

## The sociology of knowledge approach to discourse: an introduction

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## 2 The sociology of knowledge approach to discourse

### An introduction

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#### Introduction

In one of his less recognised books, Michel Foucault discusses the Pierre Rivière murder case (Foucault, 1982). Rivière, a young man from the French region of Normandy, had killed his mother, sister and younger brother. After wandering around in the woods for a few days, he was caught by the police. Weeks later, a trial took place, involving different kinds of experts (psychologists, doctors, a judge, policemen). Rivière had confessed to the murders once he was caught: yes, he had killed them. During his time in prison, waiting for the trial to take place, he wrote a lengthy text explaining why he had done what he did. He pronounced himself guilty and stated that he wanted to be sentenced to death. Consequently, the defence case focused on a slightly different, but linked question: given that he was the doer of the deed, was he really responsible for what he had done? Should he be considered sane or insane? This question became the crux of the case. If he was sane, then that implied full responsibility and thus the death sentence; if he was insane, then that implied limited or even a complete lack of responsibility and therefore the asylum. Rivière made strong arguments for the soundness of his reasoning and full responsibility. And medical, psychological and police experts confirmed his sanity. Yet others did not. One particular expert in psychology stated that there were obvious signs of insanity in his report of the crime, in his confession and in his childhood behaviour (based on testimonies from people in his village). The arguments of this particular expert determined the outcome: Rivière was declared insane and sent to an asylum.

Foucault refers to this story in order to reveal discourses as core structuring elements in discursive battles and conflicts. In the Rivière example, the case was fought on the basis of different competing discourses. Their struggle consisted of what we can call the *definition of the situation* (an old term from pragmatist and symbolic interactionist sociology, established by William I. Thomas and Dorothy Thomas). This definition was highly consequential, as we have seen. If we look closer at the situation, we can identify different actors engaged with the case: Rivière, some policemen,

a medical doctor, several psychologists, a judge and others. These participants collected data (medical data, police data, psychological data, etc.). They wrote reports. They argued in front of the judge. Crucially, they assembled different kinds of knowledge and rival ways of knowing in their presentation of different perspectives on the case. Moreover, they did not act as individuals; rather, they performed discursive expertise. That is, in their role as actors or agents of a particular type of expertise, they drew upon established and institutionalised practices of discursive meaning making. Discourse here does not mean simply *using language, speaking to each other, or engaging in communication and interaction*. Here, *discourse* is used to identify specific instances of communication as being articulations, parts or expressions of particular patterns of serious speech and sign-using acts which derive from a home base in, for example, academic institutions of psychological knowledge production. Foucault (2010) uses the term “discourse” to refer to complexes of serious, regulated statement practices which constitute the objects they are dealing with (that is, referring to) in a particular way, for example a particular scientific discipline, a religious belief system, or a political ideology.

Conflicts over the definition of situations likewise occur in quite different areas and arenas. In fact, they are a basic feature of the collective human struggle with the world, its existence and resistances, with unfolding events, catastrophes, action choices, evaluations and all kinds of corresponding ways of problem solving. Events, problematisations and their actors who are engaged in the politics of knowledge and knowing, that is, in meaning/world making; these are the core drivers of discursive struggles (and social transformation). To illustrate, consider a society which has invented individual cars for moving around, going to work or to places for leisure. And this society also has invented alcoholic drinks for the purpose of promoting good feelings now and again. Here again a core question of responsibility emerges. If alcohol consumption affects human perception and hence bodily reaction time, then a drunken driver might be a danger for others on the streets. Much like the Rivière case, this too is a situation where different experts and discourses can jump in. First, statistics can show whether there are more or worse accidents when drunken drivers are involved. Medical experts provide evidence of bodily perception and reaction to dangerous driving situations. Religious movements see a chance of supporting a ban on alcoholic beverages, that devil’s brew. Other organisations mobilise other knowledge in order to show that drivers under the influence of alcohol drive much more slowly and therefore are less dangerous than other drivers. Public transport lobbyists pick it up as a chance to establish better public transportation systems. They all will look for evidence, refer to normative and/or factual evaluations and contribute all kinds of performances in a struggle for a collective definition of the situation. This is exactly what Joseph Gusfield (1981) investigated in his analysis of *The Culture of Public Problems*. Other symbolic

interactionists were interested in similar cases, as was Foucault, for example when he researched madness, the medical gaze, the order of things, the new regimes of disciplining and punishing and the social ordering of sexual relations (see Keller, 2017a). The very same core ideas are present in *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1978) and *Policing the Crisis* by Stuart Hall *et al.* ([1978] 2013). These authors practiced in different ways discourse research on scientific and public meaning making and reality construction. Ulrich Beck (2008: 24–46), in his works on world risk society, suggested the concept of “relations of definition as relations of domination” in order to explore the social hierarchies and processes which account for a situation of ecological or technological risk, threat, or danger. SKAD expands this concept, applying it to the idea of social relations of knowledge and knowing, and the politics of knowledge and knowing, which occur throughout all social fields and concerns. This is what Foucault called regimes of power/knowledge. This is what SKAD is all about.<sup>1</sup>

### **Discourses as objects of inquiry**

SKAD proposes a conceptual frame of its object (discourses and dispositifs), a corresponding methodology to approach that object and concrete methods or techniques for collecting and analysing data.<sup>2</sup> As human beings, we live in particular, sometimes rather limited, sometimes quite large and comprehensive symbolic universes. SKAD, as a research agenda, is interested in the events, actors and processes that establish, shape and transform such universes via discursive structuration, that is through social relations of knowledge and knowing, and competing politics of knowledge and knowing – what Foucault called regimes of power/knowledge, or what Stuart Hall referred to as the “centrality of culture”.<sup>3</sup> Social relations of knowledge are complex socio-historical constellations of production, stabilisation, structuration and transformation of symbolic orders that link agency, practices and objects within a variety of social arenas. These constellations imply hierarchies, domination, exclusion, compliance, conflict, resistance and competing ways of accounting for what is “real”: a concern, a problem, the right way to evaluate factual and moral evidence and how to act. SKAD is a sociology of knowledge-based perspective on what Linda Tuhiwai Smith addressed in her path-breaking work, *Decolonizing Methodologies*: SKAD aims to provoke thinking “about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies and knowledge institutions play in [...] social transformation” (Smith 2012: XII). It is about what feminist theories call the situatedness of knowledges (Haraway, 1988), its effects and dynamics. Such arguments resonate strongly with basic sociology of knowledge arguments established by Alfred Schütz, Karl Mannheim, Ludwik Fleck, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann and many others (see Keller, 2011a, 2011b, 2019). The term knowledge herein refers not only to what counts as socially recognised and confirmed positive

knowledge. It refers to the totality of all social systems of signs, and in so doing, to the symbolic orders and stocks of knowledge constituted by these systems which mediate between human beings and the world they thereby experience through the pragmatic reference function of signs. Included among these are such things as religious doctrine, sociological theory, interpretive knowledge about social situations, wider theories of globalisation, freedom, sustainability and so on:

The cultural archive [...] should be conceived of as containing multiple traditions of knowledge and ways of knowing. Some knowledges are more dominant than others, some are submerged and outdated. Some knowledges are actively in competition with each other and some can only be formed in association with others. Whilst there may not be a unitary system, there are 'rules' which help make sense of what is contained within the archive and enable 'knowledge' to be recognized. These rules can be conceived of as rules of classification, rules of framing and rules of practice.

(Smith, [1999] 2012: 45)

Discourses become real through the actions of social actors, who supply specific knowledge claims and contribute to the reproduction, liquefaction and dissolution of the institutionalised interpretations and apparent unavailabilities. Discourses crystallise and constitute themes in a particular form as social interpretation and action issues. The concept of discourse is well suited to the analysis of social processes, practices and politics of knowledge in and between contemporary societies. SKAD states that the discursive construction of realities is *one* form of the "social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), but one of the most influential and basic ongoing activities, on local as well as regional, national, transnational and even global scales, as well as in between such layers. It is the particular form which can be addressed as *discourse(s)*. We cannot see discourses in the way we see, for example, a piece of cake, a building, or even a concrete set of social interactions. *Discourse* is not an ontological entity per se. In the empirical world, we have ongoing series of small discursive events: minor and major texts, leaflets, reports, written or spoken expertise, speeches, pictures, figures, numbers, and so on, produced, performed and challenged by concerned and committed social actors. In order to analyse discourses, we can only collect such disparate elements or utterances, occurring at different points in time and in different social as well as geographical spaces. *Discourse* is a heuristic device for ordering and analysing data, a necessary hypothetical assumption in order to start research. It assumes that particular documents or pieces of data are performed according to the very same principles or rules of ordering, while other documents of sign usage will differ from that. Discursive orders are the results of a continuous communicative production which, however, is not

understood as spontaneous or chaotic, but rather occurs within interwoven, structured practices which relate to one another. Discourses are realised through the communicative actions of social actors. A pamphlet, a newspaper article, or a speech within the context of a demonstration actualises, for instance, an environmental policy discourse in differing concrete forms and with differing empirical scope. The materiality of discourses simply refers to the way discourses exist in societies, how they become *real* in what potentially could be used as *possible empirical data*. A discourse can be defined as *a regulated practice of statement formulation responding to some problem, urgency or need for action, including knowing something, defining a situation and perpetuating or transforming a given order as such problems for action*. Empirically, it is manifest as a sequence of concrete utterances, which are bound together or assembled by the very same logic of regulation and formation. Discourse as structuration offers

- normative orientations and rules for the performance of speech acts (e.g. established genres),
- rules of signification for the constitution of meaning,
- social and material resources for action (actors, dispositifs).

In performing their articulations, social actors draw upon the rules and resources that are available via the present state of a given discursive structuration. This is not a deterministic rule or regulation – rather, such a given and performed structuration works as instruction, which implies some freedom of application on the actor's side. Research into discourse must take account of the social actors' agency if it is to consider the creativity, shift, or transformation in discursive meaning making over time. Social actors are socially configured incarnations of agency, according to the socio-historical and situational conditions. When performing discursive statements, they participate in a crossfire of multiple and heterogeneous, perhaps even contradicting discourses, trying to negotiate the situations and *real world* problems they meet.

*Discursive construction* is different by its forms and means from other processes of social construction such as personal talk and private interaction or some instrumental activity. It implies diverse materialities, practices, relations – what Foucault referred to as dispositifs. SKAD conceives of this form as existing within the broader framework of sociology of knowledge established by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) and their predecessors. Such a re-embedding of discourse research allows for a direct link with the qualitative and interpretive research methodologies of the social sciences. Building upon arguments from pragmatist and symbolic interactionist traditions, the sociology of knowledge and Foucauldian analysis, SKAD argues that each of these traditions has something important to offer for discourse research. In the following, SKAD's basic understanding of discourses as objects of inquiry will be further outlined.

(1) Conceiving of discourses as practices of sign usage implies social actors who take up the role of speakers articulating, realising and performing a particular discourse in a given, that is (to be) defined situation. This idea holds for written and spoken utterances, visualisations and other micro-events of discursive production, for example in climate-change discourses or in academic (scientific) or religious discourses. Actors/speakers perform a particular discursive structuration in order to respond to some urgent need for action. Such an urgency can be located in an epistemic endeavour (as in producing scientific knowledge), in educational purposes (as in teaching sociology), or reacting to some event in the outside world (such as a nuclear catastrophe, a situation of poverty, a court case, a *social problem*) or similar. Such a performance requires skilled actors, that is, human beings able to handle symbols and larger sign systems in general, as well as the more specific sign systems and sign relations established in a particular process of discursive structuration, which in itself can be considered a longer or shorter process of historical institutionalisation through continual permutations of (inter)action.<sup>4</sup> According to pragmatist philosophers of mind and language, such a competence builds upon the basic social processes of communication which take place in a given “universe of discourse”, that is in a symbol or sign system, which has been established by some collective around a common concern:

This universe of discourse is constituted by a group of individuals carrying on and participating in a common social process of experience and behavior, within which these gestures or symbols have the same or common meanings for all members of that group, whether they make them or address them to other individuals, or whether they overtly respond to them as made or addressed to them by other individuals.

(Mead, [1934] 1963: 89–90)

Although this concept of discourse is somewhat broader than that suggested by Michel Foucault, such an idea holds true for everyday existential life in a social community as well as for more specialised fields of (discursive) action (such as an academic discipline, or poetry, or a religion). In order to become a competent symbol user and a participant within a pre-established collective and field of such an action, you have to undergo a process of socialisation. Only then can you perform a discursive practice which fits into the given discursive universe. Communicational events are not a direct effect of structural regulation, but the effect of the way social actors actively articulate, interpret and deal with a given discursive formation in a given situation.

(2) Building upon what has been said in the preceding paragraph, one has to state that the individual mind’s capacity for symbol usage is somehow an effect of social structuration. Using signs and symbols allows



our embodied minds to transform sensual experience into conceptual experience.<sup>5</sup> What our bodies perceive on a sensual level (light, sound, smells, tactility, temperature, etc.) in their permanent pre-reflexive state of existence gets transformed in our minds through an ongoing flux of “typifications”. Our consciousness can be considered an ongoing process of “typifying”, which means that we use (in a mostly non-reflected way) interpretive schemes to identify elements of a situation and their supposed qualities. Thinking here is the outcome of a permanent *doing relations* between our body/mind and some “object” it is concerned with (whether it is material or ideal, living or not living and so forth, including the fact that our embodied mind might turn to itself as such an object, for example when thinking: “I know what kind of statement to make in this situation”). This point is crucial in understanding the practice of sign usage behind discursive performances – here as well it presupposes a perceived and more or less ordered situation as a situation where this or that discourse I might be able to perform applies (and others not). When you as a reader, here and now, of this text perceive and identify black and white lines and spots, and your mind combines such perceptions into letters, words and sentences which you read as written signs of a particular language in a particular setting of reading (your office, your apartment, in a train, or wherever), with a particular meaning and reference to something beyond these pure signs, you are performing this process. Schütz ([1932] 1967) called such a complex interplay between body, mind and signs in the common adult person with quite common skills the *constitution of the world* in the individual embodied consciousness. Such a constitution performs a particular ordering of the world, for example as a moment of reading a book here and now, as being this or that kind of situation, as articulating this or that discursive structuration (a religious confession, a sociological argument in a discussion and so forth). This allows human beings to act in and interact with the world, its materiality or existence, including other individuals in this world, and including producing fragments or pieces of discourse. In some rare occasions, an individual will have to invent, or try to invent, a particular new sign in order to deal with a “new” experience, situation, or problem. This happens for example when someone invents a new word for a machine she or he has just created. There is a basic capacity and freedom of sign creation and interpretation of a present situation inherent to the human condition. But most of the time, individuals use established signs, or what Schütz called “types” and “interpretive schemes” out of the social and collective, historically established stocks of knowledge at hand (Schütz and Luckmann, 1973; Schütz, 1973a). Talking about the constitution of the ordered (or disordered) world in the individual body/mind therefore does not imply that this is a process outside the social, not deeply shaped by social means. On the contrary, it is the socio-historical embeddedness of human beings which allows for such a constitution. This happens when we classify black



from white, letters from pictures, books from texts, people from apes, a rock from a rose. One could say that in most of the situations we have to deal with, society has already done the interpretation and classification, the basic ordering of the world. We do not have to invest much energy into navigating that – our bodies/minds just do it. We then can focus on more particular elements and handlings of small and large situations.

According to Schütz, such processes ground the very basic matrix of the everyday life world of humans in which we all live, eat, drink, make love, run, sleep, care for others and so forth. And it applies for particular sub-universes of meaning which are ordered along particular ways of experiencing (like dreams or fantasies) or particular ongoing concerns. Consider the case of a scientist entering the field of mathematics and starting to work in it. S/he, as an embodied mind, constitutes this situation in a particular way which implies a given pre-structuring of what to do, to write, to tell:<sup>6</sup>

[...] the scientist enters a pre-constituted world of scientific contemplation handed down to him by the historical tradition of his science. Henceforth, he will participate in a universe of discourse embracing the results obtained by others, methods worked out by others. This theoretical universe of the special science is itself a finite province of meaning, having its peculiar cognitive style with peculiar implications and horizons to be explicated. [...] Any problem emerging within the scientific field has to partake of the universal style of this field and has to be compatible with the pre-constituted problems and their solution by either accepting or refuting them. Thus the latitude for the discretion of the scientist in stating the problem is in fact a very small one.

(Schütz, [1945] 1973b: 250–256)

These particular universes of discourse have their own social histories. Take mathematics as an example: it emerged out of the social practices of calculation and reflexivity, which became formalised and institutionalised, as all other scientific disciplines. In the process of socio-historical and interactive institutionalisation, the means and resources for performing mathematical discourse are established, including the constitution of actors capable of producing the statements of mathematics and able to control each other in such a production. This holds for public discourses, too, although in lesser degrees of discipline and structuration. One might be able to perform basic arguments from climate change discourses without being a climate researcher. Therefore, public discourses involve heterogeneous actors and statements which are not related to each other by a discipline or religious world view but by the performance of particular definitions of a situation. In order to articulate “climate change as a human made threat” in a given discursive event, you have to combine certain elements of meaning making while excluding others.

Following Schütz and Luckmann (1973) and Berger and Luckmann (1966), we use “knowledge” to mean all kinds of types (signs and meaning/reference) and incorporated ways of action people use in general and particular ordering of situations.<sup>7</sup> Knowledge refers to entities that some kinds of people suppose to exist. These entities can be “classes” for sociologists, angels for children, a heaven for Christians, or life on Mars for some musicians. Knowledge is not a term reduced to the factual given, but to phenomena assumed (by some) to exist. Language/meaning is a social reserve for knowledge. The social construction of reality implies dealing with materiality as well as with the effects, resistances, or agency of such materiality: “Knowledge about society is thus a realization in the double sense of the word, in the sense of apprehending the objectivated social reality, and in the sense of ongoingly producing this reality” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 84).

Talking about “social construction” does not imply some architect’s master plan for constructing something. Certainly, there are historical situations of collective institutional design making (as in revolutions and religions). But as a whole, social construction can be considered rather an ongoing historical process which emerges out of the interwoven interactions of social actors and the material conditions they live in. Society becomes objective reality through historical processes of interaction with others and with our material world, through human interpretation of this world and comprehensive processes of institutionalisation. As objectivated reality it exists, whether we want it to or not, as long as material conditions for existence stand, as long as it is produced by human action and its objectifications – allowing, shaping and constraining our thinking, feeling and acting. In ongoing processes of socialisation and internalisation, elements of such a historical *social construction of reality* become our “subjective reality”, that is the ground for the body/mind based *constitution* of the world in everyday life which allows us to define situations, to use some vocabulary of motives and to interact with others. Berger and Luckmann (1966: 172) emphasised especially the role of language and the daily conversation machinery for the construction of a shared social reality:

The most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation. One may view the individual’s everyday life in terms of the working away of a conversational apparatus that ongoingly maintains, modifies and reconstructs his subjective reality. [...] It is important to stress, however, that the greater part of reality-maintenance in conversation is implicit, not explicit. Most conversation does not in so many words define the nature of the world. Rather, it takes place against the background of a world that is silently taken for granted. Thus an exchange such as, ‘Well, it’s time for me to get to the station’, and ‘Fine, darling, have a good day at the office’, implies an entire world within which these apparently simple propositions make sense. By virtue of this implication the exchange confirms the subjective reality of this world.

The same argument holds for a discursive statement such as “Sociology deals with social structures (like class, race and gender-based inequalities) and processes (like socialization or habitus formation) which shape individual action.”

(3) The points made so far are important to understand the basic condition for discourses to come into existence in a longer or shorter process of socio-historical emergence and structuration as well as for their transformation and perhaps disappearance. Discursive events and practices, in order to be performed, need skilled actors capable of using particular combinations of symbols, capable of defining situations. Discourses exist as series or assemblages of such performances which all together make up their empirical reality and existence. This account is not only valuable for the discourses and discursive conflicts we research. It is also valuable for our own analytical work as discourse researchers. We too are performers of discourses about discourses. There is no escape.

Discourses, as a particular way of constituting specified meaning, emerge around some concern or problem requiring action and thinking, more or less in competition with or opposed to other ways or modes of meaning making. These can be issues of knowing something (for instance about *nature, god, the nation*) or of dealing with small events (like a court case) or big events (like sustainability, migration, global interconnection, a disaster). They are the emergent effects of historically-situated collective action and interaction. Think about the evolution of competing religious worldviews or of highly specialised sciences. They do not simply show up all of a sudden. They develop their concrete Gestalt through concrete socio-historical processes. Like everything human made, they are the historical products of human interaction with the world. To talk about a *discourse X* or a *discourse Z* is just a shortcut for all those permutations of action and actors interplaying, adjusting and disciplining themselves by commenting on what meaning patterns or tools to use, judging good from bad, correct from incorrect performances and so on. Such an account holds true for comprehensive and long lasting historical discursive formations like Catholicism or the social sciences. It holds true too for more hybrid public discourses with shorter spans of existence, like those arising around and competing with regard to a current matter of public concern such as Brexit, affirmative action, gay and lesbian rights issues, economic intervention into markets, the post-colonial condition or ecological disaster, to name only a few. Most current discourse research is interested in cases such as these, their causes, dynamics and effects. Often we identify such discourses (competing or not, conflictual or not) by their theme or concern: energy transition, climate change, bioengineering, biodiversity, drug addiction, human trafficking, health insurance issues, European integration, refugee crisis and so on. We have to be very precise about our point of entry into their analysis. Climate change discourse, one of the most researched discursive processes, is in fact plural: such discourses

differ according to national and linguistic contexts, to the level of political action in a given case, to the speakers involved and so forth. We never find THE discourse, but instead particular discourses on their concrete levels of singularity and appearance.

Discourses, according to Foucault, can be analysed by considering given and collected fixed speech acts (textual, visual, oral), performed and accessible utterances which follow a particular set of rules governing their production.<sup>8</sup> We can refer to this as a co-constructive relationship between a discourse and a given discursive event within this discourse. Actors perform discourses in a process of realisation (in the sense of Berger and Luckmann) or articulation of a discursive structuration. They actualise them and thereby bring them into the situation here and now. And they are sometimes able to shape or even transform them, for example when adapting them to new purposes and problems. In most of the cases, established discursive regulation grounds the coherence of dispersed discursive events as being elements or fragments of one discourse, and not of another. Therefore, discourse is the name we give to an amount of empirically accessible data (pieces of text, reports, books, lectures, leaflets, etc.) which have a concrete materiality as discursive practices and effects of such practices. The research interest in discourses then can take rather different shapes. A very basic distinction is an interest in the *internal* historical genealogy or emergence of *one* or several discourses and the power/knowledge work they do (for example religious or scientific discourses). This was Foucault's interest in his study of the order of things (in academic discourses), the medical gaze, or the history of madness. Such discourses (like sociology and psychology) differ in their vocabulary and in the meaning making patterns and strategies they use, in the reference claims they perform, in the objects and in the speaker positions they establish. Their evolution is shaped by internal as well as by external forces, including sometimes oppression, control and censorship by religious or political powers. The concrete shape of such processes has to be identified in empirical analysis of given cases of interest. Said's work in *Orientalism* as well as Hall's *et al.* in *Policing the Crisis* are cases in point.

A different question would address the participation or involvement of discourses in ongoing (conflictual) definitions of situations, events and needs for action, as in the examples given at the beginning of this text. Then SKAD discourse research focuses on that situation or a series of such situations and the performativity of involved discourses: What knowledge and moral claims do they make? How do they account for factual evidence and aesthetic or moral evaluation? What resources do they draw upon? How do they relate to each other, and with what effects for the definition of the situation?

Whether you are interested in the historical emergence of one discourse or a set of discourses in a particular field, or in discursive conflicts upon matters of concern, SKAD argues for a perspective on discursive

patterns of meaning making (the *content side* of discourse which will be discussed in the next paragraph) and on the concrete materialities of discourses. It addresses their materiality through the concept of the *dispositif*. Here again, Foucault introduced some key arguments. Dispositif refers to a complex of heterogeneous but related elements such as actors, texts, laws, buildings, practices, legal and procedural measures, objects – in short: sayings, doings, artefacts and materiality – assembled to deal with an “urgency”: some problem, identified via occurring processes of problematisation.<sup>9</sup> SKAD’s usage of the dispositif concept refers to two dimensions of discursive world making. First, it permits addressing the concrete *infrastructure of discourse production*, that is the symbolic and material resources which allow for a discourse to articulate discursive events, to perform a particular discursive practice. Sociology, as a discourse, needs qualified speakers and positions in academia; it needs devices to research, write and publish. It needs funding to produce statements and so on. Exactly the same thing holds for social movement actors or NGOs which perform a counter-discourse in a concrete case of problematisation. The infrastructures may differ considerably, but any particular discourse produced requires some kind of infrastructure – otherwise it just would not happen.

SKAD’s usage of dispositif, moreover, refers to a second element, the *infrastructures of discursive intervention*: discourses and discursive conflicts produce highly diverse outcomes like laws, rules, judgments, evaluations, classifications, new human actors, practices and artefacts, which address the mastery of an empirical concern. Consider the case of inequality in education (following the PISA-rankings). Governmental action which tries to improve national performances will set up whole packages of intervention into schooling and pre-school education, for example by devices for classification of *weak* pupils and measures for teachers’ empowerment. Such measures intervene into a given field of practice; their effects then might re-enter discursive meaning making. In fact, discourses and dispositifs are closely related, interwoven, or interconnected.

### **SKAD’s methodology and conceptual tools**

SKAD is not a method but rather a research agenda and a theory-methodology-methods package aiming to examine the discursive construction of realities in social relations of knowledge and knowing and in the social politics of knowledge and knowing. Such a perspective implies that discourse research is not about applying a given theory (like Bourdieu’s field theory) to a concrete case. On the contrary, it conceives of research as experimentation in the sense of Michel Foucault (see Foucault, 1991 and Keller, 2017a ). Such a stance allows for surprises and new conceptual thinking and theorising stimulated by the empirical case and its analysis. SKAD is concerned with analysing the processes, causes, dimensions,

dynamics and effects of discursive construction in whatever area of society you are interested in. Even in experimentation, researchers need heuristic concepts which allow them to proceed, to decide what to look for and what to neglect. Therefore core elements of SKAD's conceptual framework will be presented in the following. These imply a comprehensive range of possible questions to be asked. It is important to keep in mind that in a concrete research, no one can address the totality of given discourses, possible questions and tools at hand. SKAD proposes a toolkit; for a concrete research purpose you will have to make your own choices regarding questions, concepts and proceedings. As the contributions in this volume show, researchers will focus for example on the meaning making side of competing discourses via the analysis of texts and documents, or inquire into the dispositifs of intervention via ethnographic research. In concrete research, you choose which SKAD concepts suit your research interests and you might introduce new concepts from other methodologies if necessary, as far as they integrate into the basic SKAD framework of sociology of knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

### *Research questions*

Discourses are situated in time and in social as well as geographical space. The analysis of a concrete discourse or discursive conflict might start from general research interests, current theoretical and empirical concerns in your discipline, your interest in a particular phenomenon, or similar. It then addresses questions ranging from micro-levels of concrete and situated discursive practices to issues about the dynamics of discursive structuring of symbolic orders and to wide-ranging reflections on the relationship between discourse, extra-discursive events and social change. A given theoretical problem or discussion in a field as well as a concrete interest in a particular object<sup>11</sup> might serve as the origin of one's investment in a precise question. Therefore you will have to adapt the following general questions to your specific purpose:

- What is the historical trajectory (the emergence, presence and disappearance) of discourses and the way they change through time and space?
- What is their unfolding structuration of meaning, their impact and the knowledge work they do in given social contexts? What kind of definitions do they perform in collective struggles for an issue of concern and with what effects?
- How are they located in a current power/knowledge regime or field and its stabilisation or transformation?
- What are the social actors, practices, means and resources involved in discursive conflicts and meaning making in a public or specialised

arena of a given concern? Are there excluded or marginalised voices? Who is allowed to speak and define what?

- How do discourses sustain or challenge established values, norms and factual statements?
- What is the role of (key) events in discursive conflicts? Are there major changes, and how do they occur?
- How do available dispositif infrastructures of discourse production shape the dynamics of discursive meaning making?
- What kind of dispositif intervention infrastructures are established, and with what effects?
- How do particular discursive formations or discursive conflicts relate to other dimensions of social structuration? How do they establish and shape phenomena like “interests” or “motives”?
- What are the social consequences or the power/knowledge effects of discourses as they relate to fields of social practice and everyday life, action and interpretation?

Such questions can be addressed in different kinds of case studies, on different levels of the social, and with a broad range of applications to concrete research issues. The contributions in this volume give some examples of that. Since real world empirical research in the social sciences always is subjected to restrictions of wo/menpower, time and money, it is not feasible to address all such questions at once. Therefore a concrete study of discourse must select a research interest to focus upon.

### *Interpretive analytics and co-construction*

SKAD discourse research involves a process of empirical *reconstruction* of power/knowledge regimes and their dynamics. The aim is to understand and thereby explain them, and to make visible the contingencies in the work they do. This kind of reconstructive analysis requires data. Written texts (like newspaper coverage, scientific reports, books, expertise, leaflets, advertisements), orally performed speeches (like lectures, TV debates, parliamentary debates, interviews), visual (like graphs, figures, tables, maps, photos, paintings) and other artefacts (like books as material devices, a building, a digital website device, etc.) and observable practices can become such data, when approached via research (or produced by research). Using data in an analytically sound way implies that such information functions as a corridor of resistance, in the sense that you have to ground your arguments in reference to that data. You cannot say or write anything you want about a given document. Its material and symbolic qualities allow you to make certain statements, but not others. To put it very simply: the present book cannot be considered a biomedical sciences document; it would be hard to argue that, given the current nature of that discipline. The relationship of data to the research is addressed in



the term co-construction. Co-construction means that you work with the help of data. Nevertheless, it is you, the analyst, who starts with questions and looks for responses in the documents. Different questions will lead to quite different responses, and sometimes, there may be no response at all. In that case you have to retrace the document and case inspiring and guiding you in order to rethink and pose different questions.

Finally, this kind of case study work is an exercise in interpretive analytics. Here I refer to two major arguments. First, a piece of data has to be split up, to be divided into its diverse elements and dimensions (some might call that the element of deconstruction in SKAD). In contrast to most interpretive research, such a document cannot be considered per se as being a document of just one discourse. Instead, it may appear as an arena for various and heterogeneous discourses. Consider a long article in a high quality newspaper assembling different points of view about a given concern. This does not make it a document of a single discourse, but rather a discursive micro-arena in itself. Furthermore, such a text usually performs only elements or fragments of particular discourses. Discourse research therefore is an art of combination: the analyst has to put together pieces of a discursive puzzle in order to reconstruct the whole discursive structuration, which then can provide grounds for a more theoretical or critical diagnosis (for example with emerging concepts like *bio-power* – this was Foucault's approach in his empirical work).

Second, all this work is profoundly shaped by continual interpretation of signs, symbols, practices and situations. The analyst simply cannot escape such processes of interpretation:

The basic problem for the sociological researcher when he or she is reflecting upon his/her work, is making it transparent for him- or herself and for others how (s)he understands that which (s)he believes to understand, and how (s)he knows what (s)he thinks (s)he knows. [...] Their claim entails absolutely stripping the basic operations in sociological research and theory construction of their epistemological naïveté, to reconstruct them and elucidate them.

(Hitzler and Honer, 1997: 23–25)

As was argued above, every human definition of a situation is an interpretive process. This holds true for discourse research too. The analyst interprets both the research situation and the research case; in working through concrete data a continual interpretation of signs and symbols is always involved. Therefore, hermeneutics, the methodology of interpretation, plays an important role in discourse research. This is not about hermeneutics in the older sense of unmasking a hidden economical or ideological force behind the present data, or of revealing what some author intended to say by what she or he wrote. Rather it can be considered a hermeneutics of surfaces, which allows for making sound

arguments about given and created data. There are different options for such a hermeneutics, and some SKAD ideas about it will be presented below.

SKAD, much like all approaches in the field of discourse studies, is characterised by a high degree of self-reflexivity. SKAD reconstruction work is also inevitably construction work. It is a discourse about discourses which follows its own discourse production rules, ways of enabling and disciplining. Therefore it does not allow for an objectivist account of a given research case, but a situated analysis which tries to argue its case not in an arbitrary way, but in a conceptually and methodologically sound way. Its results then can be discussed and related to other work using different approaches (see Zhang and McGhee, Chapter 8, this volume).

### ***Analysing discursive meaning making, knowledge and knowing: some concepts***

As we have seen above, SKAD has a theory and methodology with regard to its research objects (discourses, dispositifs, their relations, confrontations and effects) and to its own analytical procedure. This theoretical grounding explains the conditions of possibility of discursive processes. It is not an explanatory device which identifies *ex ante* a few causal factors then used to explain given discursive issues of interest. Instead, it suggests a conceptual toolbox and a methodology for heuristic purposes. This means that diverse elements of such a toolbox can be used in concrete research in order to analyse, to establish questions with which to approach data and, one hopes, get some answers. Not all of these resources will be employed in every study. And other conceptual tools might be added, if necessary.

### ***Utterances and statements***

The first and most important conceptual distinction was established by Michel Foucault in his work in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, [1969] 2010). This distinction addresses the core discursive effect of producing or organising meaning and thereby, based on the referential function of signs and symbols and the resistance corridors of the world, the reality of the phenomenon a discourse deals with. “Utterance” refers to the concrete given and ever singular micro-discursive event which allows us to analyse discourses: a speech, a printed text, a unique result of a concrete discursive practice, a historical individuality. Even two versions of the very same newspaper article have distinct concrete materialities resulting from the atoms and molecules constituting them. If you consider their symbolic content, made out of a particular arrangement of signs and symbols, the appresentation of meaning which they perform, they already appear less singular. So a book might sell a million copies, each

of which has its own material structure, but all perform the same arrangements of signs and symbols. This too is a kind of singularity. As Foucault argued, discourse research has to use such data, but it is not interested in their material but rather their symbolic singularity. He introduced the concept of “statement” (and statement formation) in order to label what such research should be interested in. Statement refers to typical patterns, to the rules and regulations which give coherence to a given piece of data as being a performance of this discourse rather than of a different one. This seemingly complex idea is in fact rather simple. Consider how you would identify a sociological text from a psychological one, or from a religious or a political one. Such texts differ by the elements they use to address issues in different ways. Such elements are more than vocabularies and rhetorical devices. They include patterns of relating some elements rather than others, and in particular ways. Therefore, discourse research has to look for statement patterns, not for the concreteness of utterances – the latter ones being only points of entry for analysis. This implies that the very same statement can be made in very different utterances and situated forms; it might even exist as text, image, graph, or audio-visual data. In his book *The Order of Things* ([1966] 2001), Foucault identified such statement patterns as “epistemes” (e.g. the episteme of similarity between entities, organizing relational knowledge in academia for some centuries). SKAD suggests using five analytical concepts deriving from general sociology of knowledge in order to analyse patterns of statement production: (1) interpretive schemes, (2) argumentation clusters, (3) classifications, (4) phenomenal structures and (5) narrative structures (plots). Taken together, these elements form the “interpretative repertoire” (Wetherell and Potter, 1988) by which a discourse performs its symbolic structuring of the world.

(1) *Interpretive schemes*: The term interpretive scheme (in German: *Deutungsmuster*) denotes social/collective meaning and action-organising schemata, which are combined in and circulated through discourses (see Keller on waste, Chapter 4, this volume; Truschkat and Muche, Chapter 12, this volume). The concept is close to the idea of “frame” and “framing” as used in symbolic interactionist social movement and social problems research. But it does not imply any reference to cognition or intentional use. It is a concept applied to knowledge patterns in the social stocks of knowledge established by situated groups and societies in order to deal with some constellation of the world (“romantic love” is an example of such a pattern, related to emotional relations between two people; “technology is always a risk” might be a pattern in a quite different field which organise how some technological concern is presented). Such interpretive schemes can organise rather different kinds of phenomena or events, and indeed, they do undergo historical and social transformations. Discourses differentiate in the way they combine such frames in specific interpretive frameworks. They are able to generate new interpretive schemes and ways

of positioning them within the social agenda. This concept has a particular importance for the relation between discourses and our everyday practices and self-understanding, e.g.: Are we really in love? Is this technology safe? Shall we run to improve our health? What is it like to be a good father or mother – what do I have to do?

(2) *Argumentation clusters*: Schünemann (see Chapter 5, this volume) introduced the concept of typified argumentation clusters as another helpful category. A strong interest in argumentation goes hand in hand with a focus on political issues. Argument, as conceived here, is defined as appearing at the intersection of a discourse strand (as for example the macroeconomic discourse strand in a given society) and the strategic orientation and calculations of actors in a political conflict or campaign situation. Arguments thus emanate from a discourse strand and most likely develop in different strategic directions. Consequently, the concept is not to be conflated with rationalist or deliberative notions of the *good*, *better*, *bad* or *worse* argument. It refers to particular clusters of *if A, then B* relations which organise a particular set of statements in discourses.

(3) *Classifications*: A third element in the content-focused analysis of discourses is the exploration of classifications (and therefore qualifications) of phenomena which are performed within them and by them (see Unger, Scott and Odukoya, Chapter 9, this volume). According to the long history of sociology of knowledge, classifications are a highly effective form of social typification processes (Keller, [2005] 2011b, 2019). Like every form of symbolising, sign usage in discourses classifies the worldly given into particular entities (for the classifier) which provide the basis for its conceptual experience, interpretation, and way of being dealt with. Competition for such classifications occurs, for example, between discourses about what “groups at risk” should be identified for medical health purposes, what kind of substances should be considered drugs, what category of people should be attributed what kind of rights and duties, or what kind of behaviour should be considered “normal” or “deviant”. Classifications have significant impacts on action. The interest in classificatory devices and classifications is due to their constitutive role for symbolic ordering in discourse and practical action as an effect (see Bowker and Star, 2000).

(4) *Phenomenal structures*: The concept of phenomenal structure does not refer to some kind of ontological entity that is supposed to be behind representations, or to some essential qualities of a phenomenon. Rather, it assumes that the so-called Gestalt of a phenomenon of concern at a given socio-cultural and historical moment, is constituted by discursive action and meaning making *within* a concrete discourse. Competing discourses and discourse coalitions set up competing phenomenal structures. Such meaning making establishes phenomenal dimensions and their concrete qualification (see Ide, Chapter 13, this volume; Keller on waste, Chapter 4, this volume; Truschkat and Muche, Chapter 12, this volume). For instance, constructing a theme as a problem on the public agenda

requires that the protagonists deal with the issue in several dimensions. They have to refer to argumentative, dramatising and evaluative statements; the determination of the kind of problem or theme of a purpose for action, the definition of characteristics, causal relations (cause-effect) and their link to responsibilities, identities of involved actors and non-humans, values, moral, aesthetic, and factual evaluation and judgments, consequences, possible courses of action, forms of self-positioning and othering, etc. In such processes, *different, heterogeneous or hybrid forms of knowledge and claim making* might be involved (as referring to scientific evidence, to morality, to religious cosmologies, or political programmes), or competing forms of *futurising* (like prognosis, scenario, oracle) and “historising” (narratives about the past and its implications for the present). The concept of phenomenal structure addresses these kinds of considerations and links them to the fact that discourses, in the constitution of their referential relation (their *theme*), designate different elements or dimensions of their topic and link them to a specific filler (an interpretive scheme, an argumentative pattern, a classification pattern, etc.) Both the dimensional structure of phenomena and their concrete implementation have to be depicted out of empirical data – there is no pre-established dimensional matrix to apply (although there are some common patterns in problem definition, like causation, evaluation and solution which might occur often in given cases). Identifying particular phenomenal structures, their presence and transformation through time, and analysing how they relate to phenomenal structures performed by opposing discourses is one of the core analytical processes in researching discursive conflicts. You should be aware that reconstructing such a structure at a given moment in discursive processes is like taking a snapshot – they change over time and in discursive competition. Indeed, they are always situated snapshots, even if they might be stable for a certain period and discursive context. Looking for the events, actors, processes and knowledges which intervene and cause them to change from a situation X to a situation Y is one of the core tasks of discourse analysis.

(5) *Narrative structures*: The structuring moments of statements and discourses, through which various interpretive schemes, classifications and dimensions of the phenomenal structure (for example, actors or problem definitions) are placed in relation to one another in a specific way, can be described as narrative structures. Narrative structures are not simply techniques used to combine linguistic elements, but a *mise en intrigue* (Paul Ricoeur’s “*emplotment*”), a configurative act which links disparate signs and statements in a particular form (Ricoeur, 1984: 5). Narrative structures integrate the various statement patterns of a discourse into a coherent and communicable form. They provide the acting scheme for the narration with which the discourse can address an audience in the first place and with which it can construct its own coherence over the course of time. These may be stories of progress or decline, of true or false

knowledge, of religious empowerment and belief or established facts, of heroes or criminals, of upcoming disasters or much better and equal societies and futures (see Keller on waste, Chapter 4, this volume; Truschkat and Muche, Chapter 12, this volume).

### ***Social actors, speakers, subject positions, subjectification***

SKAD starts with a sociological concept of (individual or organisational) *social actors* and their constituted agency in a social context. Such actors are related to discourses in different ways. The first and most obvious relation is that of actors becoming *speakers* in discursive affairs. This might happen by their being socialised within a particular universe of discourse (such as mathematics or psychological expertise) for example through university education and careers and institutional role taking. This might happen also by just starting to engage for organisational or private reasons with an issue of public concern (like poverty, human rights, or ecological transformation). It is important to see that assuming a particular speaker position in a given situation might not result in a stable or permanent engagement. Some collective actors (like political parties and their representatives) can switch and even take opposing speaker positions at the same moment, depending on the trajectory of a discursive conflict. So discourse research should look carefully at how speakers relate to discursive positions taken, and how this might change. To insist on a general category of social actors is helpful then in order to look for invisible speakers, implied speakers, excluded speakers or “silent voices”, that is, actors you might expect to show up, but who don’t – which can become a matter for your analysis. Finally, social actors bring in their economic, symbolic, social, cultural and knowledge resources in a discursive structuration. This can have significant impacts on the discursive processes of interest.

The category of *speakers* is rather simple. They are those producers of discourse who perform the utterances mentioned above. They might draw upon different resources in order to authorise their contribution (like scientific expertise or personal experience, religious spirituality, or success in elections and so forth). SKAD discourse research is not about the unmasking of a hidden agenda or intent of real speakers, but about the way statements are legitimised by certain categories of speakers rather than by others. SKAD assumes that actors and speakers have a more or less complex set of interests (like making money, performing a “good show” etc.) and use strategic action. There are highly diverse drivers for action and engagement. But according to SKAD the interesting point is their legitimation as speakers, the kind of knowledges they use in order to articulate their statements, and the effects resulting from this.

*Subject positions* refer to identity and action templates for subjects or role models constituted in discursive meaning making (see Küppers, Chapter 11, this volume; Stücker, Chapter 6, this volume). A good example is the

eco-citizen, the friend of the environment who in principle does not take the airplane, reduces water consumption, has a bike instead of a car, works to lower her/his carbon footprint and so on. Often, there are negative subject positions too, that is positions which have to be educated, disciplined, punished, excluded, like the ecologically irresponsible type who isn't concerned about questions of climate change and such. A third variation here are the implicated subjects, that is actors (groups) which are referred to as being the core concern of a discursive structuration. One example would be the case of "the possible users of this or that technology with this or that need – we are doing what we can for them". Aspects of such subject positions are positioning processes such as othering (the capitalists, the oriental people) and "selfing" (we the people, we the west, we the good versus them, the bad and the ugly). Another variation might be the evocation of non-human speakers like ghosts, angels and gods as having made this or that speech, order, or statement. In such cases these non-human speakers are represented by other speakers (such as believers of all kinds) who perform their speech acts as a kind of ventriloquism in order to make them real and empirically accessible.

Subject positions can be core instances of the interpellation processes that discourses perform. But we should not confuse discursive templates with occurring processes of *subjectification*, for example in organisations or in everyday life. If we are addressed as entrepreneurial subjects or ecologically friendly subjects, we have a capacity for manoeuvring such interpellations, ignoring them, refusing them or giving them a most personal shape (see Bosančić, Chapter 10, this volume). Dispositifs play a central role here, such as in institutional and organisational infrastructures that offer concrete situational settings for the corresponding programming efforts in the form of buildings, trainers, seminars, technologies of the self, codes of practice, laws, participants and so forth.

### *Discursive fields, discursive coalitions*

SKAD describes discursive fields as being social arenas, constituting themselves around contested issues, controversies, problematisations and truth claims in which discourses are in reciprocal competition with one another. Such arenas can be public, as in most mass mediated controversies, or more closed for particular publics (such as scientific discourses). In the processing of discourses, discourse coalitions might emerge by effect – different and sometimes even opposing actors might use overlapping forms of statement production which serve to add to each other's power in a given case. These coalitions can be established intentionally too, certainly.



### **Practices**

The term *practice(s)* depicts very generally conventionalised action patterns which are made available in collective stocks of knowledge as a repertoire for action, that is, in other words, a more or less explicitly known, often incorporated script about the *proper* way of acting. *Discursive practices* are the communication events which realise a discursive statement production in a concrete situation. They can be observed and described as typical ways of acting out statement production whose implementation requires interpretive competence and active shaping by social actors. The social processing of discourses also takes place through ways of acting which do not primarily use signs, but which are essential for the statements of a discourse (for example, the construction or assembly of measuring instruments in order to prove specific statements about environmental pollution, or the collection of waste in order to measure its components). We can call them discourse related non-discursive practices. And finally, there are practices which are only loosely related to particular discourses, like taking a train or producing energy. Although they might be closely linked to certain discourses (like energy transition), they might be much less related to other discourses (like drug addiction). Nevertheless they are important in order to allow for scientists to meet and books to be published and so on. SKAD here again differentiates between the latter and between *model practices* generated in discourses, that is, exemplary patterns (or templates) for actions which are constituted in discourses for their addressees. For example, in environmental discourses, this might include recommendations for eco-friendly behaviour (turning the shower off while you shampoo your hair, using your bike, or preparing slow food).

### **Dispositifs of discourse production and world intervention**

The social actors who mobilise a discourse and who are mobilised by discourse establish a corresponding infrastructure of discourse production and problem solving which can be identified as a *dispositif*. Consider the state's need to get some *money of its own*: financial laws, administrative regulation, tax authorities, tax assessment, tax investigators all together, mixed up with texts, objects, actions and persons, constitute the *dispositif* in question. SKAD distinguishes between *dispositifs as infrastructures of discourse production* and *dispositifs as infrastructures of intervention and implementation emerging out of a discourse* (or out of several discourses) in order to deal with the real world phenomena addressed by discourses. Consider the issue arena of *the refugee crisis*: with reference to the discourse (re-)production level, these include the discursive interventions of the various managements, spokespersons, NGOs and press committees as well as the research centres which produce, diffuse and legitimise specific "problem statements", brochures and so on. With regard to

implementation one could include among these, for example, the legal regulation of responsibilities, formalised proceedings, specific objects, technologies, sanctions, courses of study, personal and other phenomena produced to intervene in this case of *urgency* (like the Mediterranean sea watch and border control boats).

SKAD therefore is not just textual analysis of signs in use, communication, textual or image research. It can be simultaneously case study, observation and even a dense *ethnographic description and analysis*, which considers the link between statement events, practices, actors, organisational arrangements and objects such as historical and far-reaching socio-spatial processes (see Hornidge and Feuer, Chapter 7, this volume; Elliker, Chapter 14, this volume).

### **Doing SKAD: about methods**

SKAD research, like other research in social sciences and the humanities, has to be led by a research interest or concern. Such a concern can be informed by a diverse range of motives: a comprehensive reading of literature, a theoretical interest, a curiosity about a particular event or process of problematisation, an engagement with power/knowledge regimes, their effects and their transformation. This has to be translated into more concrete questions referring to empirical cases for research and thereby leads to reflections about data collection and data analysis. Following a given research interest, such data might consist of highly diverse textual and visual documents, including sometimes media coverage and social media utterances, scientific reporting and publications, expert interviews (see Zhang and McGhee, Chapter 8, this volume) or group discussion; other cases will prefer ethnographic observation and so forth.

Foucault stated in one of his interviews that he does not establish a pre-given data corpus but preferred to be informed and guided by data and analysis, from one piece of data/step of analysis to the next one according to his results, upcoming new questions and other indications given by such data. This is close to the idea of theoretical sampling as formulated by grounded theory. Theoretical sampling implies reflecting upon and arguing good points for the entrance and continuation of research. Why might this piece of data be interesting to start with? Then, do the analysis and think about the next piece of data to look for. Given first results, what kind of data could be interesting for a next moment of analysis? According to your research interest, you might be able to identify big events (like scandals, disasters, manifestations, law making, parliamentary debate, a scientific invention or whatever), or moments of a major discursive conflict, or a minor struggle about the definition of the situation as a point of entry. A useful strategy is to look for comparative cases or longer time spans (if you are interested in a more genealogical perspective). How was a problem conceived of in the 1960s? What about ten years later? Had any

changes occurred? If not, then what about another ten years later? Yes? Then try to identify the phase of transformation and start from that in order to identify (new) involved actors, knowledges, events and discursive meaning making. According to grounded theory vocabulary, this can be called a strategy of minimal and maximal contrasting: For the latter, look for most different data in order to explore the broad range of a discursive structuration and then decide, if some document still performs the very same or rather a different, competing, opposing discourse? Use minimal contrasting, that is the most similar pieces of data in order to explore discursive elements more deeply. Criteria like “similarity at first glance” or “complete difference at first glance” are very useful to develop precise reconstruction of core elements, the latter being helpful to explore the range of heterogeneities in a discourse or discursive field. Use ethnographic approaches if you are interested in the situatedness and the work of dispositifs in discourse production and world intervention. Since today more and more discourse data are available as digitalised data, it becomes easier to work with computer-aided qualitative data analysis and software tools for documenting analysis. But one should keep in mind that, given that such programmes at hand are useful tools to organise research and data analysis, they do not replace the researchers’ tasks and interpretive strategies (see Luther and Schünemann, Chapter 15, this volume). And there is a growing risk of working only with *easy-to-access* data, and of no longer taking the time and pains to do archive research. The range of data to consider and the places or sites to look for them depend on your research interests. You will have to decide when enough is enough, when you will no longer find any new, interesting details or aspects. But be aware that analysis is never complete in an objectivist sense of *having it all*.

Close or deep readings of collected data (*natural* texts and audio-visual data, conducted interviews, etc.) imply two strategies. First, close reading serves as information gathering in order to get just *information* out of the data: information about involved actors in a given case of concern, about important events, artefacts, documents, knowledges, relation building, whatever. Mapping such information again and again can help you in pursuing, reflecting on and developing your research.<sup>12</sup> And mapping is useful for presenting results (see Keller, Chapter 2, this volume; Luther and Schünemann, Chapter 15, this volume). A different kind of analytical reading takes place when you work on the reconstruction of statement patterns like interpretive schemes, argument clusters, classifications, phenomenal structures, or narratives, as discussed above. Here you can start with a careful analysis of the document as document (see Prior, 2003): What does or should it perform, in which context? What are the general features of such documents? Then SKAD, like other qualitative approaches, favours sequential analysis of textual or visual data, a step by step elaboration of categories which give labels to patterns of meaning making (interpretive schemes, classifications, narratives), dimensions and fillers of phenomenal

structures, involved forms, legitimations and hierarchies of knowledge etc., much like the Foucauldian labelling of three different epistemes mentioned above (see Foucault, [1966] 2001). This step is about reconstructing the rules of discursive production in a given case of interest (see Keller, Chapter 4, this volume).

SKAD is not interested in the *consistency of meaning* inherent to *one* particular document of discourse per se – most speech acts humans perform are not really consistent (why should they be?). Therefore, it assumes that such data articulates some (not all) heterogeneous elements of discourse or that perhaps a piece of data is a crossing point of several discourses (as in many books or newspaper articles). So discourse research has to break up the surface unity of utterances. The mosaic of the analysed discourse or discourses in conflict and competition evolves incrementally out of this process. Writing research memos helps in reflecting on, readjusting, integrating and rethinking analysis (see Strauss, 1987).<sup>13</sup>

Please be aware that a sound analysis of data is the driver of empirical research, but in itself usually cannot be considered a successfully accomplished research project. During research you should not forget your questions or the theoretical concerns and discussions in the field you are working in. So try to include reflections on the question. What is my case a case of? What can I conclude from this case for a broader discussion or field of research? What has my research contributed to more general interests and discussions beyond the given case? What does it tell us about power/knowledge regimes, their dynamics and effects? Such reflections and their translation into theorising contribute to the lasting success of works in discourse research.

## Outlook

SKAD theory, methodology and methods have been presented here in a condensed way. More detailed argumentation can be found in the references given and in the empirical case studies which constitute this volume. These studies account for SKAD's coherence as an analytical framework, as well as for the need to adapt it to the diversity of given research interests and concerns. Current challenges (not only) for SKAD research include a more detailed account of the role of visualisation in discursive meaning making, emotional and affective dimensions of discourses, and a closer look at the materialities which are involved in discursive performance and discursive world intervention. Recent contributions from New Materialism and the affective turn have again placed a range of stimulating ideas on the agenda of the social sciences. But contrary to some arguments levelled against social constructivism in such work, SKAD assumes that its approach to discourse research can deal very effectively with such issues. There is no need to move beyond discourse analysis. Instead, its capacity promises productive exploration in the years to come.<sup>14</sup>

## Notes

- 1 The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) has been developed by the author since the late 1990s in Germany (see Keller 2005; 2011a; 2011b; 2012; 2019). The label was fixed in 2000 for a presentation in the first *German Handbook on Discourse Research in the Social Sciences* (Keller *et al.*, [2001] 2011). A follow-up book, *Doing Discourse Research* (Keller, 2013), introduced readers to different perspectives in discourse analysis, including several chapters presenting core SKAD research methodology. The theoretical ground and conceptual framework were designed in *The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse. Grounds for a Research Agenda* (Keller, [2005] 2011b), including a comprehensive discussion of the history of the sociology of knowledge and approaches to discourse research across disciplines. An English translation will be published in 2019. Articles and edited books as well as conference series followed, which further elaborated elements of SKAD. I refer readers to this work for a broader discussion of SKAD's methodology and relation to other approaches in the field of discourse research.

Meanwhile SKAD has spread widely into discourse analysis in German social sciences and related disciplines (consider for example the list of SKAD work at the end of this article). I used SKAD in work on public discourses around waste policies (see Keller, Chapter 4, this volume), in research on sociological knowledge production via qualitative methods in Germany and France, in a study of the legal regulation of prostitution in Germany, and in comparative studies on Hydraulic Fracturing and shale gas controversies or energy transition in Germany, France, and Poland. Supervised SKAD PhD work includes studies on language politics in Kazakhstan, the new eugenics after World War II in Germany, democracy building in Bulgaria, making futures in risk conflicts, and many others. Regular SKAD workshops in German and English are held at Augsburg University each year, as well as at other places around the world. Please refer to Keller's SKAD-Blog (see <http://kellersskad.blogspot.de>) or [www.diskurswissenschaft.de](http://www.diskurswissenschaft.de) for updated information.

- 2 SKAD can be considered a theory-methods-package much like grounded theory. That is, theory in SKAD does not refer to a system of cause-effect explanatory devices, but rather to what could be called in the English-speaking world a research agenda and a corresponding research methodology.
- 3 It is not by chance that the original SKAD book from 2005 started with a Stuart Hall quote:

Recent commentators have begun to recognize not only the real breaks and paradigm-shifts, but also the affinities and continuities between older and newer traditions of work; for example, between Weber's classical interpretative 'sociology of meaning' and Foucault's emphasis on the role of the 'discursive'.

(Hall, 1997: 224)

In his text titled "The Centrality of Culture" Hall suggested a definition of discourse related to knowledge and culture, quite close to SKAD. Later cultural studies did not pick up this definition but used discourse in a way closer to Critical Discourse Analysis work (Barker and Galasiński, 2001).

- 4 This refers to Anselm Strauss ([1993] 2008). For pragmatist philosophy see works by John Dewey and George Herbert Mead (on mind, action, and communication) and Charles S. Peirce (on signs) as well as early Chicago-school sociology.
- 5 This is a meeting point between pragmatist philosophy and social phenomenology as elaborated by Alfred Schütz ([1932] 1967) and his subsequent work in

the 1940s and 1950s (see Schütz, 1973a; Schütz and Luckmann, 1973), where he develops his own theory of signs in dialogue with pragmatism and language philosophies.

- 6 This is what Schütz wrote in 1945 on the existence of “multiple realities”. Such a statement is close to Foucauldian ideas about discursive formations (see below).
- 7 In English-language research communities, sociology of knowledge today is still mainly reduced to the sociology of the construction of scientific knowledge or STS. Such a shortcut ignores the historical tradition and range or scope of sociology of knowledge in classical French and German sociology.
- 8 Foucault held different ideas about the interests of discourse analysis (see Keller, 2008, 2017a).
- 9 The term *dispositif* is common in French; it refers to an ensemble of measures that is made available for a specific purpose, such as for a political, economic, or technical undertaking. In this, it is close to the English word *device*, but implies a more complex arrangement of elements in order to address a purpose. Such a complex constellation of relations is not the result of a social actor’s master plan, but the effect of an accumulation of diverse strategies. The common English translation as “apparatus” implies a much too machine-like view of such a constellation.
- 10 STS scholars have produced a large number of concepts (like boundary object, blackboxing, inscription) which can be very useful for SKAD research. For example arguments from material semiotics as established by John Law (2008) and from situational analysis by Adele Clarke (Clarke, Friese and Washburn, 2017) can be related to SKAD.
- 11 Foucault was interested in the analysis of the historical emergence of the modern subject in different fields of knowledge and politics. Most of his concrete research can be closely linked to his own life experiences (being born into a family of surgeons, working in asylums, being homosexual in a heteronormative social order, etc.).
- 12 See especially Clarke, Friese and Washburn (2017) on mapping.
- 13 To be clear: SKAD, unlike classical Grounded Theory, does not aim to explore particular “situations and (inter)actions” and their basic social processes, but ongoing discourses in social arenas. It is therefore closer to Situational Analysis (Clarke, Friese and Washburn, 2017).
- 14 See e.g. the response to affect theory by discourse analyst Margaret Wetherell (2012) or Keller (2017b) on Latour’s critique of discourse oriented work.

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