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Summary of the article

Mills deals with the various aspects of discourse, one of the most frequently used and contradictory terms used by Foucault in his works. The article throws light on Foucault's various definitions of discourse and critically examines his insights on the external and internal components that shape or control discourses. Foucault defines the term in different ways in his works. Discourse consists of all meaningful utterances and statements; utterances that form a grouping such as discourses of femininity or racism; and, for Foucault, the unwritten set of structures and rules that constitute a discourse assumes greater significance than the utterances themselves (Mills, 2003, p. 53). However, for him, discourse is not equivalent to language or reality. On the other hand, he argues that discourse constrains one's perceptions on reality and affects the way one perceives reality. Many hold that for Foucault there exist no non-discursive realms as his writings always suggest that everything is constructed and conveyed through discourse (Mills, 2003, p. 55). Foucault argues that even our understanding of physical materials take place through various discourses. For instance, one's notions of a perfect body, feelings of tiredness or stress, and physical or mental well-being are governed by related discourses. Discourse and the structures it imposes on one's thinking play a significant part in the understanding of material objects and the world. Even the ritualistic non-serious talk when an English man begins the conversation is part of a discourse as one very easily notices the absence of such non-serious talk. In fact, discourses around the individual are so powerful and influencing that one is unable to think or express outside

these discursive constraints.

For Foucault, the notion of exclusion is significant to discourse and he purports that each discourse is characterized by forces that either try to circulate or suppress it (Mills, 2003, p. 54). Foucault also observes that the production of discourse is selected, controlled and regulated in every society. Each society excludes discourses based on both external and internal components. External exclusions take place because of taboo, the distinction between the mad and the sane, and the distinction between true and false (Mills, 2003, p. 57). While taboo acts as a strong excluding factor Foucault points out that the discourses of insane people are discarded by the society whereas what is true is determined by positions of power. On the other hand, the internal exclusions are based on factors such as commentary, the author, disciplines, and the rarefaction of the speaking subject (Mills, 2003, p. 58). While commentary on a given text contributes to its richness Foucault points out that majority of the commentaries on texts address what the text has failed to convey. Similarly, he argues that a text needs to be regarded as an independent discourse despite the author's credentials and publishing history. The disciplinary boundary refers to the limits of the subject area of the text. However, for Foucault, such a limit never exists as one may find applications of the text in other disciplines as well. Similarly, certain discourses are not open to all and, the rarefaction of the speaking subject, assumes that not everyone can speak authoritatively as it necessitates a fixed standard to produce a discourse.

The last part of the article deals with such terms as 'episteme,' 'archive', 'discursive formation,' and 'statement,' that are closely related to the

structure of discourse. Episteme refers to the groupings of discursive formations and analyzes the similarities or differences among them; archive refers to the unwritten rules that govern the production of statements or discursive formations; discursive formation refers to the grouping of similar discourses dealing with the same topic; and, statement can be understood as utterances made by authorized individuals (Mills, 2003, p. 62-65).

Foucault postulates that there is always a tendency to regard the statements of those in positions of power or affiliated institutions as more authorized than others.

Reference

Mills, Sara. (2003). Michel Foucault. In. Robert Eaglestone & Royal Holloway (Eds.) Routledge Critical Thinkers: Essential Guides for Literary Studies (pp. 52-66). London & New York: Routledge.