

**Language, Education and the Empowerment of Women:  
A Critical Sociolinguistic Ethnography**

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## **Statement of originality**

I, Sudha Athipet Vepa, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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(Sudha A Vepa)

# Language, Education and the Empowerment of Women: A Critical Sociolinguistic Ethnography

## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on the impact of global capitalism on women's empowerment programmes in higher education in Bangladesh. The topic has warranted a nuanced attention ever since world organisations and philanthropic foundations have directed their attention to women in so called developing countries to accelerate economic growth. Drawing on a sociolinguistic ethnographic approach, I investigate the trajectories of empowerment of three women from socio-economically underserved backgrounds studying at the focal university which endeavours to empower women and produce future leaders by offering leadership skills and English language as part of a liberal arts education. In so doing, I adopt Foucault's concepts of governmentality and subjectivation with the aim of illuminating the tensions between a moral obligation to transform and the promise of social mobility. Through an analysis of stance-taking and affect as communicative social practices in daily interactions and narrations, I demonstrate how the women come to understand that learning English and developing leadership skills entail working on themselves to become desired. I argue that the women's construction of 'becoming empowered' shapes and is shaped by the discourses of women's empowerment they are engaging with, sometimes showing alignment and sometimes contestation. My study of their trajectories also details an interplay of capitalist logic and inequalities of class, patriarchy and coloniality which complexly shape their subjectivities. The thesis documents what drives these women to pursue a neoliberalised education system with English as the language of promise despite the struggles and the precarity of such a system; more than their internalisation of neoliberal values it is their desperation to liberate themselves from a life of deprivation and discrimination which they hope a transformation into a neoliberal corporate self-hood would engender.

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As I come to the end of this long research journey, I have much to be grateful for. I owe my thanks to all the institutions and people along the way who made it possible and helped shape my dissertation.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my dear parents who taught me how to indulge in the joy of learning.

## Impact statement

My thesis contributes to academic knowledge in three ways. First, it participates in the current discussions pertaining to language, education and subjectivity in the current political and economic conditions and further complexifies it by placing women at the centre of the discussion. The study follows the trajectories of three women from underprivileged backgrounds, currently studying at an international liberal arts university in Bangladesh which considers English language learning and leadership skills as crucial for their empowerment and the analysis uncovers their struggles into 'becoming' certain types of desired subjects. Secondly, my findings contribute to the scholarly debates on the uptake of neoliberal market values demonstrating how the women train themselves to perform alignment, but not without critically questioning them and how their subjectivities are shaped through tropes of, besides neoliberalism, colonialism, post-colonial linguistic nationalism, socio-economic class and patriarchy. My thesis interrogates why despite struggles and conflicts, the development of the entrepreneurial English language learner is imagined to bring about social mobility and social justice to these women. I argue, based on the data, that for the women, more than their internalisation of neoliberal values it is their desperation to liberate themselves from a life of deprivation and discrimination and regain a sense of self-esteem which they hope a transformation into a neoliberal corporate self-hood would engender. Thirdly, affect used both as a concept and as an analytical tool along with stance-taking has played an important mediating role in my research in bringing language analysis closer to social reality.

These contributions and findings would be of significance and relevance to current research in critical sociolinguistic ethnography and linguistic anthropology, and also to practitioners and educationists in Bangladesh as well as internationally, where setting up such programmes for multilingual learners including those from South Asia warrants a knowledge of the issues involved. The interdisciplinary approach to my research makes my findings applicable to work being done on women's development/empowerment in the fields of development and women's studies. In addition, the impact of philanthropic giving on women's empowerment programmes should be of interest to funding organisations and philanthropic foundations that support women's higher education in South Asian countries.

My plan is to explore the possibilities of reaching these various groups within academia and beyond and share relevant aspects of my findings with them. As I considered this research endeavour as empowering research on, for and by the women in the study, I found opportunities to discuss some of my findings with the participants who have kept contact with me. A trip back to Bangladesh was planned for 2020 to attend the graduation of some of the participants and to disseminate the outcomes of my fieldwork to the staff and management. Unfortunately, this did not happen due to the Covid-19 pandemic. An on-line session is being planned instead. I hope this thesis will pave the way for more practical and collaborative work in the future with stakeholders and scholars interested in taking forward an active impact of critical research for social justice.

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# **Chapter 1: Language, education and the empowerment of women – An overview**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Ever since women were recognised as a valuable economic resource to invest in as a measure to rescue global capitalism, during the economic crisis of the 1970s and 80s, there has been an increased interest in the development or empowerment of women in the so called 'least developed' and 'developing' countries such as Bangladesh. Those in power at the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Economic Forum thought it was necessary, productive and worth investing in women's development for the economic benefits it would fetch. In other words, women were perceived as the 'magic bullet' (Kabeer 2005b) to resolve a whole pack of issues (e.g., poverty, illiteracy, over-population, child mortality, health and hygiene) and other targets set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, subsequently, in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals by the United Nations. Besides, it has been found opportune for the State and other regulatory bodies to work on stereotypical assumptions about language, education and life of women, and to decide what is best to empower them through internationally aided projects. While billions of dollars may have been invested and targets may have been met, the question remains - whose targets? In addition, in this process, the trend in the current socio-economic conditions is not to directly impose an arrangement or totally disregard the voices of women, but to afford self-agency to the responsabilised subject in pursuit of future socio-economic success through concealed or disguised coercive strategies of regulatory structures of power.

With these broader issues in mind, I attempt to understand through my research a local situation from local perspectives. I seek to demonstrate how such practices and market logic, which can be described as neoliberal in character, infiltrate into everyday life and how women from a working-class background respond to such conditions. The participants in my study are former garment factory workers who have taken a bold step to undertake a 5-year long under-graduate course in the medium of English at a prestigious international university in Bangladesh that has set as its mission the empowerment of

women and the creation of a generation of women leaders. My aim is to uncover how the daily life of these women shapes and is shaped by the larger structure as a constituent part of it (Giddens 1991). My study focuses on the lived experiences of a group of students persevering in the hope of finding social and economic prosperity in the future through an education in English and by mastering certain skills in leadership which in my research site are believed to be necessary for “becoming empowered”. It explores what it means for a woman to be on a trajectory of social mobility in the given space and time under the current socio-economic and political conditions of change.

In this thesis, I examine the discursive construction of the idea of the empowerment of women in an educational setting in Bangladesh. Using a sociolinguistic lens and an ethnographic approach, I explore the different language and communicative resources that play an important role in the ways the ideas of becoming socially and economically empowered, regulated by institutional regimes under the current conditions of political economic transformations, impact on how students live their daily lives. It aims to reveal how this, in turn, shapes and contributes to the discursive construction of the empowerment of women as understood in the local setting. The study is based on the primary assumption that the process of becoming empowered is a subjective experience mediated by on-going semiotic negotiation, performance and positioning which also involve the construction and reconstruction of identities that are believed to be diverse and dynamic.

In the rest of the chapter, I describe why I chose former factory women turned students as the central focus, the motivation for the study (1.2), and then I place women in the bigger national setting of development/ empowerment in Bangladesh (1.3). After that, I state my objectives and the research questions that have risen from the context (1.4). This is followed by a description of the field site (1.5) which includes my impressions on the first day at the university that I call ‘International University’ (IU henceforth) and provides a brief outline of IU, the participants, and the entry point for my research: the project I will refer to as Programme for Promise (1.6). Finally, I give an overview of the chapters in the thesis (1.7).

## **1.2 The motivation for the study - The factory women of Bangladesh**

The story of my connection with Bangladesh goes back to the days when I was working as a lecturer in ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) and later TESOL (Teaching ESOL) in a further education college in London. Like all ESOL classes, mine were also regarded as highly “multicultural” and “multilingual”, a microcosm of the global. One of the much-awaited highlights of my classes was a 20-minute slot that my students and I had allocated to what we called ‘Global Matters’, when students were invited to share cultural and political matters of their communities and their countries of origin. One such session turned out to be a critical moment for me on my research journey.

During one of our Global Matters discussions in April 2013, a small group of Bangladeshi students brought to the attention of the class a huge tragedy that had recently taken place in Bangladesh – the collapse of the eight storey Rana Plaza building in Dhaka, which had housed a thriving ready-made garment factory, killing more than a thousand workers, mostly young women. They explained how it was a case of negligence on the part of the factory owners who put profits over the safety of their employees. The profits they made came from their exports to high street retailers in Europe and North America (e.g., Next, Gap, H&M, or Walmart ) who were international partners in the businesses. The students were very angry and desperate to do something, at least raise awareness of the social injustice to Bangladeshi factory workers, and women in particular, who were being exploited and forced to work in appalling conditions. In my capacity as a teacher, I helped them draft a petition in English and they joined a local activist group that had started collecting signatures and pledges from families, friends and workplaces to boycott goods from the high street fashion retailers.

Three years later in 2016, by which time the students had moved on and I had just launched on my doctoral studies, an article in an international newspaper caught my eye:

‘A new scheme offers free degree courses at the [University] to improve the prospects for workers in Bangladesh’s clothing factories...The [University] opened in 2008 in (...) to educate the brightest young women with the greatest potential and create a new generation of female leaders (...) It is funded by donors including the IKEA Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Its founder, Bangladeshi - American (...), says that, unlike most Asian universities, which admit only those able to pay fees, “our cardinal principle is to recruit the most talented people, irrespective of background...”. The garment factory workers’ university fees are covered by charitable

donations, but the (university) requires factory owners to continue to pay wages while the women study. Their families rely on the income and would not let them attend otherwise...' (... Anonymised source).

This development in the story of the factory women aroused my enthusiasm to search for more information. Reuters Foundation reported in the newspaper that it was gratifying to see some compensation being made finally for the past injustice:

'Three years on, as experts lament how government, retailers, factory owners and consumers have done little to safeguard workers, a small miracle has emerged from the tragedy and is slowly taking shape in the south-eastern corner of the country... Established in the aftermath of the disaster, [University]'s [PP] programme aims to use higher education to empower women labourers to become leaders and have a stronger voice in shaping the future of Bangladesh's lucrative garment sector' (Anonymised source).

This got me wondering about how the workers made sense of this radical change in their lives, from working on the assembly lines taking orders from above to studying full time at a prestigious international liberal university with the freedom to make their own choices and decisions, and what kind of transformations they could be experiencing. In relation to that, the university's challenging initiative in the empowerment of women appealed to me as an interesting subject to investigate. It was more than just a research topic to me.

I grew up speaking Marathi (my birth language) with my parents and some of the family, but as we often moved and lived in non-Marathi speaking states in India, I developed parallel fluency in speaking and also literacy in languages spoken in those areas, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada. For inter-state communication, though, it was English that served as the lingua franca. My language education at school and college indeed comprised of English, the so called first language (as it was the medium of instruction at the chosen school), Hindi as the second language (the imposed national language in South India) and Tamil as the third language (the official state language of Tamil Nadu hence compulsory). My parents believed an English medium education would help me access higher education more easily (also see Chapter 4, p 102-103). This linguistic repertoire, I believe, has had an impact on my motivation for this study in Bangladesh as well as the Institution Focus Study (IFS) which I undertook two years prior to my PhD in a north London further education college.

Since my graduation and teacher training in South India, I had been involved in women's education in colleges and universities where the medium of instruction was English for all girls coming from English medium as well as vernacular medium secondary schools. I taught English to women who came from mofussil areas, that is, surrounding rural areas, to the college with aspirations to become graduates and who had to study alongside high school graduates from English medium schools in the urban and sub-urban areas. English played an instrumental role in their educational lives and for future success, as they imagined it. I have had first-hand experience first as a student and then as a college lecturer with the so-called "two-language / three-language" formula, in the post-colonial Indian education system, with all its sociological factors relating to its politics, contradictions, struggles, caste and class inequalities and consequences.

After working in FE in the UK for nearly three decades, with diverse groups including Asian women, being drawn to Bangladesh to carry out my research felt like arriving at another important point on my trajectory as an educationist and proponent of women's rights to education. As an English college lecturer both in India and in the UK, working with young adults whose first language was not English, I have been fascinated by the affective ways in which they adapt (or resist) to the overpowering pressures to cope with English in the hope of securing a 'successful' future. This had motivated me to undertake for my IFS in 2014-2016, a study on the progression of ESOL students onto mainstream vocational courses in the UK further education system. It focussed on the struggles and inequalities experienced by ESOL students and the dissatisfaction in terms of their progress felt by both students and teachers involved. My IFS led me to reflect on the impact of and changes in the perception of English as the international language of education, in a country like Bangladesh. I wondered about the changes that are taking place for South Asian women in education and in their learning of English, as Bangladesh turns 50 - a neighbour sharing borders with India now but which was once part of the Indian sub-continent sharing the Bengali language and culture as a British colony until 1947.

As to the university-factory project in Bangladesh highlighted in the newspapers, I had several questions to find answers for: How are the factories benefitting by paying the wages to their employees while they do full-time

residential study for 5 years? What's the role of the stakeholders – the Government of Bangladesh, the donors, the factories, the university's Board of Trustees, the academic staff and the students themselves – in the daily running of this project called 'Programme for Promise'? What kind of educational programme is on offer at the independent and international university which officially aims to develop leadership skills in women from marginalised backgrounds? And what does this mean for those involved? What are the experiences and practices of the factory women themselves transforming into aspiring students at the university? I decided to go to Bangladesh to conduct my fieldwork.

In the next section, I contextualise this initiative in women's empowerment against the background of the wider socio-economic development changes that have taken place in contemporary Bangladesh.

### **1.3 Setting the scene – Women in the bigger picture**

Since the 1970s, economically under-developed and developing countries in South Asia, like Bangladesh, have been undergoing social and economic transformations due to the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) offered to them by powerful international financial institutions led by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The requirement to repay the huge loans, which were often beyond the capacity of some of the poorer countries, resulted in economic adjustments in the form of privatisation and de-regulation, all of these affecting adversely all sections of the public, especially the poor, the rural and women. Studies in Women's Development in South Asia have shown how in the current era of late capitalism where human beings are weighed in terms of human capital and investment, women are the hardest hit (Lewis 2011; Nadeam and Rayamajhi 2013) although, since the 1970s, women have been increasingly assigned centre-stage. According to Alam and Matin (1984), the reasons for the focus on women are two-fold. First, women emerged as a 'fashionable concern' (ibid. p. 2), mainly due to the introduction of the empowerment of women agenda as an international development goal by the UN and other international aid agencies promoting quick-fix projects in literacy, cottage industries and agricultural entrepreneurship. Second, women, who made up at least half the adult population, began to be seen as a large unutilized resource for economic

growth (Kabeer 2005a) as well as a hindrance needing empowerment (Alam and Matin 1984).

The measures that were implemented in the areas of women's education and development in Asian and African countries, influenced by the instrumentalist discourses of women's empowerment that were circulating in international aid organisations, have been critiqued for their global capitalist market rationality. They have been identified as capitalist interventions by both feminist scholars (e.g., Prügl 2015, 2017;; McCarthy 2017) and scholars in development studies (e.g., Arends-Kuenning and Amin 2001; Kabeer 2001; Kabeer and Mahmoud 2004; Batliwala 2007; Karim 2008). The institutionalisation of the concept of women's empowerment is demonstrated in the implementation of some of the initiatives of the Government of Bangladesh and the NGOs.

Two of the initiatives that attracted international attention and acclaim were the large-scale employment of women from rural areas in factories manufacturing ready-made garments for export markets in Europe and the US, and the micro-finance credit and self-employment of rural women propagated by powerful NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisation). The RMG (ready-made garment) industry underwent large scale privatisation and internationalisation due to its million-dollar export expansion. The garment factories are of special interest to my research, for reasons mentioned in an earlier section (1.2) of this chapter. A more focused review of literature on RMG and women's development in Bangladesh as part of its modern nation-building will be presented in Chapter 2.

My case study falls within the scope of women's education for empowerment, and raises issues relating to language, education and identity in the current times. To address the research questions that have emerged in this inquiry, a critical sociolinguistic lens seemed more appropriate to adopt as illustrated briefly in the next section.

#### **1.4 A sociolinguistic study – My objectives and research questions**

As a sociolinguistic study, my research contributes to the scholarly discussions critiquing language, identity and global capitalism in educational and employment settings – e.g. Cameron 2000a; Urciuoli 2003, 2014; Lorente 2007; Duchêne 2008; Duchêne and Heller 2012; Pérez-Milans 2013; Flubacher

and Del Percio 2017; Park 2017; Tabiola and Lorente 2017; Codó and Patiño-Santos 2018; Soto and Pérez-Milans 2018; Urla 2019; Martín-Rojo and Del Percio 2020. But it further complicates the discussion by placing the woman at the centre of the investigation of current social and economic transformations. The complication lies in unpicking the normalised ways in which women are categorised as a homogenous group and the entrenched social norms that make people, including women, believe for themselves and for others that, if they conformed to certain taken for granted categories and followed certain conventionalised objects of promise (e.g., a 'happy' marriage consisting of a man and a woman and a son and a daughter or, as in my case study, pursuing English language as the 'happy' object), they would attain success for themselves and for the community around them (Ahmed 2010).

Considering that there is limited research on the experiences of working-class women in an educational setting from a sociolinguistic ethnographic perspective, we know very little about women as neoliberal subjects and their uptake of neoliberal values. Therefore, my overarching research aim is to understand how the empowerment of women is understood and practised, and then interrogate how far social inequalities are addressed or reproduced in the process of empowerment that is professed particularly in this empowering education setting. This entails, as the primary aim of the study, an exploration of the attributes of the notion of women's empowerment that are discursively and communicatively made sense of by all stakeholders at the university, including the learners. It involves focusing on the alignments and dis-alignments of the women concerned with institutional discourses as they build on desirable attributes to become empowered women, with a consideration to what it means and what it does to them in the process. Secondly, as it is a study on empowerment, it endeavours to provide a platform to the women as participants in the study to contribute to the understanding of language, education and empowerment in their own terms. Thirdly, it aims to investigate what influences or constrains their choices and views, and how social norms play an affective role in their lived experiences. Finally, and importantly, it also interrogates the stereotypical assumptions made of the Bangladeshi factory women.

Given the above issues and aims, I arrived at the following questions to guide me in my work on the field:

1. Under the current conditions of social and economic change, in what particular ways is women's empowerment imagined, practised and legitimised at an international liberal arts university that officially aims to empower underserved women as leaders?
2. How do women learners position themselves and others, and negotiate their subjectivities in response to the knowledge and skills invested in them? With what lived consequences for those involved?
3. How might the learning of English serve as a 'promise' for women from disadvantaged rural backgrounds in the context of their university education?

Equipped with these questions and some knowledge of the university gathered from their website, I set out to do my field work to observe and become part of the daily life at IU. In the next section, I document some observations and experiences on my first day at IU to introduce my field site. That will be followed by a description of the English language provision at the university called Programme for Promise and of the participants in my study, the RMG (ready-made-garment) students.

### **1.5 My field site**

*It is 8.50 am on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2018. I am waiting for the university shuttle service in the car park of the 6-storey staff quarters building of the university. There are a few other people waiting in small groups, who look like senior members of faculty and management - three American, two British, two Indian, one Chinese and one Polish (as I got to know after alighting the shuttle). The discreet international mix in this small space differentiates it from the noise and bustle of the dense population just outside the tall entrance gates of the complex. We are waiting to be transported to the university campus which I am told is about 15 minutes away. I am looking forward to my first day at the university although I am exhausted, and jet lagged and still trying to make sense of the events that have happened since my arrival just yesterday. I reflect on some of the details as I wait with the others for the shuttle.*

*I had arrived in Chittagong airport, Bangladesh, after a long and delayed flight. The arrivals lounge was dark and dusty, and packed with people and several small armies of military personnel stationed at strategic points of the small airport. I had been strictly instructed by the university's Chief Operating*

*Officer, Mohammad, a retired Lt. Col., who had helped me process my visa, to wait to be received by the university staff and on no account to attempt to take a taxi. Within a few minutes of my arrival at the immigration desk I was warmly greeted by two young women smartly dressed in Asian 3-piece suit. One introduced herself as Security Officer, Nafisa, in charge of guest security (also an ex- army personnel), and the other as, Martha, a Vietnamese driver of the university shuttle service. I felt a sense of instant relief when they spoke English, as it was only Bangla that was used even for all official communication in the airport. I was not confident to try my beginners' level Indian Bengali in the serious, busy and tight-lipped immigration environment. A queue was beginning to build up, but I was told by Nafisa that there was no need for me to wait in the queue. She took my documents from me, walked straight into the immigration office, explained something to an officer in Bangla and came out with a stamp in my passport in just five minutes.*

*Then we drove through one of the most densely populated and chaotic cities in the world, through the dust and the heat of the afternoon, for nearly an hour and a half, and finally the driver announced that we had arrived at the university. I was accompanied to the temporary staff accommodation where a young secretary in a saree was waiting to go through some formalities with me. She briefed me about the safety and security of guests, particularly while travelling to and from the university campus, which indicated that I had still not reached my destination. She advised me to take the university shuttle like all other international staff for all local travels. I was just beginning to understand that the university was treating me within their international guest category, and hence, I was expected to abide by certain regulations. I was well protected and grateful for the unexpected arrangements they had kindly made for my safety, but I felt a bit strange and restricted. At a later stage, I learnt from some friendly American staff living next door that the university had tightened its security particularly for its international guests, after the terrorist attacks on foreigners in Dhaka in 2016.*

*I began to understand that, as an independent international residential university, it was responsible for the safety of its staff, students and visitors. In fact, a few months later into my fieldwork, I would be told by some staff during interviews that there had been some protests recently outside the university by some radical Muslim groups, against the university's offer of liberal education to*

women (as the Programme Director would put it during one of his interviews with me: 'It would be naïve on our part to be complacent about our vulnerability in a place like this, although Bangladesh is a moderate Islamic country supporting secularism...'). On accessing my email on arrival, I had been pleasantly surprised to see an invitation from John, the Programme Director for Programme for Promise (PP) to talk to his team about the purpose of my visit, and from the co-ordinators of the programme inviting me to attend a series of faculty meetings the following morning. I was also invited to attend an urgent and important staff meeting called by the Dean of Academic Affairs.

The shuttle has now arrived and enters the car park at 9am sharp after a security check. Everyone starts walking towards it and I overhear discussions about the agendas for the day's meetings, to which I had been invited too. It is a bit too soon for academic meetings for me, I think, but I feel very welcome. Besides taking care of my safety and security, the authorities have planned the day for me. It also makes me wonder if I will be able to cope with such a high level of management organisation and efficiency.

We all get into the white 10-seater mini coach. It is air-conditioned with its dark windows and soon assumes an international air as the staff continue chatting in English – British, American, Indian, Chinese, Polish and Bangladeshi. The atmosphere is friendly and casual, and the conversations centre on the Dean's meeting that is to take place in the afternoon. From what I overhear it appears as though there are concerns about the progression of students from Programme for Promise (pre-Access level) to Access Academy (Access level) due to their standard of English. This is being discussed more seriously by two individuals, sitting in the front row, who had earlier introduced themselves to me as the Director of Access Academy and the Director of Finance. I am tempted to ask them questions but restrain myself. I decide to wait to learn all about it at the Dean's meeting.

Soon we are in front of two very tall iron gates in a recessed inconspicuous entrance, fully blocked from the view of the busy street. After a security check again, the gates open and the mini coach enters a narrow lane flanked by seven storeyed buildings three on each side (I would later learn that it was popularly called 'the Lane', the hub of student activities). This is it - the campus. My first impression is one of disappointment as I was expecting to see open spaces and trees and students all over the place, as I had imagined from

*the pictures I had seen on the university website. Instead, the lane is deserted and the buildings are dark and quiet. 'Where are the students?' I ask the person walking with me to the lift. Apparently, the students are all either in the computer labs or in their halls of residence or on the terraces of the tall buildings. Besides, being the meeting day for teachers, she tells me, the students are busy doing other things, outside the campus. She introduces herself as the executive secretary and informs me there was a campus tour scheduled for me after the meeting. It is something they do routinely with all their visitors, she explains. I am already beginning to get used to the corporate style management of the university and trying my best to fall in line with it; I pull out my diary to make note of the time of the campus tour.*

*During the campus tour, I notice two of the six buildings look newly decorated and furnished, compared to the others and these housed the executive and academic offices, faculty rooms, Admissions and Recruitment / Marketing, the CDIP (Careers Development and International Programmes) office, classrooms, lecture halls and student facilities like the library, the IT labs, the Writing Centre, the gym, café and the auditorium. The rest of the run-down buildings are the student halls, dining rooms, kitchens and a medical centre. I am told by my tour guide, Trina, a soft-spoken and respectful young Bangladeshi, elegantly dressed in a saree, that these are temporarily hired buildings. She gives me all the information about the university in English while answering my questions in a professional way.*

*The university (IU) is a small independent international women's university with a capacity for about 700 residential scholars and 100+ academic staff and mentors of which 50% come from 10 different countries. It started in 2008 with the support of international aid when Bangladesh was chosen as its location. It is a regional university in the sense that it attracts women students from about 15 surrounding Asian countries. It offers American-style undergraduate programmes in liberal arts and sciences in the medium of English with general core programmes accredited by the American Association of Universities and Colleges. My tour guide describes the university as unique in the region for two reasons. According to its mission statement, which is displayed outside the executive offices, and its statement of purpose, it is dedicated to the education and empowerment of 'exceptionally talented women' from rural, poor and underserved backgrounds. Hence, unlike other private*

universities, the women selected to study are on scholarships raised through several philanthropic and corporate donors across the world. Secondly, besides English ability and Maths scores, the university carefully tracks women with leadership potential, as its aim is not just to educate but create a generation of female leaders who can bring about change in their communities. There are three levels of programmes available to place students according to their English ability – Programme for Promise or Pre- Access level, Access Academy (bridging to UG) and a 3-year Undergraduate programme.

Trina also gives me an update on the arrangements made so far for the gala celebration of the university's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary along with its special Commencement events in May to be attended by international dignitaries – among them corporate magnets, a Nobel laureate, NGOs and activists and also Cherie Blair, a campaigner for women's education and rights. She is proud that the university has achieved a lot in a very short time and is highly respected for its charitable work in women's education in the local educational circles too and adds in a humble tone that they are trying to do their best to provide quality education to the marginalised groups of women from Asian countries. The university relies on donations and is struggling to raise the funds necessary for the facilities. On one of the corridors brightly lit by florescent lights, leading to the executive offices, she stops and proudly points to the wall which has the pictures and plans of the state-of-the-art new international campus, one planned to be constructed on the 104 acres of land on the beautiful hilly outskirts of the town. She says that the land is a donation from the government of Bangladesh. The new futuristic campus designed by an American architect looks very impressive.

While I am grateful to Trina for introducing me to all the departments and faculties, and for showing me around with a useful commentary, I feel a bit disappointed that I see only buildings and staff and no students on my first day. I guess I must work out the times when the students would hang out in the Lane between or after their classes. Trina understands my desperation to meet students and leads me to the library in the hope of seeing some students there. There are dozens of young women occupying every corner of the small library and pouring over their books and laptops, some in T-shirts and jeans or shorts, and several others in Asian 3-piece suits and headscarves. On seeing us, a group of students walk up to us to ask Trina in English something about an

*event while switching to Bangla at times. They are a happy, chirpy bunch and I gather, very excited about a cultural show that they are organising for the Mother Language Day, sometime in February. As we leave the library, Trina tells me 'They are our RMG (ready-made garment) students, very hard-working students. Our university is proud of the Programme for Promise as it gives opportunities for these poor and rural women to study at university'. I can't wait to get to know the students and hear all about it from them. (Field- notes 25<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018).*

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My initial interactions with the institution not only helped me document my first impressions of an international university, with its corporate management practices in some areas, and the significance of its location in Bangladesh, reflecting the local political and social situation. It also indicated how my identity was being constructed on the site which further added to my understanding of the daily life at the university. As an international visitor/guest and as a researcher from London, I was instantly accepted as part of the university community, this giving me access to resources that I gratefully acknowledge as a big step towards what is often regarded as 'integrating with the local culture'.

Having given a glimpse of my field-site, with some of the social practices that existed there, I will now briefly describe the entry point of my research, Programme for Promise, including a background of the main participants who took part in it.

### **1.6 Programme for Promise and the RMG (Ready-Made-Garment) students**

The point of entry for my research is the Programme for Promise (PP, hereafter) English language provision, often referred to as 'the flagship' of the university due to the altruistic nature of the provision as well as to its challenging mission. It is meant for learners who need to improve their English before joining the mainstream route to a liberal arts and sciences degree programme. It was started in 2016 as a separate provision within the university where learners could spend about a year going through an intensive English language learning programme. After achieving IELTS points of 5/6 (a foundation level internationally recognised as required to engage with academic undergraduate study in English), they move on to the Access Academy, a one-year bridging programme, before then entering their 3-year undergraduate studies.

On this programme, learners are selected from marginalised and socio-economically disadvantaged groups. They are all funded through scholarships from international corporations, with IKEA Stitching Foundation and the OSF (Open Society Foundation based in the US) being the seed donors. At the time of my fieldwork, PP had completed two years and there were about 200 women learners on this programme from five main categories and a few minor ones which were included as and when funding became available. They are identified as marginalised and labelled for administrative and funding convenience as: RMG (Ready-made Garment factory workers); Grameen Daughters (daughters of the micro finance borrowers); Bangladeshi Rohingyas (settled refugees from Myanmar); Myanmar Rohingyas (who have more recently fled the atrocities in Myanmar); and Afghan / Hazara which included persecuted ethnic minority groups from Afghanistan and fewer numbers from other groups such as Hill Tribes, Nagaland (India), Tea-plantation workers, Pashtun, Tajik, Cambodian and Chinese.

My focus was on the women selected from the ready-made garment factories across Bangladesh to study at IU (see section 1.2, Motivation for the study). At the time of the fieldwork, in January 2018, there were 48 RMG students on PP and several students from the previous two batches had 'successfully' progressed on to the AA and 1<sup>st</sup> year UG levels. This gave me the opportunity to select participants to represent each of the year groups to allow a wider scope to study the experiences of the RMG learners over 2 years. I chose to have twelve participants of which three, one from each of the programmes, served as my primary or focal participants.

Hasina (on PP), Fowzia (on AA) and Zinia (on UG 1), all participants that I have given pseudo names to protect their confidentiality, come from different rural and suburban districts near Dhaka, about 300 to 500 km north of the district where the university is located. They stayed in the halls of residence like all other international students. My visits to their villages and families confirmed that they were from working class backgrounds with limited resources and their fathers, now all deceased, having worked as a cook (Zinia's), farmer (Fowzia's) and shopkeeper (Hasina's) to support a large family of 3 children or more. A primary level of education was all the parents managed to access.

Academically all the three students had completed HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) in the medium of Bangla. In their high schools, located

close to their villages, they had one period of English which was normally taught in Bangla. Rote learning was encouraged at all levels. They all came from a highly teacher-centred learning environment, so an independent, research oriented liberal education was a completely new concept for them. After HSC, working in the garment factories had been the only option open to them in order to support their families and themselves. The three of them worked in the garment factories in the urban areas located in EPZs (Export Processing Zone), close to their villages except Fowzia who in order to escape a forced early marriage had to run away from home and work in a factory about 500 km from her family. Their factory-floor experience ranged from eight months (Hasina) to three years (Zinia) to eight years (Fowzia) as a Needle Woman, Quality Supervisor and Quality Inspector, respectively. The wages they earned ranged from 6400 to 8000 Bangladesh Takas per month (i.e. £64 to £80 a month).

While working at their factories, Zinia, Fowzia and Hasina applied for the IU scholarships to study at the international university, and after a rigorous selection process comprising of a written test and interview in English they were selected to pursue a five-year long university study – in January 2016, September 2016 and September 2017, respectively. They became eligible for a full scholarship of \$15000 per year funded by IKEA Stitching Foundation which covered their tuition and residence, due to their socio-economic and marginalised backgrounds. Except for Zinia, the learners continued to get their wages from the factories for the duration of their studies to support their families and themselves.

As mentioned in the university admissions criteria, the university was keen on recruiting women who a) were the first in their family to access higher education; b) came from socio-economically marginalised backgrounds; c) had 10 to 12 years of schooling; and, most importantly, d) showed leadership potential and an intolerance to social injustice. After selection, they were placed at streamlined levels on the PP programme first to get an intensive coaching in English. An opportunity to attain proficiency in English is a step leading to lucrative job markets, as they would explain it to me in their interviews. According to their individual narratives, although they all come from poor backgrounds with limited access to education and training, they had always aspired for higher education to help improve their socio-economic status. A public university in Bangla medium had been unaffordable for them. So, a full

scholarship to study at an international private English medium university was a 'golden opportunity' and 'a dream come true', in their words. At the time of the fieldwork, the selected participants in my research were at 3 different levels of the academic journey at IU. Their trajectories are presented separately in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

My fieldwork also involved visiting three garment factories where my participants had worked – one in the CEPZ (Chittagong Export Processing Zone) and two in the suburbs of Dhaka. Visits to the villages and spending time with the families of the participants near Dhaka and Chittagong provided me with a fuller picture of the life and background of my participants from rural Bangladesh. The next chapter (Chapter 2), on the modernisation of Bangladesh, would bring the context of my research participants into sharper focus.

### **1.7 An overview of the chapters**

In this first chapter, I have introduced how the research idea evolved and how my research interests in the social and economic processes vis-a vis women's education and empowerment led me to carry out this study. I have explained the rationale, research objectives and questions that my research aims to address outlining my theoretical orientation. The chapter also has offered glimpses of my initial experiences on arrival in Bangladesh and at the research site which are relevant to the understanding of the wider socio-economic and political processes that are an integral part of the daily life at the university into which I was beginning to integrate. An introduction to the entry point of my ethnographic fieldwork and the background of my three focal participants sets the stage for a consideration of the wider transformations that determine Bangladesh as a developing country in the next chapter

To do full justice to the understanding of the research project, it is important to historicise the socio-economic and political transformation that have been taking place globally, and locally in Bangladesh in the last few decades, since its separation from Pakistan in 1971, and their impact on the nation-building process and women's development in particular. In Chapter 2, I provide this by drawing on research conducted in and about Bangladesh in the areas of language, education and neoliberalism and also referring to relevant

literature on women's empowerment and global capitalism from women's studies and development, development economics and feminist scholars.

Chapter 3 reviews the central conceptual and epistemological traditions suitable for the nature of the data that was available and collected. I discuss the concepts of subject, governmentality and affect in terms of neo-liberal capitalism, and Language and Education as the sites of social construction of knowledge. I identify the methods most suited to analyse the data collected at the field site and to present what was discursively and communicatively circulating in the community. Drawing on linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistic ethnography I make sense of how a critical analysis of discourse can be adopted, bringing ethnographic participant observation techniques and an interactional analysis to complement each other using stance and affect as the linguistic expression of the social phenomenon. In Chapter 4, I explain the methodological procedures I followed on the field, the selection of participants, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, reflexivity in research and ethical concerns.

Chapters 5 to 8 show a presentation and analysis of the data. Chapter 5 focuses on the institutional construction of the notion of women's empowerment and its discursive circulation in the institutional space. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 take a close look at the individual student's engagement and dis-engagement with the institutional discourses of education and empowerment by tracing their trajectories of mobility from their assembly line experiences in the factories to their current status as university students and how their subjectivities emerge in the given conditions of change. Chapter 9 is the concluding chapter which consolidates the previous ones and discusses the findings in relation to the themes analysed in Chapters 5 to 8 as well as the concepts reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 while highlighting the main contributions of this thesis to research in sociolinguistics.

## **Chapter 2: Modern nation building and the empowerment of women in Bangladesh**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I explore those socio-economic and political transformations at the global level and in Bangladesh that have given rise to the research problem and questions in this study. As introduced in the previous chapter, my study aims to uncover the ways in which wider socio-economic processes are embedded in the everyday life and communicative activities in social spaces and the mutual shaping of them (Heller and Martin Jones 2001). This chapter maps the institutional discourses of women's education and empowerment that are interwoven with nation building processes that Bangladesh has been going through since the 1970s, while emerging as a developing modern nation state at the intersection of colonialism, nationalism and global capitalism. Hence a focus on Bangladesh as a modern nation-state in the making would offer a more nuanced perspective of the significance of localised discourses about language, education and empowerment and the consequences these have for policy and practice at the focal university as socially, politically and ideologically constructed over a historical period (Ibid. 2001; Heller and McElhinny 2017), in the case of Bangladesh in this study from 1970 onwards.

To study the local discourses in relation to the wider socio-economic and historical changes I focus on the trajectories of a group of women from a working-class background who have transited from the ready-made garment (RMG) factories to International University (IU). For a fuller understanding of these two institutions, which are part of two different transnational infrastructures and their association, it is necessary to pay attention to global as well as national political economic changes that have impacted on them and enabled the current conditions. What is common to both the garment industry and the educational institution is that they are private, transnational in their operation and they also rely heavily on international aid and global philanthropy, respectively. Being one of the poorest countries in the world with a large population, Bangladesh with its rich human and natural resources, has been found to be worth investing in by transnational corporations and international foundations (Lewis 2011) – thus enabling policies and values of a global

capitalist expansion from the so-called Global North from the 1970s and 80s onwards. Bangladesh's separation from Pakistan in 1971 after a long war and its nation building processes soon after, coincided with the implementation of the new political economic theories referred to as 'neo-liberalism' (Harvey 2005).

Against this background, educational institutions have been forced to reposition themselves and restructure to respond to the global economic transformations impacting on modern nation-building processes in Bangladesh, as in several other countries. One of the influences has been internationalisation of education in response to globalisation (Stromquist 2007), which in poorer countries such as Bangladesh has often meant the reliance on foreign aid for financial and academic resources (Lewis 2011). Besides philanthropy and donations that make the educational and empowerment projects for women possible in Bangladesh and at the university under study in particular, is corporate social responsibility (CSR) of companies and factories. For example, the RMG students at IU as former factory workers, are paid their wages during the 5-year study period to sustain their families who depend on those wages and without which the women would not consider going back to education. The garment factories offer this financial facility as part of their CSR.

Given these economic arrangements within the infrastructure of the focal university, I will first provide a brief outline of neo-liberalism, including philanthro-capitalism as the underlying socio-economic factors in my study (2.2), with the aim of setting the stage for a review of Bangladesh's participation in global capitalism and its impact on women in the rest of the chapter. I will first provide some relevant insights into Bangladesh as a developing nation-state with its unique characteristics and the factors that have necessitated global involvement. This will involve engaging with Bangladesh's modernisation processes and strategies (2.3) of which women's development/empowerment is an important constituent (2.4). As the central focus of this chapter, some perceptions of the concept of women's empowerment will be explored, illustrating relevant national initiatives and discourses in women's education and employment. To do this, I will draw on literature from women's development studies on Bangladesh and some feminist studies as they provide a strong base to initiate my arguments and also afford a deeper understanding of the experiences of my participants which are shaping and being shaped by these

national women's development discourses. After that, I will focus on language in education policy and the factors leading to the privatisation and internationalisation of higher education in Bangladesh (2.5), which will help me place IU and its students and follow my research questions on English and the empowerment of my participants in later chapters.

## **2.2 Neoliberalism and Philanthro-capitalism – The impact on women**

In the last three decades the increasing gap and inequalities between the world's richest and the poorest brought about by neoliberal capitalism has emerged as a central concern in various areas of social science research. Neoliberalism has meant different things to different scholars – as a set of principles for economic reform based on global capitalism (Harvey 2005), as a technology of government and the conduct of individuals as entrepreneurial selves in all walks of life (Foucault 1977, 1978, 1982a; Gershon 2011; Brown 2014) and as an ideology that promotes market logic not only in the businesses and strategy of states, but it permeates the choices and actions of individuals in everyday life (Bourdieu 1991). All these meanings are important in different measures in my study for a holistic approach to an exploration of the impact of neoliberalism on subjects and their uptake of it. I discuss the concept of neoliberalism as a technology of government (or governmentality) later in Chapter 3. In this section I present some of the political economic conditions that impacted on the modernisation processes in Bangladesh which in turn are relevant to make sense of what shapes the focal university and its social actors.

Neoliberalism as a theory of political economy formulated by Milton Friedman in the 1970s, an American economist of the Chicago school, prioritised individual freedom, human dignity and personal choice for economic development. Friedman propagated the idea of the free market and reduced government involvement as a measure to increase economic growth. In the years 1978 to 1980, which David Harvey (2005) calls 'a revolutionary turning point in the world's social and economic history' (p. 1), the powerful leaders of the time, Ronald Reagan of the US, Margaret Thatcher of the UK, Deng Xiaoping of China and General Augusto Pinochet of Chile appropriated these values to propose their new policies as a political reaction to what was perceived as a failure of the welfare system and the nation states and to rescue the financial downturn and accelerate economic growth. Capital being the main

focus, these reforms had been taking place in the form of deregulation, privatisation, free trade and withdrawal of the state from certain areas of governance. The most important feature of neoliberal capitalism is the occupation of positions of power in key international organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and World Trade Organisation (WTO), by the advocates of the neoliberal market rationality (Harvey 2005) who were often the super-rich with their money power. One of the main determining factors for neoliberal expansion across borders was the saturation of local markets in the more powerful countries, which made giant corporations seek markets in the Global South and extend the neoliberal framework to the so-called third world countries, like Bangladesh, as Structural Adjustment Programmes, covering economic liberalisation, privatisation and deregulated international capital flows. Following the plans was a mandatory pre-condition for procuring loans from the IMF or WB for economic development. Critics of neoliberalism, like Harvey, have viewed these principles as not equally beneficial to every nation-state or social groups within a nation-state. The 'financialization of everything' (Harvey 2005: 47), and the resultant measures of privatisation and deregulation in Bangladesh problematised the sovereignty of the nation state with its notions of nationalism, which was seen by the nation's elite as the most powerful socio-political and economic authority for matters of nation building (Billig 1995). Its struggles and separation from Pakistan, based on a linguistic nationalism of one-state-one-language, was immediately followed by global capitalism during its nation building processes.

Not only did the neo-liberal state relinquish power in market matters and give support to private entrepreneurs, but in turn got into privileged relationships which played a key role in the 'restoration of class power' (Harvey 2005: 33) – in the case of Bangladesh it was a continuation of class power among the British and American educated elites. Neo-liberal theory was meant to bring power and freedom to the individual. Instead, neoliberalism has proved to be, according to Harvey, an enhancement of the powers of an emerging class of capitalists. New systems in trading relations and entrepreneurial opportunities have enabled the accumulation of fast and vast wealth by a small group of individuals in the new sectors of the economy, like information technology and also influencing privatisation and the internationalisation of other sectors including higher education from the west (Stromquist 2007) with powers to influence political and

economic processes nationally and internationally. The billionaires across the globe today have amassed more wealth than the poorest half of the world – see, for instance, Oxfam’s announcement in 2017 at the time of the World Economic Forum at Davos that the number of the richest possessing more wealth than 50% of the world population had fallen from 85 in 2014 to 8 in just two years (Hickel 2017: 16) showing the increasing concentration of wealth in the world’s richest minority.

This new class of billionaires has adopted smart strategies to keep their money-making machine spinning. One of the lucrative ways has been found to be philanthropy, which ironically makes more profits for them by donating a small amount or at the cost of the poor. This capitalistic phenomenon colonising third world countries has been fashionable among the billionaires since 1997 and is called Philanthrocapitalism, a word coined by Matthew Bishop in 2006 in *The Economist*. The term ‘Philanthrocapitalism’, an oxymoron, juxtaposing two antagonist concepts together, one of altruism and the other of profit, basically echoes Milton Friedman’s (1970) idea that ‘the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits’ (in Bishop and Green 2015: 546). In more simplistic terms, in order to be able to do social good, one needs to be financially sound. In their book, Bishop and Green (2008) argue how Philanthrocapitalism can save the world, listing several recommendations for the rich businessmen, including to earn honestly, pay their taxes and to work effectively in partnership with the government and, at the same time, calling for a suspension of cynicism about wealth from those who oppose Philanthrocapitalism.

On the other side of the debate, scholars have critiqued the almost undemocratic ways of the wielding of power by controlling elected governments and taking over decision making by the wealthy at world organisations like the World Health Organisation and the World Trade Organisation, due to their giving capacity (Harvey 2005). Activists like Vandana Shiva (2020), Shiva and Shiva (2020) view Philanthrocapitalism as a recolonising force of our time. It is not ‘giving’, she argues, ‘it is sophisticated appropriation (money grabbing)’ (Ibid: 3). As an eco-feminist fighting for the rights of poor rural women in agriculture and small-scale farming in India, she lashes at Philanthrocapitalism as ‘violent economy’ that is hurting poor women. Describing Philanthrocapitalism as a form of patriarchy, she raises the alarm that ‘violence against women has taken on new and more vicious forms, as traditional

patriarchal structures have hybridized with the structures of capitalist patriarchy' (Shiva 2013: 3). She argues that the dignified economic self-sufficiency of the rural women in growing their own food and feeding their families is interpreted as economic deficiency, as not contributing to economic growth by global capitalistic policies, thus forcing these women to change their mindset to a market logic and profit as well as discounting their contribution and grabbing their meagre produce, their body and soul (Ibid). She views projects of women's empowerment as a process of disempowering women and then identifying a reason to empower them with a political economic agenda, all as part of global capitalism (Shiva 2000).

It has been argued that what is new about the new concept of Philanthrocapitalism is its openness about making private profits from the opportunities provided by philanthropic giving or investing (McGoey 2012), which is demonstrated in Bill Gates article in the Times magazine (2008) about how 'creative capitalism' can save the world's poorest - "...the poorest two-thirds of the world's population have some \$5 trillion in purchasing power . . . it would be a shame if we missed such opportunities" (Kiviat and Gates 2008). They assert that the best way to fight world poverty is by rewarding investors from wealthy countries for investing in under-served regions. This has led to a surge in the recent decades in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes in the form of micro-finance and social entrepreneurship, from businesses competing for profits and markets in Asian and African countries. For example, the Indian Parliament passed a new Companies Bill in 2012 imposing CSR on companies with over 10 billion rupees turnover, which has directed corporate interest in women's education, empowerment and entrepreneurship programmes (Abraham 2013).

In this race for CSR programmes, local and international corporations have found it opportune to target women from rural and working-class backgrounds perceiving them as a large unutilised resource for economic growth, a 'magic bullet' to achieve economic targets (Kabeer 2005a) as well as a 'hindrance' to economic growth needing empowerment (Alam and Matin 1984) (Please see section 2.4 p. 41-47, for a more elaborate discussion). CSR programmes targeting women's empowerment in African countries have caught the attention of feminist scholars. In her ethnographic study on a CSR women's empowerment programme in Ghana, McCarthy (2017) explores the unexpected

responses enacted by women managers and farmers in a rural area. She notes that in an attempt to address gender inequalities CSR projects often position women as 'saviours of economies or communities and proponents of sustainability' (Ibid: 1). CSR projects by multinational companies have been viewed as an attempt to neo-liberalise feminism in the way they have appropriated feminist values to empower women within a neoliberal market rationality of government (Prügl 2015, 2017). It has been argued that neoliberalisation of feminism 'draws attention to a specific kind of inequality and engenders a particularly feminist subject' (Rottenberg 2014: 418); a feminist subject 'that accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care' (Ibid: 418). Neoliberal feminism gives rise to a new feminist subject 'who is not only individualized but entrepreneurial in the sense she is oriented towards optimizing her resources through incessant calculation, personal initiative and innovation' (Ibid: 422). The woman self-trains to bring the right balance in her family care-study-work life using a cost-profit calculation. As such, neoliberal women have been found to be a rich resource to rescue global capitalism by the World Economic Forum (Elias 2013). This emphasises the critical argument I introduced in the previous chapter that the neoliberal logic of perceiving women's empowerment as an investment for other gains as human capital raises questions of social inequality and injustice, utility as opposed to capability, which is the core of my argument in my thesis.

Women's empowerment projects that gained momentum in Bangladesh are discussed in detail in a later section (2.4) in this chapter. But before that I provide an account of modernisation processes in Bangladesh with the aim of contextualising the conditions that facilitated the interventions from the international aid givers and corporate foundations in the form of philanthropy and CSR.

### **2.3 The economic modernisation of Bangladesh – A developing nation state**

The concept of 'nation-state' has political implications. It refers to the 'one-nation-one-state-one-culture-one-language' ideology embraced by the so called 'nationalists' (Billig 1995), who as a powerful group promote a common language, cultural heritage and values and at the same time assume distinct borders between theirs and other states (Hobsbawn 1992; Billig 1995). Such a

discursive construction of 'bounded communities' or 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983), characterised by an imagined finiteness, sovereignty and fraternity, facilitated the control of economic activities by some elite groups or individuals in local and national markets. One of the reasons for the emergence and success of the nation-state system in Europe which spread through the rest of the world was believed to be the economic advantage of having a centrally controlling state for the purposes of standardising education, with uniformity in language, skills and literacy in an industrialised world. Another reason was the expansion of imperialism through colonisation which further suggested transformations in the geographic space with distinct borders, commercial and industrial development of western Europe and political power relationship between nation-states (Billig 1995: 22).

In other parts of the world, the so called dependent and developing countries such as the Indian sub-continent including Bangladesh, where linguistic varieties, cultural practices and religious establishments had previously co-existed without distinct boundaries, nation-states emerged in different ways for different reasons. Separatist agitations arose as a consequence of decolonisation (Hobsbawn 1992). Decolonisation involved creating independent states out of existing colonial frontiers which was often done without reference to or consultation with its inhabitants (Ibid: 178). In the case of India, after its struggle for independence from British rule, the borders were drawn between India and Pakistan in 1947 to create two partitioned states bounded by religion mainly and majority language. The area of East Bengal (now Bangladesh), in the North- East of India, with its Bengali language majority, was changed to East Pakistan, and because of its Muslim majority population was annexed to the Urdu majority Islamic Pakistan on the north-west of India. They were geographically separated by an Indian land mass of more than 2000 km between them until 1971 when East Pakistan emerged as the nation-state of Bangladesh in 1971.

The formation of several 'nation-states' in the developed west was combined primarily with national economic interests but, in the developing parts of South Asia, the formation of the nation-state predominantly combined with national liberation and independence from persecuting colonisers. Nevertheless, with all their ethnic and linguistic heterogeneous entities and liberation nationalism, they were soon to imbibe the European nation building

values of controlled borders and economic advancement (Hobsbawn 1992: 169). In the case of Bangladesh, with Islam as the established religion of the state, it is the only Islamic country in the world that fought for separation on linguistic grounds (Ibid), Bengali/Bangla being spoken by 98% of its population.

The nation building activities in Bangladesh, as a new nation-state, started in 1971 after its separation from Pakistan. It coincided with the saturation of markets in the Global North, leading to an expansion of markets, competition and capitalistic interactions and global movements in every sphere as a web of inter-related domains or 'scapes' – 'ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes' (Appadurai 1996: 33). This had implications for socio-cultural and economic changes of the recent times both in the Global North as well as the Global South which have been described as 'a strikingly new interactive system' (Appadurai 1996: 27). In the current global conditions, nation-states are no longer individual independent units of development but 'inter-dependent' (Giddens 2000). In the developing globalised economy, the sovereignty of the nation-states and their capacity to govern public domains, like the provision and management of education, underwent dramatic changes as the so-called globalisation and competition in the international market intensified. Moreover, the rise and influence of international organisations like IMF (International Monetary Fund), WB (World Bank), OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), to oversee the economic and educational policies operating in different nation-states, further contributed to the internationalisation of sectors including higher education and development.

In the light of these global political and economic circumstances impinging on modern nation states, it is essential to consider the special characteristics of Bangladesh and its modernisation processes as it emerged as a sovereign state at a time when the sovereignty of nation states was at stake. More importantly, to contextualise the lived experiences of my participants who are on trajectories of social mobility, it is necessary for me to consider the local historical, socio-economic and political circumstances that led Bangladesh to focus on women's upliftment initiatives, the impact of the structural adjustment plans on them and the conditions under which women were educated and employed. A snapshot of some of the historical facts that determine Bangladesh

at the intersection of colonialism and decolonisation, nationalism and global capitalism would help place my research in the broader socio-economic picture and support my argument in later chapters that in Bangladesh all these historical forces have played their part more or less at the same time, although the neoliberalisation of every aspect of life, including education and language, has been dominant in the recent decades, as documented by literature reviewed in a later section.

As mentioned earlier, Bangladesh is a relatively young nation-state having separated from Pakistan in 1971. As a nation, it is determined by its origins in India as east Bengal, by its colonisation by Britain until 1947 (as part of India), by being an annexe to Pakistan from 1947 to 1971, and by its Muslim majority (83%), and by its moderate and secular values compared to the other Islamic countries in the Middle East. With a population of 163 million (World Bank data 2019) living in an area of about 147.63 km square (not much larger than England with more than twice its population), Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated and poorest countries in the world.

Most importantly, Bangladesh is determined by its majority language, Bangla, spoken by 98% of its population, and by its linguistic nationalism, which had triggered a national liberation movement in 1952, against the imposition of Urdu on a population with a strong Bengali identity, by the then West Pakistan government. This was followed by almost two decades of protests for autonomy which led to the 9-month long war of independence in 1970-1971, culminating in the birth of Bangladesh with Bangla as the national language and a secular form of government which allows religious law to prevail over personal and community life.

Since its independence, Bangladesh has been characterised as: a recipient of an excessive flow of foreign aid; having corrupt and powerful policy makers and privileged elites with colonial connections; highly patriarchal; a stronghold of active NGOs; and a large population of the world's poorest people (Lewis 2011). Bangladesh was one of the first countries to fully avail of the SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programmes), driven by the lure of development. SAPs are global economic programmes introduced in the early 80s to provide large loans to developing countries conditional to the adoption and fulfilment of certain policy prescriptions. Unfortunately, like some of the other Asian countries like Philippines, Bangladesh did not fare well and could not fulfil all the

conditions initially due to mismanagement and poor performance by some of the political regimes (Rahman 1992). The inability of the poorer countries to repay the loans thus resulted in the privatisation of government owned industries and institutions and weakening of the power of the state (Osmani 2005) to carry out its welfare duties.

In the last three decades or so Bangladesh has become more visible on the international scene due to the state's increased support for participation in the global capitalistic market, thanks to its women in the garment factories. The manufacturing sector, particularly the RMG (ready-made garment) sector, started gaining momentum. According to the Bangladesh Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA, [bgmea.com.bd /trade](http://bgmea.com.bd/trade) information), in 90/91 there were 834 factories which rose to 4621 by 2018/19 (not including the sub-contracted factories). The reason for the boom in the export industry was the SAPs measures which allowed preferential access to Bangladesh in some international markets like the EU. In addition, the achievement of some of the key Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly in the secondary education of girls, set by the UN raised Bangladesh from the status of an economically so called 'least developed' country to a 'developing' country in early 2018.

One of the main areas identified for development in the MDGs (2000 to 2015) followed by the Sustainable Development Goals (2015 to 2030) by the World Bank and implemented by the state mainly to repay the loans borrowed for the structural adjustment programmes, was the upliftment of women who formed almost 50% of the total population. This was partly realised through employment of women in RMG factories and the self-employment of rural women supported by NGO- run micro-credit programmes, two women's development initiatives much discussed in development literature. In addition, secondary education for girls was also prioritised by the World Bank as a salient measure for overall economic growth. These initiatives in women's development require further elaboration for an understanding of the circumstances the women in my research rise from. In the next section, I will first present some perceptions of women's development / empowerment work following the SAPs by drawing on literature from studies in women's development and then, highlight two areas of women's empowerment, secondary education and

employment that are relevant to my research. This will be followed by a theorising of the concept of empowerment.

#### **2.4 Women at the centre of development – Empowering women**

Until the 1980s and the 1990s, social class in Bangladesh had been defined by access to land assets in the countryside. Women's rural labour made a major contribution to agricultural production, although their participation in the public space was restricted by 'purdah' – the norms of the seclusion of women (Lewis 2011). With the advent of globalisation and the government's drive for modernisation, female migration to urban areas (mainly to overcome the hardships of rural life) and the subsequent presence of large numbers of women in the urban labour force have brought a major shift in their socio-economic status. On the one hand, they were part of a rising working middle class challenging the power of the smaller western educated urban elites, but more pragmatic to avail of the economic opportunities aligned with international aid. On the other, they constituted a class of urban poor, living in unprotected conditions and vulnerable to exploitative practices and social injustice.

The placing of women at the centre of economic development discourses in developing countries in South Asia has been challenged and critiqued as predominantly utilitarian and instrumentalist by several scholars in Women's Development Studies (Alam and Matin 1984; Stromquist 1997; Arends-Kuenning and Amin 2001; Kabeer 2005a; Karim 2008; Nazneen *et al.* 2011 ). Since the 1980s in Bangladesh, and in other countries like the Philippines, policy makers nationally, in an effort to integrate with global market conditions and to raise economic growth standards set by the international aid organisations, have focused on women's development (changed to 'empowerment' after 2000) as the 'magic bullet' (Kabeer 2005b) to resolve issues that were thought to hinder economic growth - wider issues such as poverty, illiteracy, increasing population and poor health and hygiene. 'Women are our most valuable resource' and 'empowering women is feeding a community' was the type of rhetoric that was rife in the World Bank, the UN and in the government policies (Prügl 2015). In a similar tune, from 2000 onwards, the concept of women's empowerment became entrenched in the development discourses and policies of the local government, the donor organisations, the NGOs as well as the local women's organisations in Bangladesh.

These discourses and policies have promoted measures with economic outcomes most often by strategically concealing or disguising the power arrangement involved in economic development (Lummis 1996). The debt crisis of the 1990s and the measures adopted to repay the SAPs loans to the World Bank had their impact not only in Bangladesh, but also on the labour and migration of women in poor Asian countries, including Thailand, South Korea and the Philippines. In an economic crisis like this, it has been studied, the worst hit are usually the women (Nadeam and Rayamajhi 2013). The feminization of labour in the Philippines and Thailand as nannies, maids and entertainers exported to wealthier countries such as Singapore and to Europe, and the exploitation through cheap labour of women in the Bangladesh factories, have generated funds and foreign currency to pay off the national debts accrued from the restructuring loans (Ibid 2013).

By reviewing the impact of the structural adjustments on women, I seek to understand how those from the rural working classes were defined, to contextualise the experiences of my participants on their journey of social mobility, and also to study the impact that these discourses have had on their understanding of empowerment. The two main areas in which women's development / empowerment was believed to be achieved in Bangladesh was the education of girls and employment of rural women, the areas in which the government was able to produce quantifiable reports of progress and benefits. These specific initiatives are of historical significance to my study as my participants often indirectly referred to them or sometimes assumed it was common knowledge, while sharing their lived experiences which have had consequences in their current status as students.

Regarding the benefits of educating girls, L.H. Summers of the Office of the Vice President of the World Bank, in his report on Economic Development (1992), states that research has convinced that 'investment in the education of girls may be the highest return of investment available in the developing world'. The report argues that the calculations presented imply that 'educating girls looks quite attractive compared to educating boys and quite likely has higher returns than health and family planning interventions' (Ibid. p.10). He argues that there is statistical evidence to show reduction in fertility rates and improved figures in children's education and health that can be related to the education of girls. In fact, Bangladesh exceeded its targets in primary and secondary

education between the years 1990 and 2016, with more girls than boys, bringing down, as anticipated, the numbers of child mortality and neo-natal mortality (SDGs Bangladesh first progress report, 2018, General Economic Division, Bangladesh Planning Commission). But while this major hurdle to economic growth may have been eliminated in Bangladesh in the recent decades, helping it to be raised from the status of an 'underdeveloped' country to a 'developing' country in terms of women's empowerment, the direct educational gains for the girls attending school presented a rather mixed picture of some economic gain but little improvement in matters of choice (Arends-Kuenning and Amin 2001).

As to the second area mentioned above in which women's participation was expected to raise economic growth, employment, two interventions to empower women as human capital made Bangladesh prominent in the international market. It involved the mass employment of women in the ready-made garment export industry and the micro-credit self-employment programmes for rural women. I will focus only on the RMG sector, as it relates to my research in two ways. Firstly, it is an important point on the trajectory of socio-economic mobility of my participants, the main focus of my study. Secondly, the RMG factories that my participants come from play an active role as one of the chief benefactors of the RMG students at IU by continuing to pay the wages during the 5-year period of study at the university, as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The RMG (ready-made garment) sector is a multi-million-dollar export industry today and has contributed to the national economy in significant ways. Bangladesh Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA, [bgmea.com.bd/trade](http://bgmea.com.bd/trade) information), for example, records RMG exports formed 84% of total exports in 18/19 compared to 50.4 % in 90/91. This amounted to \$34,133 million in 1992/93, compared to \$204,554 million in 2018/19. Behind all these sharply rising growth figures taking the GDP to 13% from 3% in 1991 is the RMG workforce of 4 million out of which about 85% are women, a great majority of them recruited from economically and socially disadvantaged rural backgrounds (Mustafa *et al.* 2016). Some surveys conducted to assess the empowerment and well-being of women factory workers also revealed a general satisfaction and an overall upgrade in their social and economic status – e.g., in domestic decision-making matters such as children's health and education

(Mustafa *et al.* 2016). Although the remittances at the family level may be low, the sheer number of women employed by the factories not only gave some financial uplift to rural Bangladesh but also effected on a very large scale the consequent 'radical challenge to the myth of male breadwinner model of the family in Bangladesh' (Kabeer and Mahmud 2004: 109).

However, targeting young rural women who were unskilled and on their first jobs on short term contracts has been viewed as exploitative and discriminatory on the part of the factory employers, as some studies revealed the downside of the RMG story. On the one hand, there was a large-scale migration of women from rural to urban and suburban areas where the factories and EPZs (Export Processing Zones) were located, bringing about a set-back in the local village and agricultural industries (Lewis 2011). On the other, the factory employers preferred unskilled women to men to work on assembly lines:

'For factory work, job announcement in the local media and press particularly targeted the young, so called agile female workers who were quick and nimble fingered because young females often are considered by male bosses to be more malleable and suitable for long working hours at repetitive tasks and easier to control than men...' (Nadeam and Rayamajhi 2013: 65).

Even though the factory working conditions have improved since the Rana Plaza tragedy, due to the intervention measures adopted by the international buyers, a study conducted by Ricardo David (2013) points to certain types of institutionalised discrimination that women suffer in the factories, including: harassment by male supervisors; gender based job roles; lower wages; forced over-time work, sometimes running to 6 hours a day on top of the normal 8 to 10 hour day; job insecurity; and poor literacy of workers leading to lack of awareness of their rights to health, safety and security. An analysis of women's empowerment discourses in public documents and political manifestoes in Bangladesh carried out by Nazneen *et al.* (2011) also shows how it is not always the donors or benefactors who impose their views of women's empowerment on the social actors, but rather the social actors involved in the projects – e.g., the government, the NGOs, the women's organisations, and the women themselves. The authors argue that these social actors each shape their understanding of the concept by linking it to the local, traditional and political conditions and conveniences. Their finding is that, although there is improvement in women's participation in education and employment, this is yet

to be matched with progress in terms of institutional and cultural changes as far as equality of power for women is concerned.

By educating girls at the secondary level some hurdles in terms of population control may have been crossed, and by giving women employment in the factories Bangladesh's multi-million-dollar industry engaging with multi-national firms may have boosted the economy. They may evidence some participation by women in education and employment. However, the question is: are there real gains for the women in terms of women's empowerment, understood in the transformative sense of the concept – i.e., besides economic, a cognitive, psychological and socio-political upliftment (Stromquist 1993) – effecting not only individual gains and insights but also collective action to challenge inequalities? This calls for an exploration of what women's empowerment really means.

The term 'empowerment' has gained popular currency in recent times in several spheres including education, management, labour unions or health. Since 2000, perhaps around the time of the setting of the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) by the developing countries, the term 'women's development' has shifted to 'women's empowerment' in international circles. This, in fact, reflects a shift in the international development economics discourse which has brought about the mainstreaming of gender inequalities and feminist concerns (Nazneen *et al.* 2011). In a deeper sense, while eluding a single fixed definition, 'empowerment' can then be understood to bear emancipatory connotations; in Stromquist's words: 'one which brings up the question of personal agency rather than reliance on intermediaries, one that links action to needs, and one that results in making significant collective change. It is also a concept that does not merely concern personal identity but brings out a broader analysis of human rights and social justice' (1993: 13). It thus assumes adult women in a sub-ordinate position needing upliftment.

This idea of empowerment became politically mobilised in women's movements in the Western world in the 1970s (Stromquist 1993), although the fight for women's right to vote had started in early 1900s. It must be remembered in this context, nevertheless, that the concept of women's empowerment and rights was not new in South Asia. While Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) was founding the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Britain in 1903, Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati (1858-1922), a scholar,

social reformer and pioneer in women's education and emancipation, had already founded the Mukti Mission in the 1890s, in colonial India. Meanwhile, Begum Rokeya (1880-1932), an activist and a prolific writer in the then Indian East Bengal (now Bangladesh), was busy publishing her feminist (to use a more modern term) science fiction novella in 1908, protesting against colonial and patriarchal oppression of women and forming the Muslim Women's Association.

Basically, empowerment is related to relationships of power, and is understood as a process that assumes an awareness of powerlessness and mobility from a less powerful state or subordination to a more powerful or equally powerful state. It involves personal intervention allowing the power to rise from within; hence it is closely linked to the personal experiences and processes undergone by the subject. Michel Foucault refers to the phenomenon of power as an ongoing enactment and negotiation of meaning by all subjects. He shows how, by personal agency, human beings go through a process of subjectivation (Foucault, 1982b, 1984b); that is, power is contingent on the negotiation of meaning in social interactions and on personal agency that bring about changes in the individuals and the power relationships. How empowerment is understood depends on the user's interpretation of power, hence is socially constructed. In this sense, Rowland (1995) argues, 'Empowerment must involve undoing negative social constructions, so that the people affected come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and influence' (Ibid: 103). If negative notions of power and its unequal distribution are overlooked, as in the case of women's empowerment projects discussed above, the process of empowerment becomes futile and yet another attempt to hide inequalities and oppression. Empowerment can be seen as constitutive of three dimensions, namely: developing a sense of self-confidence and capacity that requires self-agency; being able to negotiate and influence relationships and decision-making; and going beyond that to collaborate with others for a bigger impact and transformation (Rowland 1995) in socio-political contexts.

Understood as a socio-political concept, then, empowerment is more than just consciousness raising among a group of women or just a quick-fix political or economic intervention. The diverse individual needs of women must be understood even to achieve a collective aim of social justice. Viewing from this perspective, the education and employment initiatives by NGOs and the

government for women's empowerment in Bangladesh, under the financial support of international agencies, have been projects with partial achievement since they were planned to accumulate human capital mainly, as the literature on women's development indicates. Rather than achieving equality to make social choices in all spheres of life, which Sen (1997, 1998) refers to as 'human capability', these projects have used the potential of women to achieve other economic goals such as 'empowering' women to eradicate poverty, 'empowering' women to reduce fertility, and 'empowering' women to achieve gender equality in education. Human capability and human capital, Sen (1997) argues, are connected but distinct, the former in its broader perspective encompassing the latter. For example, if education is viewed as commodity production (increasing human capital) in terms of adding value of production in the economy and income for the educated person, it is enhancing human capital. If, however, education is taken to be beyond human capital to increase the ability of the educated to make informed choices and to make herself heard and taken seriously, then it is addressing capability. According to Sen, these approaches could be understood as processes of economic development and social development which are inter-related and vital for empowerment and for the advancement of human well-being. The capability approach places the individual at the centre and supports the view that her well-being depends on her ability to participate actively in the society – i.e. depends on her agency to pursue freely her goals which she values (Sen 1999b: 189-203). As women's empowerment is a subjective process, as discussed earlier, it is important 'to bear in mind the important distinction between women as a socially subordinate category and women as a highly diverse group of individuals' (Kabeer 2001: 82).

With these transformative empowerment concepts in mind, and while studying the subjectivities of the women in my study, I intend to investigate the kind of tensions that may exist between utility and capability in the university's understanding of women's empowerment as well as my participants' as they pursued their liberal arts education in the medium of English. I am also interested in how the ideologies about English as the language of power, social mobility, international development, and as a pathway for promise (as the university proclaims), might contribute to the tension under the current neoliberal conditions. But these assumptions about English have to be

understood in local, historical and socio-economic contexts, and in developing nation-states such as Bangladesh, where education and employment are empowerment priorities, language is involved in two important ways, both as a source of symbolic added value and as a mode of management of global networks (Duchêne and Heller 2012: 10). In fact, the medium of instruction (MOI) and the teaching of English as a second language in Bangladesh are planned and implemented by the State in connection with local, national and international socio-economic and political interests, thus shaping the ideas about and tensions in language choice in education. I will attend to these issues in the following as I discuss modern nation building.

## **2.5 Language and modern nation building**

In the nation building of so-called developing countries, education and language-in-education planning have traditionally been key sites of planning national development, often based on taken for granted goals of economic and political advancement. That is to say, language planning in these settings is seen as a 'site of the construction of a particular discourse on language and society' and can be ideologically loaded (Blommaert 1996: 215). It defines what a 'good' society is and what is perceived as best for its social and economic development (Ibid). Blommaert argues that as these assumptions are time and society specific, a study of language planning demands historical awareness. Awareness of how language was embedded in the histories of colonialism, nationalism and capitalism helps us understand how social inequities are constructed or deconstructed over time (Heller and McElhinny 2017: 3). Hence, language / language planning as resource constitutes a key site for the construction of social identities and unequal social relations (Bourdieu 1977a). In short, language in education planning is not apolitical. Inequality arises from ideologies or entrenched beliefs about language and language preferences in particular bilingual and multi-lingual settings, ideas which in turn are framed and mapped on to people and activities associated with them (Irvine and Gal, 2000, Woolard 1998).

To fully understand dynamics of social change in bilingual education it is important to consider how the views on bilingualism and language competence have changed over the course of political economic history in the local context in response to the shifting global demands (Heller 2007; Ricento 2015). In the

case of Bangladesh, the beliefs about English language from 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards and their impact on language-in-education policies are rooted in its colonial past (British colonialism), its struggle for separation from Pakistan grounded in linguistic nationalism (post-colonial nationalism), and in the contemporary neo-colonial drive towards economic globalisation (global capitalism), including a lure for what is perceived as modernity based on an American life-style (Imam 2005; Kabir 2012; Hamid *et al.* 2013; Chowdhury and Kabir 2014; Hamid and Erling 2016).

The ideology of English as the language of power, class and dominance emerged during the long British colonial period in the Indian sub-continent which lasted until 1947. This brought with it the power of the 'bourgeoisie' based on their attempts to establish its superiority (Gal and Irvine 1995; Irvine and Gal 2000) through hierarchisation and racialisation of social groups and languages. English as the language of government and administration was made available only to a few influential native elites in the colonies. The political agenda of the British in imparting English education to colonies in Asia – e.g., in India – dates back to Macaulay's Anglicist endeavours in 1835 (Phillipson 1992) to cultivate educated personnel to serve the British Raj. It also follows down to the establishment of the British Council, in 1935, for cultural propaganda and to further the long-term interests of Britain, perceived as neo-colonial in the post-independence period.

The ideology of English as a mark of elitism that co-exists with Bangla, as two separate organic bodies, is anchored in the ideological framework of modern nationalism and the associated one-nation-one-culture-one-language slogan (Anderson 1983; Billig 1995; Bauman and Briggs 2003). As Bangladesh sought independence from Pakistan drawing on post-colonial nationalism, the European idea that links one culture to one language as well as the political significance of a language for claiming territory, nationhood and sovereignty (Gal and Irvine 1995: 1) became instrumental and thus shaped the national identity of the land of Bangla as Bangladesh, particularly in 1971. Since then, Bangla has remained the heart and soul of the nation, although English, seen as the legacy of the British Raj, has continued as the language of communication and education among the society's British educated elite (Hamid and Erling 2016).

The ideology of English as the international language of trade and communication, as well as the language of economic and social development, emerged with the rise of the global markets in the 70s and 80s, and the massive flow of resources across nations. In this context, English has at times been mobilised in Bangladesh to challenge its linguistic nationalism (Chowdhury and Kabir 2014), but this time with the US taking over to cast its economic influences. In this regard, the ideologies of English that circulate in Bangladesh today, and which shape its language policies and choices, entail the assumption that English is the language of social and economic mobility, and the language of higher education and empowerment. As such, the British Council, joined by American aid organisations such as US Agency for International Development (USAID), have continued spreading English in Bangladesh via marketing of ELT initiatives while at the same time dominating education and development activities. This, however, contrasts with burgeoning literature denouncing that these aid agencies lack local understanding and fuel capitalist unequal profit-making logics linked to the interests of multibillion global business enterprises (Rahman 2005; Hamid *et al.* 2013; Kabir and Greenwood 2017; Hamid 2016a).

Despite the resistance though, to English as the language of the elite, of the coloniser and as the neoliberal hegemon in conflict with Bangla (Imam 2005; Kabir 2012; Chowdhury and Kabir 2014; Hamid and Baldauf 2014) in Bangladesh today the demand for English and for English medium education continues to increase, as the above literature indicates, not just by influences from outside but more from the elitist supporters of English with their vested interests from within. In addition, employers prefer candidates with 'good' communication in English and parents want English education for their children – they either send them to private schools, where they believe the quality of education is better than in the public schools (English being equated to quality), or resort to private tuition in English with the hope of finding admission in English medium secondary schools or colleges, as will be illustrated in my data in later chapters.

The aspirations for English are driven not always by the language itself, but by a desire to belong to a more favoured class or for economic reasons, thereby creating categories of English medium and Bangla medium besides reproducing hierarchies and a class structure within English education based on imagined levels of acceptable English language competency. This is

demonstrated by the high level of competition for places in English medium colleges and universities which causes immense stress among aspiring students and their parents who cannot afford the tuition fee. For example, at IU, in one of the batches, several hundreds of applicants across Bangladesh took the admissions test for just 25 sponsored places that were available that year. Indeed, the main objective of IU is to empower women from socio-economically deprived backgrounds as leaders and change-makers, and what it deems necessary to accomplish its mission, particularly with women from Bangla medium schools, is the provision of intensive English language training that will enable them to access UG programmes in liberal arts and sciences through the medium of English.

The current assumption that English is the language of promise and that an education in English opens doors to opportunities and is essential for social and economic mobility or empowerment is central to my research, a subject that has been much discussed and debated in recent literature. This belief springs from the more enduring idea circulated in most countries of the world today that English is a global language and a 'mainstream feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (Graddol 2006: 22). It is supposed to be a global language in the sense that it does not belong to any one country and that the language called English exists and is believed to be accepted in several variegated forms. However, this does not negate the fact that what is believed to be global in most countries is the local form used by specific social groups within some privileged countries, thereby allowing access to more resources for some and less for others. This critical view is missed by those that are made to believe that English leads to empowerment for all. Empowerment may be happening in some ways for some people, but my question is – is it happening on equal terms or is it producing / reproducing inequalities in some other ways?

It has been argued that there is not enough evidence of direct co-relation between English education and economic development in developing countries (Seargent and Erling 2011). It is a misconception based on the fact that the highest GDP is found in countries where English is the dominant language in communication and education. While some studies have shown that competence in English and an English education have brought increase in salary and better job opportunities in the local employment market (Kapur and Chakraborty 2008) in Asian countries, there is no guarantee of transnational

mobility as the proportion of jobs requiring high competence in English is small compared to the number of job seekers across the world (Ricento 2015). Ricento proposes that, while there are other factors that impact the labour market, education policy should follow informed judgments about the 'relative value of languages within identified employment sectors' (Ibid: 37).

Moreover, the variety of English and level of English competence considered acceptable in a local context may be inadequate in a more English-dominant competitive context, thus failing to fulfil the required communicative functions (Blommaert 2005: 77-78). Students and job seekers migrating from Bangladesh to Europe and America, for instance, have been found to do jobs not commensurate with their local qualifications (Imam 2005). As far as English education for social mobility is concerned, Imam argues that 'by no means everyone who acquires English will join the local or global elite' (Ibid: 480). She believes that, while English helps Bangladesh to become more globally connected, it also renders it more globally vulnerable to exploitation. The lure of English has promoted the rise in the number of international English programmes that cost three times more than local education. Besides, Imam states, this has created a lucrative market for English teachers from abroad or local teachers with foreign qualifications leading to segregation of local teachers with local qualifications. She questions the ethics of such a system which raises hopes of those seeking social and economic mobility by creating illusions of English as the language of promise.

At the same time, it has been debated, to deny the poor and the marginalised sections of the society access to English education, which seems to have brought socio-economic mobility to some, has been deemed as another potential way of furthering social inequality and segregation based on economic grounds (Brutt-Griffler 2005). In his discussion on the ideology of English as the language of economic and social mobility, Ricento (2015) counter argues that English education alone is not the solution to the elimination of poverty nor to address issues of social mobility on a national scale. What is needed to evidence English as a promoter of social mobility or as an inhibitor of local development in low-income countries, he posits, is a critical analysis of the neo-liberal policies and of their 'effects on status, learning and usefulness of languages, including in sectors of the knowledge economy' (Ibid: 42). He

asserts: 'English is not the inherent hegemon, or the de facto oppressor, or the ticket to social and economic mobility...' (Ibid: 42).

Some scholars have represented the local opinion on the advantages of learning the dominant language, be it English or an official regional or national language, as opposed to insisting on learning in one's first language or mother tongue. In some circumstances, particularly in urban and sub-urban settings, education in the mother tongue or first language, instead of English, has not been favoured by all social groups, as it was seen not empowering them in the current neo-liberal competitive conditions (Gupta 1997). In my own experience as a lecturer in English in India, I have witnessed parents and students demanding for places in the English medium sections, as they viewed being offered places in the vernacular medium as a denial of rights to education and socio-economic mobility. While the demand for English as the MOI for social and economic reasons is well recognised, studies have evidenced the advantages of using the first language in classrooms, along with English, as a possible solution to issues of equitable access to a globalising economy (Hornberger and Vaish 2009). This would work in monolingual classrooms, though in multi-lingual classrooms where students and teachers do not share their first languages the choice of a common language of communication becomes problematic, as in the case of IU where students come from different Asian countries and the teachers are from all over the world. In this regard, English can also be seen as the language for inter-cultural communication (Sharifian and Jamarani 2013).

In Bangladesh today, while English has been embraced as a language that opens doors to education and employment and economic prosperity, Bangla still remains the first language of daily life and education for a large majority. There is a strong feeling about English taking over as the language of the educated and the powerful, creating social inequalities and social segregation between the rich and the poor which is often equated to English medium and Bangla medium, respectively, those that can afford English medium through private education and those who cannot, English serving as an indexical of class (Imam 2005, Hamid and Erling 2016) . One of the educational objectives of IU, an independent university, is to enable students who had been deprived of an English medium secondary education, through a special English provision to help access HE in English. My study aims to reveal if or what kind

of social differences and struggles are reproduced due to language choices and if the competence in English language and communication plays a role in the local definition of a 'good' or 'successful' student, with what consequences for students from English medium and Bangla medium schools, a division created in the Bangladesh educational system through its medium of instruction (MOI) policies, which are outlined below.

## **2.6 Language-in-education policies and the privatisation of higher education in Bangladesh**

An overview of the ideologies about English in Bangladesh and the questions raised about the construction of English as the language of socio-economic mobility, in the previous section, gives us some indication of the tensions that might exist and impact on language-in-education planning in Bangladesh. In this section, I outline the specific reasons for the shifts and divisions in the MOI and English as the medium of instruction (EMI) policies through a review of literature focused on Bangladesh (2.6.1). After that, I discuss the privatisation of higher education in such a context (2.6.2) where in the local perception 'private' equates to English and English equates to international, in order to contextualise the International University (IU) that I intend to zoom in.

### **2.6.1 Medium of instruction - Bangla or English?**

The significance of MOI policies in relation to English as the medium of instruction (EMI) can be traced through three important historical periods intertwined with the beliefs about English versus Bangla – 'the colonial MOI', 'the post-colonial nationalistic MOI and the 'appropriated MOI' in the current late capitalist period (Hamid, Jahan and Islam 2013: 144-145). Given these historical connections to English in Bangladesh, in the early years of its independence, by an act of parliament, Bangla was established as the language of communication in all walks of life including government and administration and as the MOI even in higher education (Banu and Sussex 2001; Rahman 2005), as well as in schools, totally ignoring the presence of several ethnic minority languages in the country. Although English received policy recognition due to historical reasons, the sentimentalities surrounding the Bangla language

pre-dominated, and English was moved from being a second language to the status of a foreign language (Hamid and Erling 2016).

It was not long before the process of decolonisation was overtaken by globalisation which brought with it the assumptions of English as the global language, the path to economic growth, the language of education and technology, and the language for international development (Seargent and Erling 2011). As Lin and Martin (2005) observe, the South Asian British colonies which are at different historical and economic junctures on the development trajectory still share one contemporary moment in history. In their encounters with the forces of globalisation, English has been unanimously perceived as a powerful resource for their socio-economic advancement (ibid: 2), and therefore, an important language to be considered for inclusion in the education system. While nationalism and decolonisation entailed a resistance to English as a coloniser's language in the nation building process of Bangladesh, 'globalisation made the borders of the nation states porous and re-inserted the importance of the English language' (Canagarajah 2005: 196).

Thus, the re-emergence of English as a dominant language in education in the former British colonies is more a result of the local hegemony of English (Pennycook 1994a). The appropriation of English in Asian contexts (Kachru 1996) has interesting variations. While in India it has been Indianised and appropriated as lingua franca and as the language of intra-state communication, in Bangladesh its use is purely functional still. That is, although English has become a part of the socio-cultural system in a rather *laissez faire* manner as the MOI of private education (Hamid, Jahan and Islam 2013), there is 'seemingly no possibility of English becoming the lingua franca ' (Rahman 2005 : 31), at least not in the near future, mainly due to the fact that 98% of the population speak Bangla, and secondly because at the policy level and in more conservative circles the domination of English over Bangla is perceived as westernisation of local culture. Caught in a language war between the pride of the political ideology of national language, Bangla, and the profit of the global language, English, the government has been unclear about its language policies since the first National Education Commission set up in 1974. The education policies and reports highlight the introduction of English in public school education but lack clear documentation of the actual implementation of

the policies (see Chowdhury and Kabir 2014, for a consolidated list of education policy and commission reports from 1974 to 2010).

A review of the literature on English-in-education policy and practice in urban and rural Bangladesh, in all the education sectors, primary, secondary, tertiary and the madrassa strand of religious education points to a common line of argument in all the discussions (Imam 2005; Rahman S 2005; Hossain and Tollefson 2007; Hamid 2010, 2011a,; Kabir 2010; Hamid *et al.* 2013; Chowdhury and Kabir 2014; Farooqui 2014; Rahman A 2015; Akbas 2016). This can be summarised in the words of Zillur Rahman Siddiqui (2003, cited and translated by Rahman 2005) who regrets: 'we lack a definite national policy on language, based on consensus of the people and that's the main reason for the apparent downfall of the overall standard of both English and Bangla' (Ibid 2005: 32). The over-emphasis on Bangla and the political attempts to suppress the dominance of English during the nationalistic period is perceived by some scholars as a setback in the education of a generation of students. The gaps in the implementation of the language policy of English is also attributed to the periods of political instability resulting from the take-over of the government by military coups.

An overview of four decades of reforms and the seven national education commission, from independence in 1971 until the early 1990s, shows the shifts in the emphasis on English in the policies, as an almost irreconcilable friction between English and Bangla (see Chowdhury and Kabir 2014, for an overview table). The lack of clarity and confusion over the implementation of the language policy and its practice can be directly linked to the dilemma in multilingual settings, where multilingualism is perceived more as a problem than as a resource. However, focusing on South Asian countries in non-Anglo cultural contexts particularly, globalisation has necessitated internationalisation of education in the adoption of English as the language of instruction in higher education. This has encouraged applied linguists and TESOL scholars to shift the traditional ESL paradigm to the English as an international language (EIL) paradigm which emphasises the teaching and learning of English as a pluricentric language – as practised by multilingual speakers of English for international trade and intercultural communication (Canagarajah 1999, Sharifian 2009, Holliday 2009, Matsuda and Friedrich 2012, Marlina 2014). The lack of resources to train teachers and provide learning materials to implement

the English policy was another important factor too. Currently in Bangladesh, English is a compulsory subject from Class 1 to 12, and the medium of instruction along with Bangla in public sector colleges and universities. This is seen by some educationalists as 'the possibility of an education system that can bring about a healthy juxtaposition between heritage and modernity' (Chowdhury and Kabir 2014: 1). However, the government's initiatives to encourage the private sector to open English medium schools and universities, from 1990 onwards, catering to the demands of the rich elite of the society with western connections, has made a significant neo-liberal appearance by opening a linguistic market (Hamid 2016).

There are legitimate reasons for the boom in private schools and universities. With a per capita national income of US\$ 840, a literacy rate of around 53%, and a population of 165 million, Bangladesh could afford only 2.2% of its GDP to education, which is one of the lowest in South Asia. In addition, 30% of this population has lived below the poverty line (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2013, in Hamid and Erling 2016: 27). Nevertheless, despite the large population and its financial constraints, Bangladesh, in the last three decades, has advocated an English-in-Education policy as indispensable for human capital development. The gap between high policy expectations and low financial capacity was being filled by a reliance on donor-funded projects mainly from the US and the UK which have promoted English language education and training in English language teaching (e.g., English in Action and Project English, launched in 2008 and 2007 by the Department for International Development and the British Council, respectively). Consequently, this has produced divisive medium of instruction (MOI) policies for the public and the growing private sectors of education, including higher education (Hamid and Baldauf 2014). The impact of such divisive policies on higher education institutions (HEI) in Bangladesh are discussed in the next section.

### **2.6.2 Privatisation of Higher Education in Bangladesh**

The adoption of English as the medium of instruction in education, in several former British colonies in Asia, and particularly in higher education, marks the divide between the public and private universities (Ramanathan 2007, Hamid *et al.* 2013, Hamid and Baldauf 2014). The division between the public and private sectors in higher education in Bangladesh is evident in their MOI policy –

English only in private universities, and Bangla and English in the public universities. This indexes social and economic significance for those who can afford an English education and for those who cannot in a competitive job market. In Bangladesh, although English was treated as a foreign language initially in the post-colonial period, a handful of English medium international schools were allowed to operate to cater to the needs of expatriate communities and the local elite.

The restriction of English in the public sector schools and universities only increased the demand for private education in English medium, which was perceived both as prestigious and promising. This led to an expansion of the private school industry followed by a natural progression to the opening of private universities, through the Private University Act in 1990 (Banu and Sussex 2001). Since then, there has been a rapid growth in the number of private universities. Currently, out of a total of 135 universities, 40 are public and 95 are private universities, with a total of over two million students enrolled in HEIs (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics [BANBEIS], 2017). This contrasts with numbers in 1971, when there were only 6 public universities and 26,390 students, according to the Ministry of Education, Bangladesh.

The Private University Act (1992) specifies that all tertiary education, public and private, is to be co-ordinated and monitored by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh which is responsible for maintaining standards and compliance. This has resulted in the Higher Education system being taken over by a state controlled UGC that has adopted a corporate and managerial style of governance (Kabir and Webb 2018). While the private universities are funded by private philanthropists and industrialists, the public universities are funded by the government and partly by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other international organisations. The state allocation to tertiary education was 0.23 % of the GDP (ourworldindata.org) and the total education expenditure according to the World Bank stood at 1.5 % of the GDP in 2016 and continues to remain one of the lowest in South Asia (The World Bank, dataworldbank.org).

There are three main reasons why the government agreed to the proposals made by stakeholders for the promotion of private universities in Bangladesh in the 1990s, namely, a) large numbers of school graduate

applications for a disproportionately low number of university places available, the government having exceeded its targets for secondary education; b) lack of government resources to open more public universities, only a very small percentage of the education budget being available for higher education; and c) brain-drain of the cream of the society to universities outside Bangladesh. Consequently, since the private higher education act was officially passed in parliament in 1992, the number of private universities has risen dramatically; more than double the number of public universities as stated earlier. They have played a significant role in meeting the demand for HE in the medium of English (Islam and Salma 2016). The private universities offer market-led Business and IT courses mostly in line with the American system and standards, as American education is perceived to offer a more lucrative market than the traditional British university system (Alam *et al.* 2007, IIEP research paper, UNESCO).

In addition, an affiliation with Western systems of education is assumed to be part of the internationalisation of HE, and a projection of the 'global brand mentality' (Wildavsky 2010: 168). In his book about how global universities are shaping the world, Wildavsky argues that 'higher education has become a form of international trade' (Ibid.:167) wherein universities compete in the global education market as in other markets. The internationalisation process has involved attracting foreign students, a transnational movement of students with a 'global brand' mentality, the creation of branch universities or satellite centres in other countries, and more recently the rise of world class institutions competing on global university rankings in Asian countries from where students previously migrated are now attracting foreign students themselves – e.g., Japan, Singapore, China and India. To add to the list, IU in Bangladesh, as a unique international university, recruits women from more than 11 Asian countries.

In Bangladesh, an institution is perceived as 'international' when its standards and curriculum follow an American or Western European system and /or have academic or financial links with universities in a foreign country. Most important of all, it is considered international as English is the medium of instruction. An international university, it is believed, also provides a steppingstone for student mobility to other parts of the world. Also, as part of its internationalisation of HE, besides encouraging private universities to flourish and the migration of students abroad, the Government of Bangladesh is open to

the setting up of independent international schools run by embassies like the Australian Embassy and the American Embassy and of international universities that have been given full autonomy by an Act of Parliament and Charters of Memorandum of Understanding. Such elite institutions are fewer in number, but are the most prestigious, exclusive and expensive, fully funded and run by international stakeholders.

One such institution is IU, which according to its website is an independent international university that offers an American style liberal arts education. In order to understand what liberal arts education originally meant and what its main purpose was it is necessary to go back in history. Brown (2015) traces the historical background of liberal arts education in America and the changes and contradictions that it has suffered due to the shifts in the political economic systems. With its origins in the classical education of 5<sup>th</sup> century Europe, covering disciplines like grammar, mathematics, philosophy, literature, arts and classics and critical pedagogy, the term 'liberal arts' came into use in the 14<sup>th</sup> century tagged with 'class', the pursuit of learning that was fit for the elite and ruling class of white men who were free and rich enough to afford a life of learning and leisure – as opposed to the vocation-based training of the common working-class masses.

In the post war years, when education was democratised in Western Europe and America, liberal arts was extended to the masses through public universities and community colleges. The aim was altruistic, to continue with quality academic liberal education in order to put into practice social mobilisation measures and break the cycle of social and economic deprivation and inequalities. While this move demonstrated equality as an ideal, it did not do away with class stratification and 'selectivism' (Brown 2015: 186) seen in the private / public divide. The advent of neo-liberal market rationality, Brown adds, with the university league tables as an example, contributed to the promotion of competition and profit-oriented consumer education with promises of social and economic gains to attract larger numbers, including working class men, women, ethnic minority populations and migrants. In these terms, and as 'centres of excellence' for the preparation of its students as neoliberal subjects with skills to compete in the job market (Urciuoli 2003b), liberal arts colleges were no exception as far as the neoliberalisation of education was concerned.

Adapting education to meet neoliberal demands has its effects on the conceptualisation of language and communication, which are now understood as skills, and based on neoliberal principles, claim to raise the value of individuals in various competitive educational and workplace settings (Martín Rojo and Del Percio, 2020). In educational programmes in Bangladesh, language learning, particularly English language learning in higher education institutions, is at the top of the agenda and is a vital component of the skills package ( Banu and Sussex 2001; Rahman 2005). In the current HE scenario, public colleges and universities across the world face financial and political constraints to continue to offer quality liberal education to produce democratic citizens and with the pressure of having to keep to the original aims of a liberal education. At the same time, getting a place and studying in elite, top universities has become a matter of prestige and status (Brown 2015: 192-193). Furthermore, the reliance on corporate funding is leading several universities to become centres of corporate culture and centres of excellence, e.g., academic leadership being taken over by corporate leadership geared towards raising funds for the university and marketing for the business sponsors and in the rise of the ‘academic managers’ (Giroux 2002: 435). Accordingly, institutions governed by such neo-liberal ways of thinking produce specific types of subjects (Brown 2015).

In my research, I aim to investigate what specific types of transformations are projected by the students at IU which claims to offer a liberal arts education to empower women from marginalised backgrounds. But before delving into IU (see Chapter 5), I first need to account for my theoretical and epistemological choices which I account for in the next two chapters.

## **2.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I have examined the ways in which the emergence of Bangladesh as a neo-liberal nation-state in the recent decades, with the enduring influences of its colonial past, has impacted on the education and empowerment (or development) of women. By highlighting two prominent interventions by the government and other stakeholders, to empower women through education and employment in the RMG factories, the chapter engages with relevant literature in development and feminist studies to show the instrumentalist and capitalist perceptions (and institutionalisation) of the concept

of women's empowerment, an important aspect to understand the environment in which the focal university and my research participants functioned. The chapter shows that these local initiatives are driven by a lure for development to become globally marketable which is shaped by powerful international financial structures, one of the major sites in the modernisation process being language and education. The chapter also traces the histories of English in Bangladesh and the impact on how English and English language learning are perceived in Bangladesh today which, in turn, have also impacted on the education of my participants. The drive to compete in global markets has not spared Bangladesh from the privatisation and internationalisation of HE as well as from the discourse of English as the language of development and empowerment in the process, particularly in the private sectors, despite the social and political tensions around it. Through a review of related literature on language and education in Bangladesh, the chapter offers a critical introduction to the study of an independent international university and the trajectories of a group of former factory workers as they pursue an education in English to become socially and economically empowered.

## **Chapter 3: Neoliberal Subjectivity, Language and Education – A Critical Sociolinguistic Ethnography**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of the modern nation building processes in Bangladesh and highlighted the impact of a neoliberal capitalism and its market logic of profit and investment on women's empowerment, education and language vis-à-vis larger histories of colonialism, post-colonial nationalism and modernity. As a sequence to this, in Chapter 3, I place my study of neoliberal subjectivity in the educational setting of Bangladesh within a conceptual framework in order to bring a theoretical focus to the analysis of trajectories of empowerment of a group of women from marginalised backgrounds. They were formerly factory workers but enrolled at International University (IU) where ideas about English language learning and leadership skills, as part of a liberal arts education, play a dominant role in making social differences, deciding who is a 'good' student, what it means to become empowered women, and what skills are deemed necessary to get access to the global market.

In what follows I first conceptualise the major themes that underpin my study (3.2), after which I place my research within a critical sociolinguistic ethnographic framework and provide an outline of the analytical framework that I propose for my study (3.3).

### **3.2 Conceptual framework – Neoliberal Subjectivation, Language Learning and Affect**

The main objective of my thesis is to understand the process of 'becoming empowered' through self-regulation and in relation to a neoliberal capitalistic rationality of self-responsibility, self-interestedness and preparedness for the global market. I am interested in documenting how my participants projected themselves as certain kinds of 'subjects' with desirable attributes associated with skills such as leadership, resilience, flexibility, critical thinking and English language communication. I also see their emotions playing an important role in their choices and negotiations of their identities as they navigate their social lives. As such, the concepts of subjectivation, the entrepreneurial language learner and affect provide a conceptual foundation for my research to draw on;

they bring an inter-relatedness between the themes and categories that we shall see emerging in later chapters. These will be addressed below, in turn.

### **3.2.1 Power, Self and Subjectivation**

By anchoring my arguments in Michel Foucault's theorising of power, self and subjectivation, I seek to understand how 'human beings are made subjects' and the complex power relations when they are placed 'in relations of production and signification' (Foucault 1977 in 2002: 326). In so doing, I am drawn to know how the empowerment of women at the intersection of gender and social class is understood and circulated at IU and what 'becoming empowered' involves. I align with the view of power as generative and of empowerment as a form of awareness of the social dynamics of power, from the part of the less powerful, and their capacity in gaining control over their own lives (Rowlands 1995). Hence, the empowerment of women in Asian contexts involves a realisation on the part of the working-class women, the factory workers in my case study, of the normalised ways in which they are subjected to social injustice, not only due to the reproduction of class stratification in the current neo-liberal capitalist conditions (Block 2018) but also to the persistent gender disparities prevalent in patriarchal societies. In other words, empowerment involves awareness, resistance and gaining voice over social class and gender issues (Nadeam and Rayamajhi 2013). Since my study encompasses self-agency (or capacity) and negotiation of identities in relations of power – i.e., a focus on how the techniques of domination and the regulation of the self in the institutions concerned operate, it requires a deeper understanding of the concepts of self / subject and power, and their interconnectedness with the concept of governance.

While speaking of 'empowerment', therefore, it is necessary to explore first what 'power' means and what the role is of the individual subject in power relations. According to Foucault (1982b), 'power' is relational, that is enacted by all and is produced socially in ongoing negotiations over meaning. Relational implies that power is not always given, as assumed in most women's empowerment projects, including IU. It is also taken, meaning that individuals create conditions of freedom but are also constrained by historical, social and economic circumstances in the processes of negotiation. As the realisation of powerlessness by a certain group of women and their capacity to take control

are part of a subjective process, empowerment happens from an experience of the self within, as a 'subjective' experience. In Foucauldian terms, power is an enactment, is socially constructed, and in the strategic game of exercise of power there is potential for human agency and resistance. In short, 'freedom' in the Foucauldian sense (1984a) presents human beings as subjects who are both free and constrained. Therefore, the notion of empowerment of women can be best understood as a process in which the participants' struggles and their capacity to resist become the focal point.

Foucault's theorising of power in such terms problematises the understanding and practice of women's empowerment in at least three ways. First, the notion of empowerment is assumed as 'giving' marginalised women the power in terms of skills to become socially and economically mobilised. Second, empowerment becomes limited to time-bound projects as they are often accountable to funding bodies in terms of measurable outcomes resulting in an over-reliance on economic indicators or 'counting the women' (Kabeer 1999) – e.g., the number of women from working class enrolled and graduated or the number of women in 'top' jobs, which have nothing to do with women's empowerment in the fuller sense (Kabeer 1999). Women's empowerment is about power in that it is a socio-political process whereby people get involved in power relations, negotiations and exercise of control (Batiwala 2007; Rowlands 1995). Third, empowerment, like power, is on-going and dynamic as it is socially constructed in daily interactions as social conditions change and give rise to new complex needs at the inter-section of race, class and gender. Hence, empowerment or disempowerment may happen to people at different times and in different ways, changing the power relations all the time.

In this sense, when women's empowerment projects work under the assumption that power is something that is held and exercised by a certain group over a group of marginalised women or women needing power, I argue, it raises questions about who holds the power, over whom, and who should the powerless women emulate to become equally powerful in the current socio-economic conditions. Indeed, short term women's empowerment projects embedded in misinformed assumptions and ideologies, and with selfish interests to serve as 'magic-bullets' to achieve other targets – particularly in South Asian contexts after the 1990s (See Chapter 2) – have often been viewed as not fully realising the objectives of women's empowerment (Batiwala 2007).

For an empirical study of power and of how individuals are turned (or turn themselves) into certain types of desired or 'empowered' subjects with certain power (that is, subjectivation), Foucault suggests taking as a starting point the forms of resistance against different forms of power – e.g., the power of men over women, of parents over children, of doctors over patients, of teachers over students and of administration over the ways people live. The target of these struggles is to produce the effect of power and the objective of these struggles is not so much as an opposition to an institution, group, the elite, or a class but to the technique or form of power (Foucault 1982b in 2002: 329-330):

'This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attracts him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognise, and others have to recognise him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subject' (Ibid: 331).

'Subjectivation', or the submission of the self to the process of subject making, involves not an overt exertion of force or power but knowledge of 'technology of the self'. The related terms, 'self' and 'subject' have been often used synonymously with 'identity' but in theoretically nuanced ways. In his analysis of the 'self' Foucault uses the notions of 'subject' and 'subjectivity' to bring out the inner workings of a reflective self as an outcome of a process. For him 'subject' carries two meanings, namely: 1) 'subject to someone else by control and dependence'; and 2) 'tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault (1982b) in 2002: 331). These two meanings of the term indicating control from outside and control from within, respectively, were attributed to the 'subject' by Foucault in an early and later part of his intellectual life, showing a shift in his conceptualisation of the term, from the self as a docile controlled being to a self that is autonomous with self-agency. Although both suggest a form of power that subjugates the subject, in the latter conceptualisation the subject emerges with knowledge and techniques of self-regulation (technologies of the self) to operate against or within a form of domination (technologies of domination) that does not use outdated forms of rigid control but techniques of coercion that make individuals act upon themselves. Foucault argues that if one has to study the subject and how he is governed, we have to study the interaction between them:

'...he has to take into account the interactions between those two types of techniques – techniques of domination and techniques of the self... Governing people, in the broad sense of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assume coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself' (Foucault [1993], in Lemke 2001: 203-204).

Relating dominance (or power) to self and subjectivity is the concept of 'governmentality'. 'Governmentality' is described as the 'semantic linking of governing (*Gouverneur*) and modes of thought (*mentalite*)' (Lemke 2001: 191), that is, certain modes of governance. It indicates that a study of the techniques of power cannot be undertaken without understanding the political thinking behind it and the processes of subjectivation whereby the individual is persuaded into subjectifying himself as a certain subject.

To apply Foucault's concepts to the current political thinking and to my study on the empowerment of women, empowering subjects individually (e.g., as students) as well as collectively (e.g., as an educational institution) with freedom, self-responsibility and self-care is part of the technology of power, while the subjects' self-regulation or agency to conform to the structure is accomplished through the technologies of the self. Links can be made to the current political economic conditions in Foucault's conceptualising of the subject as the 'economic self'. As he theorises, we see in all these present day struggles the emergence of the economic self or the entrepreneurial self in keeping with the neoliberal rationality of extending the economic logic to the social sphere, 'thus eliding any difference between the economy and the social' (Lemke 2001:197). This creates a context in which government itself becomes an enterprise, promoting competition and systems shaped by a market rationality. In such a system, the subject is an autonomous entrepreneur taking responsibility for her choices and undertaking to add extra market value with her acquired skills.

As such, in my study, the concept of power and how to approach it, or how governance takes place, paves the way to one of the fundamental critical questions to explore: what kind of empowering practices are present at the site chosen for study and what forms of self-transformations or resistance, if any, exist? One way of examining this would be, as Foucault suggests, to start from the struggles and experiences of women who have been identified as needing empowerment. A close observation of the transformations of the self, or the

'care of the self' (Foucault 1984a) projected in their daily life, would be needed to understand the empowering discourse being circulated and internalised in the process of making 'desired' subjects. Language and education are often said to constitute relevant terrains for us to better understand how such self-care technologies operate, and in the next section I attend to this more closely with a focus on the entrepreneurial language learner.

### **3.2.2 Neoliberalisation of education and the entrepreneurial language learner**

Neoliberalism under the current socio-economic conditions has proved to be more than just an economic policy and is seen as extending its market logic to all spheres of individual and social life, effecting a 'resignification' of education, language and the individual self (Flubacher and Del Percio 2017: 5-10). However, by placing my focus on neoliberalism as a political economy in the space of my research, I do not pre-suppose that it is the only political system shaping the lives of my participants. I argue, following Heller and McElhinny (2017) and Urla (2019), that there are other equally influential logics that underpin my study of trajectories and shape the identities of the participants and get shaped in their interactions. I refer to the political economy of colonialism and post-colonial nationalism (See Chapter 2) in Bangladesh that have had their effects on the roles and statuses of languages and their speakers. Added to these logics are the other social forces of class and gender that uniquely affect women in patriarchal societies such as Bangladesh, which contribute to the social dynamics of the political system, However, my focus in this section is on how neoliberalism can be adopted as a lens to account for changes in education, language and the subject.

The emergence of the tertiary sector as a defining element of the globalized new economy (Duchêne and Heller 2012) has had its consequences for individuals / job seekers and their language learning preferences (Heller *et al.* 2017). It has also had an impact on education in general as a life-long endeavour to accumulate the skills for the changing global job markets. The saturation of local markets and the expansion of the global service industry have raised the status of English in South Asian countries such as Bangladesh as a language of trade, economic growth and employment that brings about a shift in the discourses of language, from 'pride' to 'profit' (Duchêne and Heller

2012). In these discourses, English language, or communication skills to be more precise, are framed as an investment and an essential skill for employment (Flubacher *et al.* 2018) which will lead to the future economic prosperity of speakers. The promise of English is assumed to offer, besides market profitability from language training (Gao 2017), prestige and opportunities for social inclusion (Park 2011). It also offers, as in my study, English educational qualifications packaged with entrepreneurial skills and a network of influential connections, which can all be converted into a form of economic capital. In such an order, inequalities and class differences are re/produced when ‘...the education system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give...’ (Bourdieu 1977a: 267) which is believed to come normally with ‘habitus’ or family upbringing and background. In this new economic regime individuals are seen or expected to be seen as ‘entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life’ (Allan and McElhinny 2017:80), including education.

Against this background, education is seen as a domain undergoing major neoliberalisation and transformations (Park 2017; Block 2018) and thus as a site for the production of ideal neoliberal subjects. Higher education institutions in particular have become centres for making employable subjects equipped with marketable skills; they are seen as driven by a ‘colonisation by business logic’ (Martín Rojo and Del Percio 2020: 1). In addition, subjected by ideologies of English as the language of academic and global socio-economic success, internationalisation has become the trend in higher education, with English for Academic Purposes (EAP) being the main component to attract students from all over the world. English is believed to open doors to progress (nationally and internationally), social / geographic mobility and economic prosperity in the future, for those who pursue it. Besides, run on corporate principles and influenced by transnational corporations, the universities expect teachers and students to be flexible and malleable to undertake any role, as administrators and as ‘country ambassadors’ to help with promoting their programmes, marketing and student recruitment for the university (Hadley 2017). These measures are perceived as a form of governance that creates particular kinds of ‘self-investing’ subjects (Brown 2015: 177), particularly a workforce and student body ready to compete in the global market (Urciuoli

2008), projecting identifiable brands and identities (Bulcholtz and Hall 2004) that resemble the figure of the 'entrepreneur' in the corporate world.

In her discussion of the neoliberal idea of agency, Ilana Gershon (2011), in line with Foucault's concepts of 'homo aeconomicus', and 'entrepreneur of himself' (Lemke 2001: 200), delineates the attributes of an individual from a neo-liberal perspective, according to which managing the neo-liberal self is an important requisite of agency which can only be enabled by treating oneself as a business with 'a collection of skills'. For example, job seekers must sell themselves as 'a bundle of skills' in the market (Urciuoli 2008), so do students in higher education like the women in my study who have to project themselves as desired students for international internships. As a market actor, the neoliberal agent operates on his/her autonomy in taking the risks and responsibilities of the transaction. The freedom to act on one's own calculations of profit and loss, based on a market rationality, promotes competitiveness and encourages corporate individualism (Gershon 2011: 543) as every individual acts as a 'smaller version of corporation' (ibid: 541).

The demands of the job market and the way in which students and job seekers imagine themselves as potential candidates are shaped by the discourses of 'skills' development. In the conditions of precarity and uncertainty of the competitive education and employment markets, and to have an edge over other competitors, individuals engage themselves in continuous self-development and accumulation of skills in response to the demands of the markets. In their resilience in such an endeavour of self-development (Martín Rojo and Del Percio 2020), neoliberal subjects demonstrate flexibility (Flubacher *et al.* 2018; Martín Rojo 2020) and in the process strive to project themselves as marketable or sellable products (Garrido 2019). These projections lead me to highlight an important argument made by Allan and McElhinny (2017) which is crucial for my research on trajectories of empowerment, that is, in the development of skills the specific skills themselves carry less value than the 'particular kind of self' they index – 'responsible, autonomous, self-sufficient and entrepreneurial' (Ibid 2017: 84). Some of these defining characteristics of the so-called "neoliberal self" become apparent in the the women in my study, as we shall see in later chapters, in their projections of becoming empowered leaders, critical thinkers and resilient learners at their university. Such presentations of the self, respond to ideologies and in turn,

shape them in their alignments and dis-alignments and the ways in which they are constrained (Soto and Pérez-Milans 2018).

The projection of 'becoming empowered women' in my study echoes Martín Rojo's (2020) notion of the 'self-made speaker', the linguistic version of the entrepreneurial self, which highlights the discourse of language as investment that students have internalised so they can expect economic returns in the future if they follow certain language learning practices and opt for certain language forms (Garrido and Sabaté-Dalmau 2020) and not others. The importance placed on the self in the concept of neo-liberal governmentality can be perceived as an externally initiated agency of self as well as internally initiated – an exercise of power being present in both. A study of this process helps us understand how the power techniques (external and internal) transform the subjectivities of individuals. However, when the subject is the focus of the study, it is important to pay equal attention to forms of what I call for reasons of clarity "internally initiated agency of the self", which could manifest in different ways as congruent or divergent alignments in daily practices, or in other words, forms of resistance or ways of being / doing alternative to neoliberal rationalities. As Martín Rojo (2020) argues, how subjects conform to and perform neoliberal tunes is one model of subjectivity, but how they derive 'self-satisfaction' and 'self-realisation' out of their daily practices and reflections (as learners of English) takes the neoliberal model a step further, all self-exercised by the 'self-made speaker' (Martín Rojo 2020: 163).

As discussed above, neoliberalism thrives on the neoliberal agents it produces. It is not so much the language or the skills education that is considered worth foregrounding as the speaker of the language or what the development of skills tells us about the subject. In her work on language and integration in the context of migrant integration programmes, Allan (2016), for example, demonstrates how the development of language skills, besides being perceived as vital for employment, also tells us about those that undertake them – as willing to integrate (see also Allan 2013, Flubacher *et al.* 2018). At the same time, only certain languages such as English, and certain variants of English, have market value (Martín Rojo 2018), but the value of the language or language variety in question fluctuates according to the speakers' capacity afforded to them and where the language is being assessed, all of it determined by its 'hearability and 'readability' which, in turn, depends on its political

economic (or neoliberal) 'pretextualisation' (Blommaert 2005: 78). Besides these inequalities and categorisations in the neoliberal perception of language and education, neoliberal governmentality also works through a process of choosing what is considered important while erasing certain other things.

The ways in which English is celebrated as the language of success, economic growth and internationalisation points to other inequalities in the distribution of resources which I argue index the need of those that lack them or denied them or have limited access to them. Hence the need creates possible conditions for the entrenchment of such an ideology. Park (2010), for instance, demonstrates how the ideology of self-deprecation of Korean speakers of English creates the frenzy to learn English and becomes 'a force that deeply permeates people's practical lives' (Ibid: 28) thereby showing a linkage between the broader neoliberal ideology of language and the everyday struggles of the Koreans aspiring to become competent speakers of English. The ideologies about language, specifically English, in Bangladesh, and the narratives of the social actors at IU, point to their belief in English as the language of promise, as the key to success (Park 2011; Allan 2013) as though English is the only thing that is holding them back. At IU, English language learning is presented as the Programme for Promise which leads to an interrogation of it as a neoliberal strategy that erases other inequalities since it is taken for granted that 'it is language that promises to do the work, irrelevant of other social categories or dynamics' (Kraft and Flubacher 2020: 3).

Promises are intended to be kept but neoliberalism does not intend to keep all its promises, as it follows an ethos and agenda of its own. It makes no secret of the fact that success or failure is the responsibility of the willing subject. In the context of the promotion of English in the Bangladesh education system, as a kind of neoliberal hegemony, Imam (2005) argues that English may be marketed as an easy road to success but not many succeed in becoming part of the English-speaking middle-class elite or find jobs abroad, as promised, commensurate with their qualifications from a private international university in which they had invested. In the rationality of neoliberalism this would be justified as the failure on the part of the learners: in a neoliberal regime subjects are self-responsibilised.

As Tabiola and Lorente (2017) also reveal, the students' investment in English does not always bring profits, as what counts as good English depends

on the linguistic market (Park 2011). Tabiola and Lorente (2017) conclude that an investment in English language learning may or may not see immediate gains, but what the students gain is the recognition as persevering and enterprising selves – in short, they have been successful in becoming neoliberal subjects. Yet, apart from this certification of self-development, the frenzy for English in countries such as Bangladesh continues. I argue that the reasons for this may be the promise of hope for a prosperous future, the opportunity to dream which marginalised women in my study had been deprived of and are now grateful to be in what they consider a privileged state. This takes us to affect as a relevant aspect of investigation.

### **3.2.3 Conceptualising Affect - The promise of empowerment and the right to dream in regimes of hope**

The fact that affect has become one of the defining features of late capitalism is increasingly seen as related to a conceptualisation of citizenship which draws on an understanding of the self as a free-but-responsibilised subject (Harvey 2005: 5). Recent research in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, for example, has focused on how neo-liberal capitalism and globalisation transform not only the political economic structures but also every aspect of life including our emotional life. In response to changes in people's subjectivities, this new body of scholarship has examined how neoliberalised economies and their modes of government reproduce certain forms of affect (McElhinny 2010).

Emotions of hope and desire in anticipation of promised prosperity and pressure to compete are some of the affective features that characterise current times, in addition to fear and anxiety arising out of uncertainty as well as precariousness and self-responsibility involving risk-taking in modern conditions of life (Giddens 1991). Ideas about the 'promise of happiness' (Ahmed 2010) and related 'technologies of hope' (Ibid) as a means to self-exert pressure for future success or to resort to alternative ways of well-being (Pérez-Milans and Xiaoyan 2020), in addition to 'regimes of anticipation' (Adams *et al.* 2009) as a defining feature of current socio-economic times characterised by 'thinking and living toward the future' and as 'a politics of temporality and affect' (p. 246), have been instrumental in the conceptualisation of hope as affect in my research on the experiences and struggles of women in their trajectories of

empowerment. Thus, my study responds to Allan and McElhinny's call (2017) for more research to 'illuminate the affective effects of neoliberalism' (p. 9).

As Foucault (1982b) points out, the nineteenth century saw the foregrounding of the struggles against exploitation, and in the present day the 'struggles against forms of subjection - against the submission of subjectivity' - is becoming more and more important' (pp. 331-332). To be able to study the struggles involved in the 'submission of subjectivity' in the subject-making process of my participants who are required to internalise certain neoliberal values to become competent leaders in the global market, a dream or a promise of success in the future (which may or may not be realised), it is important to zoom in to study the techniques of self-care and self-regulatory conduct they exercise by themselves or with the help of others on their own 'bodies, their health, and their life and death' (Foucault 1982b: 330). In this, Foucault's theory of 'care of the self' or the struggles against the 'submission of subjectivity' can be linked to Ahmed's (2010: 181) notion of 'technology of hope'.

In her 'Promise of Happiness', Ahmed (2010) theorises what emotions do to people when they pursue a 'happy object' (p. 21). She describes 'happy objects' as a promise, an experience of desire and a hope for a future happy state that does not exist at present and may or may not arrive. Writing from a position of 'sceptical disbelief in happiness' (p. 2), she posits that by pursuing these happy objects, we are made to believe we attain happiness and well-being for ourselves and others, but it is often a justification for oppression. The harsh reality she points out in pursuing objects of happiness is that it involves the labour of staying on the 'right' path as any deviation can cause disturbance to the self as well as to the surroundings. 'Happy objects' could be anything the current regime with an orientation towards a future state of happiness coaxes us to pursue in order to be prepared and develop a 'technique for living well' (Ahmed 2010: 2), or a 'technology of hope' (p. 181). These technologies of hope configure forms of capital and investment in the empowerment of women through education, open to speculation not only for the women concerned but for their families, the state and transnational investment.

Drawing on Ahmed (2010), but with a lesser degree of scepticism, I take my participants' pursuit of 'happy objects', that is, certain legitimised forms of education and skills at IU (e.g., English language and leadership skills), as a 'technology of hope' for an imagined state of social and economic well-being. I

argue that their daily experiences shaped by this process signify the larger political economic systems that enable them. Affective dimensions of subjectivity are not to be taken as personal experiences that are socially detached or as neuronal. Rather, they are 'socially patterned and distributed' and 'the patterns of affect are intrinsically linked with and embedded in political economic relations' (Flubacher 2020: 121). They are spaces where histories are resurrected, as Ahmed puts it: 'through emotions, the past persists on the surface of bodies' (Ibid 2014: 202). In a similar vein, Park (2015) argues how a focus on what is perceived as personal, mundane and trivial, for example the anxiety and self-deprecation of Korean users of English, can be of historical significance to social formations, for example the reproduction of inequalities in language and education.

Several scholarly studies have informed my work in the way they have brought out the affective features of neoliberalism (Cameron 2000; Urciuoli 2008; Gershon 2011; Urciuoli and La Dousa 2013; Park 2017). Cameron (2000a), for instance, documents how in the current day service industry, besides desirable personality traits such as being friendly, enthusiastic, hardworking and willing to take risks that are set as industry standard, there are other skills, such as communication and specific gendered ways of communicating which are identified as central to the job. Call centre workers are trained and scripted in their communication and affective skills to please customers, which Cameron (2000b, 2001) describes as emotional work. Lorente (2007) reveals, by tracing the negative impact of the Structural Adjustment policies imposed on the Global South, how English is used as a commodity by the Philippines state and the private maid agencies in Philippines and Singapore to sell Filipino women as super-maids, so they can support their own families financially by leaving them to care for the children of the wealthy abroad. Pérez-Milans and Xiaoyan (2020) trace the trajectories of Chinese international students and the emotional pressures that they suffer for a 'successful' return home as a technology of hope, and how they subsequently turn to projects of religious conversion as an alternative space for hoping. In an educational setting, Park (2017) uses affective subjectivity as a strategy to study the implications of the policy of English as the medium of instruction in Korean higher education, geared towards a neo-liberal market and the anxiety and loss of confidence suffered by the students (see also Park, 2010, 2015).

Although affect is not a new concept in social science research, the surge in contemporary literature can be ascribed to an intensification of 'regimes of anticipation' (Adams *et al.* 2009). They postulate that 'hope' and 'fear', as emotions experienced in the present time for an indefinite future, do not originate as anxieties from individual subjects, but are provoked in individuals through circulation and strategic formations of regimes of anticipation that 'interpellate, situate, attract and mobilize subjects, individually and subjectively' (Ibid: 249). As an inter-subjective phenomenon having a collective effect, Ahmed describes this as 'affective economies' (Ahmed 2004: 119). She discusses how the naturalisation of collective feelings of hate, anxiety, fear, hope and so on, shape the way identities are constructed, for example the way in which the figure of the asylum seeker is socially constructed as a possible terrorist (Ahmed 2014: 79-80).

As such, I argue, a focus on the affect of hope allows us to understand how it is entrenched in the ideologies of English and neoliberal discourses of women's empowerment and how the figure of the empowered woman given the right to dream is socially constructed in the current neoliberal times. I explore the naturalisation of technologies of hope in the everyday interactions and struggles of the women in my research, and the ways in which they make a collective sense of their 'happy objects' (Ahmed 2010:21) as they pursue the Programme for Promise at the university. I document how a focus on affect might tell us something on why people do what they do despite struggles, contestations and inequalities and, following Ahmed (2010), how / if processes of empowerment could be perceived as erasures of (or justification for) certain kinds of oppression.

Having laid the conceptual base for my study, in the second part of this chapter I proceed to detail the ontological and epistemological framework that best fits an investigation relating to the concepts and issues reviewed above.

### **3.3 Ontological and epistemological assumptions – A Critical Socio-linguistic Ethnography**

My research project is based on a social constructivist assumption that knowledge is constructed by human beings in their interactions and daily meaning-making practices, rather than as something existing somewhere out there yet to be explored. This view is linked to the pre-supposition that

conventional structures configure but also constrain daily interactions (Giddens 1984). In particular, I adopt a critical sociolinguistic ethnographic (CSE) approach that acknowledges the view that further to reality being socially constructed in interactions, it is subject to structural constraints which can be empirically observed (Heller 2008). As such, I consider ethnography as a way of 'examining social practice as it **unfolds** (bold in original) while it happens' (Heller *et al.* 2018:8), which involves studying what is observable in the here and now as well as what Heller (2001a) calls 'traces' of conventional historical and political structures left by those interactions (p. 212).

Heller defines CSE as 'an approach that allows for the discovery of how social action is tied to social structuration' (Giddens 1984; Heller 2001a), by understanding both 'action and structuration to be social processes unfolding over time and across space, rather than conceptually and empirically distinct realms of micro and macro social phenomena' (Heller 2011: 10). Such an ontological insight into social reality and how to approach it raises questions about language which is taken to play two roles in the study of social processes: '...it forms part of the social practices that construct social reality and (...) it serves as a terrain for working out struggles that are fundamentally about other things' (Heller 2011:49). That is to say, as part of social practices, language creates conditions for social stratification, exclusion and social inequality (Duchêne 2008:12). In line with this understanding, I draw on an interaction-based approach combined with ethnographic methods as a suitable epistemological framework, following earlier scholarship in ethnography of communication in institutional settings, including service encounters in healthcare (Cicourel 1992), multilingual educational settings (Heller 1999; Heller and Martin Jones 2001; Martín Rojo 2010; Park 2010; Pérez-Milans 2013; Pérez-Milans and Patiño-Santos 2014; Codó and Pérez-Milans 2014, Codó and Patiño-Santos 2018), employment, transnational work and migration / education (Allan 2013, 2016; Allan and McElhinny 2017; Flubacher and Del Percio 2017; Del Percio 2018; Flubacher 2020; Garrido and Sabaté 2020; Kraft and Flubacher 2020; Martín Rojo and Del Percio 2020; Pérez-Milans and Guo Xiaoyan 2020).

By combining ethnographic and sociolinguistic perspectives I attempt to counterbalance, on the one hand, formal and abstract models of communication in linguistics, which are often detached from social life, and, on the other, the

pitfalls of participant observation approaches that fail to account for how people construct meaning in interactions. As Rampton succinctly puts it: 'tying ethnography down with linguistic analysis' and linking linguistic analysis to real life practices (Rampton 2006: 395). I am guided by an interactionist perspective that follows on Cicourel (1980, 1992) and which examines the everyday discursive organisation of institutional spaces via exploring social / moral categorisations that emerge in their daily organisation. From this perspective, the social order is taken to exist in the observable interaction; not wholly in just one given interaction, but rather in a web of interactions which are linked in complex ways to events, social actors, institutions and certain circulating forms of knowledge. The task of the analyst is to access the linkages and make them operational (Giddens 1984; Heller 2007b).

In the sections that follow I articulate this by outlining my combined analytical approaches, namely: critical analysis of discourse (3.3.1); sociolinguistics of stance-taking in interactions (3.3.2) and affect (3.3.3); and participant observation from ethnography of communication (3.3.4). The rationale behind taking this combined analytical approach was the necessity to identify and match the right tools to analyse varied types of data, including institutional discursive material (e.g., policy documents, reports and marketing literature on the university website), formal interviews with senior management, focus groups with teachers, informal group and individual meetings with students and alumni, naturally-occurring interactions in student halls, households, factories and at celebratory events, classroom observations, biographical narratives and students' personal journals.

My collection of these materials was ethnographically and interactionally driven as I focused on making linkages, '*mapping, tracing and connecting and claiming*' (italics in original Heller *et al.* 2018: 103), by examining how the daily interactions of my participants were semiotically represented in the authority of the institutional documentation as well as the wider educational and political discourses. The process involved identifying cues to contextualise and make full sense of the interactions of the participants (Gumperz 1982; Goodwin and Duranti 1992). These cues also provided linkages to certain moments of social action during my observations. As a study of individual trajectories of women's empowerment with the negotiation of subjectivities as the main focus, I could not miss noticing the stances my focal participants performed and the affective

orientations that went with them, which together served as the most appropriate tool to study language and communication as a social practice.

### **3.3.1 A critical analysis of discourse**

In recent decades there has been a shift in the view of discourse as 'language-in-use' to 'language-in-action. As Blommaert explains: 'Discourse to me comprises, all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural and historical patterns and developments of use' (Blommaert 2005: 3). As an approach to understanding social reality and social relationships, discourse analysis has gained broader social, critical and interpretive dimensions influenced by various disciplines such as pragmatics (Austin 1962), microsociology (Goffman 1972, 1981), linguistic anthropology (Silverstein 1976, Gal 1989), sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982, 1992) and critical social theory (Foucault 1970, 1977, 1984, Bourdieu 1991, Giddens 1984). The consensus in all inter-disciplinary dialogues is, as Cameron (2001) highlights, that any interpretation of a text, irrespective of its length and grammaticality, is based on our knowledge of the real world, not merely linguistic knowledge. In other words, it is our real-world knowledge that fills the taken-for-granted communication gaps left in the meaning-making process. The job of the discourse analyst lies, then, in identifying this taken-for-granted aspect of the communicative practice and studying what it signifies in the local context and how it contributes to meaning-making and subject-making processes.

In a critical analysis of discourse, it is important to pay attention to the social, critical and interpretative dimensions of discourse for a full understanding of how the text, be it written, spoken or acted, functions as a discourse event (Jaworski and Coupland, 2014). Understood as a semiotic process, discourses produce meaning within a social and political context while reflecting and shaping the social order and our relationship with the society (Ibid 2014). That is to say, discourse is a social practice that 'determines and reproduces social structure' (Fairclough 1989: 38). Pennycook's interpretation of Foucault's idea of discourse analysis neatly summarises this discussion on discourse as social and critical:

'It (discourse analysis) is not concerned with how discourses (texts) [brackets in original] reflect social reality, but how discourses produce social realities; it does not look for relationships between discourse and society/politics, but

rather theorises discourse as always /already political; it does not seek out an ultimate cause or basis for power and inequality, but rather focuses on the multiplicity of sites through which power operates; and it does not posit a reality outside discourse, but rather looks to the discursive production of truth.' (Pennycook, 1994b: 131).

The critical dimension lies in that discourse not only produces knowledge but also operationalises power, as 'no knowledge can occur without power' (Duchêne 2008: 25; Foucault 1984b). Therefore, in Foucauldian terms, the object of critique in discourse analysis turns out to be the relationship between the workings of knowledge and power in daily interactions since the exercise of power is not always top-down but happens everywhere in interactions. Hence, analysis of power is analysis of discourse.

Relating the critical to the interpretive dimension of discourse analysis is the belief that when we talk, we do not talk as individuals or use a language invented by us as individuals. We are bound to draw from our community's repertoire of things and use language in ways that are conventional and intelligible. The degree to which a person is able to make herself heard and understood depends on the distribution of and her accessibility to resources, which could result in social inequality. Therefore, a critical analysis of discourse is an analysis of voice, and an analysis of voice is an analysis of power effects (Blommaert 2005:5). Additionally, when a person talks, she talks as a member of a social or cultural group, as part of a community of practice – e.g., as a member of a certain political party or as a student member of a liberal arts university community that is a brand of exclusive and superior qualities it represents. 'Discourses are about being kinds of people. There are kinds within kinds' (Gee 2011:195). In their discursive practices people may enact different stances, epistemic, affective or evaluative, as the situation demands, as an already established member of a group, or as someone desiring to become part of one, or a stance of obligation to be part of a certain dominant group – as it transpires in the case of the different participants in my research. This takes me to the analysis of interaction as a research method focusing on stance-taking.

### **3.3.2 Accomplishing performance: An integrated approach to the analysis of interaction**

In my research at IU, social actors' performative acts of communication will be analysed with the aim of revealing processes of governmentality – the exercise

of institutional power and individual agency in the case of the women learning to be empowered, with a focus on a) what they say and what they do discursively and semiotically in the negotiations of their identities; and b) how the internalisation of social and linguistic ideologies and the structures they legitimate are played out. In this, I believe, stance-taking as a performance of the self and as part of the internalisation process plays a key role in the social construction or re-construction of subjectivities.

Stance-taking has been described as 'a fundamental property of communication' and involves 'taking up a position with respect to the form or the content of one's utterance' (Jaffe 2009: 3). Stance, placed within the scope of language, interaction, and socio-cultural value, is believed to be a form of social action that is linguistically articulated. The meaning evoked by the social action through utterances depends on the positioning of the participants in an interaction, which is itself a product of conventionalised discursive practices (DuBois 2007; Davies and Harre 1990). The central idea in all stance-taking practices is evaluation (Jaffe 2009) from which all stance-taking acts evolve. Evaluation as a broad category of focus in studies on stance-taking links the linguistic to the social (Ibid: 5). Du Bois' theory of the 'stance triangle' (Du Bois 2007) highlights evaluating, positioning and aligning as the key concepts:

'Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the socio-cultural field' (Du Bois, 2007: 163).

The subjects position themselves assuming epistemic or affective stances producing a congruent, divergent or ambiguous alignment in their evaluation of a shared object. The shared object that the subjects evaluate plays a critical role as it links the subjectivities of the co-actors thereby creating an intersubjective relationship between them. Intersubjectivity is thus indicated through alignment markers or stance markers in the form of language, gesture, and other symbolic resources, and through the affective stance performed it indexes recognisable attributes of a certain persona over time. A focus on stance-taking in the study of subjectivities relates to two central roles stance plays in our understanding of discourses – naturalising and performative roles (Jaffe 2009).

In a naturalising role, instances of stance-taking can activate pre-supposed ideologies providing a direct link, without contestation, between linguistic form and social meaning. On the other hand, stance-taking in its performative form, as socially and interactionally created, as situated and contingent, provokes indirect links which require to be inferred through indexical connections (Jaffe 2009: 22). As a discursive phenomenon, stance-taking has been studied in the critical analysis of discourse in written texts (Jaworski and Thurlow 2009) and as an interactional phenomenon in the spoken interactions of the people concerned ( Davies and Harre 1990; Bamberg 1997, 2004; Du Bois 2007) which makes it workable with my data.

The ways in which language is stylized and strategically presented in the persuasive genre of promotional and authorial texts at the educational institution in my study can be analysed as acts of stance and stance ascription. These units of identity or meaning making over time through ‘repetition and routinization (they) may become habituated and ‘structured’” (Giddens 1991) into a ‘more extensive narrative of self and a *lifestyle* (italics in original) ... [thus making] stance and style (...) ideologically and interactionally co-constitutive’ (Jaworski and Thurlow 2009 :196).

In order to study the process of identity-making or subjectivation accomplished in interactions and narratives through the stance-markers, and to trace and make linkages to wider political economic processes, in my study I adopt an integrated approach combining analytical methods from Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS) Micro-sociology (MS), and Narrative Analysis (NA). Given that an inquiry into the process of subjectivation demands an approach that starts from the subjects themselves, I find it suitable that all the three approaches take as their starting point the study of the dynamics of identities at play. In other words, I see them as sharing the ontological and epistemological belief that interaction is the site of identity construction, reconstruction or de-construction.

IS as an analytical perspective is associated with linguistic anthropologist, John Gumperz (1982, 1992), and has in its toolkit, besides Goffmanian interactional microanalysis, insights and methods from anthropology, pragmatics and dialectology. A combination of these methods allows the analyst to look beyond the situated activity of the conversation and move across levels of orders, from the situated talk to the institutional, bringing

them together to establish coherence through 'contextualisation and inferencing' (Rampton 2001: 84). Erving Goffman's work in micro-sociology has had an over-arching influence in the shaping of IS approaches, as well as providing techniques for the study of stance-taking and affect.

More specifically, a sociolinguistic perspective of stance-taking based on a moment-to-moment analysis of language, combined with techniques from micro-sociology allows us to study the identity-making process in a nuanced way. A foundational aspect of interactional sociolinguistics and an influence of Conversation Analysis is its focus on moment-to-moment sequential pattern of conversation/ interaction, such as the organisation of turn-taking, adjacency pairs, repairing, topic control, pausing, silence, exclamation and intonation, which help analysts to look for minute signs that add significance in the meaning making process of communication. Besides, in the study of turn-taking, 'the grasp of the next action that the current one projects, the production of that next appropriate action, and its interpretation by the previous speaker' (Heritage and Clayman 2010: 15) which are methodologically achieved by means of a set of socially shared procedures, contributes to the analyst's understanding of the action in interaction, context management and intersubjectivity. This orientation towards interaction analysis was important for my study of the subjectivities which are created and negotiated in the minute conversational patterns.

In the negotiation of meaning in interactions, the importance of uptake has been highlighted by Gumperz (1982) in his work on inter-cultural encounters in diverse settings. The interpretation / misinterpretation depends, he posits, not only on the context of the talk / action, but to a great extent on the ways in which the utterance is understood and evaluated based on signalling mechanisms that the interactants share or are foreign to. Gumperz calls the signalling mechanisms 'contextualisation cues' (1982a,1991) which manifest in interactions in the form of vocal prosodic features such as intonation, code switches, accent and also para-linguistic features like tempo, laughter and pauses, as well as lexical and syntactic choices. They could also be non-verbal signs such as, for example, in gaze, gestures and posture (Gumperz 1992: 231). Gumperz's notion of contextualisation cues can be linked to Goffman's concepts of 'frames', 'footing' and 'face' (Jaworski and Coupland 2014: 24), which have played a significant role within my interactional analysis framework

particularly to study the presentation of the self in the performative acts of the participants in my study.

Goffman's ideas on presentation of the self, ritualization, and participation framework are of particular relevance in the analysis of 'becoming empowered', an impression managed by the women in my study aspiring to be part of the desired social group and as a dominant marker of their identification with the institutional values in their stances. In his 'Presentation of the self in everyday life', Goffman (1990) employs a dramaturgical metaphor to theorise interaction as a 'performance' that is shaped by the environment and the audience, and in the process of establishing an identity the actor 'front-stages' the characteristics shaped and recognised by the society, as part of 'impression management' (ibid 14). 'Ritualization' (Goffman 1972, 1974) in interactional behaviour includes both verbal and non-verbal signs which act as indicators to regulate interaction through ritualised or habituated practice. As part of ritualization, different types of 'face-work' (keeping or losing face and face threatening acts) contribute to the meaning-making and recognition of stance in interaction. In his 'Forms of Talk' (1981), Goffman provides a participation framework by identifying different kinds of hearers – 'ratified' and 'unratified', and different kinds of speakers with different kinds of status as 'animator', 'author' and 'principal', thereby presenting them as 'embodiments of different and discrete agents' (Goffman 1981: 144). The shift in agent positions within an interaction, which often takes place, is described as 'change in footing', a mechanism that involves the alignment or stance of participants to talk. These techniques of Goffman's interaction order have been applied to my analysis of interactions in the identification and interpretation of different types of stance-taking and the identity attributes they represented.

The relevance of Goffman's concepts to my analysis rests on his central concern in interaction order as the social domain that he explored extensively in his studies, by which he meant 'the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's action' (Goffman 1990: 26), in each other's physical presence. This implies that the study of stance was a major concern Goffman pursued. In his own words, Goffman defines the self as 'a stance-taking entity, a something that takes up a position somewhere between identification with an organisation and opposition to it and is ready at the slightest pressure to regain its balance by shifting its involvement in other directions' (Goffman 1961: 280 in Hartland,

1994). It has been argued, 'the concept of footing is Goffman's analysis of stance of individuals in the realm of discourse analysis' (Hartland 1994: 253). Although Goffman's micro-analysis of mundane activities, particularly footings in interaction, has been described as 'potentially ephemeral and do not define 'the relationships among participants in any consolidated way', (Coupland and Coupland 2009: 227), Giddens (1984, 2009) confirms that it integrates well into the larger social order, the theorising of which was his domain of work. He adds, 'Presentation of Self retains an enduring importance too because of the weight it gives to the emotions, a major aspect of Goffman's originality' (2009: 292).

In this spirit, my analysis of stance in minute and across interactions aims to integrate the larger social order, with attention to how a combination of stance and affect can give added value to my recognition of social order in daily language and communicative activities, including autobiographical narratives and public speeches, which I argue are also interactively significant. In the case of autobiographical narratives, which often happened to be the form some parts of my conversations with my participants turned into at unexpected moments, it is not possible to adopt an interactional analytical approach to stance in identity formation, in the strict sense of the tradition discussed above. This is mainly due to the assumption that data drawn from autobiographical interviews is predominantly mono-logic narrative of past history of the narrator. However, although narrative interviews call for only minimal intervention from the interviewer/researcher, there is already an inter-personal relationship established between the interviewer and teller made up of institutional, imaginative and social factors that contribute to the interaction element and this in itself lends to the dialogical and positioning approach to autobiographical narrative analysis (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2000).

On the same note, Anna De Fina (2015) claims that, based on the premise that the process of identity building in autobiographical narrative has 'as its objective the production of a coherent self, the ability to create a coherence afforded by narrative has itself a positive effect on self-identity' (Ibid: 352). Framing a linguistic ethnographic approach to storytelling in narratives, Patiño-Santos (2018) argues that such communicative practices occurring unexpectedly in sociolinguistic ethnographies should be viewed as 'privileged discursive genres' while studying social structures (2018: 3) which they are part of. The communicative practices of the storyteller as well as the listener

contribute to the positioning and the meaning-making when complimented with ethnographical data. Therefore, following this argument and drawing on Riessman (2001) I approach my analysis of autobiographical storytelling or personal narrative as a performative act that involves the presentation of the self and an interactional negotiation with the interviewer/ listener. As Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000) emphasise, the teller's autobiographical storytelling is not an expression of her pre-existing identity, but a co-construction of identity that is emerging and shaped by the positionings in the process of narration. The techniques involved in the analysis of positioning in biographical narratives as demonstrated by Davies and Harre (1990) is described in the next chapter on methodology.

Viewing my interactional data in the light of Goffman's notions and narrative analysis, as discussed above, allows me to examine the significance of affect, the expression of attitudes and emotions that play an important mediating role, as stance-markers between language and identity. I will now discuss how affect, or affect in stance-taking, works with the type of data that I have collected.

### **3.3.3 Affect in stance-taking - An analytical tool**

Speaker positionality, or stance, as built into the act of communication, is never affectively neutral (Jaffe 2009). Affect is an important component of stance-taking, and hence I believe taken together they can provide a more robust approach to the study of subjectivities and thus can capture the finer details of the process of identity co-construction in interactions. As a tool, it links language and social life, while at the same time as social practice reveals the dynamics of individual positioning in situated interaction.

In the analysis of my interactional data affect has been indexed, not just to show how the speaker feels, but as a device to facilitate appropriate response. What affect does in everyday encounters is help with 'social referencing' (Ochs and Schieffelin 1989), by which they mean '... beyond the function of communicating referential information, languages are responsive to the fundamental need of speakers to convey and assess feelings, moods, dispositions and attitudes...' (Ibid: 8). Interlocutors need to know not only the referential information but also the affective predication, provided through some critical contextualising cues in order to be able to respond appropriately.

Affective cues in communication, as contextualisation cues (Gumperz 1982; Blommaert 2005), emerged in my data through verbal and non-verbal signs. In the debate on whether affect cues from the linguistic verbal channel performed the same and as effective an indexical role as the visual cues from the non-verbal channel, Besnier (1990) argues that linguistic structures have not been able to provide an exact co-relation between linguistic referential signs and affect due to difficulties and differences in cross-cultural understanding. Thus, he proposes a semiotic approach to the study of affect in order to compliment linguistic use of communication, particularly in culturally mediated affective stances where the indexes are socially constructed and do not always fall within any universal set of emotional categories. Furthermore, multiple affective keys also pose problems when what is said is not what is meant. In such instances, Besnier claims, non-referential indexical signs, such as facial expression or a physical action, or variation in intonation, over-ride all other signs.

Objects and artefacts could also index affect. However, it must be noted, as indexical vehicles of meaning, they are understood as embedded in those particular contexts where they occur. For instance, an object like the sewing machine, which indexes a flood of emotions associated with a rigid and subjugated life on the factory floor to one of my participants and her factory colleagues (see Chapter 8), triggers an affective contrast to the computer in their current student lives that in their perception opens up access to new worlds of unlimited opportunities and liberation. Besides objects and artefacts, I demonstrate in my data analysis how affective non-verbal responses from the audience or listeners have played a significant role as indices in public speeches and autobiographical narratives that seem mono logic, particularly in the interpretation of stance in such interactions. Also, a close observation of the affective techniques that speakers use in public speeches and storytelling to invoke the desired response from their audience can provide ample clues for a study of such interactions (Atkinson 1984).

As explained earlier, a fine-grained analysis of interaction from a performative perspective is not complete without an involvement with the ethnographic context in which speech occurs. The next section briefly outlines the participant observation I carried out on the field.

### **3.3.4 Participant observation from Ethnography of Communication**

Participant observation aids the researcher to study the interdependence of communication and other everyday activities of the participants on the field site and to understand why they say and do things in the way they do. Ethnography of communication involves the study of 'speech events' with 'settings' as one of the important components, referring to both the physical environment in which the interaction takes place as well as the cultural and psychological assumptions in and beyond the interaction (Gumperz and Hymes 1964). It is concerned with 'communicative competence', as opposed to 'linguistic competence' in a particular community (Hymes 1972a). It involves participation in and observation of the interaction between language and everyday activities – what people say and do – and making connections to other interactions taking place across space and over time.

In order to understand the communicative competence of the speaker in an interaction, the researcher needs to have knowledge of the social and cultural practices that the speakers draw on routinely. Spending a considerable amount of time on the field and in the community provides the researcher with opportunities to get to know their routines and experiences, their beliefs and attitudes, and to understand the contexts they imply in their interactions. 'Context' as a key concept in ethnographically oriented studies of language use is no longer viewed as 'a set of variables that statistically surround strips of talk'. Instead, it is believed context and talk mutually shape each other (Goodwin and Duranti 1992: 30). Observation is a major part of ethnographic work and, therefore, plays a key role in assisting the researcher to become part of the context. In this regard, participant observation has been described not as a research method, but as 'the behavioural context out of which an ethnographer uses defined techniques to collect data' (Angrosino 2007: 17) such as interviews and writing descriptions of what is being seen, heard and felt. My fieldwork and the techniques I used to collect and analyse data are described separately in the next chapter on research design.

I must emphasise the point here, however, that although described in a sequential order, participant observation and interaction analysis were conducted simultaneously and integrated as a combined analytical method, complimenting each other in providing links and filling those taken for granted gaps in communication.

### **3.4 Summary**

In this chapter I have presented the theoretical, epistemological and analytical framework of my study on subjectivities drawing on and reviewing relevant literature on this topic. I have explored the concepts of self, power and governmentality in a Foucauldian sense by focusing on scholarship related to Language, Education and Neoliberalism and their bearing on my study. I have explained my rationale for placing my study within a Critical Sociolinguistic Ethnography framework and discussed the concepts and methods within a combined analytical approach that involves critical analysis of discourse and interactional analysis highlighting stance and affect as analytical tools, in addition to participant observation from ethnography of communication to better contextualise the interaction analysis. In the next chapter I will describe the procedures I followed to conduct the fieldwork at IU, Bangladesh, as a step that will take us closer to my field site and my participants.

## Chapter 4: Research Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, I have discussed the theoretical concepts and the epistemological approaches that underpin my study. In this chapter, I will focus on the methodology including the methods and procedures I followed to find answers to the three research questions that I detailed in Chapter 1 (1.4). The theoretical framework, the epistemology, the methodology and the methods (e.g., sampling, data collection and analysis) – the four elements for research design that Crotty develops in his ‘scaffolding mechanism’ (Crotty 1998:4) – evolved from my research questions and provided a strong interconnected base for the research process. To re-iterate my research questions, as stated in Chapter 1 p19:

1. Under the current conditions of social and economic change, in what particular ways is women’s empowerment imagined, practised and legitimised at an international liberal arts university that officially aims to empower underserved women as leaders?
2. How do women learners position themselves and others, and negotiate their subjectivities in response to the knowledge and skills invested in them? With what lived consequences for those involved?
3. How might the learning of English serve as a ‘promise’ for women from disadvantaged rural backgrounds in the context of their university education?

To find answers to the above questions I took a close look at a small provision within a women’s university (IU, my field site) while focusing on the lived experiences of a group of selected participants. My study could be described as an ethnographic case study, as it involved studying the attributes and behaviours of individual women who constituted the case primarily, but at the same time, my aim was to understand and interpret those observed values with particular reference to the socio-cultural group and the educational institution they were part of, in order to illustrate features of the whole (Duff 2007). In other words, individual case studies formed part of a larger case study. Thus, my sociolinguistic ethnography of the empowerment of women comprised a multi-level case-study – at the country level, the university level and the individual learner level, including relevant types of speech events at the linguistic level across those contexts. The greatest challenge in undertaking a case study

approach is having to take the stance on generalisation seriously. I do not claim that the findings of my study are generalisable, but as a researcher I do aspire to show that they could have the potential to be transferable. I intend to show my case study as a case of something, as an instrument (Yin 2003) to gain insights into issues within and beyond, by testing the findings of my case study against the established theories discussed in Chapter 3.

Given the nature of the research questions, I needed to find ways to understand the beliefs and practices within the university and at related sites outside, and also that of the students and other social actors in the network by being part of it. In this sense, ethnographic fieldwork was vital. Towards this end, I relied on ethnographically oriented techniques of data collection – participant observation, studying documents, making fieldnotes complimented by audio-visual recordings and transcriptions of conversations, interviews and focus groups. In the sections that follow I will describe the ethnographic techniques and procedures I used (4.2), and then focus on the ethical considerations, mainly reflexivity as an integral part of my research (4.3). I conclude the chapter with a summary (4.4)

## **4.2 Ethnographic techniques and procedures**

As discussed in Chapter 3, my study can be characterised as sociolinguistic and ethnographic as it acknowledges that the interaction and a web of interactions inter-relating with each other make up the social order (Heller and Martin-Jones, 2001). Hence language use is viewed not just as a reflection of social order but as ‘social action itself’ (Ibid:12). In alignment with this belief, as a sociolinguistic study, my approach is more oriented towards ethnography of communication with a focus on the communicative competence of a particular community (Hymes 1964, Gumperz 1982). Hence my fieldwork involved studying the significance of verbal and non-verbal communication events. In addition, to be in a position to fill the taken for granted gaps in communication and to grasp the meaning and significance of the themes emerging discursively and semiotically, it became imperative for me to immerse myself in the everyday life of the university and its students by becoming a part of it. This involved following a specific method of selection of participants and adopting ethnographic methods of participant observation, recording fieldnotes and on-

going analysis of data which were suited to the needs of my research. I describe these procedures and methods below.

#### **4.2.1 Selection of participants**

It took me three weeks of preliminary fieldwork to decide on the criteria for selection of my participants. To be able to answer my research questions it was essential to recruit participants who were actively involved and directly affected by the phenomenon under study. Therefore, I chose purposive sampling which would allow me to choose participants who 'illustrate some features' (Silverman 2005: 129) relevant to my study. Secondly, it was important that the participants had 'special knowledge or experiences' (Krueger 1998: 71; Kvale and Brinkman 2009) that would contribute to the meaning-making process. That is, I had to choose from a small population of students who had been recruited by IU from the garment factories, and who were studying or had studied on the university's intensive English programme called Programme for Promise (PP). PP was the point of entry into the university for all sponsored students from Bangla-medium schools including the RMG students. PP was also the point of entry for my research. Before selecting my participants, though, I considered it quite important first to immerse myself in the activities of IU for a few weeks to understand the local practices and allow the teachers and students to get to know me too.

In the first few weeks of my fieldwork at IU, I learnt what the university as an institution, and its students in alignment, believed were essential skills to develop to become empowered. Besides the rigorous promotion of English communication skills through an intensive PP programme, the development of leadership and critical thinking abilities, as part of the liberal arts core curriculum, along with a spirit of personal freedom and resilience as 'good' student qualities, emerged in the daily discourses at IU as recurring themes. The emphasis on and orientation towards this package of skills and personal qualities differed in varying degrees among students and their year groups. This interested me and thus my selection plan changed. In order to capture this phenomenon, I decided to recruit participants from PP, AA and UG1 although initially I had planned to choose all my twelve participants from the RMG cohort that was on PP at the time of my fieldwork. I began to realise that for a study on trajectories it would be more valuable to view the progression through two levels

– from PP (Pre-access level) to Access Academy (AA) and from PP through AA to Undergraduate year 1 (UG1). It was not possible to cover Undergraduate year 2 and year 3 (UG2 and UG3) as the PP provision had only opened in 2016 and had completed only two years at the time of my fieldwork in 2018. So RMG students from PP had progressed up to UG1 only. Besides my own research criteria for the selection, I had to pay attention to practical considerations of the availability of time, semester two being the busiest on the academic calendar, and the participants' willingness and confidence to share their personal experiences.

With some help from the office administrators and programme co-ordinators, who did most of the gatekeeping for the student participants, I accessed some basic factual information about learners and identified some potential groups. After a round of group interviews to explain what my research was about and their part in it, several students volunteered to participate. However, some were not keen to take part without a certificate of participation as it was part of the requirement of students to justify time spent on activities outside classrooms with their CDIP (Career Development and International Programmes) for gaining credits. I was happy to arrange this with the permission of the Dean, towards the end of the semester, as a small token of appreciation of their participation in my research.

With some difficulty and delays, I managed to select three focal participants – Hasina from PP, Fowzia from AA (who took over half-way from Nisa who chose to become a secondary participant as she felt she was not 'really RMG') and Zinia from UG1. I have already introduced these students in my introductory Chapter 1. I thought it was a good idea to let my main participants choose their group of three secondary participants each – friends and classmates they normally hang around with. This gave them flexibility and allowed me to observe them in naturally occurring moments too. I had twelve participants in all, three focal and nine secondary participants, although not the same secondary participants were present all the time. The names I have used in my thesis, of all my participants and other social actors like managers, teachers and co-ordinators, are pseudonyms given by me for reasons of confidentiality.

Although it took a few weeks to select the participants, my fieldwork observations had started even on day one of my arrival on campus, as

described in Chapter 1. In the section below, I describe how I carried out my observations on the field.

#### **4.2.2 Participant observation and fieldwork procedures**

Observing the typical and atypical features of daily meaning making processes became a regular feature of my fieldwork experience. Participant observation or observing by being part of the community constituted a major part of my ethnographic work. The techniques I used as an ethnographer on the field were those that became naturally suited in the different circumstances on the field and included interviewing, conversing, listening to biographical narratives, getting participants to write journals, attending and participating in cultural and social events and also studying documents, face-book screen shots, archival materials and artefacts like photographs, newspapers and physical features like buildings and facilities used by the students and staff – all of which contributed to a better understanding of the social practices prevalent on the field-site.

As a participant observer, my aim was not just to collect objective data about the university community's daily practices but to understand those practices as the women in the study understood them, through their use of the communicative resources available to them. This required spending all week and most week ends on the university campus, particularly in the first three weeks, to get to know the routines, who is who and their roles in the organisation of the academic and administrative departments and services, as well as to make myself visible and known. As described in Chapter 1, I had no problem integrating with the life at the university. The set up was international and English was the lingua franca on campus between the eleven or so different nationalities of the staff and students. Moreover, it is a residential university, where all members including visitors, like me, stayed at the designated halls of residence, and this arrangement worked to my advantage as I was able to mingle with the different groups in different quarters on the campus. I spent nearly six months as a resident of the university and continued correspondence with my participants well beyond a year through social media and e-mail.

During my preliminary field work period, in the first month, I established contacts with several teachers and students in the UG, Access and Pre-Access sections, observed various social and cultural events and activities like Karate

(which was a compulsory component of the liberal arts package) and Drama, sat in student forums and classrooms and had invited myself to join student and faculty meetings, mainly to make note of the kind of discourses that were prevalent on the campus relating to language, education and the empowerment of women. I conducted formal interviews with some members of senior and middle management, which gave me a head-start to look for documents and information on the university website and other promotional material, to understand what they were talking about or not talking about.

Informal conversations and interviews formed a major part of my data collection technique in my fieldwork. I make a distinction between interviews and conversations as methods, as I have found in my past research experience that their interactional structures and intentions, as perceived by certain sections of the community, can alter the data to be collected. According to Blommaert and Dong Jie (2010) 'an interview is a conversation' (p. 44). They warn that if researchers take the role of the interviewer, then the participants will respond as interviewees, and it would turn out to be a formal exchange. In my previous study, the term 'interview' and the appointment system had invoked in some less experienced young people associations with job interviews or college admissions interviews, where they have to do their best and speak grammatical English. This had forced a formality and artificiality onto the situation, and they produced repetition to avoid being singled out. Therefore, I insist if an interview is a conversation, why not just call it a conversation.

I had decided at the outset to use individual semi-structured interviews only with managers and senior staff, and with students only if a situation arose. These interviews with managers were pre-arranged, carefully prepared with target questions. Where my focus was on subjectivities of women, there was more reason to minimise the risk of formality by avoiding individual 'interviews' with the participants and making appointments for interviews. I had reasons for taking this view. First of all, I wasn't sure how the interview as a speech event was understood by this new community I was beginning to interact with and secondly, I wanted to avoid imposing any assumed structures of interaction where the aim was to participate in a joint production of knowledge (Briggs 1986).

At IU, except for a couple of initial individual interviews that took place before I got to know the students and a couple of narrative interviews where the

student was interested in narrating her personal life experiences – which naturally happened to be that way, I left it open to the participants to engage in any mode of interaction. They were mostly in the form of casual talk or conversations with me and/or with their peers, often during lunch or over coffee or after social events and sometimes even while travelling. This technique also helped with presenting myself as one of them rather than as one with authority, an impression arranged interview situations could create. The downside of this method was that the conversations were not always focused on the topics of my interest and as a result I had a huge volume of data, audio recorded or handwritten notes, to deal with. Sometimes I directed the conversations and discussions with questions or responding in a specific way. To my relief, this conversation method did not affect the collection of relevant data. On the other hand, it enhanced my data, as I was also interested in observing, recording and interpreting how they said things that pointed to identifiable attributes the participants displayed or wanted to display to be seen as somebody, as certain types of persona to be accepted as members of the IU community, rather than restricting to what they actually said about the topic itself under discussion.

Classroom observations of group interactions provided valuable data too, where students were more focused on their tasks than on me observing them. I had to follow a tight schedule of appointments to observe classroom activities to fit in with the timetables of the different levels. I divided my time among the three groups to participate in their social activities outside their classrooms and sometimes outside the campus. Some observations were obtrusive, as the participants could clearly see I was recording or making notes – e.g., interviews, focus groups and non-participatory classroom observations. Other observations were unobtrusive, like in informal conversations in the dining hall or at public events where my participants were present or took part e.g., in Mother language Day celebrations, Commencement Day events and also classroom interactions in which I became a participant.

Besides conversations I used Focus Groups or Group Interviews, which I preferred over individual interviews with the students as well as the teachers. It served different purposes with the two different groups. In the case of students, besides eliminating formality and exaggeration, a group situation gave some less confident students the courage to participate and share their ideas. Sometimes Focus groups took the form of group Interviews, where I had to

repeat the questions and encourage every member to talk. Focus Groups are generally viewed as 'giving voice' to members of vulnerable and marginal groups (Carey and Asbury 2012; Robson 2011). I believe it provided a good platform for some of my participants. The greatest advantage to me was that it gave me the opportunity to observe more carefully the interactional behaviour of the participants, what they said and more importantly how they said it and how the other members reacted and interacted. Although I played an active role, keeping the discussion focused on the given topic and interrupting with my questions and clarifications, my role as a moderator in the group discussion was a more passive one than an interviewer's normally is. In the case of teachers, my intention was only to get a collective view from professionals on the provision and students, to check my own understanding of the emergent categories and themes ( See Appendix 4), rather than observe their interactions.

I conducted at least two sets of Focus group discussions with each of the student groups in order to clarify or strengthen the themes that had emerged discursively during my field walks. For example, attitudes towards and alignment with certain aspects of their past and present education systems, the facilities at IU, attitudes towards English in Bangladesh society, at IU, and their own, their experiences as factory women in general, their experiences as students at a prestigious university, social discrimination against women in general and readymade garment factory women in particular, and their perceptions of becoming empowered women (see Appendix 3).

In addition to audio and video recording, I made copious notes soon after the events whenever recording on the spot was not possible. Not all circumstances of the interactions were congenial for recording (either with the recorder or with my pen and note- book). Moreover, I was keen on capturing some natural talk in naturally occurring moments to reduce the effects of observer's paradox (Cameron 2000: 24; Sarangi 2007: 577), which is the concern of every observer whose presence as an observer, or the very presence of the recorder, could alter the behaviour of the observed. The only way I could do this was by stopping to look and behave like an observer from outside as far as possible but becoming part of the community and participating fully in their social life leaving my recorder and notebook and pen behind sometimes. This meant that as soon as I was back at my desk or while I was

travelling back I had to jot down in detail in my notebook, all that I had heard, seen and felt which were of significance to the themes emerging at that point. I noted down words as they were spoken as far as I could remember, any interesting verbal and non-verbal reactions and behaviours and emotions performed during the interaction. It took only a couple of weeks for my participants to get used to seeing me with my recorder and my notebook, which was inevitable sometimes. They would even remind me to switch on the recorder. A curious student once asked me what I was scribbling in my notebook, to which Nisa (one of the secondary participants) laughingly replied, 'all good and bad things about you' (fieldnotes paraphrased quote). This warranted an explanation from me, and thereafter whenever possible and appropriate I showed my notes to the concerned students and elicited what they thought about it.

My fieldwork was not confined to the campus of IU. I had decided at the start of my fieldwork to visit the factories where my participants had worked before coming to the university. I was also keen to visit their families and spend time with them in their villages and on day trips. As soon as I had selected my participants I wrote off to their factories, two near Dhaka and one in Chittagong seeking permission to visit their factory sites with my participants (their employees) during the students' summer break when they would be going home for their vacation. Two out of three factories were kind enough to arrange a visit and interviews with the managers. I also had the unique opportunity to visit the factory floors of one of the biggest garment factories in CEPZ (Chittagong Export Processing Zone) along with the IU admissions team, talk to prospective IU students, waiting to take their admission tests, and observe IU's marketing and recruitment events. The visits to the factories and the families, and conversations with the people my participants had connections with, gave me a deep and better insight into the experiences and issues which have had an affective influence on their subjectivities. Keeping a record of all the collected data and engaging with data analysis was an on-going procedure, as described in the section below. The corpus of my data was quite large and the most important and relevant data can be viewed in Appendix 8 on page 276 / 277.

### **4.2.3 Recording data and on-going analysis**

Recording the data took different forms and became an integral part of the selecting, synthesising, and analysing process. Besides audio recording almost all interviews, focus groups, conversations and casual chats and video recording events that I was allowed to, I started making notes alongside about events that seemed relevant - what I saw and heard and also said - either immediately if the situation permitted or soon after while the scene was still fresh in my memory. An on-going data analysis was carried out at 2 levels – a thematic analysis and a linguistic analysis.

To start with, I worked through a process of recognising descriptive codes and then synthesising them into categories and sub-categories. At the end of each day on the field site I read the notes and wrote it up as a story. My notes consisted of descriptions in detail accompanied by my reflections and interpretations of them (Creswell 2012). I paraphrased what was said using the key words the participants had used in their interactions, along with the enactments, responses, body language and the physical arrangements. I made sure every entry had details of date, time, place, and my comments as a researcher if necessary, to make recapitulation at a later time easier. As a novice in the field of ethnographic writing I spent time training myself to write descriptions, staying as close to the observed data as possible, including the keywords, phrases and sentences used by the participants. The exact words and phrases used by the participants were labelled as field quotes (FQ) and those that were paraphrased as paraphrased quotes (PQ). Direct quotes (DQ) were the ones I was able to pick up from audio recordings. Sometimes I got my notes checked for authenticity and accuracy of translation and paraphrasing by some UG students and co-ordinators who had volunteered to help.

By reading my descriptive notes and listening to the audio recordings several times I was able to identify recurring themes relating to my research questions and generally to the topics on language, education and women's empowerment. At the start I was guided by my well-defined research questions which I had stated in my research proposal, but just a few days on the field found me overwhelmed by new questions and more interesting perspectives I could not ignore. My research questions were undergoing changes to match the scope of the data that was being collected. After a process of going forwards and backwards and looking at the content of the data that I was collecting, I was

able to filter down and establish a set of persistently emerging themes to pursue and work on, but also preserving the odd ones in a different file. I can call this my first stage of analysis. At this first stage, the list of themes was very long, running to over 80, and quite messy.

The second stage of my data collection and analysis mainly centred on the observation in relation to my focal participants and their daily activities. I had set up colour coded notebooks to correspond to the field work and observations on different sites related to each of my three participants. It also helped in identifying and categorising previously identified general themes under the participant categories and sub-categories. The recording and analysis of data involved selecting the interactions or parts of interactions that contributed more to the projection of the persona, or the presentation of self, that became evident and, I was interested in capturing in their verbal and non-verbal communication practices. At this stage of analysis, based on the categories of themes that had appeared in the first stage including family and socio-economic and educational background, I was mainly looking for identity attributes in their projections as leaders, critical thinkers and resilient and responsible individuals, their attitudes towards language, education and empowerment as promoted by IU in various activities, their congruent and divergent alignments with their factory and university experiences and values, contestations and contradictions, their struggles and progress in their pursuit of a 'successful' life and in their current positions on the trajectories of social mobility (see Appendix 9, p 278/279, for a sample of the finalised list of the themes/codes). This required transcribing relevant audio recordings verbatim.

I transcribed the interactions from my audio recordings using a minimalist transcribing system recommended by Heller *et al.* (2018), but also borrowed some conventions prescribed by Seedhouse (in Heller *et al.* 2018: 185) in order to cover additional details of spoken interaction sequences and features such as loudness, emphasis and overlapping (see Appendix 2 for conventions used in transcriptions). I ensured pauses, sighs, laughter, silence, background noise and other para-linguistic features were indicated on the transcript. I cross referenced these transcripts with the field notes I had made on those occasions to recollect and record prominent gestures, facial expressions, glances, signs of mockery and irony and body movements and included them in the appropriate

places in the transcripts. After this, I seemed to be ready to attempt a further linguistic analysis of the interactions.

I carried out a moment-to-moment analysis of interaction following Rampton (1995, 2006) and several other empirical studies discussed in Chapter 3. The verbal signs the participants used included grammatical features that carry out emotive functions, e.g. use of the habitual present tense in storytelling to increase tension and dynamism or immediacy of action to invoke the desired affect in the listener; use of adverbs in hedging, and quantifiers for intensity; emotion through intonation and voice quality to show shifts in positioning; discourse markers like 'you know' to indicate empathetic closeness; engaging in affective speech acts like self-praise or self-deprecating; besides using syntactic features like active/passive constructions to remain non-committal or formal, reported statements to show change in footing, to give a few illustrations of affect in language use. To add to this list, the use of poetic devices such as satire is saturated with affect, a device Zinia (Chapter 8) used to her advantage. The non-verbal devices in interactions include gestures, facial expression, body orientation and other visual signs that index affect.

The analysis of Fowzia's autobiographical narrative required special attention as it did not fall directly within a sociolinguistic interactional analysis. As discussed in Chapter 3, I adopted the techniques of biographical narrative analysis of positioning. Guided by Davies and Harre (1990) and adapting the analytical approaches theorised by Bamberg (1997, 2004), Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000) and Riessman (2001) in their analysis of positioning in narratives, I worked through three levels within a framework to interpret my participant's presentation of self in her autobiographical narrative in Chapter 7. At levels 1 and 2 it involved looking at the positioning of the story characters vis-à-vis to each other and looking at the positioning of the storyteller in the interaction, by narrative design. At level 3 the teller's interactional positioning was analysed for linkages with normative discourses, showing congruent or divergent alignment, or both in the course of the narrative. In other words, 'the teller rises from a level of narrator, narration, and audience to a wider level of social reality' (Bamberg 2004: 336-337).

In all these interactional and narrative analyses my focus was on how the women in my study made sense of the university and factory environments. I examined the categories and the intersubjective constructions and viewed them

against the observed data. I was moving on from a thematic content analysis to a more inferential linguistic analysis, looking at verbal and non-verbal cues, at stance and positioning and affective effects to mobilise the linkages between institutional and individual communicative practices and the wider social processes by mapping, tracing and connecting (Heller *et al.* 2018). The analyses involved looking for intertextual, interdiscursive, and contextualising communicative practices that linked the diverse discourse patterns that were identified in the earlier stages of analysis.

As I was dealing with the lived experiences of women in a particular community, affect, stance-taking and positioning figured significantly in the data as mediating devices between communication in interaction and the social and political economic structures within which my participants were operating (Jaffe 2009; Ochs 1992). Drawing theoretical guidance from Goffman (1981), Jaffe (2009), Du Bois (2007), Bamberg (2004) and Besnier (1990), as discussed in Chapter 3, and following Ochs (1992) for a closer analytical perspective, I carried out the analysis of stance and affect in two steps. First, I identified the linguistic forms that indexed interactional stances such as affective, evaluative and epistemic, based on the meaning being conveyed and how an intersubjective alignment was being built up in the interaction between the participants or between a participant and me, as the interlocutor. Then, at a complex level, I linked the stances to certain subject positions with reference to social categories and processes that had emerged as themes (of becoming a leader, becoming a critical thinker and becoming resilient) and are typically associated with taking specific stances and emergent characteristics of certain persona that are recognised in the discourses of the staff and students at IU. An ethnographic sensitivity was vital to examine if these stances can carry social relevance beyond the immediate interactional context, and to demonstrate that as social actors their subject positionings involved negotiation of social meaning (Jaffe 2009; Jaworski and Thurlow 2009). In this way, the process of stance-taking or positioning in interactions including affective positioning, was linked to the social identity and ideological constructions.

Throughout the fieldwork, in my observations, data collection and analysis, in fact from the point of deciding to go to Bangladesh into my writing up stage, I have paid careful attention to ethical considerations and abided by standards stipulated by BERA (British Educational Research Association).

Reflexivity as a major concern in social science research occupies a central place in research design, as I detail in what follows.

### **4.3 Reflexivity and ethical considerations**

In matters of reflexivity, which I believe is fundamental to any research project, I take the position of Heller *et al.* (2018) which involves: 1) problematising ‘the position of the researcher together with that of the researched’; and 2) treating ‘methodologically all discourses and viewpoints as (in principle) debatable with regards to the contexts in which they emerge’(parenthesis in original, Heller *et al.* 2018: 149).

Firstly, being aware of the fact that no research is absolutely neutral and that ethnographic studies in particular are not ‘air-tight’ from personal experiences and biases of the researcher (Heller *et al.* 2018:9), I acknowledge that my subjectivity may have played a role in the framing of the research questions, the selection of the participants and the field site as well as in the collection and analysis of data. At the same time, I have tried to question how these would impact the participants and to carry out a systematic checking of my interpretations with the knowledge and observations of other social actors on the field and my research colleagues at home, so that the interpretations are not exclusively mine.

Secondly, as stated in Chapter 3, I take the epistemological stance that knowledge is socially constructed through a dialogue between the researcher and the researched. In this dialogue, the positioning of the researcher and her background has been found to be crucial. In this regard, I have two important statements to make. The first one is concerned with the question of who I am and how I am entitled to study and document this social practice that interests me. I grew up in South India in surroundings where it was the norm that an education in English would lead to social and economic prosperity. My parents, coming from humble but intellectual backgrounds, believed in investing the little money they had in the education of their children in the medium of English. My mother, in particular, who has had a great influence on my academic pursuits, was a self-educated literary scholar, being conversant and highly literate in five regional Indian languages. Due to lack of access to secondary education and adverse circumstances she was forced to stop her education at the age of twelve. In spite of all the knowledge she had gained over the years, the only

regret she had until she died was that she couldn't speak English 'properly'. She would ask me, even in her old age, to teach her, but I had always felt she had more than adequate knowledge to call herself a scholar, without having to learn English. Having not been in that situation myself and being a product of post-colonial India, I have always been intrigued by the deep entrenchments the associations to the language called English has caused in the lives of people, particularly in the former colonies of Britain, like India. I bring to my research my personal experiences and also professional experience of over three decades in women's education in India and as an ESOL/ TESOL lecturer in London.

The second statement regarding my positioning is that, since my study focuses on the ideas of empowerment of women and social mobility, I have attempted to conduct my research in ways that would give my participants the opportunity to share the platform in my empowering research. Cameron *et al.* (1992) describe empowering research as 'research on, for and with' participants. Following this principle, I have used interactive methods, treating my participants as people with their own purposes in life and valuing their agendas by sharing knowledge, both academic and about my research. I did this by participating in their daily life and having an on-going dialogue with them throughout my stay at IU and after. I integrated with the university community from the start, first by attending and supporting all their social, cultural and charity events. During classroom observations, I often took a break from being an observer in the corner and participated in the team activities on an equal footing or acted as the teacher's assistant helping out with organising activities. I offered to help my participants with their English outside the classroom, which was received with much gratitude as most of them were struggling with their written English.

IU is a women's residential university with a majority of students coming from Islamic backgrounds. I had to abide by some of the safety and security restrictions on campus and respect the local sensitivities, which were new to me. Although I had sought prior formal permission from the authorities in IU, to access resources and to observe and talk to staff and students, I had to seek special permission every time to be in certain classes or groups within the university and sometimes was also refused permission by some lecturers understandably for their own reasons. While most teachers and managers were open and welcoming and eager to share, some others were cautious and

sensitive to having a visitor and made sure no one involved was affected – for example, recording presentations in classrooms or filming women from traditional Muslim backgrounds participating in sensitive political and social debates on women’s liberation, were considered breach of confidentiality and unsafe for the women. On some occasions, I was obliged to get advice from the lecturers concerned on what was appropriate to document and what was not to respect the local sentiments. For a successful ethnographic field work, I felt building relationships of trust and understanding the limitations was of paramount importance to me including acknowledging responsibly all their contributions to my research. I made every effort to protect the confidentiality of my research site and my participants as far as possible by giving them pseudonyms in my thesis. Any information quoted from documents and the university websites have not been directly cited to maintain anonymity.

In terms of how I was perceived by the different sections of the IU community after a few weeks of my stay there, here are a few examples. I was formally introduced as a PhD researcher from UCL, who had come to stay at IU for a few months, by the Programme Director (PD) of the Programme for Promise to all staff as well as the external assessor from the UK, who was visiting the university at that time, to assess the quality of the provision. The external assessor interviewed me, soon after, on my research experiences at IU since my arrival, and made it a point to include my comments in his published report.

The teachers on the Pre-Access programme, with whom I was interacting on a daily basis, viewed me as someone who had TESOL experience, and often requested feedback on their teaching skills, whenever I chose to sit in their classes. It took a while to make them understand that I was not focusing on teaching and learning, and it was not my intention to observe their teaching. The Bangladeshi women students I interacted more closely with viewed me as an Asian originally from India and an English teacher and researcher from the UK, who shared some of their cultural interests and understood their social issues, as someone who was interested to learn from them about their histories and experiences. At all levels they showed a willingness to help and I felt warmly welcomed and accepted as one of them.

However, this was not the case at the very beginning of my fieldwork. Once a young Bangladeshi third year undergraduate student clad elegantly in a

saree, approached me, and got into a conversation about my research. The following was one of the comments she made:

'Why do you people from the west take so much interest in women empowerment of Asian women? They think we are submissive and stupid (laughs)...we have a traditional mentality, and we can't take care of ourselves'.  
(Field quote from notes)

I tried to explain to her that I was there, as a researcher, to study and understand precisely that. Although I was clearly Asian and also in a saree like her, I was perceived as an 'outsider'. I felt my entitlements as a researcher were being challenged but could see she was making an important point about stereotyping by the 'west' of Asian women as needing 'empowerment' and in that process she was stereotyping me as a scholar from the 'west'. For me, her comment felt like the right note to start my fieldwork on. I was alerted to the dangers of stereotyping which could happen in new surroundings and how power relationships play a key role in different ways. I took this as a good sign to delve deeper but more sensitively into the field.

#### **4.4 Summary**

In this chapter, I have described the methods and procedures that were the main aspects of my research methodology – selection of participants, fieldwork procedures, methods of data collection and analysis of data. Data collection, recording and analysis were on-going and simultaneous and closely followed my research questions. Reflexivity as an ethical concern has been given the main focus. This is so because being sensitive to local sentiments and reflexive about how I was perceived and acknowledging and questioning my subjective involvement in the research in a transparent way, are, I believe, important requirements for a successful ethnographically oriented research. My account of the experiences on the field site in this chapter sets the stage for the analysis and presentation of data about IU in Chapter 5, and the student participants in Chapters 6 to 8 to follow.

## **Chapter 5: The Institutions and the construction of the 'talented student'**

### **5.1 Introduction - The 'important meeting'**

*My first day at International University (IU) happens to be the meeting day for all staff. I have been invited to attend five meetings of which one catches my attention. The meeting marked as 'urgent and important' on the email is to be chaired by the Dean of Academic Affairs. It takes place in the executive conference room attended by about 25 members of faculty and staff including the Programme Directors of Programme for Promise (PP or Programme) and Access Academy (AA), Directors of Admissions, Finance and Marketing. It has been called to discuss admission policies and possible changes to accreditation and some of the student selection procedures.*

*The urgency and importance of the meeting is concerned with the progression issues surrounding a group of students who were progressed a semester ago from the Pre-Access (PP) to the Access (AA) level but had to be sent back due to their lack of progress. They have been temporarily placed in 'Recovery Class' as they don't seem to fit in PP or AA. It is bad news, the Dean announces, that nearly 30% of PP students (including some RMG students) are found 'not ready' to pursue Access study due to their inadequate level of English and other academic skills necessary to progress from then on to an under-graduate programme in Liberal Arts and Sciences. She is concerned that this situation should not be allowed to recur as it is a huge budget deficit. Failure to progress in one year had implications on funding, as all the PP students are sponsored through foreign funding.*

*The Finance Director reminds those staff that suggest a longer English language learning programme, that many of the PP students, including the RMG students, are 'identified students', identified as 'IKEA scholars', unlike mainstream regular applicants. Hence, the funding is restricted to only 5 years. Some Access and Under-graduate faculty express their frustration that some groups of students are not suited for academic studies at all and if allowed to progress would bring the success rates down. They suggest that those students should be placed on an exit point after PP with a certificate. The Programme Director of PP is not happy with these suggestions and points out it is important to keep the promise the university has made to these women who have taken*

*'personal and employment risks' to join the university. They have been 'promised a degree in 5 years' he stresses, and the teachers and students are working really hard seen in the improvement in their English, but unfortunately, a focus on IELTS coaching alone over just two semesters, doesn't seem to be working. He is emphatic that changes have to be made to the curriculum and the learners need sustained help with English beyond PP to succeed. This again has implications for further costs at a time when the university was going through cuts, the Dean expresses in a worried tone. Some suggest that the university must increase its intake of fee paying English medium students and aim to recruit 'highfliers' in order to improve its academic profile. Some even suggest that the university must extend its admissions beyond Asian countries to raise its 'international status'. At this point the Dean draws the attention of the staff to parts of the university's mission statement and its objectives from the university charter (Extract 1). It goes as follows:*

#### **Extract 1 Mission statement and Objectives**

XXX (IU) seeks to graduate women who will be skilled and innovative professionals, service- oriented leaders in the businesses and communities in which they will live and work and promoters of intercultural understanding and sustainable human and economic development in Asia and throughout the world. (Mission Statement)

... There exists an urgent need to create and sustain centres of excellence in the education of Asian women ... The International Support Committee and the Support Foundation desire to establish and maintain the university as a high quality university accessible to talented Asian women in general and in particular for women from the rural poor and other disadvantaged populations. It is a non-profit organisation. (University Charter and the Handbook 2018-2019).

*This is to remind everyone present that the university is dedicated to training 'talented Asian women' from disadvantaged backgrounds as 'skilled' leaders who can promote 'human and economic development'. The university, as a non-profit organisation, has set itself this difficult challenge and they have to face it. She then moves the focus of the meeting to a review of admissions criteria and accreditation.*

*The Admissions team come in here to explain that the current difficult situation is a consequence of waiving the admission policy for PP students with regards to the 12-year HSC (higher secondary certificate) entry requirement in order to increase numbers and attract funding from sponsors within a short time. Some of the PP students have only a 10-year school certificate and many of the RMG students were adults returning to education after a long gap, some*

*with families and personal problems. The Programme Director intervenes at this point and repeats, that the university has committed to the women as well as the funders that they would fill this educational gap, a right to education that these women have been denied and to enable them to pursue higher education. The Dean puts forth a suggestion made by senior management to change over to a two-year International Baccalaureate (IB) to address this issue which is met with loud protest from some tutors as IB is perceived as an even more difficult route for students from a non-English medium background. Before the meeting is adjourned the Dean introduces me to the group and asks me if I would help by joining one of the sub-committees and offer my perspectives on new accreditation for PP. I willingly agree to help in whatever way I can, but politely add that I still have a lot to learn about the students.*

*(Field notes January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018).*

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From the meeting it was clear that there was pressure at various levels: pressure felt by senior management (indexed by the call for help even from an outsider and a total new comer, like me) to maintain a high international profile while accomplishing its mission to educate and empower women from underprivileged backgrounds who are perceived as lacking in skills; pressure felt by middle management to devise new systems to manage risks and ensure smooth running of the provision, and to resolve the current urgent issue to find a place for these 'unsatisfactory' students, as it seems they don't fit either in PP or in AA; pressure felt by teaching staff to raise English levels of learners from non-English medium schools to an academic level of IELTS 6 within a year or less; and finally the pressure experienced by the learners who may feel undermined and categorised as 'Recovery Class' and tagged with a challenge to improve their English and other necessary skills within a semester while their peers move forward, as expressed by a tutor later after the meeting.

I left the meeting room overwhelmed with questions to which I had to find the answers on the field: Who are these 'identified' learners categorised as 'Recovery Class'? What are they recovering from? Or what are they recovering, in order to become 'desirable students' again? How does the university imagine itself and its 'talented Asian women'? What qualities and practices does it promise to instil in its students? What are the roles and interests of the other

powerful external bodies that were being addressed, although absent, at the meeting?

The Dean's meeting gave me immediate access to the point of entry for my research as it was a good snapshot of all the social actors and their actions interacting over a specific issue in this given time and space of the meeting. I was interested in the RMG factory learners currently on the Programme for Promise and also in those that had progressed from there on to Access and UG courses at the time of my fieldwork (2018). The group of learners called the 'Recovery Class', which was the main concern of the meeting, consisted of several RMG learners too. I was interested not so much in the resolution of that particular issue discussed at the meeting *per se*, as in the relative congruence between the different departments and personnel within the university- Senior Management, Finance, Admissions, CDIP (Career Development and International Programmes), Middle Management for PP and AA, co-ordinators, teachers and students - as each played their social role emanating from their position. They contributed in their own capacities to the discourses circulating within the university and displayed their collective orientation towards a set of values influenced by powerful external agencies intersecting at the university in their pursuance of the institutional goals. The 'important meeting', as it was perceived by all staff invited to the meeting, served for me as the right ethnographic trigger to investigate the various aspects that constituted and regulated social life in the institution.

This chapter presents an account of the specific ways in which IU, the focal university, constructed a distinct profile for itself as an international university dedicated to the education and empowerment of women from 'the rural poor and other disadvantaged populations' (University Charter), and how the categorisation of the RMG (ready-made garment) factory women, as one of its target student groups, was made meaningful. It explores how the discourses of women's empowerment are discursively defined at the university and by its external social relations. While English is the major site of struggle for these learners from non-English medium backgrounds, as revealed at the meeting, the chapter highlights the way in which the struggles with English are given less prominence or erased in the process of foregrounding the development of leadership skills, which are deemed important for social mobility. The institutional belief is that leadership skills, combined with English, would

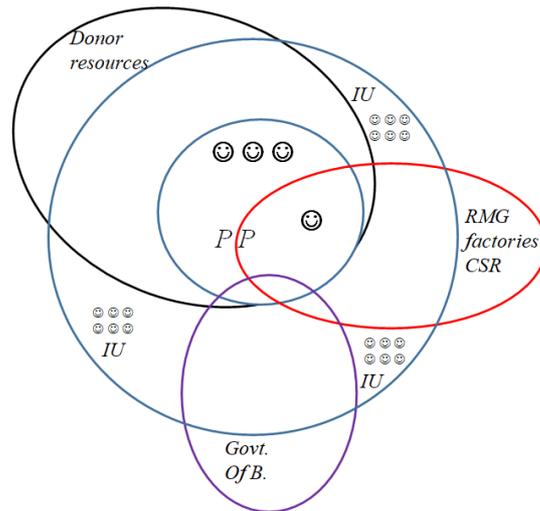
contribute to the personal development and linguistic behaviour of these women to become equally marketable as their middle-class peers from English medium schools.

The analysis in this chapter aims to track: a) the major areas of congruence or the joint alignment in certain discourses about women's empowerment among social actors presented in daily language and communication practices within the university; b) the political socio-economic relations that have come to be established between four powerful institutions, IU, the RMG sector, the Government of Bangladesh and the philanthropic foundations, in the process of accomplishing a joint mission; and c) the process of normalisation of institutional values in the university's endeavours to prepare empowered subjects. In what follows I first give details of the University and its partner institutions (5.2). Then I will focus on how the university implements its mission by selecting and training its 'talented' students (5.3). This is followed by the discourses of English at IU and the challenges faced by it in the accomplishment of its mission (5.4). The chapter concludes with a summary (5.5).

## **5.2 The university and its partners**

An analysis of some of the promotional material on the university website, available documents, and interviews with managers and faculty, answered some of my questions which were sparked off by the meeting described earlier and made it clear why the members at the meeting with various responsibilities interacted in the way they did. Viewing my fieldnotes from the meeting against the information on the website highlighted the involvement of four major external domains: the Government of Bangladesh as a benefactor granting permission and autonomy to the university; the multi-national ready-made garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh helping a certain underprivileged category of learners with their wages during the 5-year period of study; the philanthropic foundations providing the funds; and global corporate organisations that generate the funds - all forming a web of centres and sharing a common aim. I present the involvement of these institutions in relation to the university in Fig. 5.1:

Fig. 5.1 Web of institutions



In the following subsections, I will analyse the institutional rhetoric that is used by senior management to market the university and its mission (5.2.1), followed by an analysis of the impact of the partner institutions, the Government of Bangladesh and the RMG factories (5.2.2), as well as the international aid givers and the corporate fund raisers (5.2.3).

### 5.2.1 The university and its mission

To attract resources from a wide range of donors and make an impact on prospective students and their parents, employers and sponsoring governments and other stakeholders in neighbouring Asian countries, the university presents itself in a unique way with an extraordinary mission and commits itself to outcomes worthy of investment. The following strip of institutional marketing rhetoric (Extract 2) on the university’s website highlights qualities the university claims for itself as being ‘the first of its kind’.

**Extract 2: ‘Who we are’ - A stance of exclusivity**

‘(XXX) is the first of its kind: an independent, regional institution dedicated to excellence, women’s education and leadership development – global in outlook, but rooted in the contexts and aspirations of the people of Asia.

Located in xxx, Bangladesh, XXX exists solely to educate and empower a rising network of women leaders through the transformative power of liberal arts and sciences education. Open to women from all walks of life, (XXX) particularly encourages women who are the first in their family to get university education.’ (University website: Who we are).

(XXX – name of university anonymised)

The above is part of the university's promotional discourse for marketing and recruitment. It claims for itself 'excellence' signifying the highest quality it aims to instil in its students. It believes in providing excellent education through the development of leadership qualities, mentioned twice. The terms 'excellent', 'women's education', 'empower', 'leadership', 'local', 'global' and 'Asia' in the first paragraph serve as a neat cluster of signs (Urciuoli 2003b) that describe IU.

The university considers itself the first of its kind in its status, location, purpose, and target student population, indexing an exclusive brand. As a women-only university It claims to be 'rooted' in local contexts while maintaining a global outlook in preparing competitive leaders for the labour market. This gives a certain guarantee to parents and the society at large that their daughters/ women are in a safe and secure environment that respects so-called 'Asian cultural values.' In its description of its unique qualities in the accomplishment of an altruistic aim, the university projects a stance of exclusivity which assures all the stakeholders that it is a safe and productive investment. In doing so it positions its students as exclusive too, as we shall see later. The Vice Chancellor (VC) of the university, whose main job is to market the university to its prospective donors and raise funds, describes in Extract 3 below taken from her interview with me, the international character of the university and how she perceived it as the 'first of its kind'.

**Extract 3: 'The university is international in the true sense of the term.'**

S: XXX claims to be a unique international university and the first of its kind. Can you tell me a bit more about this?

VC: XXX has its unique features. First of all, according to the University Charter and the Binding Memorandum of Understanding, the university gained full autonomy by an act of Bangladesh parliament over the establishment and running of the university.... We are bound by the agreement to recruit women from all Asian countries and to reserve 25% of the seats for Bangladeshi women...

...The university is international in the true sense of the term. Unlike the other international universities in Bangladesh, at XXX, the Board of Trustees is made up of international leaders. It has a large international support network operating from various countries, east and west, to raise funds and sponsorships. Our students come from 15 different Asian countries. About 50% of our faculty are from overseas. The curriculum is based on an American model of Liberal Arts education...

...It is also the first of its kind because of its location. It is a regional university, centrally placed in Bangladesh, in the region of the Muslim populations in South and Southeast Asia. This has enabled recruitment from 15 Asian countries. The university's commitment to Asian women's education and re-generation is seen as an important element to ensure democratic forms of governance not only in Bangladesh but also in the neighbouring countries. Above all, the brain behind this innovative programme is a Bangladeshi settled in the US. I would also add that we are the first to undertake innovative and challenging projects in the region. Our latest initiative is the Programme for Promise programme that has been running successfully for the past two years. We recruit sponsored students from socio-economically underserved backgrounds. We have women from the RMG industry, the Rohingyas, Grameen Daughters, persecuted Afghan communities, hill tribes and stateless women. We are looking into the recruitment of women from the tea plantations and the Madrasas in the future. The idea is to prepare them in the first year of their entry with intensive English for a liberal arts under-graduate education. Our graduates come out as leaders. Although small in number, 200 to 220 graduates a year, they will be capable of leading groups in their own areas and forming networks of women leaders in communities and businesses... (Interview with VC, REC 101)

S- Sudha      VC- Vice Chancellor      XXX- name of university anonymised

The above monologue comes across as an argumentative discourse delivered by an enterprising leader, well versed in marketing, making an argument for the university as highly marketable and competitive. She takes a stance of exclusivity, demonstrated in her rendering from an institutional voice which has a well-defined structure: enumerating reasons to consider the university for a 'unique status'; using comparison to strengthen her statements – 'Unlike the other universities in Bangladesh...'; substantiating the argument with a concrete example of the PP provision created to support certain marginalised categories of learners. Her argument is based on institutional criteria relating to mission, faculty, student recruitment, curriculum and political, economic, and educational outcomes and the tone is one of authority and confidence, signified by her use of factual statements which seem hard to be disputed.

The VC highlights three important points of argument for its unique status, besides the international character of the university, which is the most important and legitimised selling point in Bangladesh: its autonomous status; 'intensive' English education; and the type of students it targets particularly on PP. Both in the VC's monologue and in the extract from the website 'full autonomy' and 'independent', emerge as important status symbols, their positioning at the very start of both the instances quoted above, indexing their high value as a selling point. The university's detachment from the Bangladesh government and the local educational bodies gives it an edge over the other

private and so called ‘international’ universities in Bangladesh, which have come under criticism in the recent years.

With regards to the second point, the VC’s mention of the purpose of PP to impart ‘intensive English’ as a preparation for undergraduate education is of particular significance. The discourse of English as an international language and its indispensability for the development of these women seems to be ingrained and legitimised in the education policy of the institution. The underscoring of English as an essential part of the assemblage of skills, such as critical thinking and leadership, as perceived by the university, will be further elicited in other discursive spaces in the university in a later section.

The third point of comparison implied in both the extracts is in the ‘sole’ purpose of the university – to ‘educate and empower a rising network of women leaders’. The university offers a liberal arts and sciences education which has ‘transformative powers’ to transform women from underserved backgrounds into women leaders. The VC mentions the specific underprivileged categories that the university targets, implying a contrast to the other local competitors who cater to the rich and elite in the society. The marketability and competitiveness that the VC claims for the university and displays in her monologue typify leaders the university hopes to graduate – marketable and competitive.

At the same time, the attitude of care for women and their empowerment, being a challenging endeavour, draws support from international donors, as mentioned earlier, and more importantly from the local government, which has entrusted responsibility and granted autonomy to the university. A mutual reciprocity between the university and the other partnering institutions becomes visible in the sections that follow, beginning with the involvement of the Government of Bangladesh as a powerful player, followed by the garment factories with an obligation to join in.

### **5.2.2 Support from the Government of Bangladesh and the RMG factories**

The Government of Bangladesh, the ready-made garment factories, the Stitching IKEA Foundation, and the corporate fund raisers play equally significant roles as partners in the mission of the empowerment of women. First, as the host, the Government of Bangladesh has supported IU since its inception in 2008. It declared (Extract 4):

#### Extract 4

'The Government of Bangladesh places high priority on improving the condition of women and on strengthening the quality of education as a means of advancing national development and desires to host and support the University in Bangladesh' (The University Charter).

Bangladesh was aspiring to achieve the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, agreed by world leaders at UN in 2000) to move from an economically 'underdeveloped' to a 'developing' status. They were aimed at tackling poverty in its various dimensions and provided a developmental framework of action plans for 15 years (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, UN). Further SDGs or Sustainable Development Goals were set in 2016 for the following 15 years (2015 to 2030). Of the eight MDGs, the 3<sup>rd</sup> MDG, the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment was the goal that overlapped with the women's empowerment aim of the university and perhaps brought about a timely agreement between the Bangladesh Government and the university in 2008.

For aiding the government in its national development, and to achieve its MDG 3 (later SDGs 4 and 5) on women's advancement, the Government of Bangladesh not only welcomed the establishment of such a university in the country and granted autonomy and 'international status' (UGC – university website). It also donated 104 acres of land to the university to construct its new state of the art international campus. In return, the government expected a commitment from the university to recruit at least 25% Bangladeshi women students. Its sustained support was evidenced when it played a key role in 2016 when the university set up its 'innovative and challenging' (VC's monologue) project, Programme for Promise (PP), to strengthen their joint mission to empower women, particularly Bangladeshi women. The multi-million RMG (ready-made garment) sector was identified as a source from which to recruit socially disadvantaged women. The RMG (ready-made garment) industry was involved in the Programme for Promise programme run by the university by not only providing the students, but more importantly by continuing to pay the salaries for five years as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Programme for Promise, as the show-case project, was the most advertised initiative of the university, at the time of my fieldwork, and was visible on social media and covered by national and international newspapers as proudly claimed by the university's marketing team in their presentations. The

reasons for the programme's popularity and publicity in the press are obvious. It had support from higher levels of the Government and the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for its development aims. The original idea was from IU's founder, a Bangladeshi settled in the US who implemented the plan along with the Government of Bangladesh and a CEO of one of the largest groups of garment factories who is also a member of the university's Board of Trustees. The logic behind this idea is publicly explained by a government official in Extract 5:

**Extract 5**

'XXX (university) believes that talent exists in every sector of the society. We thought that in Bangladesh in the garment sector where more than 3 million women are working there must be some incredibly talented women who would be able to, if they are given a liberal arts education, not just make themselves skilled, but what will happen is they will become leaders in their own chosen fields...' (MP, Bangladesh Government, in a promotional video).

The above supporting statement indicates that the government has a commitment and also there is an expectation from the government. Once these talented women from the factories become 'skilled' through a liberal arts education, they will also be change-makers as leaders.

Besides the political backing, the Rana Plaza tragedy in 2013, which had killed more than a thousand workers, mostly young women, due to unsafe working conditions, provided a strong case not only for providing opportunities to the factory women, but also for CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) monetary support from the factory owners, without which the families of the workers would be deprived of a living. The implied selling point was, firstly, it would remedy the bad reputation and, secondly, their employees would act as their 'good ambassadors' in an international environment. The timing was right. An international newspaper (Extract 6) spoke about the university opening its doors to Bangladesh garment factory workers soon after PP was inaugurated:

**Extract 6: ‘...countering the storm of negative publicity...’**

‘...The garment factory workers’ university fees are covered by charitable donations, but the XXX (university) requires factory owners to continue to pay wages while the women study. Their families rely on the income and would not let them attend otherwise. XXX, one of the (university’s) first graduates, was given the task of convincing factory owners to agree to these terms and send their employees... “I didn’t get a very positive response at first,” says XXX (University Outreach Co-ordinator). But her impassioned argument that this was a golden opportunity for them to support their workforce and improve their reputation, countering the storm of negative publicity triggered by the collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013, and the widespread perception of garment factories as sweatshops, won out. Five owners signed up...’ (The xxx newspaper)

(XXX – anonymised names)

According to the current Recruitment Officer (RO), the attitude of the factory owners has changed since. Thanks to the safety regulations enforced by foreign retailers, the working conditions in the factories have greatly improved. So they are no longer worried about their reputation. They know that their former employees currently studying at IU are acting as their ‘good ambassadors’ in gratitude for their financial support. The RO said the most challenging part of her job was convincing the employers to pay the wages. She explained – ‘what they are demanding in return is press publicity which can be very expensive, and the university is not keen on incurring extra costs, in the current financial crisis. This is a big issue, and as a result the enthusiasm of the factories to participate in the partnership is decreasing and so is the number of applicants from the factories’ (field notes, paraphrased quote).

However, the factory owners of the current students are coming up with their own ideas to gain publicity for their CSR work. The PD commented:

‘How clever the factories are! They are aware how the RMG women are talking about them...XXX (name of the factory) are coming to video the students, to see their employees speak glowingly about them... They (the workers) are grateful for the employment and education opportunity and the economic independence, so have nothing to complain about...’  
(REC 15040402, interview PD).

This was not the case always. While the RMG students were very grateful for all the help from their factories, they had their own critical opinions about the CSR and women’s empowerment discourses in Bangladesh. Towards the end of my fieldwork, when the participants had got to know me better, during private individual conversations, some of them voiced the experiences of RMG women. I visited three garment factories with my participants, one in Chittagong and two near Dhaka, all IU partners in education. On being asked, the managers of all

the three factories attributed their employment of large numbers of women, about 80% of the workforce, in their factories and their willingness to pay wages to the learners as part of CSR, to their commitment to the national agenda of the empowerment of women. While driving back after visiting Zinia's (my UG1 focal participant) factory near Dhaka, Zinia opened an interesting conversation with me about what her manager had just said about women's empowerment (Extract 7):

**Extract 7 : '...people forcing women to do job// DO JOB/ DO JOB'**

S: Sudha      Z: Zinia

- 1    Z: our factory/ and many people are saying we are giving jobs to women to be empowered//
  - 2    But the girls working in factories/ or anywhere// the girls is not [enjoying the money]//
  - 3    S: [Um, why]
  - 4    Z: Before they getting the salary/ the husbands and family members are coming to the
  - 5    factory gates to get the salary/Also we have many cases here/ that a person marrying 2 or
  - 6    3 girls and all are working In factories or anywhere/ and because they will earn money/ and
  - 7    he will enjoy it// they FORCE ↓them to work// (angry, pushing hands forward with force)
  - 8    S: so/ they use women↑//
  - 9    Z: Yes// so I don't think just giving or doing job is women empowerment// Women's
  - 10    empowerment means whatever I think I can do/ I can do//It's not that/ I am educated so I\*
  - 11    have to do job//
  - 12    It is my wish, if I do \*not wish/ I should not have to do it//
  - 13    S: Yes/ you should have the [freedom]//
  - 14    Z: [Yes/yes//] but here I saw that people forcing women to do job//\*\* DO JOB/DO JOB
- (REC072 S Chat after factory visit - 0.13 to 2.0)

Zinia's tone is one of anger towards the social pressures and her reaction to the normalisation of control in the name of empowerment, which invokes an emotional response from me. She takes the floor from the start assuming epistemic and affective stances while evaluating her factory director's perception, and also of other sections of the society (line 1) that women's empowerment means educating women and creating jobs for them. She starts to give her reasons for her opposition in line 2. My uptake (line 3) is one of sympathy and my overlap brings out my emotional involvement and concern to elicit further reasons. Zinia responds in lines 4 to 7 describing what she perceives as the exploitation of women by the family / society with an expression of anger demonstrated by her action indexing force (line 7). My comment, showing surprise and indignation in the rising intonation, 'so, they use women ↑' (line 8) provokes Zinia to construct her critical evaluation of the concept of women's empowerment in Bangladesh (lines 9-11) which emerges

out of her RMG experience – ‘we have many cases here’ (line 5). According to her empowerment is not just giving jobs or doing jobs. It is the freedom to do what the woman wishes and not being forced. She also mentions if a woman is educated, it doesn’t mean she has to do a job (line 10). ‘Educated’ contextualises the extension of her argument about factory work to the field of education, where she implies ‘many people’ believe empowering women through education means getting them ready for jobs for economic growth. In the final line, she presents a contrast to my mention of ‘freedom’ in my supportive statement (line 12), with an emphasis on ‘DO JOB/DO JOB’ (13) in direct speech, embedding the society’s words and indexing her annoyance at the strategic promotion of ‘empowerment’ devoid of freedom. The sudden change in the speaker’s tone of voice, the use of repeated forceful imperatives, her gestures showing extreme frustration and the overlapping in the last line enact an affective stance of annoyance in opposition to the control and force of the powerful institutions in the society.

Zinia is reacting in her own way, to the discursive power of several institutions here (Blommaert, 2005), the family, the factories, the Government and the educational institutions, which have all set their own goals for the empowerment of women. While expressing her attitudes towards the society and how she views the intentions of the institutions that promise power to women, it seems to me she is also front staging an important characteristic of the ‘desired student’ or the ‘talented woman’ at IU: the ability to critically question social injustice and voice her opinion on the exploitation of women as capital, in this instance. The positioning of Zinia as a critical thinker will be further analysed in Chapter 7.

Besides the support from the government and the CSR from the factories, the university also relies on international aid from philanthropic foundations to fund the students’ tuition fee and residence. The Stichting IKEA Foundation is one of the key funding agents for learners on PP, particularly those from the RMG sector. The network of corporate fund raisers situated worldwide, some of whom are members of the university’s Board of Trustees, play a significant role in the financial management of the university. I turn to these below.

### 5.2.3 The impact of the international aid givers and fund raisers

The students sponsored by IKEA are identified as 'IKEA scholars' for administrative reasons, as Stichting IKEA Foundation sponsors 200 learners with full scholarships of \$15000/year for five years of residential study. The Stichting IKEA Foundation shares the university's developmental aim through its CSR initiative, as stated in the Development Aim (Extract 8) below:

**Extract 8: '...create a new generation of leaders for the region...'**

'...help young women to break the cycle of poverty, illiteracy and disenfranchisement that persists for many women in South and South East Asia and the Middle East. XXX (university) graduates will ultimately form a network of women leaders who can help to address the greatest challenges facing their communities, including educational disparities, poverty, gender discrimination and ethnic conflict. By training talented women in leadership and critical thinking and inculcating in them an ethos of tolerance and respect for diversity, XXX aims to create a new generation of leaders for the region...' (Development aim – IKEA Agreement).

(XXX – anonymised name of university)

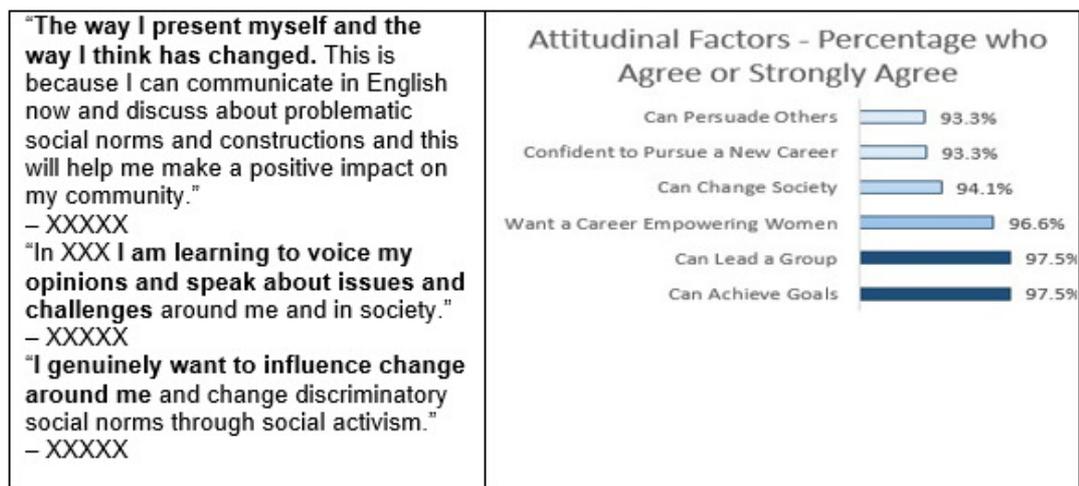
The development aim, according to the agreement, clearly states who the beneficiaries would be, which regions they would come from and what the expected outcomes would be, thereby stipulating who would qualify for the scholarships. What the institutions jointly offer to do is to produce a 'network of leaders' who will help address the 'greatest' challenges facing the communities such as 'educational disparities, poverty, gender discrimination and ethnic conflict'.

The focus and emphasis of this development discourse is more on what could be achieved and gained in terms of meeting targets by educating women rather than on the specific ways that the education will benefit the women themselves. The discourse of empowerment of women identifies 'leadership' (repeated thrice), 'critical thinking' and 'tolerance and respect for diversity' as an essential part of the 'training' of 'talented women' – a configuration of skills which caters to capitalist ends of using the women as resource. The terms 'leadership' and 'critical thinking' are strategically deployed (Urciuoli 2003b) to index the joint perspective of the two institutions on what counts as 'good education' and 'good student' in their understanding of good citizenship. The 'training' is for those who will be identified as 'talented', meaning possessing

certain 'desirable' qualities and merits, recognised as such in this particular field by the two partners. The 'training' of 'talented women' will be discussed in a later section.

The expected output(s) according to the Agreement are stated as - the IKEA scholars will: a) be placed in summer internships; b) actively participate in extra-curricular activities and c) demonstrate leadership within the university and in their non-academic roles. In order to achieve its objective of providing necessary training in these skills, 'the university has developed a unique curriculum focused not only on providing students with a world class liberal arts and sciences education, but also essential leadership training, hands-on learning experiences and opportunities to connect with mentors and professionals...' for their self-development (University Objectives from website). The university is expected to provide periodically reports on the evaluation of progress made by IKEA scholars in class and their engagement with extra-curricular activities and independent student projects. The 'self-development' and leadership outcomes, as recognised by the institutions and other social actors within the university, are projected in the power-point slide below (Fig.5. 2) which is used as part of the presentation at the university's marketing events.

Fig. 5.2 Self- development and leadership outcomes



XXXXX- current students at IU formerly factory workers XXX - IU

The various components of 'leadership', 'critical thinking' and 'communication in English' as recognised by the university are embedded in the quotes of current student-models experiencing a transformation and from the survey insert on

Attitudinal Factors in Fig. 5.2. They are both meant to be evidential as well as inspiring to prospective students and other stakeholders. The first and foremost skill according to the outcomes in the slide is the ability to communicate in English which has changed the way the student presents and thinks. The ability to 'voice' (one's) opinions, 'influence people' and 'change discriminatory social norms' require both critical thinking and leadership. To voice her opinions a woman needs courage and confidence. To influence people and effect changes a leader needs to develop 'persuasion skills' which is related to how well one is able to articulate. Eloquence and public speaking are encouraged at IU. The skills training comes as an integrated package of leadership, critical thinking and English as they overlap with each other. They are neatly summarised and shown as high scoring transformational outcomes in the Attitudinal Factors insert. The 'can-do' statements are supported by words spoken by some current students who are projected as 'successful students' and hence a role model to emulate. It is a powerful discourse strategy to raise the hope and aspirations of prospective students in anticipation of a better future that will mobilise them to the status of leaders in the society, like the senior students, that is if they pursue the education and training offered by IU. In addition, the technique of showcasing current students under construction exercises gentle power on prospective students to take responsibility to transform themselves into certain desired types of subjects.

Such joint partnerships with an aim to empower women through education would not be possible without a strong network of fund raisers - the Support Foundation (SF) who do the most difficult job. The SF along with the Vice Chancellor (VC) are actively involved in raising funds for the university and for the completion of their new campus project. The SF is based in the US as a registered non-profit organisation but offers advice and support to its branches operating from countries like the US, UK, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan. Thanks to their efforts, besides Stichting IKEA Foundation and Open Society Foundations, Jack and Beth Meyer and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations as the seed-funders, the university has attracted funds from several local and global philanthropic organisations and corporate firms. To mention just a few of the foundations and organisations supporting IU with funds, scholarships and internships taken from the list published in the Annual Report 2017 - Goldman Sachs, Abbots, UNIQLO, Abbvie Foundation, Victor and William Fung

Foundation, Grameen Bank, Levi Strauss, The Rockefeller Foundation, Metlife Foundation, US Department of State DRL, BRAC; the list is long.

The members of the Support Foundation function as members of the Board of Trustees and many of them are leading figures in the corporate world. Their participation in the university events, some of which I had occasion to attend, (e.g., Commencement) and their inspiring speeches posted on the website, have a high impact not only on donors and other stakeholders but also on the aspiring body of student leaders and create an environment of corporate success. One such promotional video is of an economist and Vice Chair of a leading corporate firm in Japan, and her articulation of the concept of 'Womonomics'. The concept promotes the idea that women's education and empowerment will improve the economy as a whole and suggests solutions to removing the obstacles to women's economic participation (Extract 9).

**Extract 9 : '...the return on a dollar is higher for educating women than for men...'**

'...Numerous studies have shown that the return on a dollar is higher for educating women than for men because women are more likely to pass on the education philosophy to their children and the rest of the community. My other passion is getting more women into the economy. Female economic participation is very low in japan (and developing Asian countries). In a country with a shrinking economy and population, using half that population more efficiently makes sense...'(University web-site)

The powerful delivery of the speech and the persuasive arguments for women's education in economic terms, as well as her sheer status as a strategic analyst, establishes a firm corporate leadership model for the students to follow. A statement made by another key player, in one of his interviews with a student leader (Extract 10 taken from Annual Report 2017: 19), places women's higher education at the centre of all-round economic development:

**Extract 10 : '...by achieving SDG 4 and 5... we will amplify our ability to achieve all other SDGs...'**

**Question from a student:** Right now, issues such as climate change and security are increasingly threatening the livelihoods and quality of life of billions of people. How does women's higher education fit in, both in terms of our collective priorities as well as the potential for impact?

**Answer from corporate leader:** The UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2020 offer a snapshot of the transnational issues that we face as global citizens... I believe that by achieving SDG 4 and 5, thereby achieving quality education for both boys and girls, we will amplify our ability to achieve all other SDGs... a woman's education and empowerment will impact her children, her family and her community...( Member Board of Trustees, South Korea network of corporate leaders and institutions).

The idea of placing the woman at the centre of economic development as the potential for impact is further emphasised by the following quote from a CEO on the university's website (Extract 11):

**Extract 11 : '...that silver bullet is women's education'**

'When you try to treat just one issue, such as providing clean drinking water for a single community, it can get overwhelmed by all the other problems on the list: poverty, disease, violence, sanitation and climate change. We need something to treat these problems across the board – a silver bullet. For me and many others, that silver bullet is women's education' (Senior Managing Partner and CEO ; Co-founder Chairman Emeritus XXX SF, USA).

According to him, and perhaps all of the SF involved in the raising of funds from the corporate world, women's education and empowerment is a 'silver bullet' to 'treat' a whole load of 'problems across the board'. All the three extracts above index corporate leadership models and are examples of a persuasive genre highlighting the women's development discourse currently becoming popular in CSR discourses. The emerging theme of the woman as a valuable resource yet to be tapped and her empowerment through education as the answer to all economic problems in the developing world is the crux of my analysis in the following sections, particularly how this is imagined to be accomplished by the university with the support of the partner institutions involved.

One of the ways in which the training is being accomplished is attributing or sharing its stance of exclusivity and corporate leadership with its students and offering membership of a prestigious university community. The unique characteristics it models and claims for itself are perceived as the skills and qualities it expects and endeavours to inculcate in its students. In relation to how the university describes itself and its mission shared by its partners as shown above, I will now discuss how IU perceives a 'talented' student and the social construction of the image of the IU leader.

### **5.3 The 'talented' student**

A talented student is one who fits in well with the university's requirements, mainly with the potential to become a leader and change maker, besides possessing other skills necessary for self-development. A focus on the selection process, with particular attention to the characteristics of the 'talented' student

(5.3.1), and then the training facilities offered at IU once they are selected (5.3.2), can reveal how the university imparts and legitimises this knowledge.

### **5.3.1 The Selection process: to secure the promise of a better future**

To be worthy of a scholarship and the employer's financial support, and to be selected for a place at this prestigious international university, the applicants undergo a rigorous selection procedure set up by Admissions. The admissions team, along with the marketing team, is responsible for marketing the university nationally and internationally, and for the selection and recruitment of 'talented students', from the regular admissions (fee-paying) route as well as the sponsored routes. The selection of potential students from the RMG sector was a longer process as the competition for places was high and most importantly the university had to 'ensure the prospective students had academic integrity... We need to be equitable but also super-selective', as the PP Director would put it in his interview with me. For example, in a previous round of on-going recruitment, 15 learners needed to be selected for that cohort out of nearly a 1000 that took the entrance tests in English and Math. At the time of my fieldwork, the Admissions team were sorting out recruitment in a local factory and, before the event, the Recruitment Officer showed me the power point presentation that she was asked to use at the factory. A selection of slides that caught my attention is presented in Figs. 5.3, 5. 4, 5.5 and 5.6.

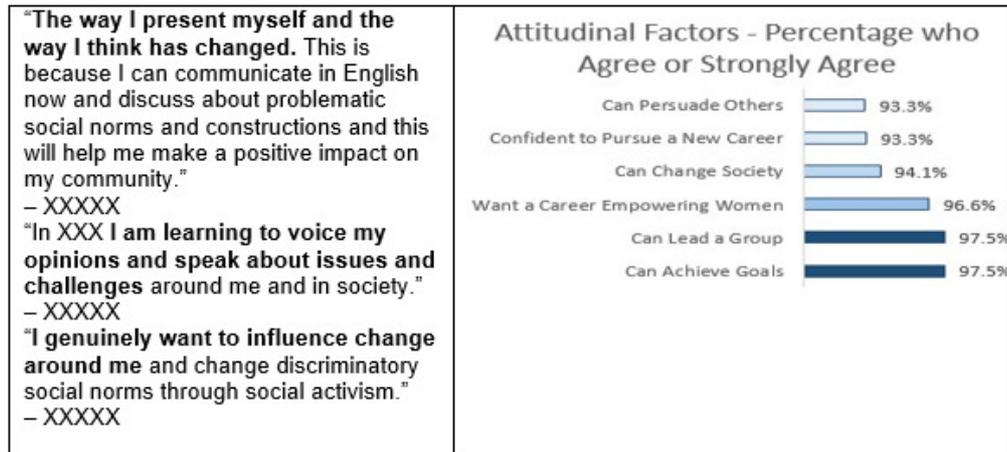
Fig. 5.3 Why this university?

- Focuses on **English-language** acquisition
- Offers additional training in **mathematics, computing, martial arts, and leadership**
- Requires ~20 hours of class time per week
- Offers structured **independent reading time, group study sessions, and peer and professional mentorship**
- Offers opportunities for **community service and extracurricular activities**

Fig.5.4 Curriculum-Programme for Promise

- All-Women's Learning Environment
- Dedicated Faculty & Staff from 10+ Countries
- Full Scholarships Available to Cover Tuition, Room & Board, School Supplies, Healthcare, and International Travel
- Flexible Pre-University Preparatory Programs Focused on English & Mathematics
- American-Style Liberal Arts & Sciences Curriculum
- Dynamic Residential Campus / Hostels
- 20+ Extracurricular Activities & Clubs Including Sports & Performing Arts
- 100+ Professional Mentors from All Over the World
- Placements into Top Internships, Graduate Schools, and Jobs

Fig. 5.5 Student Leadership Development



XXXXX– current students at IU formerly factory workers XXX - IU

Fig. 5.6 Criteria for Admission

Programme for Promise is only offered to those who are invited under a Sponsored program. To be considered for Admission, an applicant should ordinarily:

- Have completed at least SSC/ Class 10, a total of minimum 10 years of education
- Have demonstrated leadership potential and a commitment to work for positive social change
- Belongs to a community which falls under XXX sponsored category
- Have demonstrated leadership ability through participation in extra-curricular activities and public service.
- Or, have been sponsored /nominated by an organization

Throughout the presentation, the persuasive genre to market the programme is clear through the use of adjectives. ‘All-women’ , ‘Dedicated faculty’, ‘full scholarships’, ‘flexible preparatory programme’, ‘American style’, ‘dynamic residential campus’, ‘professional mentors’ and ‘top internships’, for example in the first slide (Fig. 5.3), persuade the customer (here the factory employers and workers) to imagine the institution in a certain compelling way – i.e. American, international, Faculty and staff from 10+ countries, prestigious, rich, caring, liberal and professional. The curriculum in the second slide (Fig. 5.4) is attractive too – ‘English language acquisition’ being the focus. English is a selling point, as explained by the PD in his interview: ‘in Bangladesh English is a sign of societal status’. The power-point presentation invokes an eagerness to be part of this prestigious international corporate community, at no financial cost.

While marketing the university’s policies and values and its unique features, the presentation conveys to the prospective applicants, at the same time, the type of ‘talented women’ IU is looking for. Figs. 5.3 and 5.4 give an idea of the high profile international and diverse environment the women will be

expected to fit in. By drawing attention to the acquisition of English Language at the start of Fig. 5.4, it is being made clear that a certain level of English would be expected which will be assessed through a written test and interview in English (explained in another slide, not included). Figs. 5.5 and 5.6 stress the most important skill the applicant must possess. 'Leadership' dominates the content of Fig. 5.6 on Admissions criteria: 'leadership potential and commitment to work for positive change', 'leadership ability' demonstrated through 'participation in extra- curricular activities and public service'.

Fig. 5.5 is totally devoted to 'Student Leadership Development' telling prospective students that they would transform into leaders if they studied at IU. This slide was analysed earlier (section 5.2.3) to understand how the institutions made sense of leadership and critical thinking. It is re-contextualised here to enumerate the important attributes of the 'talented woman' the marketing and recruitment team is looking for. The discourse of the promise of a better future, of becoming leaders, that runs subtly through the persuasive texts is meant to offer hope to the factory women. The quotes from the current RMG students in Fig. 5.5 intends to inspire and trigger desire to be like one of them. But to be like them the prospective student must commit herself to achieving what the university deems valuable and legitimate in terms of knowledge and skills.

To be selected to study at this university, the applicant must have the potential to improve English, the courage to voice her opinions, make a positive impact on the community, influence change, challenge discriminatory social norms, besides develop skills to persuade and lead others, to pursue new careers and achieve goals. In short, the 'talented woman' is someone who has the ability and aspiration to transform into a leader with the attributes mentioned above. One of the directors who was routinely involved in interviewing and filtering the candidates explained what she looked for in the prospective student: 'our main aim is to find out if they had the drive, the drive to change things, the ability to see social injustice. You can call it leadership potential' (AD interview). In short, right from the time of their admissions interviews, students are guided to present themselves as future leaders and come with clear aims to change things in their communities, as was demonstrated in the first meeting I had with the PP students, analysed in Chapter 6. In the next section, I document my observations of the various ways in which the university prepared its students as future leaders.

### 5.3.2 The training of leaders

Once the students are selected, they go through an equally rigorous academic journey, particularly in the first year, as they are expected to raise their English level as well as develop leadership skills to keep up with the university expectations. This involves, as I observed, balancing a very busy schedule between curricular and co-curricular activities provided by the university, based on a liberal arts curriculum which the university believes is best suited to create a generation of women leaders.

In order to prepare women for leadership roles, the university has designed an educational package that it believes would 'best' suit its purpose. One of the lecturers explained to me (Extract 12) how the university's mission of 'women's empowerment' is perceived and imparted by teachers:

**Extract 12 : '...to be thoughtfully critical in their responses to issues of concern...'**

'...Women's empowerment at XXX prioritises a number of values. Primarily we aim to cultivate leadership skills, critical thinking skills, confidence and independence. In and outside the classroom we encourage students to express themselves, to be thoughtfully critical in their responses to issues of concern, and beyond the classroom to be proactive and active in addressing issues practically. These are evidenced in community projects in and outside the XXX community...' (E-mail correspondence with Dr C).

(XXX – anonymised name of university)

The lecturer highlights in this professional discourse 'leadership skills, critical thinking, confidence and independence' as the values that are prioritised by teachers at IU in keeping with the 'women's empowerment' objective. As institutional values, they are cultivated in classrooms and normalised in the daily activities, some of which are shown in the photographs later in this section. The university's self-identification statement quoted below (Extract 13), from the IU Handbook, explains its curriculum policy:

**Extract 13 : '...a purpose-designed General Education Core Program...'**

'...XXX adheres to best practice in international education, with a specific focus on the education needs of Asian women, through a purpose- designed General Education Core Program in the liberal arts and the sciences. The Medium of instruction is English.' (Handbook-'Identity').

(XXX – anonymised name of university)

In the above institutional discourse, the university projects itself as an educational institution that has carefully evaluated the specific educational needs of its students through the use of the terms 'best practice', 'specific focus' and 'purpose-designed'. They invoke a positive uptake in the stakeholders to something that is commonly understood as generally a 'good thing' and normative, as is the short crisp statement: 'The Medium of instruction is English'.

'Best practice' in the university's perception is the American style undergraduate programme in liberal arts and sciences which it currently offers through Majors like Bioinformatics, Economics, PPE (Politics, Philosophy and Economics), Environmental Science and Public Health, besides Minors in several subjects ranging from Asian Studies to Finance and Mathematics, and also dozens of other short courses like Drama and Mandarin. Its educational practice is characterised by student-centred, research oriented interactive approaches in pedagogy. The liberal learning curriculum as defined on the university website seeks to 'link education with professional training and learning with action in the real world' rather than restricting to an 'ivory tower' (IU website).

What is special and unique about a liberal arts curriculum is that all programmes are grounded in a 'purpose-designed' General Education Core Programme to develop essential skills. It is a set of foundation courses (Ethics, Literature, Social Analysis, Civilisation Studies, Arts, Math, Natural Sciences and Writing) common to all students, embedding skills such as 'leadership, the ability to frame and develop debates on the basis of critical thinking, and the inspiration to envision large-scale change' ('curriculum' on website). The Core Programme is fully accredited. An Associate Professor who teaches on the Core Programme expanded on how these skills are assessed, (Extract 14) in email communication with me:

**Extract 14** : '...Critical thinking **IS** assessed through both formative and summative assessment...'

'The Core Programme is a common foundation set of courses in the Liberal Arts curriculum. Critical thinking is embedded in the learning outcomes of the Core Program in which I teach modelled on the AAC&U. (American Association of Universities and Colleges). Yes, Critical thinking **IS** (emphasis original) assessed through both formative and summative assessment within a course ... Overall, we look at the ability to make reasoned arguments both in written and verbal form...It means that students are able to be thoughtfully critical and reflexive about problems that present themselves ... Unlike critical thinking, the explicit development of leadership skills are not always embedded in learning outcomes. It is implied in some cases that building up academic skills including critical thinking will lead to or add to the cultivation of sound leadership abilities...' (E-mail correspondence with Dr T).

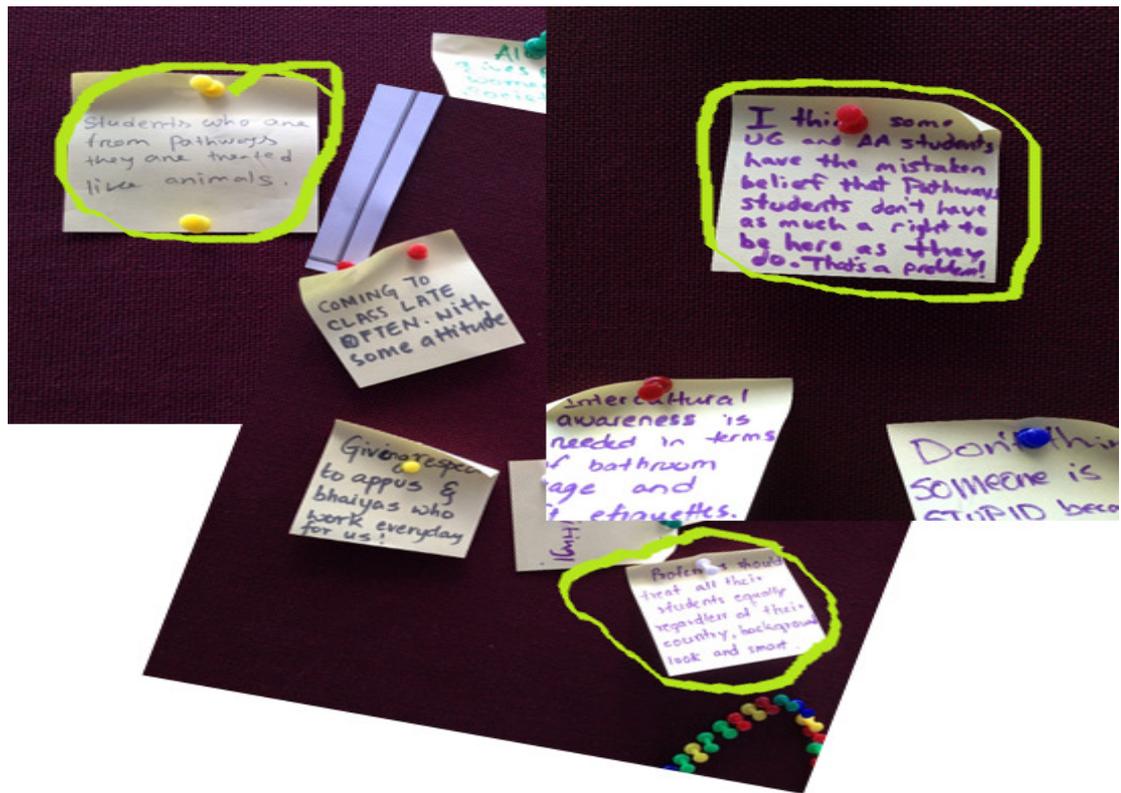
The embedding and assessment of Critical Thinking makes it an important academic skill to be learnt and developed in order to be a 'successful' student at IU. It is a pre-requisite to become empowered and a leader, as the curriculum emphasises. Although leadership skills are not formally assessed currently, the university has plans of developing a curriculum for the teaching and learning of leadership skills. To this effect it proposes to appoint a Professor of Women's Leadership who will lead the Centre for Leadership, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship at the university (University website). Some observations of the development of critical thinking in the classroom are presented in the context of the learners in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

The curriculum is embedded in the extra-curricular activities which form a major part of the daily life on campus and compliment the skills developed in classrooms. This is demonstrated in the activities described below. While active participation in classrooms brought its academic merits, competing to take part in extra-curricular activities outside classrooms would increase visibility and add credits to show on their CDIP (Careers Development and International Programs) record. The CDIP played a very important liaison and marketing role in student life as well as a crucial public relations role at the students' exit point by marketing its students and alumnae impact to external agencies in Asia, Europe and America for prestigious internships and graduate positions. Internally the job of the CDIP is to organise events like the Commencement inviting world leaders and speakers from international organisations, provide volunteering activities and promote the skills valued by its external agencies, e.g., employers. Its job is to represent and market its current students as 'successful' and 'dynamic leaders' (website), almost like attractive made-to-order packages, having acquired all the employability skills recognisable to corporate employers, through specially designed programmes and activities.

Karate was a compulsory bi-weekly activity that was built into the timetable in the first two years. I observed while some students viewed it as an imposition and showed the minimum participation required by arriving late or by absenting, some others took it seriously as part of their self-confidence building (field notes, chat with students). The campus was always buzzing with activity, all week, at weekends and outside term time. Studying at a residential university had its advantages, as it was possible to maximise participation, especially when students from outside Bangladesh, and even from outside the local area, could not afford to travel home during vacation, which was often the case. This gave ample opportunities for students to increase and document their participation and competitiveness. Inter-House Sports events took place at the weekends and Cultural events like the Talent Night competitions were held in the evenings. Participation in external events carried more value for CDIP records - attending conferences (e.g., inter-collegiate Women's Empowerment Summit and Model UN) leadership camps and volunteering in schools and in community projects run by NGOs.

During the semester I was there, one of the events that significantly added to my understanding of local discourses was the Intercultural Awareness Week, celebrated with faculty involvement across the campus. Besides cultural programmes, traditional costumes and food to celebrate diversity, there were public debates and small group seminars on cultural issues. In the panel discussions on 'Cultural Diversity and Cross-Cultural Challenges' which I attended, students displayed eloquence, confidence to speak and argue before a large audience and the ability to handle complex issues critically and reflexively drawing knowledge from personal experience and texts that they had read. These are attributes that they are trained to acquire in the classrooms, as mentioned by the associate professor earlier. Besides, the participants who were senior students clearly with an English medium fluency, acted as role-models to the junior students. As part of the Intercultural Awareness Week, I noticed on my daily walks that there were opportunities for students, less inclined to attend and participate in lectures and panel discussions, to express more discreetly their concerns and make suggestions to improve intercultural understanding. Fig. 5.7 shows pictures of the responses that caught my eye.

Fig. 5.7 Some concerns on post-its



While the highlighted posts, understood as from PP students, show some courage in publicly denouncing the discriminatory behaviour of the perpetrators, they also index their positioning and being positioned as vulnerable, perhaps arising out of their working-class background and more importantly their low competence in English and limited resources, a subject that will be analysed in more detail in a later chapter. What makes the development or demonstration of these skills more challenging, particularly for learners from RMG, is that they are constrained to do it all in English. This refers back to the university's self-identification statement quoted earlier in this section – 'The Medium of instruction is English' (Who we are). It is an institution policy, and it serves as an attractive market deal as well as a challenge for the RMG students. It is up to them to make use of the opportunities for self-development in a competitive environment, as the Director of AA argued, 'it was their choice to be here' (fieldnotes).

My participation in the student activities (some of which I mention above) helped me recognise from the local perspectives, particularly the students', the skills they aspired to acquire through participation in those events which the institution provided them, and why they invested their time and effort in them.

Underlying the acquisition of all other skills was the pressure as well as the desire to learn English. This will be addressed in the following section.

#### **5.4 Discourses of English at IU**

While English is recognised as a need for socio-economic mobility and used as a marketing tool by the university, the students are receptive to the fact that, based on their performance in the English written test and interview, they would either be placed on AA or on PP. Even within PP they are carefully streamlined into 3 progressive levels. The main thrust of the Programme is English communication skills, and the students are made to accept that it all depends on how they show progress in English, one of the important discourses of English circulating in IU also among the managers and teachers as indicated in the staff meeting at the start of this chapter.

A Programme Director who is responsible for the smooth running of the programme described in his interview with me how important it is for the learners to improve their English, particularly those placed on the Programme where 100% come from non-English medium schools with poor levels of English and study skills. A part of his interview is shown in Extract 15.

**Extract 15: ‘...hugely handicapped due to the lack of English...’**

...

S: What is the main focus of Programme for Promise in terms of curriculum?

PD: In terms of what is offered here in PP they are coming into a completely English medium environment, which it truly is...It may not be necessary, but it is worth mentioning here that there are many higher education institutions in Bangladesh and in Asia that publicise themselves as English medium but the reality is the mother tongue is frequently used in the classrooms .But because you have a genuinely international university here... there is no resorting to Bengali. So, one of the primary focus of the Programme is English to help these young women who were showing potential ... as per the admission procedures, but who would be hugely handicapped due to the lack of English... But the main thrust of the Programme is the development of the English language competences without which they wouldn't be able to study in this kind of environment...Despite the potential, English for them, unlike the so called \*good middle-class girls from the English medium, English is an obstacle...// (Interview with PD REC 15040402).

The English language policy, according to the PD, marks the uniqueness of the university as ‘a genuinely international university’. A major theme that emerges here is the equation, International= English, as far as the perceptions in Bangladesh is concerned. The ‘internationalness’ of universities in Bangladesh

is measured in terms of how 'completely English medium environment it is', as brought out by his comparison of IU with other so called 'international universities' that resort to their 'mother tongue', Bengali, in the classrooms. The uniqueness of the programme also lies in the fact that it has undertaken to remove the 'obstacle' of English for these able learners, thereby offering equal opportunities like their English medium counterparts. They would otherwise be 'hugely handicapped' with their lack of English. The institutional discourse of English as a dominant and essential language to overcome 'obstacle' and 'handicap' in order to provide equitable access to the market like all the English medium middle class, is a strong justification, in his view, for the existence of such a Programme.

The emphasis on English is felt and reproduced discursively in the university. In the halls of residence, where the student population is highly diverse, the room allocations are centrally and strategically managed by mixing students of different linguistic /ethnicity groups to ensure languages other than English are avoided to eliminate what could be perceived as disrespectful behaviour. It is also to promote the use of English as the common language of communication and better multicultural understanding. When one of my focal participants, Hasina, a Bangladeshi, first took me round the halls she introduced me to one of her room-mates who was Nepali (the other two were a Bhutanese and an Afghan) and started conversing with her in broken Nepali. It seemed to me that she was showing off as the two exchanged and prompted sentences in each other's languages laughing all the time. She then stopped abruptly and apologised for switching over to Nepali, as it was against the university rules. She jokingly explained, 'They want us to improve our English. I don't know about my English, (laughter) but I have picked up a lot of Nepali in six months. Sam teaches me Nepali and I teach her Bangla, so we feel we are at home' (field notes, Paraphrased quote).

In the classrooms, the rule of English is strictly adhered to. Teachers particularly follow the rule as a pedagogical principle. In all the classes, I observed teachers constantly reminded and warned students who seemed to care less. During an interview, after a class observation, a teacher on Access programme talked about her experiences of teaching English to non-English medium students on PP (Extract 16):

**Extract 16 : ‘...with the permission of our director...’**

...

S: What is your experience of teaching Programme for Promise students?

Miss A ... The problem is their level of English is very very low. In the beginning they were completely lost. Some of them could hardly write a sentence or even fill in a form correctly. They had very little exposure to English. It was very difficult teaching them. I had to grade my language to their standard. Many times, I would use Bangla in the classroom, with the permission of our Director, otherwise they won't understand. I was constantly going back and forth in English and Bangla. But it got more difficult when the Afghan students came along. Because I don't know Afghan language... (interview with Miss A, REC 074 ).

Getting permission from the Director to use the students' first language in an English classroom indexes a normative practice for teachers in IU; the casual manner in which she states it but implies its importance by mentioning it. As earlier expressed by the PD, resorting to Bangla in the classrooms would bring down the international quality of the university and make it no different from the local universities that call themselves international.

As a middle manager, the PD is responsible for implementing the English language policy of the university on this programme. Having worked for the British Council to set up ELT provisions in Asian countries, the PD is fully aware of the credence the English language has gained in Asia and particularly in Bangladesh, and its demand. Hence, in keeping with the international profile of the university, PP follows a standardised assessment system based on 'internationally recognised' language descriptors of CEF (Common European Framework) and IELTS (international English Language Testing Systems). He firmly believes that a full effort to improve English is very important to empower these women from marginalised backgrounds, but it poses a risk for IU and the learners, as he emphasises in Extract 17.

**Extract 17: ‘English... is not aligning at all with their economic status’**

...

S: So do you believe that English has a role to play for these women?

PD: English DOES have a role to play in their life and identity. It is quite embedded in their societal status. Parents want it for their children... It raises confidence and opens doors to better employment. English is a badge you wear that indicates your class and where you are coming from...especially in Bangladesh it sends out all the signals of power. It is part of the uniqueness of XXX but it is also part of the risk for XXX and these learners... English is giving them social status but it is not aligning at all with their economic status. The two seem closely linked, at least in the case of the English medium girls, but certainly not in the case of our RMG learners (Interview with PD, REC 15040402).

(XXX – anonymised name of university)

The discourse of linguistic dominance emerging here anchors the institutional belief that English meets the perceived needs of the learners – to access better employment and to attain a higher social status, but in their current condition they are not viewed as coming from an economically well-off class, like the English medium girls from rich families. He brings out complex sets of association of English with social class and with economic status, which the RMG women are aspiring for, but it is perceived by others as a mismatch in their current condition. In the perception of the PD, the challenge poses a ‘risk’ for IU and these learners, as seen in the Dean’s meeting earlier in the chapter..

This perceived difference in linguistic capital, and the resulting inequalities in legitimacy, has worked against the progress of some of the RMG learners and can be viewed as one of the reasons for the ‘Recovery Class’, as implicated earlier. The ‘Recovery Class’, the issue of inadequate English of some learners, was an instance of the discourse of challenge and recovery from being at risk that provoked responses from the affected actors in the various discursive spaces, each giving their own perspective based on the challenges the issue posed for them. At the management level it was a budget deficit, something the institution had to ‘recover’ from and prevent its recurrence in order to sustain the provision. Besides having corporate overtones, the term ‘recovery’ also had connotations of ‘care’ as far as the teachers were concerned, but to the students it meant self-recovery from certain setbacks in their educational trajectories. At interviews with the PD, the Co-ordinator, the Admissions Director, the teachers and the students, different views emerged on the implications of the ‘Recovery Class’ and PP in general, as to what the students needed to recover or recover from.

To the PD, the Programme itself was a ‘high-risk programme’ due to its ‘non-traditional learners’. Until 2017, the AA and UG teachers had been used to teaching students from English medium schools. But after that, with more PP students in their classrooms ‘it was becoming difficult to handle learners who needed sustained help with language’ (PD, interview). To the programme co-ordinator, it was clear the learners were facing some form of discrimination from their English medium peers as well as some staff. She felt it was due to the ‘inappropriate mixing’ of English medium and non-English medium students: ‘The difference in the confidence levels between the English medium regular admissions and our PP students progressing to AA is striking ... The worrying

thing about the feeling of insecurity is that it can start putting a brake in terms of their learning. It is beginning to block them, beginning to corrode their own self - belief. You have to be incredibly strong and brave to survive in this environment' (AA tutor interview). Indeed, to survive in an international academic environment, they were required to be self-responsible to develop skills to be assertive and to challenge social discrimination.

The Admissions Director had her own related concerns about the 'risk' factor in her responsibility in meeting the raised targets for fee-paying students in the following year. She was already receiving complaints from the current fee-paying students as they were reluctant to learn alongside students from 'RMG' factory and 'Rohingya' refugee backgrounds. The number of fee-paying applicants was falling. When there were only 10 or 15 learners from under-privileged classes it was not noticeable, she explained,

'...but when you have a big class of 100 of these students coming in, the fee-paying feel threatened... We are taking RMG workers and people from remote areas who have not been to schools that give good education. They haven't had access to critical thinking. It's not just English medium, but they are used to rote learning and had no option to have good teachers perhaps. It's the system of education here. This year we have to increase the numbers. I don't know how it will work'.

(DA, interview REC 006, DQ ).

The Director of PP also expressed similar fears. He felt as more RMG and Rohingyas come in there was a potential risk for the university, not in terms of academic performance but in terms of perception:

'Up until now the perception has been positive... When numbers grow how that will affect the perception, we don't know. At a very high level, Sheik Hasina (the Prime Minister) will say "Excellent, giving opportunities to everyone". But at the middle- class level, they say "Do I really want to send my daughter to a class that has half Rohingyas and RMG in it", which will be the case'.

(PD interview 15040402 DQ).

To the English teachers, however, teaching on PP was a challenge, 'It is a tall order... a huge jump from a 250-word simple composition to a full blown 6-page academic argumentative essay...', remarked one of the English teachers (English Teachers' Focus Group meeting REC 15031501). The students on their part, the Recovery students as well as all RMG students viewed the Recovery issue of the university as a stern message. At the first focus group

meeting I had with the RMG students, Yasmin, an RMG student on Access, describes in a few words how they feel about being part of a prestigious university:

‘XXX (IU) is a golden opportunity. So, we must use properly. They who gives donation will assess us, so must do well and we need English to do well ’  
(1<sup>st</sup> FG RMG REC 001 AA ).

Voicing the pressure felt by all RMG students, Yasmin is assuming responsibility and showing accountability to her three benefactors, her donors, her factory, and the university. Her colleagues at the meeting shared her view that it was a golden opportunity given to them; to be ‘successful’ it was their responsibility to improve their English and live up to the image of the ‘talented’ woman that the institutions have configured for them. The internalisation of the institutional discourses and the inter-connecting themes emerging from the learners’ perspectives, which shaped their subjectivities, are analysed in more detail in the chapters that follow, where I describe the trajectories of three RMG learners.

### **5.5. Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have examined how a routine educational activity such as the progression or non-progression of a small group of students, in the Programme for Promise in the focal university, can invoke its social relations to several local areas as well as specified trans-local institutions which in turn respond to wider socio-economic and political issues. This has been done through the analysis of a marketing corporate discourse which shows the discursive power of these institutions. It also shows a semiotic coherence in the way the institutions, and various personnel at the university in their own capacities, showed a convergent perspective on what counts as ‘talented’ or ‘successful’. The marketability and exclusivity projected by the university are emblematically associated with a homogenised body of students believed to possess certain recognisable leadership attributes. In other words, marketability and exclusivity are mobilised via the discursive imagining of the ‘talented student’ as someone who has the ability to persuade and lead a group, is confident to pursue new careers, takes risks and self-responsibility, dares to voice an opinion, challenges social injustice, effects changes, and achieves goals, communication in English being

the requisite skill to acquire these attributes. But a preliminary investigation into the challenge of the 'Recovery Class' through interview responses from various social actors involved with the programme began to reveal a gap between such an imagined student and the contradictions resulting from the stereotyping of this other category of 'recovery' learners on the basis of their presumed 'lack of progress'. All PP students in general, and the RMG students in particular, are considered extremely hard-working and self-responsible mature students who have socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds; have not received previous English medium education; are not paying fee; have poor English skills; lack study skills; do not have experience of or exposure to higher social and academic environment; and lack confidence and courage to overcome discrimination. The three chapters that follow will account for how this gap was experienced and made sense of throughout the trajectories of three of the RMG learners, with close attention to how they navigated their way under these conditions.

## Chapter 6: Becoming a leader - The story of Hasina

### 6.1 Introduction: Meeting the RMG students

*My first encounter with Hasina takes place at the RMG (ready-made-garment) Programme for Promise students meeting which Ari, the Programme co-ordinator, has kindly arranged to introduce me to the group and help me select my sample. I am looking forward to my first meeting with the much talked about 'RMG students'. As we walk to the classroom where the meeting is to be held, I ask Ari how the RMG students would respond to a non-Bangla speaker and to my interest in their factory background. She explains that I would be pleasantly surprised and would have no problems as the students are used to having visitors and observers in their classrooms and being interviewed and filmed constantly. This is evident in the number of visitors, both press and international corporate heads I have been meeting at the university guest house where I stayed initially for a few weeks. I learn from her that many of the RMG students, as their first learning experience at the international university, are overcoming any inhibitions they might have arrived with in order to be seen as 'competent' students at an international university. My presence would be viewed, as Ari laughs and explains, as yet another opportunity for their publicity and for them to talk about their benefactors, the university and their factories.*

*When we enter the room I see, to my surprise, a group of about 25 / 30 young noisy students, some standing, some sitting and some scribbling something on the board. A few of them are in hijab (head covering) and a couple in niqab (head and face covering and long cloak), some in jeans and T-shirt and a majority in salwar kameez (three-piece Asian suit comprising a long top, trousers and a shawl). It is a dark classroom in a dark building lit by fluorescent lights and surrounded by small classrooms where the PP classes normally take place. They all seem to know each other well and also Ari as their role model, as Hasina described her later, and they cheerfully chat in Bangla and English. The students introduce themselves to me with warm smiles. I am introduced to the group by Ari, who speaks confidently in English in a slight American accent. She introduces me as an external researcher from London University interested in doing a study on RMG students. Ari had studied in English medium schools before graduating from IU two years ago. She has gone back to her Alma Mater to work for a couple of years before applying for*

*her Masters in one of the universities in Europe. She leaves the room soon after introducing me. The students ask several questions; their lack of English doesn't seem to bother them.*

*Hasina, a slim young student in jeans and t-shirt and a ponytail, who is seated in the front with a group of five others at her table is full of energy and enthusiasm and it does not take long for her to gain my attention. Whenever it gets too noisy, she takes charge and gives instructions in Bangla to her friends at the back to keep quiet. They respond to her well in a friendly manner. She is also helpful in translating to Bangla some of what I say about my research to the students at her table. She translates some of the students' questions to me from Bangla into English. They have a lot of questions which to me means they are keen to participate. Hasina comes across as one of the most confident and active students in the group due to her English language skills. Soon she is standing next to me facing the group and asking how many people would be interested in participating in the research. More than half of them stay behind and give their names to Hasina to write down on a piece of paper. It seems like Hasina has appointed herself to be my assistant. 'Let me know how many participants you want, even outside the Programme, I can arrange it through all my contacts' she assures me. Perhaps she is used to doing the role of a class representative, I think, or she is trying to play Ari's role. Since their break time is nearly up, I promise to meet them all in smaller groups in the following week.*

*By the following week I have become part of the Programme myself, as I have started to sit with them in their classes. They feel free to chat with me and in my presence in the dining hall and on the corridors. Some speak to me in Hindi, as I am dressed in the Indian saree most of the time and they also try to teach me Bangla. They are always keen to help. I am now able to recognise many of the RMG women and notice Hasina in the company of her classmates, Sham, Tina, Aru and Al, in the dining hall, the Student Space or in the area outside the university buildings which is popularly called 'the lane' by staff and students. They all appear very eager to be part of my research as a group. Hasina happens to be the friendliest, the most confident and forthcoming with information on various aspects of student life. She takes the initiative to show me round their over- crowded dorms, crammed communal kitchens and the over-shared bathrooms and also their beautifully furnished Student Spaces and well- equipped Reading areas. She is very proud to show me her little room, her*

*bunk bed and her desk and introduce me to her three room - mates who were from different Asian countries – Nepal, Afghanistan and Bhutan. By the end of that week I have decided to ask Hasina if she would like to be one of my focal participants and invite her and her group of RMG friends, potential secondary participants, to join me for coffee in their Tale-Space café.*

*(Field notes, Hasina, green nb, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018)*

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Having introduced Hasina, I proceed with the presentation of the story of Hasina, becoming a leader, through an analysis of her daily interactions as a student of the Programme for Promise. The story runs through three sections – The trajectory of a promising student - from factory to university (section 6.2), leadership in classrooms and outside (section 6.3), and Hasina's struggles (section 6.4).

## **6.2. The trajectory of a promising student - From factory to university**

Hasina was a 21-year-old Bangladeshi student. When I first met her in January 2018, she had been at the university only for four months. After completing Year 12 in a Bangla medium school, Hasina had joined a college but she was a 'failure' in the first year, as she described herself to me, due to her erratic attendance because she had started to do several part-time jobs to support herself and her family. In 2016, she dropped out of college and took up a full-time job as a Needle Woman in an RMG (ready-made-garment) factory in a suburb of Dhaka, from where she was recruited to study at the international university. She was one of the six women selected out of the 60 that took the admissions test in that cohort from her factory.

For Hasina, the interview had been easier than the written test, as she believed she was a confident speaker with 'fairly good' English communication skills and she had learnt before-hand, as she explained to me in the first focus group meeting, what the university expected of its applicants from the co-ordinator's presentation and her seniors. She had never thought she would go to a university like this since it was 'beyond her expectations', as she would put it to me. Besides the scholarship, her RMG factory had agreed to pay her salary during the period of her study. At first, it was not easy to convince her family as they thought it was all a scam, 'the factory was trying to sell me off to some foreigners' (from her public speech later in this chapter). Later, they consented

and became proud of her although it meant staying away from home for five long years. As she was from a Bangla-medium school her English skills were not adequate, according to the university, to cope with undergraduate studies in the medium of English. So she was placed on the Programme for Promise to improve her English, but she was in the 'top' group. However, she always felt, as did all her friends, that she should have been placed on Access programme.

One of the important criteria for selection to this prestigious university, as marketed by the admissions team, was the candidate's potential to become a leader (see Chapter 5). Hasina had been identified as one such woman who was worthy of a \$75,000 scholarship, sponsored by the IKEA Foundation. While this windfall was seen as a 'jackpot' by Hasina and all her RMG colleagues at the University, it brought with it, as mentioned earlier, certain pressures to which she responded in her own way. The pressure to perform in a competitive environment and meet the university's expectations often forced the students, including Hasina, to talk about their goals to bring about change. At an informal meeting from which Extract 1, below, has been taken, Hasina and her group, Tina, Sham, Aru and Al, having gone through their admission interviews only five months ago, chose to talk about their future goals to effect change in the community, these involving asserting RMG women's rights, fight against forced early marriage, working for the aged destitute, being a social worker and becoming a teacher who helps poor children respectively. Such goals defined them in their views as potential leaders in the community in alignment with the university's admission criteria. They projected themselves as worthy members of a competitive university culture.

Hasina's positioning at this meeting depicts her as a person aspiring to be a leader in the above terms and striving to maintain that 'good' student image. While all the other students in the group speak briefly with some determination about their goals (about three minutes altogether), Hasina takes the floor for almost 3 minutes, drawing attention to her 'good' communication skills in English compared to the others. All the group members present are former factory workers and they show their support by listening to her intently and through non-verbal signs, illustrated in Extract 1 below. In the first 10 minutes of the meeting, we talk about why they thought English was important for them. The second part of the meeting was about their future goals, a subject they had been asked to speak about at their university selection interviews (which I learnt later). About 15

minutes into the conversation, Hasina gives her presentation of what she wants to do after her university education:

**Extract 1: 'I want to remove that thing' – a change-maker**

A- Hasina    B-AI            C- Tina            D- Aru            E-Sham

S- Sudha

[...]

- 1    **S:** So/ you have your goals all set//
- 2    **All:** [YES]/
- 3    **S:** what do you want to be/ What do you want to change// Let's finish off with that/
- 4    **All:** [okay]/
- 5    **S:** [Yes]/
- 6    **A:** sh should I start/ (puts up her hand first)
- 7    **S:** [YES!]/
- 8    **A:** [thank you so much]/ like, in my, in my life, I did LOTS of part-time jobs/ but the BEST it
- 9    was that RMG sector, my life turning point//
- 10    **S:** right//
- 11    **A:** because of that one/ that job/ I got the opportunity to study in a/ in an international
- 12    university//
- 13    **S:** hmm//
- 14    **A:** so/ when I was working there/ I saw lots of things/ like/ there were like/ women are
- 15    facing discrimination// lots // there are lot of workers are female/ \*WHY/ / not because they
- 16    giving um women more importance //
- 17    **S:** [hmm//]
- 18    **A:** [more priority] / it's because / when you're \*torturing them/ they are not saying anything!
- 19    / I saw them a needle is going inside their one finger and coming from [the OTHER SIDE] /
- 20    (demonstrates with hands and an expression of pain)
- 21    **S:** [OOH!] //
- 22    **A:** [and] before taking them to the hospital/ they are just pulling it out (demonstrates pulling
- 23    out needle in casual manner) and the next day/ with that bandage/ they're coming AGAIN //
- 24    (eyes wide open showing shock) and working with same speed //
- 25    **B:** This happen in the factory// We see everyday accidents [very pain...]

(Continued on next page)

26 A: [they have] they don't care about the pain, NOT because they're not feeling this // they  
 27 have that mind, if they're not working PROPERLY/ maybe they won't say anything/ but the  
 28 work will/ like/ increase / you have to finish it later// (Al, Tina, Aro and Sham look serious and  
 29 nod gently in agreement)

30 S: right//

31 A: they're working! / Only \*women are facing these things/ males are very less//  
 32 \*WHY//because they're doing strike for their right/ they're more powerful/ maybe physically  
 33 powerful or maybe mentally powerful/ I don't know WHY/

34 S: hmm//

35 A: women are facing those things// SO I want to remove that/ \*thing//

36 S: remove what//

37 A: \*WHY/ Like/ only for that/ hmm STITCHING and all /most of the workers are female//  
 38 \*WHY// so I want to remove that thing // I want to change that side / and they are getting a  
 39 very less salary// I know / I ALSO work there so I know that //

40 S: uhmm/ you mean unequal treatment//

41 A: so/ I want to do something for this sector// but I DON'T have any idea \*how to do that// I  
 42 have my goal in my mind/ but I don't know \*how to do it//

43 S: so/ you want to work for your community / [and that's your purpose...]

44 A: [yeah / I want to work for them] /

45 S: you'd like to work in Bangladesh/ [And make sure]

46 A: [ Yes/ I want to go \*OUTSIDE as well] because without going other side/ I can't get  
 47 \*MORE help // only from \*my country is not possible / because / it's somewhat related to the/  
 48 like/ outside/ \*ABROAD/ because all the buys (not clear) are from/ most of the buys (not  
 49 clear) are from Europe, as far I know//

50 S: most of the? (Voices, 'buyers')

51 A: \*BUYERS / because order in RMG they are from Europe and other countries/ America  
 52 and other countries //

53 S: hmm / I see your point//

54 A: so/ I have to TALK WITH \*THEM as well / because they should know what's happening  
 55 \*HERE //

(From Audio REC001 Initial Group meeting PP)

The main theme of the extract is Hasina's future goal, and in order to state it emphatically she follows a narrative structure to contextualise her position in the story as a witness to social injustice and inequality. First, she introduces herself as a former factory woman (lines 8-12), then raises the issue substantiated with a vivid example from her past factory floor experience showing her empathetic involvement (lines 14 to 29), challenges the exploitation of women (lines 31 to 33), and finally ends with a justification and statement of her future goal (lines 35 to 55). The stance Hasina performs is that of a change-maker. The presentation of the self (Goffman 1990) in the interaction is of a leader who is intolerant of discrimination and her uptake of the university's expectations is one

of appropriation of her entitlement as an identified IKEA scholar as she sees it and in the way she identifies herself as a former RMG worker. The stances that she takes in the different parts of the narrative are marked by the narrative structure itself.

To start with, I ask the group if they had their goals set, to which they all unanimously answer 'Yes' (line 2) – the unanimity in one voice suggesting they all may have without exception clear goals to bring about change. They are then invited to talk about their future goals and what they want to change (line 3). Hasina volunteers to go first. She introduces her affiliation to the RMG sector, which is contextually significant, as the social construction of the 'RMG student' at IU. For her, of all the jobs she did, 'RMG sector' was the 'BEST' and her 'life turning point' (line 9) as it brought her the opportunity to study in an international university. While most of the RMG women would normally be expected to choose to be discreet about their factory background, due to social reasons (see Chapter 5), the stance Hasina takes is one of alignment with the RMG sector. She cherishes her relationship with it (lines 8 to 12) and emphasises with a repetition (line 39) 'I ALSO work there...'. Indeed, it was the identification with this group that helped her procure a place at the international university. Alignment with this group has brought other benefits to Hasina besides financial and academic, e.g., publicity, which is analysed in a later part of this section, where Hasina emerges as a public figure.

Hasina engages the listeners' (her peers' and mine) attention by changing her stance to that of a challenger of social inequality (line 14), starting the main part of her story with 'So, when I was working there...' - 'so' indexing a change in the narrative foreboding something more significant to follow and 'when I was working there' showing first-hand experience of an issue centring the 'factory woman'. It also indexes a change of footing from her alignment with RMG, in the introductory part, to a dis-alignment with the factory's exploitative practices. In this part of the narrative, using rhetorical devices, she focuses on and brings a connection to one discriminatory act on the part of the factories that she thinks is legitimised and laminated as women's empowerment in Bangladesh. She articulates that the employment of more women than men in factories was discriminatory and exploitative – 'there are lots of workers are female/WHY?' (Line 15). She answers the rhetorical question herself (lines 18 / 19) - because women endure suffering in silence, but men will not.

To substantiate the point she is making, Hasina narrates a true incident that she has been witness to (it seems her peers have been too) with a demonstration of her empathetic involvement (lines 18-24) – a needle accidentally piercing through a worker's finger and someone just pulling it out without calling for medical help and, worse still, the woman returning to work the next day as 'the work will increase' and 'she has to finish it' (lines 26-29). The dramatic reproduction of the factory scene accompanied by non-verbal signs such as facial expression and gestures (lines 18-24) makes her narration more compelling and rouses emotional response from me (line 21) and Al acknowledging casually that this happens in the factory everyday (line 25), normalising harsh factory practice. The factory woman in the story is jointly characterised in the interaction as vulnerable, and the factory is evaluated as harsh and exploitative, a compelling act which Hasina accomplishes in this part of her interaction with her audience. Hasina talks publicly about her factory floor experiences positioning herself as fearless in exposing injustice (lines 14-29). In order to justify the seriousness of her goal, Hasina implicitly conveys two important social concerns: a) that the employment of more women in factories can be seen more as an exploitation of their vulnerability rather than as an act of empowerment as it is officially believed to be (lines 14-33); and b) that women on the factory floor work under tremendous pressure and in fear (lines 23-29). The gentle nod from the other participants after line 27 indexes a collaborative identification of a need to fight social injustice and the support for Hasina, their spokeswoman, an acknowledgement of her leadership.

In the final part of the narrative, Hasina states her intended goal – (line 35) 'SO I want to remove that thing', 'SO' again indicating a change of gear, the start of a new segment in her narrative, showing justification for her goal and asserting her stance as a change-maker. By 'thing' she means discrimination against women. She does not directly answer my question 'remove what?' (36). Instead she elaborates on the injustice to factory women – only for the low-level stitching jobs they employ women, they are paid less, and she knows all that because she worked there (lines 37 – 39). I respond with 'you mean unequal treatment' (line 40). Hasina continues talking about her goal, without answering my question, taking for granted the listeners have understood her goal. My prodding her for a more precise statement of her goal acts as a face threatener which she first manages by avoiding giving an answer, then she

explains that she has a goal but doesn't know how to work towards it (lines 41-42). I prompt her by asking if she wants to work for her community in Bangladesh (lines 43 / 45). Hasina confirms she wants to work for them, but with an overlapping in line 45, before I can complete my sentence, she seems to convey eagerness to go abroad as she has a good reason to talk to the buyers 'on the other side'. Hasina performs the stance of a campaigner for women's rights with global involvement. She believes her goal cannot be achieved without talking to the foreign buyers (lines 46-49). Her emphasis on 'THEM' and 'HERE' (lines 54 – 55) brings out the connection between the international buyers in 'Europe, America and other countries' and the situation in the garment factories in Bangladesh, something 'they should know' and a justification for her to go abroad. The ability to evaluate and question and the confidence to take part in global activities is something IU as an international university would give her credit for and promote, and she hopes she would go abroad to achieve her goals (see Chapter 5, about Careers Development and International Programmes).

With all the above attributes visible in Hasina's positioning as a leader -a goal to bring about change, eloquence, communication in English, courage to express her opinion about her employer, ambition to go abroad and confidence – Hasina had no difficulty in getting 'selected' not only to study at IU but also to represent the university as an 'ideal' emerging IU leader. It seemed as though all the participants in this meeting had set their goals at the time of the university selection, as it had covered one of the interview questions (see admissions procedures in Chapter 5), and perhaps rehearsed articulating it over several activities. However, what seemed to set Hasina above the others was her ability to communicate in English and engage her listeners in affective ways, although she was quite vague about her goal itself. Hasina told me proudly during one of our chats, 'they always select me because I have no problems with English like the other PP students' (field notes). This will be further detailed in the next section.

### **6.3 Leadership in the classrooms and outside: 'A typical product of IU'**

During my stay in the University residence, I observed there was a continuous stream of visitors to the university in various academic and administrative capacities and 'selected' student representatives were frequently involved in

meetings and focus groups. Hasina was one of the very few privileged to represent Programme for Promise (PP). I was introduced to two of the important visitors on two different occasions. One was an external assessor for PP from the UK and the other, a corporate member of the Support Foundation, from America, both closely involved with International University (IU) in different ways. While they both commented how impressed they were with the 'young lady', the former felt she had been 'cherry picked' from amongst the most vocal of the learners and the latter felt 'she was a spark, turning out to be a typical product of XXX (IU)' as she had the makings of a leader (Field notes). This was no surprise to me as I had selected Hasina too as my focal participant even before I met these important visitors.

To study how Hasina negotiated her social relationships in the classroom, I observed some English lessons. Hasina was often the centre of attention in the classroom. As she was the class representative, she always assumed the role of the leader or spokesperson for her peers, but also, it seemed to me, she acted as a means of distraction, seeking attention at times. She would position herself at the centre of the class and take pictures of the teacher's work and the homework put up on the white board and tell her peers, 'I'll send it to you, let's all go now', while all the girls crowded around her to get their homework sent. She took charge of the appliances in the classroom, the cooler, fan, projector, and the blinds, switching them on and off, which seemed to be normal practice as the others hardly paid attention to the constant disturbance which seemed like being of service to others (some video and field notes). She took an active part in class discussions by answering questions, speaking for her group and leading and facilitating group work.

Extract 2 (below) provides a glimpse of Hasina's interaction during group work where she naturally assumes and is assigned the role of the leader/facilitator. While completing the group task assigned to them by the teacher, they socially construct Hasina as a leader with team management skills as she takes the responsibility to get all the members' input by helping one member to understand a question and also controlling another who gets distracted from the task.

There are about 20 students in the room. They are distracted and very noisy, as the teacher arrives 30 minutes late to the lesson. She was caught up in a political rally, which was quite common in Bangladesh. The teacher sets a

writing task first, although it is a Reading lesson, to quieten them and then about 20 minutes into the lesson the teacher sets group work - to discuss the answers to 5 questions on 'driverless cars' based on the article 'Cars That Think' (from their prescribed course book Q-Skills for Success 3). The students have read and understood the text in a previous lesson. The class becomes very noisy again with everyone reading and speaking loudly. The teacher moves around to the groups to check work. I walk around too, and some students involve me in their group discussions by asking questions; in other groups, I just listen and observe and make notes when the students are busy working. I place three USB recorders with 3 different groups, making sure one of them is on Hasina's desk.

### Extract: 2: 'What you think?' – facilitating agreement

Group members – A: Hasina      B: Al      C: Prasanna

T-Teacher

- 1 T: ... Discuss your answers to Questions 1 to 5 on page 73. (Noise of moving chairs
- 2 and talking in the background)
- 3 A: OK// (starts reading Q1 loudly) 'Which sentence summarizes the main idea of
- 4 the reading/ Underline it'// for me it is the first sentence in the reading// (reads the
- 5 sentence from the text loudly) what do you think//
- 6 B: I agree with you//
- 7 A: You agree with me/ OK/ What about you, Prasanna// (Prasanna is quietly
- 8 looking into the text then raises her head)
- 9 C: I choose (a)// (has misunderstood the question. Seems to refer to Q2)
- 10 A: No no no nooo// It's about the first question/ we have to choose the sentence
- 11 from this text that gives main idea//
- 12 C: Ooh// (looks confused)
- 13 A: Do you agree with us// the first sentence in the text//
- 14 C: Yeah yeah/ I agree//
- 15 A: OK// what about the second one? (Reads the question loudly to the group)
- 16 'Read these sentences from Reading 1. Underline the sentences in the model on
- 17 page 72 that summarize them'//
- 18 Ok/ now/look at (a) (reads the sentence loudly)// for this I choose the 3<sup>rd</sup> sentence in
- 19 the text (loudly reads the sentence from the text)// what you think// (looking at
- 20 Prasanna)
- 21 (No response for 4 seconds)
- 22 C: For this question I choose (a)// (has clearly misunderstood the question again)
- 23 A: Yeah↑// so for (a) isn't this the right sentence// (points to sentence in text, and
- 24 C nods)
- 25 C: Yeah//
- 26 A: OK// what about (b)// (notices Al whispering something to someone in another
- 27 group) Al/ALO// for (b) which sentence you choose from text//
- 28 B: for (b) ↑// (looks down and reads quietly to herself without answering)

29 A: What you think/ All// (nudges AI who is looking down at something under the  
30 desk)

31 B: eh...OK/ (returns to task) ha/ha (laughs) OK// it is not clear// but I think I  
32 choose this sentence (starts reading loudly)

33 A: Yeah// but I think this one better (reads another sentence from the text)//

34 Teacher interrupts the group.

35 T: So/ have you finished matching//

36 All: Yeah/ finished// (actually they haven't)

37 T: If you have finished matching you have to do 3 to 5 together/ OK//

38 All: OK//

39 A: For (b) which one you choose// (addresses C)

40 C: For (b) I choose this one (reads the same sentence as A's)

41 A: OK/ let's move to (c)// (reads sentence c) I choose last sentence in paragraph  
42 1//

43 B: What you choose// (asks C)

44 C: I think this sentence/ and this sentence also// (points in text) I'm not sure//

45 A: Yeah/ 1<sup>st</sup> one definitely//

46 B: I also the same//

47 A: All same↑// yeah↑

48 (Teacher is writing something on board)

49 B: Listen// (whispers to A. A bends down) listen/ listen (undertones) next time/  
50 next time/ when Miss ... (not audible) when Miss (A and B laughing and looking  
51 down)

52 T: Do the talking later/ OK//Finish the questions now//Right↑// (continues writing  
53 on board)

54 A: Yeah/it's tasty// (not audible) (all laugh softly) Now/ let's discuss Q3// (reads  
55 Q3 loudly) 'Does the writer have a positive or negative reaction to driverless cars'//  
56 So/what you think// ...

(REC 002 – Group SY 25:15 – 55:30)

An analysis of the stances which the three subjects take in the above group interaction demonstrates Hasina in the lead role with the attributes of a leader. She positions herself as the initiator and the facilitator of the group work assigned to them by the teacher, to work on questions 1 and 2 a, b and c in the text. Al and Prasanna, the other two participants, position themselves as comrades to be led, more as evaluators, waiting to be asked to evaluate Hasina's answers as stance follows (Du Bois 2007). It must be noted that Hasina interacts with Al and Prasanna separately each time seeking their agreement to her suggestions, although in line 8 she expects collaboration from Prasanna by asking – "Do you agree with us?" The pronoun 'us' indexes the differential in the stance pointing to the fact that she has already gained agreement from Al and it is a joint stance. First of all, Hasina does the loud reading all the time (lines 3, 15, 18, 19 and 34), showing her confidence and the ability to take the initiative without any inhibitions. Each time Hasina repetitively uses what seems to be her characteristic style of facilitating the collaborative work - reads the question loudly, gives her answer and asks others what they think. (e.g., lines 5, 19, 31). There is resonance in the words 'I agree with you' 'You agree with me?' 'Do you agree with us?' and 'Yeah, yeah, I agree' (lines 6,7,13,14) showing a direct convergent alignment in their evaluation of the answers given by Hasina. She confidently takes the floor most of the time and is sure of her answers when B and C are not, saying 'yeah, but I think this one better' / 'yeah, 1st one definitely' (lines 33 and 45), thereby assuming the position of an authoritative leader expecting agreement from the other subjects.

As the lead person, Hasina also takes responsibility for her group members; C requires help with understanding the question (lines 9-11/ 22-26) and B seems a bit disinterested as she either just agrees with all that Hasina says showing complete faith in Hasina's knowledge (lines 6, 32,47) or is busy doing something else, and needs nudging (line 30). She exercises gentle force on C to agree to her answers (line 24) and control over B who doesn't pay full attention (lines 28, 30) to which both respond in a positive way – leadership strategies she uses in order to be able to complete the task set by the teacher. There is pressure from the teacher twice during this interaction asking them to get on with the task. Although Hasina also gets distracted by Al over some inaudible conversation about food, which the teacher seems to have overheard

(line 54-55), she quickly brings the group back and manages to complete questions 1 and 2 with them. From their subjective positions as collaborators in the group task, their evaluations of each other's answers and convergent alignments, it appears as though Hasina's peers perceive her as helpful, communicative, friendly, knowledgeable, committed as well as fun, all of it resulting in the social construction of Hasina as an accomplished leader in this interaction.

The emphasis on communication in English and public speaking skills as part of their leadership training was visible in the recording and assessment of presentations given in classrooms, inter-class activities, inter-collegiate and international events and academic conferences. Proficiency in oral communication paved the way for more lucrative corporate internships and eventual international scholarships to study abroad (Chapter 5 about CDIP). Hasina took part in her first Model United Nations (MUN) symposium with several under-graduate students and was aspiring to be like one of its leaders, as she mentioned in her conversations with me. Being a 'good' IU student representative, according to all the social actors at the university, entails strong leadership attributes, one of which is the capacity to impress and make a public appeal.

Not long after, Hasina was selected by the management to give a speech at one of the panel discussions at the university's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and 6<sup>th</sup> Commencement celebrations. Hasina came to invite me and felt it was a great honour to be selected to sit with distinguished people. It was a big event at the institutional level, attended by world leaders like a Nobel Peace laureate) and a former Vice President of World Bank and many other dignitaries. There were several parallel panel discussions but the one I chose to attend was focused on the Programme for Promise, where Hasina was one of the speakers. Her speech is presented below in Extract 3. The auditorium was filled with about 500 people, including staff, students, graduating students and their parents, managers, corporate donors and sponsors and members of the Support Foundation and Board of Trustees, alumni and the Press. On the stage were present the Programme Director of PP, a member of the Support Foundation from the US, two alumni currently studying in the UK who had worked in IU earlier as Co-ordinators of PP, and 5 PP students each representing their

category as RMG (Hasina), Myanmar Rohingya, Grameen Daughters, Afghan Hazara and Bangladesh Rohingya.

The students each spoke about their experiences and aspirations. Hasina's speech was a big success and she received a string of applause and praise from everyone present, including me, and also on social media. She was interviewed by the Press. Everyone present at the panel discussion that day seemed to recognise the makings of a leader in Hasina, qualities that IU strives to inculcate in its students, which is demonstrated in the responses to Hasina's public speech recorded in Extract 3.

### Extract 3: 'That's why I am here' – Exceling in public speaking

1 ' ... Today/ I am /sitting /in front of you/with a \*vision/ to \*change the RMG factory/  
2 from poverty level// I would like to thank/\*XXX(IU)/ for giving me this life changing  
3 opportunity// (loud clapping from a section of audience mostly students, after a brief  
4 pause) when I came to IU/ I had faced a lot of challenges// first of all/ when I entered  
5 to IU/ as I was working in a garment factory/ and I had break from my education after  
6 high school/ it was very difficult// it was challenging/ communicating in English//  
7 Students from abroad are from English medium schools// I can still remember/ I used  
8 to feel shy to speak in front of public/ /HOW/ the Programme made me confident  
9 enough/ to speak in front of you// TODAY// in \*ENGLISH // Even I can still  
10 remember/ my family they were against me// when I got my offer from IU//they said/  
11 "what ↑ is your factory selling you now ↑"// They thought/ my factory will sell me  
12 off//WHY/ someone/ they are spending so much money// for a \*garment worker ↑//to  
13 \*educate a garment worker ↑// it was hard/ to face everything// I somehow/ came to  
14 IU// now//they are really proud// when they see me /communicating/ with others /in  
15 English// I am the first child/ from my family/ to attend university// (loud clapping,  
16 starting from panel members) and I feel proud /when they feel proud// (long pause for  
17 clapping to stop)

18 When / I came here// I came with a /view/ for women//more than \*80% of people in  
19 garment factory/ are female//and every issue/ related to women/ will affect/ directly  
20 the productivity of the factory//so// every factory/ should/ concern// so// should/ give  
21 priority to women issues// I have/ personally // I have suffered / there// with women's  
22 health// \*Especially/\*menstrual health and hygiene// from my personal experience/ I  
23 KNOW// I once got / untimely periods// and I went to the health centre ↑// I was  
24 introduced to the concept of using dirty ... cloth/ instead of pads ↓// I had no option  
25 ↓// And it is not my /\*individual case// most of the female worker working there, it is  
26 \*EVERYONES case. (Long pause. Pin drop silence in the hall) now/ this thing is  
27 happening/ because of lack of awareness//in garment factory// and lack of/ support  
28 from health centre//

29 Now something needs to be done about this//I came /\*here/ and / I/ strongly hope/  
30 after graduation/ after completing my education in IU/ I will be in a position to / in the  
31 future// I will be able↑ to do \*something/for my \*SISTERS/ in the garment factory ↑//  
32 (loud clapping from the floor) I HAVE ↑ to do something for THEM// THAT'S WHY I  
33 AM HERE// '

(SH Speech, PP Panel, Commencement, REC088)

This extract is a formal speech prepared for the occasion, and rehearsed, as seen in the speaker's clarity of speech and slow rendering with regular pauses. In her speech, Hasina performs the stance of 'becoming a campaigner' as the university envisages. What Hasina demonstrates here is her public speaking skills which is part of the university's packaging of leadership development and the empowerment of women. Before Hasina starts, she is introduced by the Support Foundation member as a representative of the latest batch of RMG students recruited by IU on to their PP programme.

A close analysis shows that the relevance and significance of the speech lies both in its content and in its narrative structure. The content of her speech inter-sectionally deals with issues of gender and class in the figure of the factory woman. The narrative structure engages the attention of the audience and provokes the expected response at the crucial stages in the story. Hasina starts with an abstract of her speech (lines 1-2), followed by an orientation of her background and challenges (lines 3-15), the scene of action with an example leading to a climax (lines 16-23), an evaluation of the situation (lines 23-24), ending the story by connecting to the abstract (lines 26-33). It is to be noted that there is loud clapping from the audience after the abstract, in the orientation and also at the end of the speech, all of it highlighting not only the crucial stages of her narrative but also the audience interaction and uptake of those stages.

The opening sentence with the choice of vocabulary, 'Today, 'vision' and 'change' with emphasis, its use of the present continuous tense in 'am sitting', and the inclusion of the audience in the apparent dialogue, sets the tone of determinacy and authority with which Hasina assumes the epistemic stance of a leader, a spokesperson and an activist to bring about change in the RMG sector. Although her goal to 'change RMG factory from poverty level' sounds too broad and vague, the rhetorical use of words overshadows the actual meaning of the sentence. Her acknowledgement of IU's part in giving her this opportunity to bring change in the social world (line 2) attracts loud clapping, signifying the audience acknowledgement of IU's achievement in producing such leaders with a determination to effect change.

Then Hasina goes on to list all the challenges she had faced when she came to IU from her humble factory surroundings and how she had overcome them – from being shy and ashamed of her English to becoming 'confident enough to talk in front of you' (lines 7-9), convincing her family that her factory

was not selling her off (lines 10-13) and after a few months making them feel proud of the English skills that she had developed and for 'being the first child in my family to attend university' (lines 15-16). This again attracts loud applause, starting from the panel members in appreciation of all her efforts but more of IU's efforts to educate women from disadvantaged backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, the university takes pride in recruiting women who are the first in their family to pursue higher education, and documents it in its admissions statistics as one of the criteria for selection (Chapter 5).

Hasina raises two very critical questions related to institutions and sociological issues: The first is about what the family thought of the RMG industry. 'They said, what, is your factory selling you now? (Line 11). The second question: 'WHY, somebody, they are spending so much money for a garment worker, to educate a garment worker?' (Lines 12-13), which again shows the family's / society's legitimate apprehensions about the capitalist institutions which have a reputation for the exploitation of women, as indicated also by Hasina and her fellow RMG students in Extract 1 in this chapter.

Having set the scene and gained the encouraging support from the audience, Hasina then takes the stance of a champion for factory women's rights and describes a specific issue and the action she wants to take. With 80% of the workforce in factories being women, Hasina believes, women's issues have to take priority (lines 18-21). Her speech reaches a climax marked by a high and low intonation (lines 23-25) and higher volume when she intensifies women's suffering with a personal experience: 'I KNOW' (line 22/23) is emphatic because she has personally suffered that experience of being deprived of proper women's health care in the factory (lines 22 - 25). As the spokesperson for her female factory colleagues, she identifies herself with them in their deprivation of human rights in terms of their access to basic sanitary needs. Her willingness to share in public a personal experience using stark vocabulary – 'untimely periods', 'dirty cloth', 'pads' – breaks the wider stereotype of a factory woman as a shy, suppressed and timid being, and presents her as an emerging leader with courage, daring to effect a change. She evaluates the situation as 'happening because of lack of awareness in garment factories and a lack of support from the health centre' (lines 27-28). Hence 'something needs to be done about this'. She marks the end of her speech by a rising intonation and announcing loudly 'I HAVE ↑ to do something

for them', showing urgency and commitment for the cause of her 'sisters in the garment factory' (line 31). While she claims solidarity with the factory women by calling them 'sisters', she also distances herself in the use of the pronoun 'them' as she is now a university student and in a better position to become a leader in the community after her graduation (line 30). The very last line, 'THAT'S why I 'm HERE' (lines 32-33), sums up neatly the reason why Hasina is 'here' on the stage, to represent the RMG women as their spokesperson and also 'here' at this reputed university, to get educated to become a leader in the community. This again invites loud clapping from all sections of the audience, revealing the social recognition of Hasina's leadership attributes that she skilfully displayed in her performance of 'becoming a leader' in this instance.

There was one question to Hasina from the floor, a face threatening act, about what she thought about the recent reduction in the employment of women in factories, due to mechanisation, and how she could justify her 80% women's employment rate in the factories. Hasina who didn't know the answer, replied strategically, she would have an answer to that question after she has graduated. Hasina tactfully saved her face by taking the stance as someone waiting to be trained by the university, effecting a change of footing in Goffman's terms (1972, 1981), from a principal to an animator. The university, on its part, conveyed to the public through the model of Hasina what it values as good citizenship from its students and how it perceives leadership potential – i.e. English-speaking skills and the confidence to express her opinion.

Hasina was selected by her university as part of its marketing strategy to showcase as a model PP student from a factory background who is transforming into a public speaking figure with leadership potential to make changes in the community. And in doing so, by highlighting and acknowledging the leadership qualities that she developed, her struggles get in turn backgrounded. The transformation of the individual into a certain kind of desired subject willing to change herself is celebrated rather than the true achievements themselves. Clearly, at this university, English opens doors for those who can speak it. They get 'selected' for international events and get sent for prestigious internships. As proof of this view, the reporters from a leading newspaper in English, were waiting to interview Hasina soon after the event. The former factory girl had managed to attract media publicity (Fig 6.1 below). There was an article about her in the newspaper the next morning.

Fig.6.1 Media publicity for Hasina

**Newspaper Anonymous**

Home > Star Weekend > Labour Rights

... Group's factories, along with others, also participate in a pre-collegiate programme at the [REDACTED] University [REDACTED], where each year, a handful of RMG workers are helped to get back to university.

[REDACTED] is one such student in the programme. This former worker of [REDACTED] Textiles is now pursuing higher studies and perhaps knows best what kinds of skills training women would need to play more decisive roles. ...

"Women are rarely promoted to become supervisors," says [REDACTED], "and while educational qualifications have a lot to do with it, the demands of the job are also another reason why they never become supervisors." ...

Essentially what [REDACTED] is saying is that whole systems need to change to make sure the growth of the RMG industry is inclusive of its women.

As mentioned earlier by Hasina in Extract 1, her social identification with the RMG category and the marginalised working class brought her financial and academic gain, and later media publicity. The former Recruitment Officer, who recruited Hasina on the programme, and who was present at the panel discussions, also benefitted from the credit of identifying a potential leader. She was proud of Hasina and this is what she said in a Facebook conversation after the event, in response to her professor's comment about Hasina and with reference to the write up in the newspaper:

Prof: '...beautiful story, she is right- experiencing a role is fundamental in understanding how to lead it.

RO: Absolutely professor! I still remember being impressed with her interview! So happy she is slowly living up to what she said.'

H : Dear xxx standing next to you I felt blessed. Your words have showered more inspiration to me. I have been more hopeful for upcoming future...

RO: ...Always hold onto to your dedication and passion. Never give up!

(Prof – Professor            RO- recruitment Officer            H- Hasina)

However, engaging with the normative model of 'becoming a leader' at IU did not come without a price. The next section describes the struggles that Hasina faced to keep up with the demands of being a leader. Halfway through my fieldwork, a few weeks before her exams in April, I noticed Hasina was nowhere

to be seen, even on Facebook. She would never turn up for meetings that we had arranged and let her group down in the last minute. For several weeks she stopped responding to my e-mails. When I started looking for another focal participant, she heard about it and turned up one day in my room. That is when she explained to me in confidence her struggles.

#### **6.4 Hasina's struggles: Coping with the transformations**

Hasina confessed to me she was finding it hard to cope and conform to rules as she had not been used to discipline since she was young. She found it hard to take part in all the extra-curricular activities as the university expected, and also keep up with her studies. She was getting migraines due to the stress, and she was depressed because she was not able to do all that she wanted. It seemed she struggled to keep the image the university expected of its 'good' students. There was pressure on her to be a 'good' representative of PP. She also had personal problems while coping with the transformations involved with studying at an international university. She narrated a few unhappy incidents in her personal and family relationships which were not audio recorded as per her request, but there were others she did not mind sharing. They were less serious, according to her, but they added to the stress and anxiety that she was experiencing at that time. Extract 4 is part of one of the stories she told me:

##### **Extract 4: 'I did nothing wrong'**

' ... yesterday/ yesterday I put one photo of mine on Instagram, I was in only that saree, so my blouse was like backless, kind of backless, not whole/ so um my friend xxx clicked one photo of me, that I am showing my back, and that photo was SUPER! Like kind of pretty, sexy photo, I love that one/ so I wanted to post it on Instagram, so I post it on Instagram, there was two comments / one was my senior/ he's from uhh our same school and college/ and he's from my area also/ and what happened? // I know he's a FAN, he's a HUGE FAN of sunny leon, film star/ they are putting like photos of celebrities they are wearing bikini, when I put my that photo he commented/ "bina dikhaye vi rehe sakti thi pith"/ "dikhane ki keya jarurat thi"/ "you could have like, you, you could have stayed without posting this photo also, what's the need to showing this one"// I was like, kind of shocked,/ that time I thought about my family, maybe they will also know, he's from my area also, I think "do something"/ then I have one of my seniors, he was my mentor, he also said "you should remove the photo"/ I didn't remove that photo because I care for them, but I thought like, "everyone is saying this, I don't want to, like being any argument with them, that's why I deleted that photo, not because that I did anything wrong/ there wasn't/ I did nothing wrong ...'

(Taken from PAA REC 033)

Hasina was afraid her mum and her relatives would be worried and angry with her for posting such a photo on Instagram, if her senior colleague from her village showed it to them. She confessed to me that, if she went to her village, she would not be allowed to come back to the university. At the time she was looking for a part-time job to earn a bit more to help her mother and to stop depending on her sister's husband. The feedback from the UG student, Osra, at one of our meetings with Hasina, also suggested that Hasina was having problems with her family because of her desire to change her lifestyle and challenge traditional ways. Osra also mentioned that Hasina's attendance at the Drama and Music Clubs had fallen. To check if all this was affecting her studies, I met her tutors, Ms. Anna and Ms. Rona, who expressed their concern too regarding her insufficient attendance and her academic progress which according to Ms. Anna, her English teacher, seems to have reached a 'plateau' (fieldnotes).

Hasina was under tremendous pressure to live up to that social image that she was negotiating with other social actors, for example the promise she showed at her admissions interview, the new lifestyle she was adapting to in order to be accepted by her more Westernised international peers, and also as a member of a traditional rural community. The two main struggles that Hasina faced, in her own descriptions, were: a confusion over conforming to traditional values since she joined IU and a lack of discipline, as she saw it. When I made my trip to her village near Dhaka, in connection with my visit to her factory, some of these struggles became more perceptible, as described in Extract 5.

#### **Extract 5: Factory visit with Hasina**

It is almost the end of my field trip in Bangladesh, and it is summer holidays for the students at IU. It is time to make my much-awaited visits to the factories in the suburbs of Dhaka, where Hasina's and Zinia's factories are located. I take the flight to Dhaka and then a private taxi to XXX (anonymized) where Hasina and one of her Nepali classmates, Sangita, come to receive me, before proceeding to her factory in the EPZ. The first thing I notice is that Hasina and her friend are both in long dresses completely covering their body and in hijab. On the university campus I was used to seeing her in shorts and tops and more outgoing in her behaviour. As we drive to the factory, I compliment them on their lovely dresses, but Hasina responds complaining that 'it is unfair that the factory women sweat to make beautiful western style garments for export, but the women who make them never get a chance to wear them' (fieldnotes paraphrased quote). Hasina and her friend chat about aspects of their personal life where they have to balance between fitting in an international university and the expectations of the rural communities in Bangladesh and Nepal which they are also part of. Hasina shows me some pictures of herself in a sleeve-less

blouse on face book which she says 'a trouble- maker' in her family had shown to her mum in the village. This has created serious problems in her personal life. She also shows me what she is carrying in her bag – two sets of clothes. She explains 'if I am going out with my family, I'm wearing long dress and when I'm with my friends, I'm changing it in washroom and wearing tops and other things' (fieldnotes paraphrased quote). To me the two sets of clothes symbolise two roles Hasina is playing - a traditional Muslim girl abiding by the customs of her rural society and the student at an international university dealing with the influences of a free western lifestyle. Hasina tries to articulate that there are two sets of contrary expectations to live up to and she is finding strategies to deal with them, but she is struggling in the transformative process, having joined the university only a few months ago.

At the factory, we are received by a manager who takes us around the factory. Hasina is very excited to meet some of her old colleagues on the factory floor. She shows me the Needle Station where she had worked as a Junior Needles Woman and introduces me to her colleague who used to help her hide from the CCTV camera to eat her biscuits. She had been caught and reprimanded by her manager on several occasions for wasting her time, she admits with laughter. Thinking back, she considers it hilarious how she had hated being disciplined to follow rules and regulations. Hasina takes pictures with some of the workers who admiringly congratulate her on her 'fantastic success' in the selection exams to study 'English in international university'. She seems to have been popular on the factory floor. However, as we take leave of the managers, they advise Hasina to 'make the most of the scholarships' she had received and 'not to waste time' (fieldnotes paraphrased quote). Hasina nods her head obediently with an expression of gratitude on her face. As we drive out of the factory gates Hasina explains in a serious voice that her managers' advice was to remind her of her 'responsibility', because her attendance and behavior at the factory had not been particularly good, in their perception, and they were afraid she may continue with the same bad practice at the university.

*(Fieldnotes, factory visit / Hasina 5 May 2018)*

Hasina experienced tremendous stress at this point in time and space of her trajectory, trying to balance between two lifestyles in terms of dress and behavior and, secondly, conforming to IU's expectations and regulations, which she mentioned in her private chat with me. The constant reminders from her benefactors (including her factory managers) to make the best use of the opportunity they had provided her contributed to her stress levels. Like Fowzia (in Chapter 7), Zinia (in Chapter 8), and all the RMG students, Hasina was under great pressure. Yasmin, an RMG student, expressed her feelings about being a student of IU (see also Chapter 5):

'(IU) is a golden opportunity. So, we must use properly. They who gives donation will assess us, so must do well and we need English to do well' (1<sup>st</sup> FG RMG REC 001 AA)

Hasina is still in touch with me through Facebook, at the time of writing this dissertation. She has progressed to Access Academy and has been elected as its representative. Her Facebook interactions show that she is taking active part in the national Bangladesh Youth Leadership Training programme. Although she had displayed a shift in her alignment with the university requirements during her exam period, she seems to be gaining the resilience to bounce back to continue to live up to the university's and her benefactors' expectations in her development as a leader.

### **6.5 Chapter Summary**

The presentation of Hasina's trajectory and the analysis of the stances which she frontstages illustrate the leadership attributes which align with the university's configuration of a developing change-maker – i.e. skills to persuade and lead others, the courage and confidence to express opinion, goals to bring about change and, above all, ability to communicate in English in front of a larger audience. While Hasina demonstrated such a leadership potential, my data also reveals the struggles she went through in order to cope with the control exerted by a conservative rural society, where she came from, and the pressure of having to live up to the leader image prescribed by the university's international liberal arts education aimed at empowerment. Despite the struggles, though, Hasina comes out as the 'successful student' imagined by the social actors at IU. This can be attributed to the stances of alignment that she takes to the institutional values, her most recent transition from the factory to a more privileged and promising environment, and the ways in which she turns her struggles and inequalities to her advantage in the appropriation of her entitlements as an RMG learner. In the next chapter, I demonstrate how Fowzia's uptake differs from Hasina's, although it is also one of alignment with the institutional values presented to her.

## Chapter 7: Becoming Resilient - The story of Fowzia

### 7.1 Introduction: 'Well, this is factory woman's life...'

*It is 6am and the last day of the semester at IU. Fowzia, Nisa and I set out for the EPZ (Export Processing Zone) to watch the clocking-in time at the factory gates. We take a CNG (Compressed Natural Gas vehicle, or tuk-tuk) at the university gate to travel to the port area where the EPZ is located. On the other side of the gates, a bus load of IU students in shorts and T-shirt are getting ready to be transported to the new campus grounds for a basketball tournament. I notice Fowzia and Nisa are both dressed differently today, in long dresses and head and face coverings (niqab). They explain they are going to be walking on the streets with strangers.*

*Fowzia is a mature student, of about 29 years of age, studying on Access Academy (AA), having progressed from the Programme for Promise (PP) a year before. Unlike Hasina, she is reserved and is often seen on her own or in the company of Nisa, a 20-year-old factory colleague also on AA with her. As one of the most experienced of all the RMG (ready-made garment) students at IU she has a more serious and mature attitude to life and work. Her difficult personal circumstances did not permit her to take me to her village or introduce me to her family members, as some other participants had done. Instead, on her suggestion we decide to go on a day trip to the beach and port area after watching the clocking-in time at the gates of the factory where she had worked before joining IU. Fowzia volunteers to show me round the places where she had lived as a factory labourer. She assures me it would be quite an experience to walk to the gates of EPZ (as she had done for several years) with thousands of factory workers rushing to clock in.*

*During the hour- and a half long ride, Fowzia and Nisa, very excited about the day-out, and seated on either side of me, chat non-stop. The heat and dust, the noise of the heavy traffic on the roads and the high volume of their talk to keep above the deafening roar of the CNG gives me a headache. Nevertheless, I keep my recorder on to try and capture what I can. They describe to me some of the factory conditions they had experienced. Before joining the university with a full scholarship Fowzia had worked for eight years, and Nisa for a year, in a South Korean ready-made garment factory situated in the EPZ which manufactures garments for international retailers. While Nisa*

*had been a designer based in an office, Fowzia had worked on the floor as the Final Quality Inspector. Her work had involved checking and carrying men's heavy jackets made for Timberland, standing and walking for ten hours a day. This has had an impact on her health as she suffers from a chronic chest pain. In spite of this, Fowzia describes her experience at the factory as 'a little bit miserable'. Fowzia recalls how her 'life in the factory was totally different from life now. In the factory there were limits you can't cross and compared to that IU life is heaven'. In the factory they had suffered a lot of pressure to meet hourly targets and long hours of work had left them exhausted with very little free time. They had not been allowed any leave from work. According to them, the factories are interested only in making profits. I am reminded of my visit just a few weeks earlier to the factory floors of one of the biggest garment factories in the EPZ along with the university Recruitment Officer for one of their recruitment events. I visualise exactly what they are talking about – the long, noisy assembly lines with thousands of closely monitored workers labouring with their machines endlessly to meet the hourly production targets.*

*Nisa, unlike Fowzia, had worked in the Pattern section away from the factory floor, as she has a Diploma in Fashion Design. As part of her course, she had done work experience in the garment factory and had felt at that time 'never work in a factory'. But it was 'Allah's wish', as she puts it, she had to go back there for a job. She considers herself coming from 'a working middle class'. 'I'm not like them' (she means factory floor women). 'All my eight brothers and sisters have master's degrees. I don't have to work so hard. Also, I don't have a sad story to tell although I'm RMG'. To this Fowzia responds, 'yes, we always wondered why Nisa worked in RMG. She has educated family and their support. I had to work to support myself, my family are not educated, and they are against me always'. Earlier in the semester I had originally selected Nisa as my focal participant from AA. But she had withdrawn voluntarily giving the same reasons, that she was not 'really RMG' as she did not have 'a sad story to tell', which seems to be how an RMG student is perceived by those that believed they didn't belong to that category.*

*To my relief, we are nearing the EPZ and the CNG driver is not able to take us any further due to the dense crowds of factory pedestrians on the road. We get off and join the thousands of workers marching briskly towards the EPZ gates. The PEZ, one of the 8 EPZs (Export Processing Zone) in Bangladesh is*

*a huge, enclosed complex spanning 243 acres, housing over 170 industrial units with over 60% being foreign investments, boasting exports worth 27 million US dollars and employing over 200,000 workers of which nearly 80% are young women (EPZ website). My intention is to observe the punching-in time, which I had missed during my earlier factory visit, by joining the march of the thousands of workers to their garment factories. Nisa had jokingly described to me earlier, 'you will not see the ground. But it doesn't matter. There is no need for you to walk, the crowds will just carry you along' (paraphrased quote). Walking the 3 km or so in the midst of a packed stream of workers rushing to join the queues for clocking-in proves to be an overwhelming and exhausting experience for me, which Fowzia casually describes as 'well, ma'am, this is factory woman's life'. I have a glimpse of what these men and women undergo just to get to the gates and clock-in before 8.05, lest they lose their wages, by observing and talking to some of them as they rush by, a majority being women in hijab or niqab.*

*We know we would not be allowed without prior permission beyond the main gates which are guarded by heavy security and cameras. We wait in a by-lane for the crowds to subside. Most of the workers who cannot afford transport walk and they live within 5 km of the EPZ in the semi-slum areas near the Pre-port zone. Fowzia had been one of them and had done the walk and back every day, but Nisa says she had travelled by a hired CNG as her family were not happy for her to walk on the streets near the factories, particularly in the evenings. As I watch, I have raging questions in my mind: why nearly 80% of the workforce were young women? Why in a patriarchal society, as Bangladesh is believed to be, so many thousands of young women were out on the streets at 7 am rushing to work? Once they get into their factories, they will be either standing, sitting, or walking for 8-10 hours plus overtime as their job required and working under pressure to meet hourly targets, and after work as several of them we spoke to said, had caring responsibilities at home. Indeed, these conditions must be making them resourcefully hardy and resilient.*

*When the traffic clears, Fowzia takes us to the area where she had lived for eight years sharing accommodation with two other factory women at the back of a dilapidated building in a muddy by-lane about 5 km from the gates, and where she had met a young man and got married against her father's wishes. While we walk down the narrow lane, I get into a conversation with*

*Fowzia who has suddenly turned very quiet. I cannot help asking her, 'How did you do it for eight long years?' She laughs and says with a twinkle in her eye: 'Ma'am, I am Boxer. Remember?' We all laugh. I understand she is referring to the sturdy, naïve and labouring horse called Boxer, in George Orwell's Animal Farm. A few weeks ago, she had been chosen to play the part of Boxer in their team's classroom presentation of the prescribed novel, which I had attended. Fowzia becomes more serious and explains:*

*'...first I thought I won't go with you today...because it is painful... but then I thought I should go// I should show Ma'am whatever our life was// ... I don't know how I did it//... yeah, also money// that time I thought if I go back home what will people say?'*

(Audio REC 15032104/ Field notes / factory gate, F 28 April 2018)

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The above description of a small part of Fowzia's daily routine as a factory worker, and her words summing up the way she had felt, introduces the development of Fowzia's, and of many of RMG students' trajectory as resilient women. Fowzia's casual acceptance of the hard factory life as normal practice – in her words 'well, that's a factory woman's life', her reference to Orwell's faithful and hard-working horse, as well as Nisa's distancing herself from the factory floor and her characterisation of a 'factory woman' as someone with a 'sad story', shows how the figure of the factory woman is made sense of, besides the factories' use of these women's desperate condition and hardiness as a profitable resource which shaped such an establishment and helped it to thrive.

Fowzia was one of the several thousands of young women who had to leave their home and village in search of factory employment, a big step for them in their life. The migration of women to urban areas as part of mobilisation has been taking place since the 1980s (Lewis 2011), and this fact may portray Fowzia as stereotypical in some ways. But she was alone, without support and permission from her family. I was aware from her autobiographical narration earlier that she had to run away from home twice to escape a forced marriage and had to work in a factory to support herself. She had struggled to live there without any financial or moral support from her family who lived in a village 500 km from the town where her factory was located. Besides the need for money, it was the thought of how she would be perceived by the society, as the run-away daughter, if she went back home, that gave her the strength to face the rigors of

factory life. She had chosen to face the risks of working in the factory to going back home.

Becoming resilient, in the process of struggling to establish a self-regulating and independent identity, such as becoming a leader with public speaking skills (as in the case of Hasina) or becoming a leader with critical thinking skills (as in the case of Zinia, in the next chapter), is the core of Fowzia's narrative. Combining both a biographic narrative approach as well as a sociolinguistic micro-analysis of stance and affect in interaction, this chapter aims to show how Fowzia front stages her attempts at perfecting the institutional values to be resilient and self-responsible, which her factory life had already instilled in her in a different way and which, in fact, had made her eligible for the prestigious scholarship to study at IU. Fowzia's past life experiences and her daily activities at IU reveal the struggles that she was going through at the time of my fieldwork, in her attempts to conform to an imagined social persona of an independent woman, demonstrating her intolerance to social and gender inequality. To quote her words: 'I want to be Fowzia', meaning free of the shackles of male domination in a patriarchal society, as will be seen further below. One of the ways she believed she could attain freedom to make her own decisions was by pursuing an education in English and become empowered. This was her goal of self-development which aligned with IU's mission to produce dynamic leaders with a determination to bring about change. The theme of resilience, arising from the data, played a pre-dominantly significant role throughout Fowzia's trajectory of mobility, which came across as her way of performing and making sense of IU's idea of a leader, a resilient change-maker.

Fowzia's story is the story of a resilient and responsabilised woman who preferred to think of herself as a brave persevering survivor rather than a victim of social pressures. In the rest of the chapter this becomes more visible in the presentation of self (Goffman 1990) which she enacted in her autobiographical narration (7.2). She negotiated certain identity attributes conventionally associated with such an imagined persona. These are replayed in the section that follows (7.3) as she makes an effort to attain a sense of liberation and self-identification, to pursue English as the language of promise and to react against social discrimination, all of it as part of her leadership development training at IU. Fowzia's autobiographical narration analysed below depicts the transitions

in her life and is both an enactment through affective stances of self-determination and an expression of hope to build a prosperous life.

## **7.2 Fowzia tells her story: turbulent transitions**

Throughout the fieldwork, Fowzia often showed a desire or a need to talk about her personal life. As Nisa had mentioned earlier, Fowzia, like other RMG students, had a 'sad story' to tell, which she seemed to feel was the contribution she could make to my research. Media publicity on the Programme for Promise (PP) language provision for factory workers at IU have often covered their 'sad stories' in the interview, which to a great extent seems to shape the figure of the 'RMG student'. During our conversations, Fowzia would always revert to narrating her story which was spread over several pieces of autobiographical sections of her long and private interactions with me running over two hours at times in different places and at different sittings as the time, place and her mood permitted. Fowzia's personal narrative helped me understand the ways in which social factors played a role in the construction or de-construction of her subjectivity, why she told her story in the way she did and the way she wanted me to hear it. In her story, she projected herself as a woman crossing difficult hurdles in her fight for her rights to be what she wanted to be, an assertive, self-empowering individual taking responsibility for her own social and economic well-being as an active citizen which also involved risks. She demonstrated heightened reflexivity in her entitlement to study, made her decisions and realised her full potential at the liberal arts university.

The analysis of the stances that Fowzia takes in the following narrative is led by the nature of data. It centres on narrative as social practice, on what is done (rather than merely on what is said) as the core of the story. The subject positions that Fowzia takes as the narrator – as the empowered survivor – and as the narrated – as the victim of patriarchal control – have been closely followed using biographical oriented narrative / discourse analysis, chronologically tracking her development from a position of sub-ordination to one of liberation. Fowzia's biographical narrative analysis that follows, depicting her negotiation of her subjectivity, is divided into three stages based on the three reversal of fortunes that she faced and the new states that she negotiated each time for herself over a span of ten years. These stages are perceived in her stances as a brave woman taking risks, as a determined self-empowering

woman, and then as a survivor having succeeded in the test of endurance. At each stage, the analysis is presented at first at a thematic level outlining the story, and then at narrative interactional micro levels (Davies and Harre 1990; Bamberg 2004) depicting Fowzia's positioning in relation to the characters in her story and her evaluation of them – in which I had a significant and affective role to play as the listener and part of the story telling. Her story is one of struggle for and against power and control, and the three stages, analysed below, show her development as an activist of gender inequality, as she emerges finally through her narration as the self-reliant and self-confident survivor with a new hope.

### **Stage 1. The brave defiant woman: taking risks**

The first stage of her story is part of the initial interview I had with her and Nisa together. After high school, she had joined a Bangla medium college but when her father became ill, she was forced to give up her studies and seek employment. A garment factory near her home was recruiting women. However, her family were against it. Her father and her four big brothers, who had taken to the farm after a primary education and could not make ends meet, wanted to force her into marriage. She took the bold step to run away from home to escape a forced marriage. She said that 'was her only way to go forward'. She travelled to a town, 500 km away, where she had a cousin who helped her find accommodation and a job in a garment factory in the EPZ. As she had left home without permission and dishonoured the family name, as her father viewed it, she was barred from visiting home. In Extract 1 below Fowzia narrates the initial conflicts she had with her family:

#### **Extract 1: '...I deny their permission/then I came there...'**

- 1 S: Why was your family against you?
- 2 F: '... I have four brother/ but/ they are not/ much educated plus/ they are not/ you know, what
- 3 I should say? / It's not selfish / I don't want to say selfish but/ they are / maybe they are not
- 4 able to/give me/ enough support/so, for me it's my // great problem/ they are not supporting
- 5 me// ... I heard about/ rmg/ ...so I want join there/ but they are not agree to send me/
- 6 specifically my father and mother/ ...: because, you know society/ we have some common
- 7 conception about rmg/ they think people that work rmg, they are not good they are doing
- 8 something wrong/ something bad/ ... so they are not agreed to send me/ uh, even though they
- 9 not agreed (smiles), after that I deny their permission / then I came there/ and then I took job
- 10 //...

(REC 021)

Fowzia's narration starts with the statement of her problem – her wanting to work in an RMG factory and her family denying permission. The interaction is between Fowzia the narrator and me, the listener. The narrator solicits support and sympathy as well as assumes certain shared knowledge from the listener as in all story telling sessions, thereby effecting a congruent alignment in the evaluation of the situation, analysed in the next paragraph. She introduces the characters in her story – her four brothers and her parents. There is one more important character in the story, Fowzia the narrated, who had to defy patriarchal authority and leave home to be able to take up a job hundreds of miles away. The relationship between Fowzia and her family in her story is one of control and power, and the tensions arising out of certain misconceptions is, according to her evaluation, due to a lack of education.

Fowzia the narrator describes the brothers as 'not much educated plus'. The post- expression 'plus' is important as she strives to find the right adjective, rejecting 'selfish' as inappropriate, and choosing to describe them as 'not able to give enough support' (lines 2-4) – i.e., inability due to lack of education. This describing clause plays a crucial role here to show the social relationship between the narrator and her brothers. Fowzia the narrator positions herself at a higher level, as someone progressive and more educated than her brothers, to be able to judge her brothers' lack of 'education plus'. But Fowzia the narrated is subordinated by the patriarchal authority, the social knowledge she shares with me, as an Asian woman, with a 'you know' (line 2). Another sociological knowledge she assumes of the listener with a casual 'you know, society' (lines 5-6), is the 'common conception' of the local society of RMG as 'something bad' (line 7). The two instances of 'you know' index my involvement as the listener, and her positioning me as part of her storytelling action and evaluation of her characters. She attributes this social perception of RMG as something 'bad', as the reason for her parents denying permission – again showing an inability to support and make independent decisions and instead led by social misconceptions. Fowzia the narrator emerges victorious (lines 7-8), indexed by her smile, a smile of defiance, and breaks the sub-ordinate position of Fowzia the narrated, by defying them.

The short narrative clauses, 'then I came there/ then I took job' (line 8) with the finite past tense verbs, 'came' and 'took', seem to emphasise the brisk succession of events and the causal effects shown by 'then' used twice and

'there' in the last line referring to her refuge 500 km away from home. They also show the first reversal of status and the emergence of the new state which brings about a transformation in Fowzia's trajectory in her definitive self-positioning and self-perception as the brave and defiant woman, in her use of the word 'deny' although misplaced for 'defy', defying patriarchal authority and social norms concerning gender roles, and achieving her goal. That is the end of the first stage in her narrative.

## **Stage 2. Assertive and determined: Self-empowering**

The next part of her story is about her marriage. While she was working in the factory, she got married to a man who she had got to like. This angered her father and her brothers even more as they perceived this as a dishonour to the family's reputation. In Stage 2 of her rendering of this part of her story, Fowzia describes how her father and her brothers react to her marriage and depicts herself as the assertive woman bent on making her own independent decisions. It is taken from a longer chat, between Fowzia and me in Tale Space (a café on campus), a few days after the earlier session. We had arranged to meet up to talk about the Women's Empowerment Summit that Fowzia was planning to attend the following week. On the subject of women's freedom to make life and career choices, which was one of the outcomes advertised by the conference organisers, the discussion reverts to Fowzia's personal life in Extract 2.

### **Extract 2: 'So again I run away from home'**

- 1 F: my father died before / 2 year/ after I got married my father um, got shock/
- 2 Because/ uh he/ didn't like/ I will marry someone / by affair//...
- 3 S: ... So/you married by/ your own choice //
- 4 Yes//... that's why he was angry// and first time he told/ I can't go my home/ /and then/ some
- 5 days later/ suddenly/ my family called me// and I went there// and they are planning about/
- 6 somehow/ uh/they will capture me in the (laughs) home/ and then I will divorce my husband/
- 7 so they will/ can uh/ set my life/ another way// that time I was not agree (laughs)// so, after
- 8 some days I stayed there/ then I // uh realize they are doing something against my (smiles,
- 9 chuckles) relationship // I was not agree/ so I again run away from home (laughs)// before he
- 10 was angry// umm // I did something again// so he was more angry (voice breaks) // and uh //
- 11 (silence for 5 seconds, looking out of the window) he didn't talk with me for two years//
- 12 (emotional, wipes tears off her eyes). (There is long silence from both of us. I offer water.)
- 13 ...and I always feel bad for this/ I lost my father and last two years I didn't talk with him/ I tried
- 14 to talk but (not clear due to choking and looking away)...

(REC 021)

In this part of the story, Fowzia's narration reaches a climax, characterized by the complicating action of the brothers overpowering her. The trigger is her

marriage 'by affair'. In this episode, she is invited home, after having been rejected for a while since her first escape. Sensing her brothers are plotting against her to break her marriage she runs away again, but this leaves her with a life-long regret as her father dies soon after.

In the above narration Fowzia takes the stance of a stronger and more assertive woman who will not submit to patriarchal control when it comes to decision making about her personal life. She presents her brothers as predators or enemies who 'will capture' and 'set' (her) life in another way – that is, in their way. She uses the future tense 'will capture', 'will divorce' 'will set' (lines 5-7) to show a future uncertainty, a plan that never materialised to signify the weakness in their plot against her and foreboding the defeat of her oppressors. In contrast, Fowzia the narrator positions herself as a determined and victorious individual, indexed by her triumphant laugh and chuckle (lines 6, 7 and 8). There is a strong story-telling element in the use of the habitual present which engages the listener's attention by making the action more dramatic and evoking urgency – 'then I realise they are doing something...' (lines 7-8), 'so, I again run away from home' (lines 8-9), giving her climactic action a casual heroic air with her laugh (line 9). This is the second reversal of fortune and the emerging new state in Fowzia's life trajectory. The reversal not only brings a change to the plot, but it also implicitly displays a transformation in Fowzia's character, as she portrays through her narration, from a helpless victim of patriarchal control to a strong, assertive, and self-determined subject.

However, in the last four lines there is a sudden shift in her positioning, a clear change of *footing* (Goffman, 1981) in the speaker's orientation – from a critical evaluative and epistemic stance to a stance of affective involvement, from triumph to regret contextualised by the change of mood from laughter to tears. Fowzia the narrator gives in, or the *animator* and *author* of the words is subdued by Fowzia the narrated, or the *principal*, when she recalls her relationship with her father in the last two years of his life. In her display of her feeling of regret and remorse, accentuated by her voice breaking, the long gap fillers 'um' and 'uh', her brief silence and looking away while wiping her tears (lines 9-13), the narrator and the narrated become one, the animator/author/principal, thereby evoking more sympathy and an emotional response from the listener in line 11 - offering water and giving time for her to recover. She feels her action was the cause of her father's anger, and perhaps

illness, which is expressed in 'I did something again/ So he was more angry/' and she never got to talk to him again (lines 9-13). This connects the story back to the abstract in the first line.

In this extract, free of all verbal responses from me (except the question in line 3), Fowzia still interacts with me and demonstrates through her narrative and emotive stances how she wants to be heard, and in the process evokes a congruent alignment from the listener (me) through signs of support, which forms a generative part of the story. Fowzia feels supported to continue, with her story to the next stage.

### **Stage 3. Another test of endurance: a survivor**

The third stage covers her life at the factory when she fell ill with a chest pain and was about to give up her job. At that point, IU announced the admission tests for university entry with scholarships. Fowzia took the tests and was selected to her 'great surprise'. According to her, she got in because she had done very well at the interview. She was able to show them that she had, in her words, 'strong personal experiences that will help me become a leader in an NGO to fight for rights of women like me', which was her future goal (interview/fieldnotes). Unfortunately, Fowzia had another complication in her story. Her father-in-law refused to give permission for her to study, as he did not support higher education for women. Her husband had no power as her father-in-law was the head of the family. Fowzia went through 'a lot of turmoil'. As some concerned personnel at the university (admissions co-ordinator, and her tutor) had also explained to me, her admission to the university had been delayed due to those reasons. In the end, Fowzia had signed the papers and admitted herself into the university but at the cost of her marriage. At the time of the field work, she was still separated from her husband. She confessed in one of her conversations with me that she was now content and grateful to the university for providing her a place to live, at least for the next few years, and study free of cost when she had nowhere or no one to go to.

Fowzia's narration of this part of her story is presented below in Extract 3 and shows her as the triumphant self after another reversal, as someone who had already survived two major setbacks in her life due to her independent decision making and assertiveness. In Stage 3, Fowzia bounces back, having

survived several upheavals, to present the new state that is currently emerging for her.

**Extract 3: So// it's/ now/ it's benefit for me//**

- 1 S: ... but do you still meet your husband, sometimes //  
2 F: ... I still meet with him, but not my/ father in law//... ..we are separated now/but uh still we  
3 are in touch/ but my father in law's house are against me/ because of/ this education// they,  
4 they don't want uh/ I will again go to study/ but uh / I want// uh/ he is/ in the middle // he can't  
5 left his family, he can't left me//... yeah/ and he is now in middle (laughs)// that's why / I feel  
6 too bad/ because I, I didn't got support from my family/ and also father in law's family// so// it's  
7 now its benefit for me (smiles)/ because I can stay here and I can focus on/my/on  
8 concentration in study//...

(REC021)

The central theme of this episode is Fowzia's fight for her right to education. Fowzia introduces her husband and her father-in-law as important actors in this part of her life, again two male family members who complicate her life. The abstract of the story is 'we are separated now' (line 2), a consequence of another complicated action, relating to her going back to study. I show my involvement in her life story by asking her a personal question to which Fowzia responds with her evaluation of her husband that offers a contrast to how she strives to present herself in the interaction.

In the narration above, Fowzia positions herself as the survivor, someone who has faced serious challenges but has overcome them all. As the storyteller, she assumes the shared knowledge with me the listener, as an Asian woman, of the Asian cultural convention, prevalent in rural and also in some urban areas, of a married woman being part of her husband's family, hence bound by the authority of the father-in-law, who is the head: '...my father-in-law's house are against me/ because of// this education' (lines 3-4). She evaluates her husband as a powerless character who has no say in the matter (lines 4-5). She presents herself as decisive, as someone who knows what she wants- '...they don't want/ I will go again to study...but I want' (lines 3-4) in contrast to her husband who doesn't know what he wants – 'he can't left his family/he can't left me' (line 4), where the reference to 'he' is assumed to be understood as her husband. Fowzia, the narrator, ridicules his position with laughter (line 5). Her evaluation of her current situation is she feels 'too bad' that she had no support from both her father's house as well as her father-in-law's. She has cut herself off from them and now separated from her husband, which seems like a political manifesto against men in her life.

However, this reversal of fortune, the third within a period of 10 years, takes a positive turn marked by 'so' (line 6), and the change of tone indexing a change in time from the past to the present, including a change of stance from loss to benefit. It is the start of a new state in her life, which is perceived by Fowzia as a positive resolution - 'benefit for me' (line 6) - as she can now pursue her goal to become empowered to establish her own 'identity' through education, free of male control. Despite all the above oppressive forces, the final lines in the above extract show Fowzia's ability to bounce back into action to assert herself and make things work to her 'benefit', supporting her positioning as a resilient and successful woman.

This narrative activity helped me understand why Fowzia felt the way she did about herself. For her, storytelling as a meaning-making process seems to be a mechanism for self-development, for enacting and recognizing a positive sense of self as well as a coping strategy for her current life filled with challenging life events from the past. It shows how far Fowzia had come in her journey of self-development and where she was heading in her state as a student at an international university of liberal arts. More importantly, the analysis of her self-presentation through storytelling points to her alignment with IU values and the process of her learning to master the institutional script of doing empowerment.

Fowzia's story, although full of conflicts, is projected as one filled with hope, the hope that she would achieve her full potential as an empowered woman if she aligned with the university's values. It can be viewed as a journey of hope in anticipation of a new and better future. The three values that emerge as important for Fowzia to seek a better future are: firstly, 'becoming Fowzia' – establishing an identity of her own for which she has fought all her life; secondly, persevering and becoming proficient in English through an education in English, in anticipation of gaining power to make public decisions one day, as a leader; and thirdly, showing intolerance to social and gender discrimination. These themes are connected to the liberation war that she had with her family in her autobiographical narrative and are explored in Fowzia's experiences as an IU student in the next section (7.3).

### **7.3 A student of IU - learning the script**

Fowzia believed, as was demonstrated in her autobiographical narrative, that to be an empowered woman one needs to be able to make her own decisions and not rely on others. She also realised that to be able to make decisions, a woman needs to have an identification of her own as a free individual. Having been through oppression due to patriarchal control in her own life, Fowzia often spoke about women's liberation from societal controls as the first step to transformation and empowerment. In this understanding of empowerment which aligned with the university's undertaking to produce women leaders who 'are intolerant of social injustice', 'are confident to pursue a new career', 'can work for women's empowerment' and 'can change society' (IU marketing Chapter 5), Fowzia was displaying her alignment with the institutional values of 'being empowered'.

Fowzia's chats and daily activities are characterised by her stance of the experienced wise one, often on topics like 'women's liberation' which was her favourite. Some of the chats I had with her are presented in this section as examples of how during the course of our interaction Fowzia performed, negotiated and made sense of 'being empowered' that was made available to her at IU. What transpires as of paramount importance to her is the power to make decisions. In what follows I first demonstrate how Fowzia imagined the persona of a 'liberated woman' (7.3.1) then, highlight how English plays a pivotal role in her perception of the empowered woman with decision making power (7.3.2). This will be followed by instances where I show how Fowzia is intolerant of social discrimination as a student (7.3.3). Her self-projection in all instances is of the emerging resilient and independent woman challenging unequal treatment, in congruence with the university's idea of the 'good student' or 'leader' and is always combined with an anticipation of the 'good things' such an education would bring.

#### **7.3.1 Becoming 'Fowzia': the liberated woman**

In an interaction that takes place soon after a panel discussion on Multi-cultural Awareness which Fowzia and I attended together, Fowzia constructs, in collaboration with me, the idea of an independent woman aspiring to achieve an individuality of self. In her own way, she articulates the imagined Fowzia that she aspires to be. Extract 4 below illustrates her positioning as the woman who

has always sought liberation from social constraints in order to become the independent Fowzia of her imagination.

#### Extract 4: 'I want to make my own identity...I want to be Fowzia'

- 1 A: Fowzia S: Sudha  
2 (25:45 into the conversation)
- 1 A: I lost umm, many things in my life // so ↑// here I got this chance, I uh/ will make my life/  
2 again, as a valuable something / I want to make my own identity/  
3 S: okay //  
4 A: when I was in my father house /uh, people called me / my father name and  
5 that's his daughter/ who daughter this one //  
6 S: right//  
7 A: that one was my identity/ then after getting married, uh/  
8 and that time, my identity was, my husband name /and then his wife/ and now I want  
9 to make my own identity/ [someone]  
10 S: [as a wife]  
11 A: as someone/ but / that time I don't, uh / don't feel, didn't feel/ I feel but I didn't  
12 got any chance to think myself/ now, I got the opportunity and now I feel / I should  
13 have my own identity / someone, when will see me, that time uh they will know  
14 about my name//  
15 S: yes//  
16 A: I feel that/ like it is me \*Fowzia [(not clear)]  
17 S: [I understand, yeah] / so, you want people to know you as Fowzia// to be Fowzia//
- 18 A: I feel that/ like it is me \*Fowzia [(not clear)]  
19 S: [I understand, yeah] / so, you want people to know you as Fowzia// to be Fowzia//  
20 A: yes/ I want to be \*FOWZIA/ I am \*FOWZIA/ people will know by \*my name/ not my  
21 \*father name or my \*husband name/ or \*someone else/  
22 and/ now, I got some scholarship from there/ so/  
23 S: from your factory too//  
24 A: yes/ I can help my mom as well/ I can keep some money for my future/ now  
25 life going good/ without my personal life/ otherwise everything is going good/ (gives a broad  
26 smile)  
27 S: you are happy// ALL these problems because you wanted to study/ and you're  
28 still studying//  
29 A: yes/ (not understandable) / and my all of problem are created for my study/ so/  
30 if I, if my mind anyhow will change/ it will be very insulted for me/ because all of  
31 thing happened for study/ if I stop higher study anyhow/ that time ALL of people  
32 will blame me/  
33 S: yes//  
34 A: so//  
35 S: so, do you feel under pressure now? / [that you have to]  
36 A: [I'm not (not understandable)] sometimes I feel when I live alone/ that time I /  
37 all of my event, whatever happened in my life, when I remember all of thing, that  
38 time I feel/ bad//  
39 S: by pressure I mean you now feel under pressure/ to do well in your studies,  
40 because you have all these people who are against it/  
41 A: its ummmm (thinks for 4 seconds) you know/ I think/ it's/ en/ encourage for me/ all of  
42 them are against me//  
43 so I have to do something good/ so it's one good point for/ to encourage, encourage my  
44 study/  
45 S: [ it encourages]  
46 A: [yes]  
47 S: [in a way] it is pushing you to study/  
48 A: yes/ anyhow it's pushing me to study hard/ I have to do something good/  
49 because all of my family against/ if I uh, don't get any good things and good/ uh result or  
50 something/ they will blame me/  
51 S: okay/  
52 A: so I have to study/ strongly //...

(From REC02022)

Throughout this extract, Fowzia performs the stance of an emerging transformed woman asserting her hard-earned rights (described in her autobiographical story) as an individual to make her own decisions. She positions herself as someone who had been sub-ordinated due to her gender and denied rights to be herself and make her own choices. She expresses how she would like to be seen by others. The first two lines neatly summarise the whole conversation and Fowzia's hopefulness in her current state – she lost many things in her life. 'So' what? She has got this opportunity at IU which gives her hope to build a new life by acquiring the attributes of a new empowered woman.

Fowzia starts with a sense of loss. She has lost 'many things', emphasised by her sigh and tone of voice, but immediately bounces back in the same line with the word 'so' with a long pause. It is used here to introduce a new subject about a new life, or a change of attitude, to mean 'so what?' in the rising intonation, showing justification for her past actions, or even consolation. Here, as in Extract 3 earlier in her autobiographical narrative, Fowzia uses her characteristic 'so' to index a sudden change of topic and mood, from one of regret to one of hope, again demonstrating her capacity to bounce back with a positive attitude.

Her new life, 'here' (line 3) and 'now' (line 10) meaning IU – has provided her with the opportunity to build her life 'again'. She shows determination in 'I will make my life again'. This time as 'valuable something' (line 4). What she perceives as valuable is making 'my own identity' (line 4), as the two statements are placed sequentially, so that seems precious to her in her struggle. She uses a metaphor signifying materiality in 'valuable' and implying that her life up until now, a life controlled by the men in her family, had been reduced valueless. As in her perception, a life without freedom to do what she wants is worthless. There is firm assertion and determination in the choice of 'I want' - 'I want to make my own identity' (line 4). She explains (lines 3 to 10) the reason why she feels the need to 'make her own identity'. She has always been seen as someone's daughter or someone's wife, and she wants to change this perception. In the past, she had not felt this way because she had not been given the chance to think reflectively about herself (lines 9 to 11). Now that she is in a liberal international university, she has the opportunity to think of herself

as an individual subject, and people would now know her by her own name rather than by someone else's name (lines 13 to 16).

I respond with single words in positive terms like, 'okay', right, 'yes' (until line 19), indicating an agreement with Fowzia's ideas, showing sympathy for the way she feels about her social identification and encouraging her to construct and articulate how she imagines her social persona to be. Fowzia struggles to articulate in English the process of 'becoming Fowzia' (lines 14 to 18). With some support from me, 'I understand, yeah, you want people to know you as Fowzia, to be Fowzia' (line 19), and then by repeatedly mentioning her name (line 20), she emphasizes its importance to her as a form of capital, 'a valuable something' – 'people will know by my name' and not by someone else's – to be a liberated woman with an identification as 'Fowzia'. The expectation to accrue social recognition also stems from a stability in her economic status, an economic empowerment, (lines 22/24) which is indexed by 'scholarship' (line 22) she got from the university. To this I add 'from your factory too' (line 23). She responds to this by admitting that there is enough to support her mother and also save for her future. She sums up the description of her current state, her broad smile signifying her current happy and content social and economic state (line 24-26). I help summarise her current state (lines 27 / 28) by pointing that her determination to study was the cause of all her personal problems, and this provokes her to think what would happen if she did not achieve after all that.

Fowzia goes on to tell me that, for some reason, if she does not achieve, 'All of the people will blame me' (lines 31-32). But her preference of the expression 'pushing myself to study hard' to 'under pressure' (lines 35 – 42) gives a sense of relying on her own self-regulation rather than an externally imposed force, demonstrating the responsabilised subject. Here again, in assuming control over her life which she had lost earlier in saying 'they will blame me' (lines 32-33), Fowzia is trying to front-stage the self-initiating citizen through her positive thinking and confidence in her perseverance and self-responsibility, although she is aware that if she doesn't 'get any good things, and good results or something, they will blame (her) me' (lines 48-50), showing her tension over the fact that she is not totally free from accountability. What Fowzia perceives as 'good things' and 'good results' (line 49) is illustrated next. One of the 'good things' Fowzia is working very hard to acquire at IU is English.

The following sub-section presents Fowzia's affiliations through her positioning as being empowered with decision making powers, which she attributes to her English education. This brings hope in her life as she describes below in Extract 5.

### **7.3.2 Becoming proficient in English - hoping for 'good things' and 'good results'**

Like Hasina and Zinia (in the next chapter), Fowzia also embraced English as the sure pathway to 'success', something institutionally tested and recommended. They expressed how when they were garment factory workers they had no further goals in their life, except to work and support themselves or their families. After they came to IU, though, life had changed for them. Now, they could dream and there was hope. A university education in English was a dream come true and it was one of the 'good things' that happened to Fowzia too. She believed English was helping her to become empowered, as she expressed in one of her chats with me on what she perceived as empowerment.

In Fowzia's trajectory, becoming empowered has meant having the right to make her own decisions and choices for which she had fought, as presented in an earlier section. However, to have the power to make decisions at an institutional level, Fowzia explained to me in a conversation, she needed to develop skills, acquire an English education and get a good job. She first talks about employment opportunities in Extract 5, which English will open up for her and then, in Extract 6, she goes on to elaborate on the skills she is developing at IU to become empowered.

#### **Extract 5: 'before I didn't have a dream...'**

'First I thought English was a common language, just for conversation. But now when I came to IU I feel English is now a part of my life...Before I didn't have a dream that I will establish myself as (chuckles) something in a good position. But now IU help me and my factory help me to think my dream... English will help me fulfil my dream to get a good job... in Bangladesh, in RMG, they have posts like manager who have to deal with foreigners... In HRD (human resources department) jobs or manager and administration jobs they want English. I want to establish myself as a skilful person. I need job experience to earn a good amount of money.'

(REC 050)

Now IU has given her an opportunity to dream and also realise her dream to 'establish myself (herself) as a skilful person'. A 'good job', according to Fowzia,

requires English skills. A 'good' job in her perception was a managerial or administrative office job, for example in RMG, which would require communicating with foreigners in English. A 'good job' would help her earn a 'good amount of money'. In the extract below, Fowzia articulates in her conversation with me what she thinks are important skills to become empowered:

**Extract 6: '...I have empowerment through English to solve problems...'**

'...In international institution my way of thinking is become strong. Whenever I can think critically, I feel I have empowerment through English to solve problems and the hope I can solve problems. Now English is important part of my life, so I am allowed to take decisions. if we are educated, we are allowed to take decisions.'

(REC 050)

Fowzia is identifying herself as an international student who is acquiring an English education. She links the categories of English and critical thinking leading to empowerment, which are institutionally packaged as 'good' education (Chapter 5) that will give power to individuals to acquire decision-making status, an important attribute of women's empowerment in Fowzia's definition emerging from her trajectory of identification. What she highlights here is that English can solve problems, and it gives her hope that she can solve problems. Being educated for her means making English part of one's life. She is trying to articulate that an education in English, in an international university, will give her a position of power to make decisions, showing her strong alignment with the university's mission and promotion of English as the pathway to 'empowerment', a 'happy object' to pursue for future well-being.

In anticipation of the success promised to her at IU, Fowzia worked hard to take part in classroom activities as well as internal and external academic and social events that were aimed at developing the students' leadership and communication skills (e.g., Women Empowerment Summit). Despite all her efforts to participate in events and meet the expectations of the university and her sponsors, Fowzia like many students from PP, had to overcome the 'hurdle of English' as the Programme Director put it (see Chapter 5) in order to compete with the students from the English medium schools on Access Academy. Otherwise, she would regress to a Recovery Class like some of her RMG colleagues. At the time of my fieldwork, the tension was high among staff,

and particularly RMG students on Access, with regards to the English language levels of students. Students like Fowzia pushed themselves to participate actively in class and persevered to improve their English. They were made aware that a certain percentage of the overall assessment grades in English and other subjects was allocated to classroom participation (see Chapter 5), due to which students made every effort to take part as equally as possible. However, this placed girls from the non-English medium schools at a disadvantage.

One of the presentation-based assessments I observed demonstrates this point. It was the dramatization of George Orwell's satirical novel, *Animal Farm*, which was prescribed for study. The students were expected to develop criticality and grasp Orwell's political purpose for writing the novel. In the presentations that morning, besides other outcomes, the students' competence to speak in English was being judged, as part of their English assessments. In small groups, the students were required to enact a scene that they had dramatized from *Animal Farm*.

The first scene, the tutor announces, is by group A, in which Fowzia plays Boxer the labouring horse. Boxer is physically strong but is naïve and gullible and believes his (cruel) master is always right. He has a deep sense of duty which mars his alertness to the exploitation from his masters. Boxer's (Fowzia's) part in the scene is to tell the younger animals the significance of that day when several years ago Old Major, their leader (the boar, symbolizing Karl Marx), had given his famous speech about his dream for a free land where all animals were equal. Fowzia, playing Boxer, comes forward a bit nervously, but makes a good attempt at speaking loudly and clearly trying consciously to pause and stress in the right places. Fowzia's speech is too brief, mechanical, and memorised, to attract attention of the audience. In contrast, in the same scene in a flashback, Old Major (another student in a boar's mask appears) gives his (her) famous long, political, and persuasive speech to the farm animals. The part of Old Major, which requires more confidence, clarity, and the ability to speak at length, is played by a student who is evidently from an English medium background. Her delivery is fluent, effortless and full of expression, and engages the audience in rapt silence. She indeed attracts more applause and cheers from the audience, and an open appreciation from the teacher / assessor (field notes, REC038 5.26 Audio/ Video).

When I met Fowzia's English tutor, soon after the presentations for a feedback, she was all praise for Fowzia for her dedication to study and her intense hard work over the year. She commended Fowzia's courage to speak and act before an audience, although she knew (as I had observed) that Fowzia was extremely nervous and under tremendous pressure. We both agreed how well the character of Boxer that Fowzia played symbolised her hard-working self, a legacy of her factory labour. The teacher reported that, although there is remarkable improvement in her overall grade, she still had to improve her English and critical thinking to be ready for her UG studies. The tutor empathised with girls from such socio-economic backgrounds, but on Access Academy, she warned, they had 'to compete with girls from English medium schools. They are no longer protected or given extra attention as they were on Programme for Promise' (paraphrased quote). She expressed her concern that this places students like Fowzia, from Bangla medium schools, at a disadvantage although they are 'extremely hard-working and highly motivated'. She added: 'they have to be incredibly strong and brave to survive and succeed in this kind of an environment. I am aware there is inequality and some kind of discrimination against RMG students, but students like Fowzia will learn to survive' (Interview Tutor A REC 075).

The tutor explained that progressing to Access Academy from PP did not come without a price. In the next section about the challenges Fowzia faced, I provide a few glimpses of how Fowzia and some of her RMG classmates feel about (and react to) being discriminated against outside and inside classrooms for their factory background and for their lack of English skills because they come from Bangla medium schools. Nevertheless, Fowzia fights back, while developing strategies to cope with the challenges, as her English tutor had rightly observed.

### **7.3.3 Fowzia's struggles - challenging discrimination and unequal treatment**

In Chapter 5, one of the main reasons attributed to the non-progress of some of the PP students, according to the Programme Director and the Co-ordinator as well as the Admissions Director, was their 'inappropriate mixing' with students from rich middle-class backgrounds when they progressed to Access Academy. The 'striking difference in the confidence levels' and 'the feeling of insecurity'

had created 'a block in their learning' (interview with Co-ordinator). Some of the discriminatory treatment experienced by students progressing from Pre-Access was also highlighted through their post-it notes during the Multi-cultural Awareness event described in Chapter 5. The Programme Director in his interview with me talked about one of the challenges faced by RMG students due to the way they were being perceived by students who considered themselves as upper class:

'Some kind of discrimination is going on. Some of our students now in AA and UG came to see me regarding that. They feel they are being seen as 'factory women' or 'refugees'. Some UG students have been saying apparently 'You, RMG workers you are giving the university a bad reputation. I'm going to be going out into the job market now where the university is getting a bad reputation because of you'. This is not a quote, just a gist of the thing. These prejudices are deeply embedded in the society they come from.'

(REC 15041204)

In one of my conversations with Fowzia and her friends on Access during lunch time, I had the opportunity to gather first-hand how the RMG students felt about some of the perceptions about them. Fowzia, Nisa and Sham shared with me and with each other their experiences of unequal treatment due to their background. Nisa had less to complain, as she did not identify herself fully with RMG, but sympathised with her RMG colleagues. They felt bullied by senior students, particularly those who viewed them as - 'don't have class, haven't any status and haven't any dignity'. To my question if they have actually had any challenging experiences after progressing to the mainstream Access course, Sham and Fowzia came up with the following accounts, as in Extracts 7, 8 and 9 (from Audio REC 016, F, N, She).

**Extract 7: 'seniors...who has a better background than us'**

**Sham:** When I came here I faced some problems...Most of these students are seniors and who has a better background than us ... one incident happened in our university .They blamed garment sector students did this work, this bad work even though we were not involved... (0.02.00 – .03.30)

Sham's acknowledgement of 'who has a better background than us', in Extract 7, contextualizes the divide that is felt and accepted as normal among the students and other social actors at IU. 'Better background' could imply higher

socio-economic classes or English medium schools. The prevalence of these categories on the campus have been openly discussed by staff and managers and documented in Chapter 5. Fowzia follows it up with an animation of a dialogue between her and a member of staff, in Extract 8.

**Extract 8: '...we are RMG girls, so we can't speak English?'**

**Fowzia:** No one would directly insult us for our background but sometimes they are showing something in their behaviour. Something about our background ... One respectable person here I don't want to take her name. She told me (change of tone to mockery) 'You can speak in English? I say, 'Why ma'am, why are you saying like this? Why I can't speak English? She say 'No, you are from RMG so thought you can't speak English' ... how can she talk like this, we are RMG girls so can't speak English? Definitely she feel proud of herself (mockery and change of tone) ' I am educated person. I can manage everything. She can't speak English...' (0.57.00 – 0.58.30)

Fowzia is angry with one of the non-teaching staff members that she refers to as 'respectable', in an ironic tone, because she has stereotyped RMG students as incapable of speaking in English. As the principal, being a directly affected participant in the embedded dialogue, Fowzia positions herself as a challenger of discriminatory behaviour with courage to challenge a member of staff. Fowzia continues to describe in Extract 9 another experience she had in the classroom:

**Extract 9: '...So One day I make noise.'**

**Fowzia:** In classrooms sometimes ... (we face) some problems. Last year... it was all scholarship people. This semester we have outside people...uhh called day scholar. They paying money and they are from English medium schools. I could speak some English, but some other people can't speak fluently. So this is a problem. During that time, they are a little bit insulting if we ask something to the teacher. One girl she can't express so she stop talking in the middle. So they are laughing. So one day I make noise. 'Why girls, why you laughing?'... I told teacher, 'teacher you should be strict. Everyone is here for learning. You should be strict'. That time I became angry why she is not telling anything... (01:05:00)

Fowzia describes the students who join directly Access Academy, i.e., mainstream (as they are from English medium schools and who are fee paying), as 'outside people' (line 2), meaning 'day scholars', a segregation that has been socially created and normalised for administrative convenience at the university. Fowzia's experience described above reveals the divide between the rich and the poor, indexed by 'paying money' versus 'scholarship', and the English medium versus the non-English medium in the classrooms in her references as 'we' and 'they', and also her hardiness to resist it. She challenges her fellow

students and also her teacher animated through an embedded direct speech enactment, to evoke a more emotive response from her listeners.

In Extract 8, Fowzia takes the affective voice as the animator in direct speech and also as the principal who is personally affected by discriminatory words of a staff member. In Extract 9, a narrative of a past event, she positions herself as the leader of the oppressed who are fighting for the right to learn. Her words enact an evaluative stance, evaluating the discriminatory behaviour of the English medium girls and the teacher's non-intervention. As the author of her words and also the animator of the embedded story, using direct speech, she brings dynamism in the narration. Her dramatic re-enactment as the challenger of social injustice is endorsed by her two classmates who had been witness to the original incident in the class, as well as me as a silent participant, again invoking sympathetic alignment from the listeners interacting within a participatory framework (Goffman 1981) of enacting intolerance to social discrimination.

For Fowzia, as it was for all RMG and non-English medium students progressing from Pre-Access, it was an on-going struggle to prove her competence and face the challenges of an English medium education in an institution and a system where the ability to use English was paramount and taken for granted as the mark of a 'good student', almost as a routine everyday practice. Yet, she showed a willingness to take risks in the hope of becoming powerful to make important decisions.

#### **7.4 Chapter summary**

In Fowzia's trajectory, leadership is projected in the form of resilience and risk-taking, self-regulation and an intolerance to social injustice. Fowzia projects herself as a survivor rather than a victim, viewing her adversities in her personal life more as turning points than excuses, and with the flexibility to adapt to changes. A biographical narrative analysis of her self-positioning and positioning of others shows her as capable of making her own decisions, claiming an independent self-identification and rebelling against things that she can change (e.g., patriarchal control in personal life, discrimination in classrooms) while at the same time accepting (and adapting to) things that she has no power to influence (factory conditions). In Fowzia's trajectory, we see more than in Hasina's the intersection of social forces of gender inequalities and

a neoliberal alternative. Placed in a position of limited choices, the neoliberal material benefits seem more attractive to her. As a practical person, she embraces material values that the university promotes for her own benefit - English for 'high position jobs', 'skilful person' for 'good money' and women's empowerment for decision-making power like men – and works very hard to survive the challenges of an English education. The data presents Fowzia as a person who embraces risks in changes and who holds hopes to be empowered with the right to make decisions, which is important for her. The analysis of her narrative activity, performed at different times, tracks her development from a position of sub-ordination to one of liberation, showing in the process her coming to terms with another kind of conformity to her university's values of leadership and empowerment as well as the consequences of such a choice for her. In contrast to this, in the next chapter, we will see how Zinia, as a critical thinker, differs from Fowzia and Hasina in her uptake of the submission to a neoliberal subjectivation.

## Chapter 8: Becoming a ‘critical thinker’- The story of Zinia

### 8.1 Introduction: The transition from factory to university

*It is summer holidays at the university and about five months into my fieldwork. I have arranged to meet up with Zinia, in Dhaka, and visit her family and the factory that she had worked in before joining the university. Zinia, my third focal participant, is aged about thirty and comes from a rural area in the Dhaka Division, about 300 km away from her university campus. Leaving her home in the village to pursue her university education has not been easy for her and she often worries about the welfare of her aging father and two younger sisters who have been dependent on her since their mother's death a year ago. When Zinia first introduced herself to me she spoke proudly of the fact that she was one of the first batch of 25 factory women from the several hundred applicants from factories across Bangladesh to be selected with a full IKEA scholarship, to study at International University (IU) in 2016. She had demonstrated at the interviews, according to the Programme Director and the Recruitment Officer, a ‘critical view of certain social issues and her intolerance to social injustice in her community and the potential to become a leader’ (fieldnotes paraphrased quote), qualities considered an essential part of the selection criteria. At the time of the fieldwork, she was on UG 1 studying Calculus, Statistics, Economics and Global Issues having successfully completed the Programme and Access courses in the previous years at the university. She is eager to take me to see her factory and then to her home to introduce me to her father.*

*The factory that Zinia worked in is one of the thousands of garment factories in Bangladesh located outside of the EPZs, hence less controlled and monitored by international regulations. When we arrive at the factory gates, we are taken to a large, air-conditioned lounge where we have a brief meeting with three Human Resources managers. They describe Zinia as ‘hardworking’ and ‘intelligent’, as she had earned two promotions within three years. She started as Quality Inspector and then she was promoted to the job of Quality Controller. They seem to make the point that they recognise merit in their workers and that they are supporters of the government's initiatives on women's empowerment. Besides, they speak highly of their management for having provided good candidates like Zinia for the university selection. Her managers give permission to Zinia to show me round the factory and the assembly lines (Fig. 8.1 below)*

*with which she is quite familiar. Zinia leads me to the factory floor assuming the air of a cicerone, a knowledgeable guide of the garment factory, who has set on her agenda what she wants me to see that morning.*

Fig. 8.1 Assembly lines experience with Zinia



*Zinia shares her views about the factory as we walk through the overcrowded assembly lines. She does this by pointing and signing rather than verbally, as we are accompanied by officials in some parts of the factory and also because the noise of the machines is drowning our voices. She draws my attention to certain areas of the factory, for example, the hourly production charts hanging in the middle of the factory floors in full view for the workers. She introduces me to the supervisors, who are all male, and we stop to watch some women using powerful machines without protective gear, the use of which apparently slows down production – hence worn only during inspections.*

*While we walk through the factory floors filled with the din and noise from various kinds of machines, Zinia describes her first day at the factory. She had been shocked by the deafening racket of hundreds of machines. She recalls asking one of her colleagues: ‘How do you work all day in the middle of all this noise?’ And her colleague had replied ‘Noise? What noise?’ Zinia laughs and says,*

*‘It definitely keeps getting better, and soon even I stopped hearing all that noise like all the other workers... Everything becomes normal, the noise is normal, the repetitive work is normal, the long hours of standing is normal, accidents are normal, being pressured to meet target production without breaks is normal, working on a Friday is normal and also shouting and being shouted at is normal...’*

*(REC072 factory visit Z 6<sup>th</sup> May 2018)*

*There is sarcasm in her voice as well as a tinge of humor in her evaluation, stressing on the word ‘normal’ through repetition, combined with a stance of control and authority in her self-positioning. She uses humour here as a vehicle to express a deeply felt sentiment to challenge power and control. As will be*

*seen in the affective stances that Zinia takes even on other occasions, she often uses humour and irony in her animations to express more forcefully her attitude towards certain social issues highlighting normalization of institutional regulations and practices, and at the same time attempting to invoke a heightened affective uptake from her audience. I ask Zinia why she had not spoken to me about the working conditions in her factory before, to which she replies with a mischievous smile: 'I wanted you to see it yourself'* (Field notes and REC072 Z factory visit).

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I visited three garment factories in Bangladesh during my fieldwork, two near Dhaka and one in CEPZ (Chittagong Export Processing Zone), but this last visit with Zinia particularly helped me get not only further glimpses of the resilient and incisive persona she was presenting. It also provided a deeper perspective on the working conditions in the factories which she, and as a matter of fact, all the RMG students, had been part of. It gave me a better understanding of the positioning of the RMG students and their uptake of it as well as their own self-positioning as they went about their new daily life at the university. There was every reason to believe what the Programme for Promise (PP) recruitment officer had said of the impact of factory work on the RMG students: 'They are trained to finish in time what they have started and never to give up' (paraphrased quote), referring to their self-responsibility, self-regulation and resilience even if it involved taking risks, which make them desirable students. In Zinia's case, she had accepted the university place although her factory had refused to pay her wages, unlike the other factories that participated in the partnership. She explained in her initial interview with me how leaving her job and going back to education involved risks, but she and her father had felt studying in English medium was an 'opportunity of a lifetime'. To her the lure of an English education had been hard to resist. Moreover, the discourse of English education as a big step towards socio-economic mobility was embedded in the Bangladesh society as an unquestionable first choice in education, as her father expressed in his own terms to me when I visited her family.

Zinia's father had played a very important role in her life and education. On several occasions, Zinia had spoken very highly of her father as an inspiration who supported her education and women's education in general and

English education in particular, although according to her they were a 'poor working-class family'. As her father put it to me with excitement and pride when I had lunch with him: 'I am very proud that my daughter has succeeded in getting into this university and is learning English' (paraphrased quote). He spoke about his own knowledge of English which had helped him work as a cook in the American embassy in Dhaka and support his family. He had had only a primary level education in Bangla but had learnt to speak English from the American officers. Zinia had always dreamt of studying in an English medium school and become a graduate one day. In one of her journal entries she describes her dream:

'After getting the highest point in our school in S.S.C (secondary school certificate) my dream was go to college...then I passed the H.S.C. (higher secondary certificate). Now my mind wants to fly ... dreaming of graduation, the convocation day, I am wearing the convocation dress, taking certificates from president and flew away my black hat. '  
(Journal, Feb2018)

Success to her had meant graduating from an English medium institution, and her dream was filled with the 'convocation day', her 'convocation dress', 'certificates from the president' and flinging her 'black hat' in the air. The description notably brings a Western style university graduation ceremony to mind, pointing to the fact that English medium institutions in Bangladesh, particularly the international universities, added these rituals to their ceremonies to give their institutions an international air. The American-style Commencement Ceremony that I attended at IU, at the end of the year, was similar to some of the details in Zinia's dream.

Unfortunately for her, her family was too poor to send her to Dhaka and afford an English education. So she had joined a local college where everything was taught in Bangla, even English, as Zinia and her classmates had mentioned to me at a group meeting. Soon she was forced to give up college and take up full time employment in the garment factory when her father lost his job due to his partial blindness. It was at this time that scholarships to study at an international university were made available for women in her factory. She has always been grateful for her father's encouragement to accept the place in spite of their difficult circumstances.

The transition from the rigors of factory life to a prestigious international liberal university is described by Zinia as a revival of hope for a life of better opportunities. She expresses her feelings in her journal, 'Now I can see the whole world', about her initial experience of her transition from the factory to the university, presented in Extract 1 below:

**Extract 1: '...Now I can see the whole world...'**

'When the gate of XXX (of the university) opened & we entered the lane, I felt like my dream door, which was closed for thousand years is now opening with the magic. I couldn't believe that I am in reality... Now I am sitting in front of a computer, writing about my life. Once I used to sit in front of sewing machines. Now I can see the whole world through Internet & adjusting with many students of different countries who come to study in my same university. Once margin, gauge, alter, S.P.I (stitch per inch) were my world. My dream, that was about to die, XXX (the university) raised it with full strength.' (Journal, Feb 2018).

Zinia was a budding Bangla playwright, as we will see in a later section, and she was good at articulating her feelings and experiences through the use of emotive language. In this piece of journal writing, using metaphorical contrast, Zinia describes her enthusiasm and hope that has been revived through her transition from her factory life to her present university life. She illustrates with examples that index the transformation felt by her as she moved from 'dream' to 'reality'. It was like 'magic'. She brings out the contrast and the affective significance of the computer in her present life at the university and the sewing machine of her past life in the factory. She credits her university for enlivening her with 'full strength' from a state of hopelessness ('die') in the factory. The contrast between her mundane past and a present life full of hopes brings out the contradistinction and foregrounds an alignment with the present. It is a discourse of radical transformation from an environment of constraint to one of open access, from a state of hopelessness to one of anticipation. The metaphors are emblematic of Zinia's transition and of all the RMG students at IU, as they have all expressed in their own ways in their narratives.

Zinia's journal entries describing her dream and then her transition to a life of hope, and her reaction during the factory visit to the normalisation of factory conditions which she had to adapt to, are particularly relevant to this chapter. They show how the promise of an English medium education seems to be transforming Zinia's life and foregrounds her preparedness to adapt to a new lifestyle where the mastering of other skills such as leadership and critical

thinking is also considered important. Transforming oneself in accordance with institutional expectations often implied the acquisition of skills and dispositions that came to be associated with ‘becoming empowered’, as understood by the social actors at the university. My observations of the daily activities in and outside classrooms revealed that ‘being critical’ and ‘doing critical’ prevailed among all students, more particularly among UG students, as was the norm in the university’s liberal arts education (see Chapter 5). This chapter captures some of the attributes conventionally associated with the critical thinker – possessing evaluative, persuasive and practical reasoning skills - which were predominantly visible in Zinia’s portrayal of herself and is presented through an analysis of stance in interactions using Goffman’s ideas of the ‘presentation of the self’ and ‘forms of talk’ (Goffman 1990, 1981).

Zinia’s story is the third and final part of a bigger story. The previous two chapters focused on how the participants were developing leadership skills (as in the case of Hasina) and qualities of resilience (as in the case of Fowzia). In Zinia’s case, the data highlights in particular the role the learning of English and the development of critical thinking and enterprise skills played in her new life, and the aspirations after the difficult transition from the factory. They show her desire and obligation to prove her worth as a “competent student” and a “good citizen” while, at the same time, the struggles that such transformations entail which she is coming to terms with. First, Zinia is seen displaying her evaluative skills by framing liberal arts education as ‘the best’ in a group meeting together with her classmates, thereby categorising herself and the students of such an education as marketable (8.2). Then, in a conversation with me, Zinia appears demonstrating her persuasive and argumentative skills to prove that for women from rural Bangladesh an opportunity to develop critical thinking is important to become a leader (8.3). In her endeavours to be successful, she projects her entrepreneurial persona in her practical decision-making (8.4).

## **8.2 A stance of exclusivity- evaluating marketability**

At my first meeting with Zinia and her group of UG1 classmates (former factory workers progressed from PP and AA), I was interested to learn more from the students about their perspectives on liberal arts education. In the interaction below, they all show unanimous affiliation to its values as aspiring members of the new ‘exclusive’ community that they had chosen to be part of. It is exclusive

as it is totally different from the Bangladesh school system they come from, and as they project it. They evaluate and construct categories of 'good' and 'bad' as they express the differences and preferences in their own terms, in Extract 2.

**Extract 2: '... this university's system is very useful and it's the best thing'**

D: Shazia    C: Zinia    B: Sharmila    A: Saki    S: Sudha

- 1    **S:**    Tell me what you think of the liberal arts education in XXX //
- 2    **D:**    I think umm the XXX and this education system is
- 3    liberal arts / I like it very much / before I don't know about these systems / because
- 4    in my country we are not study like this way and uh / what is the different from our
- 5    Bangladesh to XXX education / is liberal arts that for the women empowerment/ if
- 6    you want to make the women empowerment then this university's system is VERY
- 7    [MUCH ...]//
- 8    **S:**    [right]//
- 9    **D:**    very much useful for that//
- 10    **S:**    ok//
- 11    **D:**    If you / if you umm / go to our Bangladesh educational system / then you can see
- 12    that there is lot of things just memorizing things/
- 13    **S:**    hmm/
- 14    **D:**    teachers and professors they just judge the students / uhh according to them
- 15    memorizing/ HOW MUCH one student can memorize or just memorize and write the
- 16    things and practical and if you want to see their practical knowledge they doesn't
- 17    have anything/but that one for XXX /they are actually focusing on that/that's why
- 18    we are involving in many co- curricular activities / and some volunteer work /as in
- 19    university and out of university as well//and its volunteers work like/job
- 20    job/ so / that things actually the XXX students learn from here//
- 21    **S:**    there are [the internships]/
- 22    **D:**    [the internships] /
- 23    **S:**    yeah ok//
- 24    **D:**    so I think the (iu)/
- 25    **S:**    which is very [useful]/
- 26    **D:**    [useful] and it's the best thing//
- 27    **S:**    right//
- 28    **C:**    also I want to add something with (Shazia) / what she has said like um we also
- 29    used to do that in our schools college / we just memorize our books and we give
- 30    he exam for good marks (coughs) (everyone laughs)/for good marks and also
- 31    after finishing our schools we wanted to get in good college for study//
- 32    **S:**    hmm/
- 33    **B:** ... so what really matter for us was to get a good grade/
- 34    so now we are having here it's really different like we are not just reading
- 35    books / (Zinia) also mentioned that we are not reading books uhh //
- 36    **S:**    not just reading books//
- 37    **B:**    we are reading so many journals, articles, newspapers so its really helpful to
- 38    erm know the ongoing things, that's happening//
- 39    **S:**    right//
- 40    **B:**    not only around, around our country also around the world / in XXX we are in
- 41    our class we usually have presentation like at that we didn't have in our school or
- 42    college / also we didn't KNOW that how to do presentation, how to speak in public
- 43    so its such an (not understandable) for us we are gaining here//
- 44    **S:**    ok this is giving you confidence to give presentations //
- 45    **B:**    it will really help our future / that when we will get good job then we can apply
- 46    there those skills //

... ( UG1FG1 REC 002)

(XXX anonymised name of university)

In this extract, taken from a long group meeting, Zinia and her group of three UG classmates are enacting a joint stance of allegiance to the liberal arts education that their university is providing them. They do this by comparing it with the Bangladesh education system and constructing categories of a 'good way of learning' and 'a bad way of learning'. According to them, the Bangladesh system of education which is based on rote learning is not a good way of learning, as Shazia points out in her opening statement. It is followed by a confession of their own past practices, or a back-stage performance by Zinia and the other two participants by a shift in the *footing* (Goffman 1981) from Shazia's which gives a more detached evaluation of the Bangladesh education system, and then their joint construction of IU's 'good way of learning' with examples.

Shazia opens the discussion and occupies the floor for a while, as is the case in most interactions I have observed. In all meetings where Shazia is present, the discussion starts with her, a privilege she enjoys and a position of authority she assumes because of her senior RMG position in the Procurement Department of a leading Korean garment factory. She had gained quick promotions due to her English communication skills which had high value in her job of negotiating business with Chinese clients, as she had stated in one of her meetings with me about what English meant for her.

She takes the floor first by giving her views on what is 'best' and what is 'not good' in line with the university's rationale regarding the empowerment of women. As the *stance-lead* (Du Bois 2007), she takes an evaluative stance followed by an epistemic stance demonstrating her knowledge of the two systems of education. 'I like it very much', Shazia says (line 3), 'it' referring to the liberal arts system. The main difference according to her between the Bangladesh education system and the IU system is 'liberal arts ...for the empowerment of women' (lines 4-5). As a current student of IU, she endorses with an emphatic affirmation that 'if you want to make the women's empowerment then this university's system...is very useful' (lines 5-9). She also speaks as an experienced student of the Bangladesh system, but assuming the stance of an *animator* (Goffman 1981) in her distanced critique (lines 11-12) of how students are assessed on 'HOW MUCH one student can memorise' where students have no practical knowledge (lines 14-16). Compared to that, IU

focuses on 'co-curricular activities' and 'volunteer work', 'in and out of university' (lines 18-20). She mentions 'internships' which are 'very useful' (lines 22-26). For these reasons, she concludes, IU is 'the best thing' (line 26). She takes the floor for much of the interaction distancing herself from the issue in her use of the pronoun 'they' (lines 14-17) in the Bangladesh system who are affected, not including herself, as perhaps she now considers herself part of a more privileged education system.

Zinia takes the turn next, and as a *stance-follower* (Du Bois 2007) responds to Shazia. Although she aligns with Shazia's evaluation of the two systems, instead of distancing herself as Shazia did in her animation / authorship, Zinia in a *change of footing*, or a slightly divergent alignment, takes the stance of the *principal* (Goffman 1981) actor by presenting herself as a product of the Bangladesh education system. She admits how she memorised her lessons to gain good grades – 'we also used to do that...' (line 28/29). The change to 'we' from 'they' throughout (lines 28-31) indexes a change of alignment from one of distanced authority / animation projected by Shazia, to one of honest acknowledgement, as the principal, as one involved in an earlier act of collusion which Sharmila endorses shortly. Here, by performing an act of self-evaluation, Zinia displays her ability to be judicious at the risk of embarrassing Shazia, who earlier tried to disengage herself from the Bangla system, by a *face threatening act* (Goffman 1981). She reminds everyone that at one time they were all part of such a system, which provokes laughter (line 30).

The ridiculing of the memorising practice in Bangladesh schools and the change in alignment are marked by disparaging laughter (from everyone), which signals through mockery their dis-alignment with such a system. It also seems to index their feeling of embarrassment or self-deprecation, on having played along with the system which they are now denouncing. After an embarrassing self-evaluation, laughter aids as a *face-saving act* (Goffman 1981). There is full endorsement from Sharmila and a justification for her laughter when she takes the next turn (line 33) in her use of 'us' - 'so what really matter for us was to get a good grade' – again a *principal* involved in and affected by the system. She substantiates the group's argument in favour of IU's with examples of what it offers, reading and public speaking skills (lines 34-45). She feels that 'those skills' (line 46) will help them when they get a 'good job' in the future. Their

argument gives the impression that by dis-aligning with the Bangladesh education system and aligning with IU, they position themselves as 'privileged' to be studying in what they perceive as the 'best' (line 26) system provided by IU with better chances of getting a 'good' job. There is a convergent alignment from all the interactants, in the end, through their comparative evaluation of the education systems and also in their joint positioning as 'privileged' students of a liberal arts education. In this part of the interaction, Saki remains an interested *by-stander* (Goffman 1981).

The participants jointly evaluate the liberal education system as 'good' education based on what is perceived as their educational need by the institution (and hence by them) – firstly, the empowerment of women, the reason why they are there. By speaking in general terms 'if you want to make women empowerment, then this university system...is very useful' and 'it is the best thing' (lines 5-7 / 9), Shazia is not just speaking for all women needing empowerment but specifically through implication includes herself and all her factory colleagues – a social category she creates for RMG women which is accepted by the other participants. Secondly, the major difference in the pedagogy which is of significance to them is the university's emphasis on 'skills', particularly critical thinking and public speaking, which are embedded in the curriculum learning outcomes (see Chapter 5). They will help them become more marketable than the students coming out of the Bangladesh system in the competitive job market. In addition, by self-categorising themselves as women needing empowerment through an act of evaluation, they are front-staging and conforming to the way other social actors, the factory employers, the university and their benefactors have imagined them, thereby justifying the existence of such a provision for working class women.

Zinia felt that for women like her a liberal education embedding critical thinking was 'the best', as Shazia put it earlier. During our conversations, Zinia, like other UG1 students, seemed eager to show me her ability to think critically and argue persuasively, as we shall see in the following section.

### **8.3 Articulating an argument – critical thinking skills and women's empowerment**

Zinia often spoke about gender inequality, the corruption and the exploitation of women as labour and, at the same time, the national drive to empower women,

positioning herself as a mature observer (as seen during our factory visit in 8.1) who cannot tolerate social injustice (also see Extract 7 in Chapter 5). I present one of our discussions on women's empowerment in Bangladesh in which Zinia argued logically and persuasively what she considered was most important for the empowerment of women in Bangladesh. In Extract 3 below, Zinia performs the critical woman while together with me she is making sense of certain social issues pertaining to women's education in rural Bangladesh. I am interested to find out what is helping Zinia at IU, and this is how she responds:

### Extract 3: 'Women are not allowed to think'

- | A-Zinia | S-Sudha  |
|---------|--|
| 1       | <b>S:</b> What aspects of education in IU are actually empowering you//                          |
| 2       | <b>A:</b> What aspects of education (repeats and thinks before answering)// I think mostly       |
| 3       | uhmm*critical thinking because when we are watching even a movie also/ we have to                |
| 4       | do some research on the film. So it is not only watching or enjoying but we have to              |
| 5       | think about it also//  |
| 6       | <b>S:</b> Um ok//  |
| 7       | <b>A:</b> I think most of the girls in our Bangladesh / they have a brain/ but they don't know   |
| 8       | how to use the brain// (S laughs. A laughs loudly)   |
| 9       | <b>S:</b> That's a very very general statement to make [about ...]                               |
| 10      | <b>A:</b> [and really I think sometimes umm that]  |
| 11      | <b>S:</b> [do you truly believe that] a lot of women don't think//                               |
| 12      | <b>A:</b> Yes// they don't think//   |
| 13      | <b>S:</b> Is it only women/ or even men//  |
| 14      | <b>A:</b> Mennnn...actually/ our society force men to think//but our society/ummm/ don't allow   |
| 15      | women to think//   |
| 16      | <b>S:</b> So men are forced to think and [...]   |
| 17      | <b>A:</b> [And women] are *not// women are not *allowed to think//and (volunteers personal       |
| 18      | experience by pointing to herself) even I can share my experience// when I was little,           |
| 19      | not very little, enough big/ [uhhh]/   |
| 20      | <b>S:</b> [An adult]   |
| 21      | <b>A:</b> Yes/an adult (chuckles)// if I say something, people would say/' WHY you thinking like |
| 22      | this//you are a *girl// you don't have to think like this'//                                     |
| 23      | <b>S:</b> umm/was it your family or outside the family//   |
| 24      | <b>A:</b> not my family/my family don't think like this//my father always inspire me to do       |
| 25      | something// but in my area/is quite a village//and they say/'WHY you thinking like               |
| 26      | this//do you want to be EXTRAORDINARY or something' //they ask me like this//                    |
| 27      | <b>S:</b> umm/they ask these questions only of women //  |
| 28      | <b>A:</b> yeah/yes yes//   |
| 29      | <b>S:</b> they don't ask [men]? /  |
| 30      | <b>A:</b> [Even when] my father tried to send us to a good school / and my neighbours said/      |
| 31      | WHY are you spending a lot of money for the *girls? ↑ /they are saying to my father//            |
| 32      | <b>S:</b> umm  |
| 33      | <b>A:</b> Why are you spending a lot of money for the *girls// because you will not get any      |
| 34      | profit for that// they will get married and they will go to others house// so you will not       |
| 35      | get any profit from them//   |
| 36      | <b>S:</b> umm//  |
| 37      | <b>A:</b> And my father said/I don't think it is only for the boys//education should not be only |
| 38      | for boys//Girls are *my child and boys are also *my child// so why should we                     |
| 39      | discriminate// he said like this// (has a serious look)  |
| 40      | <b>S:</b> umm//  |
| 41      | <b>A:</b> then my neighbour said/ (chuckles) *MY daughters are all *very beautiful// (moves      |
| 42      | her hands around her face with a sarcastic smile) they will get *good husbands// so              |
| 43      | they don't need *any education// (laughs loudly)   |
| 44      | <b>S:</b> so that's the attitude of some people towards women's education//                      |
| 45      | <b>A:</b> Yeah// (laughs)  |

(REC002SII/Feb 18/ 5:25 to 8:59)

Placed within the framework of interpreting women's empowerment through education, and embedding critical thinking as a learning outcome, this interaction provides Zinia with a platform to perform an act of 'being critical', using persuasive and argumentative skills. Zinia and I are constructing an understanding of certain social issues pertaining to women's education in rural Bangladesh. A fine-grained analysis depicts the process of construction of what it means to be critical for Zinia within the situated institutional practices. The mood of the participant in the interaction is one of mockery. Zinia uses parody and positions herself as a knowledgeable person who is able to see the backwardness in the social attitude of some people towards women's education in rural Bangladesh, which she deplors. My opening question (line 1) contextualises a theme discussed in a group meeting earlier where Zinia and her friends collaboratively engaged in the construction of categories, e.g., 'women needing empowerment', 'without critical thinking they can't learn anything new' and IU being the 'the best thing' for women's empowerment. I am positioning myself here as someone trying to understand and get involved in the discourses of women's empowerment that are widely circulating at the university at all levels. To my direct question (line 1), Zinia answers 'critical thinking' (line 3) after careful thought signified by her repetition of part of the question to give herself time. She elaborates that it is an important aspect of education at that university, as she points out it is embedded in every activity, watching 'even a movie' (line 3/4). Instead of talking about what she personally perceives as an important aspect of empowerment, as the question suggests (line 1), she exemplifies the university's mission through the example of the daily activity (2-5), thereby implying that whatever the university thinks important should be important for her.

Having made this point (line 7 onwards), Zinia frontstages an epistemic stance. First of all, she opens an argument by expressing a strong opinion – 'I think'-through a generalisation '...most of the girls in our Bangladesh have a brain but they don't know how to use it' (line 7/8). This statement denotes at least four discernible functions in the interaction, namely: 1) as an opening statement to the line of argument, it is appropriately placed to provoke or invite response from the interactant, thus waiting for an uptake; 2) contextually it advocates the reason why critical thinking is important in education in Bangladesh; 3) the epistemic stance she takes indexed by the generalisation

comes across as an assertion of authority on local socio-cultural issues in the particular society that she comes from – at the same time, the epistemic marker ‘I think’ placed at the beginning of the sentence (line 7) shows a downgrade in her generalisation as an opinion open to discussion; and 4) it facilitates the categorisation of ‘girls who don’t know how to use their brain’ while setting the scene for the unpacking of certain underlying ideological issues pertaining to a patriarchal society.

The tone in which the serious social concern is expressed is lightened by my laugh and a loud laugh from Zinia (line 8). The laughter seems to indicate a shift in the mood and footing from seriousness to one of humour, from an *author* to an *animator* of the statement (Goffman 1981), as a result of which my uptake is a dismissive stance but posing a gentle challenge at the same time by saying ‘that’s a very general statement to make...’ (Line 9) causing a slight disruption to Zinia’s stance. In response to this, Zinia quickly regains her position in the interaction in the overlapping – ‘And I really think sometimes umm that...’ (line 10). By asking for a reconfirmation (line 11) I pick up Zinia’s attempt at restoring the seriousness in her argument and her authorial role and bringing a convergent alignment in the interaction. The laughter (line 8) can be attributed to her mockery of women’s situation in Bangladesh, which I will return to later.

The change in footing also acts as a mild face threatener to Zinia who reasserts her position as an authentic social authority on the matter by a firm overlapping (line 12). To point out a good instance of socio-dynamics at play, at this point the roles of the interlocutor (me) and the participant (Zinia) as the challenger and the challenged, respectively (lines 11 and 12), shifts to the roles of seeker of knowledge and one with knowledge. My question – ‘is it only women or even men?’ (Who don’t know how to think, line 13) gives Zinia a chance to assume the role of an informed person again, and so she grabs it by making another generalisation with a chuckle (line 14). Her chuckle seems to index the parody in her statement of men who have to be forced to think. However, this time, before the interlocutor could change her stance to a challenger and perform another face threatening act, she continues to assume authority by substantiating her statement with a personal experience (line 18/19), a combined role as the author and principal that allows her to remember people in her village reprimanding her (lines 21-22), and with repetition (lines 25-26) to emphasise the point that she had made earlier (lines 14-15) about

men and women, all the while projecting the social persona of an experienced woman capable of maintaining her epistemic stance to make her point.

Zinia's epistemic stance is conveyed through the use of generalisations that are culturally embedded. She resorts to it in the two turns where she displays her pursuit of membership to the university community which she believes can be claimed by being recognised as an authentic observer and informant on socio-cultural issues of women – a leader with critical thinking skills and persuasive powers who is valued by other social actors at the university. After establishing the categories of 'they', 'we', and of 'women' and 'men', as existing in the rural society, in addition to de-aligning herself and her family from the common villagers who don't have a progressive attitude towards women (lines 23-24), the interaction takes a slightly different discursive turn due to a subtle change of topic, from generalisations to specifics in Zinia's life, that is, from an *author's* stance to one of *principal*, and then switching to *animator* as the credibility of her performance demanded. There is a change of social voice in the use of direct speech, as per the views of her father and her neighbours in dialogue with each other.

In this second half of the interaction, Zinia presents her argument, not directly as in the first half but indirectly by enacting a scene where her father and her neighbour are the actors, or authors (lines 33-43), and she is an animator. When she impersonates her father, she speaks more seriously (has a serious look - line 39), showing her respect for his views. In contrast, when she imitates her neighbour she chuckles, laughs and shows sarcasm and contempt through tone and other nonverbal signs such as via gesturing and deploying facial expression, as when her neighbour talks about her 'beautiful' daughters (lines 41-43) who will surely get 'good husbands'. Acting comes naturally to Zinia, as I observed later during my fieldwork that she was a playwright and interested in Drama. From this point in the interaction, the figure of Zinia's father appears as a role model in the otherwise patriarchal society that Zinia grew up in. Men like him, as Zinia illustrates with an example (lines 30/31), faced societal pressures with regards to their daughters' education: 'So you will not get any profit from them//'' (lines 34-35) the neighbours told him.

Within this participatory framework, Zinia and I share certain assumptions or cultural knowledge. One assumption is to do with the category of 'good school'. A good school that they believe in Bangladesh involves 'a lot of

money' (line 30/31) is a private school where the medium of instruction is English. An education in English is also assumed, as implied by Zinia in the category 'good school' which seems to be portrayed as providing progressive thinking skills as opposed to rote learning that predominates in Bangla institutions, connecting to the earlier group discussion. The other assumed knowledge in the interaction is the Asian social custom of treating the woman after her marriage as the property of her husband's family. This is brought out in the metaphor of profit and loss that Zinia animates in the authorial words of her neighbour (lines 33-35), intersecting with the rural Asian discriminatory convention of treating a girl as not worth investing in.

Through the dramatization of a dialogue between her father and a neighbour Zinia not only re-creates a stereotypical situation in rural Bangladesh but, more importantly, exhibits her expertise in the use of parody and exaggeration to show her criticality in a more refined and non-committal way, as it is done in most parodying situations where the audience (here me) is left to decipher what the animator (here Zinia) supports without being openly judgemental (line 45 – 'yeah' and final laughter). The use of parody reduces primary accountability to some extent and increases a sense of shared value as demonstrated in the closing lines of the interaction between Zinia and me. On the other hand, she plays the animator echoing her father, and also her neighbour in contrast, not so much, it seems, as a defensive practice to manage a face threatening situation or to defer commitment leading to indeterminacy, as it usually is, but to strengthen her claim to authenticity and credibility in relation to the generalisations that she makes in the first half of the interaction. Interestingly, the extensive use of direct speech serves two seemingly contradictory discursive purposes: as a parody to gain public interest and support (of the interlocutor), and as an animation to accentuate her role as the author in the earlier part of the interaction. Bringing in the authority of the father through his direct speech, in order to make a convincing argument about women's suppression, can also be seen as a ritual ingrained in traditional patriarchal societies where the male authority has the ultimate voice. The benign patriarchal figure is present prominently in the second half of the interaction, and she speaks for herself through her father's voice, although my question (line 1) addressed Zinia's personal opinion.

In this interaction, Zinia displays her ability to argue logically using interactional devices, as illustrated above, to make her point, an important attribute of a critical thinker in the liberal arts university. Through her performative act, the expression that Zinia gives is of a woman capable of thinking critically, but the expression she gives off (Goffman 1990) is of a woman struggling to shake off institutional (line 2) and patriarchal (lines 16, 20,22) control – it relies on thinking and speaking through them. However, she argues with conviction, using her persuasive skills and generalisations, what was essential for her and for other Bangladeshi women to become empowered.

The extract is just one of the several instances where students consciously frontstage (Goffman 1972) 'being critical', a theme that persistently ran through practices outside classrooms and assessed in daily classroom activities, pointing to the embedding of critical thinking in the daily life of the students. On close observation of their academic demands, the reasons became clear. The semester in which I carried out my field work was a crucial one in the academic life of the UG1 students. It was the semester when they had to complete assignments and give presentations on researched topics. Later in the term, I had the opportunity to attend presentations in Zinia's Global issues class on topics like Domestic Violence and Honour Killing - Zinia scored high marks for critical analysis but unfortunately her English brought her overall score down, according to her tutor's assessment.

It was also the time when they had to apply for their major subject that would be the main area of study for the final two years of their under-graduate programme. Securing their first choice depended on their academic performance which, among other things, included critical reasoning and curricular and extra-curricular participation in assessments and classroom participation as well as evidence of enterprise skills. Competence in English was also an important criterion, particularly for subjects that required a higher level of writing skills, but that was not assessed separately as it was assumed students possessed the required level of English. The students were made aware of this at the time of the admissions selection and also through an ongoing system of professional and personal development run by the Careers Development and International Programs - CDIP (see Chapter 5).

Under such conditions, from mid-semester onwards, issues surrounding the choice and selection for their major put them under pressure to perform to

the expected standard. The selection process and how to cope with the high levels of competition became important topics of discussion. Zinia had to prepare herself and make an informed decision about her major subject with her future career in view. In the next section, I present an important stage in Zinia's academic trajectory, her development as an entrepreneur with the ability to make practical decisions, as revealed in the interactions and activities that she engaged with.

#### **8.4 The entrepreneur - making practical decisions**

I noticed that Zinia was worried about meeting the selection criteria for their first choice of Major during this period. The students that I spoke to were stressed as they may not get their first choice because, on the one hand, some popular subjects such as Economics and Politics, Philosophy and Economics were over-subscribed and, on the other, the university was keen to fill the other majors too. It was interesting to find, after talking to several students about their choices, that Economics was the most sought after, particularly among the Bangladeshi students.

Zinia had shown her keenness to study Business and Economics to pursue a career in Business or banking, like all her friends in her group, as is seen in Extract 4 below. Taken from my focus group meeting with her and her group of UG1 secondary participants, this interaction shows how they collaboratively constructed their imagined future career aspirations after a long discussion on the purpose of 'good education'. They all agreed that the aim of university education should be person development and good citizenship, rather than oriented towards only certain kinds of job markets or money making, summarised in Zinia's words:

'... in our country people think that we are getting education ONLY FOR to get a good job, but I think No. Education is for me can make you build up for yourself and not only just for job. if we study only for JOB then I, I think that it is not education. You are making yourself for getting money but not for enlighten yourself. Person development is very important'

(Audio REC001UG1FG 2).

Soon after, about 11 minutes into the conversation, we switched to the topic of their future plans, which seemed to contradict the above discourse on education

for enlightenment and person development without materialistic aims, as Extract 4 shows:

**Extract 4: 'After making my capital I will do business'**

S: Sudha      A: Zinia                      B: Saki              C: Sharmila      D: Shazia

- 1    **S:**      So what sort of jobs are you planning to do//  
2    **A:**      I think I am into business// (muffled whispering in background, Saki and Sharmila  
3              giggle)  
4    **S:**      alright/ so you are preparing to take up a business job//  
5    **A:**      yes / at first I think that I'll do job just for to get capital (chuckles) because for  
6              business I must need some capital that's why// (Sharmila starts giggling and Saki  
7              joins in ) and after making my capital I will do business// (giggles)  
8    **S:**      So you need money//  
9    **A:**      Yes// (laughs)  
10   **S:**      what about you (Shazia)? What do you want to do in the future/ How is this  
11              education going to help you//  
12   **D:**      umm basically I am already involved in job // every month I am going to my  
13              office I told you before // so I like my that position also but I want to continue this  
14              TYPES of job but not in the same company // and maybe other company, maybe out  
15              of Bangladesh as well // but in uh (not understandable) procurement  
16              department I like the most because it involve to do the business//  
17   **S:**      right//  
18   **D:**      and um actually I get on very WELL nowadays so that's I am I feel comfortable//  
19   **S:**      you are already trained//  
20   **D:**      yeah that's why I feel comfortable for it//  
  
21   **S:**      how is the xxx education helping//  
22   **D:**      for†/  
23   **S:**      for that kind of job//  
24   **D:**      because you know the xxx major economics is the most popular major here//  
25   **S:**      hmm//  
26   **D:**      and lot of students are taking economics in xxx / and economics  
27              umm teach you how to deal with the erm business related things//  
28   **S:**      So are you going to do economics next year//  
29   **D:**      yeah I applied to//  
30   **S:**      have you got your major//  
31   **D:**      yeah //  
32   **S:**      ok, that's good (D smiles, pleased)// what about you Saki//  
33   **B:**      I haven't decided yet/ but I think I will do job in bank//  
34   **S:**      right / that's again money// (everyone laughs)  
35   **C:**      it's all about money/ right? //  
36   **S:**      we all need money/ yes//  
37   **B:**      so I also want to take economics as my major so that it will be helpful for my job//...

(REC001UG1FG2 group meeting -11.36 to 12.04)

The above interaction reveals the backstage performance of what is actually going on with their choice of subject, in contrary to the impression that they had given earlier while talking about their views on the purpose of education: by front staging their ideal views on a liberal education for person development followed by a back-stage, they uncovered their practical decision-making with regard to their unanimous choice of Economics as their major subject, which they hope would get them 'good' jobs or help with their business plans in the

future. In so doing, they provide a good instance of the 'expression one gives and the expression one gives off' (Goffman1990). But it may be worth examining now, in more detail, the discourse devices that index the expressions that they give off in the interaction.

To my question about their future plans, Zinia takes the turn first (not Shazia, as she had her reason for taking the back seat this time) with her statement 'I think I am into Business' (line 2), which provokes some whispering and giggling from Sharmila and Saki. In response to my question on whether she wants to do a job in Business, Zinia goes on to explain that she would first do a job - 'after making my capital I will do my business' (lines 5-7). She chuckles and giggles as if to respond to Saki's and Sharmila's teasing which contextualises the reason for their spontaneous reaction to her statement of her future business plans. It is a face threatening act that seems to embarrass Zinia, and so she tries to cover it by joining in their giggling (line 7). I also try to save the situation with a supportive statement that she needs money (line 8).

Next, I turn my attention to Shazia, who has not reacted in the same way as the others but shows a slightly different uptake to the issue, an uptake of acceptance and resignation since decisions have been made for her (lines 11 to 30). She makes me aware that Economics is a 'popular major' in the university as she believes it helps with 'how to deal with business related things' (line 27). She hopes Economics will help her get a job outside the garment industry, perhaps even outside Bangladesh. Saki, one of the participants in the giggling ritual, then admits that she is thinking of working in a bank, in response to which I make a provocative comment: 'right, that's again money'. Everyone laughs (line 34) pointing to why the subject of 'money' was making a difference to the conversation. The collective reaction to my comment is re-enforced by Sharmila's words 'It's all about money, right?' (Line 35), expressed in a sneering way to highlight how their unanimous choice of Economics is geared towards their future plans to do Business: to work in the Procurement Department in the garment industry or work in a bank.

Sharmila's remark, which signifies a face-threatening act for the whole group, makes me come up with another face- saving comment – 'we all need money'. This prompts Saki to make her decision (line 37) to take Economics too so it will help her get a 'bank job'. The unanimity in the choice of Economics justifies Shazia's framing of it as 'the most popular major here...' (Line 24-26).

In addition, through a change of stance from being a person directly responsible (principal) for the choice, to a stance of one acting on popular influence (animator), Shazia seems to gloss over their materialistic reasons and their accountability for the choice that they have made. It also implies that aspiring for the most sought-after subject has its reasons at IU, and two are particularly relevant. Firstly, it is prestigious as it is difficult to get in due to the high competition. Secondly, it has the benefits of international internships. The CDIP (Careers Development and International Programs) had set up, in line with the university's mission 'to produce leaders in businesses', an elaborate development programme and a credit system to provide and promote participation in internal and international internships and events (mentioned in Professional Development Handbook on website) with a view to raising the professional profiles of students to international standards. According to the CDIP requirements, besides leadership, proficiency in English is essential, 'a huge hurdle' and 'a handicap' for students from PP who come from Bangla medium schools, as the Programme Director put it in his interview with me (see Chapter 5) and seen in the stress and tension that they were going through. Zinia and her friends were aware that securing a place in Economics depended on academic performance and evidence of enterprise skills.

Placed in these circumstances, Zinia realised that to achieve her business goals, or even get her first-choice major (Economics), she had to attain proficiency in English and also develop her enterprise skills which the university encouraged and provided opportunities for. Zinia was actively involved in voluntary work outside the university to raise awareness of menstrual hygiene in high schools and madrasas, as part of an external volunteering group (Figs. 8.2 and 8.3 below). Indeed, she was excited to show me pictures on this that had appeared in the local magazine and newspaper and felt pleased with her achievements as these could now be recorded in her enterprise profile.

Fig. 8.2 Zinia in the Madrasa



Fig. 8.3 Volunteering with Campaign Red



I had the opportunity to observe Zinia give private tuition to some high school children in Accounts and Bookkeeping, which she said was helping her develop some 'skills'. What Zinia meant by 'skills' made sense when a few weeks later she appeared for an interview to be selected for a summer internship called Teaching Cell which involved giving English and math lessons to garment factory workers. After the interview, which I was allowed to sit in, the interviewers, two staff co-ordinators of PP, commended her for her knowledge of teaching skills which she seems to have acquired through a programme of continuous self-development, for which they would select her, but they felt that others had scored higher in their communication skills in English. The interview panel members felt it was a good start for Zinia, as to be able to aspire for more prestigious internships in Business (or for the international internships abroad which are more competitive), 'the biggest hurdle to cross and the greatest challenge is English for Zinia and many of the RMG students' (field notes paraphrased quote). On being selected, Zinia expressed to me her hope to be able to apply for more lucrative internships in the future.

As the comments from the interviewers showed, communication in English was given priority over other skills that a student may possess, although it is not officially talked about. It was something that UG students were expected to have. However, among the RMG students 'English' was the buzz word on the campus. A great majority of students on Programme for Promise had said in a survey conducted by the external assessor, who was on campus at the time of my fieldwork, that the most important reason why they were there was to 'learn English' (External Assessor's Report 2018). That was Zinia's aspiration too, as she mentions in her journal quoted earlier. Zinia showed a strong alignment with English language learning to start with, but as the semester progressed I noticed that Zinia became disengaged and also hostile towards the prominence

given to the performance in English by the social actors around her at the university as well as in the wider society in Bangladesh. I turn my focus on Zinia's struggles in the next section, where she comes across as a sceptic challenging the status quo.

### **8.5 Zinia's struggles leading to dis-alignment**

Zinia's struggles emerged in her trajectory as a direct result of the pressure to improve her English leading to her scepticism, although at the beginning she showed a keenness to become proficient in English, as an English education had always been her dream. English played a key role in Zinia's trajectory of empowerment as a student of IU. It was not only the university's expectation (as seen in the previous section) that was exerting its pressure on Zinia but the society that she interacted with and was part of - her family, friends, teachers, fellow students, employers and the factories - played a significant part in influencing the path her trajectory took in the context of English. She grew up dreaming of becoming proficient in English. Zinia's desire to study in the English medium was prompted by the social perceptions of English as an asset, her father being one of the strong influences, and as an important requisite for empowerment, implied by the university. The teachers at IU followed the English policy in all their assessments (see Chapter 4). Zinia's close friend and colleague from the garment industry, Shazia, also a secondary participant in this study, had an impact on Zinia and the other RMG women due to her seniority and success in her career which she attributed to her English skills, as mentioned earlier. Although her family and friends motivated her to persevere with English, Zinia was beginning to feel her lack of English was letting her down. In one of her conversations with me and her friends, Zinia expressed how frustrated she felt when she failed to understand her teachers:

'... at the first time, umm, I couldn't understand. I was... I read every day, but I couldn't understand what I am reading actually. Then, uh I went to my professors and umm I ask her that I CANNOT understand what should I do? Then she gave us, some tutorials also. So, it was \*SO HARD what I can say I sometimes uh I tried to cope like uh when I cannot understand I kept silence sometime and sometime I ask uh them (her English medium colleagues) separately what is uh she saying. Not only for this situation, umm not for English only, but the math. I regularly had to go to my professors. Sometimes I feel that if professor can speak Bangla then I could have understand that better.'

(REC 15031401 - Z 16.55 to 18.29)

In what follows, Zinia's disillusionment with English as a dream language becomes evident in the way she contested social and linguistic bias in the play that she wrote and staged with a group of RMG students (8.5.1). Her continued struggle with English finally made her react against what is accepted as normative at the university, as will be seen later in this section (8.5.2).

### **8.5.1 Zinia's scepticism: contesting social and linguistic bias**

Zinia's stance as a sceptic, challenging the social perception of English was more visible in the satirical play that she wrote in Bangla and staged along with fifteen other RMG students for their Mother Language Day celebrations. International Mother Language Day, recognised by the UN, is a national holiday in Bangladesh to commemorate the martyrs of the Bangla (language) revolution who gave their lives for linguistic rights in the riots of 1952. I was invited for the cultural evening presented by the students and staff. Zinia's short play was the highlight of the evening as it sent the audience rolling in laughter. It was a satire on how the different sections of the society, including politicians and students, celebrate it today and how the Bangla language, for which several people gave their life, is being perceived by the younger generation. Zinia was commended by all the teachers and students who attended the event.

As I could not follow most of the dialogues in Bangla, I requested Zinia and her friends to watch the video with me later at the weekend and translate the dialogues which had seemed very funny to the audience. It was hilarious especially the character of the young student who played the 'smart' guy and spoke a mixture of languages. During the discussions I had with Zinia and her friends about the hidden messages in the play, it was interesting to note how they constructed categories of who is 'smart' and who is 'unsmart' in relation to English speakers, as perceived by the wider society.

Extract 5, below, is taken from the long interaction between, Zinia, Saki, Sharmila and me, happening while we are watching the video of the play. In this extract, Zinia and her friends are jointly constructing the stereotypical character of a modern, young man called 'Cat', who projects himself as belonging to a rich and elite class by speaking English mixed with Bangla and Hindi and behaving like a Bollywood star. He is dressed in smart Western clothes, wearing sunglasses, and keeps tossing his hair with an air of casual formality, conscious that he is being filmed by the journalist but acting as though nothing was worthy

of his attention. In the video, we are watching a journalist interviewing the visitors to the Shohid Minar (Martyrs' Monument), one of whom is 'Cat'. The extract starts with 'Cat' explaining to the journalist why he speaks a mixture of languages and not his mother language, Bangla, and my participants are translating the Bangla dialogue to me, while applying it to the current conditions in Bangladesh.

### Extract 5: 'They are very rich'

S-Sudha	A-Zinia	B-Saki	C-Sharmila
1	A:	Then he says/ if I speak in *Bangla/ people will think I am [*KET]// (loud laughter	
2		from audience in the video, all three participants laugh)	
3	B:	[KET]/the word KET is Bangla//	
4	S:	KET/ [what does it mean]	
5	B:	[unsmart//illiterate]//	
6	S:	illiterate// not smart ↑//	
7	A:	That's why/ he doesn't want to speak in Bangla//	
8	S:	oh/OK//	
9	C:	Nowadays [that's what is happen]	
10	B:	[that happens here] //	
11	S:	you think it's happening a lot in Bangladesh//	
12	C:	Yes// we can see that happening in our university also// (chuckles)	
13	B:	also other cities// those who are studying in universities//	
14		(Loud laughter and clapping from audience in video after journalist's comments)	
15	S:	Let's stop it here [...] (video stopped)	
16	S:	What was the journalist's comments about the boy//	
17	A:	Like/ we talked with an alien//like alien// he born in Bangladesh but he is feeling	
18		ashamed to speak in Bangla//	
19	S:	right// you were just saying this happens a lot [in your society ...]	
20	B:	[Yeah/yeah]	
21	C:	[This happen] most in city side/ who are studying in English medium school or	
22		college//	
23	S:	yeah//	
24	C:	they think if they speak only in Bangla/they are unsmart//	
25	B:	[they are so smart] they are good at English//	
26	A:	[some people] who think English is like//the *highest language// (raises hand to show	
27		high)	
28		like prestige//	
29	S:	Why do you think they have that sort of mentality//	
30	C:	because they are... *REECH	
31	S:	[rich] rich ↑//	
32	C:	yeah / reechch// different country's people/ higher class of people// they want to	
33		speak in English// so they are feel proud to know them//	
34	A:	because in our country English medium takes a lot of money// that means *normal	
35		students cannot afford that English medium// so when they are going to English	
36		medium school/ it means they are rich and very prestigious// (raises hand)	
37	C:	They are very reech// showing their standard//	
38	A:	Showing 'my child can speak English very fluently// *SOOO fluently that my child	
39		can't speak Bangla// they are *SOOO proud// (laughs, all laugh)	

(REC014 14.55 to 15.20)

The interaction is in two parts (lines 1 to 15 and 16 to 39), showing a change of scene from video watching the satirical play written and directed by Zinia to real

life discussion of its relevance to current conditions, centring on social attitudes towards English and Bangla. The analysis shows how through a change of stance Zinia, Saki and Sharmila animate what is being performed on the stage, which allows them some freedom from taking responsibility for their outspokenness. Although she is the author of the words, and creator of the characters in the play, Zinia the animator in the interaction plays a more significant role in the interpretation of social attitudes to English through the audience's uptake of the characterisation of CAT (pronounced /ket/ by the students), the main character. The use of satire intensifies Zinia's role as an animator of the social constructions about the stereotypical character of CAT as the 'smart' English speaker (projected as speaking a mixture of Bangla and English), as opposed to the 'unsmart' Bangla speaker (speaking Bangla without mixing it with English). Also, humour plays a vital role, affording a light-hearted treatment of a serious social issue, the prominence given to English and its social consequences.

In the first part (lines 1-9), we watch a small portion of the video where Cat, the central character, is describing himself to a journalist as someone who does not want to be seen as 'KET' by speaking only in Bangla. The play on the word 'KET' provokes loud laughter from the audience in the video and also from Zinia, Saki and Sharmila (lines 1-2). Saki explains to me that 'KET', a Bangla word means 'unsmart, illiterate' (line 5). The word 'unsmart' sounds strange to me, so I clarify it by repeating 'illiterate/ not smart↑' (line 6). Zinia explains further: 'That's why he doesn't want to speak in Bangla'(line 7), as the animator, shifting the accountability to the character.

The second part of the interaction (line 9 onwards and 15 after video stops) is an interpretation of the hidden messages in the satire, where Saki and Sharmila bring the character of Cat to life. There is a change of scene in our interaction from the character in the play to social reality when Sharmila starts by saying 'Nowadays that's what is happen' (line 9 ) with a chuckle, and they elaborate on that for me that this kind of attitude of not wanting to be seen as 'KET' ('unsmart') is prevalent in 'our university also' (line 12) as well as at universities in other cities in Bangladesh (line 13), particularly in English medium schools and colleges (lines 21-22), thus foregrounding the perception of English as 'elitist' or as a class indicator.

In the next turn, Sharmila repeats 'they think if they speak only in Bangla they are unsmart' (line 24). I do not correct her this time as I decide to go back and check if such a word as 'unsmart' exists in the dictionary since it seems to be in active use with the students. Saki supports Sharmila's statement with 'they are so smart they are good at English' (line 25) with an ironic twist. Sharmila and Saki take turns to explain how speaking only in Bangla is perceived as 'unsmart' and speaking in English as being 'smart'.

The rest of the interaction is about the status of English in Bangladesh and the social categories it creates. Going to English medium schools is 'prestigious', 'higher' (lines 26-28) in status and, according to Zinia and Sharmila who take an epistemic stance, people have this mentality because 'they are rich ('reech)', they have dealings with foreign countries (lines 30 to 37). In lines 34-36, Zinia further adds meaning to the social hierarchy that her friends have been trying to articulate by making a differentiation between the rich students who can afford English medium and the 'normal' (lines 34-35) students who cannot afford it. The conversation proceeds with a discussion of why parents want to send their children to English medium schools. They all endorse Zinia's observation as she mocks those parents by animating through direct speech (line 38-39), not so much for speaking in English as for neglecting Bangla, laughing and provoking laughter in response. They build a joint stance challenging the linguistic status of English.

Zinia has used the word 'smart' in association with English skills several times now and in earlier interactions, as pointed out in the examples above, and it is used in the mainly British English sense of stylish appearance, fashionable and rich (Cambridge dictionary). In the video, 'Cat' is constructed as an embodiment of 'smart', in appearance and behavior in a sarcastic way, through his use of English mixed with Bangla and his fashionable attire and behavior. Zinia and her friends jointly address and contest the linguistic bias by constructing categories of 'smart' / 'unsmart' relating them to social class hierarchies. When Zinia first joined AA with English medium students, she had low self-esteem due to her lack of English but had felt, as she expressed, - 'that I'm only the different person in the class ... they were\* really smarter than me' and showed a strong aspiration to be like 'everybody else in the class...' (REC 15031401-S). However, towards the end of semester 'smart' had taken an ironic meaning to convey contestation.

In the light of these examples, Zinia's association of the feeling of being 'smart' with 'English', as a stance marker, in separate interactions made complete sense in the trajectory of her self-positioning with 'English', moving from one of congruent alignment to one of divergent alignment, as we will see in the stance that she takes on the institutional assessment of her academic performance.

### 8.5.2 Challenging the status quo

Towards the end of my field work, Zinia became more open with her attitude to some of the institutional practices when she had got to know me well. She was happy to share how she felt about her own academic performance and how falling short of standard expectations in that semester did not really bother her. In Extract 6 below, taken from a longer confidential chat about her personal and academic struggles to meet the university's expectations, she dis-aligns from the normative values and challenges of the institution's standardised assessments and expectations.

#### Extract 6: 'I didn't get good marks. So what?'

S – Sudha

Z-Zinia

**S:** ...What are IU's or your teachers' expectations//

**Z:** Expectations↑ it is always all teachers like this type of person who is doing the better results. This is the thing everybody wants... Yes, good marks, yeah, but for me I don't think about the good marks. Even I didn't get good marks in PPE (Politics, Philosophy and Economics). In the first term I took Politics and I didn't get good marks. Last term my professor helped me. Actually, I understood the policy at the last moment and I got the highest mark in the class but as my first term mark was not that good that's why my grade didn't come that much good...Whatever it is I don't care. But I \*LEARNED. What I didn't know I \*LEARNED...I didn't get good marks. So what ↑ (laughs). Not (laughs loudly) so what, but it doesn't matter...

(REC073Z from 13.35 to 14.45)

Zinia positions herself as someone challenging the norm who doesn't really care for good grades to meet her teachers' expectations, emphasising her defiance towards the legitimatised form of knowledge, competition and expectation. The extract shows a movement in her trajectory, from her hard working, 'never give up' attitude to study portrayed earlier, to a frustrated 'so what?' attitude and a final self-consolation in 'it doesn't matter'. After this conversation with Zinia, I met her professor, at the end of my fieldwork, to find out about Zinia's achievement and progress in that semester, as Zinia had told

me at our first meeting that her performance at that point would determine the choice of her major subject. Her professor confirmed that she would be required to repeat her assignment to improve her grade if she wanted to compete for her first-choice major. She added that it was mainly because of her level of English and her 'limited ability to plug into certain channels critically in English' (field notes paraphrased quote).

Being an 'IKEA scholar', as I noticed, came with its own demands more for Zinia than for Hasina and Fowzia. On the one hand, because Zinia was in the first batch of RMG students entering UG, it was a new challenge for all concerned, teachers, students and administrators, Zinia being one of the 'unconventional students' as the Programme Director described RMG students earlier (Chapter 5). On the other, Zinia had already spent two years at the university and was beginning to show signs of disagreement and frustration with the market logic that did not work for her. Besides a struggle with English as illustrated in this section, Zinia was going through other struggles too. Joining IU was not an easy choice for her as it involved financial and employment risks as well as family responsibilities. Nevertheless, Zinia was steadfast and demonstrated high resilience throughout the semester. She kept in touch with me for several months after I left Bangladesh. She also got through her exams and got into Economics, her first choice, but in her last e-mail (Oct 2018) she informed me that she was dropping out of the university at the end of the year, citing 'personal circumstances' as the reason for that decision.

## **8.6 Summary**

The analysis of Zinia's trajectory of empowerment indicated that she initially showed an alignment with the university's mission to empower women through critical thinking, an important aspect of liberal arts education. She also realised the importance of English and enterprise skills to achieve her goal to become a businesswoman. Her trajectory showed too several struggles as she involved herself in a routine of engaging with self-improvement activities while dis-aligning with certain market values such as that of competition, the prominence given to English or the institutional imaginings of the empowerment of women, all of it mediated through her stance-taking as a 'critical thinker'. The chapter has traced some of the recognisable attributes of a critical thinker through the study of the positionings she enacted. To start with, her practical thinking in

accepting what was the norm, seen in her choice of subject, future career and her desire to become competent in English, although she was aware of the biases that such a system was reproducing. She also demonstrated social knowledge, analytical thinking, communicative ability and logic in her arguments about what women needed most to become empowered. Finally, the most visible attribute was her capacity to introspect, identify, evaluate and challenge certain social biases and institutional practices. Most importantly, she displayed her leadership in provoking critical discussions with her small group of friends to denounce, through an affective stance of ridicule, current market rationalities, thus creating space for alternative ways of thinking. Unlike Hasina who showed appropriation and Fowzia who enacted full alignment, Zinia projected herself as a reflexive subject caught in a tension between a moral obligation to conform and a certain reluctance to subjectify herself to what she perceived as aspects of pseudo-elitism and materialism in English education. However, the uncertainty of what the future held for her in terms of socio-economic mobility, given her adverse personal circumstances, made her avail of the opportunity to dream provided to her and her RMG colleagues for which they felt grateful. In conclusion, the analyses in Chapters 5 to 8 lead me to further discuss, based on the analyses of the processes of neoliberal governance and its uptake by the three participants presented in their trajectories, the inequalities that surface in such a regime and, despite such conditions, if there is hope of empowerment for these marginalised women. These issues will be further expanded in the concluding chapter.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion - The empowerment of women and the question of social inequality**

### **9.1 Introduction**

In this final chapter of my thesis, I summarise my findings and discuss the critical themes that have emerged from the analysis of data in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. My investigation focused on governance and the transformation of subjects, in the belief that where empowerment of women is seen as a necessity there already exist social inequalities that need to be addressed. Following this, my discussion in this chapter centres around the question of whether women's empowerment as understood and practised in my case study recognises those inequalities and the need to address them, or if it rather poses a possible risk of further reproducing social inequality in the current global capitalistic conditions. And, indeed, data analysis in Chapters 5 to 8 reveals both fleeting moments of hope involving potential empowerment and (re)production of social injustice, as far as the women in my study are concerned.

In Chapter 5, I have illustrated the discursive strategies used by institutions to socialise their subjects within a specific template of empowerment coloured by a corporate leadership ethos. In Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I have captured how those values are internalised (or resisted) in ways that shape the students' subjectivities as 'good' or 'successful' through the development of specific skills to become responsabilised future women leaders. As it has been evidenced, these transformations are not without struggles and consequences for women from working class rural and patriarchal backgrounds. Nevertheless, the possible uptakes are various, including general alignment (even appropriation) by capitalising on their status as factory workers to claim entitlement (as in the case of Hasina – Chapter 6); preparedness to take risks in a global capitalistic market (as in Fowzia's case – Chapter 7); and intense affective personal experience driven by a promise of future prosperity (as in Zinia's case - Chapter 8). I have analysed the uptake of each of the three participants and their peers as secondary participants through the ways in which they presented themselves in their daily life.

Three inter-related themes have emerged from the analysis which I attempt to establish in my discussion as a contribution to sociolinguistic studies on neoliberal governmentality and through which I hope to have answered the research questions in this thesis. They are, a) women's empowerment as a possible technology of governmentality and inequality-making (9.2); b) the subjectivities of the women participants in the internalisation of the neoliberal market logic of competition and materiality; and c) the moral obligation to transform and the centrality of English as a resource and a site of struggle in doing so (9.3). I return to these themes and discuss their implications in the sections that follow.

## **9.2 The empowerment of women as a technology of governmentality and inequality-making**

A review of literature in Women's Development studies that take a critical stand on women's empowerment projects in Bangladesh and other Asian countries, under global capitalistic conditions (see Chapter 2), leads me to view similar attempts to empower marginalised women through education with scepticism and ask – why women? why these women? Who gains? I argue that, while there is potential for socio-economic mobility, at least for a few individuals, as the data suggests, there are varying degrees of apprehension of how empowerment is understood and internalised in the context of my study as well as of the social inequalities that are ironically normalised in the daily lives of these women.

Before I continue with my discussion, I would like to draw attention to a very important observation about the university where I conducted my fieldwork. The university's mission of women's empowerment and its emphasis on self-improvement and development of certain skills are genuine intentions to provide educational opportunities to those women who (were) missed out due to the uneven distribution of capital in an unequal class structure such as the one in which they lived. As a non-profit-making institution, the university has altruistic aims to serve the cause of social and economic mobility for those carefully identified categories of marginalised and disenfranchised women, for example the ready-made garment factory workers, the Rohingya refugees and the persecuted communities from Afghanistan, all of whom require financial and educational support. As such, this analysis is not meant to be taken as a critical

evaluation of the university's work for this good cause, or as an attempt to devalue the deep commitment and dedication of its management and staff. Rather, my intention in this thesis is to shed light on the particular ways in which higher education institutions are entangled in a web of socio-economic and political conditions that are prevalent in education globally, and in the English language learning and teaching industry in particular along with some of the inequalities that are perpetuated. My aim was to examine how this impacted on projects intended for the empowerment of women.

Educational institutions, including liberal arts universities in the US and elsewhere, are placed in a dilemma to vocationalise education to bring a closer connection between undergraduate education and the job market as demanded by students, parents, employers and funding bodies. 'Students want jobs not debts' has been the slogan of stakeholders in higher education (HE). At the same time, HE institutions have been struggling to balance it with liberal values and knowledge to safeguard their academic reputation (Giroux 2002; Brown 2015). In this scenario, I chose to focus on a liberal arts university in Bangladesh with women's emancipatory motives, influenced by educationists from the US and the UK and their policies and practices and further complicated by global philanthropic foundations and corporate fund raisers that support them financially, as part of the internationalisation of higher education.

The data collected at the field-site in Bangladesh demonstrates the presence of neo-liberal tendencies co-opting discourses of the empowerment of women through socio-economic development and education which raises issues of inequality. It is a cause for concern as inequality and empowerment are, in principle, terms in contradiction. Scholars in different disciplines have argued and documented neoliberal governmentality as the dominant form prevailing in every sphere of life today (see Chapters 2 and 3). This led me to examine the processes of governance and the transformations of the subjectivities in my study adopting neoliberalism as a political rationality that seems to inform the current ways of governance which is reshaping education, language and the self (Flubacher and Del Percio 2017, Martín Rojo and Del Percio 2020). As my original contribution to knowledge in this field, I place women at the centre of these discussions and give a critical thought to women's empowerment as a form of neoliberal governmentality first, to then unpick the inequalities that are bred in the process. Let me address these, in turn.

### ***9.2.1 Neo-liberal governmentality of women's empowerment***

Foucault's (1977) concept of governmentality, as discussed in Chapter 3, refers to a mode of governance that allows subjects the freedom to act on themselves and others. The emphasis is on the concealment of hierarchical power relations and the shift of responsibility from the government to the governed individual as the responsabilised subject. My concern was to examine how the embedding of neo-liberal values of competition, profit, individual entrepreneurialism involving risk and self-responsibility was taking place through the promotion of leadership, resilience, critical thinking and English language learning as valuable skills, and how the subjectivities of the women were shaped or assumed to be shaped in the process of internalisation of the values being promoted at International University (IU). Drawing on my data analysis in Chapter 5, I will highlight two of the several practices through which a neoliberal form of governance was observed taking place – i.e. the practice of selection, on the one hand, and a corporate style of marketing through role modelling or presentation of what is understood as 'success' and a 'successful student' which offer glimpses of the subjectivation process, on the other.

Starting from the point of selection of candidates until the exit point and beyond, there was a consistent emphasis on the skills and qualities that the university professed to instil in its students, thereby creating a vision of the ideal student it hoped to recruit and develop. The promotional material and presentations by powerful members of the government as well as the corporate world (see Chapter 5) gave an indication to the prospective students, even before their admission, of the kind of environment and expectation they were committing to, if selected. The university described itself in the way it expected to see its students using a corporate-style 'leadership communication register' (Urciuoli 2008, 2020) e.g., excellence, quality, leadership, independent, innovative, international, skilled leaders in businesses and communities – which, when studied beyond its referential dimension, offered insights into its governing effects. 'Selection' is another buzz word closely associated with private schools and colleges in the current climate (Brown 2015), which emerged in my data to evoke discourses of a market logic, competition and the continuous improvement of oneself to attain an edge over other competitors in individualistic ways. These are combined, as it has been noted, with the rhetoric

of 'the need to compete', 'compete to be profitable' and even 'compete or die' (Martín Rojo and Del Percio 2020: 9). The inevitable result of competition and selection is categorisation and segregation which became visible in selection procedures.

The selection for a place at the prestigious international university, particularly for sponsored places, was understandably a tough one, as the university barely managed to raise funds to support only a limited number of scholarships although the number of applicants was enormous. Nonetheless, the very idea of selection indexing a marked degree of social selection, I argue, does pose a risk of reproducing social inequality besides indexing a mode of subjectivation. As regards the first, it is generally accepted as a normalised fact that educational institutions, particularly the prestigious ones, cannot help being selective. While it appears to be fair to give at least a selected few or the deserving candidates the opportunity to pursue higher education, in the current socio-economic conditions selective schools and universities have promoted unhealthy competition with dire consequences for those rejected amounting to depression, a sense of failure and even suicide in some cases. These conditions arise out of a culture of self-blame and self-deprecation, as documented by earlier studies about the frenzy for English education in Korea arising out of a culture of self-deprecation (Park 2015). In my own study, by highlighting the stories of Hasina, Fowzia and Zinia, the 'successful' candidates who managed to get the opportunity to study at IU, the questions about the untold stories of the hundreds of other applicants who are perceived as 'failures' or 'unsuccessful' seem to be answered in a way, but they warrant a critical thought, as this impacts women in certain patriarchal communities in unique ways.

There are still thousands of women out there on the factory floors continuing to labour without opportunities to dream. One of the stories of rejection the recruitment officer for RMG told me anecdotally was of a young factory woman who was aspiring to study at IU with a scholarship. As she was unsuccessful in getting a place, she was contemplating on running away from home which was the only choice left for her to escape a forced marriage. It was a story similar to Fowzia's, except that Fowzia considered herself 'successful' as a resilient woman for having got into IU in spite of the personal battles she had to fight with her father, brothers, husband and father-in law to realise her

dream. Although the lives of these women were affected to a large extent by the local social conditions they lived in, the neo-liberal market logic emerging from global capitalism that encourages competition for resources and which foregrounds categories of 'success' and 'failure', or 'benefit' and 'loss', while normalising their despair and anxiety as results of their own failure, could be seen as attempts to gloss over social and structural inequalities (Park 2010, 2017). More importantly, and pertaining to the students in my study, I have attempted to point out in my analysis of the attitudes of my participants that such conditions are produced through a process of naturalisation of selection, streamlining and segregation. It was evident in my data in the way the RMG students accepted being placed at different levels of English and in the Recovery Class, on the basis of their performance for which they considered themselves responsible and accountable (see Chapter 5).

As a mode of subjectivation, the terms in which the university described itself offered a template for students with regards to the preparation that was required and the adjustments to their identities that they had to make in order to compete for a place and to fit in with the image of the 'talented' woman circulating within the university and in its external connected organisations (Chapter 5). Also, through the promotional discourses mentioned earlier, the university indicated to the prospective students the skills and qualities they were expected to evidence and could expect to develop in order for them to be categorised as 'talented' – i.e. evidence of leadership potential, intolerance to social injustice, a will to bring about changes, resilience to hard work, adaptability to new environments of study, and work and communication in English, although English language training would be given to those not ready to launch on a liberal arts degree course. My participants felt no reservation to tell me how they prepared hard to answer the anticipated questions at their selection interview. This was further demonstrated by the RMG students at their first meeting with me, in the way they spoke about their future goals and why they were there, as though rehearsed, as bringers of change.

These are instances to show how the students were from the outset navigating their way to project themselves as desirable, or unconsciously imbibing the values presented to them as necessary to become empowered. It was quite evident in their daily projections (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) that they had already had the experience of navigating capitalism, perhaps a different kind of

neoliberalism in their past factory life. They were now going through a second course in a new educational environment, as far as my knowledge of their trajectories goes.

Another way in which citizenship in the institutional corporate culture was secured was through exposure to role models that were presented on the university website and at public events. The entrepreneurial model, with qualities of flexibility, resilience and marketable skills has been particularly popular with institutions aspiring for success and excellence and has been a subject of discussion in scholarly work (Urciuoli 2008; Gershon 2011; Martín Rojo and Del Percio 2020; Flubacher *et al.* 2018; Martín Rojo 2018). To this rich tradition I have attempted to contribute by configuring the qualities of the entrepreneurial leader through an analysis of Hasina's trajectory (Chapter 6) in particular, which I present later to establish its significance to sociolinguistics.

To demonstrate subjectivation through role-modelling, I have shown that to socialise into a corporate culture, the students at IU were given opportunities to interact with leaders of international business firms and global foundations at internal and external events that provided leadership models for the aspiring students to emulate. Besides these international figures, alumni students who had been high-flyers were also presented as role models which was a way of showcasing their achievements at IU which, in turn, led them to studentships in universities in the UK and the US as well as internships at reputed international corporations and United Nations organisations. Their performance as confident speakers of English, as well as the presentation of their achievements and the skills that they had acquired, was yet another index of how success was made sense of and endorsed by the social actors at IU. All the graduating students and their parents I interviewed after the Commencement ceremonies unanimously agreed that to be able to compete in the global job market they had to find lucrative and reputed internships and go abroad to work or study. They expressed gratitude to IU for creating global connections for them which were important for their mobility and felt highly privileged to be part of the culture. The discourse of going abroad, also occurring in the trajectories of Hasina and Fowzia as the path to success, was seen as a normalised progression route for the successful IU graduate and symbolic capital mobilised by influential networking practices, a feature of current corporate culture in

international universities in Asian countries (See Chapter 2 Privatisation of Higher Education in Bangladesh).

Hasina and Fowzia demonstrated in their trajectories their belief that being in an international university brings future international benefits if they trained themselves in specific ways, as modelled by their alumni seniors. The publicising of success stories is not a new practice. It has been quite common as a marketing strategy or as a celebratory or inspirational event used by many educational institutions to inspire and attract students as well as funding. But neoliberalism filters in when it becomes a mechanism to establish who counts as an ideal student and when the qualities of the neoliberal subject that are perceived as commendable become more visible than the true achievements themselves, thus serving as 'a site where the stereotyped figure of the successful learner is created, circulated and imbued with indexical value' (Park 2010: 22). In the success story of the RMG learner (see Chapter 6, Hasina's public speech / Extract 3) that was showcased at the Centenary celebrations where a large number of students, parents, funding bodies, trustees, media and all other stakeholders had gathered, we see the figure of the neo-liberal agent (Gershon 2011).

The neoliberal subject (Hasina) had risen from her adverse circumstances by her own individual effort and her commitment to self-development, particularly in English language learning. The transformation she displayed, from being a working-class factory woman to a member of a privileged university community, from her Bangla-medium school background to an aspiring fluent speaker of English, of which her family and community were proud, highlighted her 'extra-ordinariness' (Park 2010: 30). The struggles and suffering that she had undergone due to structural inequalities and social barriers, or even the indexicalities of her ordinary life, are either erased or naturalised as her own responsibility to overcome and what was highlighted was her extra-ordinary drive and aspiration to cross those barriers and realise her dream. In short, class and gender inequalities were backgrounded, and taken as yet another identity trait and personal misfortune. In the social construction of Hasina as the 'good' student, it was implied the contrast with the 'not good' student who had not used her agency to mobilise herself. By defining or fashioning the subject as an entrepreneur of herself (Lemke 2001) on which the neo-liberal social order depends, we are diverted from the social inequalities

that are exacerbated by a neo-liberal way of thinking (Harvey 2005). The ‘good’ student, Hasina, was presented as possessing distinctive characteristics indexed as being educated in the right way, having prestigious social position as part of a community of elite corporate personnel, displaying competence in English communication (including public speaking and persuasive skills), enacting leadership potential as a change maker, showing individual participation and risk taking, having social connections and global involvement or aspiration, developing intolerance to social injustice and her agency in overcoming it and, above all, proving self-regulation, adaptability, perseverance and willingness to change.

As mentioned earlier, there is nothing new in the process and preparation for selection itself and in the practice of showcasing successful alumni or current highflyers in educational settings, but I intend documenting here one of the ways in which governance works without direct influence being exerted on the subjects by highlighting certain desired features while erasing some others. Through this I hope to have provided an example of how the legitimisation of certain knowledge and skills for empowerment takes place – or any aspect of social life for that matter. As naturalised knowledge it becomes a template for organising social life and a way of promoting the colonization of a market rationality in every aspect of education (Urla 2020). I have illustrated in my analysis how prospective and current students were disciplined into presenting themselves as citizens willing to adapt to a neo-liberal corporatised environment, as seen in the marketing material analysed in Chapter 5 and their enactment as ‘talented women’ in their trajectories, in the subsequent chapters.

Having discussed how the empowerment of women can be perceived as neoliberal governmentality, based on the analysis of my data in Chapter 5, I proceed now to show the consequences of this practice of governance for the subjects, and identify the potential risk of re-producing further inequalities.

### ***9.2.2 Women’s empowerment as a technology of inequality making***

In my study, empowerment emerged as a possible technology of inequality making, first, in the way empowerment was understood and practised and second, the way an empowered woman was envisioned. Chapter 5 sheds light on how the social actors on the field – the management, teachers and students, and the external supporting institutions like the Government of Bangladesh, the

philanthropic foundations, corporate fund raisers and the garment factories – socialised each other into prioritising certain capitalist values and skills-register that was in circulation which link them discursively and also shape the organisation of social life (Urciouli 2008, Gal 2018). Women from a working-class background such as my participants are imagined as needing empowerment within a neoliberal frame of thinking, as analysed in Chapter 5. My analysis suggested that empowerment was principally viewed as a project of maximisation of resources. It is entrenched as a neoliberal logic at every level, particularly for the other benefits it fetched as an investment. From the point of view of the philanthro-capitalists and the international fund raisers, empowerment is geared towards economisation and materialism with the hope of breaking the cycle of poverty by raising their economic status as if it would act as a silver bullet to tackle several other social and economic problems. The state hoped to meet targets for employability and economic development through the education and empowerment of women while the university and the corporate employers hoped to provide opportunities for better jobs and higher salaries for the candidates with the right employable skills. The students with full scholarships to cover tuition and maintenance and their factory wages to support their families were seen to benefit materially and symbolically from such an arrangement. In short, progress was measured in terms of monetary benefit for all.

However, while economic stability was a basic need of the participants in my study who came from a rural working class, I argue on the basis of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 in Development Economics and the principle of human capital versus human capability (Sen 1997), my data, including the observations made by the Programme Director of Programme for Promise (PP) (see Chapter 5) that economic mobility was not directly linked to social mobility for these learners. He was talking in the context of discriminatory practices against the RMG women on campus ( also from the post-it comments on the notice boards in Chapter 5) and the experiences of my participants in and outside classrooms (Chapters 6,7 and 8) as well as in the broader society. The social perception of these women was shaped by their rural background, conventional upbringing and lifestyle, Bangla medium secondary education, economic status and their RMG factory reputation. In short, habitus and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986) played as important a role as economic

capital. The question of social mobility was quite complex in their case and seemed like it required to be internally mobilised by the agency of the self. In other words, to be accepted by the middle-class English medium student body with access and exposure to international standards or Western lifestyles, or even to be able to study alongside them and compete with them, these women were expected to take the responsibility and act on themselves to transform into certain desirable bodies that an English education is imagined to shape. It is assumed English language learning will do the job.

Therefore, to address the shortfall which English might redress, the university claimed to support them to fill that educational gap to bring about equality through its English language provision, which the marginalised women had been denied. The students also believed an English education would resolve the inequality (Chapters 6, 7 and 8); an ideology highly entrenched in the Bangladeshi society (see Chapter 2). The economisation of women's empowerment as well as the profitability of English language learning (Duchêne and Heller 2012) believed to be the sure route to socio-economic mobility for all learners irrespective of social differences brought with it the affective gains of pride and a sense of justice for all concerned. Besides, I argue, it is not socially just that some have to work harder than others and aim to reach standards set by those others, in most cases by the more privileged, in order to access the same resources. My contention is that there is more to social mobility than just providing English language learning. The impression given was one of meeting the need of the women requiring empowerment, as though English was their only shortfall and the only thing they needed, rather than addressing the class and gender inequalities and the capitalistic practices that created such conditions in the first place. The weaknesses of such a system of belief is bound to develop cracks which was shown in the tensions arising between the promise of English for social mobility and the moral obligation to transform (Kraft and Flubacher 2020) and the affective consequences for the women, particularly Zinia (Chapter 8).

By calling attention to the social and gender inequalities in my case studies (Chapters 6, 7 and 8), I highlight the fact that they were rural working-class women facing oppression in a patriarchal society, which was being overshadowed by the glamour of an international English and liberal education. Hence, all appearing equal in the social perception with English education and

leadership skills being provided to fill the supposed gaps, they still found themselves to be not equal enough, and under neoliberal conditions it was their responsibility to become equal. As George Orwell aptly put it in his satirical novel, *Animal Farm*, 'All animals are equal, but some are more equal than the others'. There was an on-going struggle for these women to identify what would help them become empowered, equal and included, and in all the three cases, they identified their need as competence in English while acquiring other skills identified for them as necessary for empowerment, which they all believed would socially and economically empower them. I will return to this theme of the centrality of English in a later section. IU on its part, identified as its duty the imparting of leadership and critical thinking skills, which would help personal and behavioural development of its students to prepare themselves for the global market.

These neo-liberal discourses enmeshed in the daily life at IU were informed by the ideology that empowerment was all about developing the ability to take care of oneself and to become independent and responsabilised subjects with accountability for their successes as well as their failures. Besides, as responsible and independent subjects, women would no longer be a burden on the society. It was believed there was a need to empower women as future leaders and change makers and equip them with skills which IU had identified as necessary and impart those skills by embedding them in the liberal arts curriculum, a mission that has won international and national corporate support.

I argue that this is a tall order, particularly in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh which although generally believed to be moderate, is governed by Islamic personal law which does not always give equal rights to women in everyday decision-making. The question is not if women will make able leaders, but rather if they will be allowed to take equal part in decision-making. The participants in my study were not too sure how they would be able to put into practice the liberal values and leadership skills they were being imparted once they left the university gates, which was indexed by the way their dress code changed (Chapters 6 and 7) when they were out of the campus. To foresee what was in store for my participants who hadn't yet graduated, I interviewed two alumni students at IU about these gender issues and whether they would be able to practice what they had learnt on their liberal arts courses, and their answer was 'No'. One of them said: '... The society wants women to be

educated, but they don't want them to use their education'. This echoed Zinia's words, 'Women are not allowed to think...' (Chapter 8: Extract 3) when she argued that critical thinking was the most essential skill for Bangladeshi women. Besides gender issues, there were political constraints and pressures from religious radical groups. The adoption of liberal arts education, which had its origin in the West (Europe and North America), in Asian contexts brings with it certain challenges in terms of assumptions about the 'freedom of expression' and 'critical thinking', and therefore makes it imperative to be conceived in a more amicable way to suit the local political and social conditions (Tan 2017: 127). While projecting itself as respecting Asian cultural norms by running a women-only institution, for example, to reach traditional communities, IU potentially runs the risk of reproducing the existing limits on women's rights and freedom, which ironically does not seem to help IU to fulfil its mission fully.

Given these circumstances, different types of inequalities intersect here, which pose challenges for women studying in a liberal arts institution to deal with – besides neo-liberal capitalist values, gender issues and class inequalities embedded in the social structure. I interviewed four graduating students, two Bangladeshi and two Afghan, after the commencement ceremony, and all the four felt that, after studying in a liberal arts university for 4 years, they would find it hard to fit in their community when they went back. Their plan was to move to big cities or go abroad. In other words, they wanted to leave their communities. This goes to prove the point that a corporate style liberal leadership education in the guise of an empowering mechanism to address gender and class inequalities only engendered possible risk of further inequalities and social disjuncture in the creation of a new class of women leaders who embraced or pretended to embrace (or were forced to embrace) neo-liberal values in pursuit of a socio-economic 'success' that their education promised to them.

Having said that, I also witnessed on my visit to the Rohingya refugee camps several current and alumni students from IU volunteering or working for NGOs at the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, an area bordering Bangladesh and Myanmar. This is the world's biggest refugee camp occupied by over 650,000 stateless Rohingyas fleeing the persecution in Myanmar. The IU students had risen to help in a national/ transnational crisis and, on being interviewed, expressed their aspirations to work for UN organisations in the future in order to bring about changes in these oppressed communities. What in reality the

intentions and experiences of the volunteers and graduates working in the NGOs are, and whether there are capitalistic motives in the training and employment of women in these difficult environments, are questions for future research. However, in the discussion of my current thesis, and in calling attention to some of the inequalities that lie embedded in a neoliberal way of reasoning, I have attempted to provide a nuanced account of how neoliberal governmentality works on the ground and how it has power to overshadow other more pressing issues. By doing so, I hope to have answered my first research question about what kinds of knowledge are legitimised and in what ways.

This leads me on to a discussion on how the values administered in a neoliberal market framework are received and negotiated by the subjects in question – the RMG women identified as requiring empowerment, which is my second research question.

### **9.3 Transforming the self– navigating discourses, the promise of English and a moral obligation to transform**

In this study, ‘Becoming empowered’ is the theme of the big story about transforming the self which is made up of three smaller stories – ‘becoming a leader’ (Hasina Chapter 6), ‘becoming a resilient woman’ (Fowzia Chapter 7) and ‘becoming a critical thinker’ (Zinia Chapter 8). Each of the participants approached the idea of empowerment in their own way, but within the communicative template provided to them by their university, depending on the resources available and what they considered important. They together contributed to the discursive construction of the figure of the emerging empowered woman or leader, or the ‘neoliberal leader’, with the specific qualities and skills that defined the persona in an institutionally desired way.

The process of transformation including the uptake of the ‘submission to subjectivation’, as Foucault puts it, was captured in the trajectories of Hasina, Fowzia and Zinia. Given the data on the individual experiences of the women, it was crucial to avoid the risk of overemphasising the totalising effect of neoliberalism in my context by paying attention to other social, political and historical phenomena too that are intermingled in their daily interactions. Much scholarship has gone into documenting neoliberal technologies and the production of the neoliberal self (for an overview see Allan and McElhinny

2017), but as Urla (2019) points out less attention has been paid to the ‘uptake’ of the neoliberal market logic by the social actors and in what ways the uptake is conditioned (Ibid.268). It so happens that, as a study primarily about the subjectivities of women, their responses to a neoliberal style of empowerment emerged as an integral part of the inquiry. It has involved exploring what factors came into play as they navigated various discourses, including the dominant ones around leadership and English packaged as important for empowerment, and how they dealt with tensions between a moral obligation to transform and the promise of English which are discussed in the sections below.

### ***9.3.1 Navigating discourses of women’s empowerment***

One of the main contributions of this study as to the conditioning of the responses of the women to the market logic of empowerment is the recognition of subtle influences of other historical and social factors (See Chapter 2) in the daily activities of the students. By making note of these as they made their appearance in fleeting moments in the daily interactions, I was able to document that neoliberalism was not the only phenomenon engulfing the life of the women in my study, although it was the dominant rationality at the institutional level. The combinations of different types of logic made their subjectivities highly complex, as they reacted in different ways and in varying degrees. This foregrounds an important argument in my thesis – the necessity to study the individual life trajectories and the specific stances they take towards minute occurrences thus avoiding the danger of homogenising the experiences of these women with ‘becoming empowered’.

The struggles that Hasina, Fowzia and Zinia have portrayed through their stances, varying from their alignment to dis-alignment to contestation, arise from a multiplicity of logics, particularly in their perceptions of English – besides a neo-liberal market rationality, colonial and post-colonial influences of class and prestige, nationalism in their attachment to Bangla and hostility towards the dominating power of English, a perceived need for modernity driven by a lure of ‘foreignness’ or internationalism, patriarchal oppression and discrimination against women in education based on religious and cultural beliefs, their rurality and economic status – all of which appeared in their interactions and shaped their subjectivities differently. The influences are hard to pin-point as they are inter-mingled in complex ways. This makes me assert that the participants in my

study have not yet totally internalised neo-liberal values in this given space and time, hence the mixed projection in the neoliberal uptake which is discussed in this section. Rather, I would argue, it is their marginalised status, deprivation and discrimination in the uneven social structure and histories that drive them to pursue the only option open to them, or given to them, ‘the golden opportunity’ to dream of a better future. As one of the major contributions of my research I have attempted to show in my data analysis how neoliberal subjectivation works at the ground level in conjunction with other logics and how the performance of neoliberal subjectivity by my participants does not necessarily mean they fully favour it. As experienced women, they navigate the neoliberal discourses negotiating their limited options to their advantage in their daily struggles between hope and despair.

The option open to them was to develop a set of skills perceived as leading them to socio-economic well-being in the future. The key skills identified by IU and its support organisations, emerged as a ‘cluster’ or ‘skills-register’, ‘strategically deployed’ (Urciuoli 2003b), understood and practised collectively at IU in a specific way. They carried more social than denotational meaning, in that when students learnt to adopt and respond to such a register, they became accepted as a certain type of students and felt included in the IU community. Being part of the community brought material and symbolic gains. But it involved responding and rising to the expectations of their middle-class peers, the university and the international job market beyond, using self-agency. While making a contribution to scholarly work on subject and subjectivities in areas of education, language and employment focusing on how neoliberal rationales are extended to individual conduct and in the making of entrepreneurial selves (e.g. Urciuoli 2014, 2020; Codó and Patiño Santos 2017; Del Percio and Van Hoof 2017; Garrido and Sabaté-Dalmau 2020), my analysis further shows that the participants were not always demonstrating these skills but sometimes they just pointed to them to identify themselves as aspiring to be ‘good’ students or ‘talented’ women. Nonetheless, this ‘pseudo-register’, as Urciuoli (2020: 92) calls it, significantly contributes to our understanding of what the university claims for itself and its students perceived as requiring empowerment, besides other reasons, to attract the much-needed funds and support.

The set of skills that IU had configured as necessary for empowerment included leadership, resilience building, critical thinking and competence in

English. Some of these values and personal development skills have been an integral part of education for centuries, but they assume a neo-liberal character when market logic as a generalised social norm is applied to them, that is, they work from a template defined by profitability, flexibility and entrepreneurialism to produce a brand of enterprising subjects or 'good' students (Urciuoli 2014, 2003b). Leadership as an umbrella concept covered a broad spectrum of skills and was sometimes projected at IU as including critical thinking, intolerance to social injustice and resilience besides communication in English. Although all my participants demonstrated varying degrees of internalisation of the discourses of leadership, critical thinking and resilience, in different measures, my data analysis also showed that in each of the trajectories some discourses were more dominantly foregrounded than the others.

My analysis revealed that the skills are weighed in terms of human capital in contemporary capitalistic conditions, the main concern being how the students could acquire an exclusivity, the edge to fare well in the competitive job market, that is be able to do better than the others. To this effect, the university and the corporate world had made a conjoined effort to design and inculcate the skills they considered essential especially for a transformational leadership, as these women had been chosen to be trained to bring change in businesses and communities, as the IU website proclaims. The university organised corporate-oriented leadership programmes and participated in women's empowerment conferences to facilitate students to take part and gain points in the CDIP (Careers Development and International Programmes) to procure business internships that can later lead to better jobs. As Fowzia reported to me after she attended a women's empowerment summit that the conference was worth the Taka 650 she paid (about £8, nearly half of her monthly factory wages) as she got to seeing 'a 5-star hotel', meeting 'high status people' and 'achieved a certificate' was an experience that she had not had before or could have even dreamt of. The most important thing she learnt, which she didn't know before was that 'women can apply for any job, even men's jobs' (from REC021). This showed that while being exposed to gender inequalities, Fowzia was also being socialised into the kind of habitus she could (needed to) aspire for – a middle class lifestyle and the power to make decisions and do any job, even a man's job, indexing the power she could gain to compete with, if she invested her time and resources in the kind of self-

development that was being advocated. The analyses of the stances Hasina and Fowzia took in their interactions and in their daily activities in Chapters 6 and 7 showed how they understood leadership and indicated their alignment with the neo-liberal discourses of leadership.

In Hasina's case, the qualities of leadership she demonstrated (Chapter 6) in her trajectory of becoming a leader were the ones that she had learnt will be appreciated by the other social actors at the university. The qualities she *frontstaged* (Goffman 1990) aligned with the university's configuration of leadership skills – skills to persuade and lead others, goals to bring about change, public speaking skills and confidence and ability to manage a team. As mentioned earlier, these skills and qualities were showcased at events and endorsed by all social actors. As the most recent entrant to the university, she displayed her enthusiasm and keenness to rise to the university's expectations of a leader with better English communication skills than her peers and showing passion for bringing about change in the RMG sector (Chapter 6 Extracts 1 and 3). She had no reservations about her factory background, unlike many of her colleagues who would rather not talk about it due to the social stigmatisation of factory women which still exists in the middle-class circles and even among student groups to demarcate class. On the other hand, as a self-confident woman with institutional backing, she used her factory background and experience, although very short compared to Fowzia's and Zinia's, to her advantage. It had brought financial and educational benefits to her which motivated her to openly appropriate her position as an RMG student to claim her entitlements. Her less confident peers felt assured under her leadership and the institutional heads were happy with the entrepreneurial leadership traits that she exhibited as they contributed to the branding of the university as a maker of entrepreneurial women leaders.

For Fowzia, leadership meant the power to make decisions. She learned, drawing on the discourses circulating around her, that a woman acquired the power to make decisions when she was educated, which in her perception was 'good' competence in English (Chapter 7 Extracts 5 and 6). Based on her own personal experience narrated by her in her autobiographical account, she argued that a woman becomes empowered when she acquired an identity of her own detached from male supremacy, as an individual who could take responsibility for her successes and risks for an uncertain future (Chapter 7

Extract 4). She believed in hard work as the only way to bounce back as a survivor rather than a victim of the current social and economic conditions, comparing herself to the labouring and resilient horse, Boxer, a subject of capitalism in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Whether Fowzia had given critical thought to Boxer's characterisation in Marxist terms was not clear. However, to me, these were some of the traits of the resilient leader that were indexed in the stances she performed in her autobiographical narrative and her seminal statement in an interaction, 'I want to be Fowzia' (Chapter 7: Extract 4).

The rise of resilience as a characteristic of the neoliberal self stems from an ontology that directs our attention to a concern with the self and subjectivity, a movement from a control from outside to control from within (Joseph 2013). In Foucault's terms the self emerges as an autonomous being with self-agency and the knowledge and techniques of self-regulation. Combined with individual responsibility for risk-taking and adaptability to changes, as in Fowzia's story, resilience comes across as embedded neoliberalism and a form of governmentality. Fowzia and Hasina as well as Zinia showed a highly adaptive behaviour, but Fowzia more than the others in her autobiographical narrative front-staged her agency in crossing patriarchal hurdles in order to access higher education. All the RMG students, with their hard factory experience for that matter, presented themselves as active resilient agents, with the capability and willingness to adapt to the high demands of an international liberal arts university. Their obligation to transform into resilient leaders as beneficiaries of prestigious sponsorships fitted well within a neo-liberal form of governmentality.

In Zinia's case, her uptake on the university's emphasis on empowerment seemed to be mixed. Her trajectory showed initially the development of an entrepreneur in her active participation in extra-curricular activities and projects, which was part of routine leadership training at IU and in her keen interest in Business and 'making capital' and her aspiration to become competent in English and 'smart' like the English medium girls who came from rich families. In the latter part of her trajectory, she projected herself as becoming critical of the capitalistic discourses and practices that she was part of. Using humour and satire, she contested the social perception of English and the 'smartness' that was believed to come with it in the play that she wrote and staged with her RMG friends on Mother Language Day (Chapter 8 Extract 5). In the presentation of herself (Goffman 1990) as 'becoming critical' through her

stances and affective uptake, she showed her intolerance to social injustice by using argumentative skills. She argued that critical thinking skills are the most important for women in Bangladesh to get empowered. What Zinia was front staging was the importance of effective communication in English that was required for articulating critical thoughts, besides her development as a critical thinker, in keeping with the university's emphasis on critical thinking as an embedded skill in the liberal arts curriculum.

Critical thinking had always been an important part of liberal arts education to promote democratic ways of thinking although in recent decades it has been overshadowed by professional and entrepreneurial skills. At IU, critical thinking, which included reflecting, debating and free speech, was emphasised at every level not only to project the character of liberal arts education but also to inculcate it as a skill necessary for marginalised women to become aware of the practices of social injustice. However, there were limitations to exercising critical thinking more freely due to local political and socio-religious reasons as mentioned earlier. When a Western system of liberal arts education embedding critical thinking and free speech is adopted in Asian educational contexts, particularly for women from traditional backgrounds in an Islamic country, it becomes conditioned by these constraints. Secondly, the secluded women-only environment, created to attract women from traditional communities, ironically disabled the women's empowerment agenda to a large extent, as students expressed their inability to interact with their male counterparts on important gender issues. In addition, as critical thinking demanded a good command of English to articulate and argue, the RMG students often had difficulty in getting through their assignments and presentations, as Fowzia's and Zinia's tutors reported to me at their interview (see Chapter 7 and 8). Hence critical thinking was often viewed by the students as part of communication in English or equated to English as they seemed to be linked in their assessments.

Despite the projection of alignment with critical thinking, Zinia's stances sometimes garbed in satirical images and ironic humour showed a certain degree of resistance, more directed towards English. This was an indication that although Zinia and her friends embraced the values imparted at IU, they did not do it without critical questioning. It must be remembered that these women have already lived through a more capitalistic regime, perhaps different from the

current one, in their past factory life. It was due to this reason that Zinia's trajectory projected in a greater measure than Fowzia's and Hasina's an intolerance to social injustice as an outcome of critical thinking, and an important pre-requisite in transformational leadership development or empowerment. Zinia's and Fowzia's reflexivity was visible in their affective stances of the mature critical observer of gender inequalities and the exploitation of women in the nation building process through a neoliberal emphasis on education and employment, which indexed a dis-alignment with neo-liberal capitalistic conditions to some extent. One of the reasons for a degree of difference in Zinia's uptake could be that she felt less obligated to her factory employer as a benefactor in her education as they had withdrawn the payment of her wages when she started her university education, unlike the other factories in the partnership. Hasina and Fowzia, like most other RMG students, felt a deep sense of gratitude which added to their moral obligation and responsibility to perform well. This did not mean that Zinia was not grateful for the opportunities given to her as an RMG student. She expressed her indebtedness to her donors and the university for the material support, but she pointed rather than demonstrated in her stances her obligation to conform to neoliberal discourses. She was caught between her scepticism and her desire to make social and economic progress. In her interactions she implied there may be consequences in terms of her personal values and beliefs if she conformed, but if she did not conform, she may be losing some hard-to-find opportunities for a possible socio-economic progress, which was her immediate necessity. Zinia's struggle was highlighted in the humorous but forceful affective stances towards the social perception of English as the language of the elite and in the gender issues in Bangladesh in our group conversations (See Chapter 8).

As such, to perform well there was an obligation to conform and transform themselves into what the social actors at the university perceived as 'talented' equipped with a template of skills and qualities to become empowered as leaders. Whether they were really internalising the neo-liberal skills subjectivities as leaders, critical thinkers and resilient women and they really wanted to become leaders and change-makers or not in the first place, were less important questions for the institutions as long as they had projected the 'brand' to the satisfaction of the stakeholders. The process of subjectivation,

which as a consequence of the pressures and tensions could be radical in some cases and circumstances. It was a stressful one and came with struggles in the lived experiences of women from a working-class background, as seen in their trajectories. Yet, they were willing to adapt to a new lifestyle and take the risks involved. All the struggles in their trajectories were epitomised in their perceived need to stay in the labour of learning English. This forced me to change my third research question during my fieldwork, from how English might lead to socio-economic mobility to why despite the struggles these women still pursue the promise of English.

### ***9.3.2 The promise of English and the moral obligation to transform - hope and anxiety***

A distinctive contribution of my thesis to sociolinguistics is the approach it takes to understand and document the subjectivities and subjectification of the women using affect both as a concept as well as an analytical tool, all of it with the objective of providing a method of analysis that takes us closer to social reality. By adopting an affective lens, I attempted to capture in a more nuanced manner the ways in which historical, social, political and material conditions emerged as enabling conditions for the women to dream and desire English that was legitimised to bring social and economic mobility, and the way women positioned themselves in the process of negotiating their subjectivities to fulfil their moral obligation to transform. It helped me observe the reciprocity of the subject and the social structure in such processes more clearly. As I have tried to show in my interactional analysis, the affective stances of my participants and their emotions of hope and anxiety brought to the surface the histories of deprivation, marginalisation and structures of social inequalities that they had lived through or were experiencing, not just as individuals but as women, as working class, as Bangla medium and as RMG.

It is the promise of social mobility which is an ongoing emotional struggle. The struggles and stresses that Hasina, Fowzia and Zinia went through, which were institutionally normalised or backgrounded, are documented in the analysis of their trajectories of empowerment in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, respectively. Hasina's personal struggles were mainly around finding a balance between her traditional rural upbringing and the international culture and lifestyle she was being socialised into at IU, particularly in matters of dress

and behaviour of women in the Bangladeshi society. As a young woman, she expressed a longing to wear fashionable clothes like some of her classmates (see Chapter 6 Extract 4) that came with a western liberal education in English at the international university and a deep feeling of social injustice for not being allowed to wear Western clothes which she as a factory woman had once laboured to make for Western markets. Fowzia's struggles were in the form of challenging discriminatory treatment from staff and students of RMG women for their lack of a middle-class taste and manner and English competency, besides hostility from her own family members who were against women's higher education (Chapter 7, Extracts 1, 2, 3, 8 and 9, also Chapter 5 post-it comments in fig. 5.7). In Zinia's case, her struggles were related to her financial and care responsibilities for her family, which often interfered with her studies. A greater struggle for her was the stress of the obligation to conform to capitalistic values in order to overcome her poor economic status. In addition, like all RMG students collectively, my participants carried the burden of having to overcome the stigma of their past factory life and to rise from their marginalised conditions. They brought to the surface the struggles women from rural and traditional patriarchal societies face, caught in the midst of other social forces and a neoliberal materialistic phenomenon, which sometimes seemed to step on each other.

It is precisely for the above socio-economic reasons that the RMG factory women had been identified by IU as needing empowerment. They were offered full scholarships as well as their factory wages for five years, which was a 'golden' opportunity, as Yasmin, a secondary participant in my research, described it. I feel tempted to quote Yasmin's words again, as they have not stopped ringing in my ears and invoke two important themes relevant to this discussion:

'XXX (IU) is a golden opportunity, so we must use properly. They who gives us donation will assess us. So we must do well and we need English to do well...' (1<sup>st</sup> FG RMG REC 001 AA )

Yasmin speaks for all RMG students at IU. The implication is that they have accrued on themselves the moral obligation to adapt and perform well. She identifies English as their need if they have to do well. Yasmin's words reinforce two important themes that have circulated discursively and semiotically in the

trajectories of Hasina, Fowzia and Zinia – the moral obligation to transform and the promise of English, which are related, and demonstrate the affective dimensions of how the students relate themselves to the obligation and to the learning of English.

In the presentation of their selves the women showed their obligation not only to the benefactors but also to themselves. In Foucauldian (1982) terms, the self needs to be shaped with certain technologies to become productive in the current capitalistic conditions. Besides developing themselves with leadership, critical thinking and resilience, what they considered more important to succeed in their life was English communication and English language learning. In other words, without English, all other skills, like critical thinking, would not lead them to success. Although the university treated English competency on par with the other skills as a strategy to background or to normalise it as a taken-for-granted aspect of an international liberal arts education, the students persistently emphasised English in their anxiety and in their fears, as well as their hopes in anticipation of a prosperous future. Their understanding of English as demonstrated in their interactions, was shaped by the ideologies of English as the language of the powerful upper class, of the decision-maker, of the master (derived from a colonial / post-colonial construct) and as the language of materiality, corporate status, the rich, high salaried jobs, global connections and all kinds of symbolic capital in a more neoliberal capitalist sense, combined with a drive for modernity encouraged by the state and associated with a private American style education system.

I consider my investigation about what English really meant to these women and why the ideology of English as the language of empowerment was so deeply entrenched in their lives, as a significant outcome of this thesis. At a deeper affective level, the trajectories of Hasina, Fowzia and Zinia showed that these discourses about English were not really about English; they were about the associations of English with other social dynamics (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). As a colonial influence combined with neoliberal aspirations, the promise of English had taken deep roots in Bangladesh (see Chapter 2 for an overview), particularly in the imagination of the marginalised groups. To my participants, English was the language of the 'rich' and the 'educated' (Chapter 8, Extract 5), but Bangla was still the preferred home language. Their language preferences were signalled through their mockery of people (the 'rich' and the 'smart')

associated with English and the emotional identification with Bangla during the Mother Language Day celebrations (See Chapter 8 Extract 5). Yet, they showed a strong desire to become competent in English, which they believe would help them become 'rich' and 'educated' in the future, a desire for something they felt they had been deprived of. In their current life, English seemed to be an attractive proposition. Hasina took pride in displaying her English communication skills which had rewarded her with leadership roles and to prove to her family that her choice of studying at IU was after all a right one; Fowzia worked extremely hard to improve her English and become educated so she can enjoy decision-making power, which was denied to her by the male members in her family; for Zinia, studying in the English medium was a 'dream come true' as it had been a dream since childhood to be as 'smart' as the English medium girls, but her family were too poor to afford an English medium school for her. In all these instances English is viewed as a means to obtain privilege as it is associated with the privileged; it can help one attain a sense of self-worth and come out of a state of deprivation effected by social and political events in history. Deprivation of different kinds, emotional, symbolic and economic, I found in my data, was a factor that had strengthened the assumptions about English as the language of hope. It seemed to give them beyond the usual financial stability, job and education, an affective satisfaction and an access to achieving a feeling of positive self-image.

In the trajectories of Hasina, Fowzia and Zinia I have illustrated in the stances they took, that their desire to learn English stemmed from a deep feeling of deprivation of English education in the past due to their socio-economic class and / or gender and their eagerness to free themselves from those marginalised positions. Added to that, the lack of competence in English, which was perceived as their failing, had been a reason for discrimination which they considered their responsibility to overcome. Also, the hope of English offered to them was a hope of inclusion, to be part of the mainstream student body or be included in the middle-class university community. These affective discourses were expressed by them in different ways. For Hasina and Zinia, learning English was a question of pride; they wanted to make their family and community proud of them for their achievement and as a step towards future prosperity. Hasina also showed confidence that comes along with competence, which gave her and her community the assurance that social mobility was

taking place. Zinia showed a strong affective relationship with English, expressed in her journal as a 'dream come true' when she got into IU. Although she also pursued English as the route to success, she contested the association of English with the rich and elite, or 'pseudo-elite', through humour and satire in her play which used powerful emotions as cues to highlight linguistic inequality in Bangladesh. In Fowzia's trajectory, the desire to learn English, seemed to emerge from a deep sense of shame and indignation suffered due to class and gender discrimination where English was used as the site of contention. In one of the small stories Fowzia told me, she challenged discrimination in the classroom, when the English spoken by an RMG student was laughed at. When a staff member showed surprise at Fowzia's ability to communicate in English, Fowzia retorted, 'Why Ma'am, why RMG students can't speak English?' The unconscious bias in the social construction of the RMG student as low class and as someone who cannot speak English, surfaced here. In this instance the class status of an RMG student indexed her low competence in English, as it was assumed she could only have had a Bangla medium education. At the same time, dialectically, her low English level indexed the class she came from. Such experiences in daily life, had triggered feelings of anxiety, moral outrage and a desire to learn English to prove themselves as 'good' or 'better' individuals as understood by the society to overcome their RMG or working-class status. Fluctuating between the emotions of anger and hope, such everyday experiences of these women projected how emotions associated with English became rooted in social structures of inequality (Park 2015: 59).

As Ahmed (2014) postulates, 'through emotions, the past persists on the surface of the bodies' and '...histories stay alive, even when they are not consciously remembered' (ibid: 202). The stances and emotions also brought to the surface how hope or the promise of social mobility as a political rationality enabled a neo-liberal form of governmentality which manipulated and secured the moral obligation to transform. As such, the stories of Hasina, Fowzia and Zinia are not to be dismissed as personal and subjective accounts, but closely observed as minute instances of feeling that communicate and open up large historical avenues and social structures (Pérez-Milans 2016) to study social inequalities and the associations of English – in particular, how they are reproduced and how they may be contested.

#### **9.4 Thesis summary**

To summarise, I started my discussion with the question - Are there possible risks of reproducing inequality in the ways empowerment of women was imagined and practised at IU? The answer is 'Yes', when empowerment of women is practised in neo-liberal terms of profitability, adaptability and entrepreneurialism in a competitive environment. There is a latent risk of reproducing inequalities in the very attempt to habituate women into becoming individualised entrepreneurs of themselves and in the projection of exclusivity, prestige and privilege that comes with 'elite' connections, all of which reproduce class and power hierarchies. There were capitalistic overtones in the promises of social mobility that were made in the imperative of English and other skills as the 'happy object' (Ahmed 2010) to pursue for material success in an uncertain future. It comes across as glossing over, or as some kind of justification for the systemic social and gender inequalities that are prevalent in the everyday life of these women/students from rural working - class backgrounds. It is morally wrong to expect them to work harder than their privileged English medium peers, take responsibility for their success as well as their failure and suffer anxiety and fear of rejection or exclusion, although measures are being put in place, like the Recovery Class, to upskill them. In this we see their vulnerability to neoliberal capitalism, as Cameron (2000) has observed in the context of communication training for workers: the lower their status, the more monitored and scripted their performance becomes, in comparison to the less monitoring and scripting of workers of more privileged status. It is true of the training and scripting of Bangla medium students from working class and marginalised backgrounds by way of intensive English language programmes promising social and economic mobility.

However, data also indicates that it is not all gloom, as the RMG women in my study have proved to be far from the stereotypical factory women, assumed to be docile, timid and subjugated. They have shown resilience and criticality which they have accrued from their factory floor experiences and the courage to question and react to neoliberal discourses of empowerment and English. Zinia, in particular, reflected on what empowerment meant to her – it is the freedom to do what one wants to do, and not be driven by a 'do job, do job, do job' discourse, she expressed in frustration. She was required to internalise

this discourse of women's empowerment through employment in her past factory life, which she viewed as exploitation of women, and she implied this pressure to work prevailed even at IU, as in many institutions, where education was oriented towards jobs. Zinia and her three friends from UG1 had a long conversation with me about their ideas about 'good education' and empowerment (see Chapter 8). Fowzia, the brave, was reacting to discrimination in her classroom as she had just started attending classes with mainstream students (from English medium schools) on her Access course. She encountered discrimination and unconscious bias due to her English and social class, this time not from men but from women (Chapter 7). Hasina showed full alignment with the ways of the university to start with, but experienced struggles and contradictions which were hard for her to grasp as she had only recently joined IU. This finding in the difference, rather progression, in their uptake of neoliberal inequalities, was an interesting surprise as I had not planned to observe their uptake in this way at the start of my fieldwork. The difference in their uptake, particularly between Zinia and Hasina, seemed to co-relate with the length of time they had spent at IU. At the time of my fieldwork, Hasina had been there about 5 months, Fowzia over a year and Zinia over 2 years. Familiarity with the system was an obvious reason, but it seemed to depend more on their past experience, maturity and peer groups.

Credit should also go to IU for giving students the freedom to raise critical questions about various aspects of a liberal education in classrooms and student forums. This was helping to form solidarity groups, like Zinia's, in which topics such as what really empowers women, the purpose of education, the social perception of English in Bangladesh, or how liberal arts education differed from the Bangladeshi system, were frequently discussed and debated. It was gratifying to observe that they were creating spaces where solidarity-based empowerment was happening. They collaboratively challenged, in one of their group meetings as well as publicly on the stage, the social assumptions about the materiality of English and English as a path to empowerment and prestige, projecting a broader sense of community well-being. Although such projections were not devoid of struggles and conflicts, even the presence of certain tensions indicated to me the possibility of transformative empowerment and a reason to hope. Transformative empowerment refers to collaborative

ways of attaining power of which individual empowerment is an ingredient (Rowlands, 1995). What remains to be seen is whether the transformation in the lives of these women brings about a reduction in social injustice in the wider society which made women's empowerment projects necessary in the first place.

These fleeting moments of hope in my data lead me to conclude that alternative routes to the empowerment of women are becoming visible, making the imagining of women's empowerment go beyond the responsabilisation of women and taking a more collaborative and transformative character, in opposition to mere neoliberal individualism. They also look beyond the economisation of every aspect of life, including women as investment, to venues of human capability where women participate and are seen, heard and taken seriously. However, my hope comes with a certain degree of scepticism. My hope is that, on the basis of the social needs of the women revealed in my study, those of us who are involved in education and language would continue to strive to uphold the social as the main aim of education and keep the economic, or materiality to be more precise, as far away as possible from it. There is hope that educational and language policies could be adapted to more collaborative forms of empowerment through consultations with educators and social scientists rather than corporate donors. My scepticism is about larger issues of hierarchies of power and inequalities handed down to us by histories of social, religious, colonial and capitalistic exploitation which have become too strongly embedded in our social structures. Traditional structures of patriarchy have mingled with what Shiva (2013) calls "capitalistic patriarchy", causing formidable hurdles for women to contest and cross. It would require extreme measures of activism to remove those hurdles and an enormous collaborative effort on the part of the women. Until then, programmes such as Programme for Promise, which offer these marginalised women a temporary haven where they learn to dream and believe they experience a sense of social mobility, may produce leaders despite all this, although small in number, with the resilience to fight the infectivity of neoliberal subjectivation.

### **9.5 Concluding remarks**

The journey of my research does not end here, as we can see I have no concrete solutions to such complex problems or answers to bigger questions of

how to eliminate inequalities in a structure that is fundamentally unequal and unjust, and further aggravated by the infiltration of neoliberalism into our social life. To deal with the seemingly simple issues that have risen at the ground level in my thesis, such as, in my participants' own words - 'Women are not allowed to think' (Zinia); 'I want to be Fowzia' (Fowzia); 'We need English to do well' (Yasmin) - as the deeply felt needs of these marginalised women to become empowered, I posit one way is to include men in the conversation, men who are aligned with ideas of eliminating gender inequalities, as I consider it is important to hear about their experiences of women's empowerment. Due to the constraints on time, my fieldwork was limited to women and their experiences. A focus on men would make the study more balanced and at the same time help clarify a bigger question that emerged late in the research, triggered by the issues in the daily life of my participants. The question is: why has the ideology of women's empowerment in recent times failed to imbibe the transformative values of feminism in spite of adopting feminist ideas of equality and social justice? Some feminist critiques of neoliberalism speculate that the appropriation of feminist ideas by neoliberalism was a neoliberal reaction to women moving into the workforce in the 70s and 80s and making gender discrimination more visible (Prügl 2015). She argues that instead of challenging capitalism, feminism 'appears to have gone to bed with capitalism' (Ibid:614). That makes me think that women's empowerment projects born out of such a partnership and showing only features of a "capitalist patriarchy" (Shiva 2013) of profit and competition and creating individualised neoliberal women, could have another backlash, or other consequences for women's rights and emancipation, particularly in Asian countries where gender differences are traditionally naturalised on religious grounds. In this context, as the whole world watches, at the time of finishing this dissertation, how the fate of women in Afghanistan is going to change under the new Taliban and while the super-powers negotiate their conditions for economic aid to Afghanistan by moving women from the margins to the centre, it is hard for me to pass without stopping to recall the personal interactions that I had with Afghan women during my stay in Bangladesh. There was a large number of Afghan students at IU, particularly from the persecuted ethnic minority communities like the Hazara, who were going through an undergraduate liberal education at the time of my fieldwork. They narrated their stories of suppression and expressed their fears about

going back and fitting in. My thoughts are with all those brave and intelligent women who have returned since to their country as graduates and are now facing one of the greatest challenges of all times as change-makers in extremely oppressive conditions. My hope is they will meet their own collective targets for the rights of women, rather than those of capitalist patriarchy.

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## Appendix 1: Abbreviations

AA	Access Academy
AD	Admissions Director
BGMEA	Bangladesh Manufacturers and Exporters Association
CDIP	Careers Development and International Programmes
CEF	Common European Framework
CEPZ	Chittagong Export Processing Zone
CNG	Compressed Natural Gas vehicle
CSE	Critical Sociolinguistic Ethnography
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DQ	Direct quote
ELT	English Language Teaching
EMI	English as the medium of instruction
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
ESOL	English to Speakers of Other Languages
FG	Focus group
HE	Higher Education
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
IB	International Baccalaureate
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IS	Interactional Sociolinguistics
IU	International University
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOI	Medium of instruction
MS	Micro-sociology
NA	Narrative Analysis
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSF	Open Society Foundation
PD	Programme Director
PP	Programme for Promise
PPE	Politics, Philosophy and Economics

PQ	Paraphrased quote
RMG	ready-made garment industry
RO	Recruitment Officer
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SF	Support Foundation
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
UG	Under- graduate programme
UGC	University Grants Commission
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VC	Vice Chancellor
WB	World Bank
WEF	World Economic Forum
WTO	World Trade Organisation
XXX	Anonymised names

## Appendix 2 : Transcription Convention

Adapted from Heller *et al.* 2018 and Seedhouse 2004 (in Heller *et al.* 2018, pp. 185)

/	a short pause
//	a pause
[ ...]	section excerpted
[	point of overlap onset
]	point of overlap termination
↑	Rising intonation
↓	falling intonation
CAPITALS	loud
*	emphasis
xxx	anonymised

## **Appendix 3**

**Focus Groups with students at 3 levels – Pre-Access, Access and UG1**

**February 2018**

### **Questions**

1. Why did you choose to come to IU? Did you have a choice?
2. What aspects of your education in IU do you think are empowering you?
3. Do you think a liberal arts education is important for women? Why?
4. Is learning English important for you? Why?
5. Have you thought of your future plans?
6. What kind of education would you wish for your children?

## **Appendix 4**

Focus Group Questions - Meetings with Faculty - 5<sup>th</sup> April 2018

1. In what ways does the course you teach on serve as a programme for promise for your learners? How does this relate to the university's mission?
  
2. One of the main criteria for selection to IU is the potential to be a leader.  
What is leadership?  
How do you perceive leadership in your learners in the classroom?
  
3. Are the students on the programme facing any issues of progression? What is your experience as a teacher on the programme? What in your view needs to be done for a smooth progression of the learners to AA and to UG?

### Appendix 5 Ethics

#### **Information letter for students taking part in the research – focal (3) and support participants (9)**

**Name of Researcher:** Sudha A. Vepa  
**Name of University:** Institute of Education, University College London, UK  
**Name of Research Project:** Language and identity – Women in Higher Education in Bangladesh

My name is Sudha Vepa. I have worked as a Lecturer in English in India and in the UK for more than 30 years. I am currently doing a research degree at the Institute of Education, UCL, London. As part of my research I would like to study the experiences of Asian women in Higher Education in Bangladesh, particularly their English Language learning experiences. It is my intention to focus on a group of women with an RMG (ready-made garment) background and find out how they are benefiting from their education at (IU).

I would like to invite you to take part in my research project. Your participation will greatly help me in my research and enable me to contribute towards improving and enriching the learning experiences of Asian women in universities in Bangladesh whose first language is not English. It will be an opportunity for you to voice your opinion about your experiences and at the same time to be exposed to some of the research ideas and skills used in this study.

Participating in my research will involve being observed in classrooms, meetings and workshops as well as outside classrooms at certain events. It could involve visiting your workplace, if you are working and chatting with your family and friends. On most occasions I will be able to inform you and get your and your teacher's permission before I do an observation. Most of the observations will be followed up with an informal chat so we both have an opportunity to clarify any points.

You do not have to take part in the research project if you don't wish to and this will not affect your studies at the university. You can also withdraw from participation any time during the project if you decide to do so and you will have the right to stop any information about you being used as data. Some of the interactions will be audio recorded and with your permission be used as data. It will be kept confidential and anonymised. All the data will be securely stored using pseudo names instead of your name and will be used only for this research project and to inform research in this area.

Before we start the project you will be invited to a short initial meeting with me when I will explain to you in more detail your rights as a participant and give you more information about the project. You will have the opportunity to ask me any questions you may have. You will be asked to sign a consent form.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information letter. If you agree to participate in the research project please contact me directly on:

[sudha.vepa.14@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:sudha.vepa.14@ucl.ac.uk)

Or telephone me on : \_\_\_\_\_

Sudha A Vepa

## Appendix 6 Ethics Informed Consent Form

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Project Title: Language and Identity: Women in Higher Education in Bangladesh

Researcher: Sudha A Vepa

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research. Before you agree to take part, the person organising this research will give you all the information you need.

If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

### Participant's Statement

I agree that:

- I have read the notes written above and the Information Sheet and understand what the study involves.
- I understand that if I decide at any time that I no longer wish to take part in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw immediately.
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me from any publications.
- I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- I understand that my participation will be taped/video recorded and I consent to use of this material as part of the project.
- I agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in this study.

Signature:

Date:

Researcher's name: Sudha A Vepa  
UCL Institute of Education  
20 Bedford Way London WC1H 0AL  
sudha.vepa.14@ucl.ac.uk

## Appendix 7 Ethics

### **Information and request for permission to observe activities**

**Name of Researcher:** Sudha A Vepa

**Name of University:** Institute of Education, University College London, UK

**Name of Research Project:** Language and identity – Women in Higher Education in Bangladesh

My name is Sudha Vepa. I am currently doing a research degree at the Institute of Education, UCL, London. As part of my research I would like to study the experiences of Asian women in Higher Education in Bangladesh, particularly their English Language learning experiences. It is my intention to focus on a group of women with an RMG (ready-made garment) background and find out how they are benefiting from their education at (IU). My ethnographic study will involve observing the learners who have given their consent to take part in the research project within classrooms and also during other extra-curricular activities.

I seek your permission to attend the session mentioned below:

Name of session / activity:

Date and time of observation:

Some of the interactions will be audio or video recorded with your permission to be used as data. The focus will be on the learners and those that have given their consent to participate in the research. The data will be kept confidential and anonymised. All the data will be securely stored using pseudo names and will be used only for this research project and to inform research in this area.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information letter. If you have any questions please contact me directly on:

[sudha.vepa.14@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:sudha.vepa.14@ucl.ac.uk)

If you have no objections to your session being observed please sign the consent form below.

Consent Form:

I have read the information and I give permission for the above activity /session to be observed.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name:

## Appendix 8

Data collected between January and June 2018 at IU

1. Senior Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual Interviews with Vice Chancellor, Programme Director for PP, Programme Director AA Director of Admissions</li> <li>Staff meeting chaired by Dean of Academic Affairs</li> </ul> <p>(Audio recorded and notes)</p>	6 sessions Approx.5 hours 30 mins
2. Academic staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual interviews and informal meetings/email with 6 teaching staff on PP, AA and UG1 Dr.C – Associate prof of Anthropology teaching on UG courses Miss A – English lecturer on AA Miss Anna – English teacher on PP (2 meetings) Miss Rona – Maths teacher on PP Dr.T – Asso. Prof responsible for General Core programmes</li> <li>Focus group meetings with 2 groups of 4staff members each – 2 English and 2 maths teachers in each group</li> </ul> <p>(Audio recorded / fieldnotes)</p>	6 sessions/6 hours  E-mail correspondence  2 sessions/2 hours  2 sessions 3 hours
3. Staff Co-ordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal meetings with : Recruitment Officer(RO) for PP Ari- programme Co-ordinator for PP responsible for internal academic activities and liaison with external agencies and community groups from where students are recruited</li> </ul>	4 sessions
4. Student participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual meetings: 5 with PP students, 8 with AA students, 5 with UG1 students, 3 with graduating students : Main focal participants – Hasina, Fowzia and Zinia Secondary participants – Al, Tina, Aru,Sham, Prasanna from PP/ Yasmin, Nisa and Sam (from Access), Shazia, Sharmila and Saki (from UG 1)</li> <li>Focus groups: PP- 3 sessions, AA- 2 sessions, UG1- 2 sessions</li> <li>Informal conversations incl. fb chats and emails: PP-8, AA- 9, UG1 – 6 (varied durations)</li> <li>Classroom observations /interactions: PP- 6sessions, AA-6 sessions, UG1- 6 sessions</li> </ul>	21sessions/ 21 hours approx.  7 hours  Approx. 20 hours

	(Audio- recorded, some classroom interactions video recorded, fieldnotes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Journals and diaries – 10 in total</li> </ul>	27 hours
5. Visits to ready-made garment factories	Visits to factories with participants including meetings with factory managers, HR personnel and supervisors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 factories in Chittagong Export Processing Zone, Chittagong</li> <li>1 factory in Export Processing Zone (Dhaka)</li> <li>1 factory in Ghazipur (near Dhaka)</li> </ul> (Audio, some video, photographs and fieldnotes)	4 half day visits
6. Visits to participants' homes	Casual meetings at lunch with parents and family members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 in and around Dhaka including meeting Zinia's father</li> </ul> (Audio, some photographs, field notes)	4 half days
7. Day out with participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To the factory gates and beach with Fowzia and Nisa</li> <li>Shopping and private school tuition session by Zinia</li> <li>Handloom weavers' village with Hasina and Sam</li> </ul> (Audio, video, and photographs and fieldnotes)	2 and a half days
8. External agencies associated with IU	Meetings with: External Assessor for PP programme from the UK Corporate member of Support Foundation from the US	1 hour
7. Official Documents	7 in total	
8. Events on campus	Several – Sports Day, Cultural events celebrating national and religious days – (e.g. Mother Language Day, Naw Roz) Charity events, Talent Shows, Student Forums, Commencement, and Centenary Year celebrations (Audio, video, photographs, and field notes)	Several
9. Total	Photographs – approximately 300 Audio recording – approximately 120 hours Video recording – approximately 26 hours Field notes - 9 notebooks	

Note: IU – International University, PP- Programme for Promise, AA – Access Academy, UG1 – Undergraduate First Year

## Appendix 9 – List of codes

### Major Category 1 – Becoming empowered – emerging attributes

#### Major category 1 constituting sub-categories – Leadership, Resilience, Critical Thinking and Entrepreneurial skills

Observed actions	Emerging attributes / themes	Sub-categories constituting 'Becoming empowered'
<p>Making speeches Being centre stage 'I am a princess'</p> <p>Performing activism</p> <p>Being showcased as IU model student Identifying changes to make</p> <p>Practising critical thinking in classrooms to identify social inequalities Competent user of English – gets selected to represent English Communication skills coaching in PP</p>	<p>Creates desired impressions Attracting attention Popularity – expects to gain followers and admirers Shows she has a serious future goal Marketing and gaining citizenship</p> <p>Leadership potential – securing a place at IU Critical thinking goes with leadership</p> <p>English as an imperative for 'success' English as language of international communication / access to HE and social media/ international internships and careers</p>	<p>Becoming empowered through Leadership skills</p>
<p>'I want to be Fowzia' Patriarchal control Fighting gender discrimination Working hard at English / labouring in factory with chest pain Accepting of capitalist / neoliberal conditions 'Studying liberal arts is empowering' Interest in NGO work</p> <p>IU – 'an opportunity to dream' Living in uncertainty</p> <p>'Learning English is empowerment' 'English will help me get big money' English gives decision making power/ leadership</p>	<p>A life-long struggle for identity resistance to power, courage to defy/survivor not victim persistence endurance</p> <p>preparedness</p> <p>awareness of women's rights to bounce back public/ social welfare – leadership potential aspirations and hope anxiety, low self-esteem, disadvantaged gaining confidence, gaining voice</p> <p>hope, deprivation</p> <p>English as an important requisite to be a leader</p>	<p>Becoming empowered through resilience</p>
<p>Becoming critical of social</p>	<p>Gaining awareness and voice</p>	<p>Becoming empowered</p>

<p>practices – part of curriculum  Shortcomings of Bangla medium schools  Discrimination in classrooms and halls due to lack of English/ social class  ‘In BD men are forced to think but women are not allowed to think’  ‘Critical Thinking is important for me to pass my exams’  Speaking critically may not work outside campus  Riots against women’s liberal education  Think and speak in English to be heard</p>	<p>Categorisation  Indignation, courage to question  Gender/ cultural issues  Practical /immediate need– end of education to pass exams  Understanding limitations of liberal education in BD  Patriarchal society  English is the language of power/  English and leadership potential</p>	<p>through critical thinking</p>
<p>‘I want to make a lot of money’  I want to be a businesswoman in the future’  Business and Economics as most popular subjects  Emphasis on the development of skills through co-curricular activities eg. communication, volunteering  Compete for international internships / participation in Model UN and other inter uni activities  Corporate leaders as role models  ‘They (the English medium girls) are smarter than me’  ‘English is power’  English is the language for international relations and business – ‘I can communicate with foreign buyers in my procurement job in the factory’</p>	<p>Financially oriented  To be marketable  To compete for ‘good’ internships at international level  What employers look for  Future career concerns / anxieties  Acquire corporate leadership skills as means to ‘success’  Competitive  Language as a powerful resource  Language as profit</p>	<p>Becoming empowered through entrepreneurial skills</p>