



# Power, Knowledge, and Language Hegemony from the Perspective of Michel Foucault

Rahmatullah<sup>1\*</sup>, Arlin Adam<sup>2</sup>, Syamsu A. Kamaruddin<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sociology Doctoral Program, Makassar State University, Makassar, South Sulawesi | email: [ullahrahmatullah19@gmail.com](mailto:ullahrahmatullah19@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Sociology Doctoral Program, Makassar State University, Makassar, South Sulawesi | email: [arlin.adam73@gmail.com](mailto:arlin.adam73@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>Sociology Doctoral Program, Makassar State University, Makassar, South Sulawesi | email: [syamsukamaruddin@gmail.com](mailto:syamsukamaruddin@gmail.com)

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## Article Info

### Article history:

Received 17 December, 2023

Revised 02 January, 2024

Accepted 11 January, 2024

### Keywords:

Power;  
Knowledge;  
Language Hegemony

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## ABSTRACT

Philosophy is present to answer human questions that are not addressed by other fields of knowledge. Every branch of knowledge begins with philosophy and ends with art. This means that all sciences, both natural and social sciences, originate from philosophy before undergoing further development. As the foundation of knowledge, philosophy questions sciences based on ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects. This paper is compiled from a literature review (library research method) of Foucault's works, the works of theorists mapping Foucault's social thoughts, and research based on Foucault's approach. The literature study method is a study used to gather information and data with the help of various materials available in the library, such as documents, books, magazines, and so on. Many contributions have been made by Foucault to the intellectual world, whether in philosophy, culture, social, political, or artistic fields. One of Foucault's significant contributions in philosophy and politics is his concept of power. Therefore, acquiring knowledge through educational programs requires power, in this case, referring to proficient language abilities, and conversely, gaining power requires knowledge. Knowledge indeed holds power and brings about authority, and obtaining knowledge also requires authority. The results of this thinking can be observed in real-life, such as in the United States, which has become a superpower due to the abundance of information received and language hegemony that demonstrates a balance of power.

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## Corresponding Author:

Authors Name : Rahmatullah

Sociology Doctoral Program, Makassar State University, Makassar, South Sulawesi

Email: [ullahrahmatullah19@gmail.com](mailto:ullahrahmatullah19@gmail.com)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is present in every aspect of human life. Philosophy exists to address questions that cannot be answered by other fields of knowledge. According to philosophers, every branch of knowledge begins with philosophy and ends with art. This means that all sciences, both natural and social sciences, originate from philosophy before developing further. Moreover, normative and deductive methods in science are created based on norms contained within philosophy. As the founder of knowledge, philosophy questions sciences based on ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects [1]. The three of them are the foundations of knowledge. Firstly, in ontology arises the question: "what is being studied?" Secondly, epistemologists pose the question: "How is this knowledge acquired?" Thirdly, axiologists ask the question "For what purpose is this knowledge used?" These three things are used to understand the knowledge itself.

After reigning for approximately three centuries, the power of modernism as the foundation of the philosophy of knowledge has collapsed, and postmodernism has taken its place. Postmodernism, emerging in

the early 20th century, is essentially a movement that spans various aspects of civilization, including art, architecture, and philosophy. In the latter context, postmodernism is fundamentally a critique of Western Modern Philosophy, particularly the knowledge orientation grounded in a singular truth in its philosophical thought products, namely, logos, which literally means knowledge [2]. Logos implies the pinnacle position in the structure of knowledge truth, where the authority of meaning is unquestionable. The consequence of this epistemological pattern is the birth of a dichotomous gap between the thinking subject and the object of thought, or what is referred to as the one (self) and the other (other). The former dominates the latter in terms of metaphysical truth [3]. The far-reaching impact of such a truth structure gives rise to civilization products that value Western superiority as the "self" over others as the "other," such as colonialism.

The postmodern agenda aims to unravel dichotomous relationships that emerge through language. For postmodern philosophers, language becomes an instrument of truth, and they deconstruct it by, for example, elevating the "other" as a form of resistance or tracing the traces left by metaphysics. Ultimately, individuals are free to interpret or give meaning to any thought because the author or the authoritative subject that gives birth to philosophical ideas is considered dead. "The author is dead," as per the idea put forth by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), a French-Algerian philosopher. According to him, the world we know and understand through language is merely a play of signs that refer to meaning (logos). Language is a text or a knowledge structure consisting of meaning structures formulated by the author to establish their conception of something. Since there is no authority in meaning, there is no absolute truth. Therefore, Derrida deconstructs or dismantles signs in language, picks up the debris left from the text's structure, then rearranges it, dismantles it again, and so forth [4].

The workings of postmodernism become much clearer when we delve into the thoughts of Michel Foucault (1926-1984), also a French postmodern philosopher. While Derrida focuses on deconstructing the authority of knowledge by deconstructing sign systems in language, Foucault openly attacks modernism by exposing the power that constrains knowledge. Thinkers or philosophers have their own perspectives on the sciences contained within philosophy, and one of them is Foucault. Foucault's original name is Michel Foucault. He was a French philosopher born in 1926. Foucault studied under Jean Hippolyte and Louis Althusser. Before publishing the book titled "Madness and Civilization: A History of Madness in the Age of Reason," he was a foreign diplomat, illustrating clearly how his thoughts were shaped and understood by many.

Foucault was a left-wing figure of his time. He was actively involved in various left-wing groups participating in anti-racism campaigns, human rights violation movements, and prison reform struggles. Foucault's thoughts have had a broad influence on various scientific studies, especially social sciences like anthropology and sociology, including how we indirectly perceive history as a science. As a philosopher, many works and theories emerged from Foucault's thoughts. These theories are used as guiding principles in science. Foucault's created theories and concepts address the relationship between power and knowledge, and how both are used to construct social control through social institutions, especially in prisons and hospitals. Foucault's work shows that power issues have been the focus of his attention throughout his intellectual career. Foucault focuses on explicit discussions of power and its relationship with knowledge. Foucault's concept of power has a different meaning than the concept of power that colors the political perspective from a Marxist or Weberian perspective.

Foucault's thoughts on power are more influenced by Nietzsche. However, Foucault often disagrees with Nietzsche. According to Foucault, power is used to regulate its people. In fact, he believed he knew about his sexual life from the policies of Queen Victoria I, who dominated her government. This includes issues of sexuality that are personal and private matters. According to him, free sexual life must be free from propriety. Here, it seems that power, as defined by Foucault, must be limited by the governance system. Foucault's thoughts on power are interesting to discuss because looking at his background and theoretical perspectives, Foucault becomes very intriguing. Foucault himself was born into a family of philosophers, but his research focus lies in the social sciences or humanities. His enthusiasm for the social sciences is the result of learning from several previous experts. His thoughts contribute to the field of knowledge that is still studied to this day.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

To assist in data retrieval, this paper is constructed through a literature review (library research method) of Foucault's works, the works of theorists who map Foucault's social thoughts, and research that adopts Foucauldian approaches. The literature study method is a research approach used to gather information and data with the aid of various materials available in the library, such as documents, books, magazines, and so on [5]. This method is chosen because it is not feasible to conduct field study research and directly inquire from the thinkers themselves, in this case, Foucault.

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### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Philosophical thoughts of Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a prominent French thinker and scholar of the 20th century. He possessed a wealth of knowledge and showed particular attention to various disciplines and fields of study [6]. Foucault was born in Poitiers, France in 1926. He grew up in a devoutly Catholic family, where his father was a practicing surgeon [7]. Due to his father's profession as a surgeon, his family hoped that Foucault would continue his father's work. However, from a young age, Foucault was more interested in the field of history, which later evolved into philosophy [8]. Foucault is better known as one of the post-modernist thinkers alongside several of his peers such as Gilles Deleuze, François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and many others. Examining his various works, Foucault extensively attempted to trace and dissect epistemological changes across various fields of knowledge. He introduced concepts such as power/knowledge, episteme, genealogy and archaeology, and other concepts, along with the notion that truth is a regime. His various ideas continue to be used and studied to this day. His thoughts remain relevant for understanding social facts and contemporary cultural developments. However, his ideas are still debated. Nonetheless, this returns to the essence of science, which exists to be debated, and the identity of philosophy, which exists to be questioned.

Foucault was a simultaneous critic of knowledge and social critic. In his extensive exploration of the history of knowledge, Foucault was assisted by two figures in formulating major ideas and concepts about the history of reasoning into a critical idea about truth and meaning within the social and cultural context. These figures were Martin Heidegger and Georges Canguilhem. Through a series of thoughts, he successfully applied various ideas and concepts that could explain phenomena occurring in society. One of Foucault's well-known concepts is power/knowledge. In his book "Power/Knowledge," Foucault argues that power is a mechanism that creates the rationality of law and knowledge as tools to enforce broader power [9]. Power and knowledge have a reciprocal relationship. Power can serve as a justification tool for law and knowledge. Similarly, by utilizing knowledge, power can be acquired.

Foucault's understanding of power differs from the commonly held notion of power. Power is often interpreted as the ability to influence others to behave and think in accordance with the desires of the influencer, a concept that tends to be coercive and sometimes involves violence. However, Foucault offers a new perspective on power, where it is seen as rational, positive, productive, and discursive relationships. For Foucault, power is not understood as a relationship of ownership, such as property, income, or privileges that can be acquired by a small group in society and are susceptible to extinction [10]. Power spreads within societal relationships, not centralized in one person or institution. Thus, power can be viewed positively. For Foucault, power is seen not as something encompassing, but as generating knowledge, with the two intricately intertwined. Power and knowledge are like two sides of a coin juxtaposed with each other. Therefore, every instance of power is related to the formation of knowledge, and the formation of knowledge can directly shape power relationships. Foucault extensively discusses the relations that occur among humans and how power is practiced in the context of culture and communication between individuals. Power can be utilized both repressively and dominantly, meaning someone can control others, but what Foucault refers to is power in terms of strategies and interhuman relations. Power is practiced in society as a strategy to exert influence on others.

To understand power as a strategic relation, one can find various key ideas; First, power essentially emerges from relations among various forces. It can be said that power is absolute and a priori, meaning it is not dependent on human consciousness. It is clear that power does not belong to individuals or groups that can be distributed; Second, power is not located in one point but is dispersed everywhere. Thus, power cannot be localized. Power exists where there are structures and relations among humans; Third, power is seen as a mechanism or strategy that emphasizes practices and functions in a specific field. In every power relation, there is a struggle strategy. This strategy takes the form of power influencing others; Fourth, power is closely related to knowledge. With the occurrence of power practices resulting from relations among humans, knowledge can be defined and take shape. For Foucault, knowledge does not emerge from a subject who knows something. Instead, knowledge arises as a result of power relations among humans. It can be concluded that knowledge would not exist without power, and vice versa, power would not exist without knowledge; Fifth, power usually arises from below and is essentially non-repressive. The essence of power is not domination, where someone can have power over others. Power operates through the regulation and normalization of what occurs in human relations; Sixth, where there is power, there is always resistance. Every resistance in society can be directly responded to through action. Actions resulting from resistance must be carried out in a state of freedom and mutual acceptance.

The purpose of Foucault's thoughts on power or knowledge is for individuals to develop independently and find their own forms that align with their desires. When an individual can regulate themselves well, they can also effectively govern others. Thus, power is not something to be possessed by a group of people or a state; instead, power is everywhere and can be held by anyone through relations among humans. Foucault aims to show that we, as individuals, are part of the power mechanism. Therefore,

individuals must be aware of their position in the power relations that occur. Through this awareness, a desire is created to wield power in a good and proper manner. However, in reality, many individuals in society are still unaware of their roles in the power mechanism. Although Foucault's ideas are widely recognized and practiced by many, it is possible that his thoughts may conflict with the ideas of others. Nevertheless, studying the concepts of power and knowledge from Foucault's perspective is not in vain. The contributions of Foucault's ideas can be utilized in various social fields in society.

### 3.2 Power dan Knowledge

Previously, we often understood knowledge as something independent, separate from the intervention of specific power with the principle of objectivity. Even to maintain the objectivity of knowledge, emotional aspects and matters related to personal interests had to be set aside. This effort was made so that the acquired knowledge findings would be objective. This understanding suddenly shifted when Foucault stated that knowledge is not something we simply discover and accept as a detached truth from power. According to Foucault, knowledge has been infiltrated by power from the beginning, framing our perspectives and paradigms in how we perceive things. Through discourse, power infiltrates in the form of theories and paradigms [11]. Foucault's perspective on power and knowledge seems to unveil a reality that has been obscured for centuries by claims of objectivity and universality. For Foucault himself, the power relations and knowledge that subsequently create a truth are an unavoidable reality.

So, how does Foucault explain that power can infiltrate knowledge? According to Joseph Rouse, power infiltrates to legitimize the truth of knowledge through two simultaneous levels: political power and epistemic power. Through political power, the state or government can create one (or several) perspectives that are then accepted as truth in society. With its power, the state (seemingly) has the right to determine which views are correct and which are wrong. This can be done through censorship mechanisms, as is often done in authoritarian countries. Meanwhile, through the epistemic route, universities or research institutions become institutions that determine something as scientific or unscientific. According to Rouse, what political power and epistemic power do is an effort to normalize judgments to align with normative constructions. The term "norm" here refers, of course, to norms in the sense of a specific power. This process ultimately produces a standard of normality. The consequence of this process is that everything outside of "normality" will be judged as something abnormal (not in accordance with existing norms).

In the "Discourse on Language," a lecture given by Foucault at the Collège de France in 1970, he explains how language, which plays a crucial role in discourse, is controlled by power. According to Foucault, in every society, the production of discourse is always controlled, selected, regulated, and redistributed according to predetermined procedures. In language, we encounter what is known as exclusionary practices, an effort to exclude certain discourses because they are deemed "incorrect." The most evident aspect of this practice is what later became known as the prohibition of discussing certain themes (prohibited words). In this sense, discourse is forbidden because it is considered taboo (by those in power). Among the things that cannot be freely discussed are topics related to sexuality and politics, especially in authoritarian regimes. These taboo topics are always censored to prevent them from spreading into public discussions.

In addition to the concept of taboo, language also creates a mechanism known as binary opposition, namely the establishment of the black-white dichotomy. Through this mechanism, language users are compelled to distinguish between discourse labeled as reasonable (reason) and unreasonable (folly), between sanity and insanity. With this dichotomy, we are constantly required to speak within the framework considered reasonable (by those in power). The mechanism to create classifications of right-wrong is usually based on the human desire to always approach truth and knowledge. The desire for truth has excluded all discourses unrelated to truth and knowledge. The desire for knowledge, whether consciously or unconsciously, has forced those who want to be called intellectuals to speak in academic terms. In this case, the principle of truth in knowledge, with its authority as present in hospitals, also has the right to define what is called madness.

According to Foucault, the exclusion mechanism mentioned above is an external exclusion mechanism in the sense that the prohibitive and right-wrong dichotomy mechanisms come from outside the discourse itself. Besides the external ones, he suggests there is another mechanism called the internal exclusion process. Among these internally exclusionary mechanisms is commentary. In the world of texts, we are familiar with what is known as the grand narrative that was once told, then retold, and subsequently commented upon. This practice is nothing more than a repetition or inter-textual repetition. According to Foucault (as we commonly understand), we need to distinguish between what is referred to as Primary Text and Secondary Text. These two texts have mutual dependence; however, the crucial point to emphasize here is that the role of the secondary text functions more as a commentary. According to Foucault, there is nothing new in the secondary text; what happens is merely an attempt to present again what has already been said in the primary text.

In discourse, especially in academic discourse, we are also required to have the ability to integrate many scattered principles as data and turn them into a particular unity in the form of coherent writing or statements. This mechanism, referred to by Foucault as the author mechanism, demands the skill to synthesize various principles into a cohesive whole. If someone can do this, they can be called an author or someone considered to have authority in a specific field. This mechanism operates internally within discourse. This can be seen as a process of power expansion from something internal within language, then spreading to the actor who is later recognized as an expert or authority. With one's success in achieving expert status, they are considered to have the authority or power to judge something as true or false (scientific or unscientific) [12].

In addition to the restriction mechanisms mentioned above, Foucault also addresses another limitation mechanism called disciplines. In language, he argues that humans are disciplined to adhere to linguistic rules, such as the use of subject and predicate, and so on. Disciplining, in this context, refers to a set of rules that must be considered as true. Through this set of rules considered true, it organizes and controls all behavior [13]. In "Discipline and Punish," for instance, Foucault elaborated on how the regulation and disciplining initially operated. According to him, through the process of disciplining, our bodies are arranged (subdued) in such a way that we move docilely. In this context, power regulates and organizes the manners, habits, and behaviors of our bodies.

### 3.3 Knowledge for Language: Language Hegemony

The study proving that knowledge is power can be implicated in various fields, one of which is the ability of humans to master a language to gain control over other forms of knowledge. In essence, language proficiency represents one of the forms of modern hegemony. Considering the author's background in the field of history, possessing language proficiency, besides the mother tongue, enhances the author's thinking abilities. This proficiency proves more beneficial when compared to imagining the author lacking such abilities. With the author's unique experiences, it becomes impossible for others to attain the same experiences, regardless of the inherently unique nature of human beings. Education is not only meant for "enriching oneself with the ability to think"; there is also a form of hegemony or power that governs the truth within the realm of knowledge.

Taking the time frame from the arrival of the VOC trading ship in the Indonesian archipelago in 1598 until the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945, there were at least the Netherlands, France, and England, as well as Japan, that made their mark on Indonesia's history. Naturally, the history they documented was expressed in their own languages, and not all individuals could comprehend the languages of the histories they created during their time in Indonesia.

The previously mentioned limitations in language proficiency can hinder an individual from learning about the history of their own nation. Studying one's own history serves as an essential container for instilling the spirits and values of nationalism and the struggle of the Indonesian nation [14]. Facing the increasingly advanced technological developments, as evidenced by the advent of the Society 5.0 era, history has been able to instill human values and concepts of humanism. Therefore, to realize the Society 5.0 era, which replaces the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Indonesians are required to first be capable of learning and understanding the history of their own nation [15]. So it can be clearly understood what the impact would be on Indonesia as a great nation if it does not study its own history.

Returning to the previous section on language proficiency. As a universal language, English is part of hegemony [16]. As in the case of the United States, which can dominate the world with its knowledge, the same applies to the proficiency in the English language. Colonial practices in the Indonesian archipelago left various events documented in various writings. For example, when the Dutch engaged in colonialism in the Dutch East Indies, it was recorded in the Dutch language. To understand the events that the Dutch carried out in the Dutch East Indies, as recorded in the Dutch writings, this is where the hegemony of a language begins to take place. The Dutch writings (now transformed into primary historical sources) are translated into English to meet the demands of a universal language. The Indonesian people, as the hosts where these events took place, are "forced" to learn English to understand their own nation's struggle. For those who do not master English, they are unable to fully comprehend a historical event. This is where the power of foreign languages, especially English, is evident in education, specifically in studying history. The hegemony of language is not limited to the field of historical science; it also applies to other disciplines, especially to access sources of information that are more extensive and relevant. Furthermore, regarding language proficiency, it is also tied to the pronunciation of a language or the speaker's accent. Due to a lack of sufficient power, individuals must possess and adapt their speaking accent to what is considered "good." One example is that good English is often associated with an American or British pronunciation, which is deemed as the standard English accent [17].

As a tool used for daily socialization, language cannot be separated from life. Language hegemony extends beyond the field of education to the everyday use of language in Indonesia, especially in the regional languages of the archipelago that have levels or language structures. An example of language hegemony in

regional languages can be seen in the structural order of the Javanese language, which has its own levels (speech of level) depending on and to whom the language is spoken. There are speech levels consisting of ngoko lugu, ngoko andhap, antya basa, basa antya, wredha krama, mudha krama, kramantara, madya ngoko, madya krama, madyantara, krama inggil, and krama desa. Additionally, there are specific language levels for the Javanese royal court known as kedhaton and bagongan. In brief, when speaking to someone older or respected, the language level used will be higher, and vice versa. Not only in the use of the Javanese language, but there is also the Japanese language which has specific rules in its speech, somewhat similar to the Javanese language. The levels of speech in the Japanese language can be divided into three: futsu or ordinary form, teinei as a polite form, and keigo as a form of respectful speech. Similar to the speech in the Javanese language, specifically, the keigo level in Japanese speech is intended to refine the language used by the first person (speaking or writing), to respect the second person (listening or reading), and also the third person (being talked about) [18].

Besides the two languages mentioned earlier, speech levels also exist in the Korean language, which has six (some mention seven) speech levels [19]. Still similar to the function of speech levels in the two languages mentioned earlier, these speech levels are intended to show respect to those who are older than the speaker. Through the example of the three languages, there is a similarity regarding the function of the speech levels in each language, which is to show respect to those who are older and/or to honor the interlocutor. It is evident how power relations, as explained by Foucault can be observed; the higher the speech level used by someone, the higher the power they possess. Following the same statement, to assert power over oneself or over an individual or group, the individual will use a speech level that "degrades" their interlocutor, such as using ngoko lugu in Javanese or using the futsu variety in Japanese, both of which are aimed at ordinary people. Speech levels are not only about showing respect to interlocutors; the power relation in uttering a vocabulary in society is also a form of differentiation among community members [20], especially for those who hold power or are considered to have lower power or are deemed to have no power at all. Power is formed in something intangible, just like power in language speech levels mentioned in this section. Just consider how human individuals speak to their "superiors" or how a "superior" speaks to someone considered their "subordinate"; it is clear how power can be seen from the way they speak.

Finally, language proficiency cannot be possessed by everyone due to the differing abilities of each individual. Foreign languages, especially English, hold hegemony in the world of education (as well as various other fields). By learning English or other foreign languages, language proficiency can lead individuals to access a wider range of information that enhances their thinking abilities. One of Foucault's ideas is the existence of power that brings about knowledge and vice versa. Therefore, obtaining knowledge through an educational program requires power, where power, in this case, refers to proficient language skills. This also works the other way around; to gain power, knowledge is necessary. Knowledge indeed holds power and brings about authority, and to acquire knowledge, power is also required.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Michel Foucault is one of the great thinkers in history. He has made significant contributions to the intellectual world in the fields of philosophy, culture, society, politics, and the arts. One of Foucault's major contributions in philosophy and politics is his concept of power. Unlike other thinkers who have expounded on the concepts of power, Foucault presents a new perspective on power. According to Foucault, power is not something solely controlled by the state, something measurable. For him, power is everywhere because it is a dimension of relations. This is where Foucault's uniqueness lies. He does not define what power is but how power functions in specific fields. Knowledge and power work like two sides of the same coin. They are inseparable. Power produces knowledge, and knowledge has power effects. This is the essence of Foucault's theory of power and knowledge relations. Foucault defines power strategies as inherent in the desire to know. Knowledge is a way of exercising power over a particular object.

Language proficiency cannot be possessed by everyone due to the differing abilities of each individual. Foreign languages, especially English, hold hegemony in the world of education (as well as various other fields). By learning English or other foreign languages, language proficiency can lead individuals to access a wider range of information that enhances their thinking abilities. One of Foucault's ideas is the existence of power that brings about knowledge and vice versa. Therefore, obtaining knowledge through an educational program requires power, where power, in this case, refers to proficient language skills. This also works the other way around; to gain power, knowledge is necessary. Knowledge indeed holds power and brings about authority, and to acquire knowledge, power is also required. This line of thought can be observed in real-life situations, such as in the United States, which has become a superpower due to the abundance of information received and language hegemony that demonstrates a balance of power.

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