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Hard work, growth mindset, fluent English: navigating neoliberal logics

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In: M. Sardoc (Ed.), *The Impacts of Neoliberal Discourse and Language in Education: Critical Perspectives on a Rhetoric of Equality, Well-Being and Justice.* Routledge Studies in Education, Neoliberalism and Marxism, pp. 100-119

(Page 100) A prominent feature of the shift to neoliberalism within education is the notion of neoliberal governmentality (Dardot & Laval, 2014; Foucault, 2003), or the processes through which market principles such as freedom, quality, flexibility, competition, choice and constant improvement are extended to individuals and their social lives, and get to regulate people's conduct as well as the ways they understand themselves and others (Martín Rojo and Del Percio, 2019; Urla, 2019a). According to these neoliberal principles, students are responsible for their own personal and professional success, which they ostensibly attain by continually acquiring commodifiable skills and investing themselves as bundles of human capital (Urciuoli, 2008, 2019). Such discourses are particularly pervasive in Higher Education, but can also be observed in state-led or NGO educational institutions for job seekers across the world, which demonstrate the "colonisation by business logic" (Martín Rojo and Del Percio, 2019:1) of domains that were previously not governed by the economic principles of the market. Through this 'colonisation', students are exhorted to develop neoliberal subjectivities whereby they seek to continually – and willingly – enhance their competitive edge by investing in perpetual self-development in order to meet the demands of the labour market. Language learning has not been left untouched by this process, and indeed is doubly imbricated: "On the one hand there is the language of neoliberalism itself, and on the other there is the role of certain languages under neoliberalism" (Gray et al., 2018: 473). With regard to the latter, when framed in discourses of profit (Duchêne and Heller, 2012), language becomes a resource for students to acquire in order to increase their human capital and exchange for further monetary gain (Duchêne and Daveluy, 2015; Gao, 2017).

Such a framing is particularly salient in India, where Katy is conducting fieldwork. Through its colonial history, English has long been associated with power and social stratification, leading to, among other things, what Ramanathan (2007, 2005) has termed the English-vernacular divide, in which English remains in the hands of a privileged few. Following reforms in the 1990s which saw a shift from a state-led development model to pro-market liberalization policies encompassing almost every aspect of the policy regime (Maiorano, 2015; Basu & Sen, 2015), there has been a boom in private (Page 101) English-medium schools, educational NGOs and coaching institutes to meet the growing demand for access to the language (Fernandes, 2006) as part of a wider "enterprise culture" (Cameron, 2000), wherein "India is now imagined as a nation of individual enterprising people" (Gooptu, 2013: 7). This demand for English stems, in part, from discourses of profit, as mentioned above. Yet, while these discourses are indisputably present (Proctor, 2014) it is important to remember that the capital of English pre-dates neoliberalism, and while certainly now deeply entangled with the neoliberalisation of education, it finds its roots in the colonial history of the language and the British empire, as well as the ways in which it has become symbolic post-independence of a middle-class identity (Fernandes, 2006). Neoliberalism, thus,

has been woven into education on a global scale, but it is important to take into account the varied ways which it informs people's practice.

This means examining the different forms in which neoliberalism, as "a variegated phenomenon" (Block, 2017: 51) or as a mobile technology (Ong, 2007), manifests itself in particular socio-historical and political economic contexts (Gao, 2017) and how it gets entrenched with older, but still persistent histories of colonialism and imperial dispossession (Ganti, 2014). If historians of neoliberalism tend to trace the principle of entrepreneurialism back to longer ideas of investment promoted by Beckert's 'human capital' theory (Beckert, 1964) or to the conceptualization of selfhood tied to protestant work ethics (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000), Gooptu (2013), for example, explains that in India the notion of the entrepreneurial self —which is a key concept used by scholars to point to the type of subjectivity produced by neoliberal governmentality— gains traction through various conceptualisations of non-economic traits of "Indian enterprising self-hood". She clarifies that three related understandings of enterprise are currently in circulation in India. The first refers to business as a growth-oriented economic activity; a second one invokes entrepreneurship as pertaining to distinctive personal qualities, such as individual initiative, daring, energy, and relentless striving; and a third points to a set of imagined quintessential Indian traits, such as a work ethic related to the notion of *karmayoga*, as well as ingenuity, resourcefulness, adaptability, and a determination to succeed. This latter is also associated with a vernacularized and democratized notion of enterprise as jugaad (usually defined as 'creative improvisation'), which is now projected as a much-vaunted feature of popular culture (Gooptu, 2013:10). Along the same lines, Upadhya (2013) demonstrates how, in contemporary India, soft-skills training (Urciuoli, 2008) is 'indianised' through Hindu spiritual ideals.

This has effects for the way we, as ethnographers, study neoliberal governmentality. While, as Urla observes, the technologies of power that seek to produce the neoliberal self are well documented, "we know less about the uptake and what conditions it" (Urla, 2019a: 268). Along with Urla, then, this chapter seeks to bring to the forefront the ways in which students in an NGO-led English and skills training course in Delhi make sense of – as well as navigate, interact with and sometimes contest – the neoliberal discourses (Page 102) that inform the programme's vision and that subject their bodies to practices of control and regulation. In doing so, we aim to highlight their multiple positionings – that is, how they both contest and embrace discourses, and how they attempt to make sense of it alongside their perceptions of obstacles to their social mobility. Focusing on the uptake, that is, on individuals' dialectic engagement with neoliberal rationalities, is also a means for us to understand these engagements as deeply entrenched with and conditioned by localized theories of selfhood, personal development and progress as well as language learning. Looking at uptake also enables us to generate insights about how, and under what circumstances market rationales get translated into spheres and domains which were historically imagined as non-economic and thus have effects on people and their lives.

We begin with an overview of the NGO and its students, before drawing on ethnographic data and promotional material to demonstrate how the NGO mobilises logics that seek to shape students into self-investing learners by inculcating in them a 'neoliberal register'. We then turn to analyses of classroom and interview data to interrogate how students and staff negotiate these discourses, in order to argue that the adoption of such a register does not necessarily mean that students internalise it. Rather, we demonstrate that students and staff reflect critically upon – and, in varied ways resist – the language of neoliberal logic. Finally, we ask why they continue to invest in practices that they perceive to be futile, arguing that such a question can only be

answered by looking more widely at the 'other' logics within which English education is entwined.

English for social mobility

The data in this paper is taken from an ethnographic study (2018-2019) at a non-profit, educational NGO in Delhi, India, comprising daily participant observation, semi-structured interviews and informal interactions. The NGO was founded by an ex-pat Indian philanthropist and has multiple branches across North India. The CEO's vision is to provide English, personality development and professional skills training to underprivileged students over the age of 15 who would otherwise be unable to access this cultural and linguistic capital. Students attend one hour forty-five minutes sessions, six days per week for one year, completely free of charge. Many of the students and facilitators expressed their gratitude for the institution, noting that similar fee-paying institutes in Delhi were far beyond their financial means. Indeed, while the vast majority of students did not live below the poverty line, financial instability was a real concern, and many were frustrated at having been denied 'adequate' access to English in their government schools while their privately educated peers had been able to benefit from their English-medium education. Although the students can be loosely termed as representing the lower-middle class strata, the groups observed in this study comprised a relatively heterogeneous group, differing in their educational qualifications, (Page 103) occupation, parental occupation & educational background, age, religion, and caste. With regard to the latter, it is important to stress that the use of the terms 'lower' and 'higher' caste is highly problematic, given the way in which caste 'position' is contested (see e.g. Gupta, 2004; Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma, 1994) and not uniform across the country. For example, while the agrarian caste of the majority of students in this study is classified in Delhi as OBC (Other Backward Class) by the government as it is deemed educationally, socially and economically backward, in other states they fall under the ST/SC category, usually reserved for the most oppressed classes such as *dalits* (previously known as untouchables). The complexity of caste notwithstanding, the students who hailed from this particular agrarian caste, one which is strongly represented in this suburb of Delhi, suffered a certain amount of caste stigma as they are stereotypically viewed as uneducated, violent and thuggish: it has been noted that they were categorized by the British during colonial rule as a "criminal tribe". Due to their official status of OBC, members of this caste can benefit from reservations for public sector jobs, in an attempt to redress the imbalance perpetuated by the caste system. Yet, as Leela Fernandes (2006) demonstrates, since the economic reforms of the 1990s, privatization has swept the nation, with jobs in the private sector becoming symbolic of the wealthier, prosperous middle classes, leaving many of the aspiring middle classes from 'lower' castes lagging behind in public sector jobs that provide lower salaries and much fewer 'perks' (Fernandes, 2006). Thus, while the caste-based reservation system has allowed for some social mobility via the acquisition of (often lower-rung) jobs in the public sector, many of those from so-called 'lower' (or less privileged) castes are increasingly demanding access to the cultural and linguistic capital that they perceive to be the key to social mobility (Park, 2011; Proctor, 2014) and a means to affirm their middle class aspirations (Fernandes, 2006; LaDousa, 2014). In many ways, the NGO echoes their desires explicitly, presenting itself as a way for disadvantaged students to "break the cycle of poverty" by "assisting [them] on the path to professional jobs" (NGO promotional material).

Empowering subjects

In the vision of the NGO as developed by the CEO, along with a team of academics and practitioners from India and abroad, there is an emphasis on alleviating the widespread un(der)employment that affects a large number of youth in Delhi. In response to this problem, the NGO has developed what they call a 'theory of change' that focuses on five key areas – soft skills, English, lifelong learning, mentorship, and career guidance – that students ostensibly do not gain from the government school system. Underlying this is the implication that English and soft skills, but also the capacity to invest in a constant improvement of the self, are the only barriers preventing them from gaining stable employment and improving their socioeconomic conditions. This argument is made even clearer in promotional material which Katy was able to (Page 104) collect at the NGO and which was designed to attract funding and recruit volunteer mentors for the students. In this text, a section dedicated to their values reads, "We believe that people can bootstrap themselves out of poverty", citing "professional skills, and depth and strength of character" as the means to do so. The NGO also delineates clearly the skills that students can and should acquire from the course, namely: lifelong learning, grit, growth mindset, drive, discipline, perseverance, communication, collaboration, ethics, resilience, self-esteem, adaptability and critical thinking, many of which are the subject of entire lessons.

This 'theory of change' which can be found in different organizational documents and promotional material is, however, not only meant to make a diagnosis of the causes and possible solutions of underemployment and to act as a body of expertise differentiating the NGOs from public education and legitimizing their existence. As a powerful rational, it also acts upon individuals through the mediation of different textual genres (posters, pictures, flyers) that serve the inculcation of values of improvement and development into people's minds and guide individuals in their attempt to become both self-responsible and empowered subjects. For example, the walls of the classrooms and textbooks students use in their classes at the NGO are adorned with motivational quotes that (in)directly reference these skills and attributes ("Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do" – Pele, "Success is the sum of small efforts repeated day in day out" "Only I can change my life, no one can do it for me"). These textbooks, which have been developed in close collaboration with UK and US based ELT scholars and strongly draw on research from Project-based Learning, International Baccalaureate, Tribes TLC® and the Intrinsic Institute Leadership Development Program, clearly espouse neoliberal rationales, most notably the principles of the entrepreneurial self, by which students become responsible for their own self-worth and success, which they manage by continually investing in their own human capital, and tirelessly adding 'skills' to their repertoire.

In a further example, a promotional poster that Katy came across in the NGO pictures two young Indian graduates (male and female) in Western-style graduation dress alongside the questions: "Do you want to be a winner? Do you want to earn more money? Do you wish to make your parents proud? Do you wish to see yourself in this photo? Then attend [NGO name] class everyday". This A3 sized poster, which hangs on the back wall of the centre, greeting students as they walked through the front door, suggests a causal link between the regular attendance of the NGO's classes and individuals' capacity to gain money, respect and pride. In doing so, the poster mobilises affect – being a winner, making one's parents proud – in ways that are salient for a young Indian audience for whom – while we are wary of drawing on culturalistic tropes – parental respect as a value often holds particular weight. Indeed, for many of the students interviewed by Katy, making their parents proud and providing for them was a frequently cited reason for wanting to learn English. (Page 105) Success here is

indexed by the western graduation gowns and diploma scrolls held by the students, which conjure images of elite international and Indian degree-conferring institutions (as opposed to the local colleges that the students often attend which tend not to engage in this style of graduation ceremony), thereby embellishing the social weight of the certificate they receive upon completion of the course. The poster thus interpolates its students as agentive selves who can act upon their own lives to achieve success: they too can be like the young Indians in the photograph if they follow the rules. Importantly, the reminder to "attend class every day" is reminiscent of the explicit objectives of Personality Development centres to remove what are perceived as 'indianisms' such as lax attendance and time-keeping, which are ostensibly incompatible with Western workplace culture (see McGuire 2013). Indeed, a large hand-drawn poster above the entrance asks students as they walk through the door each day "Are you on time?" As such, this poster is an example of not only how neoliberal logics are reproduced by the NGO, but how they are reproduced in ways that are entangled with other, context-specific, pre-existing logics of cultural values and orientalising tropes.

Textual genres such as the presented poster, the promotional material or the slogans are not the only technologies through which the NGO's theory of change, and the principles of winning, improvement and empowerment it mediates, are circulated. In one of the graduation ceremonies attended by Katy, the CEO delivered a speech to students, in which he congratulated them and encouraged them to continue their learning, before students were sent in small groups for career guidance sessions. During the speech, he uttered the first half of a common Hindi idiom and asked the students to complete it: *'Jitni chadar ho utna hi pair phailana chahiye'.* This translates literally as 'spread your feet only as much as the sheet allows' or more idiomatically as 'do not aspire for more than what you are capable of'. He then promptly told the students to forget this, reminding them they can do anything they put their mind to, and that they should not believe those who say otherwise. In a conversation over lunch afterwards, he was asked why he had chosen to say this. Referring specifically but not only to the caste system, he explained how these students often learn from a young age that they should 'stay in their lane'. He wants to change this mentality and encourage the students to claim the freedom they deserve which, as the NGO documentation claims, can be done through a combination of English, soft-skills and personality development training.

The analysis of the NGO material as well as the CEO speech at the graduation ceremony echoes in many ways research on similar programmes for the un(der)employed in the UK (Del Percio and Wong, 2019), Italy (Del Percio and Van Hoof, 2017), Belgium (Van Hoof, Nyssen and Kanobana, under review), and Canada (Allan, 2016, 2013), which, as Allan writes, "are less about the specific content or knowledge they provide than about the ability to produce citizens who increase their potential value in an unknowable future by continually investing in their human capital in the present" (2016: 63). It is precisely this 'unknowable future' that comprises the danger of this neoliberal (Page 106) ethos. Through their English training, as another poster on the main wall of the classroom demonstrated, students are called upon to 'continuously learn', 'embrace change', 'accept responsibility for their failures' and not 'blame other (sic) for their failures', or 'criticize'. What we see here is the fostering of a culture of responsabilisation which thrusts accountability onto the student, and away from any structural barriers to their social mobility such as class, caste, race and gender. Importantly, construed in this way, any failure they encounter is due to the individual's failure to sufficiently adapt and self-invest (Martín Rojo, 2018). Students are exhorted to overcome obstacles by being flexible, "constantly changing and continually adapting to variations in market demand by constant self-work or self-improvement" (Martín-

Rojo, 2018: 550, 2019) and investment in English is a crucial part of this self-improvement. And yet, while discourses of language-as-commodity paint languages with high social capital such as English as a tool to "render their speakers competitive" (ibid, 542) on the employment market, many have demonstrated that investing in English repeatedly fails to see returns, for reasons indissociable from other elements of social stratification such as race and gender (Kubota, 2011) and the ever-moving goalposts that delineate 'good' English (Park, 2011), as "commodification applauds only certain language variants" (Martín-Rojo, 2018: 558). It is for this reason that Tabiola & Lorente conceptualise investment in English in the context of the Philippines as "speculative capital", as "its goal is not just monetary gain but the appreciation of the student's human capital, measured primarily in partial estimates and holding no guarantee of future return" (Tabiola and Lorente, 2017: 70). Indeed, the students' ability to 'cash in' on their English skills is wholly dependent on those who are in the position of regulating their access to resources, who will judge not only their language skills but also their persona and background. In other words, English does not guarantee jobs in a market that is regulated by far more than language; rather, learning English marks students as a self-investing, entrepreneurial self, equipped for the neoliberal workplace.

Now, we want to be very clear on this point. The emphasis on encouraging students to take control of their own destiny stems, we think, from a genuine desire to seek change for those who suffer the brunt of oppressive systems of social stratification by re-allocating unevenly distributed capital. As such, this analysis is not intended as a criticism of the NGO, and certainly not as a devaluation of the deeply committed staff at all levels. Rather, we aim to shed light on the ways in which the NGO is wound up in a wider web of educational trends that are not only prevalent in education in the West, but also across the ELT industry (Allan, 2013) and other educational and training sectors, including those with altruistic motives (Luke, 2017). Indeed, as McGuire shows in her ethnographic exploration of fee-charging 'Personality Development' courses in Delhi, such training programmes are "distinctly neoliberal in nature, characterized by a culture of enterprise in which disciplined self-government appears paramount" (2013: 110). Along with McGuire, in this section, we have attempted to demonstrate how this 'culture of enterprise' and (Page 107) 'disciplined self-government' gets naturalized within the NGO through the circulation and consumption of a set of keywords (Williams 1977) that are understood as essential for students hoping to access professional jobs. Students are thus exhorted to envision themselves as "bundles of skills" to enhance their competitive edge on the job market (Urciuoli, 2008). Urciuoli argues that these 'soft skills' are semantically vague, in that their meanings can shift according to the different ways in which they 'cluster' (ibid). When used together, she writes, "particular elements of meaning collectively emerge" (2008: 214), creating thus a new register: a skills register which expands "with new conceptual formations". Importantly, the semantic vagueness of these skills keywords – that is, the way in which their denotational meaning can often be ambiguous – allows them to act as "strategically deployable shifters" and, in turn, allows the user of such registers to index social alignments (p.214). In other words, learning to adopt such a register carries more *social* than *denotational* meaning, in that it marks one as a particular type of worker, successfully adapted to the demands of the neoliberal, corporate workplace. In the next section, we will examine the ways in which students who are targeted as the beneficiaries of such projects of change marry up such discourses with their lived experiences. An analysis of how neoliberalism is taken up and negotiated on the ground is fundamental if we are to avoid understanding it as a totalising logic (Bell, 2019; De Korne, 2017).

The contours of the neoliberal register

To demonstrate how students engaged with such discourses, we first present one extract from a classroom observation, taken from a group who were completing the fourth of five books that divide up the yearlong programme. In this particular group, the eight students were all aged between 16 and 20, and predominantly young women (one student was male). They had all been educated in Hindi-medium government schools, except for one young woman who had studied in the English-medium stream of her government school. The teacher, Rupal, had also been educated in a Hindi-medium government school and was a student at the NGO before undergoing in-house training to become a facilitator. Although she stated that she belonged to the 'highest' caste (Brahmin) – as opposed to the majority of students who hailed from the agrarian caste discussed earlier – she had lived a rather difficult life, and had grown up below the poverty line. For her, the NGO had changed the direction of her life, giving her the opportunity to become an English teacher, thereby equipping her with a certain amount of cultural as well as economic capital. It is important to point out here that, while their different caste positions are certainly not irrelevant, in terms of class and educational trajectory she identified more with the students than those in management positions. As such, she is an interesting conduit between the more economically and socially privileged staff at the top who design the curriculum, and the students on the ground (Page 108) who attempt to negotiate the incongruity between the discourses reproduced by the NGO and their lived experiences of structural oppression.

This interaction is taken from a teaching session entitled 'lifelong learning'. The students had watched a video before reading a list of questions related to the topic in their textbooks. The video contained clips of interviews with Bill Clinton and the CEO of Microsoft, Satya Nadella, about their own learning experiences, the challenges encountered in these processes and their coping strategies developed to overcome these challenges. Having discussed as a group why lifelong learning is important, and how to ensure they continue once they complete the course, they proceeded to the sixth question: "what in your life or environment can prevent you from learning in the future?" After waiting a few seconds for a response, the teacher adds "like [*female student name*] your marriage can stop you", prompting laughter from the students. She follows this up with "isn't it? But should not be", while a student comments "yes, yes, that is really problem for her". Passing over this comment from the student, the facilitator reverts back to the question, asking "Anything? What can stop you learn? Nothing?" Students offer answers such as "in our life fixed mind can stop us to learn", "narrow mind can stop us to learn new things in in our life" which she acknowledges with "good" and "yes", while another student's answer "when people do mock [məʊk] about my life that things stop me to learn" receives only a correction of pronunciation ("mock [mɒk], speak mock [mɒk]") and grammar ("that thing *can* stop me to learn").

There are several salient points to highlight in this interaction. First, the teacher and students demonstrate an understanding of the type of answers that are expected from this question or, in other words, of the appropriate skills register. In this extract and in the following part of the lesson, students offer neoliberal buzzwords such as 'fixed mindset' or 'narrow mind' (as the antithesis of 'growth mindset' and 'open mind') that place emphasis on individual rather than societal barriers, and they are validated by the teacher in her responses with 'good', 'yes'. One can see clearly here the use of Urciuoli's strategically deployable shifters (2008) that allow students to portray themselves as possessing the appropriate attitudes towards work. Yet, as Urciuoli writes in a more recent paper (2019), the term 'pseudo register' is perhaps more apt, in that the students are not so much *demonstrating* the skills they refer to, but simply *pointing*

to them. This does not, of course, make the pseudo-register any less important: they 'mark' themselves as 'good' students nonetheless simply by paying "lip service" and, crucially, they also contribute to the institution's branding as a place that claims to produce a certain type of student (p. 92). Secondly, and more important to this analysis, the fact that there are set answers to this question is made clear at the beginning of the extract where the teacher 'breaks out' of the register by providing an unexpected, humorous answer. After waiting a few seconds for a response to the question of what could prevent the students from learning, she says, "like [female student], your marriage can stop you" which provokes laughter (there had been a running joke for a few weeks about this student's impending (Page 109) marriage). Through this comment, Rupal draws attention to a structural barrier that the young women – herself, as an unmarried woman, included – may face if they marry into a family that will not allow them to continue education or work. Indeed, several married women in the NGO explained that they had to lie or fight with in-laws and husbands to attend class, and another female student had recently married and never returned to class. Rupal quickly follows her jokey comment up with "but should not be"– in other words, marriage should not prevent the woman from continuing her education. The speed with which she attempts to move on from her joke is perhaps an indication that she realizes that this utterance is not appropriate for the register expected here, and she signals a transition back to the 'proper' register by asking 'anything?' (i.e. does any one have any 'real' answers to the question), thereby disqualifying her previous comment as a legitimate answer, and closing down a potentially fruitful conversation that could have followed from the first student's response: 'yes yes, that is really problem for her'.

Finally, we can see evidence that one student also 'strays' from the acceptable register by pointing to elements of social judgment beyond her control that could prevent her from learning ('when people… do mock about my life that things stop me to learn"). Rather than un-critically accepting responsibility for potential future failure – one of the tenets of the bootstrap mentality – the student flags up the role that social stigma could play in preventing her future success. In doing so, she draws attention to what Gershon and LaDousa term the "fissures" in neoliberal logic (2019) or, the tensions and clashes between neoliberal principles of choice and freedom and other understandings of the social world which, in this case, are linked to the caste system as well as patriarchal ideologies of sexuality and femininity. However, rather than this becoming a point for discussion, it is regarded as an inappropriate answer. Her response does not receive validation in the form of 'good' or 'yes' from the teacher; she is simply corrected on her pronunciation and grammar, and the teacher moves on, stating, "ok, one more answer".

On the one hand, then, one can see how the keywords discussed above which are present in the NGO's promotional material and curriculum become part of a skills (pseudo)-register that the students learn to adopt in class. As such, by learning and adopting this skills register, students are able to align themselves with the image of the good neoliberal student who will work hard to achieve success. When they speak out of this register, as was the case for the teacher and one of the students in this extract, their comments are either framed as being irrelevant to the 'actual' discussion, or almost completely ignored. Alternative discussions that are not compatible with the neoliberal rationales have no place in the classroom, thus demonstrating how language plays "a key role for the everyday *doing*" of this governmentality (Del Percio and Wong, 2019: 192-3). On the other hand, to learn to successfully perform a register does not mean that one necessarily endorses or submits entirely to it (ibid; Upadhya, 2013). On the contrary, we have just seen how members of the NGO are aware of the tensions that arise when (Page 110) the logic put into practice contradicts their experience of social

obstacles. In other words, they navigate the tensions between a multiplicity of logics working simultaneously. The classroom may not have provided the appropriate environment to delve deeper into these contradictions, but this does not mean that they went unnoticed by those in the NGO.

Contesting neoliberal logic

While the interactions in class delineate the 'contours' of the acceptable neoliberal register, there were fleeting moments where students and staff alike drew attention to the way this mode of reasoning about oneself, and about ones place in society, stands in tension with other models of selfhood and society affecting students in their everyday lives. Interestingly, these 'fleeting' moments in class were contrasted with much more developed discussions in the interviews. Rupal, for example, talked at length of her limited control over her future. As an unmarried woman whose parents are in the process of finding her a husband, she is "not sure" whether her future husband's family "will allow [her] or not" to continue working. She is thus acutely aware of the gendered barrier to her future success, and has adopted strategies to retain some independence. By becoming a teacher, she can hope to keep her job as it would allow her to return home by the early afternoon for housework and, if she is not allowed to work outside the home, she plans to offer tuition services from home in order to be able to support herself: "if I face any problems so/ I don't need to see anybody's face that/ can somebody feed me". As such, Rupal demonstrates a keen awareness of the contradictory nature of the multiple logics at play, in particular how the neoliberal rationality clashes with her understanding of social barriers, and she tempers her hope in ways that allow her to exercise agency within the confines of the patriarchal system.

Abdul, a recent graduate of the NGO volunteering[1] at the branch, was equally cognisant of these co-existing, but in a way diverging, logics. Like Rupal, he too was educated in a Hindi-medium government school and had studied at the NGO after spending several years feeling a deep sense of hopelessness for his future. As a young Muslim man from a poor family, he had witnessed first hand both the social and economic barriers to prosperity, and, in the interviews, offered scathing analyses of oppression in India. The following extract is taken from an interview, where we had been discussing unequal access to English, and the gatekeeping practices of elite institutions. Following a question about whether he thought 'poor' students in elite higher education institutes risked encountering judgment from other students, he replied:

A:	8	no no actually it's actually/ it shows you know really good thing also/
	9	if you're coming from poor family and then you're/ then you did some
	10	really hard work so we respect that also right/ so its not like that we/

(Page 111)

	11	ok er it was/ yes we can say in some/ see/ here you're no/ see/ first we
	12	can/ if you're talking about/ means language/ so lets talk about
	13	language/ if we're going something else/ like caste system and
	14	religion/ that's separate thing
KH:	15	*han* [Hindi: yes]

[1] The NGO has recently begun a volunteering scheme for newly graduated students to help in class. See Allan (2019) for an insightful analysis of volunteering as 'hope labour', "premised on the logic of investment" (p.67) *This note appears on p115 in the final print*

A: 16 right of course that time discrimination happens doesn't matter you
17 speak English or what right
KH: 18 ok
A: 19 still you are from lower class and all but this is good thing/ that you
20 are coming from that class/ still you can speak in/ English/ that's a
21 good thing
[section omitted]
A: 22 so it's just that's why I said that it's separate it's / I just want to you
23 know/ put it/ you know/ aside both things are completely different so
24 with/ if you go with the mentality of that community and that class
25 system and all so we feel that// doesn't matter whatever you do/ how
26 well you speak in English still you belong from the same community
27 right/ it's like it's like you know a race of rat I think it's very famous
28 race of er rat and tiger// doesn't matter rat wins or not still it's a rat
29 right/ and tiger is always tiger / right doesn't matter who wins or not
30 who cares

There are clear traces of both neoliberal rationales and arguably, at the same time Hindu understandings of *karmayoga* and *jugaad* in the way he moralizes hard work, stating that "we respect" those who work hard to pull themselves out of poverty (lines 8-10). In doing this, he draws on the trope of the 'good' poor person who works strenuously to beat the odds. Many stories of this type were shared in the NGO and more widely in the media, with newspaper articles about the sons of rickshaw drivers gaining entry to India's most prestigious engineering colleges being used as discussion points at the beginning of class. The message from such narratives is clear: if he can, you can – no excuses[2]. And yet, the self-contradiction is overlooked – if such a feat were so easy and normal, then it would not be noteworthy.

Immediately after mobilizing this discourse, however, we see Abdul stumble as he tries to coalesce this narrative with his sociological observations. In lines 11-14, he stutters, leaving sentences unfinished as he tries to form a coherent line of thought with two very contradictory logics: (neo)liberal work ethic, and (Page 112) structural oppression. In contrast to his initial comments about the praiseworthiness of working hard, his cutting remarks at the end of the extract paint a rather bleak picture of a society in which attempts to garner cultural or linguistic capital are futile: "doesn't matter rat wins or not still it's a rat right" (lines 28-29). Through this, we see Abdul construct two very different world-views which, in a way, co-exist in the very same narrative, the first being more aligned with the ethos that hard work, skill-acquisition and English can lead to success, while the second points to the 'rules of the game' that are rigged in favour of the powerful. In further conversations, Abdul frequently oscillated between the two, often contradicting himself and never fully explaining *how* these two 'mentalities' are separate (lines 14 and 22). While ideological contradictions are certainly common, to keep them separate analytically is perhaps the only way to retain hope, particularly given the shocking way in which he refers to structural issues of social stratification by insinuating that certain communities are viewed as 'rats'. As a Muslim man in a climate of growing Hindu nationalism and violence towards Muslims (Santhosh, 2015; Vicziany, 2015), he is keenly aware of the reality of living in a marginalised position. Indeed, at the time of writing, the highly polemical Citizen Amendment Bill, which is

[2] These narratives are also evident in Bollywood films (Gooptu, 2013; Chakravarti, 2013); see also Park (2010) for media discourses of elite 'success stories' in South Korea. *This note appears on p115 in the final print*

being widely perceived as an anti-Muslim law, has sparked mass student protests which have resulted in police violence across the country.

Abdul's comments, while they are at times confusing, are reminiscent of those made by participants in Allan's study of similar programmes in Canada, which draw attention to their futility, as the programmes "failed to consider how immigrants embodied the "Other" to many employers" and thus were unrealistic as "by virtue of being marked as foreign or racialized, their skills and credentials were a priori devalued" (Allan, 2016: 10-11). If we replace 'foreign' and 'racialised', with Muslim, 'low' caste or gendered, one can see sharp parallels with Abdul's viewpoint. Furthermore, as Allan argues, such comments also shed light on the ways in which these programmes demonstrate "a liberal colorblind democratic approach to the labour market which [fail] to take into account the ways in which it [is] deeply discriminatory" (ibid, 11). Similarly, by opting for an explicitly 'bootstrap' approach to empowerment, those responsible for designing and managing the curriculum at the NGO underestimate the structural discrimination that many of the students are likely to encounter. Interestingly, however, the facilitators and volunteers – who, as mentioned above, act in many ways as conduits between management and the students – retain varying levels of awareness of and criticality towards these discourses. It is, perhaps, precisely this go-between position that renders the contradiction all the more confusing and thus results in incoherent explanations or low-key resistance in the form of jokey asides.

Investment and resistance

Abdul explicitly expressed the futility of working hard and acquiring the necessary capital when one is often positioned by others in a stigmatized (Page 113) way. Yet, it is important to remember that, while Abdul relates this, he is simultaneously, it seems, investing in the logic and technologies that he questions. Similarly, Rupal continues to pursue it while at the same time acknowledging that her 'success' is unlikely to resemble the paths taken by the multi-millionaire CEOs whose pictures and quotes decorate the walls of the classroom. The NGO has undoubtedly provided them with economic and social benefits – they have a salary (or a chance of a future salary from the NGO) which is stable and higher than that of their non-English speaking peers, access to further training, potentially enhanced marriage prospects, reported 'respect' from friends and 'pride' from family, and high self-esteem. But, at the same time, there remains an awareness that 'working hard' will not remove them from their marginalized positions in society, and the 'benefits' are not always so clear-cut: Rupal reported that her English credentials may become problematic for suitors who do not speak English and thus who may perceive her 'superiority' as face-threatening, or who may consider her as too modern, thus an unsuitable wife; Abdul spoke of teachers from other institutes being surprised that a Muslim man would want to become an English teacher. Thus, neoliberal rationalities, as we have shown, do not systematically produce neoliberal subjects, and programmes that seek to inculcate such subjectivities "do not determine the actions or thinking of the participating subjects" (Del Percio & Wong, 2019: 192). Rather, the rational is "mobilized, rationalized and dialectically engaged with on the ground" by subjects who question the logic and the effectiveness of such programmes (ibid). Why, then do they continue to invest in the contradictory logic? Indeed, are the students actually investing in these contradictory logics?

To seek to answer such a question, we argue, means paying attention to how forms of neoliberal governmentality are weaved into other logics and workings of power. As Urla highlights, it is through critical ethnographic measures that we can hope to observe "how logics of governance interact with other already existing logics and forms of relationality, personhood, and governance" (Urla, 2019a: 271) and "how neoliberal

rationales become intertwined with longer, locally-anchored histories of colonialism, modernism and capitalist exploitation" (Martín-Rojo & Del Percio, 2019:4). In his exploration of language learners in Catalunia, Pujolar (2019) demonstrates how the mobilisation of neoliberal logics in reasons for language learning was varied, with some participants frequently drawing on alternative, non-economic based discourses to rationalise their pursuits. In doing so, he draws attention to how the 'saturation' of neoliberal discourses is perhaps not so evenly widespread and thus to the existence of "more varied and complex positionings" (p.114), suggesting that those who experience social marginalisation may be less likely to be enticed by neoliberal tenets (Urla, 2019b). The extracts presented in this chapter corroborate these findings.

In our instance, the production of neoliberal subjectivities via the acquisition of English is deeply intertwined with the long-standing hegemony of (Page 114) English in India and the ensuing indexicalities and associated personhoods that are indissociable from the language's colonial and class-based history. This is a process that, we argue, cannot be fully captured through a neoliberal lens, and must be explored in ways that can account for the historical, ideological and affective dimensions of speaking English. As we demonstrate elsewhere (Highet & Del Percio, forthcoming), students join this course first and foremost with a desire to become English speakers, that is, not only to acquire the language but also to perform a constructed English speakerhood that stretches beyond language to encompass moral and bodily dispositions that are perceived as superior through their claims to modernity. In other words, they envisage English not only as a commodifiable skill to be (potentially) exchanged for monetary gain, but also as a source of symbolic pride (as opposed to the shame they report feeling when unable to speak English) and self-worth that is connected to affective, rather than economic or 'human capital', dimensions, and which are indissociable from the stigma faced due to their caste, class or religion. They seek a moral and bodily transformation of the self, but not necessarily – or perhaps only adjacently – the neoliberal self. Of course, an affective desire for English is deeply entangled with neoliberal rationality (Dardot and Laval, 2014), but it is *also* part of a longer-standing ideology of English superiority that finds its roots in the colonial project and which continued post-independence with the English-speaking elite. As such, while English is certainly neoliberalised through discourses of profit and linguistic commodification, it would be a mistake to understand this as the only fire that fuels English language learning in India. The workings of neoliberal rationalities cannot be fully understood without a deeper examination of the ideological processes that lead some students to enrol in such courses to begin with; it is here that we may find further explanations for why students and teachers continue to hope, and to pursue such courses, despite their suspicions of the 'bootstrap' ethos.

Conclusion

The students and facilitators in this branch demonstrate the need to observe not only the various ways in which neoliberalism manifests itself globally (Harvey, 2005), but equally "the variable uptake of neoliberal values and personhood" (Urla 2019a, 271). Through an analysis of both the NGO's documentation and extracts from classes and interviews, we have argued that, while the vision of the NGO is shaped by an ethos that invites specific neoliberal subjectivities, this is taken up by students and facilitators to varying degrees, leading to reflection, acceptance and contestation in ways that are often contradictory or confusing as they grapple with the disjuncture between what they learn and what they live, and the various strands of competing logics woven into their social practice. In this case, a critical pedagogy that encourages students to reflect on structural oppression (see e.g. Martín-Rojo 2019) (Page 115) may not be sufficient, in

that many prove to already be highly reflective on such issues. It does, however, raise questions of how these reflections could lead to a form of mobilization or a stronger resistance, one which "cannot be individual, but requires the construction of an alternative discourse and another rationality, of new hegemonies that contribute to create new subjectivities" (Martín-Rojo 2019: 184). If the NGO takes seriously its quest for the empowerment of disadvantaged students, then this raises further questions of how the NGO could seek to provide institutional support that would allow students to collectively pursue alternative discourses by drawing on their own experiences of structural barriers and "incorporating [neoliberal] concepts and their attendant experiences to more egalitarian political projects" (Pujolar, 2019: 130). Importantly, such resistance would need to address the full range of the political economic make-up, or how "neoliberalism often combines with racialized and colonialized histories"(Allan and McElhinny, 2017: 92) in order to interrogate the ways in which the hegemony of English constructs particular personhoods beyond (and prior to) that of the neoliberal self.

The participants in this study demonstrated an understanding of what the NGO (and by extension, the workplace) expects, and they adopt (or "strategically mobilise" (Del Percio & Wong, 2019: 197) the neoliberal register, with some pushing back through 'safer' forms of resistance such as jokes or in situations outside of the classroom. While their engagement with neoliberal 'buzzwords' allows us to delineate the contours of the neoliberal register, it is not *necessarily* evidence of internalization of the ideology. They invest and contest simultaneously, for reasons that can be traced to forms of neoliberal governmentality, to the (post)colonial history of English and to Hindu ethics, and they seek ways to capitalize on the 'positive' aspects of neoliberalism, such as its alliance with discourses of empowerment, in order to carve out a more stable, independent future within the confines of processes of marginalization. Whether they submit to the neoliberal imperative or not, in either case, English is perceived as non-negotiable, and to view this only through the lens of neoliberalism would be to overlook key components of the processes of inequality. After all, the neoliberalisation of education has certainly contributed to the representation of English as a pre-requisite for social mobility, but the injustices perpetuated by English in India can trace their roots much further back.

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