THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY: CADS APPROACHES TO THE BRITISH MEDIA

Edited by Eva M. Gómez-Jiménez and Michael Toolan
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JAVIER FERNÁNDEZ-CRUZ
Universidad de Málaga
fernandezcruz@uma.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9007-9976>

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The Discursive Construction of Economic Inequality is a monograph that emerged from a symposium at the University of Birmingham in mid-2018, featuring chapters presented at the event as well as additional commissioned chapters from other scholars. Edited by Eva M. Gómez-Jiménez and Michael Toolan, this book explores how language in the British media portrays and influences economic inequality. Using a variety of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study (CADS) approaches, it provides an historicized perspective on the normalization of wealth inequality in the United Kingdom from the 19th century to the present day. By analyzing print, radio, and online media, the nine chapters, written by scholars with backgrounds in Critical Discourse Studies, reveal how the media influences public perception and contributes to entrenched inequality in modern Britain. The book highlights the multifaceted nature of economic inequality and its interconnections with health, gender, and class. In the times where poverty is justified as an individual choice, and meritocracy and financial self-aid are discursively hegemonic, this book is an asset for social scientists of diverse fields (e.g., Economy, Sociology, Journalism, Pol-Sci) to gain a linguistic perspective of this phenomenon.

This volume contributes to social sciences by offering an Applied Linguistics perspective on the representation of those suffering from inequality. It shows how an imbalanced structure of power has used negationism and repression as tools to control and perpetuate itself, all in the name of democracy and liberty. The book's

core idea underscores the inescapable nature of inequality, a concept that constantly evolves with changing historical circumstances and class power balances. These social interactions lead to new forms of discourse and require innovative strategies for addressing it. The Introduction, written by Eva M. Gómez-Jiménez and Michael Toolan, establishes the overarching theme of the discursive construction of economic inequality in the UK. It provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the book's focus and methodology. Following the Introduction, nine chapters analyse specific aspects of economic inequality, examining how it is represented and perpetuated through language and British media.

The first chapter, written by Nuria Lorenzo-Dus and Sadiq Almaged, applies CADS techniques on Labour and Conservative annual conferences on poverty and social exclusion from 1900 to 2014, dividing the data into three periods. Keyword analyses are conducted to identify relevant terms, followed by manual categorization of contextualized use of these terms into Poverty and Social Exclusion discourses within the corpora. Finally, an ideo-textual analysis is performed on concordance lines containing the most frequent keywords. The findings reveal two dominant discourses: a financial-centric approach favored by the Conservative Party, and a more hardship-oriented narrative favored by Labour. Both parties tend to use abstract words to depict poverty and social exclusion, often using third-person language to distance decisionmakers from responsibility. Not strikingly, party leaders tend to use passive forms when depicting 'the poor', which reinforces the aforementioned inescapable nature of economic exclusion.

Chapter 2, by Joe Spencer-Bennet, conducts a critical discourse analysis of inequality during World War II, drawing from sources in the Ministry of Information and the Mass-Observation project. Employing a qualitative approach, the chapter thoroughly examines official texts, particularly focusing on the synthetic vernacularization of political communication directed at the masses. This shift in political discourse from abstract and educated to a more vernacular "new language of leadership" for the masses is explored. The analysis reveals that the language intended for the 'masses' was rife with stereotypes, primarily serving aims of population control rather than fostering democratization or egalitarianism.

Chapter 3, written by Isabelle van de Bom and Laura L. Paterson, offers a compelling analysis of the evolution of the 'welfare state' concept in the press. To accomplish this, they meticulously extracted concordances containing this term from a subcorpus of articles sourced from *The Times*. They systematically classified all instances of the key term from 1940 to 2009. Their findings reveal that the term is not anchored to a consistent core value and that its associated meanings have fluctuated over time. Notably, the discourse surrounding welfare shifted ideologically, aligning with neoliberalism and associating welfare with the creation

of a socially marginalized underclass. This shift intensified following Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of *The Times*. During the 1960s, the welfare state was largely taken for granted and scarcely mentioned. However, it came under intense scrutiny during the 1970s and 1980s, coinciding with the acquisition of the newspaper by the tycoon. More importantly, this chapter unveils that *The Times* has restricted the concept of welfare to the provision of benefits for the less privileged, omitting core elements such as education or the National Health System from the discourse on welfare.

In Chapter 4, Michael Toolan undertakes a critical discourse analysis by comparing the keywords extracted from a corpus of opinion articles sourced from *The Times*, spanning two distinct decades: the 1970s and the 2000s. This study's central focus is child poverty, and it introduces two contrasting script types: a *laissez-faire* approach and an interventionist approach. While the research is undeniably intriguing, it would greatly benefit from a more explicit exposition of the methodology employed. During the 1970s, the interventionist approach was considered desirable, while in the 2000s, the narrative took a contrasting turn. Discourse surrounding welfare and state-supported assistance became marginalized, and poverty in the 2000s was predominantly portrayed as a personal issue, with the state seemingly incapable of providing viable solutions.

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Chapter 5, authored by Ilse A. Ras, analyzes how the press portrays elite crimes, such as 'corporate fraud' and 'modern slavery'. The research examines rhetorical techniques and neutralization in media coverage, using different time periods (2004-2007, 2008-2010, and 2011-2014) to construct the Modern Slavery Corpus from database searches in 22 British newspapers. The study finds that reporting on these crimes often avoids assigning responsibility to corporate criminals, instead blaming governments for a perceived failure to regulate effectively, allowing corporations to evade accountability.

Chapter 6, authored by Jane Mulderring, explores the intricate relationship between health and inequality, with a specific focus on the analysis of the UK government's *Change 4 Life* program aimed at reducing obesity from its inception in 2009 to 2019. This chapter seeks to examine the linguistic representation of target groups within obesity policy, aiming to uncover the linguistic processes that shape the normative linguistic identity assigned to certain populations. Furthermore, it endeavors to identify the strategies employed by the government to engage specific target audiences. To accomplish this, Mulderring's research draws upon two primary sources: a corpus of policy documents and a corpus of advertisements disseminated on television and social media platforms. However, the chapter does not provide detailed information regarding the size or scope of these corpora.

Chapter 7, co-authored by Leslie Jeffries and Brian Walker, undertakes a comprehensive examination of the evolution of 'austerity' in discourse, one of the Great Recession mantras, instrumentalized in advancing a neoliberal agenda. The authors meticulously scrutinized the utilization of the key term 'austerity' in the UK Parliamentary context by juxtaposing two time-tagged newspaper corpora during different stages of the crisis (beginning and end). Over time, the discourse surrounding austerity has transitioned from a concept associated with war-rationing across all social classes to the imperative of 'balancing the books' discourse —to justify the reduction of public spending disproportionately impacting the less affluent and exacerbated inequality. Thus, 'austerity' evolved into a hegemonic term that resists critical scrutiny, often positioned as a necessary evil.

In Chapter 8, Richard Thomas undertakes a commendable task, meticulously transcribing and analyzing news broadcasts from BBC (publicly owned) and ITV (a private broadcaster). His analysis spans the years 2007 and 2014. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, a consistent use of neoliberal anti-regulation rhetoric to shield the interests of the affluent is unveiled, which is particularly outrageous for the publicly-funded BBC, all while demonstrating reluctance to address the pressing issue of inequality. In his analysis, the author highlights how these news outlets often employ neoliberal anti-regulation rhetoric to defend the interests of the super-rich, while consistently using language to mask their reluctance to address the pressing issue of inequality. Thomas's paper artfully strikes a balance between statistical precision and engaging, thought-provoking arguments, leaving the reader with a plethora of questions that beckon further exploration.

In Chapter 9, Wolfgang Teubert boldly concludes the book with what may be considered its most combative episode, asserting that his hermeneutic work is unequivocally "not a scientific paper", and indeed, it need not be. The author challenges the foundational principles of parliamentary systems under the control of the oligos, the *few*, who safeguard their interests in the market from the masses while veiling inequalities under the rhetoric of "individual liberty" as working-class movements grew stronger in the 19th century. In his analysis, Teubert posits that true freedom is primarily enjoyed by the wealthy, thereby asserting that they are the only ones truly capable of exercising their freedoms. To manage the revolutionary aspirations of the working class and suppress major upheavals, the narrative framework was strategically shifted overnight from "democracy is evil" to "we already live in a democracy". Teubert conducts a hermeneutic analysis of select texts from political works and the records of British Parliament discussions on democracy, spanning from 1832 to the present day. While his pessimistic perspective on a seemingly divided and powerless working class may be contentious,

it offers a rare opportunity to engage with critical issues in linguistic discourse. Teubert's work offers valuable insights into the discourse surrounding the working class and contemporary discourses of meritocracy and the follies of a social ladder. Ultimately, he concludes that hegemonic discourse inhibits workers from actively advocating for equality within the democratic sphere, which would lead to equality and real democracy for the working-class social majority.

The book closes with an Afterword by Danny Dorling where he reflects on inequality and an omniscient market economy "where everything is for sale, everytime, everywhere" (185). You cannot be unlucky but rather you have not tried hard enough.

While the book undoubtedly offers valuable insights, it is worth noting that there was room for more visualizations and statistical analyses within its pages. Such enhancements could further enrich the presentation and interpretation of data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Apart from this, the book provides a highly valuable multidisciplinary bibliography, encompassing fields like linguistics, discourse studies, political science, sociology, and cultural studies. Within its pages, readers will discover a treasure trove of methodologies that are very valuable in their own right for the analysis of other discourses, but here succeed on the quest of underscoring the profound changes in discourse over time. Each chapter critically scrutinizes the discursive norms used by the elites that often obfuscate and marginalize the source of social inequalities. Encouragingly, this body of work is an antidote for fatalism: it demonstrates that nothing is irreversible. If discourse could evolve in the past for the worse, it could also be reshaped (for the better, for *the many*) in the future.

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