THE DISCOURSES OF CAPITALISM: EVERYDAY ECONOMISTS AND THE PRODUCTION OF COMMON SENSE, BY CHRISTIAN W. CHUN (ABINGDON AND NEW YORK, ROUTLEDGE, 2017)

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Christian W. Chun is Assistant Professor of Culture, Identity, and Language Learning in the Applied Linguistics Department at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. In his book, he analyzes the discourses of capitalism through which people understand and give meaning to the economic system they live in.

Chun's dataset consists of 312 video recordings of *everyday economists*' comments on a piece of art about capitalism that was displayed in public spaces in New York City, Boston, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (in 2012 and 2013), and London (in 2015). By *everyday economists* Chun means passersby, as the latter all have some kind of knowledge and everyday personal experience with the economy. The work of art was a sign made by Steve Lambert stating, "Capitalism works for me!" Alongside this, passersby could vote whether they found the statement to be true or false in relation to their own lives. After voting, they could also give their opinion about the topic and answer questions from Lambert's assistants, who recorded these interviews.

Chun has a strong oppositional perspective about capitalism, both for personal and political/ethical reasons. This standpoint defines the tone of the book, and the basis of the analysis. He successfully identifies neoliberal frames even within comments critical of capitalism by rejecting common assumptions made in connection with capitalism. This means that even those who oppose capitalism sometimes refer to common – although profoundly disproved (both by academics and everyday life) – *characteristic elements* of the system. These elements, or more accurately, viewpoints, more or less come to life in misleading definitions of capitalism that link the system to freedom, choice, and democracy.

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Chun aims to point out and disprove these definitions while specifying the most popular frames related to them. The book also reflects on the lack of adequate public pedagogy about the subject, and the success (as it exists) of anti-capitalist movements.

The chosen corpus and theoretical and methodological approach implies that Chun accepts the theory that discourse is affected by social institutions, politics, economics, etc., but that these institutions are affected by discourse as well. Therefore, the analysis of public and specifically economic discourse is not only important for understanding what people think about capitalism and how, but is also relevant because what they think of it and how directly affects the system.

As Chun himself states, there have been many attempts to analyze discourses on economics and politics (especially on the topic of the current Western economic system) and its relations. These research projects were all carried out by researchers from economic or political fields. Although they applied linguistic approaches in their work, Chun claims that there is a core difference between professional economists and political scientists who use linguistic methods, and linguists who analyze discourse on economics and politics.

Chun's work emphasizes how everyday people make up their minds about the economic system they live in, and how their thinking is restricted by false definitions. Without mentioning it specifically, he reflects on Habermas' public sphere theory in relation to the chosen data. In Chapter 2, Chun argues that everyday economists' opinions about the economic system are just as important as the opinions of professionals. He claims that the way that people think about the economic system that surrounds them can affect many choices of theirs, such as their votes in national elections. By this choice of corpus, Chun widens the scale of opinions about the economic system, giving voice (and by voice also power) to everyday people. According to Habermas' public sphere theory, in the democratic, critical public sphere it is not only those voices that should be heard about public issues that are considered to be those of professionals, but everybody else's too. Therefore, Chun's chosen data contributes to the democratic public sphere by democratizing the academically analyzed discourse on the Western economic climate.

Chun's main arguments are voiced in the first three chapters. In these, he gives his chosen definition of capitalism, arguing that common definitions are typically flawed and usually associate false positive properties with the phenomenon. Then, he aims to define ideology, implicitly suggesting that capitalism is indeed an ideology. Connecting ideology and discourse, he reflects on Gramsci's theory of hegemony. His final argument appears in the analysis itself, implying that the neoliberal framing of capitalism appears even in the opposing arguments of commenters.

On the definition of capitalism, Chun addresses a few – according to him – false equivalences between capitalism and the traits of the current economic climate. These equivalences mainly suggest that capitalism brought freedom to so-called Western countries. Freedom of speech, freedom of choice (democracy), free (private) enterprises, and free market are just a few examples of this discourse. In Chapter 1, Chun argues that these "freedoms" are not necessarily tied to capitalism. On the contrary, he continues using the Marxist definition of capitalism throughout his analysis: i.e. capitalism as a class structure in which capitalists make profit from the value of the surplus production of workers (p. 9). This definition affects his analysis significantly since he approaches participants' meaning-making processes from the Marxian angle, thereby delegitimizing every definition of capitalism that differs from this.

Considering the nature of ideology, Chun cites Slavoj Žižek, stating that the difficulty of the phenomenon is that it is hard to recognize when expected, but emerges immediately when one wishes to avoid it. After acknowledging the lack of scientific consensus about the definition of ideology, Chun draws on Louis Althusser and Stuart Hall in indicating that an ideology is a complex system of thoughts and ideas through which people give meaning to their everyday life; an assortment of views that are thought to drive their existence and action.

On the relation between capitalism, ideology, and discourse Chun presents Gramsci's theory of hegemony, arguing that the power relations in society are not only grounded in (physical) coercion, but also in the internalization of oppression by those who are ruled. According to this position, in order to maintain the dominance of capital over the working class, the latter must accept this dominance and give their consent to the ruling elite. This acceptance and consent are reflected through the discourses of capitalism. Chun claims that this reflection is the main *problem* (as he opposes capitalism, he frames every discourse and act favoring capitalism as a problem, either explicitly or implicitly): although people are able to see that the system is harmful in every possible way, they nonetheless think that capitalism is still the best of all possible systems, if there is any other option at all.

Elaborating on Gramsci's theory, Chun reflects on the role of intellectuals in the production and reproduction of hegemonic (and counter-hegemonic) discourses: "any hegemonic aim thus involves a dynamic ongoing process with the production of knowledge selectively framed, limited, and disseminated with the help of invested intellectuals who themselves enthusiastically embrace and legitimate any system by which the governed are ruled" (pp. 38-39). Hence, in Chun's argument, hegemonic discourse helps to protect and maintain the hegemony; the existing social (and in this case, economic) order. Counter-hegemonic discourse on the other hand, questions the existing system through

pointing out its faults and weaknesses. One of Chun's most important findings is that hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses can both appear in the same opinions about the current economic system, whether they are for or against capitalism.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6 Chun presents his findings, which he has generated by applying a mediated discourse analysis and argumentation framework. The chosen quotations of passersby are highlighted in relation to how good an example they are of the most commonly mentioned frameworks of capitalism. In Chapters 4 and 5, one mostly gets to know about capitalism-friendly discourses, while the last chapter on participant comments concerns anti-capitalist (counter-hegemonic) opinions. In these chapters, Chun not only addresses the most popular themes and gives his own opinion about them, but also reflects on their flaws and faults.

The analysis thus reflects on found discourses while proving that even anti-capitalist commenters approach the topic through neoliberal frameworks. In the fifth chapter, one can find the opinions of commenters who recognize the flaws of the current economic system, but do not see how it could be changed, because even with its flaws it remains the best system they can think of, or because they think there is no other system at all. Chun also emphasizes utterances of *everyday economists* that suggest the system can somehow be fixed. From the researcher's perspective, these opinions strengthen the idea that even though people see the problems with the system, they are engrained so deeply in the ideological spiral that it seems more appropriate to try and fix the former than to change it. This chapter highlights how people see the economic system as something natural, with which one has to live, even if one does not benefit from it. In the last chapter, Chun connects his findings to public pedagogy.

From a critical viewpoint, I would highlight two shortcomings.

As the basis of his analysis, Chun uses the comments of passersby in the U.S. and the United Kingdom without reflecting on the differences between the countries' then-current economic climate. This is problematic if one considers that there are some important differences in the interconnection of the economic and the public sectors in the U.S. and the United Kingdom. By making this choice, Chun assumes that these differences do not matter, since both countries have a capitalist economic system. From his viewpoint, this is understandable, as he does not find capitalism acceptable at its core, and addressing the differences between the countries may suggest that there is a "better" or more acceptable version of this economic system – a message Chun would probably like to avoid transmitting.

However, such basic differences do matter, not just in people's lives, but perhaps also in their discourse about capitalism and their meaning-making of it.

For example, someone in the United Kingdom may have never had to deal with the American for-profit healthcare system. Therefore, for that person, monetized healthcare may not be part of the capitalist economic system, and nor would they be expected to understand the former as a consequence of the latter. In contrast, citizens of the United Stated have lived their whole life with such a healthcare system (one that operates wholly within the capitalist economic system), hence basic healthcare may be a part of their discourse on capitalism.

The second weakness of the analysis is the corpus, as also emphasized by Chun himself. Since the interviews were carried out by the artist's staff, the follow up questions that were asked lack a theoretical or methodological background as they were not designed to be components of scientific analysis. This not only means that the interviews missed some important points in relation to the research (the interviewers did not ask the necessary questions), but also that there were no guidelines for them. This is not the fault of the original experiment, as neither the artist nor his staff knew at the time that Chun would use their recordings in his research.

Other reviews of the book, such as those by Jan Blommaert (2018/47, Language in Society) and Elizabeth R. Miller (2018/12(2), Discourse and Communication), praised it for its surprising choice of corpus, detailed and precise definition of the concepts that were applied, identification, interpretation, and precise interrogation of definitions of capitalism, and the sophisticated, social-centered analysis, with Blommaert also connecting it to linguistic landscape analysis. All the aforementioned commendations are correct, while special emphasis may be placed on the applied methodological approaches, which – as opposed to some strongly linguistic centered analyses – concentrated mostly on the social, political, and economic context.

Christian W. Chun's analysis gives a deep and important overview of discourses on capitalism. His work is not only important for its linguistic and critical findings, but also for highlighting how *everyday economists* understand the economic system around them. The book also presents the current neoliberal frames about the economic system, which could make it interesting reading for people outside the academic field. Chun's strong condemnation of capitalism gives the book a critical tone, as well as an extra framework through which one can analyze the function and operation of discourse. Even though the researcher chose to present his findings through a counter-hegemonic discourse – an anti-capitalist standpoint –, in the book itself the anti-capitalist standpoint *becomes* the hegemonic discourse, since one receives all information through and compared to Chun's own point of view.