

A Foucauldian Approach to Climate Change Discourse

How can the climate change discourse in Canada's "2030 Emissions Reduction Plan" shed light on the problem of allocating responsibility?



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Abstract

This thesis sheds light on the complexities of climate change discourse by applying Foucauldian discourse analysis to the Canadian 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan. Through a six-step analysis process, the thesis intends to investigate the effects of discourse on the understanding of climate change and the consequences of constituting knowledge through discourse. The six-step process addresses discursive constructions, discourses, action orientation, positioning, practice, and subjectivity. Foucault's theory of knowledge/power and discourse is used as a theoretical perspective for the thesis. The theoretical framework is applied to discuss how responsibility allocation may become problematic through the idea that knowledge allows its subject of it to become an object of underlying power structures. Thus, this discussion argues that social and economic development becomes prioritized over environmental preservation because of underlying political power structures. This is argued through Foucault's theory of knowledge/power as a case of dominating and repressing language which ultimately produces knowledge. This allows knowledge to be an object of power. The discussion also illustrates that discourse has a profound effect on the allocation of responsibility for efficient environmental governance.

Keywords: Climate change, Foucauldian critical discourse analysis, power, knowledge, responsibility, Canada

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1 Introduction

1.1 Contextualization

In the 1972 article “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, Peter Singer argues that if you witness something bad that you could prevent, you would (Singer, 1972, p. 231). This argument derives from Singer’s affluent drowning child thought experiment which critically argues the assumption that states if you were to pass a child drowning, you would disregard inconveniences, such as materialistic consequences, to save the child (Singer, 1972, p. 231). Essentially the consequences of not saving the child would be far worse than the materialistic consequences of saving the child. In Singer’s case, he exemplifies materialism by the hypothetical premise that you may have just bought a pair of expensive shoes that would ultimately be destroyed in the act of saving the drowning child. However, the clarity of that same moral compass becomes cloudy when the same child is several thousand kilometers away. As a result of the implications of geographical distance, obligation depletes, empathy resides as simply a feeling rather than an incentive to act (Singer, 1972, p. 232). We can argue this for climate change. So, if we know that climate change is an ongoing problem and countries are aware that they can do something to prevent further disaster, where is the obligation? Why has responsibility allocation become the problem? The obligation of humanity, as Singer presents, argumentatively could extend to the responsibility of humanity to salvage the environment to prevent the consequences of climate change by mitigating and adapting policy (Singer, 2006, p. 417). Potential argumentation lies in materialistic economic interests and market-based interests, including trade, preventing effective and relevant policy implementation. There is an ongoing complexity in the politicization of climate change and what politics is doing to allocate responsibility and collectively solve the issue (Singer, 2006, p. 419). Environmental politics and international environmental agreements actively aim to solve this issue and involve nations in international cooperation. So, this begs the question, where is the progress? Who takes responsibility for mitigating climate change?

1.2 Problem and Purpose

The purpose of this study is not to test a theory but rather with the help of theory, critically analyze the discourse through a Foucauldian lens. The aim of the thesis has been guided by the question of what are the impacts of the constructed discourse and what are the consequences on environmental governance?

The thesis aims to shed light on the consequences of the discourse provided in the official rhetoric by the Canadian government. The 2030 emissions reduction plan published by the Canadian government is one of the responses to climate change adapted because of the Paris climate agreement (Canada, 2020). They present a national interest in global political and diplomatic cooperation on the issue of climate change and minimizing CO₂ emissions to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees (Canada, 2020). An example of this is their approach to the Powering Past Coal Alliance, PPCA, to establish a national goal to phase out coal by 2030 in Canada (Canada, 2020). In a country that is so largely coal-dependent in terms of both energy and economic security there are many dimensions of political implications where it is questionable to consider the rhetoric and the action. If emissions are decreasing and Canada's energy transition is positively impacting within national boundaries, how come exports are increasingly shifting the problem of coal to other countries without having to face economic consequences?

1.3 Motivation and brief literature review

The politicization of climate change has been on the rise in contemporary politics, nonetheless regarding the debate on responsibility for mitigation (Kamarck, 2019). As the debate evolves the dimensions increase and countless factors contribute to how climate change as a political issue is being addressed. As Governor Bill Ritter stated in the Colorado Climate Action plan in 2007: *“Climate change is our generation's greatest environmental challenge. It threatens our economy, our Western way of life, and our future. It will change every facet of our existence, and unless we adapt to it, the results will be catastrophic for years to come”* (Ritter, 2007). The question however remains not only what is or isn't being done but how the problem itself is a subject of climate change discourse.

Current social scientific investigations of the topic of discourse and climate change mainly address policy and language within policy, often through the methodological approach of the policy analysis (Martinus J. Vink, 2013, p. 45). A large emphasis is applied to the analysis of what is being done, investigations on policy, and international environmental agreements, particularly as a governance issue (Martinus J. Vink, 2013, p. 45). A gap in the research points to a scientific relevance that needs to address not only the action but the discourse behind the action. To understand the motivations of policy, there needs to understand a

discourse that either prevents or allows for certain actions reflected in policy. Therefore, the thesis aims to explore not what is or isn't being done but the discourse.

It is often argued that action speaks louder than words. However, it may be relevant to argue that the words are what dictate the action. How discourse is or isn't, is an indication of something we must examine to better understand the practice. Understanding this may bring forth an ability to further research how we can contextualize and theorize the approach to the issue of climate change and to what extent the politicization of climate change has led to an entirely different approach to political issues. This forms the foundation of the thesis as an exploration to examining discourse and illuminating the dimensional consequences of discourse in environmental governance through climate politics.

1.4 Defining discourse

What discourse is and how it should be defined is vastly relative and hence, moving forward in the thesis the definition of discourse is prevalent. The Oxford English dictionary defines discourse as *“the use of language in speech and writing to produce meaning”* (Dictionary, u.d.). Michel Foucault views discourse in similar terms, emphasizing the production of knowledge through language. More specifically, Foucault defines knowledge as clearly interpreted by Chris Weedon in the 1996 article “Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory” on page 108 as *“ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them”*. This definition will be applied to the understanding of discourse within the thesis. Further one must understand the intertextuality of discourse which is also prevalent in the thesis (Fairclough, 1992, p. 195). Discourses will undoubtedly refer to other discourses within it which requires consideration of the intertextuality (Fairclough, 1992, p. 195).

Further, Stuart Hall emphasizes that for Foucault, discourse can be defined as: *“A group of statements which provides a language for talking about - a way of representing knowledge about - a particular historical moment ... discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But... since all social practices entail meaning and meanings shape and influence what we do - our conduct - all practices have a discursive aspect”* (Hall, 2005, p. 72). If we assume this understanding of Foucault's discussion of discourse, discourse can, hence, be identified as the official rhetoric of the Canadian government.

1.5 Research question

How can the climate change discourse in Canada's "2030 Emissions Reduction Plan" shed light on the problem of allocating responsibility?

The research question, on an abstract level, aims to illustrate one way in which Foucault's theories can reflect the current politicization of climate change. This is done by emphasizing a specific formulation of the research question rather than a broad linguistic which allows for applying a critical lens, particularly in one case being Canada. However, the generalizability level should be taken into consideration as it primarily aims to shed light on a particular discourse whereas it may not be generalizable to the climate change discourse on a global scale. Hence, the method and argumentation in the analysis and discussion should not be viewed as a general adoption of Foucault's theory but rather as an investigation into one applicable case and how in this case a conclusion can be drawn.

To answer the question, the structure of the paper primarily addresses the background of environmental efforts in Canada as a response to the Paris agreement, followed by the presentation of the theoretical framework. Here, the main effort is in understanding the complex and sophisticated interpretation of Foucauldian theories of power, knowledge, and discourse as well as the critical theory. These will be prevalent in the investigation conducted by the thesis. Following this, the methods section emphasizes the application of the theory and the analytical approach using Foucauldian discourse analysis, FDA, to approach the research question. To begin to answer the research question the analysis section further systematically analysis the Canadian 2030 emissions reduction plan through the six-step process applicable to FDA. In the following sections, the application of the theoretical approach and the analytical approach combine to become the basis for the discussion. This is followed by concluding remarks looking back at the research question to meet the purpose and aim of the thesis.

2 Background

2.1 Environmental efforts in Canada

Canada has become a rising actor in the debate on climate change and environmental governance, particularly regarding the coal industry. As mentioned above, because of the Paris Agreement, Canada has chosen to act upon the goal by phasing out coal as a primary source of energy and hence, decreasing national fossil fuel emissions. To do this entails switching to a sustainable source of energy, meaning an energy transition (Canada, 2020). However, Canada has, through climate plans and politics, taken on numerous environmental efforts and climate initiatives.

The UNFCCC multilateral assessment report from 2021 effectively summarizes Canada's climate action from the year following the Paris agreement until the present day (Canada, 2021). The overview aims to illustrate the commitment seen in Canada's climate politics following the Paris agreement in 2015. In 2016 the initial report following the Paris agreement became the first produced climate plan nationally for Canada which aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Canada, 2020, p. 3). A range of climate initiatives falls under the "Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change (PCF)" mainly focusing on green investments and emissions reduction. Investments were made in both transportation and infrastructure to increase access to zero-emission vehicles and infrastructural adaptations to climate change and resulting natural disasters (Canada, 2020, p. 3). The framework also set out to address the energy sector by pricing both carbon pollution, methane emissions, and phasing out of coal which is related to the PPCA (Canada, 2020, p. 3).

Further in Canada's development of climate change policy, the strengthening of climate plans followed in both 2018 and 2020. In the 2020 climate plan "A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy" an additional budget increase of 17.6 billion dollars was invested in green recovery for adaptation to climate change (Canada, 2020, p. 4). Following the 2020 strengthened plan, the 2021 federal budget addressed additional incentives in investments, particularly green recovery (Canada, 2020, p. 5). The additional 17.6 billion dollars that were suggested in the proposed budget ensured investments in infrastructural improvements to recover and adapt to the consequences of climate change such as natural disasters (Canada, 2020, p. 5). It also included interests in supporting climate change research and scientific

development which relied heavily on an investment tax credit that would ensure the running of relevant projects (Canada, 2020, p. 5). Many, arguably all, climate plans that have been introduced focus both on the economy and the environment.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Foucault

Throughout his life and his work, Foucault takes vast influences from a radical reading of his work, creating a skeptical nihilistic view of the world and humanity (Rosenberg, 2019). Much of Foucault's work expresses criticism of political resistance. An important political implication of Foucault's theories is recognizing his transitioning from Marxist communism to the appraisal of anarchism, emphasizing the removal of agency due to structuralist influences to allow for freedom (Rosenberg, 2019). Therefore, freedom for Foucault translates into a refusal to be governed by (Schneck, 1987, p. 30). In the thesis, the theoretical approach will not take on the idea that governing and governance should be abolished. The thesis will rather focus on analytically criticizing the discourse present in the climate change debate and environmental policy governance. Therefore, the main theoretical approaches emphasize the aspects of criticizing governance from a stance of power structures and critique of derived knowledge rather than critiquing the concept of governance (Schneck, 1987, p. 30).

3.2 Michel Foucault: Knowledge/Power

To understand Michel Foucault's theoretical demonstration of discourse, one must comprehend the basis of what Foucault defines as knowledge and power. Traditional theories of politics originate from Aristotle's understanding of the six regimes and how he identified these by the number of rulers, the public interest, and the personal interest (Philosophy, 1998). Many political theorists such as Steven Lukes have understood the concept of power through this understanding of hierarchical structures resulting in theories such as the three faces of power that penetrate the society (Schneck, 1987). However, Foucault argues that power can't be seen as a hierarchical structure but should rather be understood as a free-flowing entity, subjective and relative (Schneck, 1987, pp. 17-18).

In theoretical terms, knowledge, according to Foucault, should be broken down into discursive practice and how this is used to regulate individuals' conduct (Schneck, 1987, p. 19). To do this one must understand the influence that power/knowledge has on allowing yet limiting social practices in the political sphere. Foucault doesn't reject the idea that power constraints, however, he argues that power does more than just control and repress. For Foucault, power through knowledge produces what we know to be reality and power relations that both enable and constrain (Schneck, 1987, p. 30). This allows us to continue the discussion of knowledge/power and thus the relations to discourse.

Foucault argues that power both generates knowledge and knowledge makes one submissive to power (Schneck, 1987, p. 29). To contextualize this, we take a common example from Foucault's work "Discipline and Punish The birth of the prison" in which he argues the structures within the school are what discipline the person. This doesn't necessarily refer to the hierarchal relationships between say student and teacher but rather refers to the surrounding structures that dominate the person (Foucault, 1977, pp. 190-220). He mentions the way that desks are aligned, and how we use bells to indicate periods and associations to these. What he aims to point out is that these structures incentivize the person to internalize these power structures such that they become our understanding of the world. Hence, the knowledge derived from these underlying assumptions dominates us (Foucault, 1977, pp. 190-220). This dominance thus results from discourse formulated by the current social power relations and structures which exist within the society.

3.3 Discourse according to Foucault

Our language, the way we speak about something or write about a current contemporary problem is manifested by the structures of power in our society and what knowledge has derived from this presence of power (Schneck, 1987, p. 20). Hence, our society is in a constant state of conflict, not necessarily solely defined as physical conflict such as war, but internal and external conflicts. Our discourse will proportionally reflect these same or similar conflicts (Schneck, 1987, pp. 19-20). These conflicts will go on to dictate our ideologies and epistemological assumptions. So, what are the consequences?

One way to see it is that conflict in climate discourse can be identified through the struggles of creating effective mitigation strategies in global environmental governance. If power

dictates what we know and what we know to be true, we must assume the truth is subjective. Then the way we problematize the issue of climate change will not be translated into the same understanding and the approach to solving this issue will vastly alter. We can see this as derived from what Aristotle argued in “*Nicomachean Ethics*” that the discipline of politics can be argued as the ruling science and how we operate within other principles may be affected by these assumptions (Aristotle, 2014). Hence, what we know, and how we know it derives from these underlying assumptions which make up the discourse (Aristotle, 2014).

3.4 Critical theory

As a theoretical approach, critical theory is mainly concerned with the issues of modernity and the capitalist society through Foucault’s case, primarily emphasizing the relationship between power and knowledge (Wandel, 2001, pp. 368-382). Critical theorists such as Habermas and Foucault become increasingly influential when the Frankfurt school became globally recognized and resulted from the emergence of poststructuralism in France in the 1960s (Schneck, 1987, pp. 20-21). The critical theory aims to critique society and change the underlying basis of society’s structure (Wandel, 2001, pp. 368-382). For Foucault, discourse establishes and controls knowledge through underlying power structures which he seeks to try and shed light on these assumptions. They arguably prevent the person and the nation from truly understanding how the world works and how it may function within the discourse and discipline. There is an emphasis in his work on the tensions between consensus and conflict as well as between ideals and reality, a quite philosophical argument.

Foucault, there is nothing that can be or ever will be fundamental or universal. He rejects universalism and the structural narratives of rationality, legitimacy, and normative justification which is a byproduct of his post-structural influences (Schneck, 1987, pp. 20-21). He argues that contexts that have been socially as well as historically conditioned without fictive universals are what, for Foucault, constitute the most effective and incentivizing grounds for action and in these contexts, we can understand how action may be influenced by (Schneck, 1987, p. 26).

We may view the discourse on environmental governance similarly, the way we view climate change scenically and translate this to political discourse is influential in the adaptation of policy reform and mitigation actions which are deemed “correct responses”. Hence, as can be argued through Foucault’s contributions to critical theory, we would need to adapt the

narrative on climate change and environmental governance to alter our discourse and the actions in which the discourse projects. We may further the argument, through interpretations of Foucault. If international environmental agreements and their procedures do not guarantee freedom, equality, or even democracy, climate policies may not push us in the desired direction. This may rather be the result of power-dominated political discourse and influenced ineffective knowledge assumptions, not due to the nature of the discipline as Foucault denies but through the social construction of them.

4 Method

4.1 Research design and framing

The thesis aims to illustrate the climate change discourse in Canada, referring to official rhetoric by the Canadian government, and critically analyze the impact of the constructed discourse. To tailor to the scope of the thesis, the thesis doesn't set out to attempt a full discourse analysis as it would not fit within this scope. Hence, the discourse analysis will be limited to the main assumptions of Foucauldian theory addressing the power of knowledge and discourse discussion in his work on limited material in the shape of official documents from the Canadian government.

Framing qualitative research can have a multitude of outputs depending on the input. It essentially helps to guide how the research is approached and influences the outcomes of the method (Svensson, 2007, pp. 98-106). The research question doesn't set out to make value judgments in the discourse it rather sets out to define how the problem, referring to the gap, is shaped and in descriptive terms analyzes the consequences, or potential benefits. We can acquire descriptive data through the qualitative method, which allows for the descriptive conclusions we are hoping to find in the investigation. Hence, qualitative research deems relevant to the research question at hand.

Potential limitations to consider with the qualitative method are that the conclusions can be, at times, unreliable. This is due to the analysis of society having the drawback of being dependent on the assumption of reality that is constructive and relative (Svensson, 2007, pp. 98-106). Due to unpredictable variables that are difficult, at times, impossible to consider during the research method and hence, affect the conclusions (Svensson, 2007, pp. 98-106).

Subjectivity may also alter the possible outcome of the findings as opposed to the quantitative method (Svensson, 2007, pp. 98-106).

The research question will be henceforth, approached through a qualitative research method approach taking on an analytical lens through the Foucauldian discourse analysis method. The Foucauldian discourse analysis method will focus on a macrolevel analysis, not focusing on micro-level language aspects such as grammar and word use. The thesis will rather focus on the meaning of language and the extent to which expressed interest relates to the theoretical approach's main assumptions, which is more relevant for the analytical approach. The Foucauldian approach is critical (Wandel, 2001, pp. 368-382) and thus will be applied as such in the essay. This critically highlights underlying assumptions in its influencing abilities on the discourse and potentially affects how the politicization of the climate change issue is illustrated in the case of Canada.

4.2 Material and delimitations

The relevant material selection for this thesis is the most recent Canadian climate plan. The 2022 “Canada’s 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan” is the most recent and most detailed climate plan hence, relevant for the purpose and aim of the thesis.

The material has been accessed through the official database of the government of Canada. It is open and accessible to the public and contains all officially published documents including these four action plans that the thesis intends to analyze. This takes into consideration the reliability of the results of the discussion which is also a methodological consideration in the allocated time frame. Additionally, the material chosen in the particular year 2022 is motivated by the impact of the 2015 Paris Agreement on global involvement in climate change as well as the ability to look at the most recent discourse deems the most relevant. It is because of the Paris agreement that many countries, including Canada, started publishing specific documents planning climate action (Canada, 2021, p. 3). Hence, the most relevant for the discourse analysis of this thesis. The relevance of selecting one text is a delimitation as the extent of the thesis would not allow for a scope of material within the time frame 2016-present day. Another consideration is the relevance of several materials as it would be irrelevant as the purpose of the thesis is not a comparison or analysis of development over time but rather a discourse analysis of a particular text. However, this thesis has limited the

discourse analysis to this text as a delimiting precaution so as not to include a complete discourse analysis of the topic of climate change in social media and other platforms for language distribution. Hence, these considerations have been made to adapt the scope of the thesis and its relevance to the research question.

4.3 Foucauldian discourse analysis

The methodological approach to the thesis will rely on Foucauldian critical discourse analysis. The Foucauldian discourse analysis mainly focuses on emphasizing power relationships in society and how they are expressed through language and practice (Graham, 2010, pp. 663 - 674). This form of discourse method derives from Foucault's early studies in which he closely linked the formulation of discourse and power relations in specific historical periods. It closely reflects his theories and is mainly relevant for this thesis as it encompasses his theories of power and knowledge combined with critical theory as a basis for the methodological approach of this analysis (Graham, 2010, pp. 663 - 674).

The analysis approach aims to reflect upon the meaning of statements and language used in an interdisciplinary discourse, which may have underlying effects on how language and behaviors are expressed in response to the relationship Foucault discusses between power, knowledge, and discourse (Graham, 2010, pp. 663 - 674). The critical discourse theory draws on both structural as well as linguistic characterizations from the texts in Foucault's work and therefore deems highly relevant for the pairing of the theoretical approach to the research question. It is also closely linked to social constructivism and similar epistemological assumptions such as the defiance of universal truths or the objectivity of truth (Graham, 2010, pp. 663 - 674). Therefore, it can be used effectively in the attempt of this thesis to shed light on the discourse in Canadian climate politics.

An important methodological delimitation regarding this approach is emphasized that, as implied by Foucault, the main attempt of this method is not to attempt to substitute one truth for another. As Foucault recognizes the impossibility of universal truths, the method is intended to understand why some truths are derived, how power structures affect this, and what the underlying assumptions lead to (Graham, 2010, pp. 663 - 674). The social scientific investigation must hence be detached from truth-seeking and therefore, substituted for the understanding of truths and their origins. Specifically, this analytical approach will be a six-

step analytical process that is often used in the application of the Foucauldian discourse analysis.

4.4 Analysis process

The analytical process will specifically follow the six steps of FDA analysis which is often used for social and discursive analysis in the application of the FDA approach. The six steps include discursive constructions, discourses, action orientation, positioning, practice, and subjectivity.

The first step of the six-step analysis process, discursive constructions, is focused on identifying “climate change” and how this topic is interpreted and addressed. The discursive object in this thesis is “climate change” and the first step of this analysis involves identifying how this topic is constructed in the text (Willig, 2013, p. 132). This is largely dependent on the idea of shared meaning and how we understand the object in the context of the discourse. This may not necessarily infer that the importance is the work or grammar in themselves by the implicit and explicit meaning of the shared value in terms of the discursive construction of the climate change (Willig, 2013, p. 132).

In the analytical process, the second step, discourse, entails reassembling the analysis from step one into a larger understanding of the discourse. This implies that one must look at the discursive object in its application to the larger-scale discourse (Willig, 2013, pp. 132-133). Thus, in this step underlying interests such as social, cultural, and other influencing factors in the overall discourse in which the discursive object is prevalent (Willig, 2013, pp. 132-133).

Action orientation, the third step, focuses mainly on the function of the discourse which in this case will be most important in understanding whether the function is to advocate or abdicate responsibility (Willig, 2013, p. 133). This implies that the third step examines the contexts of the discourse and how the discursive object which has been defined in earlier stages is being used as an instrument for something larger than the language (Willig, 2013, p. 133). This also invokes the process of understanding not only the function but the purpose of the function, hence, we shall ask. what is the function and what is this gaining the discursive object? This will further contextualize the fourth stage, positioning, which involves the function of the author and the actors.

The subject positions can be identified by asking both who this is by and to whom it is for. The analysis aspect of understanding who and for whom relies on unraveling the structures within the discourse and what rights and obligations the subjects have within the function of the construct (Willig, 2013, p. 133). To meet the purpose of the thesis, the subject will be defined as the actors within the discourse, hence, the subject can be identified as both the Canadian government and the Canadian citizens which will be further discussed.

Stage five in the process is concerned with the possibility that discursive constructions and the above analysis of discourse can offer action (Willig, 2013, p. 133). Hence, what the thesis will look at in this section of the analysis is particularly how discourse allows for or restrains action and what implications this may have (Willig, 2013, p. 133).

Lastly, the sixth stage is particularly concerned with the aspect of subjectivity in the discourse. Specifically, how the theorization of subjectivity may be defined by the implications which have been analyzed in the above stages (Willig, 2013, p. 133). How we view the world and our place in it, defined by our discourse, has consequences and effects (Willig, 2013, p. 134). In a sense, one can translate this to an understanding of the experiences which are derived from the subject positions (Willig, 2013, p. 133).

4.5 Validity, reliability, and subjectivity

The nature of the thesis relies heavily on a discursive analysis addressing the relevant step for the FDA approach and hence, regarding this, one must take into consideration what this may attest to when presenting and interpreting the results. Therefore, it is relevant to address the methodological considerations regarding the validity and reliability of (Esaiasson, et al., 2017, pp. 59-66).

The reliability is specifically affected by the choice of a Foucauldian critical discourse analysis approach. One consideration to the reliability of the thesis is subjectivity and relativity as mentioned in previous sections (Esaiasson, et al., 2017, pp. 59-66). The analysis process may have limitations to the reliability as the interpretation of the material may differ and hence, it will be essential when proceeding to remain as objective as possible and follow the steps specifically. This is further addressed in the topic of material selection as the selected material itself is easily accessible and a reliable source. However, the possible problem of interpreting the material subjectively in the analysis section remains a

consideration for the thesis. However, as earlier argued, it may not necessarily be a failure in reliability that the analysis processes contain underlying assumptions that may alter the interpretations. With this awareness of the subjectivity in the process, the most important aspect of the reliability will be to meticulously follow the structure of the six-step FDA.

To answer for validity, the material and delimitation have been a large consideration in the method. Hence, as argued the timespan and limitation of material used have been an adaptation to this consideration and hence, aid to secure the validity. However, another consideration in the analytical approach is (Esaiasson, et al., 2017, pp. 59-66). Analyzing what isn't being said and its importance can be a difficult approach and create problems in relevantly addressing the problem. However, this consideration has been made throughout the methodological considerations processes with the adaptation that the analysis aspect remains transparent in the interpretations of the six-step FDA. To conclude the discussion of validity and reliability, within the analysis of the material, considerations of further research will be made. This can potentially heighten the validity as well as reliability and address the problems that the thesis may face in its results.

Further, one must also consider the implications of subjectivity in the analysis process and the potential limitation of speculation to the meaning of the context. This entails that the analysis may not be entirely impartial or unbiased as political thoughts, ideas, and social constructions surrounding the thesis are affected by the very thing it intends to analyze. However, as Foucault also argues in his theories, it isn't necessarily a fallacy, it could rather be important (Schneck, 1987). Foucault argues, as does this thesis, that it would not be incorrect to assume that one must be completely politically and detached from opinion but rather useful to look upon analysis through a lens not clouded by judgment but as a pathway to understanding the discourse.

5 Analysis

5.1 Primary delimitations and considerations

The analysis of the “2030 Emissions Reduction Plan: Canada’s Next Steps for Clean Air and a Strong Economy” will follow the six-step FDA analysis process highlighted in the previous methods section. In the analysis, the focus will not be on attempting a full analysis of the

entire reduction plan of 231 pages but rather on the relevant sections. The sections on which the analysis will mainly focus include the very start of the plan which contains the minister's forward, and the first chapter which is the introduction, discussing the country's emissions profile and the progress to date" (Canada, 2021). This is followed by chapter two focusing on the economic aspect of the reduction plan to support the transition to what the plan describes as: "a Clean Growth Economy" (Canada, 2021). Further, the third chapter on future projects as well as chapter four underlines the collaborating aspects of the reduction plans, and finally the last chapter, five, "Looking ahead to 2050" (Canada, 2021). The delimitation of selecting these relevant sections relies solely on the scope of the thesis and to what extent these sections are relevant for the purpose and aim of the thesis research question. The delimitations allow for more validity in the analysis and thus, a more fruitful discussion with dependable conclusions.

The first step of the analysis includes analyzing the different ways in which the defined discursive construction is discussed in the material, the discourse. Hence, before the analysis can be attempted one must identify the discursive objective. The thesis is interested in how the Canadian official rhetoric addresses climate change; hence, moving forward, the discursive objective will be defined and interpreted as "*climate change*".

5.2 Discursive constructions

Discursively constructing the understanding of climate change through official government rhetoric, is a powerful and essential tool within politics. This creates a collective understanding of the object and can bring either negative or positive connotations (Willig, 2013, pp. 133-136). It is also relevant to consider the discursive development as climate change was initially mainly discussed within the discourses in natural scientific disciplines. However, with the rise of more environmental international agreements, climate change has become an object of the social scientific disciplines paving way for newer shared understandings. Additionally, one must consider the implications of responsibility in terms of climate change and how the understanding of climate change may alter the relations of the object and its responsibilities of it or for it (Willig, 2013, pp. 133-136). Further, how is climate change being understood as a discursive object throughout the text?

The official rhetoric of the Canadian government in the emissions reduction plan discusses climate change with an underlying epistemological understanding of the climate's

instrumental value to humanity. On page six of the Canadian 2030 emissions reduction plan, it states that: “*Climate change entails a level of climate volatility that would harm our way of life and the stability of everyday business*” (Canada, 2021, p. 6). Thus, the climate is seen as an instrumentally valuable object consisting of resources and benefits that are directly capable of heightening or decreasing the quality of life. Climate change as an object of discussion is hence seen as the cause of humanity’s discomfort rather than what the natural science disciplines would argue. Intrinsically it is however not completely exempt from the 2030 reduction plan; on page 24 it states: “*Climate change is real. It is caused by greenhouse gas emissions resulting from human activities*”, with emphasis on “*resulting from human activity*” (Canada, 2021, p. 24), allocating responsibility to the subject *humanity* rather than the object. However, the point remains that it more often emphasizes discursive construction that climate change poses a threat to humanity rather than that humanity would pose a threat to the climate.

In terms of the responsibility allocation of the discursive construction, it highlights the responsibility of the government to address climate change. However, it could arguably question the lack of responsibility for the causes of climate change which natural science disciplines provide evidence for through human activity. One could rather argue that the discursive constructions lay blame on climate change for the consequences of itself. It goes so far as to lay responsibility on climate change for the societal inequalities that lay beyond the direct effects of climate change, on page 14 this can be exemplified through the following statement: “*By disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable, especially through impacts on food, water, and livelihoods, climate change can further entrench existing inequalities and inequities*” (Canada, 2021, p. 14). These perspectives and understanding experienced through the discursive constructions create the reality of how society, and subjects within it, portray the issue at hand.

5.3 Discourses

The consensus, in simple terms, is that climate change is a non-desirable state. “Climate change” is nonetheless constructed mainly in two different ways. On the one hand, climate change is discussed with emphasis on the natural science understanding of climate change as a natural phenomenon. An example of this is extracted from page six of the plan: “*Climate change is a crisis that persists and will only grow if we do not do more, faster. Flooding, landslides, drought, and wildfire*” (Canada, 2021, p. 6). The emphasis here is on climate change as a natural construction that has consequences for the environment such as “*landslides, drought, and wildfire*” (Canada, 2021, p. 6). However, on the other hand, it is also interpreted and used in the more underlying social science understanding of climate change in which it is both an economic, political, and social threat to society. The two different ways allow for two different understandings of the object. The scientific discourse application depends upon a more objective understanding of the state of the environment because of climate change. This means that it relies heavily on a clear correlation between, for example, climate change and natural disasters such as drought. This can objectively be proven to correlate. However, the social and economic discourse application requires more subjectivity and hence it becomes more difficult to, for example, correlate gender inequality with climate change. Nonetheless, there is an added dimension that problematizes identifying the cause and allocating responsibility.

5.4 Action-orientation

The issue of these different ways of understanding the object leads to an altercation between epistemological values on whether the environment is instrumental or intrinsically. This is crucial in the allocation of responsibility, on the one hand, interpreting the natural intrinsic perception of climate change, creates incentivized responsibility for mitigation. A mindset entails that no one is to blame but everyone has a responsibility to do something. However, contrastingly, understanding the social instrumental understanding of the object can lead to pointing the finger and making excuses rather than tackling the issue at hand. The social interpretation leads to a higher political dimension that involves the interpretation of a set of factors that are indirectly impacted by the object’s construction as well as directly. Hence, the debate broadens as does the discourse. What is the point and what does it entail to conduct the discourse as scientific vs social?

The scientific discourse is mainly convincing the audience or reader of the value that the environment is intrinsically valuable. Hence, propagating that the preservation of it is important regardless of how this affects humanity. The mitigation efforts should therefore be despite what they can do for us but rather what we can do for the environment to fight against climate change. Contrastingly the purpose of the social construction or rather the interpretative gain of the social discourse relies heavily on the politicization of climate change. One underlying ideology in the Canadian government's rhetoric is the neoliberal values of development and indoctrination of this understanding of climate change is done through the construction of the discourse. An emphasis on climate change about economic development and a "strong economy" (Canada, 2021, p. 1). produces neoliberal values through the idea that the environment is instrumental to welfare and economic development within the country. This is underlined by the economic imperative on page 16 in the emissions reduction plan as the discourse emphasizes that a "*net-zero economy will drive Canada's economic growth and create good jobs across the country*" and the reduction of emissions to mitigate climate change helps "*to create good jobs, grow a strong economy, and build a bright, healthy future for everyone, enhanced domestic climate action is needed today*" (Canada, 2021, p. 16). We can speculate that the discourse reflects the values that are embedded in the language and political interests' that are emphasized. Therefore, the shared understanding of the climate as beneficial to the economy and the society rather than its value is propagated throughout the plan.

5.5 Positionings

The scientific discourse and the "truths" produced because of the constructions allow for the attribution of responsibility upon a subject, which the official rhetoric of the Canadian government poses as itself. Thereafter social discourse allows for the interpretation of how they are responsible and how they choose to act which can be more easily argued through the domination of social discourse. The combining use of the scientific and social discourse allows the discourse to dominate the understanding of the values of environment vs economics or environment vs social welfare. This also results in the subject positioning of the Canadian government and its opportunities for action. How they position themselves within the text allows for manipulation of values through the text.

The result is that the government can manipulate the political interest and to what extent they should be prioritized. For example, it can motivate a policy that may advocate for market

mechanisms, such as a green economy, to mitigate climate change as the economic factors have been deemed the most important regardless of if it is the most effective policy. On page 171 the plan addresses a green economy approach to address climate change, “*Taking action on climate change will help to capture new and emerging economic opportunities*” (Canada, 2021, p. 171), emphasizing the responsibility of the positioned subject to act on climate change. It also shows the ability of the subject to project the political interests and hence, reroute the reader’s understanding of what should be prioritized through discourse. As the plan unfolds, it has already introduced the codependence of climate change and a strong economy adopting a political opinion through the discourse construction.

5.6 Practice

How do the discursive constructions and the subject positions within them allow or prevent action on the matter of climate change? In this case, it can be argued that the Canadian government’s epistemological assumption of the instrumentality of the environment as an argument for climate change mitigation, ultimately, begs the question of what can be said regarding climate change as well as what can be done about it. Within the discourse, the way the language is attributed and the action that follows creates co-dependency between the subject and the object such that it legitimizes the discourse (Schneck, 1987, p. 30).

By monopolizing the understanding of what political actions can be made in terms of climate action in Canada, along with a neoliberal value latency, the discourse limits the ability for effective mitigating action. Arguably, it allows the Canadian government to focus its activities on the manipulated agenda, and hence, one may argue this could advocate for a “business-as-usual” approach (Oxford, u.d.). It limits action that would require the conservation of the environment for the sake of the environment but instead allows for the adaptation of conservation that would be more beneficial to human society and its development. Thus, prioritizing material well-being, through materializing the environment.

5.7 Subjectivity

A relevant consideration in this stage of analysis is that the analysis of subjectivity is subjective itself. In attempting to highlight the experiences of the subject and the experiences created by the discourse constructions one must, to an extent, postulate. However, this relates to the methodological section in which it was stated that the discursive analysis does not

intend to seek out the truth or stipulate the existence of objective truth but rather examines possible ranges of interpreted truths.

“Discourses make available certain ways of seeing the world and certain ways of being in the world” (Willig, 2013, p. 133).

If discourse allows us to experience the world the way we see the world, is it possible that the Canadian government experiences responsibility the way they see responsibility? The Canadian government may take on less responsibility for climate change because discourse has discursively coerced a feel less responsible for their actions. This is not necessarily to argue the polluter pays principle but rather to understand the subjectivity in the discourse and how this may affect the way we experience and feel regarding the topic. This pertains not to what is said and done but what is felt about the topic. We can allude to the descriptive writing of a horror novel and the way the author makes you not only understand that the protagonist is in danger but allows you to feel scared for what is about to come. A similar effect is created with discursive constructions which we have analyzed thus far. So, what subjective experiences can the understanding of “*climate change*” throughout the discourse lead to? Further, how can responsibility be experienced by the subject positions?

The following is argued from the premises that the environment is intrinsically valuable which is, as stated throughout, the opposite ideology of that expressed in the official rhetoric. This is done as a critique of the rhetoric as a consideration of the structure of the critical discourse analysis set out by Foucault. Feeling as if you have less responsibility leads to the understanding that you have less to be responsible for. Understanding climate change as a threat to humanity rather than humanity as the causal factor of climate change leads to putting the subject in the position of being responsible for the fight against climate change to salvage socio-economic development rather than a fight for the environment. This neglects any action or value in acting to preserve the environment from climate change to the same extent as preserving human development. This may, however, also be considered as a lack of understanding of responsibility allocation or differentiating interpretations.

5.8 Summarized results of the analysis

The analysis highlighted the potential consequences of the discursive constructions, action orientation as well as subject positions to how practice and subjectivity are affected. The socioeconomic discursive construction of climate change creates a dominance of this understanding of climate change in the discourse. We, therefore, understand the environment as instrumentally valuable to the socio-economic development and therefore, perceive the discourse as reflective of the neoliberal values which one could argue are prominent in the Canadian climate change discourse. This we have seen in the action orientation and subject position allows the Canadian government to dominate the political agenda, including the mitigation efforts that they deem relevant regardless of its efficiency to fight climate change. Regarding subjectivity, the results of the analysis pointed to the victimization of the Canadian government and Canada as a nation thus allowing for the feeling of threat and lack of feeling guilty for climate change because of human societal development, thus propagating the way that responsibility should be allocated. However, the question which remains is how can this be explained by Foucault's theoretical framework? The discussion therefore will take these results of the analysis into the application of Foucault's theories. The aim is hence to theorize to what extent these results can be explained by his theories of power, knowledge, and discourse. Thus, sheds light on the analytical conclusion that responsibility allocation becomes problematic in the climate discourse in Canada's emissions reduction plan.

6 Discussion

As we have addressed within the theoretical framework, we can constitute that Foucault would argue that power is authorized dependent on what knowledge is accepted. Foucault argues that power both generates knowledge and knowledge makes one submissive to power. Generating knowledge, the understanding of climate change expressed through the discourse in the emissions reduction plan, ultimately leads to the submission of those who infer this perceived truth. Thus, the understanding of climate change in the emissions reduction plan, allows for governance that will ultimately, as Foucault argues, reflect the dominance and repressions which are faced in current political power relations. If we view economic values as the dominating political interest, we can through the analysis, see evidence of the repressions of the environmental interest such that the prioritization of economic vs environmental preservation becomes contextualized by the current power relations. To

exemplify, we can draw on the discussion posed in the introduction regarding the phasing out of coal to decrease emissions.

The mitigating approach of phasing out of coal, but still allowing for the extraction and the continuation of exportation of coal for use transnationally becomes evident to draw on Foucault's argumentation. The truth which has been accepted in Canada, because of the emissions reduction plan, is that economic development comes before environmental preservations. Hence, climate change mitigation requires adaptation to economic development however represses the understanding that climate change mitigation which prioritizes environmental preservation may be more efficient to combat climate change. Consequently, the discourse is generated from these underlying assumptions which hence generate knowledge. Once this knowledge is generated the subjects of this knowledge become objects of power to be dominated to believe certain ideological valued, in this case economically dominated interests in socio-economic development. Therefore, the discourse is allowing for the domination of the current power structures that favorite capitalist economic values, and neoliberal values. In other words, the discourse allows for the economy to come first and the environment second and sympathies align with this.

Further, this affects the way the Canadian government and the governing bodies act. The action and the mitigation action become a reflection of what the discourse has manipulated the subject to believe as the "right" thing to do. Thus, social discourse becomes, as Foucault's theory on power/knowledge would describe a tool to control the people through the knowledge they have of the accepted truth. As mentioned in the analysis the scientific discourse functions on the other hand create incentives toward responsibility allocation. Social, or socioeconomic discourse, therefore, becomes the dominating discourse, with dominating values and repressing the ability to act on the ideological assumptions of the natural science discourse about climate change.

Establishing the emission reduction plan on the epistemological assumption that the environment is instrumental rather than intrinsic, presumably allows for the dominating socio-economical discourse to appear before the reader as the most logical. The interest of the subject aligns with the interest they have been made to want because of the discourse they are exposed to. This allows for the dominating political power structures to obtain dominance over the climate change discourse. The idea of environmental instrumentality to the quality of

life of the individual is embedded within the discourse. Hence, the subject is indoctrinated with these ideals to develop these subjective truths in which their way of living becomes dominated. Evidence of this lies in the emissions reduction plan which constitutes indirectly that in the debate between environmental protection and economic development, the economy wins. Ultimately this boils down to the that economic development involves the quality of life and the welfare of humanity.

To emphasize, the problem of allocating responsibility for mitigation is heavily influenced by power dynamics, and how we allocate responsibility has been the main conflict in climate change discourse. The constructed discourse, as analyzed, limits action that would require the conservation of the environment but rather revolves around human society and its development. This emphasizes, in the discourse, the prioritizing of material well-being aligned with an anthropocentric approach to climate change and the environment. Arguably, if there is a lack of responsibility for climate change because of human activity, or rather a non-dominated knowledge understanding of this as a subjective truth, the ability to distribute responsibility is insufficient. The social discourse has the function to thereafter monopolize the ideological understanding of what is “right” to do to address the issue of climate change.

Leading by example, the Canadian government’s understanding of the climate change crisis and the actions needed to be done reflects onto the companies, industries, and people in Canada as well. Hence, if the government fails to allocate responsibility to itself through discourse, the incentive for the companies, industries, and people in Canada lacks. The same can be argued for the global arena such that one may argue the understanding of self-preservation, or economic preservation as the leading interest on the political agenda creates a prisoner dilemma situation. The leading outcome for each country is to act within its interest because the discourse implies as much. One must remember in the case of climate change policy and governance that politics dictates and in the case of a democratic country like Canada, what the people think is essential. If the government can control what people think, and how they understand climate change, it becomes easier to manipulate their values and interests. Discourse, therefore, can be a tool to achieve political agendas as seen in the case of the Canadian 2030 emissions reduction plan.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Concluding remarks

Ultimately, in understanding Foucault, it is evident that the discourse about climate change creates a subjective truth that dominates the values of one construction, socioeconomic, while simultaneously repressing to ideals of another submissive knowledge not emphasized in the discourse, environmental. Whether this is intentional or solely a reflection of the subject's positions on knowledge which it as well becomes dominated, is inconclusive. There can be speculation that it is a result of the complexity of politics and courses' role in affecting the action. Hence, action may not speak louder than words.

Understanding climate change through socio-economical values and constructed discourse to this understanding dominates the practice and action orientation of the Canadian government. Canadian political values that reflect the prioritization of social and economic development over environmental preservation are prevalent in the climate change discourse. They ultimately affect the allocation of responsibility for efficient environmental governance through underlying power structures dominating the political agenda. The main issue with climate change discourse in terms of the Canadian emissions reduction plan is not what is directly said. The issue is how it directly constructs experiences that cause the Canadian government to feel better about its lack of action and ineffective mitigating action. We may even say that they instead feel like they are making a difference and taking responsibility because their actions are reflecting what their priority is, which is ultimately the economy and social development. Nevertheless, the discourse may not necessarily be disregarding the importance of the environment, per se, but rather emphasizes the importance of the environment for humanity, and thus the discourse reflects and dominates this understanding.

To conclude, we may be willing to sacrifice our shoes to save a drowning child but whether we are willing to sacrifice socio-economic development to save the planet is not as evident. Whether this is a case of geographical distance, as Singer argues for the drowning child through experiment, or discursive construction, as argued in the thesis, it is a sacrifice that many countries are not willing to take, Canada as evidence for this.

1.1 Future research

Regarding the purpose and aim of the research question, the subjectivity, as well as the smaller scope of the thesis, may have been a limiting factor in the analysis and discussion, particularly taking on the Foucauldian theoretical and analytical approach. However, despite this, the insights discovered within the research have reached the aim of shedding light on the discursive implications of climate change to responsibility allocation and environmental governance. For further research on the subject topic, it would be scientifically relevant to extend the scope of the thesis to address the discussion on neoliberal values and the history of neoliberalism. Hence, it could provide insights into to what extent neoliberalism affects the construction of the discourse on climate change.

Additionally, it could potentially be beneficial to address the post-structural and post-material implications that were mentioned but not discussed due to the scope of the thesis. A further investigation into the philosophical concept of the polluter pays principle and to what extent this bears relevance to the discourse on climate change. Similarly, this concept was mentioned but not further discussed as a delimiting consideration. Nevertheless, relevant to the scientific discussion of discourse and its effects on politics. Hence, posing the following question: *Is the problem of allocating responsibility in environmental governance disguised as a climate change discourse issue?*

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