

# ‘Enhancing human capital?’ Language and the Neoliberal University

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# neoliberalism

- **Stamp of our age** ‘the common sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world’ (Harvey 2005:3)
- **Neoliberal transformations** – ‘redefined the relationship between state, society and the economy’  
(Ward 2012:1)
- **Neoliberalism and Education** – means to dynamic market economy + another service to be delivered on the market.

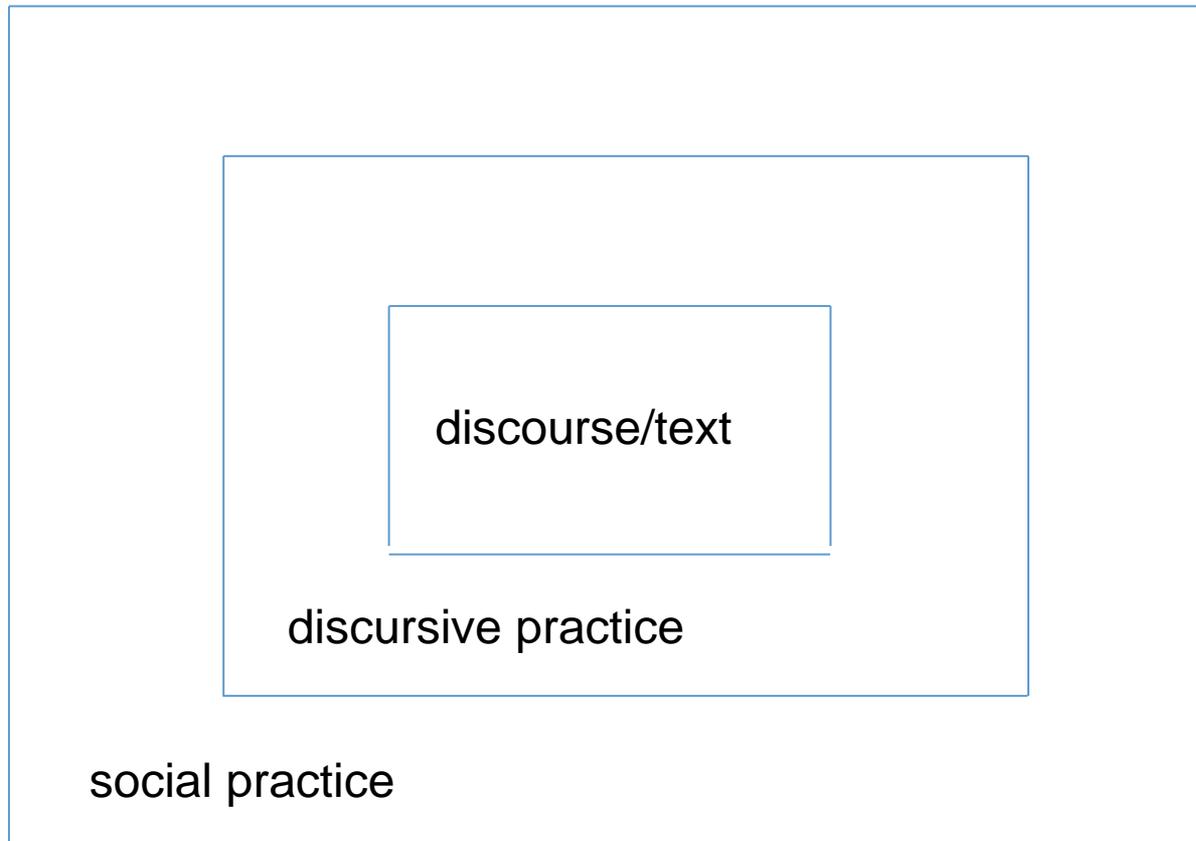
# interpretations neoliberal ideology in language

- ‘spread of market speak’ (Mautner 2010)  
‘interdiscursive alignment’
- ‘marketisation of public discourse in neoliberal capitalism’ (Fairclough 2010)

discourse ‘colonised’ by the language of new capitalism  
discursive construal of the world

\* Business communication      \* Institutional discourse  
\* Critical discourse analysis

## 'discourse driven' interpretations of neoliberalism



*'when ideologies find expression in language we call them discourses'*

*Canagarajah and Ben Said 2011*

# language, neoliberal ideology and the real world

- ‘social means behind meaning’  
‘persistent context of all language’  
(Hymes 1996)
- language-in flux, never settled
- socially driven and socially contested

## the 'persistent context' the evolving neoliberal university

- less state subvention
- academic commercialism
- internationalisation
- university management methods
- degrees tapered to the employment market
- increased competition between universities

neoliberal university speeded up in post- crash Ireland

- **austerity and ‘more for less’**

2005-2010      20% increase in students in HE

2005-2010      fall in public funding for HE by 16%

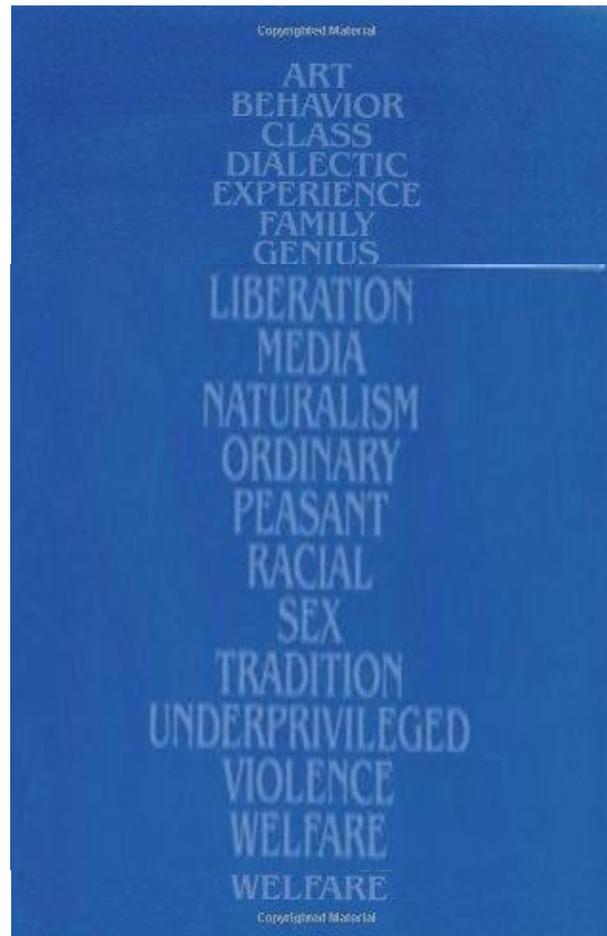
- **expansion marked by social class**

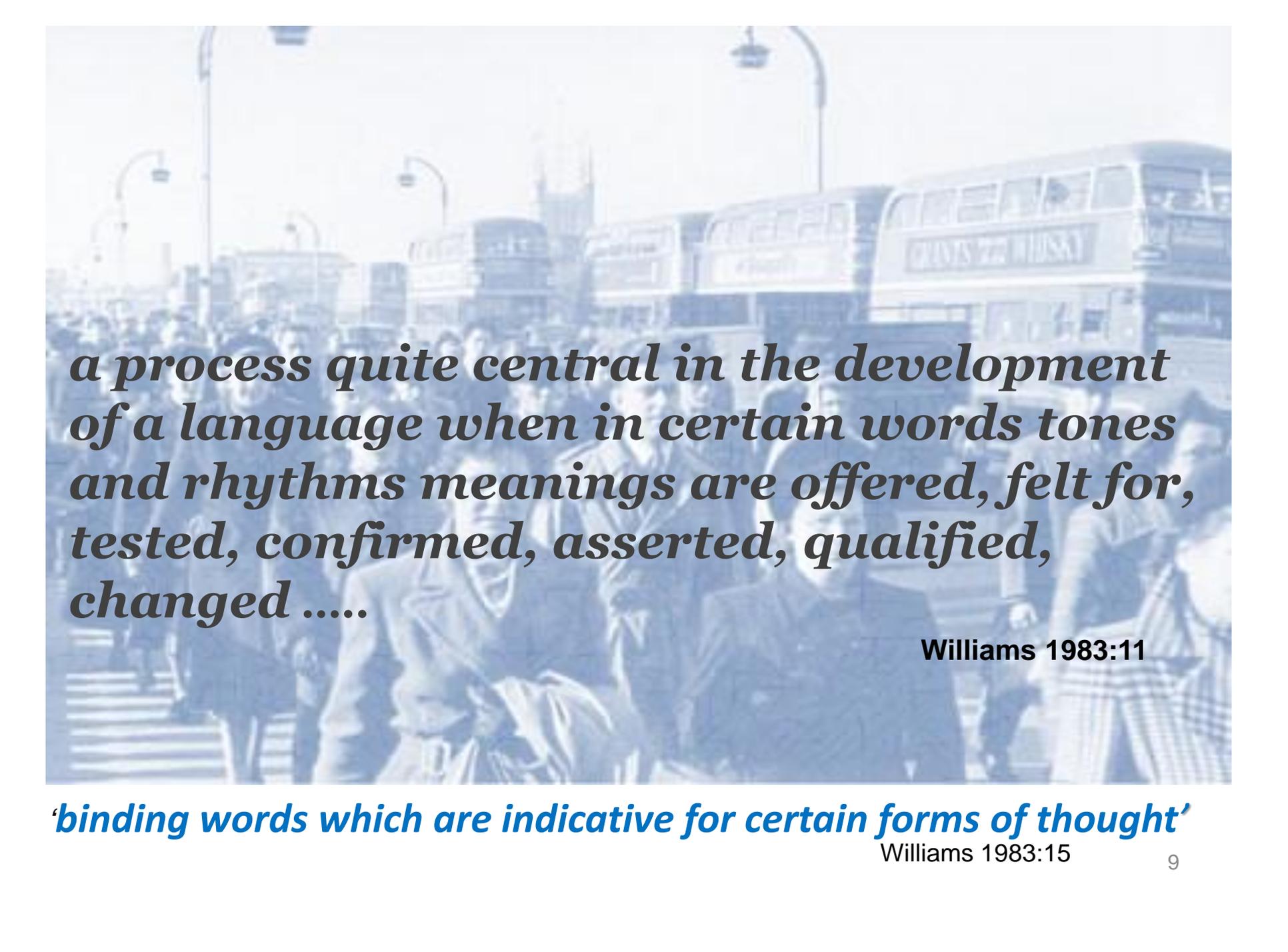
- **staff polarisation**

University staff  
pay cut by up to  
21% since 2008

# Why keywords?

*'keywords... in which deep conflicts of value, and belief are .. engaged'.  
Williams 1986:11.*





*a process quite central in the development  
of a language when in certain words tones  
and rhythms meanings are offered, felt for,  
tested, confirmed, asserted, qualified,  
changed .....*

**Williams 1983:11**

*‘binding words which are indicative for certain forms of thought’*

**Williams 1983:15**

- Keywords are ‘the nodes around which ideological battles are fought’. Stubbs 2001:68
- ‘tips of icebergs’ Stubbs 2010:21-22

## Neoliberal keywords

social agency and meaning

# Ideology

- One sided representation
- Articulated from a particular social class
- Part-believed, part-rejected
- Influenced by real world events
- Coextensive with language but distinct from it

‘neither thoughts nor language in themselves form a realm of their own, they are only manifestations of actual life’ (Marx 1974:118)

# Neoliberal keywords

( HUNT REPORT 2011)

**market**

.....*higher education providers in the Irish market*  
(p 108 )

**enterprise**

..... *the relationships between higher education and enterprise can position Ireland at the leading edge of the competitive market* (p 31-2)

**commercialisation**

..... *the commercialisation of new knowledge* (p 32)

**business**

.....*business- academic partnerships* (p76)

..... *business engagement in curriculum development*  
(p105)

**intellectual property**

..... *The commercialisation of intellectual property from publicly-funded research should primarily provide a gross return to the economy* (p 61)

**leverage (vb)**

..... *leverage the traditionally high value we place on education* (p 4)

I work in the knowledge and human resources industry. My company specialises in two kinds of product: we manufacture high-quality, multi-skilled units of human capacity; and we produce commercially relevant, cutting-edge new knowledge in user-friendly packages of printed material. I hold a middle-management level position responsible to a divisional head who reports directly to the Chief Executive. We have been increasing output of both products during the last twenty years, while at the same time pursuing a cost cutting programme by making efficiency gains of 1% per year. We compete in the global market place and our brand-recognition scores are high. The company's name is HiEdBiz plc and its motto is 'World-class products at rock-bottom prices'.

# 'Human capital'

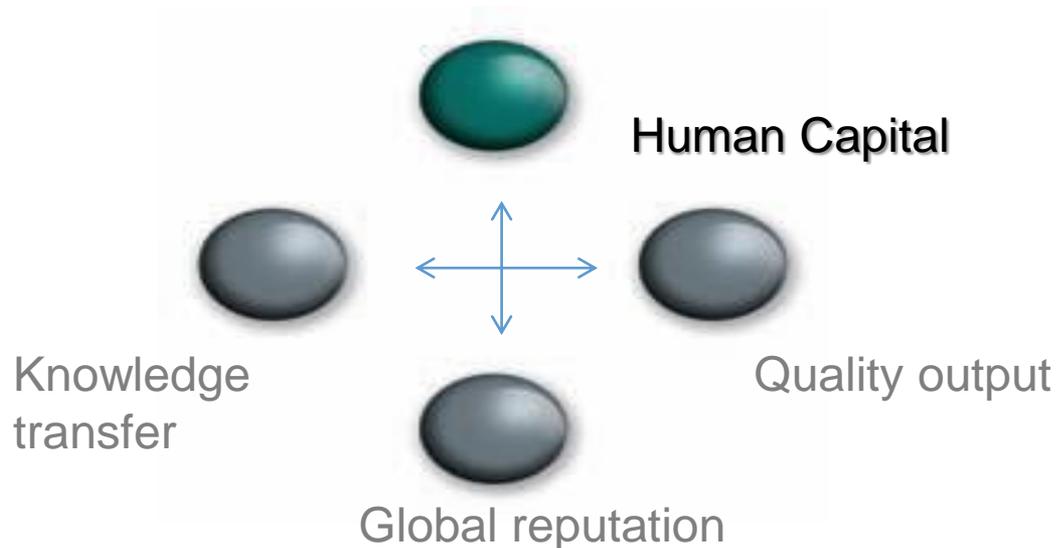
If Ireland is to achieve its ambitions for recovery and development within an innovation-driven economy, it is essential to create and enhance **human capital** by expanding participation in higher education. (p3 Hunt Report)

— *n*

*economics* the abilities and skills of any individual, esp those acquired through investment in education and training, that enhance potential income earning

# *Human capital /smart economy*

*A key feature of the Smart Economy is building the innovation or 'ideas' component of the economy through investment in human capital and its ability and effectiveness in translating ideas into valuable processes, products and services*



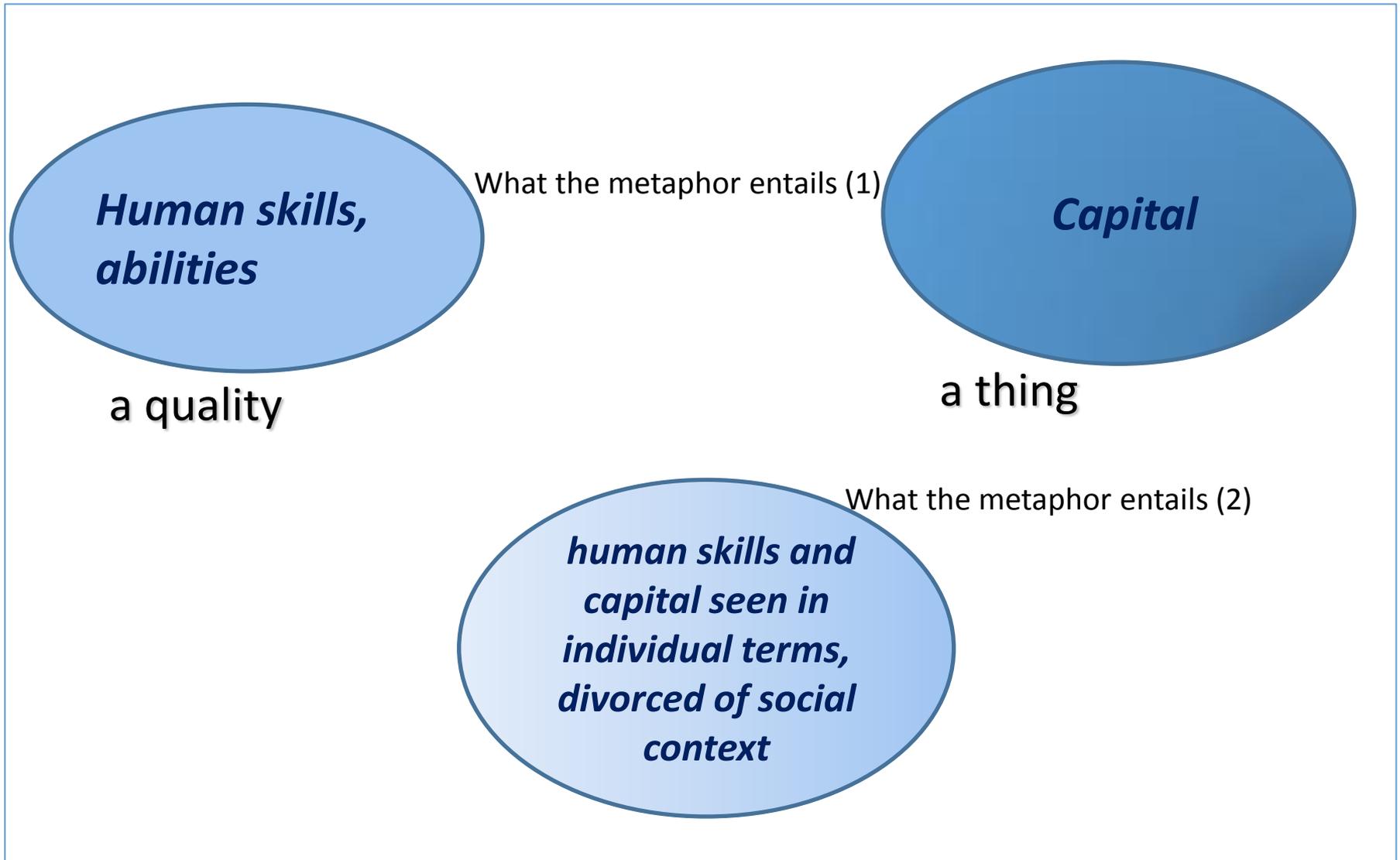
# *human* collocates with....

- (25) *shields, love, affection, design, condition, endeavour, ability, activities, brain, memory, record, eye, susceptibility, propensity, case, propensity, universals, morality, condition, excrement, failings,*  
**(Corpus of American English)**
- (25) *rights, being, Rights, experience, nature, chain, activity, actions, intelligence, heart, Rights, kindness, nervous system, servants, head, relations, rights abuses, nature, hand, look, reason, beings, operators, soul, gene,*  
**(British National Corpus 9)**  
*'human capital' 33*

# *Human capital* metaphor

- *Treats labour as a produced means of production*
- *Centres on differentiation of the labour force*
- *Brings social institutions previously relegated to cultural and superstructural spheres into the realm of economic analysis*

***Bowles and Gintis 1975***



ideological at two levels → commodification and erasing of social relations

## Human capital – rates of return

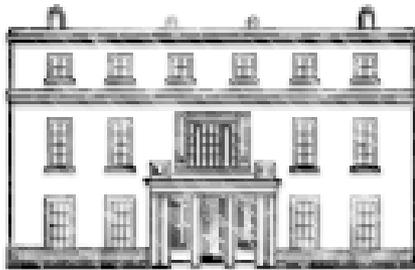
‘The Smart Economy is developed by **enhancing productivity per person by investing in human capital**’

Becker(1962) rates of return : investment in education  
: for the individual employee

# social agency and the adoption of neoliberal keywords



2004 OECD Report on Higher Education in Ireland  
2011 National Strategy for Higher Education until 2030  
'The Hunt Report'



**AN ROINN  
OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA**

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**DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION AND SKILLS**

The mission of Higher Education is described thus in the Hunt Report (DES 2011:10):

In the decades ahead, higher education will play a central role in making Ireland a country recognised for innovation, competitive enterprise and continuing academic excellence, [.....] If Ireland is to achieve its ambitions for recovery and development within an innovation-driven economy, it is essential to create and enhance human capital by expanding participation in higher education.

liberal university

\* *production of people able to govern, manage, lead*

neoliberal university

\* ***production of human capital***  
\* *responding directly to the needs of capital*

# *Human capital* 'discursive 'regime'?

- Restricts users - restricts acceptance?
- Problems of identification - **alienation**

*It ain't human and it ain't  
capital*

*Wir sind kein  
Humankapital*

# *neoliberal ideology and real world events*



create and enhancing human capital by increasing participation in higher education.....

- ideology and discourse distinct
- keywords as a tool to investigate ideology in language
- role of social agents in spread of neoliberal keywords
- role of persistent context of neoliberal university in a period of economic crisis

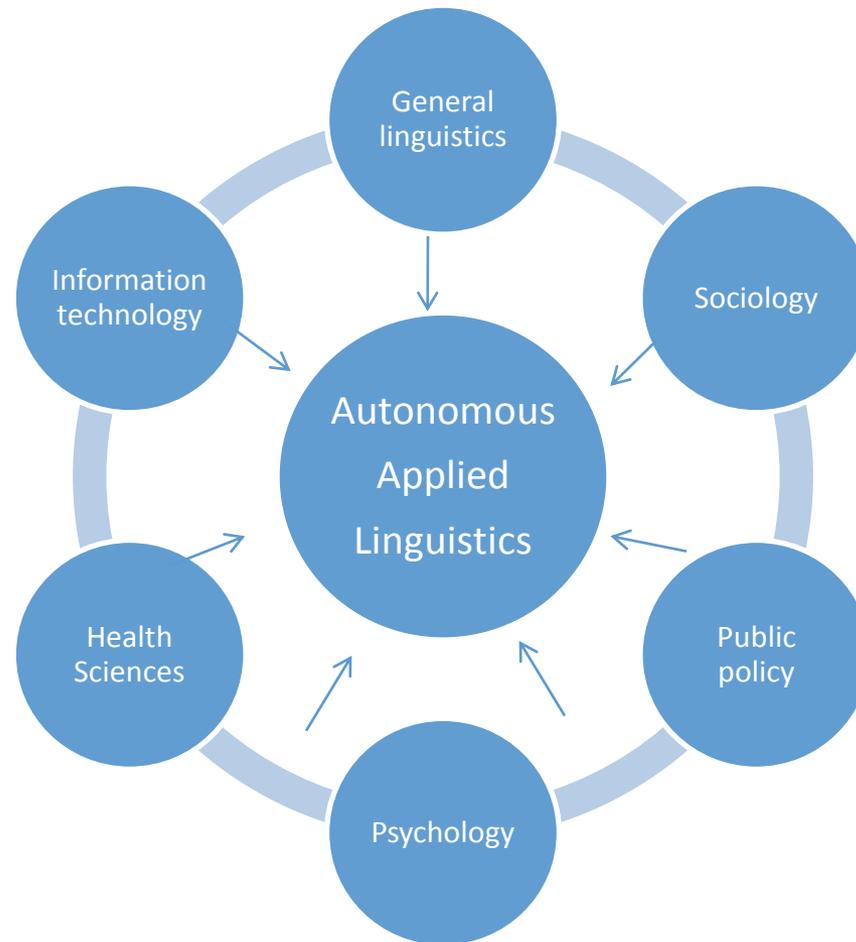
# social nature of language

- *‘The speech act is by its nature social. The word is not a tangible object but an always shifting, always changing means of social communication. It never rests with one consciousness, one voice. Its dynamism consists in a movement from speaker to speaker, from one context to another, from one generation to another. Through it all, the word does not forget its path of transfer and cannot completely free itself from the power of those concrete contexts into which it has entered....the word enters our context from another context, permeated with the intentions of other speakers’.*

(Quoted in Volosinov 1973: 199)

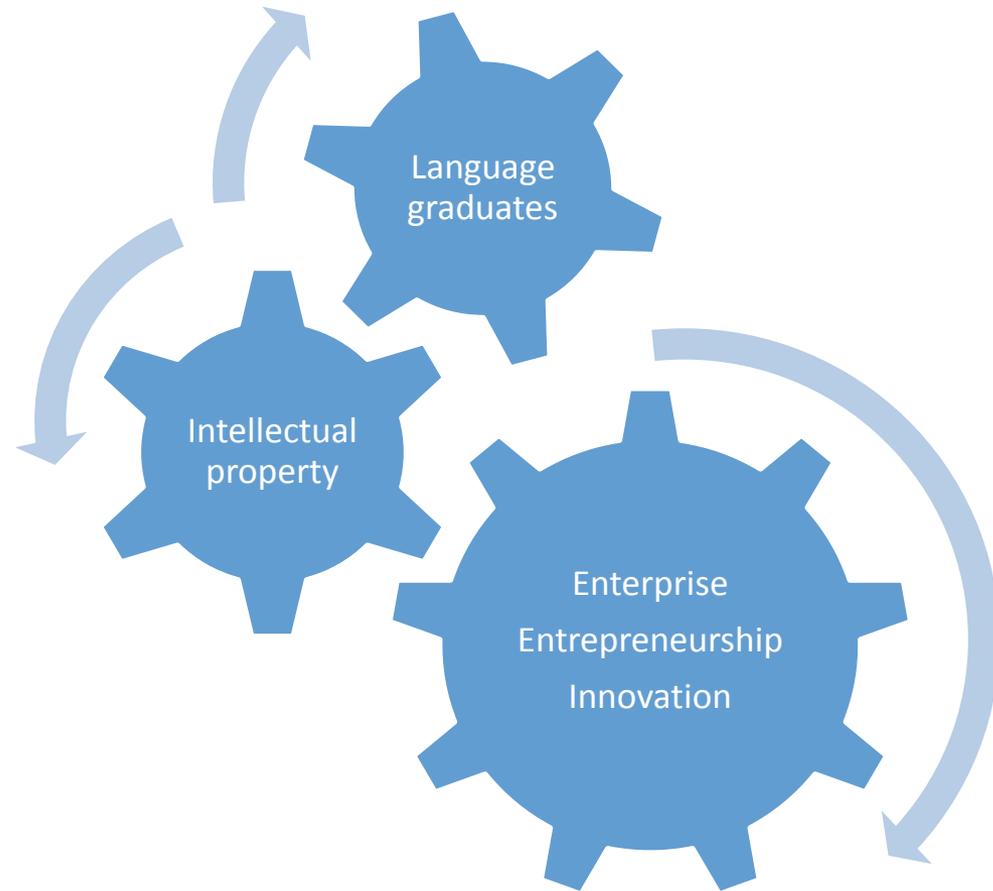


# AL a subject defined by other subjects?

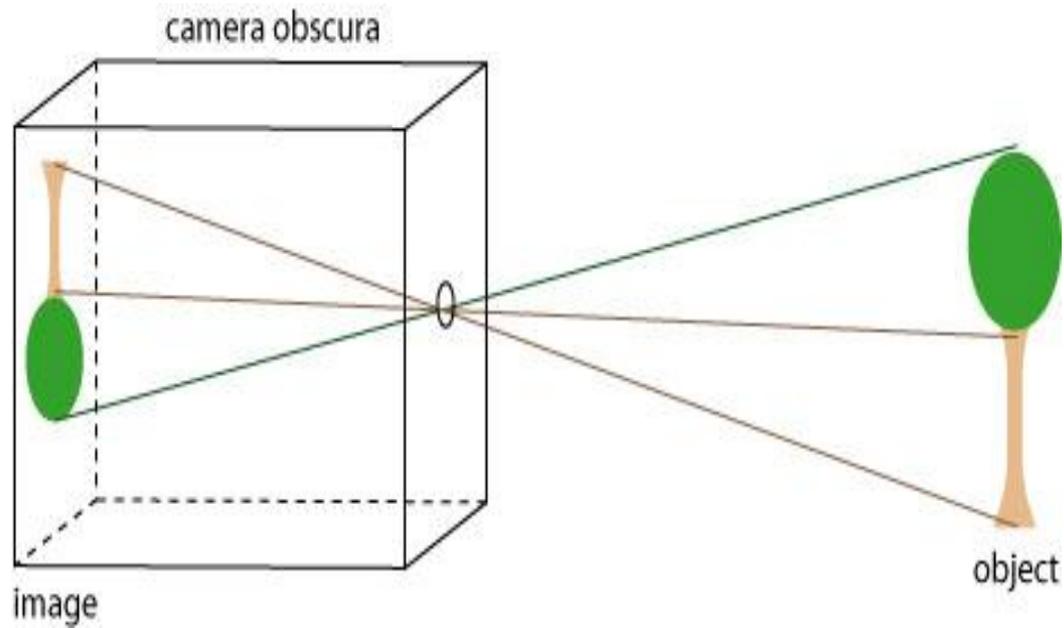


Hall, Smith and  
Wicaksono 2011 ;16

# *The neoliberal view of applied linguistics?*



# *Ideology and the real*



# Ideology and real world events



