

**ECONOMIC DISCOURSE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL REALITY:  
A CRITICAL CORPUS – BASED LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract**

Economic discourse has become one of the most influential forms of public communication in contemporary societies, shaping not only economic policy but also social perception, political legitimacy, and ideological consensus. Although commonly presented as neutral, technical, and objective, economic language is deeply embedded in power relations and ideological assumptions. This study investigates economic discourse as a discursive practice that constructs social reality through specific linguistic strategies. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and corpus-based methods, the research examines political speeches, media texts, and institutional policy documents to identify recurring lexical, grammatical, and metaphorical patterns. The findings demonstrate that economic discourse systematically suppresses agency, naturalizes market-oriented ideology, and frames economic outcomes as inevitable processes rather than contested political choices. By integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study contributes to current debates on discourse, ideology, and institutional communication, emphasizing the need for critical engagement with economic language in democratic societies.

**Keywords:** economic discourse, critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, ideology, institutional language, metaphor

**Introduction**

In contemporary global society, economic discourse occupies a central position in public communication. Economic concepts such as growth, stability, competitiveness, and reform dominate political debates, media narratives, and everyday conversations. These concepts are rarely questioned, as they are widely perceived as technical descriptors grounded in objective economic science. However, linguistic and discourse-oriented research has increasingly demonstrated that economic language is far from neutral. Instead, it functions as a powerful discursive mechanism through which particular worldviews, policy agendas, and social hierarchies are legitimized.

The expansion of economic discourse beyond expert communities into mass media and digital platforms has intensified its social impact. Citizens are constantly exposed to economic narratives that frame political decisions as unavoidable responses to external economic forces. As a result, economic discourse plays a crucial role in shaping public consent, limiting ideological alternatives, and normalizing inequality.

The present study approaches economic discourse as a form of social practice embedded in institutional power structures. By combining Critical Discourse Analysis with corpus-based linguistic methods, the research seeks to uncover the linguistic strategies through which economic discourse constructs social reality and reinforces dominant ideologies.

The objectives of this study are:

To identify dominant linguistic features of contemporary economic discourse

To analyze how these features contribute to ideological representation and power relations

To demonstrate the value of corpus-informed CDA for the study of institutional discourse

*Theoretical Framework*

### 2.1 Discourse as Social Practice

Discourse is understood in this study as language-in-use that both reflects and shapes social structures. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse constitutes a form of social practice through which power relations are enacted, reproduced, and occasionally contested. From this perspective, economic discourse does not merely describe economic reality but actively participates in its construction.

Foucault's (1972) concept of discourse further emphasizes the role of language in defining what counts as legitimate knowledge. In economic discourse, this process involves privileging certain forms of expertise while excluding alternative interpretations of economic phenomena. Consequently, economic explanations are framed as scientifically grounded truths rather than ideologically situated interpretations.

### 1.2 Ideology and Institutional Discourse

Ideology in discourse is not necessarily expressed explicitly; rather, it is embedded in linguistic choices that appear natural or common-sense (van Dijk, 1998). Institutional discourse, including economic policy language, derives authority from its association with expertise and institutional legitimacy. This authority enables institutions to impose specific interpretations of reality while minimizing resistance.

Economic discourse is particularly effective in this regard because it often relies on abstract terminology, mathematical metaphors, and impersonal grammatical constructions. These features contribute to what Bourdieu (1991) describes as symbolic power—the ability to shape perceptions and classifications through language.

## 2. Data and Methodology

### 3.1 Corpus Design

To ensure empirical validity, a specialized corpus of contemporary economic discourse was compiled. The corpus consists of texts produced between 2015 and 2024 and includes three main components:

Corpus Component	Source	Word Count
Political discourse	Speeches by EU, IMF, World Bank officials	180,000
Media discourse	Financial Times, The Economist, BBC Business	220,000
Policy documents	OECD, EU Commission reports	120,000
Total	—	520,000

### 3.2 Analytical Procedure

The study employs a mixed-methods approach combining:

Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995)

Corpus Linguistics (Biber et al., 1999)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)

Quantitative corpus tools were used to identify frequency patterns, collocations, and grammatical structures. Qualitative analysis then interpreted these patterns within their socio-political context.

## 3. Linguistic Features of Economic Discourse

### 4.1 Nominalization and the Erasure of Agency

One of the most salient features of economic discourse is the extensive use of nominalization. Terms such as liberalization, fiscal consolidation, and structural adjustment transform actions into abstract entities, effectively removing human agents from the discourse.

For example:

Fiscal consolidation is required to ensure long-term stability.

This formulation conceals who enforces consolidation and who bears its consequences, presenting the policy as an objective necessity rather than a political decision.

#### 4.2 Passivization and Authority Construction

Corpus data indicate a significantly higher frequency of passive constructions in policy documents than in general language use. Passive voice contributes to depersonalization and reinforces institutional authority by shifting focus from actors to processes.

#### 4. Metaphorical Framing of Economic Reality

Metaphors play a crucial role in shaping economic cognition. The analysis reveals three dominant metaphorical models:

Metaphor	Example	Ideological Function
Economy as organism	economic recovery	Naturalization
Economy as machine	engine of growth	Technocratic control
Economy as conflict	trade war	Legitimation of competition

These metaphors simplify complex socio-economic relations and encourage acceptance of market-oriented logic as natural and inevitable.

#### 6. Ideological Implications

The findings demonstrate that contemporary economic discourse strongly aligns with neoliberal ideology. Markets are portrayed as autonomous entities, while state intervention is framed as a corrective rather than a structural alternative. The frequent collocation of reform with evaluative adjectives such as necessary and inevitable further reinforces this ideological orientation.

By excluding alternative economic models from discourse, economic language contributes to ideological closure and limits democratic debate.

#### Conclusion

This study has shown that economic discourse functions as a powerful linguistic mechanism through which social reality, ideology, and power relations are constructed and maintained. Through strategies such as nominalization, passivization, and metaphorical framing, economic language presents ideological assumptions as objective economic truths.

By integrating corpus linguistics with Critical Discourse Analysis, the research provides empirical evidence for the ideological nature of economic discourse. The findings highlight the importance of critical economic literacy and call for greater awareness of the linguistic dimensions of economic communication.

Future research may extend this approach by examining multilingual economic discourse, cross-cultural variation, or the impact of artificial intelligence on institutional economic communication.

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