation to the aspirations of authorities.” (Rose and Miller, 1992, p.175-176)

Discourse is independent of individuals or institutions, but is shaped by systems or regulatory processes described as discursive formations. ‘One is “in the true” only by obeying the rules of a discursive “policing”’ (Foucault, 1970, p.61). For Foucault, the rules of government are not defined by traditional notions of sovereignty, the rule of law and political domination, which are themselves elements of a pervasive discourse of the state, but the rules of knowledge and power operating within the practice of government.

Second, Foucauldian discourse analysis uncovers the diverse influences that define a policy problem. In Foucault's early work on discourse, *The Order of Discourse* (Foucault, 1970), he explores the social practices of disciplines and shows how discourses are embedded in any given field of interest through customs and rituals, values and practices. Foucault shows that individuals, institutions and other social phenomena are regulated by these social processes. Public bodies and academic disciplines exhibit regulation through behavioural norms, the operation of roles, structures and hierarchies. Socially constructed phenomena are considered to be ‘true’ within the discourse. Policy discourses are continually shaped and reshaped through social interaction, and that interaction is not confined to the world of policy makers or to one spatial scale such as national policy, but encompasses many disciplines, citizens' opinions, the media, and political activity at differing spatial scales.

The third strength is that Foucault's concept of power suggests ways of studying the detailed dialogue of policy making and its implementation in order to understand the manifest practices of resistance, collaboration or co-operation. Foucault's concept of power differentiates him from many other modern thinkers. For him, power is not ‘owned’ for example by states, institutions or individuals, to be exercised on other individuals or citizens, but ‘power is everywhere, not because it

embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (Foucault, 1990, p.93). Moreover, earlier on he states that:

"Power... which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures. This also means that power is not a function of consent." (Foucault, 1982, p.219-220)

Power is not a finite resource which can be held by some and taken away from others. Foucault explains that 'discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it' (Foucault, 1990, p.101).

Power relations mediated by the social practices at play in power struggles within and between discourses, are a fundamental part of discourse analysis inspired by Foucault. Discourse analysts often focus on points of conflict and change in their field of research, as they are indicators of power relations. Flyvbjerg (2001a, p.98) notes that Foucault's 'work reflects a sophisticated understanding of Realpolitik' and that his "emphasis on marginality and domination makes his thinking sensitive to difference, diversity, and the politics of identity, something which today is crucial for understanding power" (Flyvbjerg, 2001a, p.104).

Foucault's ideas challenge the notion that policy making is a 'rational' process based on incontrovertible evidence or truth. Evidence or information used in policy making is created within the confines of the discursive formations, so that the 'truth' conforms to the rules and norms of the discourse. Foucault terms these processes 'the will to truth', the effect of which is to mask the discursive formations.

"Thus all that appears to our eyes is a truth conceived as a richness, a fecundity, a gentle and insidiously universal force, and in contrast we are unaware of the will to truth, that prodigious machinery designed to exclude." (Foucault, 1970, p.56)

Thus, the fourth strength of discourse analysis is that, through debunking the rationality of policy making, researchers become aware of the contingent nature of the policy process. They are aware of the knowledge production and rationalisation of policy options within the discourse, and hence of the boundaries and limits of the discourse. The result is that they are able to distil the rules of the discourse, and to observe the power relations of policy making, and to highlight gaps between the rhetoric and practice of policy. Discourse analysis exposes the 'will to truth' or the accustomed ways of governing, and opens up questions about how the diverse components of policy processes 'produce effects that have meaning and consequences for us' (Rose, 1996, p.38).

Foucault propounded a set of ideas that evolved throughout his lifetime and from which the four strengths of discourse analysis for policy studies flow. His writings and interviews point to a way of understanding the discourses and power relations of public policy. He described his own early work as examples of 'archaeology' or the description which resulted from analysing the strategies used, and the principles governing the strategies, within his fields of interest. In Foucault's later work he developed the related tool of 'genealogy' to analyse the power relations within a specific struggle, paying 'attention to the processual aspects of the web of discourse – its ongoing character' (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p.31). The insights produced as a result of his ways of thinking are evident throughout his work. Nevertheless, he did not formulate a methodology of discourse analysis which can be applied by researchers. In order to examine the utility of discourse analysis for researchers in rural policy studies, it is necessary to look at how researchers have applied Foucault's ideas in order to construct methodologies of discourse analysis. The next section examines examples of policy research in the fields of rural, environment and planning.

Discourse analysis and method

Foucault's legacy of ideas on discourse and power, and emphasis on the 'rules of formation' or the social practices of discourse formation, has inspired a new tradition of discourse analysis in politics and public policy research (Howarth, 2005). A corpus of work utilising discourse analysis has grown up within various disciplines, which have tended to favour distinct modes of discourse analysis. Rural policy studies do not have a well defined oeuvre but encompasses the work of a number of connected disciplines. Geographers, town planners, political scientists and others researching in the rural studies field have utilised discourse analysis grounded in Foucault's ideas. Discourse analysts whose work is influenced by Foucault's concepts have devised their own methods of carrying out discourse analysis (e.g. Hajer, 1995; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Richardson, 2000 and Dryzek, 2005). A review of the literature suggests that three broad approaches can be discerned.

The first approach taken by researchers is to draw on concepts of discourse and power because they have utility in illuminating the research topic and material under study, rather than applying any specific discourse analysis method. The classic debates in the rural studies literature of the early 1990s on the usage of the term rurality, and meanings attached to the rural (Philo, 1992 and 1993; Halfacree, 1993; Murdoch and Pratt, 1993 and 1994; Jones, 1995; and Pratt, 1996) were grounded in ideas of discourses as socially constructed realities. The contested nature of multiple discourses raised questions of power within the debates, including fleeting references to Foucault as well as to other social theorists. Frouws' analysis (1998) of rural discourses in the Netherlands draws on this rural studies debate, and quoting Jones (1995), describes the significance of relations of power in Foucauldian terms – "Unravelling this process of discourse formation provides an understanding of the flows of meaning and power that combine to create the social constructions of the rural" (Frouws, 1998, p.56, italics in original).

Other researchers in the same tradition of rural studies do implicitly or explicitly acknowledge Foucault's influence. Woodward (1996) uses the Foucauldian notion of discourse in her investigation of the contradictory discourses of rural deprivation espoused by different groups of the population, and she notes the significance of power relations in excluding or obscuring discourses of the rural. Her later work on military discourses draws on Dryzek's (2005) environmental discourses, which are in turn inspired by Foucault's concepts. She questions "the political and social accomplishments of different discursive strategies, and an assessment of how such strategies can legitimate or challenge power relations" (Woodward, 2001, p.203). Woods (1997) in a study of local politics in Somerset, outlines discourses of rurality grounded in Foucault's concept of power. Ideas of discourse and power relations recur in his writing on rural politics (Woods, 1998; Woods, 2003), though, in common with other academics in rural studies, he makes use of a variety of complementary concepts from theorists such as Latour (1986), Jessop (1990) and others to illuminate his research findings.

Thus, in the first approach to discourse analysis, the research papers give little indication of how a Foucauldian approach has influenced the research methodologies used. The significance for potential discourse analysts is that Foucault's ideas are sufficient to provide a 'way of thinking' when conducting research using traditional methods, such as desk research, interviews, action and research, which produces new insights.

The second methodological approach could be described as the most closely related to Foucault's own tool of 'genealogy'. In Flyvbjerg's extraordinary study of urban transport planning in Aalborg Flyvbjerg allows the narrative to speak for itself in eighteen chapters (Flyvbjerg, 1998). The project to improve traffic and public transport management, improve the quality of public space and encourage transport by means other than the car, is the subject of Flyvbjerg's narrative spanning nearly fifteen years. Flyvbjerg pointed out that there can be many interpretations of the project.

"[It is] not the only reality... and a reality to be interpreted differently by different readers. But for the reader willing to enter this reality and explore the life and death of the Aalborg project from beginning to end, the payback is meant to be a sensitivity to issues of planning, democracy, rationality, and power." (Flyvbjerg, 2002, p.356)

Flyvbjerg sets out the story of the Aalborg project in the context of a positive belief in democracy and of the theoretical benefits to the populous at large of planning exercises. Through laying bare the power relations, he reveals the reality of a project which has failed in these contexts. As Peattie notes 'The book does not praise the plan, but neither does it blame it; the story is one of ineffectiveness' (Peattie, 2001, p.257). Flyvbjerg's narrative focuses on how the actors interact, and

the social practices or the 'rules of formation', such as the historical relations between the planning authority and the chamber of commerce.

As with the first methodological approach, Flyvbjerg's study draws on the notions of a group of thinkers including Machiavelli, and Nietzsche as well as Foucault, because as he says, together they 'have something to tell us' (Flyvbjerg, 2001b, p.286). Foucault's notion of the 'will to truth' is evident in Flyvbjerg's emphasis on the construction of rationality as relational within the policy production and implementation processes. Flyvbjerg's study illustrates the four strengths of Foucauldian discourse analysis in the previous section, of illuminating the mechanisms of government, exposing the social practices and power relations in everyday activities, and highlighting the gap between policy rhetoric and practice.

Hajer and Dryzek have been leading proponents of Foucauldian inspired discourse analysis of environmental policy issues and their work provides contrasting examples of extensive narratives reminiscent of Foucault's tool of genealogy (Hajer, 1995; and Dryzek, 2005). Their analyses uncover the power relations within the policy arena. All three examples, including Flyvbjerg's study, are the result of a prolonged period of immersion in their respective policy fields and a long association with it. These examples suggest that, in order to understand the discursive formations of a policy field, the data and analysis requirements are extensive. However, another defining characteristic of these studies is that the writers did not set out to analyse a pre-defined period of policy activity with a start and end point, on commencing the researches on which their findings are based. Dryzek's work is based on four decades of research material and a lifetime's involvement with public policy research. Although Flyvbjerg wrote up the Aarlborg study in a shorter period, it is based on almost fifteen years of the life of the Aarlborg project (Flyvbjerg, 2002).

The consequent question for researchers is whether discourse analysis can be applied to time-limited projects when an extended or potentially indefinite period of study is not available. The third approach to Foucauldian discourse analysis, of structuring research activity, provides some means of surmounting the obstacles of time and scale. Some analysts have proposed analytical tools, an initial framework of discourses, and devices to structure the results, which all assist with managing the analysis and containing the research exercise.

In both the Hajer and Dryzek cases, for example, the writers use a framework to structure their work, and thus they fall in the third category of structured approaches as well as in the second 'narrative' category. Hajer has proposed three tools to help identify discourses within research materials. These are 'metaphor', 'story line' and 'discourse coalitions'. Metaphors are generally two or three word phrases which symbolise the key ideas of the discourse such as 'climate change' and 'access to services'. Story lines encapsulate the discourse in a short-hand form using the metaphors. Hajer says that when carrying out discourse analysis 'one quickly realises that in any field there are a couple of

such stories, which fulfil an especially important role' (Hajer, 2005, p.301). They define the essence of the discourse. Actors operating within the discourse use the story lines in communication, though Hajer points out that this does not necessarily mean that each use of the story line is based on the same understanding or depth of knowledge. 'It can be shown that people *who can be proven not to understand one another fully*, nevertheless together produce meaningful political interventions' Hajer defines his third concept of 'discourse coalitions' as 'a group of actors that, *in the context of an identifiable set of practices*, shares the usage of a particular set of story lines over a particular period of time' (Hajer, 2005, p.302, italics in original). For example, story lines of public policy are not confined to any one organisation or government department, but are shared by the national and local players involved, and by the academic community, professions, the media and others impacted on by the policy activity. These actions combine to form discourse coalitions.

Dryzek's method of structuring his material is similar. First he creates a framework of environmental discourse according to two dimensions of political ideology and practice, and then he analyses the research material within each dimension in order to define the following elements:

1. the basic entities whose existence is recognised or constructed
2. assumptions about natural relationships between different entities
3. agents and their motives, and
4. the key metaphors or other rhetorical devices that figure in the discourse' (Dryzek, 2005, p.19).

Through analysing and presenting his material using the four elements, he is able to construct the discourses within each dimension.

In the discipline of town planning, Sharp and Richardson (2001) agree with Hajer and Flyvbjerg that the intention of a Foucauldian discourse analysis is to construct a critical narrative of the story or stories. They propose 'a set of key elements' that form the methodological questions to be answered by the researcher. They argue that different discourses should be identified before the research process, as discourses are manifest in 'policy rhetoric, documents, plans or programmes, but also in institutional structures, practices and events' (Sharp and Richardson, 2001, p.201). Through this initial question, researchers make significant decisions which largely define the scale and scope of the research. Richardson (2000) was able to contain his analysis of discourses of rurality in EU spatial policy through concentrating on the stories associated with a key policy document –The European Spatial Development Perspective, 1999. Within the research process, Sharp and Richardson (2001) suggest that researchers pinpoint struggles and their outcomes as a further way of making a discourse analysis of public policy manageable. The researcher makes decisions to focus on new practices, changes in communication, and the linkages between these changes and institutional structures. This, they suggest, can be done through collecting

descriptions, particularly of opposing views, from people, documents, and studying practices, for example. New insights, they argue, are gained by asking questions about the difference between policy rhetoric and how the policy plays out in practice (Sharp and Richardson, 2001).

In his later work Hajer (2006) has prescribed a series of ten steps which he considers could be universally applied, in addition to his three devices of metaphor, story lines and discourse coalitions (Table 1). The steps imply an iterative approach in order to build up the narrative. A research framework is created through initial research, which is then used to understand the discursive formations in detail. He advocates focusing on data collection and analysis at the sites of conflict, and on the interaction between actors. Hajer emphasises the significance of social practices, or the 'settings' which regulate the actions of actors, over and above language. Thus Hajer's methodological approach is founded on Foucault's concepts of power relations, discourse and the 'will to truth'.

Table 1: Hajer's ten steps of doing discourse analysis

1. <i>Desk Research</i> – a first chronology and first reading of events
2. <i>'Helicopter Interviews'</i> – to gain an overview from different perspectives
3. <i>Document Analysis</i> – to identify story lines and metaphors, and the sites of discursive struggle
4. <i>Interviews with key players</i> – to enable the researcher to construct the interviewee discourses and the shifts in recognition of alternative perspectives
5. <i>Sites of argumentation</i> – search the data to account for the argumentative exchange
6. <i>Analyse for positioning effects</i> – to show how people, institutions or nation-states get caught up in an interplay
7. <i>Identify key incidents</i> – to understand the discursive dynamics and the outcomes
8. <i>Analysis of practices in particular cases of argumentation</i> – by going back to the data to see if the meaning of what is said can be related to the practices in which it was said.
9. <i>Interpretation</i> – come up with an account of the discursive structures, practices, and sites of production
10. <i>Second visit to key actors</i> – respondents should recognise some of the hidden structures of language.

Source: adapted from Hajer, 2006, p.73-74

The examples of the three approaches to Foucauldian discourse analysis show that they all seek to construct a critical narrative, through an examination of the power relations at play. However the 'pure' narrative approach exemplified by Flyvbjerg is less structured and more open ended than

the other two approaches, suggesting a research endeavour which is not as time bound as most research studies. The examples of structured approaches provide ways of making the research project manageable. Hajer's work provides additional guidance through his tools, and ten steps of analysis to construct the narratives of argumentation or conflict. All three approaches to discourse analysis require the use of common research techniques, such as desk research, interviews, and participant observation as appropriate to the research material, with the contingent questions of applicability, ethical considerations, operationalisation, and robustness. However, in a Foucauldian discourse analysis of public policy, the nature of the research questions and the construction of discourse narratives will be guided by the underlying conceptual foundations provided by Foucault.

Conclusions

Discourse analysis challenges researchers to question policy making processes, how dialogue takes place, and how power relations produce dominant discourses and marginalises others. Such questions require researchers to be reflective, querying the research material in ways that they may not otherwise consider, as Richardson has commented.

“Discourse theory puts the spotlight on the boundaries of thought and action. Using these tools reflexively is an attempt to first notice how these boundaries are established and maintained, and then to notice the effects of this closing down process.” (Richardson, 2001, p.354)

Reflexivity requires the researcher to consider explicitly the relationship between the researcher and the field of research. The implications of Foucault's ideas is that the researcher cannot be separated from the discursive formations in their field of policy study. And their work may have an impact on the ways that professional knowledge is framed, and on how discourses are produced and reproduced. Reflexivity in a Foucauldian tradition does not mean, as McDowell (1992, p.409) has described, taking account of the position of ourselves as the researcher as well as the position of the research participants and writing it into the research practice, as ‘there is no prior reality or unified identity to gain access to or be created by research’ (Gibson-Graham, 1994, p.214). The relationships between researcher and researched are contingent and relational. Research choices, for example of the scope of the material to study, and the discourses proposed, are inherently subjective. Both Sharp and Richardson, and Hajer suggest that researchers identify discourses and sites of conflict in the early stages of research in order to use them as a framework in the further stages of field research. The initial selection will have a key impact on the progress and findings of the research, and so ‘the position of the researcher needs to be acknowledged, to help the research audience understand the choices made’ (Sharp and Richardson, 2001, p.203).

Two common stances of conventional public policy researchers are to assume either that public policy making is essentially a rational or a political process (Gordon, Lewis and Young, 1993), though in practice researchers often acknowledge both influences. Nevertheless, rationalism plays a significant part in many professions involved in fields of public policy, through the production and reproduction of the technical or scientific knowledge of the discipline. Faludi and van der Valk, in a critique of Flyvbjerg's Aarlborg study, underline the significance of rationalism to the 'ways of thinking' within the town planning profession as well as to governing –'Rational decision making is the foundation on which Western democracy rests' (Faludi and van der Valk, 2001, p.272). The key strength of discourse analysis inspired by Foucault in fields of public policy research is to open up ways of understanding policy activity which are based neither on rational or political frameworks, but which emphasise the contingent nature of rationality and seek to uncover the power relations of policy making.

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