The Discursive Construction of Education's Role in Economic Competitiveness: from Major to Blair

 Analysing public discourse: 'corpus linguistic' computer software in interdisciplinary social research

- Jane Mulderrig
- Lancaster University, Linguistics
- j.mulderrig@lancaster.ac.uk

Presentation Overview

- Discourse of UK Educational Governance 1972-2005 (Heath-Blair)
- Methods: Critical Discourse Analysis, Corpus Linguistics, Political Economy (Jessop, 1992; 2002)
- Emergent Competitiveness Agenda: Major and Blair
- Keywords and Thematic analyses
- From the Vision to the Plan: 'Competitiveness' to 'Skills'
- 'Audit' V 'Autonomy'

Educational Discourse in the 'Age of Human Capital'

- Political economy of education policy discourse
- Late C20th Britain: towards the knowledge-based, lifelong learning, enterprise society
- Competitiveness and 'productive social policy'
- 'the wealth of nations and success of individuals depend upon the imagination, creativity, skills and talents of all our people' (DfES, 2003:2)

Using Corpus Linguistic Tools

- Problems with CDA: eclecticism, replicability
- Digital corpus: education 'White Papers' (a genre of persuasion)
- Wordsmith Tools (Scott, 1997)
- AntConc (Anthony, 2003)
- Keywords, Concordances, Collocations (e.g. Knowledge+Economy)
- Keywords as 'Emergent Discourses'
- Thatcher: Curriculum, Performance, Needs, Standards

Keywords Results

MAJOR	BLAIR
UK, GM	We, Skills
Business(es)	Support
Sector, Funding	Young People,
Quality	Want, Develop,
Competitiveness	Ensure, Our
Innovation	National
Investment	Achieve, Key
Markets	Learning
Partnership	Providers, ICT
World	Learners, LSC,
Opportunities	Programme
	Regional

- Major: Introducing Business as key educational stakeholder
- Blair and the hegemony of inclusion: towards a more personalised government identity
- 'Competitiveness' (n=254) (Keyword Ranking: 8)
- 'Skills' (n=1473) (KR: 2)

MAJOR	BLAIR
UK, GM	We, Skills
Business(es)	Support
Sector, Funding	Young People,
Quality	Want, Develop,
Competitiveness	Ensure, Our
Innovation	National
Investment	Achieve, Key
Markets	Learning
Partnership	Providers, ICT
World	Learners, LSC,
Opportunities	Programme
	Regional

Setting the Competitiveness Agenda

- Competitiveness is not just a challenge for Government and for business. It requires a change in behaviour by all of us; an openness to new ideas and, above all, a willingness to compare ourselves with the best in the world; to face up to how well we are doing and, if the answer is not favourable, to do something about it.'
- The linguistic tools of hegemonic generalisation: existential claim, semantic prosody, confessional tone, nominalisation, Token-Value relation of equivalence
- 'Cultural Circuit of Capital' (Thrift, 2001)

Concordance Results: Major 'Competitiveness' 254 Findings from Cm 2021, Cm 2867, Cm 3300

Departments are making progress in incorporating competitiveness into their scie thout it, UK business cannot translate its competitiveness into exports and wealth. that the Government can make to improving competitiveness is the creation of a the 1994 Competitiveness White Paper made clear, competitiveness is not just an contribute to business success. Competitiveness is not just a challenge for can ting and Outward Investment 1.1 Improving competitiveness is central to raising arn from them. 1.2 The need to improve our competitiveness is not imposed by but by changes in the world economy. Improving competitiveness is not about ment is determined to ensure that Europe's competitiveness is taken fully into an important role to play. 1.18 Improving competitiveness is largely a matter for 2.9 Measuring a country's competitiveness is difficult because it to improve . . . a nation's transport infrastructure to its competitiveness is widely acknowledged. ip in May 1996. A document setting out how competitiveness is being developed in 1.13The European Council regularly discusses competitiveness issues and the al authorities and other partners, the key competitiveness issues for their areas. By standard of living through improved competitiveness. It will continue to t year. It provides a snapshot of the UK's competitiveness. It sets out new policies This is the Government's third annual report on competitiveness. It shows the review the implications of these issues on competitiveness. It will seek views where locally-determined strategy for improving local competitiveness. It has announced our standard of living through improved competitiveness. It will continue to tcome of this work in its next national survey of competitiveness. Lifetime learning in improving competitiveness locally, both through key private sector partners try] (1995) Back 2 Peter Swann; Quality and Competitiveness [mimeo, Manchest 4.2 Although ultimately competitiveness must lie in the efforts commerce. r Government as well as for industry. 16.5 Competitiveness must remain a priority

In Search of a Meaning

- 'education provides our future work-force and the foundation for the economic development and competitiveness of this country' (Cm 2021)
- Relevant to all: C is not just for [business,
 Government, private sector] but also [individuals]
- Nominal Clusters: C Fund, C Challenge
- 'Competitiveness is not imposed by Government, but by changes in the world economy'
- An agent: Competitiveness: demands, requires
 [Who] businesses, education [What], alertness, improved performance, continuous change
- A process: R1 collocates challenge, agenda,
 project; L1 collocates improve, promote, enhance

- Conducive Factors: [KBE] HE research, government research, education, training and skills, science, engineering and technology, innovation, creativity...[Managerial Governance] effective public sector, value for money, efficiency, performance management [To regulate or not?] intellectual property protection, free and open markets, deregulation
- Evaluation: vital, essential, important, necessary, top of our agenda, priority for all of us [Economic and Social benefits] value for money, develop workforce skills, export performance, quality of life, higher standard of living [Contradictions?] labour market flexibility + employment
- UK's Anti-EU agenda: 'damaging effects on competitiveness of the cumulative burden of European legislation'

'Catch-all, Cure-all'

- Relevant to all
- Abstract quality
- Continual Process
- Agent of imperatives
- Source of governance contradictions
- Recontextualised in neoliberal form
- Urgent, necessary and good

Blair's Strategic Plan: SKILLS

- 1473 tokens
- Skills as Functional Commodities:
- Thatcher (163) L1 collocates occupational, knowledge and, professional... acquire
- Blair: Skills as functional commodities to secure 1) competitive advantage 2) social inclusion

Economic & Social Roles of Education

- '[education must] meet the needs and aspirations of all young people, so that they are motivated to make a commitment to lifelong learning and to become socially responsible citizens and workers; broaden the skills acquired by all young people to improve their employability, bridge the skills gap identified by employers, and overcome social exclusion.'
- Interdependencies/Equivalences:

Citizenship - Work - Responsibility

Skills - Employability - Social Exclusion

Education - Work - Social Inclusion

Commitment - Lifelong learning - Citizenship

Types of Skills (L1 collocates)	Social Actor collocates
SECTOR (77)	(-Councils, -Agreements, - Agency
BASIC (62)	Adults, School leavers, Prisoners
NEW (41)	
FUNCTIONAL (27) (All cases in '05)	Young people (14-19)
KEY (26)	Workforce
ICT (24)	Workforce, Students, Adults
E-SKILLS (23)	
ADVANCED (20)	Teachers
REGIONAL (19)	Partnerships
EMPLOYABILITY (18)	Adults, Young People, Pupils
LITERACY AND NUMERACY (14)	Adults, Children
(independent/thinking &) LEARNING	14-19 school students

- What: perishable, hierarchical, technical, dispositional
- Who: 1) Adults predominate 2) Teachers hierarchised with 'Advanced Skills' 3) Pupils not taught but enabled to acquire skills 4) Young People helped to acquire skills + [right] attitudes, confidence, values and motivation

Summary

- An audit-friendly strategy: individualisation & instrumenalisation
- Governing the subjectivities of the KBE (vitality, commitment, flexibility, motivation, willingness...). Steering spontaneity 'to plateaux that are desirable and preferable' (Arvidsson, 06)
- Skills, skills: the routinisation of innovation and creativity

References

- Anthony, L (2003) AntConc.3.2.1w http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/software.html
- Arvidsson, A (2006) Brands. Meaning and Value in Media Culture, London: Routledge [Working Paper, University of Milan]
- Jessop, Bob (1992) From social democracy to Thatcherism: twenty five years of British politics, In Nicolas Abercrombie and Alan Warde (eds) *Social Change in Contemporary Britain*, Cambridge: Polity
- Jessop, B. (2002) *The Future of the Capitalist State* Cambridge: Polity
- Scott, Mike (1997) Wordsmith Tools, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Thrift, N (2001) 'It's the romance, not the finance, that makes the business worth pursuing': disclosing a new market culture, *Economy and Society* 30 (4) 412-432