

# The economy & public discourse

Presentation to Think-tank for Action on Social Change,  
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# Outline of Presentation

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1. Introduction
2. Discourse analysis & its power
3. Analysing economic discourses.
4. What & whose discourses are heard?
5. Comments & Conclusions

# 1. Introduction

Traditionally policy has been analysed through the three 'eyes' of Institutions, Interests and Ideas.

Discourse analysis brings a fourth eye – the **Interactions** in our communications, the back and forth of our exchanges, our discourses.

Some of these discourses, and the discourses of some are very important in producing, consuming and governing our economy.

The language of policy documents, the rhetoric of political leaders and the way experts interact with the public are all communications worth paying attention to and making what they are doing more transparent and open.

## 2. Discourse analysis & its power.

3. Analysing economic discourses.

4. What & whose discourses are heard?

5. Comments & Conclusions

## **The discourse perspective on communication**

Often communications are analysed as sending ideas about the world from one brain to another in a way that has no inherent effect on the world itself.

Another way to analyse communication, the discourse perspective, is to look at communication in the way it acts on the world. Discourse focusses (Austin, 1974; Wittgenstein, 1958).

# Language as Action



‘I hereby notify the European Council in accordance with Article 50(2) of the Treaty on European Union of the United Kingdom’s intention to withdraw from the European Union.’  
May’s Article 50 letter)

‘The matters to which the directors of a company are to have regard in the performance of their functions shall include the interests of the company's employees in general, as well as the interests of its members.’

(Companies Act 2014, 224.1).



‘there is one and only one social responsibility of business- to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game...’ (Friedman & Friedman, 1962)





Formation of our elites  
in education institutes  
(O'Rourke, Hogan &  
Donnelly, 2015; Feeney,  
Hogan & O'Rourke,  
2017).



Policy texts & talk  
(O'Rourke, 2010;  
O'Rourke &  
**Hogan**, 2014). Our  
PhD student:  
Ewan McDonald.

Building reputation in  
modern art markets.  
Tom Soro is a PhD  
student I co-supervise  
with Dr. Tim Stott.

Creativity in  
Science Gallery  
(**Tangney**,  
Freeman &  
O'Rourke, 2014  
a & b)



**How do we discursively  
constitute the economy?  
(O'Rourke, 2014 & 2015)**

Through the talk in and  
between organizational  
meetings ( **Duffy** &  
O'Rourke, 2015 a & b)



In radio interviews  
with elites &  
economists about  
the economy &  
enterprise  
(**FitzGerald** &  
O'Rourke, 2016  
O'Rourke &  
Hogan,  
2013;2014)



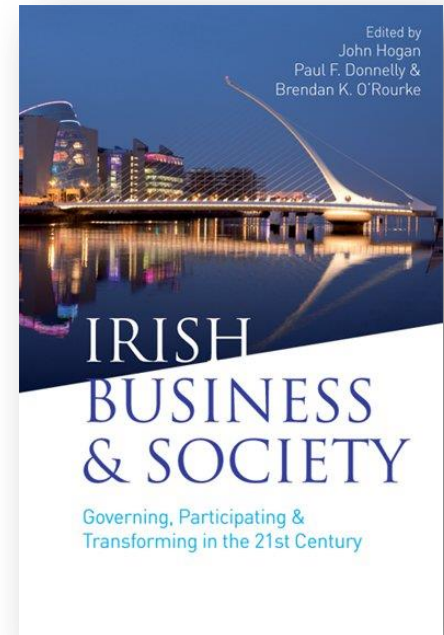
How is corporation tax  
constructed in the  
media? With Ciara  
Graham, ITT. Graham  
& Silke (forthcoming.)

Online entrepreneurial  
pitches: with PhD  
researcher Victoria  
Doyle & Dr. Olivia  
Freeman

Discourses of the economic imaginaries (Jessop) are ubiquitous from reality TV shows like *The Apprentice* (Boyle, 2008)



To economics textbooks & research papers (Samuels & Perry, 2011; McCloskey, 1986).



These discourses of economic imaginaries are how we talk and think about the economy, and so shape the economy by constructing:

- The UK's EU membership fee as being spendable on its NHS,
- Irish public servants as overpaid
- Public transport system as to be paid for mostly by 'customers'.

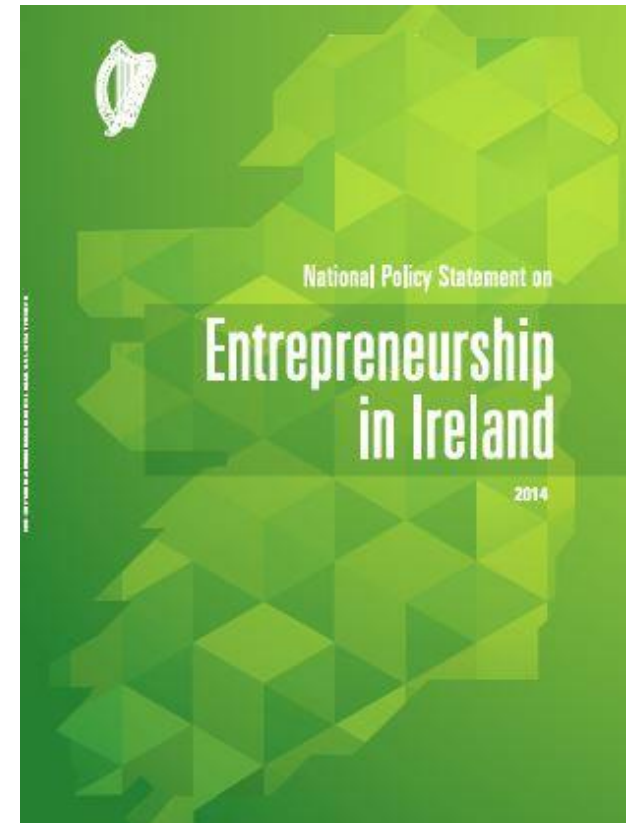
# **3. Analysing economic discourses: three tastes.**

# Quantitative analysis of two enterprise policy documents

MacDonald, Hogan & O'Rourke (2016)



2004



2014

		2014	2004
Keyword	Change	Rank	Rank
Ireland	0	1	1
Enterprise	0	2	2
Investment	+13	7	20
Development	-10	13	3
Sectors	+11	14	25
Economic	+14	16	30
Services	-12	17	5
competitiveness	+9	19	28

Collocation analysis – looking at words that occurred frequently near the key word.

Collocation analysis meant we could

“ observe a distinct shift in which a higher degree of abstraction and a focus on creating environments attractive to enterprise takes precedence [in 2014 document] over training, support and education [evidenced by the collocates in 2004 document]

(MacDonald, Hogan & O'Rourke, 2016, p. 15).

Of course more this kind of analysis is best if it leads to more in depth, more interpretative, qualitative analysis...

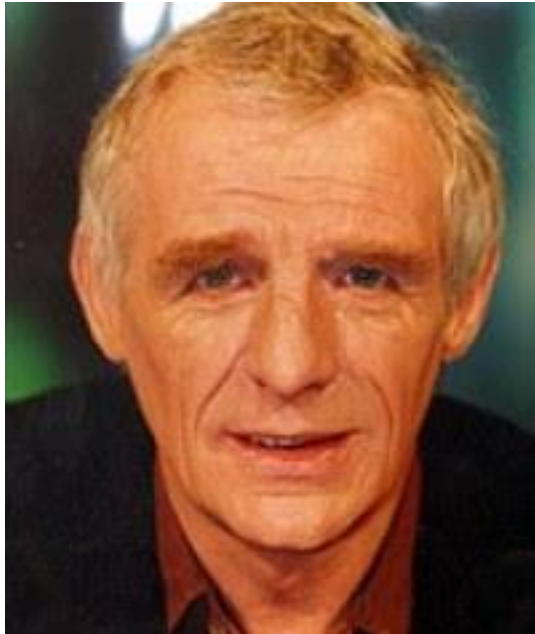
# Selected 'public' collocates selected from most frequent (5L5R)

Common	Unique to 2004 doc	Unique to 2014 doc
Sector, private, research, services, innovation	Policy, education, transport, managers, investment, infrastructure, funding, development, role, roads, industry	Expenditure, reform, employment, procurement, enterprise, support, programme, meet, initiatives



# Qualitative analysis of a celebrity interview with a politician

O'Rourke & Hogan (2013)



2008 -chat show  
'celebrity'  
interview –  
at the start of the  
crisis

Eamon Dunphy,  
interviewer



Charlie McCreevy,  
politician

## Extract from the Dunphy - McCreevy Interview



81 (16.33)	Dunphy: You are, despite the reason you came into politics, the north and republicanism and all that, you are in the public mind and indeed in fact you have been associated with beliefs about
82	McCreevy: Well
83	Dunphy: the economy I mean you are
84	McCreevy: My belief fundamentally is that people do better when they get the chances to do better, that you don't have the <b>tyranny</b> of say higher taxation, you don't have the <b>tyranny</b> of <b>overregulation</b> , you don't try to control everything from the centre and it's-because I believe you will create- people will be better off, they'll be better off in their own minds, they'll have a better lifestyle and the whole of society will be better off and that you will create more wealth and by creating more wealth you have more wealth to redistribute.
85	Dunphy: Your deep convictions single you out in that regard, tell me where they come from?

Source: RTÉ *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy*, 23 February 2008 as reported in O'Rourke & Hogan (2013)

# Qualitative analysis of *Morning Ireland* expert interview

FitzGerald & O'Rourke (2016)



2009





**Figure 2 Extract from January 2009, Morning Ireland Interview with Alan Ahearne**

9 (03:09.24)	John Murray (Interviewer): So, what are those right things to do then? You spoke about putting more money into AIB and Bank of Ireland if it can't raise it themselves. What are the other steps <b>they</b> need to take?
10. (03:18.21)	Alan Ahearne: Well the critical one is to think about how the Irish economy is going to recover. Where the growth is going to come from. We know it's going to come from exports, it's not going to come from, eh, from domestic, eh, demand or the housing market again. How do <b>we</b> boost our exports <b>and there's only one way. That is to reduce our wage costs.</b> In in normal times and normal recessions, em, they, you could have pay freezes and you would gain competitiveness against your competitors and your exports would improve. These are not normal times. We're going to have very low, if not falling consumer prices all over the world...

Source: FitzGerald & O'Rourke's (2016, p.275) account of RTÉ's *Morning Ireland* interview.

**4. What & whose discourses  
are heard?**

The dominance of neoliberalism in discourses of enterprise, privatisation and the economy in general (Phelan, 2007a&b O'Rourke, 2010; Mercille, 2014).

Elites formed in restricted number of places : Irish Cabinet ministers especially in the period 2007-2012 were drawn from a very narrow range of higher education institutions – in fact in this period their higher education was more elitist than the UK cabinet (Feeney, Hogan & O'Rourke, forthcoming).

Large role of economists in the media

Out of 75 articles written by outside writers (non-journalists) in three top quality Irish newspapers during the period 2008-2012 concerning Irish budgets 35 (47%) are economists or working in the financial sector (Mercille, 2014, p.291).

Evidence for increased role of economists is impressionistic (e.g. Allen, 2012) so we need more research.

Irish neoliberal politicians attacking mainstream economics experts during Irish boom (O'Rourke & Hogan, 2013). Could it be related to the macroeconomic cycle? (FitzGerald & O'Rourke)

Yet increased role of economists in Central bank, Department of Finance and Irish Fiscal Advisory Council.

Also increased role of think-tanks may mean more economists and more concentrated networks of neoliberal economists (Plehwe, 2014).

**What: lots of neoliberalism Who: economists.**

# **5. Conclusions & Comments**



The importance of expert discourse on the economy: Not all of them are economists, and not everything economists say is neoliberal or ideological.

Trying to provide reliable expertise on economic discourse is hard both because good analysis is costly and we all have our own ideologies but we're trying (Ali, 2014; Maesse, 2015);

The need for not only open government but more open governance.

# Thank you.

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([www.BrendanKORourke.com](http://www.BrendanKORourke.com)), in Aungier St. and  
at our future campus at DIT, Grangegorman.



[www.dit.ie/bssrc/](http://www.dit.ie/bssrc/)



<http://www.dit.ie/researchandenterprise/researchgroups/dag/>

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