

# Neoliberal Values in the News: Language and Beyond

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Inherent weaknesses of the market combined with recent technological innovations have driven investors, governments, and lending organizations in advanced industrial nations to reject the more public-oriented aspects of Keynesian economics. The alternative has been a glorification of the values of investor rights, privatization on a massive scale, social engineering of a global labor force, and austere fiscal management (at least for developing economies), all cloaked in the populist rubric of “free trade.” Legitimizing this widely unpopular set of economic policies is ultimately the task of opinion makers, whose principal means are linguistic (or more broadly, semiotic). Transnational communications giants, with adjunct news organizations, serve as key instruments in naturalizing the basic tenets of this economic orthodoxy. News writers, influenced by the values of economic “globalization,” help to insure the reproduction of those values within society. Through a critical discourse analysis of a *New York Times* article related to free trade, I attempt to illustrate how reporting on economic and trade issues, despite professions of “objectivity,” often advocates a “neoliberal” world view.

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## Introduction

Since the events in Seattle in 1999 surrounding the meeting of the World Trade Organization, news audiences have been aware to some extent of a growing international citizens' movement directed against corporate excess. The general focus of this movement is a self-inflated form of speculative capitalism combining neoclassical assumptions about the naturalness of the market and technological innovations that has increased the rate of environmental destruction, quashed independent development, driven down wages in all countries, and served as a catalyst for international conflict worldwide. As in the past, this restructured global capitalism is aided and spurred on by increases in the speed of commodity exchange, a vital factor for mass economies of scale. These increases are made possible by recent advances in the field of communications and information transfer. A concurrent development is the dissemination of a corporate culture aided by these material means of information transfer, but also by a change in the use of language employed through these means. As capitalism evolves, so does the discourse surrounding it.

Examinations of language from such a social-historical perspective are founded in the analytical methods of Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1985), Critical Linguistics (Fowler, 1979; Hodge and Kress, 1979, 1988, 1993), and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; van Dijk, 1997). What all these approaches share is an emphasis on the meaning imparted to language through its institutional, social, and historical contexts. In the current paper, I draw on aspects of all these traditions. As I attempt to illustrate, the social-economic model and the language itself form an interdependent whole – one playing off of and building upon the other. Since the broader context in which language is discussed here largely concerns international trade policy, I include a brief overview here.

## The Changing Nature of Capitalism

The history of global capitalism since the end of World War II may be related largely in terms of the changing nature of two financial institutions that grew out of Anglo-American efforts to recapitalize a devastated Europe and to avoid drastic international imbalances in current accounts. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were initially established as efforts to achieve these goals by de-emphasizing what were viewed as chaotic market values in favor of an invigorated notion of the economy as an entity over which national and international bodies were obligated to exercise control. Over the next 40 years, however, the mildly progressive nature of these organizations was eclipsed as more “individualist” pressures were brought to bear on the organizations by national governments, financial organizations, corporate-sponsored think tanks, and business-funded university research institutions.

The original aims of the organizations have since been steadily supplanted by a growing set of macroeconomic policies—often referred to as “neoliberalism”—which, over the past 30 years, have systematically replaced national sovereignty and the democratic rights of local citizenry with the interests of transnational corporate investors. In 1995 the World Trade Organization was established under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund granting ever-increased investor rights to corporations, and in 1997 a draft bill for the Multinational Agreement on Investor Rights was debated. Described by former WTO Director-General Renato Ruggiero as “the constitution for a single global economy,” this agreement would have given multinational corporations unrestricted freedom to invest capital wherever, however, and whenever they liked.

All of these “trade liberalization” compacts have been accomplished through legal negotiations with local governments

and trade “representatives” in processes that most citizens assume involve their own elected governmental officials. In fact, many of the provisions in the “agreements” are written by corporate representatives working under the auspices of governments. “Negotiations” tend to be hurried, one-sided affairs in which public officials understand few of the legal and practical ramifications of the documents discussed.

What little information is eventually relayed to the general public concerning these “free trade debates” appears in the form of judiciously “leaked” items to journalists, news summaries, or editorial reports, which, for the most part, conform to the broad outline of neoliberal concerns. Occasional opinion pieces that adopt oppositional views toward some aspects of trade policy often accept without question much neoliberal discourse themselves. Rarely does one find a news article or opinion piece in mainstream journals that questions both central economic tenets and the actual discourse used to support them.

## Realism and Social Constructionism

Coordinated efforts on the part of corporate and state forces to maintain the boundaries and the nature of discussion surrounding the economic system illustrate what may seem obvious to some—that this change is accomplished to varying degrees through linguistic means. If, for example, two reporters draw different conclusions about the same World Bank press release, at least part of the explanation for their difference is to be found in language—the actual language selected by a particular writer, “sanctioned” for use by the social times, company policy, the institutional environment, and which eventually survives editorial cuts. Essentially, this is what makes studying language in this context of real practical interest.

But apart from these material issues, I want to touch on a particularly troublesome question concerning what is often

referred to as language “reflexivity” (the paradox of using language to interpret questions of language itself). Because of difficulties in determining an “ultimate” nature of reality, the problem of language reflexivity has sometimes resulted in an extreme relativity regarding questions of truth. Norris (1992) observes that in an age of postmodern flux, reality is “whatever we make of it according to this or that predominant language-game, discourse, or mode of signifying practice.” (pp. 24–25) According to such a premise, there is no truth that one might aspire to since viewed from each linguistic standpoint, truth is purely relative. From a strictly linguistic viewpoint, this argument can be seductive and has attracted progressive thinkers drawn to the seemingly democratic notion of a nondominant, noncentralized concept of truth. The effect of such an extreme relativity, however, is effectively to divorce language from any reference to reality—a very unprogressive attribute.

Despite the obvious difficulties language may present as a medium for conveying “absolute” truth, conceding that it somehow renders all efforts equally valid is simply defeatist and, more importantly, when issues of poverty and war increasingly depend on how they are perceived by the public, it is irresponsible. Such an extreme position on language encourages the easy use of relativist notions by nonprogressive forces who argue simultaneously for radical changes in the world economy and for maintaining the status quo of power and privilege (since truth, it is claimed, depends solely on one’s point of view). Preoccupation with debates over what may ultimately be unresolvable epistemological questions concerning language and reality effectively hands the linguistic keys to well-funded ideologues who harbor no doubts about the effectiveness of propaganda. To understand this, one only need look at the massive amounts of money spent by corporate-funded think tanks on press releases and position papers, by governments on public relations, and by media conglomerates to consolidate their positions around the globe.

Public opinion is a highly-valued commodity in liberal

democracies deprived of more forceful means of controlling their own citizenry. And as local communities with their traditional means of ensuring social conformity fall victim to capitalist growth, the state assumes an increasingly active and integral role in sanctioning the social devastation of the market. Because of this, not only is it necessary for corporations to justify their lack of social responsibility, but also the government as an accomplice finds itself in a similar situation. It must, notes Habermas:

... like the pre-capitalist state—be legitimated, although it can no longer rely on residues of tradition that have been undermined and worn out during the development of capitalism. (pg. 36)

This is where the journalist and opinion-maker enter as part of that mechanism of linguistic legitimation. What I suggest should compel the critical study of language, therefore, is simply the prominence assigned it by a profit-driven information technocracy that attempts to commodify knowledge and the means through which ordinary people hope to obtain it. If taken seriously, the above claim that language “constructs” reality (a seemingly absurd neo-Kantian assertion) is very different from the more understandable claim that language constructs our *experience* of reality. I maintain only this latter position, what I view as social constructionism, but rooted solidly in a common-sense realism/materialism. Language influences our experiences of the world, but it is a material world that initially shapes our experiences and our use of language.

Consequently, the central question I pose here is, “What are the ways in which language construes (i.e. influences and is influenced by) our experience of reality?” More precisely for present purposes, “How do media texts construe the concepts of economics, free trade, and neoliberalism in ways that make them seem natural, immutable, and beyond question?” If the concerns of language reflexivity and determinism expressed above appear distant and intangible, the questions here, in contrast, are distinctly practical. That analysts on the left stress the role language plays in mystification today is, in my

opinion, an honest reaction to the stunning adaptability and creativity apparent in the use of linguistic resources by corporations and governments as means of reproducing and restructuring the social order. Understanding those resources, then, should be seen as a basic democratic challenge and one which those involved with the study of language are obliged to address.

## Analytic Model

As mentioned earlier, in conducting the present analysis I have drawn on the related but somewhat different approaches of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). I will not go into great detail concerning the similarities and differences of these systems. It should be noted that CDA relies heavily on SFG for much of its structural framework. SFG as outlined by Halliday (1994) is the most ordered and fully laid-out attempt to explain language in terms of social meaning as opposed to the more formalist/cognitive approach of transformational grammar, which incorporates semantics essentially as an afterthought (i.e. outside transformational rules).

Of importance to those concerned with practical, progressive outcomes of research is the *predictive* (as opposed to simply descriptive) potential of these models. Although designed to describe language in use, their emphasis on the dialectical interplay between language and larger social and economic contexts aims at uncovering ideological meaning that may be “hidden” in texts. This is accomplished essentially through a process of induction—interpreting lexico-grammatical “traces” in texts, which help explain different semantic-discourse practices, which in turn reveal the influences of broader sociocultural contexts. Figure 1 illustrates how two different frameworks—SFG (Halliday, 1994) and CDA (Fairclough, 1989) —represent this process.

**Figure 1. Systemic Functional Grammar and Critical Discourse Analysis Frameworks**

	SFG	CDA
Broadest	Context	Sociocultural practice
$\Delta$	Text: (semantic-discourse) (lexico-grammar)	Discourse practice
Narrowest		Textual practice

There is no single method of textual/discourse analysis determined by approaches based on these frameworks. Some are more detailed, opting for a careful clause-by-clause examination of the text; others are more holistic, examining the general “texture” of a text as it is constructed discursively. Fairclough (1995) argues for an integration of the text within its full range of contextual (broader social) and cotextual (narrower textual) features. This approach seems common-sensical to me, and in the current analysis I combine elements of these two approaches, moving back and forth between discursive elements of context and more grammatical or textual elements, such as modality or theme.

Since SFG and CDA share some technical vocabulary, it will be useful here to introduce a key interpretive framework. Halliday (1994) describes three basic kinds of meaning: experiential—describing world experiences; interpersonal—maintaining personal relations, expressing views; and textual—organizing our messages. These meanings are related to clausal structure as illustrated in Figure 2.

Most of the functional roles here should be somewhat self-explanatory. Others will be less familiar. The interpersonal role “finite,” for example, refers to what is generally called the auxiliary verb in most standard grammars. Here it serves as a means of focusing on a verb’s (and by implication a clause’s) polarity (negative, positive) or modality (how the speaker/writer views the process in terms of possibility, usuality, obligation, willingness). The “predicator” is the part of the verb that expresses action or state and often has a role in showing



**Figure 2. Three “metafunctions” of language meaning**

Experiential	Actor	Process	Goal	
Interpersonal	Subject	Finite	Predicator	Complement
Textual	Theme	Rheme		

“secondary tense.” Complement, in functional grammar, includes both object and complement. Finally, theme refers to the “starting point” of the message, rheme being essentially everything else.

## Textual Sample

The sample chosen for analysis is from the *New York Times* (NYT). Referred to in the United States as “the newspaper of record,” the NYT is widely read for its foreign and business sections and hence, it is my feeling, a good source of writing characteristic of a general neoliberal viewpoint. The article (“Border Crossing ...” Appendix 1) is by staff writer Anthony DePalma (a frequent contributor to both foreign and financial sections) and first appeared in the business section on March 3, 2001. It is a report on the views of graduate students at two business schools, one in Mexico, the other in Miami. Generically, the article may be viewed as a standard “factual” news account combined with elements of a news “story.” This is due to the writer/narrator’s voice, which is more prominent than in many strictly factual accountings. Although there are no overtly stated opinions by the writer, the bracketing of interviewee and expert quotes by the writer’s commentary often blends the distinction. Numbers in parentheses after each article quotation indicate line numbers in the text (see Appendix).

## Analysis

An initial reading reveals the casual nature of the text; the author invites readers to join him in discovering how things simply “are.” “At the Duxx Graduate School of Business Leadership here, everybody speaks English.” (1–2) As an illustration of the layers of meaning discussed above, the main clause is represented in the diagram (Figure 3).

Examining text in this fashion allows us to see its full meaning over the three metafunctions. To gain a more complete understanding of how the word “everybody” functions in the clause, for example, it is useful to view it as actor, subject, and theme simultaneously. The same holds true of the other clausal elements. So, in this clause, not only does a reader understand that “everybody” actively moves toward the goal “English,” but that a static nature is implied of the interpersonal relationship between “everybody” and “English.” This is due, in part, to the present tense verb, which characteristically suggests a stative, atemporal meaning (a fuller description would have a “finite” slot labeled as present tense). Note that the writer might alternately have chosen the continuous form assigning the action a more temporary nature. Finally, “everybody” serves as the theme selected as a main topic for the clause and might here, for example, be compared to emphasis in speech where “everybody” implies some alternative—“not just a few people, but everybody.”

**Figure 3. Modified clausal framework showing three metafunctions**

	“everybody	speaks	English”
Experiential	Actor	Process	Goal
Interpersonal	Subject	Predicator	Complement
Textual	Theme	Rheme	

It might be noted also that the writer could have opted for the passive “English is spoken” for this clause (disregarding its use by language purists to imply that English has lost influence in some areas of the United States). In such a case, the finite would be made apparent and more readily influenced by modal features (contrast “English is generally/rarely spoken.” and “Everybody generally/rarely speaks English”). The theme of the clause is now “English,” an inanimate actor incapable of showing intent. I provide this rather trivial example here to demonstrate the general methodology of textual analysis from an SFG approach. The examples that follow focus more closely on the ideas of neoliberal ideology I wish to discuss and provide a more detailed picture of how a critical discourse analysis employing the above framework works.

I will begin with some instances of “cohesion” in the text. Cohesion refers to any linguistic means of organizing relations and experience, threading a text together in a sense, and is therefore a “textual” phenomenon (in SFG terms). In the clause “they are looking forward—into the free-trade future” (lines 7–8), the demonstrative “the” refers not to any previous use of the term “free-trade future” in the text but rather to something outside the text itself. As such, it is not an actual cohesive use of the term as we might expect if a writer were attempting to achieve a logical coherence, but rather is “exophoric”—signaling reference to an extra-textual, previously established meaning the writer assumes as a shared viewpoint. This is not “a” future about which there is any question or debate, but rather “the” future that readers are assumed to have already envisioned themselves. The writer, drawing on his own experiences of an increasingly globalized world, implies (consciously or not) that the future that of free trade is somehow predetermined.

Lines 51–53 illustrate what is perhaps a more common usage of cohesive devices. “That” in the clause “Preparing for business in that world ...” (53) is an endophoric (internal textual) reference to the adjunct in line 51 (“With globalization,...”) and illustrates how the meaning of the clause depends in some

part on the writer accepting the assumptions (exophoric references of a sort themselves) of the previous speaker—a graduate business student. The writer, it would seem, does more than just assume; rather he implies an actual “world” of globalization for which preparation is required—a veiled caution, perhaps, to prospective entrants to the market. To emphasize the point once again, this cohesive tie is facilitated through the simple device of a demonstrative pronoun; yet it allows the writer to build upon opinion expressed by the business student without having to accept responsibility for its corroboration. “That world” has, in a manner of speaking, been established for him.

This in-and-out weaving of the writer’s beliefs with those of his interlocuter is a common aspect in many news texts. In this case, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish when one leaves off and the other picks up. A different writer might have been more circumspect about drawing on previously stated opinions in this way, perhaps by using “scare quotes” (“Preparing for this ‘globalization’...” ) or a comparative cohesive device (“Preparing for *such* a world ...”) in order to distance him/herself from the interlocuter’s ideas. The fact that this was not done indicates a degree of willingness on the part of the writer to adopt a position that is, if not his own, at least established for him.

The sentence beginning “As Latin America struggles ...” and ending “closing the gap with the United States” (8–12) contains several points of interest. In the initial dependent clause, the subject “Latin America” is a personification, in effect a disembodied entity—in this case, a grouping of countries—which is inherently incapable of action. To find the real actor in this clause, it is necessary to uncover what “Latin America” might represent. The subject of the main clause provides us with a possible answer—“its business leaders.” Although the cohesive link provided by “its” connects “business leaders” and “Latin America,” the meaning is simultaneously referential and possessive in nature. The leaders are both equated with Latin America and are its leaders. Yet the separation of the two

allows the writer to disassociate these two entities and thereby avoid the question of whether or not the “struggle to overcome its protectionist past” is a product of popular will or one of elite imposition.

Next, I look at relational processes in the text that work at the experiential level to orient both the writer’s and the reader’s experience toward the subject of free trade. In lines 81–82 (“But there’s also an awareness that Latin America is behind the curve.”), Halliday’s concept of “value” and “token” becomes evident. Simply put, a value is a general evaluative category of which there are numerous tokens. A common example would be the value “annoying” with specific tokens, such as “mosquitoes,” “cell phones,” “Rush Limbaugh.” Values and tokens are connected with a relational verb, typically “be.” In the second clause, for example, we see that “Latin America,” the token, is related to the value “behind the curve.” The relational aspect of the verb permits (*n.b.* not compels) the writer and encourages (*n.b.* not constrains) the reader to view Latin American countries not perhaps as having been left or kept behind (other possible verb choices) but of simply “being” there, presumably of their own volition. Notice also that the existential process (there is) in the initial clause “But there’s an awareness ...” allows the writer to avoid identifying who it is that is aware of Latin America’s behind-the-curve label. Since “there” is the subject of the clause, the issue of agency is avoided by the writer (again, consciously or not). Readers are left to their own devices to sort out the puzzle of agency; some will read more critically, others—perhaps most—will not.

A further instance of this value/token distinction is seen in lines 110–111 (“The international aspect of business is crucial ...”; value—crucial, token—international aspect of business). This is a direct quote from one of the interviewees, and therefore the viewpoint cannot strictly be attributed to the writer. Even so, it is linked coherently by the use of definite articles to implications in the previous sentence concerning “the multinational demands of contemporary business.” In addition, we

may assume that in gathering material for this article, the interviews were conducted *before* the story was written. Hence, the phrase “the multinational demands of contemporary business” can more naturally be taken as setting the stage for the quotations that follow—a forward “cataphoric” reference.

Finally, I want to look at the way the writer employs what are called “nominalizations.” Nominalizations are “objectified processes” in the sense that a verbal process with active participants is transformed into an object whose participants are effectively erased. The transformed process can then be used as a subject, attract modifiers, and serve as agent in further processes itself. One of the clearest examples of this process in the text is in lines 62–64 (“‘What we’ve seen is a transformation of the whole business curriculum,’ he said, ‘and the internationalization of business schools’”). Here the nominalized form “transformation” provides the writer a ready-made convention for concealing the fact that some person or persons actually transformed the business curriculum. The pattern is the same in the phrase that follows “the internationalization of business schools.” Once again readers are left to ponder the question “Who done it?”

The most often used nominalized form in the text is “globalization.” Often referred to as a process, it functions grammatically as a noun. The first example appears in lines 51–52 (“‘With globalization,’ he said, ‘things get tougher and tougher everyday’”). To better illustrate the logical relationships involved, we might reformulate the clause as “Because someone [corporate interests presumably] is globalizing the world, things get tougher and tougher.” “Globalization” is unpacked here so that we might see its possible actor and goal. Another case appears in lines 59–60 (“Telecommunications and globalization have overhauled the way business is done ....”) in which globalization has become a subject/actor along with telecommunications. Together they “have overhauled the way business is done ....”—no mean accomplishment for two inanimate entities. Finally, in lines 139–140 (“... too many people are being left behind by globalization”)

the nominalization functions as the actor (in experiential terms) itself responsible for leaving people behind. Note that subject (people) and actor (globalization) are different, allowing a further distancing of responsibility. A logical transformation of this clause might read “Someone [transnational corporations most likely] are leaving too many people behind through the process of globalization.” Such transformations are tangible evidence that form and meaning are directly related. The principal reason for writers to manipulate clausal form (normally described as “making stylistic changes”) is to alter meaning. Style, in this sense, *is* meaning.

There appears one further example in the same sentence, lines 137–138, “Despite President Bush’s embrace of free trade, opposition is growing among environmentalists ....” The nominalized form “opposition” makes unclear the logical relationship between opposing and opposed. We know *who* is doing the opposing (the environmentalists), but what it is they are opposing is a mystery. In its verbalized form we may take the environmentalists as subject, “Environmentalists oppose ... (what?).” The obvious complement is “President Bush’s embrace of free trade.”

## Comments

This article first appeared in the NYT business section one month prior to talks on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) held in Quebec in April 2001. As such, we might consider the piece a kind of stage setting for the upcoming talks—discussing basic economic premises, reviewing arguments for and against the agreement, eliciting public views on the topic. Although the writer does not express any overt bias toward globalization in the way of personal opinion, neither does the discursive analysis reveal any real signs of dissonance. There are no textual/discursive hints of disagreement with the neoliberal premises expressed by the interviewees.

“Bias,” it should be noted, is used here in the sense of

outward, unconcealed partiality. It is the most commonly cited reason for public mistrust of the media today and in recent years, due to the successes of conservative news monitoring groups and their spokespersons in the media, has become a conjoined pair with the word “liberal” (Rouner, Donna; Slater, Michael D.; Buddenbaum, Judith M., 1999). Yet what becomes evident in the subtle, “opaque” (in the sense that it is not easily noticed) use of language as revealed through a critical analysis may more appropriately be referred to as “ideology.” Ideologies are unquestioned presuppositions that influence the ways one views society and as such are rarely expressed openly. To use a linguistic term, ideology is “unmarked.” Recognizing an unmarked word or usage requires a second look, an extra cognitive leap, or perhaps someone to “denaturalize” it for us. Concerning denaturalization, Hodge observes that “Any explicit form of the ideology becomes a derived structure, an attempted reconstruction of what has been naturalized by a member of that culture.” (pg. 82)

“Making explicit” in this sense is what I have attempted to do with the language in the NYT article. In the entire text, for example, the single hint of opposition to globalization appears toward the very end of the article: “Despite President Bush’s embrace of free trade, opposition is growing among environmentalists, anti-trade activists and citizens groups worried that too many people are being left behind by globalization.” (137–140) Forwarded by a dependent clause noting Bush’s “embrace” of free trade, the initial discourse marker “despite” signals to readers that what follows is a contradictory, and therefore in this context, atypical view and hence more difficult to understand. The contrary view, as it turns out, is the above-mentioned nominalized form “opposition.”

Examining the particular context in which this story was constructed makes it easier to see how opposition to globalization might seem an inappropriate viewpoint. The business graduate students interviewed for the piece are themselves open advocates of a general neoliberal paradigm. Had the



writer wanted to express even mild doubt concerning the positions of his interviewees, he could have employed a number of linguistic devices to do so (negative adjuncts, increased modality, etc.). Whether the situation itself discouraged this, editorial intervention erased such traces, or the writer simply agreed with most opinions expressed is impossible to say without knowing more about the specifics of how the piece was produced. What is beyond question, however, is the evidence in the text itself.

Turning to broader social influences, the climate among investors prior to the FTAA talks was hopeful but tense due to recent “disruptions” of trade talks in Seattle, Washington, and Genoa. Again without any hard evidence one can only imagine NYT business desk editors asking for a piece that, if not actually supportive of globalization, was at least not at odds with it. In this light, media critics have noted the paper’s open championing of neoliberal policy. Commenting on the media’s conformity of views concerning the FTAA, Rachel Cohen (July 2001) notes that “Editorial pages across the country echoed the New York Times op-ed page’s twin accusations that protesters were for poverty and against democracy.” (pg. 26)

It is partly this social context that allows us to see the cohesive devices mentioned in the analysis, for example, as not simply linguistic measures to provide textual flow but as complements that add to the sense that “the free trade future” and the “world” of globalization are simply more coherent or logical views. The value/token distinction in such clauses as “The international aspect of business is crucial ...” adds to this coherence by helping to naturalize the relationships essential to a neoliberal outlook.

All of these ideas coalesce to help form a picture of an economic system independent of the society in which it functions. Emmison (1983), in discussing the evolution of modern theories of economy, highlights this notion of “embeddedness.” “Disembedded” economies are those that function in isolation from the communities they purport to serve. The neoclassical market forces given such prominence in neoliberal

proscriptions for development are clear examples of this division between concerns of society and those of an almost autonomous economy. Yet when the economy does not work in the interests of society as a whole (as seems currently evident), discourse helps blur responsibilities. As Emmison notes:

At a far more fundamental level, a mechanism of legitimation for a disembedded economy is provided by the structure of the very discourse that describes it. Put differently, the potentially visible arrangements of this type of economy have become opaque and mystified, one might almost say invisible, as a result of the reified imagery of discourse, whether this takes the form of economic processes “naturally” controlled by the laws of the market or of an object-like economy subject to neutral state intervention and guidance. (pg. 143)

## Conclusion

It is no surprise then that the NYT article never actually uses the word “neoliberal.” Few major newspapers do. As with other terms rooted in struggles for indigeneous peoples, labor rights, environmental action, and fundamental social change, the word functions as a kind of ideological shibboleth often relegating its users to a radical fringe. The more accepted term, and one with overtones of liberalism and unrestrained thought, is “globalization.” The emphasis with this term is, of course, not on the “global” cultural hegemony of Gramsci or the “global” domination of markets by a few transnational corporations. Rather, globalization is normally equated with freedom of movement and thought. Free trade, as one economist puts it, means “open borders and the free flow of ideas across national boundaries.” (Hertzel, pg. 59) Notice that no mention is made here of the financial resources and material wealth whose “free flow” is of the uppermost importance to wealthy investors around the world. These simple choices of vocabulary with all their presuppositions provide texts with an ideological undercurrent.

In all of the above textual examples, the reporter has made

linguistic choices that affect the ways his readership will likely understand what he is attempting to convey. That writers make purposeful choices to influence readers is clear. Less obvious is the fact that in some ways writers are often directed toward such choices by textual and discursive features and by institutional and societal influences. As I have noted, this process is both conscious and unconscious in most writers—critical writers (and readers) being more aware of how language functions and the consensus meaning of much discourse.

What I hope this analysis has shown is that in addition to the very real economic changes occurring as a result of actions by corporate interests and their representatives in governments around the world, part of this change is linguistic—as social influence on language and linguistic (or multisemiotic) influence on society. Texts such as the one analyzed here are constructed in such a way that “preferred” meanings are taken by readers. And those preferred readings impart much of the ideology common in today’s discussions of economics. Encouraging oppositional readings in such a context can be a tool for progressive activists everywhere.

### Appendix: *New York Times* Article:

#### “Border Crossing: Where Language Isn’t a Barrier 2 Schools, 2 Nations, One Future Envisioning Free Trade”

1. MONTERREY, Mexico -At the Duxx Graduate School of Business
2. Leadership here, everybody speaks English. At the Latin American
3. Program of the University of Miami School of Business
4. Administration more than a thousand miles to the east, everyone
5. speaks Spanish.
  
6. It might seem that the mostly Latin American natives at the two
7. schools have things backward, but they would argue that they are
8. looking forward—into the free-trade future. As Latin America
9. struggles to overcome its protectionist past and join the global
10. economy, its business leaders realize the next generation of
11. executives needs a crash course in American management to have a

12. chance of closing the gap with the United States. And that is what  
13. the students here say they are getting.

14. They come from varied backgrounds and have their own business  
15. goals. But whatever language they use in the classroom, they know  
16. they have to master American business concepts if they are going to  
17. help their countries cope with tumbling trade barriers. With  
18. President Bush promising to lobby at the Summit of the Americas in  
19. Quebec in April for his goal of a common market for the entire  
20. hemisphere by 2005, the challenge has become all the more urgent.

21. At Duxx, in a suburb of this most business-oriented of Mexican  
22. cities, 20 young men and women, nearly all of them Mexican, are  
23. learning the latest American techniques and theories of finance,  
24. marketing and leadership skills. The master's program is taught in  
25. English, which is rapidly solidifying its position as the hemisphere's  
26. preferred language of business.

27. At the same time, around 50 business people from all over Latin  
28. America are attending Miami's program, which focuses on American  
29. corporate finance and international marketing. Its classes are taught  
30. in Spanish.

31. But the mind-set at both places is international. "I can't imagine  
32. working in a company that is not globally focused," said Carlos  
33. Garcia Zendejas, 28, who is studying for a master's in business  
34. leadership at Duxx. A native of northern Mexico, he said the  
35. program's multinational nature and international faculty worked  
36. well with his experience at John Deere and other manufacturers.

37. "Working and studying this way," Mr. Garcia Zendejas said, "has  
38. opened up a lot of horizons for me."

39. For many of these students, the horizon already stretches to a world  
40. where crossing borders is hardly more meaningful than crossing  
41. highway traffic lines. Eugenio J. Cisneros, 38, was born in Miami of  
42. Cuban parents. A few years later, the family moved to Venezuela.  
43. There, Mr. Cisneros entered his father's gasoline retailing business,  
44. operating one of the busiest truck stops in the country. Mr. Cisneros  
45. has taken the family business international by buying six stations in  
46. Puerto Rico.

47. "There are no boundaries anymore," Mr. Cisneros said during a  
48. break from his classes at the University of Miami. Like most of the

49. students, he keeps in touch with his business, which usually  
50. means that as soon as a break begins, he is on his cell phone calling  
51. Puerto Rico or Venezuela. “With globalization, “ he said, “things get  
52. tougher and tougher every day.”

53. Preparing for business in that world is changing, too. “Back in the  
54. 1970’s and 1980’s, you really didn’t have to open the catalog at  
55. most business schools because the content and format of the  
56. courses were the same everywhere,” said Larry E. Penley, dean of the  
57. Arizona State University College of Business and chairman of the  
58. International Association for Management Education, which  
59. accredits business schools. Telecommunications and globalization  
60. have overhauled the way business is done, he said, which means the  
61. schools had to change what they taught and how they taught it.

62. “What we’ve seen is a transformation of the whole business  
63. curriculum,” he said, “and the internationalization of business  
64. schools.”

65. Competition among business schools has grown vicious in recent  
66. years, especially in the crowded ranks below the top tier of schools.  
67. Harold W. Berkman, vice dean of the University of Miami School of  
68. Business Administration, said he had been looking for ways to  
69. distinguish Miami’s business program from that of hundreds of  
70. similar schools.

71. “I was up one morning at 4:30 asking myself what we can do that no  
72. one else can do,” he said. He knew that Miami had become a  
73. financial capital for Latin America, the place where bankers,  
74. executives and entrepreneurs from the region congregated to dip  
75. their toes into America’s capitalist waters.

76. Professor Berkman imagined a course taught entirely in Spanish that  
77. would attract active business leaders who had a basic understanding  
78. of English but felt more comfortable in their own language and who  
79. were eager to pick up American business secrets.

80. There is an awareness, Professor Berkman said, of the Free Trade  
81. Area of the Americas coming. He was referring to the free-trade  
82. bloc championed by President Bush. “But there’s also an awareness  
83. that Latin America is behind the curve.”

84. The first class, in 1997, was canceled when not enough students  
85. enrolled. The university tried again the following year, changing the

86. approach of the advertising slightly to reflect cultural differences  
87. among the nations. It took out ads in magazines and newspapers. A  
88. recruiter was sent to the region. "There, people don't believe you  
89. until they see you," Professor Berkman said.

90. On the second try, 22 students signed up for a master's program in  
91. professional management. Students were required to come to Miami  
92. for five intensive two-week periods from fall to the early summer,  
93. supplemented by reading and study. After the first two classes  
94. graduated, in 1998 and 1999, the university added a Master of  
95. Business Administration.

96. Although classes are conducted in Spanish, all the readings and case  
97. studies are in English. Most students speak it, too, but sometimes  
98. with gaps, just as their English-speaking professors have gaps in  
99. their conversational Spanish.

100. "No tenemos loyalty," said Anthony Miyazaki, an assistant professor  
101. of marketing, as he mixed idioms in addressing the M.B.A. class. His  
102. students later said Mr. Miyazaki sometimes needed to switch to  
103. English to get across a concept, but they usually knew what he  
104. meant. Mr. Miyazaki, who learned Spanish in college, said the  
105. students often adopted American lingo in their eagerness to learn.

106. "We're supposed to use the term porcion de mercado," he said,  
107. "but everybody here just prefers to say "market share.""

108. The students at Duxx are younger and less experienced than those in  
109. Miami, but just as aware of the multinational demands of  
110. contemporary business. "The international aspect of business is  
111. crucial, especially here in Monterrey where people are expected to  
112. know about international business," said Antonio Garza Torres, 36,  
113. of Garza Garcia, the suburb of Monterrey where Duxx is situated.

114. Duxx was begun in 1993 by Alfonso Romo Garza, scion of one of  
115. Monterrey's thoroughbred corporate and political families. He hired  
116. Carlo Brumat as dean, a polyglot Italian academician with extensive  
117. experience teaching business management in English at Insead,  
118. France's leading international business school.

119. At Duxx, students enroll full time and study one or two courses at a  
120. time. Teachers fly in from the United States, Britain and elsewhere  
121. for two-week periods. The instruction and all the reading are in  
122. English.

123. Duxx students must pass standardized admissions tests and  
124. demonstrate their command of basic English. Inevitably, though,  
125. some things get by them.

126. “What’s a life raft?” asked a number of students in the interpersonal  
127. relations class taught by William O. Roberts and Karl E. Scheibe. One  
128. student responded in Spanish that it was a life preserver, another  
129. that it was a wet suit. A third called it a small boat. The word brigand  
130. in another class left nearly all the students clueless about its  
131. meaning.

132. But for the most part, English is not a major impediment, and here,  
133. at least, the old Mexican distrust of English as an artifact of cultural  
134. imperialism is dead. “English is the lingua franca of business,” Dr.  
135. Brumat said. “Not recognizing that is like shooting yourself in the  
136. foot.”

137. Despite President Bush’s embrace of free trade, opposition is  
138. growing among environmentalists, anti-trade activists and citizens  
139. groups worried that too many people are being left behind by  
140. globalization. Also, diplomatic and commercial quarrels among the  
141. nations that would make up the free-trade area make the 2005  
142. goal a moving target.

143. That does not stand in the way of those enrolled, however. If the  
144. pact happens, said Pamela Camus, 45, country director in Chile for  
145. American Airlines and a student in the Miami program, “it may be in  
146. many more years to come.” Mrs. Camus, who is Chilean, noted that  
147. it has taken the United States more than seven years to start  
148. negotiations for a free-trade agreement with her country.

149. Mrs. Camus is certain a hemispheric agreement will help Chile and  
150. other Latin American countries, but she is not willing to just sit and  
151. wait for it to happen. “Whatever the United States does has an  
152. impact on our economy,” she said. “I’m preparing myself to handle  
153. my company and my dreams in every area and every situation that  
154. comes.”

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