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# Recontextualisation of neoliberalism and the increasingly conceptual nature of discourse: Challenges for critical discourse studies

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## Abstract

This article highlights that by focusing on concepts, many contemporary discourses increasingly turn towards (re/definitions of) various abstract ideas while moving their focus away from representations of doers as well benefactors of social and politico-economic processes. Focusing on the process of such an *increasingly conceptual nature of discourse* as one of the key displays of contemporary neoliberal logic in public and regulatory discourse, the article argues that the concept-driven logic – evident in policies, but also in media and political genres – necessitates new theoretical (and analytical) tools in critical discourse studies (CDS). It is suggested that, on the one hand, incorporation of ideas from within conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) into CDS is necessary. On the other hand, it is also argued that an in-depth rethinking of the ways in which CDS approaches *recontextualisation* as a concept is equally crucial. As is argued, both insights might help tackling the conceptual dynamics in/of discourses by tracing the conceptual logic of discourse and identifying ideological ontologies of contemporary public and regulatory discourses. They also help scrutinise discourses in which social practice is often regulated and where the image of non-agentive ‘invisible’ social change allows for legitimisation of the often-negative social and politico-economic dynamics.

## Keywords

Conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*), critical discourse studies, neoliberalism, policy analysis, recontextualisation, regulatory discourse

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## Introduction

One of the main preoccupations of critical discourse studies (CDS) has been to theorise and analyse discourse in relation to society. The central aim of CDS has in fact been to look at ways in which ‘discourse reproduces society and culture as well as being reproduced by them’ (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258). Further to the main theoretical and interpretive notions in CDS, such as power (Fairclough, 1995) or ideology (Van Dijk, 1998), the key analytical concepts and tools in CDS have revolved around how society is mis/represented in public discourse. Some of the key schools in CDS, like the discourse-historical approach (DHA), the socio-cognitive approach or multimodal traditions, have focused on related processes of construction of in-groups and out-groups (Van Dijk, 1984), strategies of self- and other-presentation in discourse (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001) or on patterns of representing social actors (Van Leeuwen, 2008). All of them have aimed at analysing discursive construction of boundaries between various social groups or of distorted/stereotypical portrayal of various sections of society.

While, to be sure, the focus on mis/representation of society and its members/groups remains crucial if not central to CDS, there increasingly exists a need to tackle other tendencies in/of contemporary public and especially regulatory discourse. One such tendency highlighted here is what might be coined as *the increasingly conceptual nature of discourse*. It contributes to the fact that rather than focusing on images of individuals and social groups, contemporary public discourse increasingly revolves around debating and redefining various social and political and indeed abstract concepts, often in lieu of re/presenting the actual society or its members.

Of course, especially the public discourses have always been filled with various conceptual elements and have always tried to label social processes as ‘politics’, ‘economy’, ‘liberalism’, ‘social democracy’ or the like, thus using abstract terms or even ‘technical jargon’ (Fairclough, 2008: 812) to provide analytical language for examination of ‘real societies’ (Billig, 2008). Yet it seems that the current tendency aims to label various social processes with conceptual tools in many cases wrongly/misleadingly. It thereby purposefully avoids representations of the actual society and its members.

In contemporary discourses, concepts hence cease to be ‘generalisations’ of the broadly understood social reality and instead become *operationalising concepts* for the introduction and legitimisation of various forms of regulation. They are not just additions or elements of a meta-language tied to representation and abstraction of social action, but often become outright replacements of discursive constructions – in the sense of representations – of social change or of those that are undertaking and/or undergoing some rapid and very often abrupt social processes.

The perhaps most obvious example to illustrate the above is the case of contemporary public and regulatory discourses on immigration which, rather than discussing the condition of migrants as such, choose to discuss concepts such as ‘integration’ in relation to the majority of migration-related (social, political and economic) processes. The focus on integration allows legitimising policies once known as ‘assimilation’, indeed by endowing them with a new socially resonant concept (Krzyżanowski and Wodak, 2009). But it also becomes a catch-all excuse for the fierce criticism of social groups

– in this case migrants – who can thereby be very easily targeted by politicians and journalists and stigmatised as those who allegedly ‘do not follow integration’, do not ‘want to integrate’ and hence should not belong (Bennett, 2015, Krzyżanowski, 2010). Because of its conceptual focus, exclusion as well as its enforcement in discourses of regulation (policies) becomes largely non-agentic and especially deprived of references of those who undertake certain processes.

As this article argues, the aforementioned tendency has become particularly widespread in the past 20–30 years, marking the heyday of neoliberal politics and political economy across the globe (see later). In line with the above, CDS needs a set of new conceptual and analytical tools that would help it deal with the aforementioned increasing conceptualisation of contemporary public discourse. To this end, this article suggests furthering the discussion initiated previously (cf. Krzyżanowski, 2013a) on the possibility of combining CDS theoretical (as well as related analytical) apparatus with that of concept-oriented areas of social history. The article therefore delineates the key areas of interface between CDS, on the one hand, and the so-called conceptual history or *Begriffsgeschichte* (hereinafter BG), on the other. It does so in order to highlight that some notions central to BG – such as, for example, semantic fields, sister/counter-concepts (see later) – prove crucial as entry points for CDS-driven theorisation and analysis of discourses dominated by concepts and conceptualisation processes.

Since it becomes central to the aforementioned interface and to the set up of conceptually oriented critical analyses of discourse, the article also proposes to rethink the notion of ‘recontextualisation’ that has been central to CDS for several decades. It is argued here that the concept-oriented dynamics of discourse require a new, close and systematic understanding of ‘recontextualisation’. The article therefore proposes to do so mainly by way of detailed revisiting of the very original meaning of recontextualisation as proposed by Basil Bernstein (1990). Re-reading Bernstein’s core proposal is crucial to understanding discursive and thereby conceptual change in contemporary public discourse and the fact that it is very often purposefully ordered by a set of strategic, gradual moves. As the article argues, a closer look at Bernstein’s original ideas allows us to recognise moments of discursive changes/shifts and the fact that they are very often strategic in nature. It also facilitates foregrounding how the notion of ideology, indeed central to CDS (Van Dijk, 1998), becomes salient yet again when looking at ordering of public and regulatory discourses in the context of their contemporary conceptual change.

## Neoliberalism: Discourses, concepts and ideologies

One of the central features of neoliberalism is the fact that it introduces economic and market-driven logic into social and especially public domains previously not characterised by economic relations (Crouch, 2011; Jessop, 2012; Touraine, 2001). This process entails various forms of discursive changes and shifts (Krzyżanowski, 2013b) that, effectively, change the ways in which society and social action are represented in the public realm. Through those changes and shifts, neoliberalism becomes ‘hegemonic as a mode of discourse’ (Harvey, 2005: 3) while enabling ‘neoliberal onslaught on conceptions of “the public”’ (Colás, 2005: 70) in various – including regulatory – discourses.

Neoliberalism hence results in many ideological – and conceptual – discursive struggles that serve creating as well as legitimising an image of non-agentic or perhaps even invisible social change. This happens in politics and the media (Phelan, 2014), but especially in various hybrid regulatory genres (Krzyżanowski, 2013b, 2015; Sum and Jessop, 2013) that operationalise neoliberal politics. While policies and other regulatory discourses and their ‘driving’ ideas – or their *operationalising concepts* – are debated ever more frequently in the public realm (although the actual deliberative nature of those ‘debates’ should often be questioned), social change is not in fact represented in discourse as such but is often portrayed as a purely ideological or conceptual transition. With processes and policies being just renamed under headings of different concepts, the latter often come to dominate public discourse whose meanings, accordingly, increasingly require close and critically informed scrutiny.

One of the common fallacies about neoliberalism is that it was not a strategic or orchestrated cross-national project undertaken throughout several decades a specific set of social and political actors (Harvey, 2005; Schulz-Forberg and Olsen, 2014). What prevails – and is often legitimised – instead is a perception that neoliberalism was a certain ‘natural’ development related to the logic of, in particular, late capitalism (especially in the so-called developed countries) whose impact upon patterns of social organisation (including state and welfare systems) around the globe was in a certain sense ‘logical’ too. This untrue image of neoliberalism as something that ‘just happened’ creates its view as a certain bottom-up process. That view is sustained by public discourses – especially of politics, policy and the media – in whose interest it is to move away the attention of the actual agentic role of political and media practices and organisations in advancing, sustaining as well as legitimising the neoliberal order.

This study proposes a theoretical combination that allows looking at neoliberalism’s discursive constructions as, essentially, a top-down discursive process. The latter is transnational in nature but requires accommodation via different context-specific discursive shifts (Krzyżanowski, 2013b) that help operationalise the transnational discursive change. In this context, it is vital to view

Neoliberalism as an ideology that consists of certain concepts whose meanings change and evolve over time (...) while individual freedom and market economy are certainly core concepts of neoliberalism, they have been interpreted and defined in many different ways, and they have been combined with concepts and ideas which have roots in other ideologies, such as conservatism or social democracy, to fit specific situations or problems. (Schulz-Forberg and Olsen, 2014: 6)

Indeed, the theoretical and conceptual – and, per extension, also analytical – combination proposed here is seen as a very useful tool that may help in discovering such a conceptual nature of neoliberalism, together with the fact that it rests on context-specific recontextualisations of global neoliberal ideologies. As the article argues, deconstructing neoliberalism as a discourse must entail a concept-oriented analysis. The latter would help in identifying not only which concepts support the domination of neoliberal hegemonic discourse. It would also show how the logic of discursive construction and recontextualisation of concepts points to the wider ideologies of neoliberalism and how these are spread in contemporary public and regulatory forms of language.

## Language, concepts and re/construction of society: *Begriffsgeschichte*

'History of concepts', or *Begriffsgeschichte* (BG), was initiated in the 1950s by the late German historian Reinhart Koselleck. Since its foundation, BG has always been seen as probably one of the most progressive currents in modern social history. Inter alia, it redefined many key historical theories and methods, including those related to interpretation of the salience of historical sources or centrality of chronology in historical research (Koselleck, 2002; Olsen, 2012).

As such, BG assumes that the central object of historical inquiry should not be events or occurrences, but social and political concepts which come to define societies and various facets of social order. Central to BG's claims is the one that sees many concepts as produced within certain specified socio-political and spatio-temporal contexts – often indeed in the course of various social, political and economic 'crises' (Koselleck, 1988) – yet with certain potential and claims to universality. Therefore, many concepts studied by BG (most notably, 'democracy' or 'state') have been viewed as necessarily outliving their original contexts of social production/reception and receiving mobilising power in many contexts, indeed across historical time and geographical space.

BG has become the central trend of social history that, by looking at social and political concepts, effectively re-focused its interests towards language as the key carrier of conceptual dynamics and change (Steinmetz, 2011). As Koselleck (2004) himself argued, the BG 'concerns itself (primarily) with texts and words [...] results of its work can be evaluated continually through the exegesis of texts' (p. 75). Koselleck and BG hence view concepts in a very close relation to their lexical (and thereby discursive) representation. However, they argue that whereas 'each concept is associated with a word [...] not every word is a social and political concept' (Koselleck, 1982: 418).

Thus, only few words become concepts, and it mainly happens in the case of those words that possess, one may say, certain potential to capture or encapsulate social meanings as well as 'a substantial claim of generality' (Koselleck, 1982). Concepts come into existence in the process of signification that is essentially a process of discursive struggle of several meanings for a pre-emptive signification of social events and actions. According to Koselleck (2004), 'concepts are thus the concentrate of several substantial meanings' (p. 85). Therefore, it is vital to keep in mind the fact that concepts are created at the intersection of particularity and generality. The balance must always be kept between concepts and their lexical representations as a 'word becomes a concept only when the entirety of meaning and experience within a socio-political context within which and for which a word is used can be condensed into one word' (Koselleck, 2004, p. 85). Speaking in the language of CDS, concepts must be contextualised as well as, at the same time, conceptualised, as by remaining at the verge of being contextually relevant they enable their potential decontextualisation (see later).

Concepts acquire their charisma in the process of building context-specific relations with other concepts. For that reason, BG differentiates between (a) the so-called basic or key social and political concepts (*Grundbegriffe*), (b) their neighbouring or sister-concepts (*Nebenbegriffe*) and (c) their adversary or counter-concepts (*Gegenbegriffe*).

*Grundbegriffe* are at the core of BG's interests as concepts that possess a particularly mobilising force and as those that tend to appear in critical moments of history. They refer to – we may say 'grand' – concepts such as 'civilisation' (Ifversen, 2002), which, over the course of history, have acquired different context-specific meanings yet still have retained their, one may say, universal core. On the other hand, the other types of concepts – that is, *Nebenbegriffe* and *Gegenbegriffe* – are also conceptually vital yet mainly in their role as emphasising the social force and mobilising potential of the *Grundbegriffe*. The sister-concepts, or *Nebenbegriffe*, show concepts that are similar to the *Grundbegriffe* and that help show their placement within larger semantic fields. As Ifversen (2003) shows, the basic concept of 'the state' can be further particularised – and its meaning emphasised – by means of such sister-concepts. These include, inter alia, 'territory', 'government' or 'citizenship' and would provide a multidimensional particularisation of the de facto meaning of 'state' as a *Grundbegriffe* within certain historical and geographical contexts. Contrary to the process of forming conceptual sister-relations, *Gegenbegriffe* are vital in order to delineate limits of *Grundbegriffe*, that is, by showing concepts that are essentially adversarial to them. Using the example above, the concept of 'civilisation' is probably best understood when considered from the point of view of such of its anti-concepts as, for example, 'barbarism' which not only shows what civilisation is not, but also emphasises the set of ideas and values contrary to those associated with civilisation (Ifversen, 2002).

The process of building – and from our perspective, analysing – how the basic concepts are positioned vis-a-vis their sister- and counter-concepts is the process of building what BG calls *semantic fields*. The latter help encapsulate the number of relationships that a concept enters synchronically, that is, at the point of spatio-temporally specific analysis that shows the meaning of concepts (including their sister- and counter-meanings). The notion of semantic field is therefore central to the analyses in BG as its task is, essentially, to show how at different moments of history various concepts acquire different semantic fields and how these, as well as the 'core' concepts in question, change over time (see later).

There are several plains at which one can consider the potential interfaces between CDS and BG. As I have argued previously – drawing on the example of CDS' Discourse-Historical Approach or DHA (Krzyżanowski, 2013a) – those synergies can be considered in a dual way. On the one hand – despite using different terms ('discourse' understood mainly as a continuity of social meanings vs. 'concepts' as the historically contingent accumulation of such meanings, etc.) – BG and CDS share many theoretical ideas about language and its role in structuring as well as re-structuring society, social reality and history. Among these, both approaches share the idea that forms of language (discourses/concepts) reappear – or are, as CDS would have it, are 'recontextualised' – across different fields, spaces and genres. On the other hand, several quite obvious analytical and interpretive overlaps exist between BG and CDS. There, inter alia, such notions as the aforementioned 'semantic fields' constitute a very crucial point of convergence between discourse- and concept-oriented thinking and between ways of language as operating in the process of signification as well as articulation/meaning of social processes of change.

## Revisiting recontextualisation

Drawing on the aforementioned connections, BG can effectively strengthen the way CDS approaches one of its central notions, that is, *recontextualisation*. An in-depth and reflexive concept-oriented look at recontextualisation of discourses is particularly vital in the critical-analytic examination and deconstruction of how the ideologies – of which I focus on neoliberalism (see later) – are spread and sustained within and across various social fields, at both supranational and national levels of governance.

*Recontextualisation* has been used extremely widely as a concept in CDS. Many scholars have been providing explanations of its logic within specific language practices (Wodak, 2000) or in relation to CDS' wider theories of context (Van Dijk, 2008). Further to CDS, related areas of critical language study (such as linguistic anthropology) proposed alternative or relatively similar notions (e.g. 'entextualisation'; Blommaert, 2005; Hodges, 2008). All of these ideas have, generally speaking, argued that recontextualisation is a description of a certain movement of various elements of language and discourse across different social loci – most prominently between so-called 'sites of production and reception of discourse' (Van Dijk, 1991). It serves as an umbrella term encapsulating the fact that, as viewed especially in CDS, social functioning as well as spread and diffusion of discourse relies on intertextual connection between various articulations of social order in different contexts and at different moments in history.

While the ideas above certainly reflect the general logic of recontextualisation, it seems necessary to propose a closer re-reading of the concept (and its logic) on the basis of the work in which it was in fact introduced, that is, Bernstein's (1990) *Class, Codes and Control: The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse*. Analysing the power and logic of UK (early neoliberal) education policy of the Thatcher era, Bernstein argued for recontextualisation as a process that not only entails the 'movement' of certain discourse parts/strands (arguments, ideas, concepts), but one that, first and foremost, is a *strategic process of establishing a certain hierarchy of discourses*. As Bernstein (1990) claimed, 'pedagogic discourse [...] embeds a discourse of competence (skills of various kinds) into a discourse of social order in such a way that the latter always dominates the former' (p. 183).

Hence, recontextualisation is not only a process of discourses' spatio-temporal diffusion, but essentially also a process of creating horizontal discourse orderings. Therein, some discourses not only recontextualise parts of the other, but also become tools in the process of creating and sustaining the hegemony of certain discursive frames. The logic of recontextualisation hence always ends up in 'the dominance of regulative discourse' (Bernstein, 1990: 184). In the process, certain discourses lose their primary function and become secondary or appropriating tools of other discourses. Or, as Bernstein put it, in that process, 'any recontextualised discourse becomes a signifier for *something other than itself*' (Bernstein, 1990; original emphasis).

Secondly, unlike the widespread understanding of recontextualisation would have it, Bernstein was detailed about its complex logic and therefore spoke in great detail of various aspects of recontextualisation as a discursive and social process. He distinguished between *three stages of recontextualisation* (Bernstein, 1990) – that is, production, recontextualisation and reproduction, as well as between the *three types of related contexts of recontextualisation* – the primary one (the 'source' context of production



of discourse), secondary one (the ‘target’ context of reproduction of discourse) and the recontextualising context (the context encompassing the process between ‘source’ production and ‘target’ reproduction, the context through which the relocation and reordering of discourse take place) (p. 193).

Recontextualisation starts from the moment of ‘primary contextualization’ (in the primary context; Bernstein, 1990: 191) of textual elements. That marks ‘the process whereby the text is developed and positioned [...] whereby “new” ideas are selectively created, modified, and changed and where specialized discourses are developed’ (Bernstein, 1990). Only in the second stage are we dealing with what has traditionally been seen as recontextualisation proper, that is, ‘selective reproduction’ (Bernstein, 1990) of discourse. Yet in Bernstein’s proposal, recontextualisation was not the process located, as is commonly thought, at the end, but, in fact, as if in between the production-to-reproduction process. This is also seen as the reason for the actual power of recontextualisation processes, that is, that they are located somewhere in the intermediary contexts i.e. in displacement from (and invisibility to) both the ‘source’ and the ‘target’ contexts. Accordingly, the act of recontextualising

structures a field or a subset of fields, whose positions, agents and practices are concerned with the movements of texts/practices [...] the function of the positions, agents and practices within this field and its sub-sets is to regulate the circulation of texts. (Bernstein, 1990: 192)

The key to understanding recontextualisation is therefore not – or not only – to follow or trace its overall logic (i.e. re-appearance of certain discourse strands/structures), but to also focus, on the one hand, on the ontology of production and recontextualisation of texts and, on the other, on the principles and patterns of its reproduction (or diffusion). Hence, while analysing recontextualisation, one should follow discursive traces of *decontextualisation* (Bernstein, 1990), that is, moment/s when discourses are reordered and reshaped as well as put into new (strategic) hierarchies (including by means of various concepts and other discursive elements). Decontextualisation is vital as it denotes the moment when discourse is ideologically re-positioned. Or, it ‘regulates the new ideological positioning of the text in its process of relocation’ (Bernstein, 1990: 193) that is the overall aim of the process of recontextualisation as such.

## Conceptual and discursive change in regulatory discourse

As an example of the theoretical and conceptual merger proposed in this study, I will focus briefly on analyses of European Union (EU) policy discourses where my long-term focus (see Krzyżanowski, 2012, 2013b, 2015) has been on how supranational regulatory discourse develops over time and spreads into Europe’s national and other levels of governance. I draw on this research in order to show whether/how the examination of dynamics of the discursive and conceptual realm of policies, including the processes of recontextualisation, can help us point to their ideological and politico-strategic underpinnings.

Here, I would like to focus on the EU Language and Multilingualism Policy (EULMP) and its development over almost two decades between 1997 and 2015. I draw my brief examples in the following from the analysis of over 35 key EU documents that comprise

both *policy* and *policy communication genres* (Krzyżanowski, 2013b) and cover several stages along the development of policy and related institutional changes in the EU. The first period encompassed the time between 1997 and circa 2007–2008, that is, the development and articulation of the said policy (for extensive discussion and detailed results, see Krzyżanowski and Wodak, 2011) as well as the second stage (ca. 2008 to date) of the gradual deterioration or perhaps even dismantling of the said policy.

The example of EULMP shows that the main factor defining its development and existence resides outside the policy field in focus. More specifically, the EULMP has been seen as a key tool for appropriation of the EU's main neoliberal strategy known as the EU Lisbon Strategy 2000, which argued that the EU would 'become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Council, 2000: 5). The Lisbon Strategy also emphasised some of the typically market-economic buzzwords. Among these, the issue of 'skills' was clearly foregrounded, including in the context of 'life-long learning' that was seen as a necessity of creating the new European neoliberal self. At the same time, various domains of life that used to be branded in a socially or politically relevant way have now received new framings in terms of various facets of 'competition' or within various 'industries'. In the years since its adoption, the Lisbon Strategy – and its eventual follower, that is, the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2010) – came to dominate most of the fields of EU policy notwithstanding the EULMP.

The Lisbon Strategy is what we might consider here – speaking in Bernstein's language – the *context of production* of EU neoliberal policy discourse. It is also the primary or meta-level *regulatory discourse* that, paradoxically, gives rise to further discourses of regulation and stands at the top of the hierarchy of discourses established by the processes of recontextualisation. As the diachronic analysis of EULMP discourse shows, the latter becomes, over the years, increasingly dominated by various 'neoliberal' arguments that frame Europe's languages and multilingualism and stem from the Lisbon Strategy.

Starting especially from circa 2000 onwards (initial adoption of the Lisbon Strategy), the EULMP becomes increasingly dominated by market-driven and economic framings of languages and multilingualism coupled with overt references to Lisbon as the major ontological and ideological frame (see Example 1). While since the beginning of the policy development (ca. 1997) there has already been a lot of emphasis on the aforementioned 'skills' (eventually understood as 'language skills') in the aftermath of 2000 and further beyond 2005 (re-introduction of Lisbon despite its overall failures), the EULMP increasingly argues in favour of the fact that multilingualism is closely tied to economic competitiveness while proposing arguments about utilitarianism of languages and multilingualism for making European (i.e. EU) economy successful and globally competitive:

#### *Example 1*

Multilingualism makes a real contribution to the competitiveness of the European economy, for reaching the targets of the Lisbon strategy [...] Improving language skills in Europe is also an important objective within the drive to improve the skills and competences of the population as part of the Lisbon growth and jobs strategy. (European Commission, 2007: 1)

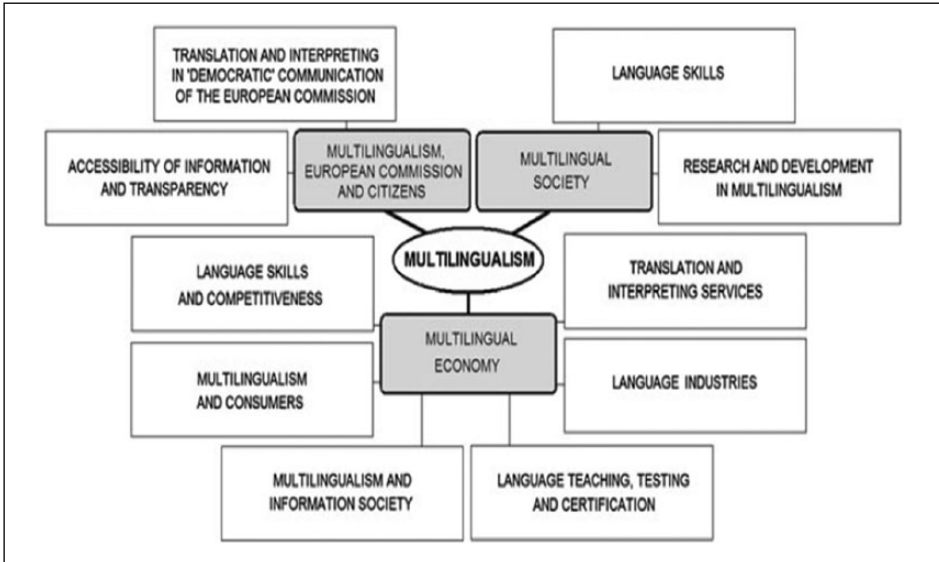
Hence, while constituting a primary *context of production* of EU neoliberal discourse (often observable across most of EU policy frames of late; cf. Krzyżanowski, 2013b, 2015), Lisbon also becomes the key source for *decontextualisation* of neoliberal regulative discourse informing and indeed defining subsequent policies, including by preventing society-oriented ideas and representations as well as preferring those related to policy logic and implementation.

While a closer look at the initial stages of recontextualisation and the context of production, as well as at decontextualisation, is central in discovering the strategic and ideological ontology of EULMP's neoliberal framing, the proposed combination of CDS and BG allows us to trace the further logic of policy discourse beyond its initial production. There, the aforementioned conceptual logic comes to the fore as it is mainly through the use of different concepts – constituting certain entry points into wider arguments and themes (traditionally in the focus of wider CDS but especially its socio-cognitive and discourse-historical traditions; Forchtner and Tominc, 2012; Krzyżanowski, 2010; Van Dijk, 1991) – that the policy is defined and redefined.

'Multilingualism' is certainly the central concept of the EULMP. Starting from circa 2003 onwards, it becomes key in the focal policy whose discursive construction mainly revolves around various attempts to constantly (re)conceptualise what multilingualism is – and what/whom it should serve – while providing ever more complex economic and neoliberal explanations thereof. Interestingly, the seemingly 'innocent' idea – in our case multilingualism (but also see examples of re-integration and so on, above) – becomes what might be defined as an *operationalising concept*. That is, it serves within the policy discourse to operationalise the wider ideological frames, thus, indeed, pointing to the ideological underpinning of recontextualisation processes. Or, following Bernstein, it is that concept that helps create EULMP into 'a signifier for *something other than itself*' (Bernstein, 1990: 184; original emphasis).

The diachronic analysis of multilingualism's *semantic field* in line with BG – that is, through discursive tracing of the processes of the concept's building relationships with its *sister- and counter-concepts* – reveals that its operationalising function allows making it not only crucial in the context of initial production and decontextualisation, but also to sustain the initial ideological framing in the further evolutions. Thus, especially in the period 2000–2008, marking the heyday of EULMP, its semantic field seems dominated by economic framing (see Figure 1). However, that framing is not only visible in the very profuse focus on multilingualism's apparent sister-concept of 'multilingual economy', but also in the fact that the apparently non-economic sister-concepts – for example, the 'multilingual society' – are also defined through the traditionally neoliberal notions of skills or through arguing in favour of 'research and development', should in fact serve economic aims. At the same time, the sister-concept of (multilingual) *society* is not only *reconceptualised* (deprived of ideological focus on society) but also *recontextualised* (endowed with Lisbon-specific economising and neoliberal understanding) and hence made subordinate to the hegemonic regulatory neoliberal discourse.

Crucially, allowing for the BG terminology, the whole process of defining (synchronically) and subsequent redefining (diachronically) of multilingualism takes place by unique dynamics of that concept's semantic field. The latter is mainly built in the process of finding 'particularisation' of the concept through different sister-ideas (*Nebenbegriffe*)



**Figure 1.** Semantic field of 'Multilingualism' in EULMP circa 2005 (Krzyzanowski and Wodak, 2011: 128).

with no anti/counter-concepts (*Gegenbegriffe*) actually being used. This seems strategic in nature as it creates an image whereby different conceptual elements are presented in an apparent natural accordance with each other. Thereby, the positioning of the concepts as mutually interdependent also emphasises that they 'sit comfortably' with each other within the proposed (and, as shown above, essentially recontextualised), strongly economising and neoliberal framing. This also points to the fact that recontextualisation of concepts is strategically controlled, as assumed by Bernstein in his vision of recontextualisation as a source of regulatory discourse. In our case, this helps avoiding that, for example, any concepts that would negate (or be against, in the sense of *Gegenbegriffe*) the proposed neoliberal meaning of multilingualism would be recontextualised and/or put into the EULMP discourse.

## Conclusion

It has been argued here that the increasingly conceptual nature of discourse is one of the key tools supporting the spread and solidification of neoliberal tendencies in contemporary societies. It happens within a variety of public discourses – including in politics or the media – yet is most potent within discourses such as policies that have the power to regulate and prescribe patterns for governance and social order. The article has claimed that the concept-driven orientation of regulatory discourses can easily be seen as a widespread tendency that is not at all arbitrary, but indeed strategic in nature. It therefore necessitates a CDS-based analysis and deconstruction that would help critique when/how concepts are recontextualised in discourses forming new ideological (mis)perceptions of society.

This article has argued that the contemporary concept-driven logic of neoliberal public and regulating discourses necessitates new theoretical (and analytical) tools in CDS. It has been suggested that, on the one hand, a combination of conceptual-historical and critical-analytical views is necessary and that, on the other hand, it is vital to rethink and revisit the ways we approach and conceptualise the widely used notion of recontextualisation. The demand for such a combination stems from the fact that, on the one hand, CDS needs better tools for dealing with the ontology of public and regulating discourses (e.g. policies) in order to trace their ideological underpinnings. On the other hand, CDS needs to be able to cope with how the conceptual realm of discourse is developed and recontextualised, thus creating space for the ideological subordination of discourses under wider, politico-economic strategies and projects. Hence, CDS is increasingly in demand of theoretical and conceptual (as well as analytical) tools that would allow for coping with how ideologised regulation is not only articulated (produced) by means of various concepts and discourse of their semantic fields, but also how these are further recontextualised to sustain discursive and regulatory power.

As illustrated in the brief examples focusing on supranational policy making in Europe, combining CDS and conceptual history is vital in the process of tracing how concepts are made pivotal for contemporary regulatory discourses and their shaping of and legitimising visions and ideas of social reality and social action. As is also shown in the brief analysis, the proposed CDS-BG combination supports as well as facilitates a more in-depth look at how recontextualisation and transformation of meanings operate in discourses defining and regulating the contemporary public realm. Indeed, the examples have shown that the process of building hierarchies in regulatory discourse – as stipulated by Bernstein (1990) – is central in neoliberal control of the public mind that is legitimised and conceived of by means of various concepts that, at present, often dominate public debates and serve as foundations for discourses of regulation.

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