

Straddling Practical and Theoretical Borders: Critically Evaluating Role and Place Through a Discourse Analytic Lens

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Abstract

Professional librarians benefit from a close examination of the meaning and purpose underlying their work. One of the most helpful and expedient ways of doing so is to employ non-LIS theories to aid in questioning processes and in critically examining personal work and institutional practices. Discourse analysis, and its related theory, critical discourse analysis, may be suitable for such a purpose. Utilized effectively, they can reveal the underlying power dynamics behind the library as an institution, including the role of librarians within an organization, and the sometimes-fraught interactions between librarians and patrons. The application of theories and methodologies to practice may ultimately improve the library experience for patrons.

Introduction

As professional librarians, we often find ourselves rushing from project to project, working and maintaining relationships with patrons, setting priorities with colleagues, and are often immersed in the minutiae of our jobs. Seldom do we pause to reflect on the meaning of our work, to ask ourselves questions such as *why* we are doing what we do or *why* our libraries look the way they do. One assumes that working in a scholarly setting, such as an academic library, would foster this type of deep contemplation, as if it is magically transmuted through the air. The reality of our fast-paced work environment is that this type of reflection becomes a luxury relegated to the past - that is, from graduate school. I argue, however, that theory can – and should – be an essential part of our everyday working lives. This paper presents an unsympathetic look at current library practices, exposing areas of concern and posing questions for library staff to contemplate. I contend that it is necessary to question our processes, to think critically about why we do certain things, how we treat our patrons (and each other), and how our libraries are physically set up or situated where they are – and why. It is not such a huge leap to cross the border between the practical and theoretical aspects of our employment. To straddle this hypothetical border suggests that we can dip into one side or another as time permits. One theory we can employ to help us with this type of examination is discourse analysis and its related approach, critical discourse analysis. Using these as theoretical lenses into the work of academic librarianship allows for a deep and substantial examination of ourselves as librarians, our patrons, and the buildings in which we serve them, one that is well worth taking not just in graduate school, but throughout our professional lives.

Discourse Analysis as a Valuable Methodology

What, exactly, does the word “discourse” mean? Even some theorists consider it difficult to define, as it can take on a variety of meanings depending upon the discipline in which it is employed (Mills, 1997; van Dijk, 1997). Based on an interpretation of French philosopher Michel Foucault’s work (a

heavy-hitter in discourse analytic theory), Mills (1997, p. 7) defines discourse as “groups of utterances which seem to be regulated in some way and which seem to have a coherence and a force to them in common.” These utterances are, essentially, “narratives . . . [such as] text, talk, a speech, [or] topic-related conversations” (Wodak & Meyer, 2012, p. 2-3), in which the “sayable and unsayable” is delimited (Barker & Galasiński, 2003, p. 2). One can speak of a “discourse of femininity” (Mills, 1997, p. 7) or, as in this case, a “discourse of librarianship.” Gee differentiates between two subtly different interpretations of discourse. He characterizes discourse (with a lowercase “d”) as the type of language used in stories or conversations. Discourse (with a capital “D”) also includes the non-language activities that accompany it (Gee, 1999), or, in other words, “other characteristics of the social situation . . . that may systematically influence text or talk” (van Dijk, 1997, p. 3). These characteristics include facial expressions or ways of acting and interacting (Gee, 1999; van Dijk, 2001). A library patron, for instance, may recognize a librarian by the way he or she talks and acts. Discourse that occurs within such a social situation provides material for scholars to analyze, using the research method called discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is defined by linguist Norman Fairclough as the analysis of how texts (spoken or written) work in sociocultural practice (Crowe, 2005). At its most basic definition, discourse analysis is “talk and text in context” (van Dijk, 1997, p. 3). The relationship between form and function is investigated in order to reveal what people are doing (or really saying) when they use language (Renkema, 2004). The listener/researcher asks themselves, “What must I assume this person (consciously or unconsciously) believes in order to make deep sense of what they are saying?” (Gee, 1999). Gee states that Discourse has the following attributes: it is semiotic (i.e. characterized by signs or language), there is some sort of social activity, there is a material presence (e.g. the presence of human bodies), there is a political meaning (e.g. some notion of power and status), and there is a sociocultural aspect (1999). The central theme in Gee’s theory is the notion of power, following in the footsteps of post-modernists, such as Foucault, in linking language to power. The idea of power plays a significant role in a specific type of discourse analysis called *critical discourse analysis*.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is more interdisciplinary than discourse analysis and is “problem-oriented” in its study of social phenomena. While context is an important aspect of discourse analysis, it becomes a vital component within CDA in its goal to “de-mystify” ideology and power (Wodak & Meyer, 2012, p. 3). Critical discourse analysis examines power relations (Crowe, 2005). Much of this work is based on research by Foucault, specifically his view on the connection between knowledge production and power (Mills, 1997). The aim of CDA is to reveal “the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination” and to consider strongly the side of the oppressed (van Dijk, 2001, p. 96). Since it is focused on issues related to power, domination, and inequality, research using CDA focuses mostly on groups, organization, and institutions (van Dijk, 2001). One of the institutions that has benefitted from a scholarly examination of power relations is that of the library, which is ultimately governed by the academic discipline of library and information science (LIS). An examination of the scholarship with LIS utilizing discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis, demonstrates three significant areas in which power relations are revealed: the role of the library as an authoritative institution, the function of the librarian as the all-knowing, controlling guardian of information, and the inequality of the relationship between library patrons and librarians.

The Powerful Institution of the Library

Institutions, as described by Renkema (2004, p. 253), are made of “those activities by which individuals construct and maintain a society,” each of which is organized around a central function. For instance, the main activity in an educational institution (including the academic libraries situated within them) is the transmission of knowledge. Institutions have a certain level of moral authority (Renkema, 2004) and they play a role in the “development, maintenance, and circulation of discourses” (Mills, 1997, p. 11). Renkema (2004) identifies three aspects of the institution: role behavior, in which every participant fills a particular social role (e.g. the library patron as the seeker of information); differentiation trends, in which each role a person takes on (and the language they use) is very separate from the other roles in their lives (e.g. the different language that patrons use in a library, as opposed to language used in a football stadium, for instance); and institutional power, which involves the notion that institutions have rules and thus influence people’s behavior (for instance, the understanding that patrons are quiet in a library). Institutions, along with culture, form the discursive structures that allow people to determine what is real and culturally acceptable (Mills, 1997). Mills argues that “discourse is regulated by institutions in order to ward off some of its dangers,” determining what knowledge counts and what can be said in a particular situation (1997, p. 64). Gee concurs, writing that institutions and language work closely together (1999). One of the institutions that has had great impact on Western society is, of course, the library. In this setting, several scholars have applied discourse analysis to the study of the library as an institution, specifically in its general mission, the spatial environment of library buildings, and conceptions of the library as a business.

In the absence of scholarly works on discourse analysis as applied to Pacific Northwest libraries, one may generalize from the literatures of other countries. For instance, in a discourse analysis of scholarly articles found within Swedish LIS journals, Hedemark, Hedman, and Sundin (2005) showed that a discourse on education is one of the primary themes found within the mission statements of libraries, specifically that the main purpose of the library is to educate the working class and the underprivileged. A library, especially a public library, should focus on serving the poor. The image of the library as an “altruistic, non-profit, service organization” is a traditional view (Closet-Crane, 2011, p. 35). However, Talja argues that the library’s motives may not be altruistic after all. She contends that there is actually an underlying element of control over poorer patrons, since libraries have traditionally been built and regulated by the elite (Hedemark et al., 2005). It is also generally accepted by librarians and the public alike that libraries are “good” for society – but, Buschman argues, this makes its “power discourse all the more sinister and hidden” (2014, p. 38). This power discourse also appears in discussions on library spaces.

One of the phrases bandied about in the LIS literature is the notion of “library as place.” Unfortunately, there is no agreed-upon definition of what this phrase means even though it is often used in scholarly works (Closet-Crane, 2011). The phrase originated in the latter half of the twentieth century, when the idea of the “library as collection” changed to the “library as place,” a public space where people could gather freely to do much more than just access collections of books (Jones, 2012). Library as place can also refer to the physical features of the library – the actual building and its interior design – as opposed to its institutional role (Closet-Crane, 2011). In her study, Closet-Crane (2011) utilized critical discourse analysis to examine the discourse on library design and planning within the literature of LIS. She found that within the literature of LIS since 1995, three “discursive threads” on library de-

sign have emerged: the library as an information commons, which emphasizes a computer-rich environment; the library as a learning commons, where services traditionally not found within a library are offered to students (such as counselling services), and the library as a place designed for learning. The latter seems to be an obvious description of a library's purpose, but the phrase takes on a different meaning within the discourse, focusing on how the library space can be used most effectively for learning.

Discussion of library space within the LIS literature would not be complete without an examination of the discourse on library collections. The traditional view of the library as a place to house collections of books seems passé in the 21st century information society. Even Foucault commented on the "tight enclosures" of libraries, where both libraries and librarians "exercise power via the organizing principles/violence of the institutions" (Buschman, 2007, p. 26). This may refer to the manner in which books or other materials are arranged on the shelf or even the architectural arrangement of the building, internal and external.

The arrangements of the books on the shelf are institutionalized (Buschman, 2007), via systems of organization that seem confusing and arbitrary to the library patron, such as the Dewey Decimal System or Library of Congress Classification, two complex systems of organization that the librarian must inevitably teach to the patron. Control is made visible through the examination of the order of books within the library stacks and in the online catalogue (Radford & Radford, 2001). Mautner (2014) supports this idea:

If you go to a traditional library . . . you enter a space to which info has been admitted only after undergoing a set of complex vetting procedures, involving authorities such as publishing houses, editors, librarians, and academics (p. 817).

These players act together to support the perception of the library as a place of ultimate knowledge, order, and control. These groups form part of a cohesive Discourse (with a capital "D," as described by Gee) and are "in sync" with one another (Gee, 1999). The library houses discourses, found simultaneously in books and in the organization of those books (Hardin, 2014), and is a discourse in itself (Radford & Radford, 2001). Through these systems of control, the patron is regulated and constrained.

While the contents of the library send a message, the architecture of the building itself may very well promote a message of fear and control. Radford and Radford (2001) analyzed the discourse on libraries found within selected books and movies, and discovered that the manner in which the libraries were designed architecturally contributed to a discourse of fear. The building itself sends a message; it is "like a church;" "big, grand, and imposing," resembling the architecture of cathedrals. As described by Boorstin, the library becomes a "temple of learning" (Radford & Radford, 2001, p. 309). Its purpose, intentional or not, evokes awe and feelings of sanctity in its patrons. This architecture has a symbolic meaning, as it represents the library's place as a permanent institution in society along the lines of the Christian Church (Radford & Radford, 2001). Freeman (2005) adds:

Richly embellished with stained glass windows, paneled with ornately carved oak, and appointed with marble statuary commemorating Greek and Roman philosophers, these libraries exuded an almost palpable sense of spiritual and intellectual contemplation. As a "temple of

scholarship,” the library as place assumed an almost sanctified role, reflected . . . in its architecture (p. 1).

It is not only the libraries built centuries ago that exude a religious aura, but also those that have been constructed in the late twentieth century or even the twenty-first century. For instance, the John L. Haar Library at MacEwan University in Edmonton was constructed in a neo-Gothic style in the 1990s, with high ceilings and lit, indented architectural alcoves simulating stain-glassed church windows (see the Appendix). Similarly, the exterior of the Central Library of the Seattle Public Library system may also be viewed as imposing, with its jutting, sharp panes of glass (in contrast to a spacious and welcoming interior).

Scholars also emphasize how the physical space of a library often evokes a feeling of surveillance; the reference desk is located centrally, so the librarian sees everything and everyone (Radford & Radford, 2001). This image brings forth an eerie likeness to the panopticon (Budd, 2006). In his work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault described the negative implications of the panopticon, an idea originated by philosopher Jeremy Bentham in which prisoners are kept in an environment steeped in surveillance, staffed with the all-seeing prison guard (Gallagher, McMenemy, & Poulter, 2015). The principles of surveillance and discipline have been internalized; the disciplinary structure developed in prisons has now penetrated other institutions (Mills, 1997), such as the library. What might be a quick solution is to place the reference desk to the side, rather than the middle of the room, accessible to but not overlooking the entrance, such as at my own library at MacEwan University in Edmonton.

It is also worth examining the policies behind the practices. For instance, Gallagher and others examined how computing facilities in Scottish public libraries exist in a panoptic environment, through their analysis of acceptable use policies (2015). A whopping 91% of those policies indicated that users' actions are “monitored, whether electronically or physically” (p. 581). A quick and random examination of similar policies at several Pacific Northwest institutions, such as at the University of British Columbia, the University of Washington, and a public library in Pocatello, reveals that monitoring activities, at various levels, may take place. Interestingly, a web site for a public library in Montana had the clear statement that staff would *not* “monitor or control” online materials, showing that some libraries are taking a stance contrary to the majority. Nevertheless, equating the library environment with that of a prison – a physical or online prison – evokes images of the authority and dominance of the library, coupled with the powerlessness of the monitored library patron.

While the library has heretofore been compared with prisons and religious institutions, a recent trend also associates the library and its functions with those of businesses in capitalist societies. In her discourse analysis, Closet-Crane discovered a tendency for LIS to borrow terminology from the discourses of other subjects, the practice of which “situates [an] argument in a larger social context” (2014, p. 25). It is possible for the discursive style of a text to draw on other discourses; for instance, the texts analyzed in Closet-Crane's study draw on political, educational, and, particularly, business discourses. When LIS scholars employ terminology that belongs to management discourse, such as the concept of “strategic alignment” or the notion that the library is in the “business of teaching,” they are employing a discourse that is traditionally within the realm of business and commerce (Closet-Crane, 2011). Yes,

a library must indeed adhere to sound budgeting practices, tracking of expenditures, reporting to their constituents, and other “business-like” practices, but library staff should be aware of how these practices are described verbally or in internal or external reports. Furthermore, the business-speak seepage into the library discourse appears to be beyond describing the fundamental business operations of the library.

Relying on other disciplines for their terminology also affects studies of library space. For instance, library space can be aligned with the marketization of universities and colleges, where the physical structure of the building serves as a marketing tool (or even a “bragging” point) for the parent institution. For example, the author’s library at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta, was constructed at the architectural midpoint of the campus, in order to situate itself as the “heart” of the university – a selling point that often appears in the library’s annual reports or on the university’s main web site. Freeman refers to this phenomenon when he writes that the “academic library has always held a central position as the heart of an institution—both symbolically and in terms of its physical placement. Pre-eminently sited and often heroic in scale and character, the library has served as a visual anchor for the surrounding buildings on campus” (2005, p. 1). The association of the library with religious, penal, and commercial institutions serves to enhance its standing as a dominant and imposing establishment within modern society. Two key players have a role in this establishment: the patron and the librarian.

The Librarian as Guardian of Information

Within institutions, such as libraries, every participant fills a particular social role, which determines behavior (Renkema, 2004). Forming the center of library operations is the role of the librarian, usually depicted in the literature and in popular culture as an expert purveyor of information. Librarians have been variously described as teachers, service providers, guardians, and police officers (Frohmann, 1994; Hoffman & Polkinghorne, 2010; Radford & Radford, 2001). Librarians utilize special language, which Frohmann (1994) refers to as “LIS talk” (p. 120). He argues that within LIS, talk is of a “specific academic and professional discipline, [with] authorized speakers” (p. 120). The talk consists of what is known as a “serious speech act;” it is unlike everyday conversation and is only done by librarians, who are “institutionally privileged speakers” (p. 120). Librarians enjoy a privileged position because they are entrusted with the task of controlling, organizing, and maintaining the availability of information. Providing information services to patrons is an “inherently powerful activity” (Rioux, 2010, p. 13). In the discourse of librarianship, librarians are the main actor, a position described by Wodak and Meyer in their approach to discourse. In the “social actors” approach, individual people “constitute” and “reproduce” social structure (2012, p. 27). Therefore, the librarian becomes much more than a person – he or she becomes the embodiment and representative of the power and control associated with libraries as a whole. As Frohmann (1994) discovered in his discourse analysis of LIS theories:

The discursive construction of librarianship as the institution, operation, and maintenance of rationalized, mechanized, standardized, and technobureaucratic procedures constructs an identity for the librarian – professional colleague of the corporate executive – which contests his [or her] . . . traditional role as guardian of high culture” (p. 130).

In one study, even the speech of librarians was conflated with that of the library, resulting in what is called a “metonymic slippage,” where librarians utilized the word “library” when they really meant “librarian” (Hicks, 2016). In a recent rewriting of the collection development policy at the MacEwan Library, it was found that many of these metonymic slippages appeared in the new document. This serves to enhance the perception that librarians and the institution of the library are capable of melding together as one power conglomerate.

In their critical discourse analysis of over 350 listserv messages related to librarians’ usage of the social web in library instruction sessions, Hoffman and Polkinghorne (2010) discovered an underlying discourse of control. They state that the relationship between the social web and librarianship reveals aspects about librarians’ professional identities and practices. In their listserv discussions, librarians either admitted that yes, they were willing to use social media in their teaching practices, or, conversely, were hesitant to do so, since this would mean giving up control over the classroom setting because students could make changes to online documentation themselves. The researchers found that one or more librarians expressed concern over not being able to fully monitor students who add content to a wiki. Many librarians preferred to teach while relying on “tool-focused procedures and scripts” and to master the usage of technology tools (p. 2). To do otherwise would mean that librarians lose control over the patron.

Such a fear of loss of control over patrons was also demonstrated by Radford and Radford’s study of the stereotype of the female librarian (1997). They found that a common perception is that librarians are the only actors who can understand how materials are arranged; it is a way for librarians to control the institution of the library and knowledge itself. In her discourse analysis of interactions between a school librarian and teachers, Kimmel (2011) examined the implications of Gee’s “capital D” Discourse on the perception of a school librarian, who was found to be “a person . . . [who] must gain recognition from others through talking, acting, using tools, even dressing like a school librarian” (p. 3). There is more to being a school librarian – or any librarian – than just words, for one must take into account all of the contextual elements of “capital D” Discourse. Therefore, librarians can gain control of the library environment and those within it.

One of the ways in which librarians control the library is by operating the reference desk. Budd and Raber (1996) identify the reference interview as a site where discourse analysis can successfully be employed. Tuominen (1997) conducted a discourse analysis of a monograph by a major LIS scholar, Carol Kuhlthau, which examined the information-seeking process that patrons undergo at the reference desk. Such a process is facilitated by a formal mediator, the librarian, within the reference interview. In her discourse analysis, Tuominen found that the librarian is often represented as an expert who provides a unique service that should theoretically meet the patron’s needs. The librarian seems to employ “different kinds of expert mind-reading techniques and technologies to diagnose the user’s visceral needs or anomalous states of knowledge” (p. 360). Tuominen postulates that librarians exert power through two strategies: the “inside-the-head” strategy, and the “misunderstanding” strategy. The former claims that the problems patrons experience when seeking information are perceived by librarians as being only within their patrons’ minds. It is less likely that the problems are attributed to troublesome information systems, even though this is sometimes the case. This method allows librarians to “control and invalidate their clients’ protests and apparent irritation or expressions of bewilderment

when confronting the information system” (p. 364). The misunderstanding strategy, on the other hand, involves librarians making the claim that searching occurs over a series of steps and that patrons who do not realize this will not understand the search process. Only the librarian can teach these steps to the user. The librarian takes on the role of all-knowing and powerful teacher.

Some scholars question the idea of the librarian as all-knowing and powerful. The image of the librarian, on the surface, is that he or she appears to be in control. However, the stereotype of the female librarian in popular culture as an old woman with a bun reveals a different position, for “the form and the voice of the female librarian is a function of a system of power and rationality that is not of her own making” (Radford & Radford, 1997, p. 263). One study examined how male librarians have been stereotyped over time, concluding that “when librarianship became feminized, male librarians were cast as such” (Dickinson, 2003, p. 108). Radford and Radford (1997) argue that the librarian is subservient. A quick glance of the service desks in any library would reveal that most librarians are female; thus, it is ever more crucial that methodologies, such as critical discourse analysis, be employed to examine how power relations are playing out within a library. Lazar (2007), for instance, encourages the use of feminist CDA, which is guided by feminist principles, with the aim of critiquing discourses that advance the patriarchal system. However, there is little research on this issue in the LIS literature, not even within those papers that employ discourse (or critical discourse) analysis. The power relationship that is most closely studied is that between librarian (as a homogeneous group) and patron.

Power Relations between Librarians and Patrons

Within the discourse of LIS, it is widely acknowledged that librarians can be seen to exude power and control over the library patron. As discussed above, one way this is manifested is through the design of the library space, which gives the librarian an aura of physical control and mastery over the library space and of its contents. They are, essentially, the “keepers of the books” (Hicks, 2016, p. 218). Another is in the language that is utilized within the discourse of LIS that describes patrons in terms of weakness and of lacking knowledge. One of the most problematic phrases to be utilized is that of “information literacy,” which is defined as the “set of abilities requiring individuals to ‘recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information’” (American Library Association, 2018). It is problematic in that it assumes that if a user does not have this characteristic – information literacy – they are illiterate, unknowledgeable, and lacking in something. It is a politically-charged concept (Haider & Bawden, 2007), although, in my professional experience, it is a widely-accepted one among professional librarians.

Taking the concept of information literacy one step further, Haider and Bawden’s discourse analysis of the conceptions of information poverty in LIS brings forth a slew of connotations and issues regarding a patron’s mental, financial, and other life circumstances that contribute to their dire problem of lacking information (2007). Their work aims to deconstruct the notion of information poverty, with an emphasis on Foucauldian techniques and theories on discourse. Information poverty is defined by the authors as “a natural element of modern life, which is strongly associated with an excess, a ‘sea of information’ on the one hand and censorship and control on the other” (p. 542). They assume that there exists the right kind and amount of information. This information is determined, produced, and maintained by those who are privileged. Information is paired with poverty, which evokes notions of scar-

city and information as an “alienable good.” In other words, information has an economic and material aspect to it. Amazingly, it rushes the librarian to solve the problems of the information poor! The latter are “created in a way that automatically assigns their salvation to the library and its staff,” for the library and its staff have a moral obligation to help the information poor (p. 550). Usage of terminology such as “salvation” once again equates the library’s authority with that of the church. The librarian becomes a crusader and ally for those who are weak, but there are sinister undertones to this notion. As Haider and Bawden conclude, “the construction of the ‘information poor,’ as it occurs [in their discourse analysis], can be interpreted as serving an almost strategic purpose aimed at strengthening the profession’s role and image and alleviating its status” (p. 551). It is intimately involved in the maintenance of the power differential between librarian and patron.

Not only is the patron considered to be poor and lacking, but he or she is also potentially a dangerous person. Castillo writes of the library as a place of order and its opposing state which is that of madness. This is characterized by the “breakdown of systematicity and the unconstrained production of discourse” (as cited in Radford & Radford, 1997, p. 255). The danger lies in the possibility that a user will bring disorder into the library. This is based on the idea that the ideal library collection is one that is complete, not used, and in order, bringing about a tension between access and completeness. When a collection is complete, it is “aesthetically and ontologically whole” (Radford & Radford, 1997, p. 257).

Rules in libraries exist to penalize patrons if items are late and to describe who is eligible to borrow books and for how long. This tension between libraries (and their staff) and library patrons has the potential to produce user anxiety. Rules concerning usage are really about controlling knowledge and gaining power over the lowly library user (Radford & Radford, 1997). Withholding knowledge results in more power for the librarian, for only they truly understand how materials are arranged and what rules are applied to the usage of them.

Many scholars argue that librarians incite fear in their patrons – they actually cause what they call the “humiliation of the user.” This idea is most fully developed by Radford and Radford (2001) in their discourse analysis of the image of the librarian in nine works of popular culture. They analyzed four novels, four films, and one episode of a television program in order to discover how the discourse of fear manifests itself in the representation of librarians and patrons. They revealed that, in these works, patrons exhibited a great deal of fear when approaching a librarian. The librarian was a figure that could punish and publicly humiliate the library user. In a work by Umberto Eco, it seemed as if the patron’s thoughts could be read by the librarian. It is a fear of getting caught doing something wrong, resulting in humiliation by the librarian – a situation in which the patron becomes a child. Many aspects of their relationship are also reminiscent of the relationship between doctor and patient, where “the librarian functions as an expert who can diagnose the user’s mental states and propose treatments on the basis of the diagnosis” (Tuominen, 1997, p. 362). It is disappointing that underlying interactions between librarians and patrons is the notion that the patron is sick, infantile, or fearful. Even the word “patron” (think, “patronize”) sets users up for an imbalanced relationship with library employees. Without the tool of discourse analysis, these underlying assumptions might not be revealed, leading to a future of strained relationships between patrons and the library.

Conclusion

How, then, can we effectively utilize discourse analysis and CDA to develop better relationships with patrons, to improve our library spaces, and to correct negative perceptions of librarians? Is it enough to read through the sparse literature on discourse analysis in librarianship, incorporating some of the themes and trends in our everyday working lives? It is a healthy start. After all, discourse analysis has been proven to be a useful tool that allows for the examination of individuals' language use in order to determine their role within a society or institution (Renkema, 2004). Although Renkema cites the teacher-student relationship as an example, just as valid is the relationship between librarian and patron.

Along with being aware of the literature on discourse analysis or other theories that might prove useful to librarians, library staff can reflect upon two key areas of concern: the way the library space is configured and how staff behavior affects the people in the library. For instance, it is prudent to examine how and where the service desks are situated – are they inviting or imposing? Do they contribute to the sense that library staff make use of the panoptic gaze, whether real or perceived? In times of renovation or relocation, a critical examination of how new architectural features might be perceived by library users is also warranted.

Moving from the library building and its configuration to the people working within, how does staff behavior at the service desks affect library patrons? Since 1876, discourses in LIS have been concerned with power that exercises control over information and patrons in the following ways: how information is talked about, how it is organized, who uses (or does not use) information, who the users are, what the library's role in culture and society has been, and how the professional and personal identities of libraries, the keepers of information, impact these components (Frohmann, 1994). It has been demonstrated in the literature that discourse analyses of the relationship between librarians and patrons reveal sentiments of fear, inadequacy, poverty, and control. However, as Oliphant (2015) argues, discourse analysis has the great potential to aid librarians in understanding the people and communities they wish to serve.

When library scholars publish works using discourse analysis, especially critical discourse analysis, there is an opportunity to “reveal power relations that are frequently obfuscated and hidden” (Wodak & Meyer, 2012, p. 20). The relationship between the physical structure of the library and the patrons who use it, and the relationship between librarians and the patrons whom they interact with, are fraught with unequal power relations. The skillful use of the methodologies of discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis can result in effectively improving the library experience for patrons. It is but one theory – albeit, an effective one – that librarians can employ when moving across the border from the practical to the theoretical.

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Appendix



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