Language and Neoliberalism

Marnie Holborow

Language, Society and Political Economy

Language and Neoliberalism

Language and Neoliberalism examines the ways in which neoliberalism, or economic liberalism, finds expression in language. In this groundbreaking original study, Holborow shows at once the misleading character of ideological meaning and the underlying social reality from which that meaning emerges.

In universities, it is now the norm to use terms like *entrepreneurial* and *business partnerships*. How have these terms become a core component of education and gained such force? *Markets* have become, metaphorically, a power in their own right. They now *tell* governments how to act and *warn* them against too much public spending. Post-crash, the capitalist market continues to be crisis-prone, and in that context the neoliberal ideology remains contested.

Free of jargon and assuming no specialist knowledge, this book will strike a chord internationally by showing how neoliberal ideology has, literally, gone global in language. Drawing on Vološinov and Bakhtin, Williams and Gramsci, and introducing concepts from Marxist political economy, *Language and Neoliberalism* is essential reading for all interested in the intersection of linguistics/applied linguistics and politics.

Marnie Holborow is a lecturer in the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies in Dublin City University, Ireland. She is a co-author of *Neoliberalism and Applied Linguistics* and has written widely on the presence of neoliberal ideology in language.

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1 Introduction

Language and neoliberalism – issues and framework

Optimizing the customer footprint across geographies was how one very large financial services multinational described, in a press release, how it was axing over a thousand people across its branches. Such language hardly surprises us as we have become only too aware of company buzzwords, PR language, management speak, corporate phrases all around us. *Value added transparency* and *customer-centric* may be what fills strategic plans and brochures in private companies and increasingly the public sector, but this corporate-speak now figures strongly across society as a whole. *Mission* has replaced policy, *entrepreneurial* has become the most prized social trait, *valued customers* are what we are and *competitive* and *market efficient* what we could be. The widespread use of financial language, as in *leveraging*, and of management speak as in *deliverables*, has permeated many areas of our lives (Kellaway 2007; Seacombe 2011; Beckwith 2006). The existence of *Brand Me* portals to help students prepare themselves for the employment market is an indication of the depth of penetration of the market into the way we speak.

Why has such pervasive use of corporate jargon arisen? The 'marketization of language' (Cameron 2001; Hasan 2003; Kelly-Holmes and Mautner 2010; Fairclough 2010) may have been evident across much of the English-speaking world for a generation, but does its presence now – paradoxically more pervasive since the market crash of 2008 – indicate that it has irrevocably become part of our social world? Is it symptomatic of a deeper ideological shift which reflects the apparent unassailable position of neoliberalism? The sweeping presence of what one writer calls 'creeping linguistic neoliberalism' (Mirowski 2013: 117) certainly raises forcefully the relationship between language and ideology. This is the subject of this book.

'Vocabularies of the economy', Doreen Massey claims, have altered our everyday encounters. A T-shirt worn by an attendant in an art gallery bearing the words 'customer liaison' converts a spontaneous discussion about a picture into a commercial transaction. Being described as 'customers' on trains, buses and in hospitals means that 'a specific activity is erased by a general relationship of buying and selling that is given precedence over it' (Massey 2013: 3). 'The vocabulary of *customer*, *consumer choice*, of *markets* moulds both our conception or ourselves and our understanding of and relationship to the world'

(2013: 5). She describes the use of this language, in a Gramscian framework, as ‘crucial to the formation of the ideological scaffolding of the hegemonic common sense’ and to ‘the establishment of neoliberal hegemony’ (2013: 4).

Her claim is that this new dominant ideology, ‘inculcated through prevailing names and descriptions, steers us towards being “enrolled in a self-identification” process’, just as strong as any ‘material entanglement in debt, pensions and mortgages’ (2013: 5). These vocabularies, which reclassify our roles, identities and relationships, ‘embody and enforce the ideology of neoliberalism’ (2013: 6). She identifies various bundles of economic words, such as *wealth*, *output*, and *growth*, which reinforce in their terms the dominant conception of the well-being of both individuals and societies. The widespread use of *investment*, *expenditure* and *speculation*, and also *earned a*nd *unearned income*, contribute to the financialization and marketization of our society. These ‘vocabularies of the economy’ and the attendant neoliberal ideology they imply is the stronger for their being accepted by all mainstream political currents, including social democracy, which ‘accept the dominant architecture of the system in place’ (2013: 6). ‘The assumption that markets are natural is so deeply rooted in the structure of thought that even the fact that it is an assumption seems to have been lost to view’; ‘this is “real hegemony”’ indeed, she claims (2013: 16). Her call is for the current ‘common sense’ of language to be challenged root and branch (2013: 17).

Massey’s observations touch on the central theme of this book: how language and ideology intersect and how neoliberalism has deeply influenced the language of today. This introductory chapter will first present some theoretical issues concerning the interplay between language and ideology, and then outline how the term ‘neoliberalism’ will be used in the chapters that follow.

Ideology, ‘common sense’ and language

The inclusion of Gramsci’s terms in Massey’s discussion of language and ideology is apt. Gramsci developed a distinctive interpretation of the dynamic and tensions of ideology and how these were reproduced in language. Gramsci’s discussion of language and ideology provides a useful starting point to examine the articulation of neoliberal ideology in language. His writings have been recently reinterpreted, highlighting his sensitivity to the social and political importance of language (Ives 2004; Thomas 2009) and re-translations of his work (Gramsci 2011) have opened new avenues of understanding of his sometimes densely expressed ideas.[1] The brief section which follows makes no pretensions to capture fully his understanding of ideology and hegemony; rather it aims to identify the strands of Gramsci’s thought which serve as an entry point into a discussion of the presence of ideology in language and which, interwoven with other Marxist interpretations of language, underpin the approach taken in this book.

First, Gramsci identified metaphor as being crucial to the articulation of ideology in language. For Gramsci ‘language is always metaphorical’ (Gramsci 1971: 450) and ideology often lies metaphorically embedded in language. Identifying the ideological role of metaphor involves a ‘critical and historicist conception’

of language (1971: 451) which locates the metaphorical–ideological significance of a word in its accumulated social history. One example he gives is the word *disgrace*, whose metaphorical origins are woven so deeply into its structure that the religious connotation has faded from view (1971: 452). Gramsci described how a 'new metaphorical meaning spreads with the spread of the new culture which gives a precise meaning to words acquired from other languages' (2011: 187). Words can mutate over different societies and historical periods, absorbing 'in metaphorical form' (1971: 451) meanings from the past but they can also be infused with new ideological meanings by new ruling orders. He gave as an example the metaphorical language of religion, which is given different ideological inflections by different social classes. The 'popular turns of phrase' (1971: 328) are cultivated within 'the whole mass of the faithful' who adopt a conception which is not their own, but is 'borrowed from another group' yet which they affirm 'verbally' because this is 'the conception which it follows in normal times' (1971: 326–28). The historical residues within language, as Peter Ives notes, are 'fundamental in operations of power prestige and hegemony' (Ives 2004: 88). Gramsci also implies in parts of his writings that he sees language as metaphorical in the broader sense that it can be used as a metaphor for social and political relations.[2] However understood, metaphor, by drawing together unlike things and declaring that they have something in common, provides a linguistic mechanism for the articulation of ideology in language. As I show in Chapters 3 and 4, the personification of the market and the market as metaphor, in different forms and guises, carries deep ideological significance and serves as reinforcement of the neoliberal message.

Gramsci's historico-ideological understanding of metaphor flows naturally from his dialectical appreciation of language and social change, a view more fully outlined (contemporaneously) by Vološinov, who speaks of the 'social life' of the verbal sign (Vološinov 1973: 21). This theme is also repeated in historical approaches, which have seen the metaphorical dimension to the meaning of words as a complex expression of changing political consciousness. Words both inherit meanings from the past but also incorporate new meanings reflecting the political priorities of social classes in the present. Christopher Hill's study of the changing significance of the word 'revolution' in the seventeenth century is a case in point (Hill 1990).[3] The appropriation of words from the past for the neoliberal lexicon – such as *entrepreneur*, as we see in Chapters 5 and 6 – and used in different contexts with different meanings, adds the authority of tradition to new ideological turns.

Second, both ideology and language are linked for Gramsci to the question of social consciousness. Language represents our potential to form a general view of the world which means, as Gramsci puts it, 'everyone is a philosopher, though in his own way unconsciously, since even in the slightest manifestation of any intellectual activity whatever, in "language", there is contained a specific conception of the world' (Gramsci 1971: 323; 2011: 352).[4] (Gramsci often writes language in inverted commas, indicating his awareness of the conventional and the new meaning of words, and how ideology can take shape through marking

the different semantic layers of a word).[5] Insofar as both language and ideology involve the ability to generalize beyond the particular and the present, to make abstractions about the world in which we live, they overlap and are interconnected. Gramsci writes 'language is essentially a collective term which does not presuppose any single thing existing in time and space' (1971: 349). Without having read *The German Ideology*, he arrives at a remarkably similar view to that held by Marx of language and ideology. Marx saw language as the mode of being of thoughts, as a form of 'practical consciousness' (1974: 51).[6] Similarly, language for Gramsci is a concrete social activity in which everyone is engaged and, in so far as it forms how we see the world and interpret it, it is also effectively ideological. This coming together of language and ideology for the individual, Gramsci stresses, takes place in response and reaction to socially dominant ideological conceptions of the world 'mechanically imposed by the external environment' (1971: 323) by the dominant social class, which attempts to shape social consciousness within the confines of existing social relations.

Third, Gramsci's well-known concept of common sense also has a linguistic dimension. Gramsci alludes repeatedly to the role of language in the legitimization of common sense. Common sense, for Gramsci, consists of a spontaneous set of beliefs which together express a conception of the world which takes the social order as 'the way things are'.[7] It is apparently the 'spontaneous feelings' that people have, 'the traditional popular conception of the world – what is unimaginatively called "instinct" although it too is in fact a primitive and elementary historical acquisition' (1971: 199). Common sense gains currency through language. Gramsci describes it as 'a conception of the world "in whatever language"' (1971: 323), and 'superficially explicit or verbal', 'inherited form the past and uncritically absorbed' (1971: 333).

Because we use language as it already circulates in society, because we socially inherit linguistic use, our 'unthinking' engagement in language can often appear to accept uncritically its ideological meanings. For example, when we are told that our local health centre has a *customer care policy*, it may appeal in an immediate sense in that it tells us we are being looked after but, at a deeper layer of meaning, it draws us into a world in which all services are seen in market terms. Or when we are told that we are living in an *information* or a *knowledge society* these phrases may seem, on the face of it, to reflect accurately the changes brought about by the digital revolution. Yet they also subtly detach human capacities from the humans that possess them, and make society appear to be driven by 'things', not people. The apparent immediate acceptance of such meanings represents, for Gramsci, a way of thinking that is 'fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential' (1971: 419) in that it places us in a passive position *vis-à-vis* the social world. Common sense as propagated by ruling orders is often, as he puts it, 'neophobe or conservative' (1971: 423), representing a view of the world which reinforces the existing social order. Gramsci's common sense, as Kate Crehan (2011) notes, encompasses its 'givenness' in that it confronts us as an external reality. But this does not mean that it does not contain contradictions and the potential for change.

Common sense is linked to Gramsci's concept of hegemony and the economic order and this connection is particularly important in matters of ideology and language. Hegemony is often loosely understood as consensual power or, following Raymond Williams, the 'structures of feeling' (Simpson and Mayr 2010; Woolard 1998: 238). However, it is important to understand that Gramsci sees hegemony primarily as a socially imposed and historically specific method of rule. Though hegemony is manifest at many different levels of society – economic, institutional, cultural and linguistic – it derives its force from those who, in Gramsci's well-chosen words, have material forces as their 'content' and ideologies as their 'form' (1971: 377). Gramsci's writings were very much grounded in Marx, and following Antonio Labriola (upon whose translations of Marx Gramsci relied) he considered that the ultimate shaping forces in human history were a society's basic economic structures and social class system (Gramsci 1971: 459; Labriola 2005; see also Crehan 2011). In some places in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci makes the source of hegemony in capitalist society very clear: 'the "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group … is historically caused by the prestige and consequent confidence that the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production' (1971: 12).[8] Meanings in language are also subject, albeit more diffusely and not straightforwardly, to the same social pressures from the ruling class, involving the manufacture of consent. The apparently agentless workings of the market (which I explore in Chapter 4) or the representation of society as a collection of individual *entrepreneurs* or *human capitals* (described in Chapter 5) are verbal attempts to linguistically 'manufacture' neoliberal consent, and its articulation through powerful public channels, as I show, disperses this 'common sense' far and wide. Through oft-repeated phrases, used in set contexts, specific ideologies are asserted on behalf of specific social interests. Exhorting everyone and society as a whole *to live within their means* may seem like a logical statement for survival, but when uttered by a politician addressing the population at large it represents a conscious erasure of differences of wealth, a dimension which actually affects the feasibility of the proposition. *Austerity* may sound like a sensible response to an economic crisis but, as I will show in Chapter 6, it subtly covers over the reasons why it is supposedly needed and the fact that it hits the poorest hardest. The ideological theme takes shape from the class interests of its speakers, and gives it what Vološinov calls a 'uni-accentual' character.

Fourth, ideological hegemony is not a settled question, neither from the point of view of those who promote it nor for those at its receiving end. Gramsci's discussion of hegemony was understood as an overall strategy which included consent but also included force, and was deployed throughout society in a homogeneous politico-economic bloc. Peter Thomas emphasizes that hegemony in Gramsci is 'a theory of *class power*' (2009: 224, emphasis in the original) – a social strategy which runs in two directions, most weightily from above in terms of existing capitalist ruling class power but also, and a characteristic often omitted from cultural commentaries, from below in the struggle of the masses of ordinary

people to envisage and establish a different social order. Hegemony, as Mayr notes, is only ever achieved partially and temporarily as 'an unstable equilibrium' and one that requires constant remaking (Mayr 2008: 14). This changing dynamic of ideological hegemony is not captured in static notions, such as 'inculcation' (Massey 2013), or 'internalisation' (Mesthrie et al. 2009: 316). The power of Gramsci's common sense was that it was neither fixed nor guaranteed, but constantly tempered by people's actual experience of the social world. Common sense 'inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed' can under certain conditions move 'beyond common sense' and become 'a critical conception' or 'good sense' (Gramsci 1971: 423, see also 333–34; 2011: 369). In other words, our daily experience of the social world seems both to confirm and to run counter to many of the truisms of established common sense. This can jolt us abruptly into new ways of thinking and speaking about the world – what Gramsci called 'good sense'. The articulation of this new awareness, informed by practical social experience, can only prevail and supplant traditional forms of common sense, Gramsci was at pains to point out, if it is given collective organization and political expression.

The same tensions and contradictions are present in the articulation of ideology in language. A dominant ideology may say one thing about people's lives which their immediate life experience contradicts and leads them to say something different. Despite the apparent weight and overwhelming diffusion of neoliberal ideology, social consciousness is never smooth and singular; it is fractured and contradictory. A verbal and ideological rupture is most evident in the emergence of new collectively articulated language in mass social movements. Against a backdrop of the official neoliberal language of *trickle-down economics*, or *the need for austerity*, deepening social deprivation and greater social inequality can give rise to alternative representations. One such representation was the verbal labelling of '*the one per cent*' for the top wealthy few who were profiting from the crisis, a designation which rapidly caught on across the world. It struck a blow against neoliberal common sense and became what one might call 'good sense'. As Noam Chomsky put it at the time of the US Occupy Movement, 'there were things that were sort of known, but in the margins, hidden, which are now right up front – such as the imagery of the 99% and 1%' (Chomsky 2012). Christian Chun (2014), in his interesting study of language of the LA Occupy Movement, has also shown how protest signs can serve as tools for rethinking dominant discourse and, reinforced collectively, can become critical language in action. An example he gives is one of the signs made up by the occupiers, which read *Corporate Welfare – all the rewards of capitalism with none of the risks*. This 'marked an important disruption to the common sense discourse of welfare in the US that had prevailed in the past 30 years' (Chun 2014: 183). The clash between prevailing common sense and actual social experience is also lived out in a fragmented form in everyday language. In post-crash Ireland, words such as *zombie*, *toxic* or *the bankers* as terms of abuse passed into common usage and disrupted the common sense of business as usual (Holborow 2012a). The dualism of common sense and good sense is played out, as Gramsci noted, in

the 'concrete historical act' of human activity (1971: 372–73) and is vital to understanding both the weight of 'common sense' language and its potential to unravel.

If the challenge to the common sense of neoliberalism arises from the raw experience of its effects, as Gramsci noted, this may manifest itself only 'occasionally and in flashes' (1971: 327). For it to survive it needs to find coherent expression, practically and theoretically. Gramsci, himself writing amid the effects of a long period of deep crisis in the 1930s, dramatically evidenced by his own imprisonment, saw that the struggle against the existing order had to take place on all fronts, ideological as well as practical and organizational. He claimed that it was often in times of crisis that the ideological terrain became intensely important since the ruling orders sought 'to conserve and defend the existing structure' and would make every effort to cure them and within certain limits to overcome them' (Gramsci 1971: 178). The widespread presence of neoliberal ideology in language is one sign, this book contends, of a concerted project for ideological hegemony on behalf of powerful social interests and therefore uncovering the ideological meanings in its use must also be part of the challenge to it.

Neoliberalism: its nature and political dimension

When dealing with interpretations of neoliberalism, two cautionary remarks need to be made. Neoliberalism is referred to in very different ways and used to cover a diverse range of developments of different scales and origins. It is a new form of capitalism (Duménil and Lévy 2004), a series of successive waves of 'rule regimes' (Brenner et al. 2010), a restoration of capitalist class power (Harvey 2005), a collection of political projects, a cultural or ethical set of shared beliefs (Hilgers 2010), even individual behaviours and norms (Ong 2007). Not surprisingly, therefore, it has been described as a 'rascal concept' (Brenner et al. 2010: 184). An early collection of studies of neoliberal experiences noted that 'precise definitions of neoliberalism were difficult' because although the basic feature of neoliberalism is 'the systematic use of state power to impose (financial) market imperatives in a domestic process that is replicated internationally', it 'straddles a wide range of social political and economic phenomena' (Saad-Fihlo and Johnston 2005: 1–3). It is therefore necessary to clarify my approach to neoliberalism in this study.

Second, because neoliberalism was identified as a political project of capitalist elites (Harvey 2005) and because it became the target of the anti-capitalist movements of the early 2000s it was from the outset a political term, used widely by anti-capitalist activists as well as academics (Klein 2007; Harvey 2005; Callinicos 2003). One of the first to recognize neoliberalism as being 'an immense political project', and to foresee its significance, Pierre Bourdieu (1998) described it as 'the strong discourse', 'because it has on its side all of the forces of a world of relations of forces', an understanding which, for Bourdieu and many others, led logically to the fusion of academic analysis and political activism. The political dimension attached to critiques of neoliberalism has ebbed and flowed. The

social effects of the economic crisis and recession which unfolded after the market crash of 2008, and in response to the poverty and social dislocation that neoliberal economic policies caused, led to an upsurge of radical anti-capitalism, demonstrated most dramatically in the uprisings of Arab Spring but followed closely by the Occupy Movement in the US and in Europe, notably Spain, alongside mass opposition to the neoliberal terms of debt repayment in Greece. At the time of writing in 2014, these movements have for the most part receded, but it is clear that political tensions and contradictions around neo-liberal rule remain and these have fed into a new wave of interest in the nature of neoliberalism.

This is certainly the case for accounts of neoliberalism in applied and socio-linguistics and linguistic anthropology. It has only been since the economic crash of 2007–8 that neoliberalism has become a recognized point of reference in these disciplines and there are many examples. The discourses of neoliberalism have been explored in language teaching in the English language industry and in the marketization of language teacher education (Chun 2009; Gray 2012; Kubota 2011) Discourse analysis of performance-based versions of citizenship, as articulated in residents' accounts of the 'desirable' urban citizen, has been set in the context of neoliberal urban transformation (Weninger 2009). Linking neoliberalism to applied linguistics as an overall theme has led to investigations into the presence of neoliberal keywords in public discourse, 'economizing' identity and neoliberal representations of celebrity in text books (Block et al. 2012). Neoliberal ideology has been analysed through the metaphors in circulation in the US media after the Wall Street bail-out (Horner 2011). Neoliberalism has also provided a backcloth to studies dealing with the commodification of language (Duchêne and Heller 2012) and the marketization of English language skills in relation to the neoliberal 'promise' of employment (Park and Wee 2012). The 'neoliberal imaginary' has been cited as a cause of employees thinking of themselves as bundles of (language) skills to be sold on the labour market (Urciuoli 2008; Boutet 2001; Flores 2013). As these examples indicate, reference to neoliberalism involves introducing questions of political economy into linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, specifically around the nature of 'language work' in contemporary capitalism and a revisiting of social class (Block 2014).

In this book, I shall be dealing with neoliberalism primarily as an ideology for reasons that I set out below. This is not to minimize the importance of neoliberalism as an economic policy regime implemented by governments or as various strategies which aim to raise profitability levels for capital, nor, indeed, to ignore the very real and tangible effects that neoliberalism has on many people and societies across the world. It flows rather from the recognition that ideology is a core reference point for analysis of neoliberalism in language and an analytical tool for highlighting more generally the inconsistencies and contradictions of neoliberalism, whether in its notions of human capital (as I examine in Chapter 2), its reification of the market (Chapter 3) or its entrepreneurship claims for society and the university (Chapters 5 and 6).

Neoliberalism as ideology

First, neoliberalism operates at the level of 'appearances' and in accordance with its own version of an ideal world, characteristics generally taken to be those of an ideology. What neoliberalism says and what it does constantly diverge. The main tenet of neoliberalism is that the best outcomes will be achieved if the demand for and supply of goods and services are allowed to play out 'without interference by government and other forces' (Crouch 2011: 17). But, as Harvey points out, what the neoliberal state was in theory was not what it practised (2005: 64–70). The same governments which were declaring their commitment to these neoliberal policies, even before the crash of 2008–9 were 'interfering' very directly to construct a 'free' market to defend the interests of capital. Although governments were publicly rejecting state intervention in the economy, their actions proved that capitalism needed the state just as much in the neoliberal era as it had done in Keynesian times. Chris Harman gives details of direct government intervention to stop market pressures closing down car plants, hedge funds and banks and of increased state expenditure in the advanced capitalist countries over the period 1990–2001. This was financed not through free market principles but through 'Keynesian' methods of borrowing secured precisely because, in the case of the US, they were strong states (Harman 2007: 97). Accounts which describe neoliberalism as a 'coup' on behalf of a new financial elite against the old production-based order (Duménil and Lévy 2004), tend to ignore these continuities in relation to the state. Indeed, as Mirowski argues, neoliberalism is built on 'double truths' (Mirowski 2013: 68), on proclaiming publicly one thing while doing something very different. This dissonance reached unparalleled proportions during the economic crash of 2008–9. The trillions of dollars poured into failing banks demonstrated how far states were prepared to go to protect the interests of the 'free market'. Self-contradiction – or 'regulation in denial' (Peck 2010: xiii) – graphically reveals the broader character of neoliberalism which, for all its 'actually existing' status claimed by both its proponents and its critics, is the expression of a wished-for world, one that offers the promise of market equilibrium 'an endless utopia' of market freedoms (Bourdieu 1998), a vision not necessarily realized in the real world. Identifying this mismatch reveals its deep ideological and political bias and also its own potential vulnerabilities. The characterization of neoliberalism as an ideology, in other words, provides a crucial avenue for critique of both the doctrine and the political project, which, as we shall see, has relevance for its various ideological representations in language.

Second, neoliberal ideology is a ruling ideology. In a succinct summary of the Marxist interpretation of ideology, Jorge Larrain claimed 'ideology for Marx, as a distorted consciousness, has a particular negative connotation whose two specific and connected features are, firstly, that it conceals social contradictions and, secondly, that it does it in the interests of the dominant class' (Larrain 1979: 48). Interpretations of ruling ideologies in class terms are often dismissed in various disciplines (especially those addressing language and discourse) as reductionist, out of date and irrelevant to the contemporary world of micro-patterns of social

consciousness (Torfing 1999; Woolard 1998; Van Dijk 2008). Those who have written extensively on neoliberalism clearly identify the powerful channels – academic, corporate and political – through which the political project of neoliberalism has been steered (Mirowski 2013; Mirowski and Plehwe 2009). Mirowski, however, specifically refrains from using the word 'ideology', preferring to characterize the political project dimension as driven by a 'Neoliberal Thought Collective' and as 'a modern social epistemology in a distributed setting'.[9] Yet it would seem that the class dimension of neoliberalism, both as a doctrine and as a political project, can hardly be ignored, and that ruling ideology fits neoliberalism particularly well. It is uniform on a scale unthinkable in the nineteenth century when Marx alluded to ruling ideologies (Marx and Engels 1974). Channels of communication, with strong ties to corporate interests, have probably never been so streamlined nor, as I show in my analysis of the reproduction of neoliberal keywords across different arenas of official discourse, so amenable to uniform reproduction of a dominant ideology. Finally the wealth of the current ruling elite of capitalism has reached proportions of concentration not seen, Thomas Piketty argues, since the nineteenth century (Piketty 2014). Given that these elites are generally unanimous on the merits of market capitalism, this enables neoliberal ideology to have a formidably powerful platform. While local variations of neoliberalism vary in emphasis and neoliberal ideology is by no means monolithic, its ties to a concerted political project on behalf of governments and corporations, in what Harvey has called 'the restoration of class power', was precisely what enabled it to become 'the hegemonic mode of discourse', now 'incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world' (2005: 3). Being the ruling ideology, as my earlier description of Gramsci's 'common sense' makes clear, in no way implies it is monolithic or that it constitutes anything as materially constraining as 'an ideological state apparatus' (Althusser 2008), but it does draw attention to the fact that neoliberal ideology is hegemonic, and that it is so probably on a scale unprecedented even for ideologies that were claimed to be dominant in the past.

The theme of ruling ideology has become more relevant post-crash. Contrary to some expectations (Birch and Mykhnenko 2010), neoliberalism appeared to re-emerge reinvigorated; the doctrine seemed to experience not only a 'non-death' (Crouch 2011) but a newfound resurgence. Deep near-global economic recession accompanied by a dramatic redistribution of wealth in favour of the rich required neoliberalism to justify its about-turns and its social effects. The point of departure for this book is ideological legitimization in relation to neoliberalism, of which Ireland, which provides much of the material which will be discussed, is a particularly strong example. Amid the imposition of austerity policies which resulted in the most serious erosion of living standards for the vast majority for decades, containment of social unrest was the overriding priority for Irish governments. The ideological strategies employed, including the linguistic–ideological representations of *entrepreneurship* alongside *austerity* in official discourse, as we discuss in detail in the context of higher education in Chapter 6, were focussed and streamlined and strongly constituted, I argue, the promulgation of a ruling ideology.

Third, neoliberalism as ideology raises the question as to why I have chosen not to describe ideology in language as *discourse*, as has tended to be typical of this type of study. Ideology has featured less in social and cultural studies than it did twenty-five years ago, a phenomenon that has been attributed to the 'simultaneous decline in salience of social class as a theme and a category' (Fairclough 2010: 26). Although ideology is loosely recognized, many critical discourse accounts often tend to rely on the Foucauldian discursive nexus, which involves 'orders of discourse', 'discursive regimes of truth', and other 'discursive practices' (Foucault 2002; Fairclough 2010: 58). Foucault rejected ideology because he considered it too identified with the social and material world, and with notions of truth and Marxism (2002: 119), and this thrust has largely characterized the 'discursive turn' since.

Of course discourse means many different things from many different standpoints. At an everyday level it can mean simply sub-text or narrative, and incorporates the very ideological aspects of language that are of interest to me here. Equally, discourse analysis has extended the boundaries of language to include other disciplines, and introduced social and critical theories as a means of deconstructing meaning, which is as I have argued in the first section of this chapter, very much the concern of this study. But discourse *à la* Foucault, which defines 'subjects' and positions them in so far as it lays down who it is possible to be and what it is possible to do, would seem to cede too many norm-giving powers to discourse and downplay the role of social forces. Equally, the non-inclusion of the material world – in this case, the social relations of the capitalist market – merely leaves it alone rather than challenging it. Ideology explicitly retains the link with the material and social world which an extensive understanding of discourse obscures. For this reason I have chosen to retain ideology as a vital tool of analysis, both for the presence of a ruling ideology in official language and for neoliberalism itself, as I hope the following chapters will make clear.

Notes

1 One reason for the fragmentary and sometimes abstruse form of Gramsci's writings is the fact that he wrote them under the harsh conditions of prison. In 1928 he received a twenty-year jail sentence under Mussolini's fascist regime for his political activities.
2 Some commentators have taken this further to argue that different types of grammar are metaphors for hegemony (see Ives 2004: 85). Marx also used the same metaphor that social relations were the 'language of life' (1974: 47).
3 Tony Crowley and Marc Steinburg, from different angles, provide historically based views of language which highlight their ideological content (Crowley 1996; Steinberg 1999).
4 Gramsci uses the Italian *linguaggio*, with the meaning of language in general, which is different to the Italian *lingua*, which he uses when speaking of a national language. English does not have this distinction.
5 See Showstack-Sassoon (2010).
6 *The German Ideology* was first published while Gramsci was still in prison but it is possible that he was aware of its content via others (Harman 2007: 116). See

Holborow (1999) for an account of Marx's view on consciousness and language. See also Beaken (2011).

7 The Italian term *senso comune* refers simply to the beliefs and opinions supposedly shared by the mass of the population and has less of the positive connotations of common sense in English (i.e. good, sound practical sense; see Crehan 2011).

8 Gramsci's words echo those of Marx in *The German Ideology* where he claims that those with means and wealth also exert disproportionate influence on ways of thinking. 'The class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force' (Marx and Engels 1974: 64).

9 This claim is made in his response to a discussion of his book hosted by *Antipode* in 2013 (see http://radicalantipode.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/mirowski-reviews_authors-response.pdf, accessed 10th December 2014).

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