Handbook of Local and Regional Development

Edited by Andy Pike, Andrés Rodríguez-Pose and John Tomaney
The language of local and regional development

Phillip O’Neill

Introduction

Novel theoretical vocabularies infuse people’s very beliefs and social practices. Along with theoretical redescriptions go practical effects such as changed views about the object of inquiry, altered practices of study, and the establishment of new social groupings and institutions.

(Cutler 1997: 4; cited by Barnes 2001b: 548)

It should be obvious that there is nothing like an economy out there, unless and until men [sic] construct such an object.


I like the fact that both language and the region are indeterminate devices. Language is a choice among an endless list of words and combinations of words and symbols. Similarly, a region is a choice of the way we represent the world we live in. When we write from a regional perspective we create a way of viewing the world for a particular purpose, and there is a tradition in this. Wishart (2004) shows how we have used natural regions to present the world as organised into tracts of land based on physical characteristics such as climate; how we have used nodal regions to show the role of central places in providing commercial services to their hinterlands; administrative regions to show how institutions can divide the world politically or bureaucratically; and vernacular or cultural regions for showing how romantic imaginations of people can coincide with distinct bio-physical landscapes.

Regionalising our world, though, is not a dispassionate act of convenience or special interest. When we write regions onto our world we are effectively assigning to it our spatial imaginaries, which are the calculations and desires that we have of, and for, our world. Jon Murdoch (2006) explains how our spatial imaginaries are enacted by our spatial deliberations and performances such as through our planning activities, our fiscal spending patterns and through infrastructure provision. In this way, spatial imaginaries are our way of choosing order and sequence from the spatial menu available to us. Murdoch calls this a process of building governmentalties into that complex set of interacting entities that we summarise with the word ‘space’. Thus Murdoch sees two things...
happening when we create spatial imaginaries: first, we “select the spatial attributes thought to be of most significance” in our interaction with the world; and, second, we intervene “in space on the basis of this selection” (2006: 156, emphasis in original). Murdoch’s point is important to this chapter. It advises us that regionalising our world is more than a convenient tidying-up of a world that is a bit messy. Rather it is an imposition of a range of ordering desires to create spatial formations that determine human activity. As such, regionalising our world is a powerful act that warrants raised awareness.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to explore the intriguing relationship between language and region by focusing on the way language and its devices drive the ways we mobilise the idea of regional development. The chapter commences with some basic views of the role of language in framing our view of the region as a economic entity. This is followed by three case studies of how language has been used to represent the regional economy in the last half century: first, as a space where neo-classical economic logics drive human activity; second, as a site where income and expenditure flows can be aggregated into discrete Keynesian entities; and, third, drawing on the Marxist language of historical materialism, as class-based building blocks, or localities. The chapter concludes with observations of emerging languages of regional development and an argument for language consciousness as a prerequisite for desirable regional development outcomes.

The role of language

The approach taken in this chapter is post-structuralist, meaning the adoption of a view that we live unavoidably in a language-encased and therefore a language-enabled world. The approach is guided in general by Jon Murdoch (2006) and by the long list of works by Norman Fairclough and Bob Jessop who have systematically joined the study of language with the study of society and its politics to show how deeper understandings of our world are possible. The approach to language in this chapter follows closely an approach that Fairclough has termed the critical discourse analysis approach, or CDA. As well, in relation to regional development questions, the chapter draws heavily on the work of Trevor Barnes, one of human geography’s leading analysts of the role of language in the development of geographical thought.

What does language enable?

A first understanding of the role of language is that it sets up the tasks at hand. Different language selections enable different types of regional analysis. Hence to describe a region we draw on unique words and language structures to produce a compendium of facts and knowledge. For example, we compose language in a particular way when we analyse the dynamism of a region to show changes in industrial sectors through time. We choose a different portfolio of language to build abstract understandings and models of regional development processes. And we choose differently again for policy language that can justify, for example, certain taxation, expenditure or regulatory interventions on behalf of a region.

More than words are used in each of these types of regional analysis. There are also maps, diagrams, tables of numbers and calculations, mathematical equations and statistical indicators. These are also language devices, dependent on unique symbols in carrying meaning to an audience. Throughout this chapter all these devices are understood to be part of what we call language.

Language enables five things for understanding regional development. First, it makes informed observation possible. Language – words, numbers, symbols, images – brings an otherwise disconnected list of unnamed landscape items into common understanding (see Fairclough 2003). Language is a social
agreement on how to name the things we are talking about: a mountain, a motorway, an abandoned factory site. Language also helps us group items into useful categories: men and women, employed and unemployed, revenue and expenditure. These are simple functions of language, naming and classifying; yet they draw attention to our inability to say anything at all about our world when a word to capture the presence of a thing or category of things is unavailable or in dispute (see Gottdienner 1995).

Second, language drives analysis. Language sets up the idea of the region as having worth or value, gives a way of expressing this worth such as through measurement or comparison, and guides the monitoring of changes through time such as by providing a way of talking about time and of standardising regional conditions from one moment or period of time to another. Language also guides us in depicting a region’s strength, its vulnerability and its stability. And language provides a way of showing a region’s connections and the ways these might produce strength and autonomy, or dependence. Often these notions of strength and connection depend on the use of language metaphors, a language tactic we explore in the next section.

Third, language guides the way we use abstractions, though we mostly do this subconsciously since language itself is a process of abstraction, a thought event where we convert an observation, thought or feeling into a symbol (a written word, an equation or an image) or an utterance (a spoken word). The arrangement of letters that make up the words ‘thermal power station’, for instance, converts a massive industrial installation with coal stockpiles covering many hectares into a small set of letters on a page capable of conveying the same meaning to the reader that would be conveyed by a direct viewing of the power station in reality.

But language also enables the assembly of more complex abstractions. The world can be depicted as a human or natural system, for example, only through the device of language. The Chicago School’s powerful and enduring representation of the city by a concentric zone model, for instance, converted observations of a growing and decaying mid-western US city in the 1920s into a template for understanding the dynamism of cities worldwide. Language enables abstract generalisations. For example, language enables us to invent the idea of inequality to describe compounded differences in income, education and employment across groups of households, and to make judgements about the desirability of these differences.

Fourth, language enables us to express our feelings about a region, to imagine something else, a different state of affairs under different imagined conditions; to chose alternative spatial imaginaries. In other words, language provides the opportunity for normative thinking and judgments. Such thinking capacity opens regional analysis to political debate about the desirability of what is going on in a region and what possibilities there are for change (see Barnes 2001b).

Fifth, language enables us to provide relative fixity to relationships between time and space. Fairclough (2003, esp. p. 151), citing Harvey (1996), shows that while space and time are central concepts in society and societal analysis, they are also social constructs. Through language constructions, space and time become core categories in locating conditions and events, showing how they are changing, positioning people’s reactions to them, and creating the parameters for contest, conflict and resolution. Obviously, then, space and time are key language-based concepts for the study of regions and pivotal to how we understand regional change and development.

In summary, then, language-consciousness is vital to effective regional analysis. As Nigel Thrift (1990) demonstrates, language establishes and drives everything that can said about the region, what the region is, what the region is composed of, why the region is an important scale of areal analysis and the nature of our analytical and policy aspirations.
Features of language that deserve attention

Barnes (for example, in Barnes and Duncan 1992) and Fairclough (especially 1992, 1995, 2003) have shown the importance of a language self-consciousness in regional analysis writing and, therefore, of the need for an understanding of basic linguistics and of the need for scholars to acquire the basic skills of language analysis. We now turn to a brief discussion of the features of language helpful in developing a language self-consciousness.

We start with the basic unit of language, the word. A word is an utterance recordable as a simple collection of letters which represent a word as a symbol or sign. A word thus refers to an object or an idea, the thing that is being signified by the sign. The signifier—signified link drives linguistic study, while the evaluation of the permanence of signifier—signified relationships is at the heart of the post-structuralist debate (see Gottdiener 1995).

Of course, words are usually delivered in sentences so that their meaning can be enhanced by being surrounded by other words. The words that are chosen and the way they are grouped and presented vary according to different contexts. Context means that both the selection of words and the meaning of these words vary according to who is the composer (the speaker or writer) and who is the audience (the readers or listeners), as you would know.

What I seek to emphasise here is that words are delivered through language structures that either systematically reproduce ways of thinking and understanding, or else challenge ways of thinking and understanding. This stabilisation or unsettling of meaning is fundamental to the processes of scholarship about regions. As we see in the case studies of regional development below, any approach to regional development has a set of language expressions and devices that are stabilised by their being agreed on by a user community; meaning that research practice lives within a stable set of pre-existing practices.

Barnes depicts the language within such set or stable practices as ‘dead’ language. Not that Barnes is deriding the use of dead language. Rather he notes that when a new approach to, say, regional analysis is being developed, there is conflict between the ideas encased in the language forms of the pre-existing or dead language of analysis and the ideas being developed by the new or alternative analysis. For the new ideas to become ascendant, by definition they must be propelled by a language that is more or less new. Prosacically, Trevor Barnes argues that the development of new ideas about the world involves a “redescription of the world in terms of novel vocabularies” (2001a: 164, citing Culler 1997).

In other words, the language which postures as a replacement language of analysis is a living language, alive to new ideas and therefore to new ways of expressing these ideas.

There are many ways that language stabilises in sets of words that carry agreed meanings. Small groups of words in a pattern, so-called ‘figures of speech’ or ‘common expressions’, are known technically as ‘tropes’. A trope is an important device in regional analysis. Most regional development concepts are expressed as tropes: the rate of economic growth, labour force participation rate, environmental sustainability, regulatory environment, industrial cluster, and so on.

More powerful and more complex than tropes are metaphors. Metaphors carry meaning across otherwise stable language worlds. They perform descriptive, comparative, explanatory and judgement roles. Technically, a metaphor is a figure of speech that carries an idea into a new domain through juxtaposing separate things with similar characteristics. A common metaphor in economic development is the biological metaphor of the human body and its development. A region might be described as being in a youthful, adult or mature stage of development, its progress monitored by growth rates, its component relations describable as its internal metabolism, its money flows seen as having circulatory properties, while periods
of depression are seen to need external injec-
tions, and so on.

Barnes’ work on metaphor and economic geography over many years shows the impos-
sibility of conceiving the region as an eco-
nomic entity without resorting to the adoption and stylisation of language metaphors in
building our representations and, therefore, our understanding of the real world we seek
to understand and change. In other words, metaphors are our pathway to shift from
observation to theorisation (see Barnes 1991, esp. p. 112). The adoption of new ways to do
regional analysis, then, involves the adoption of new metaphors as part of taking on new
words and language structures. Emphatically, Barnes and Duncan (1992: 11) see that new
metaphors “are the jolt, the frisson, that makes us see the world in a different way …
[M]etaphors create new angles on the world … [and then] they gradually acquire a
habitual use.”

Barnes’ analysis of metaphor, and his atten-
tion to language consciousness more generally,
show how language drives our understanding
of regions, leads the development of political
concerns about regional performance, guides
(or limits) the exploration of alternative
regional economic pathways, and fosters new
planning strategies. The way we talk about
regions, from day-to-day conversations through
to sophisticated academic analysis, is simulta-
neously language-limited and language-enabled. In the case of the metaphors
deployed in all this talk we can see how met-
aphors that have become common and used
uncritically – and therefore naturalised or
dead – can produce unintended, uniform
and uncritical decisions and actions. Without
language consciousness, we become the slave
of the defunct metaphor-maker, warn Barnes

Of course, beyond an understanding of
trope and metaphor, there is a vast range of
linguistic understandings and analytical skills
for building a language-informed approach to
regional analysis. Fairclough (esp. 1992 and
2003) provides a comprehensive guide to
the field. Beyond words, expressions and
metaphors, Fairclough (1992) identifies three
other areas for language consciousness. One
is the understanding of the power of lan-
guage’s structure and form; that the meaning
language carries is tied into a writer’s or
speaker’s language format and approach.
Thus, when a language-user chooses between
narrative, analytical, inferential or deductive
approaches to talk about a region, this
requires the selection of a matching vocabu-
lary, metaphorical base, logical sequence and
engagement strategy. A second language
understanding advanced by Fairclough is the
role of context, being the situation where
language is authored and targeted, and the
place for discursive practices to be enacted.
Hence a political speech to a constituent
audience about regional disadvantage will
contain markedly different language to the
language chosen for an academic journal,
and to that written by a consultant in a report
to a local government authority. A third area
of understanding of the social practices of
language, especially the reflexivity of lan-
guage, is the idea that language development
is inseparable from the triangulated relation-
ship between author, audience and society.
As much as an author might try to ignore
these relationships, authorship is always over-
determined by the immanence of audience
and society. The idea that authorship is actu-
ally negotiated with its audience is developed
in the body of work emanating from the
Russian Bakhtin writers’ group, an early
ten twentieth-century group of linguists and
writers which explored the relationship
between the act of authorship and the act of
communication, the anticipated conversation
to come (see Brandist 2002). This awareness
is captured by the concept of dialogism, being
the idea that all language is reducible to
utterances that are part of a wider audience
dialogue.

Clearly there is much to be conscious of
in authoring for a regional development
purpose. However, individual authors rarely
develop their own sets of vocabularies,
expressions, metaphors and language structures. Authors tend to belong to schools of thought, akin to what Kuhn (1962) called ‘paradigms’, or groups of work that share common research motivations (often including both research questions and political ideologies), analytical assumptions, investigative strategies (or epistemologies) and anticipated audiences. Three of these schools – neo-classical, Keynesian and localities – are now examined as case studies to demonstrate how language underpinned their development and mobilisation.

Case studies of language and regional development

Case study of neo-classical models of regional development

The neo-classical view of the region remains a major influence on the study of local and regional development. Perhaps as a consequence, the analysis and critique of the neo-classical approach has been a major theme of Barnes’ prolific writings; and once again we draw heavily on Barnes’ work in this section. The lineage of the neo-classical tradition in regional development studies is rather clear and simple (see Barnes 2001a). The neo-classical approach to the region coalesced in the 1950s with a concentration on applied economic theory and modelling. The timing here is significant because the development of the neo-classical approach cannot be isolated from the post-Second World War surge in the grand project of modernity underpinned by widespread acceptance of the idea that the application of rational, scientific-based knowledge to the management of human affairs could produce unproblematic and universally shared advances in the human condition. The neo-classical approach was thus, dialogically, propelled by scientifically derived understandings and received by a scientifically enthused audience.

Central to the rise of the neo-classical treatment of the region in the 1950s was the development of the discipline of regional science by economist Walter Isard. Central to Isard’s work was the resuscitation of nineteenth-century German spatial imaginaries, specifically of a spatial economy underpinned by hierarchies of towns and cities, with patterns of rural land use and industrial investments explainable by simple, reproducible logics. Barnes (2003b, 2004) shows the links between Isard’s seminal volume *Location and Space Economy* (1956) and the work of his fellow economists at MIT, especially Paul Samuelson. Barnes then traces Isard’s work, and thus the new language of regional analysis, through the creation of the University of Pennsylvania’s Department of Regional Science, its first PhD graduate William Alonso, the rise worldwide of the regional science discipline, and the incorporation of its work into regional policy and practitioner practices. While regional science as an identifiable discipline has declined markedly over the last three decades, regional science technologies endure in the toolboxes of regional development practitioners, for example, as the basis for calculating location efficiencies in GIS distance minimisation models, and in the spatial imaginaries of new economic geographers such as Paul Krugman and Masahisa Fujita within the economics discipline, albeit on its margins.

Features of the neo-classical approach

Barnes (1987) shows how early regional economic theories accepted naturally, as much as uncritically, neo-classical approaches to economy. The inclusion of a spatial dimension was designed to display how ordered, utility-maximising human behaviours played out on a relatively unproblematic a-social spatial surface. Subsequently, social theorists dubbed the rational spatial player ‘economic man’ or, humorously, *homo economicus*. Citing Olsson and Gale (1968: 229), Barnes (1987: 301) identifies the analytical ease of playing with a predictable human population,
noting that “the players in the spatial economic game are blessed with the attributes of economic man”, and so behave rationally and predictably.

The starting point for neo-classical spatial analysis is the construction of a spatialised economic surface. There are four famous historical spatial constructions of the domain of homo economicus (Figure 45.1). The first is Johann Heinrich von Thünen’s concentric model of land use contained in his 1826 manuscript The Isolated State. This was the first published demonstration of neo-economics in a formal spatial setting. Von Thünen used rent theory to show how the occupancy of rural land nearer a town or city depends on the user’s capacity to extract high rates of returns per square metre of land compared to the land productivity of competing users. Barnes (2003a) shows how von Thünen used geometry, relational algebra and calculus to construct a surface of possibilities for maximising economic returns, somewhat anticipating neo-classical marginal economics by half a century. The methodology pioneered what later became standard neo-classical model-making: commence with abstract assumptions that remove spatial contingency, and then progressively relax them to show the effect of movements in individual variables.

The second iconic neo-classical spatial model is Alfred Weber’s location triangle, published in his Theory of the Location of Industries in 1909. The triangle shows the choices available to industrial investors if they are motivated solely by transportation cost minimisation. Weber (1929, see Barnes 2003a) extended von Thünen’s analysis of rural land use into models of industrial location. Again, though, it was “a projection of pure economics into the spatial domain” (2003a: 78). Yet, intriguingly, its purpose was something more than “purely economic”. Weber’s strategy involved deploying the extant language and analytical techniques of neo-classicism. Ironically, Weber’s heritage is seen as his contribution to a neo-classical spatial imaginary rather than to its repudiation.

Apparently the work of August Lösch is similarly misinterpreted. Barnes (1987) shows how Lösch extended Weber’s analysis through his 1954 book The Economics of Location. The book showed how “spatial economic phenomena could be expressed in an explicitly abstract, formal, and rationalist vocabulary and directly connected to the empirical world” (1954: 546). Lösch’s work continued the evolution of regional science as a law-seeking enterprise, the discovery of abstractions and generalisation that played across space irrespective of any local bumpy bits. Funnily, though, Lösch’s construction of an idealised spatial surface was his way of demonstrating and explaining the idiosyncrasies of the real world rather then asserting the presence of the ideal in actuality. Perhaps this intention derived from Lösch being a student of heterodox economist Joseph Schumpeter, always one for elevating the contingency of real human behaviour as a prime economic force. Barnes (2003a: 81) quotes Derek Gregory (1994: 58):

Lösch wanted to disclose, to make visible, the systematic order or a rational economic landscape – what he [Lösch] called “the rational and therefore natural order” – because he was convinced that such a demonstration held out the prospect of domesticating the “illogical, irregular, lawless” forces that ravage [a] chaotic reality.

In other words, Lösch sought to construct a spatial order in order to determine how the chaos of the observed world could be bettered; showing in Barnes’ (2003a: 81) terms, a preference for a “logically constructed landscape” over “messy real places”. As with Weber, this purpose was largely lost in the subsequent use of Lösch’s work.
Figure 45.1 Neo-classical spatial analysis models
a) Von Thünen's concentric land use model
b) Weber's location triangle
A - level centres
B - level centres
C - level market areas

Figure 45.1 Continued

(c) Christaller’s Central Place theory
(d) Alonso’s bid-rent model of urban land use

In any event, Barnes stresses that what was made of Lösch’s work (say, by Berry and others) wasn’t determined only by its language but by the beliefs and social practices that framed its reading. The two – language, and beliefs and social practices – proceed hand in glove, dialogically. In this sense, Lösch’s work was very much part of what we now call a modernist view of the world, a “theoretical redescription” (Barnes 2001b: 548), taking a complex, unevenly composed world and recomposing it as a stylised space of rational predictable behaviour with, crucially, a process of “expressing the subject matter at hand in terms of a new vocabulary and syntax” (2001b: 548).

The third iconic spatial model is from Walter Christaller’s 1933 dissertation *The Central Place in Southern Germany*. In this enduring work Christaller represented the settlement pattern of his home region as a geometric distribution of differently sized towns and cities based on the relative capacity of their retailers to attract consumption spending from households spread across a featureless plain. Christaller’s neatly arranged set of nested hexagons has adorned geography and planning textbooks and lecture rooms ever since, the elegance of the representation at least as enticing as the power of any explanation on offer.

Similar figurative elegance can be found in William Alonso’s bid-rent model of land use in a city. Alonso’s (1964) urban land use theory sees the geographical location pattern of a city as derived from the opportunities householders have for maximising utility across “one-dimensional Euclidean space” (Barnes 1989: 305). In other words, the models of Christaller, Lösch and von Thünen imagined the geographical landscape as a set of “spatial opportunities” (1989: 306) to be surveyed by rational actors in pursuit of commercial activity. Says Barnes,

In summary, neo-classical economic geographers assume that beneath the heterogeneous economic landscape lies a more fundamental variable, economic rationality...[such that] the extreme, geographical relationship among places, and the internal arrangement within them, all get reduced to the single logic of rational choice. Geographical diversity and complexity are thus explained away.

(Barnes 1987: 32)

It is important to understand that this elimination of diversity and complexity is bound up in the language approaches of the neo-classical scholars – which we call their semi-osis (see Fairclough 2003) – especially in the way they used the languages of mathematics and geometry and in the way they approached the task of theory-building. We now turn to an analysis of these language approaches.

The neo-classical approaches described above have four common features. First, as explained by Barnes (1989), they employ Cartesian perspectives. In other words, the neo-classical economic geographers reduced the earth’s surface to a measurable grid of \(x\) and \(y\) coordinates where the location of human activity was determined by the solution of linear equations relating, for example, land use intensity to distance from a city centre; and commercial pull to population size and distance from competing centres. Non-linear perspectives and behaviours other than economic rationalist behaviours were ignored. As Barnes observes (2001b: 560), it was an approach that reflected a belief “that the economic landscape was fundamentally ordered and could be grasped all on a ... sheet of paper” leading, according to Barnes (1989: 299), to an “emaciated view of place”.

Second, the neo-classical approaches used the universalising languages of mathematics, especially relational algebra, and of statistics. On one hand this gave the neo-classical models the appearance of certainty; while, on the other, made the world’s economic geography seem as if it were determined by a
small number of knowable, measurable variables. Thus, as Barnes (1989) points out, an embrace of mathematics steered attention towards the enunciation of general principles without the need for attention to spatial or temporal subtleties. Likewise, any exploration of regional data was for the verification of abstract spatial principles rather than for their discovery.

Importantly, the language strategies of these neo-classical approaches shielded their proponents from unsettling observations and counter-logics. Two periods of history are important here. One is the broadening of the application of mathematics and geometry to fields of scientific inquiry in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Regional economics was obviously caught up in this. The other is the quantitative revolution in the social sciences during the 1960s when rapidly expanding computing capacities magnified the power of researchers to manipulate large datasets. Regional economics and its regional science brother thus became infused with equations, graphs and numbers.

And then paralleling the quantitative revolution was the appropriation, often uncritically, of models and metaphors from the natural and related sciences. Barnes observes that:

From physics emerged gravity and later entropy-maximising models; from sociology and land economics came models of land use, social physics, including the rank-size rule, and urban factorial ecology; and from geometry came network and graph theory and the analysis of topological forms that were incorporated into transportation studies:

(Barnes 2003a: 84, citing Pooler 1977)

And Barnes adds that, “Marking all these different theoretical ventures was the emphasis on conceptual precision, deductive logic and analytical rigour, that is, rationalism” (Barnes 2003a: 84), emphasising (2003a: 91) that mathematics in particular offered “an ineluctable principle that would guarantee the truth” (2003a: 91).

Third, the neo-classical spatial modellers used utility-maximising, homo economicus assumptions, taking these uncritically from their neo-classical economist colleagues. As noted above, space was seen only as a conceptual dimension onto which the predictable economic behaviours of humans could be mapped. Moreover the humans involved were impossibly rational, possessing complete information and making decisions solely to maximise their personal circumstances, which everyone did identically. The field of choice was all-knowable remotely and in advance rather than by empirical observation. Real space had no a priori existence or relevance; and humans were automatons.

Fourth, while the prime purpose of the neo-classical scholars was to determine the underlying reasons for human spatial behaviours, these reasons would be common from one spatial setting to the next, such that “behind the chaos and complexity of the world there is an order” (Barnes 1987: 473); and where “diversity, difference and disjunction are excluded by definition” (1987: 473). In other words, the hermeneutic approach of the neo-classical spatial modellers involved the belief that human behaviour was commonly determined and therefore predictable once key exogenous variables were identified – in the same way that scientists sought to uncover an underlying order in the physical world (see Barnes 1988). Thus the modelling approach was nomothetic, or law-seeking (see Barnes 2003a: 82). On one hand this was a major departure from the predominantly descriptive approach of early regional geographers. On the other, it removed any possibility that geographic space and place were capable of generating forces of primary importance to the way people lived, conducted business and built productive landscapes. Paradoxically, economist’s interest in the spatial landscape, then, showed little
interest in real geography and the condition of society at all.

In contrast, the application of Keynesian principles to the regional economy question was motivated principally by a determination to be able to change business and living conditions. We now turn to an examination of the Keynesian region and the language approach that characterised it.

**Case study of Keynesian regions**

Like most branches of post-Second World War economics, post-war regional economics was dominated by the application of the principles of economics developed by British economist John Maynard Keynes. There is a vast literature explaining the power of Keynesianism in constructing post-Second World War national economies as a set of Keynesian economic categories interacting in defined ways with reasonably predictable outcomes (see Bryan 2001). Importantly, Mitchell (2002) argues that Keynes and Keynesianism were instrumental in creating ‘the economy’ as a discrete object of human management. Thus Keynesian economics can be seen as building the idea of a national economy and then disaggregating it into spending categories each of which become a potential site for Keynesian-style government intervention.

These developments were necessary preconditions for the idea of the regional economy which enabled new ways of depicting and analysing the operation of spatial economies at the sub-national level. Common texts recording the canons of regional Keynesian economics are Nourse (1968) and Richardson (1972). Four features of the formulation – each steeped in language – are important. **First**, because Keynesian analysis privileged demand conditions as the driver of economic growth, the categories that constitute aggregate demand – rather than supply- or production-side drivers – became key attributes to be measured and promoted in regional economic management. These attributes flowed directly from the basic Keynesian income identity,

\[ Y = C + I + G + (X - M) \]

where \( Y \) is aggregate income
\( C \) is consumption spending
\( I \) is investment spending
\( G \) is net government spending, and
\( (X - M) \) is export earnings minus import spending, a territory’s net trade position.

Keynes proved mathematically that variations in income come from net changes in investment, government spending or export earnings; and the multiplier effects of these income changes are maximised when they are generated externally. For the region, not having its own capacity for fiscal deficits, the prime source of economic growth was seen to come from net growth in regional exports. This led to the development of ‘export base theory’ in regional economics, the simple Keynesian-inspired maxim that a region’s economic performance was ultimately dependent on the performance of its tradable goods and services sector.

**Second**, even though Keynesian economics had little to say about spatial economic relationships, the overall Keynesian approach was dependent on there being a defined territory where the basic Keynesian entities are both observable and contained in their contribution to the thing known as ‘the economy’. As noted, the Keynesian economy in its original formulation is a national economy. In the regional variation of Keynesian economics, though, the region – and not the nation – is seen as the scale where the basic Keynesian income identity plays out. That this scale jump was unexplained in the regional economics literature is surprising since the key characteristics and policy levers that ensured export earnings held a privileged growth position in a national economy – the existence of a separate national currency, controls over cross-border capital movements, the capacity to redistribute incomes.
across sectors, the ability to regulate the credit-creation capacity of the banking sector, and the capacity to generate fiscal deficits through taxation and government spending powers—were absent from the regional scale. Nevertheless, the mathematics of Keynesianism were applied enthusiastically to regional data, famously in regional input–output models and in the calculation of regional multipliers, still the information cash-cows of boosterist regional development agencies and consultancy firms worldwide.

Third, their national focus notwithstanding, Keynesian economics gave regional economics a territorially based set of economic relations, something neo-classical economics struggled to do. Hence, not only were there definable Keynesian relations between the non-household demand categories: investment, government spending and exports; these were held in tense spatial relations with their ameliorating opposites: saving, taxation and imports. Like the Keynesian national economy, then, the regional economy became a spatial imaginary replete with measurable economic categories and a mathematical schema that defined their interrelationships. Accordingly, Keynesianism gave regions an important political argument for the establishment of regional development agencies with budgetary and regulatory capacities, adopting the same Keynesian logics that were driving national economic management practices; even though the power of these capacities was often exaggerated.

Fourth, the application of Keynesian economic theory to the regions legitimised government intervention as desirable economic practice, irrespective of how effective regional Keynesianism proved to be. The elegant demonstration by Keynes that government action is capable of smoothing economic growth cycles provided also an argument by representatives of labour and capital and by community groups in support of ongoing regional development programmes. A regional Keynesianism was thus instilled simultaneously in both post-Second World War economic growth and social equity programmes.

In summary, regional Keynesianism, like national Keynesianism, provided Western political systems with an economic development language that maintained the centrality of private sector capitalism—during a period when a third of the world’s population lived under various forms of socialism—by showing how state intervention and regulation could ameliorate capitalism’s cyclical and social excesses and inequities. A different, radical language of regional economy based on class formation processes, however, emerged with the failure of Keynesian economics to maintain national economic growth in Western economies during the 1970s. This language, that of the localities school, is the subject of our next case study.

Case study of localities

The localities project, as it might be called, was an idea that was consciously formed and developed for the purpose of examining the spatialised roll-out of an exploitative capitalism across a landscape of economic regions each with its own unique social and cultural histories and contemporary circumstances. The localities project started with two concerns. One was the concern of human geographers that a search for abstract and generalised processes across all societies by both orthodox regional scientists and radical political economists was denying the possibility of regionally scaled social processes as determinants of social outcomes, and not just incidental contexts.

Mary Beth Pudup (1988) articulates this concern in detail. The demands of modern social science, says Pudup, displaced a traditional interest in regional identity and difference. In contrast, she says, the localities approach sought to attach contingency to general social processes by making their existence entirely dependent on an engagement with actually existing regional geographies. In addition, Pudup identifies a determination to marry an enlivened regional geography with a newly invigorated political economy.
of class, gender and conflict. The historical context here was the rise of anti-establishment politics in Britain in the late 1970s to counter the emergence of a Margaret Thatcher-led neoliberalist restructuring. The localities project sought a genuine engagement with class and gender questions. The predominately British project coincided with an American political economy which was focused on a differently scaled politics such as the city, in the case of David Harvey (e.g. 1985; see also Barnes 1989: 302–303), and the corporation in the case of scholars such as Barnett and Muller (e.g. 1975) and Bluestone and Harrison (e.g. 1982), and activists like Ralph Nader.

Barnes (1987) observes that the localities project retrieved an aspiration for the region as the scale where human behaviour displays “richness and diversity” (1987: 305), such that in exploring this richness and diversity one could uncover “the norms, institutions, symbols and social relationships” (1987: 306) that underpin the geographical world as well as “the role of the state at all scales, the role of local culture and society, the influence of past and present events, the importance of both macro- and micro-economic process, and so on” (Barnes 1988: 487).

Importantly, Barnes (1988) nominates Doreen Massey’s work on south Wales as “a good example of an attempt to understand the broader geographical context in which acts [sic] are to be understood” (1988: 488), for Doreen Massey’s article ‘In what sense a regional problem?’ (1979) is commonly seen as having led off the localities project. In this article Massey proposed the agenda for localities study. And while the article sought a generalist (historical materialist) explanation of spatial economic difference, it proposed the localities project as an attempt to talk about regional and uneven development by melding the language of class and the geographical language of the region.

Massey (1979) argued, then, that regional equality was the result of general processes: “the imperatives of the overall process of [capitalist] accumulation” (1979: 234) to produce a differentiated regional landscape, which was in fact a “spatial division of labour” (1979: 234), exploited in various ways to maximise profits according to a “series of ‘rounds’ of new investment” (1979: 234). Massey observes: ‘The economy’ of any given local area will thus be a complex result of the combination of its succession of roles within the series of wider, national and international, spatial divisions of labour. (Massey 1979: 235)

The key forces of the UK economy were thus identified as being strongly regional in character. For example, different economic sectors were identified as concentrated “in the areas most propitious in terms of their requirements for production” (Massey 1979: 235); while dominant, chiefly exporting industries became “the structuring elements in the new emerging pattern of regional differentiation” (1979: 235). Thereafter, the “regional problem” – Massey’s spatial imaginary – was produced by the effects on the spatial division of labour within these industries of the unwinding of the UK’s “imperial relationships” as a “dominant world capitalist economy” (1979: 235–236), and the rise of a corporations-based economy reinforced by “hierarchies of control” (1979: 236) involving the externalisation of ownership and control and the separation of research and development functions from direct production functions. This then produced an economic landscape overlain by both a hierarchy of production regions and a hierarchy of cities and regions with the tensions between them generating major and entrenched forms of social inequality. In summary, regional problems were seen as “the outcome of the changing relationships between the requirements of private production for profit and the spatial surface” (Massey 1979: 241) with the regional problem seen not as “a problem
produced by regions, but by the organisation of production itself” (1979: 243).

Pudup (1988) claims that Massey's (and the localities project's) view of the region was a reaction to having learned the social process theories of other progressive disciplines and sought ways of inscribing these onto a spatialised surface. The features of locality studies, then, were:

i) the core place of regions in Britain's roll-out of industrial capitalism;
ii) the assertion that local economies could not be understood on their own terms;
iii) requiring reference to processes operating more broadly, and therefore more generally;
iv) the primary place of labour and local labour markets in industrial transformations; and,
v) through labour, the inseparability of local cultures and local political economies.

The driving interest for locality studies (and its inherent Marxism) was that these interplays explained the UK's highly spatialised "class structure, historical work culture and gender relations" (Pudup 1988: 382).

Despite the claim to regional and local contingencies, however, and a class-rootedness discernible at these scales, Thrift (1991) showed how locality studies were implicitly structuralist. According to Thrift, locality studies stemmed from "a specific need to understand the economic, social, cultural and political changes taking place in the UK in the 1980s" (1991: 459) using the framework of "Marxism through the substitution of space for time" (1991: 460). As such, says Thrift, they elevated place to be an essence that underpins human activity, a mixer that gives flavour and meaning to life, very much in a Vidalian tradition, though without primary causative status. Elsewhere, however, and emphasising its language encasement, Thrift cedes the spatial integrity of the localities project. The localities work, he said, was important as an attempt to “find a vocabulary” that moved "away from ideas constituted with metaphors like landscapes, topographies and maps" (Thrift 1993: 93), quoting Morris 1987) seeing regions as "frames for varying practices of space, time and speed" (Thrift 1993: 94).

Thrift thus exposes the localities project as an attempt to produce new understanding of the spatial economy through the construction of an alternate method of analysis and a set of language tools for its operationalisation. We now turn to the final part of this chapter and consider the importance of language in driving the politics of regional development projects.

**Conclusion: the politics of regional development language**

Of course there are other regional development and economic languages that have steered the way we create and manage local economies. More recently, there are languages associated with post-Fordist approaches to the region which have evolved through a range of approaches tagged by labels such as institutional economics, new economic geography, competitive regions, and relational approaches. Like the case studies above, these approaches are also language dependent in the ways they construct particular views, or spatial imaginations, of regional economies.

In this part of the chapter, we reflect on language's role in the production of theory and politics, using Norman Fairclough as a guide, and we make some concluding comments on how language can be mobilised to secure better regional economic outcomes.

Norman Fairclough argues that the “relatively durable social structuring of language” intersects with the “relatively durable structuring and networking of social practices” (2003: 3) such that language singularly produces a “certain commonality and stability in
the way the world is represented” (2003: 126). This view has important implications for the way we understand the process of regional development analysis and policy development and, therefore, how we tackle the regional analysis task from a language-conscious, or post-structuralist, perspective. Echoing Barnes, Fairclough asserts:

When different discourses come into conflict and particular discourses are contested, what is centrally contested is the power of … preconstructed semantic systems to generate particular versions of the world which may have the performative power to sustain or remake the world in their image, so to speak.

(Fairclough 2003: 130)

Hence, as we have observed, language is critical to the processes of social change, especially in how we represent them and then bring forward new forms of, say, capitalism following crisis and envelop these in persuasive ideologies and fill them with everyday social practices.

For me, the enduring power of Fairclough’s work is in its illustration of how language brings about changes in our knowledge, beliefs and values. Language shapes our identities; for example, as men and women, as consumers and workers. Language, too, shapes our mental world, our thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Language also brings into being changes in the material world through changes in architecture and design, for instance; and by changing the ways we respond to these changes. Finally, language enables us to respond to change as well as to project and imagine possible worlds different from the world we currently experience (see Fairclough 2003: 8, 124).

Beyond its theoretical worth, Fairclough’s work is a guide to analysing the presence of language in social practices and social change. This chapter has shown the power of understanding the role of words, trope, metaphor and discursive practices in regional analysis and representation. Powerful skills of language analysis are available from study of Fairclough’s texts (e.g. 1992, 1995, 2003). Beyond supplying the social scientist with such skills, however, Fairclough (in 2003) delivers a manifesto for critical discourse analysis, which can be read as a guide to a politically charged language consciousness in regional development studies. For Fairclough, semiosis – the broader act of signification and communication, including communication through visual images as well as language – is (at the risk of harping) an “irreducible element of all material social processes” (2003: 204).

In conclusion, consider four final claims. The first is that there is great political leverage to be gained from allowing both language and the region to be indeterminate devices. The strategic purpose of creating such uncertainty is to take advantage of what Fairclough calls an “oscillation” of social practices between a determination by fairly obstinate social processes and the opportunities afforded by the presence of social action and agency. Key to understanding this oscillation, says Fairclough, is the way practices develop as a stabilised configuration of diverse social elements which always include discourse (Fairclough 2003: 205). As discussed, discourse is part of all social activity; it drives all representations; and it figures centrally in the shaping of identity, practice and of ways of being (Fairclough 2003: 206). Hence by choosing a language of representation and analysis which exposes the region as a framework for observation, understanding and action, we cannot avoid watching the way our depictions of the region – our spatial imaginaries – shape identity, economic practices and ways of being. An infinite selection of language opportunities for an infinite number of regional analyses, then, doesn’t paralyse our regional work. Rather, it forces us to consciously select the language and the regional framework that best match our purposes. And then it beefs up the power of
social action and agency in the face of obstinate social processes.

The second claim is that language consciousness is a necessary precursor to achieving desirable regional economic outcomes. There is little doubt that the set of motivations underlying Norman Fairclough’s persistence in his project to raise language consciousness among social scientists includes his frustration at deteriorating social and regional conditions in his home nation, the UK, under neoliberalist economic management regimes, his recognition of the role that language has played in maintaining a hegemony of neoliberalist practices, and his observation of a paucity of political responses from academic social scientists. Fairclough sees that it is necessary to expose the language strategies of neoliberalism. But, he stresses, this requires an enhanced set of language analysis skills among social scientists.

The third claim, then, is that regional analysis should always be moving from a language-limited approach to a language-enabling approach; or, in Barnes’ words, to be moving from dead languages of analysis to new, living languages. Quite simply, Barnes instructs us, when our words, tropes, metaphors, models, equations and images are static, then we are lagging in matching our analytical words with an actually existing world which has moved on in time and space. As clumsy as the process often is, we should always experiment with new ways of saying things in order to build better understandings and more desirable outcomes.

The fourth claim is that the most enlivened regional politics comes from a serious acknowledgement of dialogism and intertexuality. Such an acknowledgement turns the idea of communicating academic findings on its head. An engaged language, as we have seen, is always a triangulation between author, audience and wider society. When this engagement is resisted, a failure to communicate is one result. Another is that the author forgoes access to the knowledge and experiences that come from the presence of an audience in the writing process. In the quotation which opens this chapter, Dumont observes that the economy is very much a constructed thing. As regional analysts – through our spatial imaginaries – we are complicit in this construction. A language consciousness in our approach can only help us do our bit of the job better.

References


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Further reading

