

**When linguistic capital isn't enough: personality development and English
*speakerhood as capital in India***

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(Page 127) Since the colonial occupation of India, what we have come to call 'English' has consistently been considered a linguistic capital that, for those mastering its legitimate forms, paves the path to success (Proctor, 2015). In colonial and post-colonial India, however, English remained in the hands of an elite few, those who acted as go-betweens for the Raj and the public, and later those who took charge of forming the newly independent nation (Ramanathan, 2015). Since the liberal reforms of the 1990s which opened up the economy to both foreign and private investment (Fernandes, 2006), India has witnessed the mushrooming of cheaper English schools and coaching centres, as well the development of educational NGOs, some of which have explicit goals of providing free English training in order to empower and emancipate students who suffer from caste, class and gender based stratification. While English has long been perceived in India as a tool of modernization and progress (Proctor, 2015), neoliberal discourses have exacerbated its representation as a neutral, international language of mobility and development for everybody (Park, 2011). Similar to many other settings around the world, students covet English as the "key to material success in the modern world" (Park, 2011: 443), and join such courses with hopes of acquiring the linguistic capital they perceive necessary to increase their job prospects and social prestige. Underpinning this investment is the idea that English is "the only thing holding people back from

enjoying the benefits of globalization: upward mobility, better jobs, social betterment, and movement into a “better” culture” (Proctor, 2015: 307). Such an ideology, scholars note, is based, fundamentally, on a discourse of profit which is propagated by international agencies, local governments and educational actors – a discourse which in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics has recently been the object of commentary and critique (Duchêne and Heller, 2012; Muth & Suryanarayan, 2020) – and which understands language as a resource that can be exchanged in a globalized market that values (certain) linguistic skills.

In this chapter, we produce an ethnographic account of how the celebration of English as a vector of social mobility and personal success affects both students and teachers in India and has consequences for the ways individuals understand their own subjectivity, their learning practice and their place in what they have learned to see as the modern world. The analysis offered draws (*page 128*) on ethnographic data generated between 2018-2019 in one branch of an educational, non-profit NGO with multiple branches across North India, as part of a larger project exploring discourses of English and social mobility in Delhi. The institution seeks to alleviate poverty and combat the issue of under-employment in India by providing a yearlong, free of cost, training programme in English and personality development for ‘disadvantaged students’ over the age of 15. The NGO is a non-profit organisation, run by an expat Indian philanthropist, for whom the pressing issue is the wide-scale underemployment and lack of access to opportunity for youth in Delhi. English education is perceived to be the most effective way to counteract this and assist students on the path to professional jobs.

The ethnographic analysis presented draws on thick descriptions of classroom observations at one particular branch, formal and informal interviews with students

and staff, as well as textual artefacts collected from the centre and from their online and offline promotional material and curricula. This data will allow us to offer insights about the logics and rationales underpinning policies and programmes, such as the ones provided by the NGO in which Katy has conducted fieldwork, and at the same time interrogate the uptake of these programmes and the discourses of English and aspirations of success that they mobilise. In particular, it will allow us to document the emergence of an educational endeavour that seeks to provide students not only with linguistic capital, but equally with ‘soft skills’ that are deemed essential for the labour market. Acquiring English, we will show, does not only entail the regulation of one’s communicative conduct (also see Blommaert et al. 2009; Foucault, 2007; Flubacher & Del Percio, 2017), but involves work on ones’ personality, morality and body so that language policy in educational settings and policing of speaking subjects become part of a larger biopolitical practice which aims to turn individuals into new subjects who are fit for modernity and contemporary capitalism.

On the one hand then, we argue, this demonstrates the inculcation of a neoliberal subjectivity (Martin-Rojo & Del Percio, 2019) through English as the students learn to conduct their own selves according to principles of human capital accumulation, and invest in the acquisition of English and soft skills in the hope that their continuous actions towards a better future will eventually be compensated with some forms of symbolic or monetary returns that may, or may not come (see Tabiola & Lorente, 2016 and Duchene & Daveluy, 2015 for language learning as a speculative investment). On the other hand, we claim that beyond the neoliberal ethos that shapes the NGO’s approach, what the students seek to acquire, and what the NGO seeks to inculcate, is not only English as cultural capital that can be (speculatively) converted into job opportunities, but also an English that “goes

beyond being a skill, experienced as it is as an agent of transformation” (Jayadeva 2018: 606), which thus implies an acquisition of a whole host of extra-linguistic capital. This associated capital is, as we will demonstrate, tied to regimes of value that are imbricated in colonialism as well as the caste and class systems. Importantly, we argue, they are not only perceived as accessible uniquely through English – and thus as a natural (*page 129*) result of acquiring the language – but they are also framed as fundamental in allowing students to ‘cash in’ on their English capital. Without these associated valorised behaviours, English as linguistic capital loses its value. Finally, this analysis will allow us to claim that neoliberal self-projects mediated by NGOs in India, such as the one studied by Katy, are only able to make an impression on people and their senses of selves because they are imposed upon a population that, through histories of colonial encounters and patronizing modernization, has learned to identify in the West, and especially in what is imagined to be English culture, an ethically, morally and racially superior model of being and seeing the world. This not only comes with the promise of modernity and aspirations of mobility for those able to imitate the model, but also justifies and normalizes social stratification within Indian society.

English and personality development

English instruction is not the only form of training provided by the NGO. In promotional material, they outline 5 key areas of focus for students, namely: soft and non-cognitive skills, English language skills, lifelong learning through MOOCs, mentoring, and career guidance. Indeed, in a conversation with the CEO, he expressed trepidation about the myth of the panacea of English for social mobility. While he asserted that English was a crucial component in providing opportunities to

disadvantaged students – and the primary reason for student enrolment – he explained that the NGO strives to offer them much more, by training them in skills that will help them secure professional jobs upon completion of the course. English, he relayed, is only one third of what we do. The design of the curriculum puts heavy emphasis on job training, with multiple opportunities for students to practice CV writing, interviews and skill-development specifically for the workplace. According to the facilitators, these additional skills – often referred to under the umbrella term ‘personality development’ – are not offered to students anywhere else. Amir, a facilitator who had been educated in government schools and had been a student at the NGO himself, demonstrated his frustration with the public education system, claiming that not only did it fail to provide students with what he calls ‘adequate levels of English’, but it also failed to show students how to showcase their ‘personality’. It is clear, then, that these additional skills and personality development, *alongside English*, are perceived to be essential for the students’ prosperity.

It is important here to look more closely at the term ‘personality development’. It encompasses a wide range of what are often termed ‘soft skills’, many of which - growth mindset, lifelong learning, discipline, perseverance - were the topic of entire lessons, and thus are not seen as additional to the language acquisition but become a fundamental part thereof, as the language is accessed through such lessons. These ‘soft skills’, peppered throughout NGO documentation and frequently cited by students, become part of a register (Agha 2003) that students learn to adopt in class as a means for them to ‘fit in’. In her analysis of ‘skills’ (*page 130*) discourses, Urciuoli (2008) draws on Williams’ (1977) notion of keywords to demonstrate the semantic vagueness of such ‘soft skills’ words. That is, they can shift in meaning depending on how they cluster, and thus are deployed strategically in order to display

social alignments. As such, by learning and adopting this skills register, students are able to align themselves with the image of a ‘good’ student who will work hard to improve themselves.

In her ethnographic exploration of ‘Personality Development and Enhancement’ training for the middle classes in Delhi, McGuire argues that the professionalism produced by these courses is “distinctly neoliberal in nature, characterized by a culture of enterprise in which disciplined self-government appears paramount” (2013: 110). Against a backdrop of liberalisation – a series of liberal reforms implemented by the Indian government at the end of the 20th century – a “new middle class” has emerged, one which is not only associated with relative wealth, but also with “more intangible qualities, including self-discipline and entrepreneurial ambition” (ibid: 110, see also Fernandes 2006; Gooptu 2013; Bhatia and Priya, 2018). For McGuire, these exercises in personality development are also class-based: they offer young Indians a path to construct “enterprising, new middle-class selves” (2013: 113), which are not only linked to wealth and consumption practices but also to their ability to enact a certain self in particular urban spaces, where purchasing coffee “...is not so much an economic transaction or a demonstration of taste as it is a bodily performance of competency – a spatial practice – which signals belonging within a particular social geography marked as aspirational”. (ibid)

In order to successfully navigate certain urban spaces (malls, coffee shops) young Indians must adopt particular bodily dispositions. In this way, personality development as constructed in these courses is an attempt to inculcate a new habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), attuned to certain urban spaces. Such spaces require particular practices in order to claim ‘belonging’ (or even to be allowed access (Brosius 2010)),

from the smooth handling of the escalator and an engagement with shop employees that differs from market interactions, to the simple decision of whether or not to attempt to “brave the gaze of the [security] guards” at the entrance (McGuire 2013; see also Brosius 2010). Being in such spaces requires one to master practices of belonging in aspirational spaces. Personality development is thus an attempt to retrain the habitus: it is a neoliberal self-project, certainly, but one that is specifically invested in the production of a certain type of middle class which is the product not only of contemporary capitalism but, as we will see, longer histories of colonialism too.

English is personality development

While the underlying process of what some have called neoliberal governmentality (see e.g. Martin-Rojo, 2019) is clearly present in the way the NGO strives to shape students into “bundles of skills” (Urciuoli, 2008), to leave the analysis here would be to overlook another important element. That is, alongside the neoliberally-informed notion of personality development training, there is equally a *conflation* (page 131) of ‘English’ with ‘personality (development)’, a notion which was repeatedly offered by participants. Rupal, a facilitator who had previously attended the NGO as a student herself, recalled what she had learnt through the process:

There were many things like what’s the meaning of diversity/ what’s the meaning of integrity/ ok and I got to know that there is something called group discussion and there are some rules/ do’s and don’ts of group discussion/ I didn’t know that how to talk to somebody [...] now I know the way how to talk with somebody/ how can we interact people/ how can we invite people in

our conversation with making facial expression/ eye contact/ using intonation/
so there are many factors which if you ask somebody who doesn't know
English they'll say it's just grammar thing like if you know grammar you can
speak English/ but they really don't know that only grammar doesn't work.

She recognises that the NGO had provided her with much more than access to the language – glossed here as ‘only grammar’. She claims that it has also instilled in her a variety of ‘skills’ that range from how to use the body and the voice, to ‘values’ such as appreciating diversity and ‘qualities’ such as integrity. What Rupal reports having learnt is indeed what the NGO hopes to achieve. And yet, there is a slight but important difference in how Rupal has perceived this process. While the NGO’s promotional material implies that it offers English *alongside* these other ‘skills’, for Rupal, these two notions are inherently linked. These skills are not only collocated with English, but they are *a crucial part of speaking English*: “only grammar doesn’t work”. Of course, this is partially linked to Hymes’ (1972) communicative competence, wherein the acquisition of a language requires an understanding of communicative norms along with what is traditionally understood as language learning. Yet, communicative competence does not encompass the *moral* dimensions that, as we demonstrate later, these students see as an integral part of speaking English, which, as Bourdieu’s habitus concept suggests (see e.g. Bourdieu 1990), links speaking not only to culture but also to a socially stratified ethics of being. Indeed, when posed with a similar question, Amir expressed this rather explicitly:

Personality development is English ok (*laughs*) so just everything related with
personality development is English so /yeah English/ first here we are teaching

personality development/ but at the end people are not coming here for personality development/ people come here for English and then they learn personality development right/ so it's English that attracts them/ English is the reason why they are here/ ok if I tell them that ok English is gone/ now we teach [in Hindi] how to stand/ how to sit/ how to talk with you know foreigner/ why would they come (*laughs*) there's no benefit.

Again, English and personality development are not only collocated, but are arguably even considered to be the same thing. Personality development (*page 132*) without English is an absurd idea, indicated both by Amir's laugh and his claim that nobody would attend if English were to be removed from the curriculum. He continues:

I feel personality development starts with English in our country/ ok that's called personality development/ if you speak in English that's called personality [...] nobody says that you need to work on your Hindi or you need to speak very good intellectual sort of way in Hindi [...] the personality development is all about English first.

Personality development, according to Amir, does not exist as a concept for other languages. Amir laughs again as he struggles to recall the Hindi term for personality development, stating that 'nobody knows it in Hindi anyway'. For Amir, *English is personality*. It is important to note that 'personality' does not seem to be understood here as idiomatic characteristics: it is rather improbable that he believes that no other language than English allows a person to be a distinctive individual. Rather, personality seems to be used here by Amir – and, as we will see, by the students – as a

euphemism for ‘appropriate’ conduct, for an expected way of behaving. As such, while we can certainly see that the personality development training is underscored by a neoliberal ethos, there is simultaneously a direct link to what the English language is imagined to represent, meaning that the students are not only being shaped to become entrepreneurial selves, but they are also becoming English *speakers*, which requires much more than learning the language. It is a process that requires learning how to *do* English speakerhood, a particular personhood, that is, “contingent, performable behaviors effectively linked to social personae for some determinate population” which “index the persona (or social image) of the one performing them” and which are oriented to at “sociohistorical scales” (Agha, 2011: 172-3). In one interview with Sakshi, a student who had almost completed the yearlong course, she was asked if she would have attended if the course had been delivered in Hindi. She frowned and laughed at the question, as if the answer was obvious, then stated:

It’s not benefit for us because the family always teach us/ because the first school is our family and they always teach us how to deal and how to improve your personality and how to live in a city and how to live [...] but English is the thing like/ this is not our language/ [if] I want to learn any other’s language we have to learn their er/ how to act like this/ and how to body language/ how to behave/ behaviour [...] so I think that’s why they come here/ if they will teach in Hindi (*laughs*) everybody will not come here

Like Amir, the mere thought of such a course in Hindi was laughable. In the way Sakshi frames her language learning, she and other students have already learned how to behave and ‘improve [our] personality’ in Hindi, but by attending the NGO she

hopes to learn how to behave *in this new language*. (page 133) When asked why the NGO teaches personality development if the students already learn it at home she replied, “the family always saying in Hindi/ but whenever you speak in English your body language and your behaviour also become different”. The two languages are associated, here, with entirely different ways of being in the world. Personality development is thus the development of an English speaking ‘personality’ or, better, ‘subjectivity’, that they perceive to be inaccessible and unthinkable in another language. It would be uncautious to assume that this English speaking personality that they are aspiring for is a form of whiteness and westernness. In the next section we will demonstrate that what they are aiming for, and what these training activities seem to offer, is an upper caste/class model, that certainly involves desires for and performances of whiteness (both in a physical and a metaphorical sense), but that is also linked to colonial constructs of Indian eliteness and aspirations of upwards mobility within the Indian social structure.

Transforming the self

So what, exactly, does this English-speaking ‘personality’ consist of? Across multiple conversations, it became clear that students perceived themselves to have undergone a transformation by becoming English speakers, and that this transformation was understood to stem from the language itself. As one student stated in class in response to a discussion on the importance of English, ‘it makes us different from what we were earlier’. Rather than simply equating English speakers with certain characteristics, the students actively desire and acquire the performance of certain behaviours that they believe to be a necessary, or even resultant, part of being an English speaker. It is critical at this point to explore in more detail precisely what

these ‘behaviours’ are, and how the NGO instils them. While conscious that such a division invokes Cartesian dualism, given how the informants too tended to build upon such a framework, we will nevertheless address these in two sections: morality and the body.

Morality

The belief in the power of English to foster positive moral change in individuals was a common narrative among the students. In an interview with one student, Sakshi, a university graduate who dreamt of returning to her village in Uttar Pradesh to open an English language school, she made persistent references to English as a ‘polite’ language. While no specific examples were given for why English is perceived to be so ‘polite’ (aside from its “sweet sound”), this was a frequent claim made by students as well as by Indians outside of the NGO. These sensuous qualities of softness and sweetness (Gal, 2013) which informants projected onto English were heavily contrasted with those of the local Hindi dialect spoken in the area around the branch, as students recounted how “city boys and girls” think their way of speaking is “rude”. The inferred ‘politeness’ of English becomes iconic (Irvine and Gal, 2000) of the identity of (*page 134*) English speakers and, importantly, does so in such a way that the contingent, historical and conventional nature of the connection between English, English speakers and ‘politeness’ is overlooked and normalized. This iconization is so deeply unquestioned that the participants, on multiple occasions, identified the language itself as the sole impetus for transforming moral behaviour. In an anecdote recounted by Amir, he expressed frustration over an incident where he had bought a fashionable new backpack, and had taken it with him when meeting his friends. The only one of his friendship group to comment on his ‘cool bag’ – or indeed, in other

examples, his Marvel jacket, a new haircut or a meal of fried prawns that he had made – was his English-speaking friend. The others, he sighed, “they see that this is something new but they don’t say it”. For Amir, this was an inherent difference between “good-mannered” English speakers and the “negativity” of those who don’t speak English, who will only comment in order to criticize – a trait which, he claimed, was quintessentially Indian: “we invented this”. Later in the conversation, when asked to elaborate further on how English ostensibly instilled such ‘qualities’ in its speakers, he explained:

You know it’s sort of like manners for us/ how to say thank you/ how to say sorry how to say/ you know/ excuse me/ and thinking about other people/ considering other people that they also live in the same world where we live right/ so when you learn English you learn all these very/ what do you call/ ground level things right.

English, then, is perceived to enact positive transformations (Jayadeva: 2018) on the speaker via its inculcation of “manners” and compassion (“considering other people”), in ways that echo the embedding of certain values through the teaching of interactional norms in colonial language education (Lorente, 2017). Indeed, to return to Sakshi, part of her reasoning for wanting to open an English language school in her village was a desire to “change their thinking”, specifically with respect to oppressive gender norms for women. According to her logic, by teaching them English they will “improve themselves” and change their “narrow-minded thinking”. In doing this, Sakshi draws on the trope of the ‘un-enlightened’ rural-dwellers, thus equating the village with ‘backwards’ thinking and the city with progressiveness, indicative of

enlightenment and colonial ideologies (Heller and McElhinny, 2017) of modernity, in which a duality is posited of the city as “civilized” and the village as disordered (Kaviraj, 1997). This was an image that she herself believed she was fighting against by being an English-speaking ‘village girl’. Yet, in doing so, she reproduces the hegemonic position of English that marks it as superior because of its associations with modernity, and thus erases any potential for non-English speakers to stake any claims to progressiveness or forward-thinking (or indeed, to critique the meaning and implications of such terms). Such a depiction also reinforces the ideological representation of the ‘enlightened’ educated English-speaking classes who have ostensibly abandoned the oppressive patriarchal and caste (*page 135*) systems, or what M. S. S. Pandian terms “the demands of an Indian upper caste modernity to hide and at once practise caste” (2002: 1740) whereby “the language of caste is delegitimized in the modern public domain” (Mosse, 2019:10) while it nevertheless persists in practice. In other words, caste may go unmentioned in certain English-speaking circles, but practices of hierarchy (whether they are rooted in caste ideology or other forms of stratification) are far from non-existent. Language is one way in which such inequality claims justification – Pandian’s “caste by other means” (2002: 1735) – and is much easier to swallow.

The non-English speaker in the extracts presented above works as an inverted mirror image of the English speaker. Where the English speaker is polite, has manners, is open-minded and progressive, the non-English speaker is ill mannered, negative, backward and regressively attached to oppressive hierarchies. Such dichotomies are clearly rooted in colonial practices that, as Bhatia and Priya argue, are part and parcel of the inculcation of Western ideas of professionalism in the Indian workplace (2018). McGuire equally notes the explicit aim of some PDE

programmes, such as the ones documented here, to “remove Indianisms”, with reference to stereotypical ‘cultural’ aspects that are incompatible with Western modes of being a professional, such as lax time management and obligation to family over work (2013: 117), which echoes similar conversations that took place in the NGO. This is not simply an association of English with certain valorized qualities but rather a designation of the types of moral behaviours that are compatible with the image of the English speaker, behaviours which carry a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1992). Such behaviours can be understood as “idealized social types” (Catedral and Djuraeva, 2018: 505) or “moralized behavioral scripts” (Blommaert, 2018: 49) that include both linguistic and non-linguistic behavior and which have clear colonial and, as we will demonstrate in what follows, class-based roots. Importantly, rather than recognizing that these are collocated, explicitly learnt ‘scripts’ that are an integral part of successfully *performing* English speakerhood, they appear to the participants to be *natural results* - a “natural and automatic accompaniment” (Jayadeva 2018: 596) – from mere exposure to the language, thus further normalizing the ideological associations and discursively shaping English as an “agent of transformation” (ibid).

The body

The transformative aspects of speaking English encompass not only moral behaviour but equally the body, evident in the explicit focus in the NGO on posture, facial expressions, presentability and hygiene (see also McGuire, 2013). These concepts, we argue, while seemingly neutral, are often terms that, upon inspection, enclose veiled references to race, class and caste. That is to say, to look ‘presentable’ or to have ‘good hygiene’ or even to move the body in particular ways is to index a certain type of personhood. In a group discussion of private schools, one student (who, like other

students and the facilitator, had herself attended a government school) stated that “they [private school (*page 136*) students] **look** smart”, to which the facilitator added “yes, by looking also we find out this person is from private”. When we bear in mind the tendency to correlate private education with English education (an association that is indicative of ideological erasure as there are some private Hindi-medium schools (LaDousa 2014)), we can infer from this that the students are able to tell “by looking” if a person has been educated in a private, English-medium school. One can ‘spot’ an English speaker before they open their mouth.

Regulation of the body was a focal element of the curriculum in the NGO. The table below, copied from a student’s workbook (student’s writing in italics), demonstrates the ways in which the NGO sought to inculcate certain bodily movements into the students.

C. Do’s and Don’ts – (POSTURE, GESTURES, FACIAL EXPRESSIONS, EYE CONTACT, WORD STRESS, TONE, PITCH AND VOLUME)	
Do’s	Don’ts
<i>We should sit with proper manners</i>	<i>We should not sit cross with arms and legs</i>
<i>We should make eye contact</i>	<i>We should not loud speak</i>
<i>We should raise hand before give our opinion</i>	
<i>We should come on the time</i>	

The importance placed on these bodily movements and actions was repeatedly emphasized in class, often in ways that associated these behaviours with the speaking of English. In a mentor session (in which students near completion of the course are paired with newer students to provide mentoring support), the mentor-student asked the facilitator to give her pointers on what the mentee-student needed the most help with:

Mentor: [teacher name] tell me about her/ any problems

Facilitator: her problem/ like she is unable to frame sentence/ she is unable to give facial expressions

Mentor: you cannot give facial expressions!

Mentee: (*laughs*) no

Facilitator: same face she has everywhere/ whether she is happy or sad or

Mentor: I found many facial expressions

Facilitator: in class I don't get

Mentee: because I speak but I feel not ha-// er hesitation/ but after that/ I speak in class I feel hesitation (*laughs*)

Mentor: she is speaking/ she is speaking

Facilitator: means especially like she doesn't have a smile on her face/ like the normal kind of smiling is not there/ I talk/ you talk/ we are smiling// she doesn't smile

(*page 137*)

The problem identified with this particular student is not only linguistic (“She is unable to frame sentence”) but also, and more importantly given how it becomes the main topic of the exchange, her ability to do “the normal kind of smiling”. Despite the attempt by the mentee to explain this through the hesitation and anxiety that she feels in class due to her comparatively weaker competency in the language, she is still criticized for not smiling. When the mentor points out that the mentee is indeed speaking, the facilitator ignores the comment and continues to comment on her lack of smile: we see, then, how the mentee’s speech is irrelevant if she is not performing the expected bodily behaviour alongside it. There is, of course, a gendered, affective dimension to this interaction, indicative of the expectations of the workplaces that these students are imagined to possibly enter on completion of the course (service

providers), where women are frequently called upon to perform emotional labour as part of their job (Heller and McElhinny, 2017: 246; Cameron 2000). But, following Ahmed (2010) and Lorente (2017), we also argue that this injunction to display happiness is also part of a more general moral order which stigmatizes unhappiness and any sort of behaviour that is perceived as challenging processes of subordination and oppression. Paradoxically, then, the imperative of smiling that is imagined to be linked to English speakerhood, instead of leading to possibilities of mobility and emancipation (processes that are linked to the persona that English speakerhood represents) rather reinforces experiences of docility and situations of subordination.

Alongside the regulation of bodily behaviour there is also an explicit attempt from the NGO to inculcate notions of self-presentation and bodily care. In Pathak's interrogation of the notion of 'presentability' in India, the body becomes the site of expression of a "global Indian identity", which, although "rooted in the social position of the middle classes, specifically urban middle-class professionals", becomes an ideal to be consumed by those outside of the social group (2014: 323). Drawing on Bourdieu (1986), she describes presentability as embodied cultural capital, and thus as "a source of power, rooted in cultural hegemony – which, through its advantages for employment and marriageability, can produce economic and social power" (ibid). Students in the NGO are repeatedly exhorted to pay attention to their presentability. From the first of the five English-teaching workbooks designed by the NGO that the students progress across over the course of the year, the concept of hygiene figures prominently, transforming to the arguably less loaded notion of 'grooming' towards the fourth and fifth book. Exercises such as "Hygiene check" required the students to reflect upon their own washing habits at home but also their 'hygiene practices' in public space: "How often do you pick your teeth/nose/ears in public?"

Considering that this course is aimed at students over the age of 15, and, indeed, the majority of the students who participated in the study were aged between 17 and 50, the inclusion of such lessons is an infantilizing act— a common colonial practice (McElhinny 2005) – as there is an implicit assumption that such practices need to be taught to what are, in practice, classes of adults, a (*page 138*) large number of whom are parents themselves. If the NGO deems such ‘basic’ hygiene education necessary, there is an assumption that students may not be practicing them at home, thus positioning the target audience of the NGO as potentially unhygienic, and reproducing harmful paternalist discourses about the poor that echo the colonial technologies of subordination and discipline via health care interventions that both rationalized the colonial project and created “racialized hierarchies”, and which were often intensified further for the ‘lower classes’ (McElhinny, 2005: 185).

Indeed, concepts of hygiene are polemical in India and perhaps more politically loaded than anywhere else, given the historical conditions under which they have been mobilized. Many scholars have demonstrated how shifting understandings of hygiene emerged from colonial governance (Fernandes 2006; Kaviraj 1997) and orientalist discourses (Said, 1995), from models “concerned with maintaining caste order and purity” (Doron, 2016:727), from modernist conceptualizations of civic responsibility (*ibid*; see also Doron and Raja, 2015; Prasad 2015) and, more recently, as part of maintaining or aspiring to a middle class identity (Fernandes 2006). While hygiene may appear a self-evident, innocuous concept, Doron (2016) draws on the growing incitement (largely present on social media) for civic action that has accompanied the government’s *Swachh Bharat* (Clean India) campaign to make a critical point. Although, as he writes, “the alternative future of clean Indian cities, imagined and enacted in the present by the cumulative efforts of

youth across India, is laudable”, it is imperative to interrogate what is considered ‘unclean’. Referring to the situation as a ‘hygiene war’, he states: “the victor could declare other usages of public space and regimes of value over what is considered public space and what is seen as ‘dirt’ (for example, Un-Hindu, gendered or class-based), and then potentially follow through with a physical campaign of ‘cleansing”(p. 737-738) This has further implications for who is considered a legitimate citizen, who forms part of the “useless”, “threatening” ‘population’ (Brosius 2010: 128), and who can make a hegemonic claim to represent the ‘public interest’.¹

While we are not inferring that this is the intention of the NGO, the emphasis placed on hygiene in classes draws attention to what Doron terms a middle-class anxiety of cleanliness (ibid), as well as to the modes of disciplining subjects that have been inherited from colonialism, which, albeit perhaps not intentionally, inform the NGO’s practice. Through its training programme, it aims to produce students who are not only physically ‘clean’ in their bodies, but also responsible civic citizens who clean up after themselves, and, notably, who use ‘clean language’: a poster drawn by students reads “I keep my body fresh and clean, I clean up after myself, I use clean language, I clean up my mistakes”. Once again, the intricate weaving together of language and non-linguistic action becomes clear. English speakers are ‘clean’ in their body, their behaviour and their language. In conversation with Amir one morning, he remarked on how he is increasingly seeing more children speaking English from birth in India. He recounts an anecdote where he saw a young girl being

¹ Indeed, at the time of writing, the violence that has erupted across Delhi following the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act is indicative of these tensions.

accompanied home from school by a (presumed² non-English speaking) maid (*page 139*) and her son. While the maid and the son proceeded to walk through a muddy section of the road, the young girl shouted – in English – “I am not going from that dirty way. I’ll go from the clean way”. Similarly, in an interview with Dev, a member of staff at the hostel where Katy stayed, she asked him to describe English speakers in India. His choice of example was revealing, as he mentions not only a specific ‘body language’ but also their purported intolerance for ‘dirt’:

They have even the body language and when they speak it’s like (*puts on ‘educated Indian’ accent*) no no no I would not go there/ oh it’s so YUCKY or it’s so DIRTY (*laughs*) or something like this/ but a normal person will be like oh it’s bad/ it’s ok/ it’s ok/ we can just go from the other side it’s fine (*laughs*)

In this imagined scenario the English speaker refuses to walk through a dirty space. The ‘normal person’ in the scenario also chooses not to walk there but, importantly, they do not pass comment or express disgust; they do not perform their affective reaction to dirt. The English speakers as imagined by Dev and as observed by Amir, however, do. The point here is certainly *not* to imply that those who speak English necessarily do have a lower tolerance for areas deemed to be dirty; the point is that they are recurrently constructed as doing so. Indeed, as Ahmed writes, through such emotional responses to objects and others, “surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others” (2004: 10). These affective orientations – disgust, for example – are deeply political and

² This was Amir’s assumption, and while he is likely to be correct, the fact that he was able to make an assumption of both the language abilities and occupation of the woman is indicative of who does and does not ‘look’ like an English speaker in India.

historical, working “to shape the contours of space by affecting relations of proximity and distance between bodies” (2006: 3), thus upholding power structures.

In the NGO, the ways in which these bodily behaviours are framed often use seemingly neutral qualifiers such as ‘proper’ or ‘normal’ (for example, the ‘proper manners’ referred to in the student textbook), indicating that there is indeed a morally right and normal way to behave. Yet, what counts as ‘proper’ or ‘normal’ is political and mediated by ideology and history. ‘Proper’ here, then, becomes a euphemism for behaviour that accords with the value systems of the dominant. In other words, while the NGO course may indeed be an exercise in the cultivation of a neoliberal self, it is also an exercise in the cultivation of cultural capital associated with a certain group of English speakers, an imagined ideal built on the exclusionary practices (Fernandes, 2006) of the middle classes and Indian upper castes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have drawn on ethnographic data collected within the framework of an NGO training programme for ‘disadvantaged’ students in India to unpack the ways English is made sense of and invested in by both students and teachers. We have shown that for these informants, investing in the forms of cultural capital that English speakerhood represents in India involves not (*page 140*) only the acquisition of specific communicative skills that are imagined to be convertible on the job market. Investing also involves a transformation of the speaker’s entire persona, which requires not only an active regulation of the students’ communicative conduct, but also a constant policing of their physicality and morality.

To be sure, this regulation of behaviour (both moral and bodily) that we have documented in this contribution is exemplary of forms of policing and self-policing

(Foucault, 2007) that are emblematic of neoliberal governmentality (Martin-Rojo & Del Percio, 2019). Yet, as we have sought to demonstrate, these are not only consistent with the interpellation of the neoliberal self, but are also, importantly, rooted in circulating colonial images of the quintessential English-speaker – one modelled on the dispositions, hygiene practices, performances and value-systems of those with whom English has long been associated: the British, and the dominant classes and castes. For people on the ground, to ‘cash in’ on one’s English capital *requires* extra-linguistic behaviours that distance oneself from those associated with the lower castes and classes. Ironically, English speakerhood makes claims to a progressive modernity by ostensibly eschewing ‘narrow-mindedness’ and oppressive structures, while simultaneously upholding and normalizing processes of stratification that endow English speakers with a ‘justified’ supremacy that emanates from their perceived behavioural and moral superiority.

Now, the question that remains open is the extent to which these students are able to capitalize on their bodily transformation, i.e. to convert the acquired cultural capital into the social and economic life they are aspiring for. We know that getting socialized into English speakerhood allows students to be employed in service work such as a job at a local McDonalds. We also know that this employment often comes with forms of social and economic comfort and stability (including, possibly, a stable salary, sick pay and a pension) that for many of them do make a difference. Whether this social mobility experienced by these individuals will in the long term lead to the transformation of social structure in India, i.e. to a destabilization of class and caste structures that position entire groups of people at the margins of society and exclude them from benefiting from the modernization of India, remains to be seen. What we can say is that these training programs feed into an aspiration of mobility that exists in

large sections of Indian society and are alimented by new and old language in education policies promising empowerment and success, that is, forms of hope for a better life that represent a fertile ground for colonial technologies of power and subordination to continue operating on colonized bodies and justify the making of difference and subordination. For those of us who are involved in the making and legitimization of those policies, the account offered in this contribution should make us cautious about what language in education policies are and what they do with people, about the agendas that they serve, and the promises of unpredictable individual and societal success that they mediate and help inculcate into people's minds and souls.

Words: 6928

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