

Chapter 7

Superdiverse translingualism, commodification and trans-spatial resistances

The multi/plural turn and the persistence of the normative form

The bringing down of the Berlin Wall in 1989, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which were documented in Chapter 5, were seismic geopolitical events that had a major impact upon US governance of the world-system. While these events changed the world's geopolitics in a fundamental way, they also majorly impacted upon the nature of western intellectual enquiry, particularly in the social sciences, as postmodern and poststructuralist modes of thinking, with their emphasis on the hybrid, the fluid, and the fractal in constructions of the modern world became more popular (Jameson, 1984; Haraway, 1988; Lather, 1993; Lyotard, 1994; Hartwig, 2011). It is also around this juncture that the 'social turn' occurs, and the study of discourse becomes a much more prominent reference point in qualitative social scientific research (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Weedon, 1987; Gee, 1991; Fairclough, 1992; Coupland & Jaworski, 1999). In linguistics – at least in its applied and sociolinguistic forms – it also appeared to mark a turning away from the social study of 'languages' conceived as discrete and enclosed entities as language scholars in different fields oriented themselves increasingly to the study of linguistic hybridization and pluralization in diverse communicative sites and cross-cultural contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rampton, 1995; Baynham, 1995; Dixon, 1997; Cook, 2000; Lin, Wang, Akamatsu & Riazi, 2002). Issues of multiplicity, hybridity, diversity, flexibility, fluidity, complexity and performativity in English, often in combination with other languages, came increasingly to the fore (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005; Harris, 2006; Morgan, 2007; Vertovec, 2007; Pennycook, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2017, 2020; Jørgensen, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010, 2015; Li & Zhu, 2013; Canagarajah, 2013, 2018; Blommaert, 2013, 2015; García & Li, 2014; Arnaut & Spotti, 2014; Budach & de Saint George, 2017; Li, 2018a, 2018b; Kramsch, 2018; McNamara, 2011, 2019). In addition, the perspectives which arose were often categorized as belonging to 'late modern' or 'late capitalist' processes of globalization (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Rampton, 2006; Fairclough, 2006; Saxena & Omoniyi, 2010; Blommaert, 2010; Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Boutet, 2012; Perez-Milans, 2015; Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Heyd & Schneider, 2019) while also simultaneously drawing upon or being influenced by the turn to the postmodern that had dominated the later decades of the twentieth century through the work of theorists such as Derrida, Foucault, Laclau, Baudrillard and Deleuze. In the short space of twenty years the old modernist orthodoxies – particularly in philosophy and in the social sciences – appeared to have been overthrown to be replaced by bourgeois capitalist triumphalism, individualist neoliberalism and a 'presentist' ludic postmodernism (Hartwig, 2011; Block, 2012a; Bhaskar, 2016). It seemed an odd mix.

Of course, the postmodern did not begin in the late twentieth century, so much as 'mushroom' well beyond where it had been in the 1970s [and previously] when it was largely confined to continental philosophy and the margins of literary criticism (de Man, 1979). The 'social turn' which occurred in the social sciences and the humanities realized itself in applied linguistics as a multi/plural or dynamic turn (Kubota, 2016: 475) which gave rise in the early twenty-first century to the overlapping fields of superdiversity, translanguaging, and translingual practice (*passim*), or what I am referring to collectively as *superdiverse translingualism*.¹⁴⁹ The multi/plural turn also brought with it a proliferation of related prefixes for describing the linguistic diversity that was being observed, such as trans-, poly-, metro-, super- and pluri- (Pennycook, 2017: 269). In closer or lesser empirical alignment with these fields have been the

¹⁴⁹ This is to distinguish it from adopting Canagarajah's neologized preference for the term 'translingual practice' to encompass superdiversity, translanguaging and other related nomenclatures (Canagarajah, 2013, 2018; see also Grin, 2018).

competing *World Englishes* (WE) and *English as a Lingua Franca* (ELF) paradigms, each of which in their own way make claims regarding the legitimacy of the diverse realizations of English in the world, often involving the detailed documentation of ‘original’ as well as ‘local’ lexico-grammatical formulations produced by speakers [and communities of speakers] for whom English is not a first language (Firth, 1996; Widdowson, 1997; Bhatt, 2001; Seidlhofer, 2001, 2009, 2012; Jenkins, 2006, 2017; Higgins, 2009; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009; Murata & Jenkins, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011; Mauranen, 2012; Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Smith, 2016; Canagarajah, 2006; 2013, 2018; Li 2018b). The immediate issue to be addressed is not whether the shift to superdiverse translingualism and related themes is a worthwhile object of study, or where superdiverse translingualism exists, to determine whether it is indeed a feature of late capitalism or not; myself and others have already engaged with these questions (Blommaert, 2010; Park & Wee, 2012; Sowden, 2012; O’Regan, 2014; 2021; Pavlenko, 2017; Rösler, 2017; Viebrok, 2017; Grin, 2018; Simpson & O’Regan, 2018, 2021). Rather, it is how [and why] in the midst of evident superdiverse translingual practices and hybridized postcolonial varieties the dominant global hegemony of English in its standard form persists.

Kubota captures the ongoing problem of global English well when she states that, ‘The dominance of English and standard varieties of English is intact both globally and within English-speaking countries, marginalizing and disadvantaging non-English-speaking or nonnative-English-speaking populations’ (Kubota, 2016: 489). This includes in inter- and intra-national English-speaking politics [e.g. in the UK, USA, Australia, Ireland etc.], in the institutions of international political economy [the Wall Street-Treasury-IMF Complex], in circles of elite cosmopolitanism (Hannerz, 2006; Ives, 2010; Vandrick, 2013; Garrido, 2017; Preece, 2019), in so-called ‘high culture’ (Bourdieu, 1984; Ostrower, 1998; Michael, 2015), in state-level English language policies (De Costa, 2010; Price, 2014; Gao, 2018; Kang, 2020), and in international English-medium academia and higher education (Z. Pan, 2015; Phan, 2015; McKinley, 2019; McKinley & Rose, 2019), particularly where the chosen English medium is *written*, or is speech presented in a ‘written-like’ form; i.e. following a ‘normative grammar’ as opposed to a ‘spontaneous’ or ‘immanent’ grammar (Gramsci, 1975: 2343; Ives, 1998: 40; 2010: 528).

At a recent international conference,¹⁵⁰ the respected World Englishes scholar S N Sridhar presented a plenary lecture in which he argued that inner-circle Englishes were outmoded and no longer relevant referents for English in the world (Sridhar, 2019). He further stated that the core/periphery model of Englishes and of the global economy which had dominated theoretical thinking for so long was unsound, because ‘History teaches us that the center does not remain the center’ (ibid), but is always shifting – for example, today, economically to Asia, and for English sociolinguistically, to diverse regions across the world. It is evident in actual language use for example, that the periphery, in the words of Sridhar, has ‘invaded the core’, and that pluricentricity is the new orthodoxy in the sociolinguistics of English (ibid). This argument, as he noted, is not new; World Englishes scholars have been saying this since at least the 1980s. His point was well made, as was the plenary itself, which although unscripted, was nevertheless delivered in a recognizably normative form. This should not really be surprising since the use of the normative form is not unusual at English-medium international academic conferences when expert international scholars present. But given Sridhar’s forthright dismissal of inner-circle models and of the core/periphery dichotomy, the overwhelming immanence in his lecture of such a conforming normativity was strikingly apparent. Also apparent was his neglect of any consideration of US structural power in relation to the global dominance of the normative form (see previous chapters), and in which Sridhar – a postcolonial scholar who is tenured in the United States – is also inevitably implicated (cf. Kubota, 2016: 490, for a similar argument).

¹⁵⁰ The International Association for World Englishes (IAWE) Conference, University of Limerick, Ireland, June 20-22, 2019.

While it would be not a little absurd to expect well-trained plurilingual international scholars who have acquired an expert competence in the normative form to employ anything else in their academic work,¹⁵¹ or in international conference presentations, very little attention seems to be paid by detractors of this form, either as native speakers or as expert users, to their own roles in its reproduction and dissemination.¹⁵² If we explore why this is so, the trail always seems to lead back to capital, both in the economic form which preoccupied Marx, and in the symbolic form which preoccupied Bourdieu.¹⁵³ Indeed, to understand the continued global dominance of this form in international contexts such as the one just described, it is evident that economic and symbolic capitals are closely intertwined, and have been for a long time (Fraser, 1995). International scholars are employees of universities, whose personal economic livelihoods [as waged workers] in addition to the [symbolic] success of their careers, and that of their universities, depend upon their teaching and supervision activity, the ‘winning’ of competitive research grants, their cumulative research outputs, and the [symbolic] growth in their international profiles. For international scholars writing for publication and presenting at academic conferences in English, success in the economic marketplace of academic waged labour also depends to a great extent on success in the linguistic marketplace of standard English (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1991). The predominance of standard English is in these circumstances determined, or to borrow Althusser’s phrase ‘overdetermined’ (1996 [1965]), by monetized and symbolic capital in a cumulative relation, as well as in dialectical combination with issues of race, gender, education and social class (Wallerstein, 2000 [1975]; Fraser, 1995; Block, 2014, 2018a; Tupas, 2019; Simpson & O’Regan, 2020).¹⁵⁴ This dominance magically persists despite the obvious transgressions of – and apparent resistances to – standard English which localized superdiverse translingual practices present (García & Li, 2014; Creese, Blackledge & Hu, 2018; Pennycook, 2010a, 2010b, 2017, 2020; Li, 2018b; Canagarajah, 2018; Sridhar & Sridhar, 2018; Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2019). Beliefs about how language *ought* to be used here win out over alternative translingual possibilities for how language *could* be used, and very often *is* used when the stakes are socially different and/or not so high (Mauranen, 2015). This is because capital presents itself, in Marx’s phraseology, as ‘the real foundation’ to which certain forms of language have historically attached themselves ‘as definite expressions of social consciousness’ (Marx, 1976 [1859]: 3). To put this another way, it is a question of indexical scale. As Blommaert recounts:

[S]cales need to be understood as ‘levels’ or ‘dimensions’ [...] at which particular forms of normativity, patterns of language use and expectations thereof are organized [...] The point of departure is really quite simple: indexicality, even though largely operating at the implicit level of linguistic/semiotic structuring, is not unstructured, but *ordered*. It is ordered in two ways, and these forms of indexical order account for ‘normativity’ in semiosis. The first kind of order is what Silverstein [...] called ‘indexical order’ the fact that indexical meanings occur in patterns offering perceptions of similarity and stability that can be perceived as ‘types’ of semiotic practice with predictable (presupposable/entailing) directions [...] This is where we meet another kind of order to indexicalities, one that operates on a higher plane of social structuring: an order in the general systems of meaningful semiosis valid in groups at any given time. This kind of ordering results in what I call

¹⁵¹ Some have, on the other hand, deliberately flouted these norms for illustrative purposes (see for example Parakrama, 2012).

¹⁵² Henry Widdowson’s tirade against ‘The custodians of standard English’ (Widdowson, 1994: 379) in his lecture on the ownership of English at the 27th Annual TESOL Convention is an archetype of this kind of performative contradiction.

¹⁵³ This is not to ignore the entirely reasonable use of such a repertoire in international English-medium contexts for reasons of personal familiarity, sociolinguistic convention, and considerations for one’s audience. Nor is it to suggest that international scholars ought not to use this form if using it is what they wish to do.

¹⁵⁴ All of which are themselves shot through with the conditions of capital.

orders of indexicality – a term obviously inspired by Foucault’s ‘order of discourse’. (Blommaert, 2010: 37-38)

The scale at which [economic] capital operates in relation to language gives standard language forms an enhanced and ‘misrecognized’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 652) social indexicality which in the absence of capital they would not otherwise possess, and so it would not matter so much whether these forms were employed or not (see also Chapter 1). It will be the perceived proximity to economic capital, and consequent upon this to social value, which will determine whether the normative form is employed, assuming that it is in the speaker’s repertoire and personal interest to be able to produce such a capital-centric form. This does not preclude the possibility that it might not be in their interest to do so at all, as social and economic value may also be placed on non-standard forms in everyday local business and trading contexts in international cities and elsewhere (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2015; Higgins, 2015; Pennycook, 2017, 2020; Creese, Blackledge & Hu, 2018), as well as in globally-popular forms of music culture, such as hip hop and rap (Alim, 2006; Pennycook, 2007; Domingo, 2014).

The ownership of English

The argument regarding capital and linguistic capital-centrism also puts into a somewhat different light scholarly preoccupations concerning the ‘ownership’ or better still ‘non-ownership’ of English, which have been routinely employed as a means of pointing up the moral injustice and seeming irrationalism of the normative hegemony, and in what amounts to the same thing, of the apparently self-evident ‘(in)appropriateness of native-speaker standard English’ (Jenkins, 2006: 171) as the pedagogic model for the learning of English in the world. The positions against the normative hegemony bring into coincidental alignment a diverse range of perspectives from linguistic imperialism, postcolonial studies, superdiverse translanguaging, World Englishes, and ELF. On the issue of the ownership or non-ownership of English, however, it has tended to be WE and ELF scholars who have specifically emphasized this concept (Kachru, 1985, 1992; Smith & Sridhar, 1992; Strevens, 1992; Widdowson, 1994, Seidlhofer & Jenkins, 2003; Jenkins, 2006, 2011; Saraceni, 2009; Sonntag, 2009; Tsuda, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2012; Bolton, 2013; Tupas & Rubdy, 2015; Sadeghpour, 2019; but see also for comparison Rampton, 1990; Norton, 1997; Phan, 2015; Li, 2016, 2018b; Mori & Sanuth, 2017; Canagarajah, 2018). The term at first sight appears to be a metaphor for what is taken to be the ‘false’ ideological presupposition that having or ‘possessing’ native-speaker competence in English confers unlimited authority to adjudicate over what may be counted as the acceptable forms which the language may take. As Jenkins puts it:

The difficulty for many native English speakers, both academics and non-academics, as far as the globalisation of English is concerned, seems to be that they still regard themselves in some sense as ‘owners’ and ‘custodians’ of the language. For many, thus, the internationalisation of English simply means the distribution of national British and/or North American English varieties around the globe. Such native English speakers have yet to appreciate Widdowson’s point that “[t]he very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it. To grant such custody is necessarily to arrest its development and so undermine its international status” (1994: 385). (Jenkins, 2011: 933)

Of note here is that it is not the concept of the property right itself which is disputed, but that due to the internationalization of English native speakers of that language may *no longer* legitimately claim such a right in relation to it. In Widdowson’s words, ‘It is not a possession which they lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. *Other people actually own it*’ (1994: 385; emphasis added). What this suggests then is that there was indeed an historical time – albeit ill-defined – prior to the internationalization of English when such a right could be legitimately claimed, but that this is no longer reasonable since so many

people in the world now have English in their repertoires and use it in ways which do not conform with native-speaker norms. For Widdowson, and it seems also for Jenkins and others, these users of English are now ‘owners’ too and are legitimately entitled to exercise their property rights over it. The very concept of the ‘ownership’ of language, rather than being refuted as it probably should be, is instead here reaffirmed and universalized (see discussion further below).

A further implication which follows is that native speakers of languages which are not as internationalized or as ‘hyper-central’ as English *do* retain this property right in a way that native speakers of English do not. Arguments of this kind regarding linguistic ownership or non-ownership are not for example applied to Farsi, Catalan or Kannada, such that speakers of these languages can allowably be presumed to ‘own’ them. Not so, it seems, with English. But to say that ‘English is my language’ is not automatically in the same semantic category as ‘Fido is my dog’, or ought not to be. Yet in the argument about the ownership of English, there appears to have been a levelling or ‘muddying’ of the semantic distinction between English as a property or *trait* of a speaker, in the sense of it being a part of their socialized nature [e.g. as a native speaker], and English as property in the legal sense of the ownership of objectified and alienable ‘things’ (Simpson & O’Regan, 2020). In this discussion it has tended to be the latter conception which has taken precedence over the former in order to make it possible to extend the right of linguistic property ownership to all speakers of English wherever they may be. In Widdowson’s words, ‘communities or secondary cultures which are defined by shared professional concerns *should be granted rights of ownership* and allowed to fashion the language to meet their needs’ (1994: 383; emphasis added).¹⁵⁵ That non-native speakers of English are unjustly being denied these rights is, for Widdowson at least, due to an unspecified group of native speakers representing the inner circle nations [i.e. presumably, governments, educational and cultural institutions, native-speaker educators, etc.] who have appointed themselves upholders of the normative form: ‘So when the custodians of standard English complain about the ungrammatical language of the populace, they are in effect indicating that the perpetrators are outsiders, nonmembers of the community’ (p. 381). This for Widdowson, and for others who have followed this position, is patently unjust, because unlike most languages ‘English is an international language’ (p. 385) and so is the rightful property of everyone (see also Rubdy, 2015: 52).

This position echoes what Nancy Fraser has referred to as a politics of recognition in liberal welfare capitalism, in which ‘claims [to recognition] often take the form of calling attention to, if not performatively creating, the putative specificity of some group, and then of affirming the value of that specificity’ (Fraser, 1995: 74; see also Block, 2018b). This is the type of specificity which scholars promoting the legitimacy of non-standard and non-native realizations of English have widely documented. With regard to performance, thanks largely to the data available concerning ELF, World Englishes and superdiverse translanguaging, there is abundant evidence of linguistic non-standardness and translingual hybridization in English(es) going on (*passim*). But performance also has a negating side, which is the regrettable lack of self-awareness of many scholars working in these fields of their own performative complicity in the reproduction and dominant distribution of the ‘rejected’ standard form. Yet, while many may well be aware of this, most remain unreflecting and continue in fetishistic fashion to (re)produce it anyway (Simpson & O’Regan, 2020). While it may be true that ‘standard English is not fixed by exo-normative fiat from outside: not fixed, therefore, by native speakers’ (Widdowson, 1994: 386), this begs the question as to what it is fixed by, which beyond the workings of unnamed and secretive ‘custodians’ is left mysteriously unaddressed in a lot of this kind of argumentation: ‘And yet there is no doubt that native speakers of English are deferred to in our profession’ (ibid). Given the lengths to which applied linguists like Widdowson, Jenkins, Seidlhofer and others have gone to act as exemplars of the misrecognized model, it seems remarkable that there should be any wonder in this. But

¹⁵⁵ We might also note here, granted these rights by whose authority?

even the recognition of this complicity does not really explain anything. The real issue is why the complicity exists at all. But also, more importantly, why despite such protestations, well-meaning as they may be, outside of applied linguistics nothing much really seems to change in the unequal global socioeconomic reality of English language production, use and exchange (Blommaert, 2010; Tupas, 2015; Rubdy, 2015; Block, 2018b).

It is easy to acknowledge, for example, that academic publishing in English has become a billion-dollar industry, as has the international competition between academics to win external funding. Many hours of an academic's time are dedicated to these twin activities: publications have to be written and peer reviewed, and lengthy applications for funding have to be composed and evaluated, often with little prospect of success. The widely unquestioned medium for writing these publications and grant proposals is standard English. It continues to be very difficult to get published or funded in international English-medium academia if one's English does not conform to the expectations of the global linguistic gatekeepers – e.g. journal reviewers, editors, grant evaluation panels etc. – who filter what does and does not get published and what does not and does not get funded. That is, for a journal reviewer or grant panel, it may be easier or more instinctive to discount something that does not conform to a normative grammar than to accept it. This is because of the overwhelming misrecognized expectation of conformity to standard norms (Bourdieu, 1977: 652) to which all international scholars regardless of their language backgrounds are subjected. But calling for recognition of the misrecognition has been shown to make no difference (Block, 2018b). Worse still, many of those calling for such recognition are in their work exemplary producers of the misrecognized form. This is the part that seems much less easy to acknowledge, because they too are located in their daily activity in long-established capital networks in which standard English is the capital-centric norm. So, in their 'silent compulsion' to capital (Marx 1976/1867: 899), from which there is no exit, they make an effort to redeem themselves by acting as champions in standard English of non-standard English forms. The perceived capital-centricity of the normative form is the principal reason why plurilingual transnationals in elite international networks [e.g. IMF, World Bank, WTO, OECD, G7, G20, EU, Council of Europe, the world's capital markets, diplomatic missions] in addition to other agents [e.g. the global ELT industry, local clientelist elites, national governments, ministries of education, NGOs, international academicians etc.] consistently produce and reproduce the misrecognized form.

There is also an unfortunate 'folding-back' which occurs; because when plurilingual non-native speakers of English in these networks do reproduce the misrecognized form, they reproduce it in what still looks to be a normative 'native-speaker' form, as almost any official document produced in English by the IMF, or by any number of international organizations or corporations, will attest.¹⁵⁶ Simultaneous with this is the reproduction of the US-dominated institutional structures and networks of the capitalist world-economy (see Chapters 4 and 5). The more these structures and networks are reproduced, the more the impression is given of a globalized standard that is tied to inner-circle norms, and the greater the understandable perplexity of many scholars that, 'although English has become a global language, native-speaking English varieties from North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand are still often regarded as the desired standards for international education' (Phan, 2015: 224). The non-native English-speaking plurilingual agents of globalized standard English – and the native-speaking supporters of their right to transgress – are in this way seemingly caught in an endless circularity in which the English they produce in international [as well as national] contexts of use appears grammatically indistinguishable from that of the inner-circle normative form.

¹⁵⁶ This is notwithstanding the burgeoning literature on for example Euro-Englishes and Asian-Englishes. However, for these seem to be almost entirely directed at features of speech (see Modiano, Seidlhofer & Jenkins, 2001; Forch, 2012; Crystal, 2017; Modiano, 2017; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Wee, Pakir & Lim, 2010).

Language commodification

This still leaves us with the concept of the ownership of language itself, and whether it is truly feasible to speak of ‘owning’ language [or languages], i.e. as a personal property that is alienable. Certainly, from what we have seen of ELF and WE approaches, there are those who appear to think it is, while also suggesting for English that the days of its native-speaker ‘ownership’ are past. From a rather different direction, much has been written in recent years about the commodification of language as this has occurred under the conditions of ‘late capitalism’, and often as part of this, about the commodification of English itself (Cameron, 2000, 2012; Heller 2003, 2010; Da Silva, McLaughlin & Richards, 2007; Rassool 2007; Alsagoff 2008; Singh & Han 2008; Tan & Rubdy, 2008; Tupas 2008; Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Park & Wee 2012; Flubacher & Del Percio, 2017; Del Percio, Flubacher & Duchêne, 2017; Muth & Del Percio, 2018; Codó, 2018). Duchêne & Heller (2012), for example, note that ‘during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, we are witnessing the widespread emergence of discursive elements that treat language and culture primarily in economic terms’ (p. 3). Park & Wee (2012) are more explicit, stating that, ‘When we speak of the commodification of language, we are speaking of the conditions under which language comes to be valued and sought for the economic profit it can bring through exchange in the market’ (p. 125). In a similar vein, Del Percio, Flubacher & Duchêne (2017) ‘define language as a resource that, under certain political-economic conditions, can be exchanged for other symbolic or material resources’ (p. 1); and Da Silva, McLaughlin & Richards (2007) have asserted that ‘language, as a commodity, is no longer an inherent quality of certain individuals or something that individuals own, but something that is separate and external to their personhood’ (p. 185).

Despite the evident continuities of capitalism as an exploitative world-system (see all previous chapters), the idea that we are in a new era, which some call ‘late capitalism’ or occasionally the ‘new economy’ (Del Percio & Duchêne 2012; Heller & Duchêne 2016; Heller, Pujolar & Duchêne 2014), is an understandable one. Since the 1980s, technological advances, particularly in areas such as global communications and information technology, have been significant, resulting in a massive intensification of information flows, as well a speeding up of the activities of the working day. This has occurred as individuals in their capacities as waged workers and as social beings have taken on ever greater amounts of information processing in their daily working lives and as part of their socially-networked subjectivities (Fuchs, 2014, 2015). This has been coupled with a marked ideological shift in perspective concerning the economic management of capitalism. This had its beginnings in the shift to the greater financialization of the world-economy in the late 1960s, and the sharp move away in the 1970s from a redistributive Keynesian model of capital accumulation to the savagely rapine neoliberal model of ‘dispossessive’ accumulation to which we are subject today (Harvey, 2004, 2010; Peck, 2010; Panitch & Gindin, 2012; Stedman Jones, 2012; Mirowski, 2014; see also Chapters 1, 4, 5 and 6).

The intellectual shift towards a largely fantastical pre-1930s model of economic liberalism¹⁵⁷ brought with it changes in working practices alongside changes in economic policy, not only within the advanced capitalist economies of the core, but also within the world-economy as a whole as public assets were aggressively privatized, regulatory controls on foreign capital investments pared back, and secure employment increasingly precaritized. A particular focus of many researchers of language commodification has been the concomitant global expansion in service industries within this neoliberal frame, in which English is widely employed by ‘non-native’ plurilingual workers in sectors such as tourism, aviation, phone sex, and banking. Amongst these developments, the international call centre is

¹⁵⁷ As we have seen, Keynesianism in its various formulations maintained its hegemony in Britain and the US until the late 1970s, when liberalism, now in the guise of neoliberalism, reasserted itself. What is less well-known, is that the liberalism that was being promoted by Hayek, Friedman and others was not really a rejuvenation, or even a renewal, of liberalism in the classical mould of Smith or Ricardo. This was a different kind of liberalism altogether. See Mirowski (2014) for a useful summary and critique.

often referenced as an archetype of the neoliberal business model of the new economy, and of the way that language itself has been commodified (Graddol, 2006; Duchêne, 2009; Rahman, 2009; Heller, 2010, Pujolar, 2018). Much of the initial impetus for this understanding can be traced to the neoliberal conception of human capital theory (Becker, 1993 [1964]) and the emphasis this places on the acquisition of competitive skills in an economic marketplace.¹⁵⁸ This was to become the inspiration for Foucault's account of the neoliberal *homo-economicus*, who is 'an entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings' (Foucault, 2008 [1979]: 226). In an influential critique by Urciuoli (2008), she refers to this notion as the 'worker-self-as-skills-bundle'. She explains that in this notion, 'not only is the worker's labor power a commodity but the worker's very person is also defined by the summation of commodifiable bits' (p. 211). From her survey of Internet sites in which skills-related services were being marketed, Urciuoli noticed the skill of English, amongst several others, as being one of those commodifiable bits. This then, appears to be language being commodified under 'a skills-discourse enregisterment' (ibid: 215), and 'acting like' or 'becoming' a commodity in the discursive sense that many researchers in linguistic anthropology and in applied linguistics have indicated. We might also suggest a continuity with Marx due to the 'tendency [of capitalism] to transform all possible production into commodity production' (Marx, (1978 [1884]: 190). But this is in fact a false trail because the exchangeable commodity in Marx only has value, and therefore only is a commodity, in that it is the product of the capacity, or 'power', of the worker to labour (Nicolaus, 1973: 46-47; see also the discussion in Chapter 1). It is the labour time embodied in the commodity *in exchange* which gives the commodity its value: 'As exchange values, all commodities are merely definite quantities of *congealed labour time*' (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 130). To bring this distinction into sharper relief, you may purchase a chair, the separate parts of which have over a period of time been shaped from blocks of raw lumber by a worker in a carpentry works. These pieces of wood are then laboured upon by that worker for a further period of time in order that they may be fashioned into a chair. The labour time expended on the chair, averaged out and unitized for like chairs, is the real value of the chair. Marx refers to this averaging out of time as 'socially necessary labour-time' (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 94, 129).¹⁵⁹

Socially necessary labour-time is the labour-time required to produce any use value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity prevalent in that society [...] What exclusively determines the magnitude of the value of any article is therefore the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour time socially necessary for its production. (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 129).

The chair is a commodity in Marx's terms since the owner of the carpentry works has entered into a relationship with the worker that can be captured by the M-C-M¹ capital circuit: money (M) has been advanced [to the worker in wages] for the production of a commodity (C) which is then sold on at an increment (M¹) which the owner of the carpentry works collects (see Chapter 1). This is made possible because the wages paid to the worker are less than the real value of the worker's time, which is the price at which the chair is sold. If we apply the same logic to the call centre worker's production of English, we can see that it is not the worker's English which has been bought – although this is clearly a relevant concern for both the caller and the employer – but the worker's labour time as based upon an average

¹⁵⁸ Although Becker is certainly no socialist, his notion of human capital in relation to human beings is not quite as reductively neoliberal as is often suggested (see Gazzola, Grin & Vaillancourt, 2020: 136). It is also evident, however, that what Becker calls human capital would not qualify as capital in Marx's terms.

¹⁵⁹ The notion of there being an average 'socially necessary' period of time which can be unitized is for Marx crucial for determining the value of labour. Otherwise inefficient workers would be paid more than efficient ones.

estimation of call duration which has been more or less arbitrarily determined by the call centre owner [but minimally at a rate that will allow workers to supply themselves with the necessities they need to reproduce themselves, such as food, clothing and shelter]. This is the ‘socially necessary labour-time’ which the call centre owner expects it to take *on average* for the call worker to deal with client calls, which is then unitized and charged to the caller by the minute, and for which the call centre worker receives a lesser part of that unitized value in wages. It is therefore the worker’s labour during the call, and in effect the call itself, which is the commodity, not the worker’s English, although this is indeed an aspect of the call centre worker’s labour-capacity. But it is not alienable. If it really were possible to make language into a commodity in Marx’s sense, i.e. make it alienable, then it would be possible to purchase, say from a language teacher or a call center worker, a certain quantity of language a word or a sentence at a time, and to come into ‘ownership’ of that language so as to be able to ‘take it away’ with us. But it is evidently not the language that is being purchased in this manner, but the teacher’s or the call centre worker’s *capacity to labour*. That is to say, it is the lesson or the call which is being purchased and accumulated; these are the commodities, not the language itself.

Yet, while it is the case that the language commodity is often placed in a discursive frame so that it seems like a commodity ‘that can be exchanged in the market’ (Park & Wee, 2012: 124). This kind of discursive or metaphorical framing opacifies what it is that is actually being purchased while also conflating quite different conceptions of what a commodity is, or can be. Marx, also recognised this:

Things which in and for themselves are not commodities, things such as conscience, honour etc., can be offered for sale by their holders, and thus acquire the form of commodities through their price. Hence a thing can, formally speaking, have a price without having a value. The expression of price is in this case imaginary. (Marx 1976 [1867]: 197)

In these examples, honour and conscience can *appear* to be commodities, but contain no ‘real’ value as no labour time has been expended in order to produce them (Holborow, 2015; Gray, 2016; Block, 2014, 2018; Simpson & O’Regan, 2018). The price that is put on these human traits is ‘imaginary’ as Marx suggests, because their price – whatever that may be – cannot be based on a calculation of the socially necessary labour-time embodied within them. Rather, their price is more a calculus of human desire (Kelly-Holmes, 2005; Piller & Takahashi, 2006; Blommaert 2009; Park & Wee, 2012; Chowdhury & Phan, 2014; Cavanaugh & Shankar, 2014), than of any intrinsic commodity identity or ‘value’ which they possess. As Will Simpson and I have argued, language [and languages] also fall into this category, so that while they have acquired ‘the form of commodities’, in the absence of an embodied labour relation, they are not commodities or products in any ‘real’ or economically measurable sense (Simpson & O’Regan, 2018; see also McGill, 2013; Grin, 2014, for similar arguments). To position language as a commodity as many have done (Gal, 1989; Irvine, 1989; Heller, Pujolar & Duchêne, 2014; Heller & Duchêne, 2016; Del Percio, Flubacher & Duchêne, 2016) may be understood as a type of discursive framing, which while illuminating in its own way of certain aspects of ‘the material (*sic*) conditions of language and social life’ (Muth & Del Percio, 2018: 129) can also be rather misleading, because it does not tell us enough about how, in respect of language, relations of exploitation under the material conditions of the capitalist production and consumption of commodities actually proceed, and what the ‘real’ mechanisms are which lie beneath them. It is as Wittgenstein says, to ‘treat only of the network, and not what the network describes’ (cited in Bhaskar, 2008 [1975]: 36).

From this perspective, the idea of one’s language as an alienable product which is separate from oneself is problematic, because language is inalienable. Hence, rather than owning language and selling it as we will, we have instead created for ourselves a substitute or ‘stand-in’ for the language skills that we have, and which it is possible to alienate away. Before we can avail ourselves of this stand-in, we first need

to make the conception of language itself alienable (Simpson & O'Regan, 2020). This alienable conception consists in language as an idealized construct or abstract entity which can be *learned*. That is to say, one can move from having no knowledge of it, to having some, or even considerable knowledge of it. It is this idea, this idealization, that makes the very idea of learning 'a language' possible. Marx would probably say that it was a fetishized form, since it belongs to the modernist notion discussed earlier of language imagined as a unified and enclosed system of abstract code, which most applied linguists would agree does not really exist (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010; Dufva, Suni, Aro & Salo, 2011; Park & Wee, 2012; García & Li, 2014; Blommaert, 2016; Holliday & MacDonald, 2018; Canagarajah, 2018). It is therefore a fetish conception. A second fetish conception, is that the only means of marketing one's skill in this area is by a second alienation. That is, by gaining or having English language accreditation – e.g. IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC etc. – or documented ethno-legal status [e.g. as an acknowledged native speaker] – in order to 'verify' that you have this skill. In this way, the appearance of the credential literally *becomes* one's language skill, because others' acknowledgement of the alienable credential *stands in for* the inalienable skill (Simpson & O'Regan, 2020). Here, knowledge of one's apparent credential is mistaken, i.e. fetishized, for the thing which it is about. Bhaskar (2008 [1975]), from the direction of critical realism, refers to this as the epistemic fallacy: 'that statements about being can be reduced to or analysed in terms of statements about knowledge: i.e. that ontological questions can always be transposed into epistemological terms' (p. 36) (see also Fairclough, 2003; 2010; Pennycook, 2007). This kind of ontological reductionism seems misdirected if our interest is to understand the inner workings of the commodity form – as a product of labour [e.g. as lessons, materials, scholarly works, call slots, tutorials, cabin service, etc.] – in relation to how language is utilized in relation to that; but on a quotidian basis it allows us to make our language skills alienable and to an extent 'saleable' in a linguistic market. As Will Simpson and I have noted elsewhere:

Whether or not one accepts such credentialised tokens of language as unproblematically representative of what language really is, or should be, the ownership and exchange of such tokens on the labour market works in practice as if it really does, independent of one's beliefs about language, education or the market. (Simpson & O'Regan, 2020)

But as with the language of the call centre, it is not language itself which is exchanged, but rather the promissory note, or credential [e.g. language qualification, passport, birth certificate, curriculum vitae etc.] which stands in for it. Even then, this is still not a commodity exchange, as nothing has been produced: this is the linguistic market of Bourdieu, not the economic market of Marx. In this linguistic market an imaginary price is placed on the credential by means of the wage which it – along with other claimed skills which have been presented by the putative language worker – enables access to. We might say that the credential as an apparent certification of competence assists the bearer, along with their other 'skills', to pass to a particular threshold wage bar, without which they would not be employed at all. Commodity exchange by means of the exploitation of the worker's labour capacity [of which their linguistic capacities or 'skills' are a composite part] has yet properly to begin (Simpson & O'Regan, 2020). Moreover, once it does begin, the control of workers over the structural conditions of their exploitation is in fact negligible, and so focusing on what service workers do with their language, or for example widening that to 'the ways individuals and actors express control over their own communicative conduct as well as over the languages, behaviors and bodies of others' (Muth & Del Percio, 2018: 129) does not seem to lead to much more than the ethnographic description of micro-practices or 'micro-physical techniques' (Del Percio, 2018: 241), albeit a 'thick' one. This in turn raises the issue of resistance and how in the interests of social change this may be effected.

Resistance and superdiverse translanguaging

Advocates of superdiverse translanguaging – as represented by the fields of translanguaging, superdiversity, translanguaging practice, metrolingualism, assemblage etc., and in which for the purposes of this discussion I am also including World Englishes and ELF¹⁶⁰ – have often in a similar manner suggested that it is the act of normative transgression which, in addition to being a micro-physical act of resistance itself, is the key to wider systemic resistance and change. Canagarajah & Dovchin (2018), for example, in discussing the politics of translanguaging, refer to ‘the ordinariness of everyday resistance. That is, when people engage in linguistic resistance in everyday life’ (p. 128). This becomes the basis for the development of ‘communicative practices for radical change’ (p. 142). This also echoes the position of García & Li (2014), for whom ‘Translanguaging [...] refers to languaging actions that enact a political process of social and subjectivity transformation which resist the asymmetries of power that language and other meaning-making codes, associated with one or another nationalist ideology, produce’ (p. 43). Pennycook from a translanguaging and ‘assemblages’ perspective (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) offers a more nuanced conception of resistance in the notion of *distributed language* which ‘challenges the idea of languages as internalised systems or individual competence, and argues instead for an understanding of language as embodied, embedded and distributed across people, places and time’ (Pennycook, 2017: 276; see also Pennycook, 2020). This also chimes with Canagarajah’s emphasis on the meaning of trans as suggesting ‘more mobile, expansive, situated, and holistic practices’ (Canagarajah, 2018: 32). Like Pennycook, Canagarajah also moves to a conception of language and of semiotics which is based upon assemblages, and upon translanguaging practice as a spatial repertoire; one which goes ‘beyond abstract, homogenous, and closed structures’ (p. 33) to encompass ‘sign forms beyond verbal resources’ (p. 34). This may sound like multimodality (Kress, 2010), but Canagarajah rejects this connection.

The notion of assemblage helps to consider how diverse semiotic resources play a collaborative role as a spatial repertoire [...] when language is not predefined as the sole, superior, or separate medium of consideration. Assemblage corrects the orientation to non-verbal resources in scholars addressing ‘multimodality’. From the perspective of assemblage, semiotic resources are not organized into separate modes. To think so is to fall into structuralist thinking. According to assemblage, all modalities, including language, work together and shape each other in communication. (Canagarajah, 2018: 39)

It is worth dwelling in a little more detail upon Canagarajah’s argument, since it is illustrative of a widespread anti-structuralism in connected applied language fields, particularly towards language understood as an enclosed unitary structure, or entity. It is with Saussurean structuralism which Canagarajah and others working within a poststructuralist frame primarily take issue, because in Canagarajah’s words, ‘These constructs territorialized and essentialized language, providing ownership to certain groups of speakers and/or their lands’ (ibid: 32). The turn to poststructuralism which is evident in trans accounts such as Canagarajah’s, is also to be found in approaches which come under the banners of superdiversity, metrolingualism and language commodification (cf. Blommaert 2016; Pennycook, 2010a, 2010b; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2015; Del Percio, Flubacher & Duchêne, 2017). Translanguaging, World Englishes and ELF approaches, for their part, seem much less theoretically developed in this sense, but still share with these other approaches a similar anti-structuralism in regard to the boundedness of language (cf. García & Li, 2014; Smith, 2016; Sridhar & Sridhar, 2018; Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011; Jenkins, 2017). Canagarajah’s purpose is to ‘articulate how a poststructuralist paradigm might help us theorize and practice translanguaging according to a spatial orientation that embeds communication in

¹⁶⁰ Both of these fields are committed to a view of English and variations thereof which like the other perspectives mentioned is hybridized, pluricentric and translanguaging (*passim*).

space and time, considering all resources as working together as an assemblage in shaping meaning' (Canagarajah, 2018: 31). His eschewal of language as 'a self-defining and enclosed structure' allows him to expand upon his theme of spatial repertoires and the need to give an accounting of semiosis in the round, or of what Silverstein (1985: 220) terms the 'total linguistic fact' (cited in Canagarajah, 2018: 34). To illustrate this, Canagarajah recruited a group of research participants, all of whom were 'international Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) scholars in a Midwestern American university' (ibid: 34). They comprised one South Korean participant, one Turkish participant, and twenty-four Chinese participants. There were also four one-hour video recordings of two Chinese math teaching assistants to analyze. The interactions between the STEM scholars were, Canagarajah informs us, studied through video observation, discourse-based interviews, photographic documentation and textual analysis of multiple drafts of published articles and other written genres. From analyzing his data closely, Canagarajah comes to some noteworthy conclusions.

He notices, for example, that many mentioned that 'they were fluent in their academic and professional communication' but struggled with more casual encounters. The South Korean scholar in his study, Jihun, is one who has this issue, but Canagarajah notes that 'his writing for disciplinary purposes was very advanced,' and his initial drafts were also 'grammatically well formed' (p. 35). Canagarajah identifies this capacity to use particular words and grammars for specific activities as 'truncated multilingualism' (Blommaert, 2010: 23) since it is an expertise that is confined to select language activities while being absent or less well developed for others.

Jihun mentioned that his professional activity involved shuttling between Korean and English constantly. He mentally planned his research articles in Korean and wrote them in English. He discussed some English academic publications and experimental findings with a Korean colleague in Korea, and wrote about them in English. Even if the final draft of Jihun's published article is in 'standard written English', he has shuttled between Korean and English in various interactions and stages of the writing process in shaping this final product. (Canagarajah, 2018: 36)

For Canagarajah, what this suggests is that 'labeled language structures do not necessarily constrain one's situated professional activity' (ibid). Instead, they are used in combination in order to produce the final product. This is important for Canagarajah, and is a trait which other participants in his study also share; for example, by writing initial drafts of their academic papers in Chinese before translating them into English. In addition, other participants utilized a mix of languages for notetaking, 'though the source was in English' (ibid). This leads Canagarajah to state that, 'language works with an assemblage of semiotic resources, artifacts, and environmental affordances in specific settings to facilitate communicative success' (ibid). This is what he and others, such as Pennycook & Otsuji (2015: 83), mean by 'spatial repertoires'. But Canagarajah extends this meaning to include 'all possible semiotized resources [...] assembled *in situ*, and in collaboration with others' (p. 37). Despite this, Canagarajah does not deny the existence of labeled languages such as Korean and English: 'At a limited scale of consideration, certain words index certain places and communities, and develop identities as distinctly labeled or territorialized languages' (p. 37). But, for Canagarajah, such constraints tend to be overcome *in practice* as translingual scholars carry out their daily activities, and it is this that constitutes their resistance.

The translingual practice of the international scholars suggests that they appreciate the value of language diversity and *subtly act against dominant policies and discourses*. Even though the lack of diverse languages in the publications in high stakes contexts suggests international scholars satisfying dominant norms, we must not forget that the earlier drafts, notes, and revision interactions involve translingual resources, suggesting their value in generating the finished products. Though such translingual practices occur in safe and protected sites, away from surveillance or high stakes

interactions, *we must not underestimate their transformative potential to diversifying the workplace or pluralizing high stake activities in the long term.* (Canagarajah, 2018: 48; emphasis added)

Canagarajah acknowledges that in the final analysis there is still a notable absence of translanguaging in the finished products for publication. These are, in his words, ‘high stakes contexts’ where international scholars are ‘satisfying dominant norms’. Resistance is instead embodied in the employment of translanguaging resources in the *process* of generating the finished products, and here lies ‘their transformative potential to diversifying the workplace or pluralizing high stake activities in the long term’ (p. 48). Canagarajah seems to concede that in spite of the translanguaging activities in which international scholars engage, they are still compelled to produce finished products [i.e. academic papers as exchangeable commodities] which conform to dominant norms in relation to such matters as the use of standard English and the discourse expectations of the academic genre that they are working in (Heng Hartse & Kubota, 2014). Transformation is also configured as no more than a potential, albeit one which should not be underestimated, and which occurs through the more or less contingent activity of everyday translanguaging, and what is more, ‘in safe and protected sites, away from surveillance or high stakes interactions’ (Canagarajah, 2018: 48).

Unfortunately, in framing his argument this way, Canagarajah not only succeeds in making translanguaging practice appear politically etiolated – since it is primarily concerned with calls to recognition rather than with acts of redistribution (Fraser, 1995; Harvey, 2014; Block, 2018b) – but also *dependent upon* the fact of dominant norms, which in translanguaging and related fields are simultaneously eschewed. These norms, in a philosophical sense, constitute the *implicit ontology* for translanguaging practice (Bhaskar, 2008 [1975]: 40), since the ‘trans’ nature of translanguaging in academic written scholarship and other language practices implicitly relies upon the notion of an ‘other’ that must be transgressed, but which for the purpose of translanguaging and its interests is marginalized and suppressed. Canagarajah himself explicitly points to this other as being ‘territorialized and essentialized language’ (p. 32) and elsewhere as ‘labeled or territorialized languages’ (p. 36). This other that must be transgressed is the source of his anti-structuralism. In this sense, the perspective of translanguaging practice, or of superdiverse translanguaging, seemingly repeats the error of becoming too much entangled in the network at the expense of dealing with the overarching ‘structure’ which is being transgressed, and which in spite of this activity retains its dominance (Block 2013; Heng Hartse & Kubota, 2014). Canagarajah lays the explanation for this dominance mainly at the door of language ideologies, ‘which subtly enter through the unproblematicized “context”’ (op cit: 32) that is assumed by enclosed and supposedly ‘value free’ language structures.

Elsewhere, Canagarajah & Dovchin (2019) present a more expansive view of these issues in their study of the translanguaging practices of teenage social media users in Mongolia and Japan, referred to earlier, in which they also address the accusation of complicity in the inculcation of individualist neoliberal subjectivities which has been levelled at some approaches to superdiverse translanguaging (Flores, 2013; O’Regan, 2014; Kubota, 2015, 2016; see also Blommaert, 2016). They note that their young participants’ transgressive practices, like those of Canagarajah’s translanguaging international scholars in the US, were ‘hidden forms of resistance’ and that they left dominant language forms in ‘the public and visible social spaces unchallenged’ (Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2019: 142). Their response is to call for critical awareness among non-scholars of ‘the transgressive nature of their practices’ that they might ‘critically analyse dominant language ideologies, and develop their communicative practices for radical change’ (Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2019: 142). While there is no doubt that language ideologies play a contributory role in the dominance of normative forms (Gal & Irvine, 1995; Phillipson, 2008; Georgiou, 2017), this is to ignore political economy and the structural link to capital (Block, 2017a; 2018b; O’Regan, 2021). Instead, approaches in superdiverse translanguaging, and in language commodification too, have thrown themselves upon a preoccupation with individuated micro-resistances and the politics of recognition

without dealing with ‘the underlying generative framework’ (Fraser, 2008: 28) or ‘the generative complexes at work’ (Bhaskar, 2008 [1975]: 48) which are responsible for the (re)production of particular kinds of social activity. In the political economy of global English and the dominance of the normative form, these are the generative complexes of capital itself, principally in economic capital’s circulating form [M-C-M¹; M-M¹], and which has served as a scaffold for the historiographical account of global English structuration in this book [i.e. as M^E-C^E-M^{1E}, M^E-M^{1E}].¹⁶¹

Phonocentrism in superdiverse translanguaging

Approaches in superdiverse translanguaging, in which in addition to World Englishes and ELF, I will now for ease of reference also include studies of language commodification, make a persuasive case for closer attention to be given to the radical indeterminism and linguistic pluralism of human communication and individualist agency in the dynamic hum of lived space and time (Jacquemet, 2005; Pennycook, 2010a, 2010b, 2017, 2020; McLellan, 2010; Heller & Duchêne, 2012; Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Arnaut & Spotti, 2014; Schneider, 2014; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2015; Li, 2018; Canagarajah, 2018; Creese et al, 2018; Sridhar & Sridhar, 2018; Kramsch, 2018). In the words of Blommaert, ‘We see thus *registers* in actions, not Languages [...] and such registers operate chronotopically, in the sense we see them being put to use in highly specific timespace configurations, with specific identity-and-meaning effects in each specific chronotope’ (2016: 7). In such a perspective emphasis is placed upon the *dehiscing* of ‘language-as-entity’: the scattering [and shattering] of the discrete linguistic code, and the development of ‘mobile, expansive, situated and holistic practices’ (Canagarajah, 2018: 32; parenthesis added), in which ‘the vast spillage of things’ [...] are given equal weight to other actors and become “part of hybrid assemblages: concretions, settings and flows” (Thrift, 2007, p. 9)’ (Pennycook, 2017: 277). In the field of World Englishes, and from the direction of Schneider’s influential dynamic model (Schneider, 2003, 2007, 2014), much attention is likewise given to ‘innovative uses and sociolinguistic settings in which English is involved in expressions of cultural and linguistic hybridity (and contact)’ (ibid, 2014: 24). In the sister field of ELF, the orientation is currently to ‘transcultural communication among multilingual English speakers, who [...] make use of their full linguistic repertoires as appropriate in the context of any specific interaction’ (Jenkins, 2017: 7). And we find something not dissimilar from the language commodification perspective, where the focus is not so much the kinds of linguistic and semiotic practices which are engaged in and ‘meshed’, although these are also an important consideration, as that the contexts which are studied are very often distinguished – as in these other approaches – by the fact that they involve actors and agents who are involved in ‘practices’ involving or implying *speech*.

For example, in the words of Heller, ‘The commodification of language confronts monolingualism with multilingualism, standardization with variability, and prestige with authenticity in a market where linguistic resources have gained salience and value’ (2010: 107). That is to say, they have gained salience and value as ‘saleable’ caches of *spoken language*, e.g. in call centres, care-giving, tour-guiding, language teaching, domestic service and performance art, which are amongst the examples which Heller gives (ibid). Similarly, for Heller & Duchêne, in language commodification the terms ‘pride’ and ‘profit’ are the structuring mechanisms ‘used to justify the importance of linguistic varieties and to convince people to *speak them*, learn them, support them, or *pay to hear them spoken*’ (2012: 4; emphasis added). The orientation to speech is also marked in what is referred to as ‘policing for commodification’. In a recent special issue with that title, Muth & Del Percio explain that the aim is to examine ‘the regulatory processes that are at work when *languages and speakers are*

¹⁶¹ See also the historical periodization of ELT in Howatt & Smith (2014).

recast as and turned into commodities’ (2018: 130; emphasis added). Alongside, or as part of this, they identify such processes as largely existing ‘within an economic logic of investing into *speakers whose communicative resources represent an added value*’ (ibid: 132; emphasis added). Similarly, Park & Wee draw attention to how in the past language was considered to be entwined with ‘one’s social identity and therefore not something subject to exchange’ (2012: 125). Again, we see here the implication of language as performance – as Saussurean *parole*. Commodification changes this relationship so as to make language alienable from the person and ‘an economic resource to be cultivated for material profit’ (ibid). We have already seen how this apparent alienableness is in reality a sleight of hand: rather than language being alienated away, it is something else which stands in for language that is alienated away, albeit at a fictitious price (see above). The emphasis which is placed on language and its apparent alienableness, in addition to the focus on how language is performed – e.g. in call centres, interviews with migrant job seekers, and television news programmes – seems undoubtedly a consequence of the framing of language commodification in terms of symbolic capital and the linguistic market of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1986, 1991), for whom the proper object of a sociology of language, as for Saussure, is an unapologetic *phonocentrism* and privileging of speech.

[A] sociological critique subjects the concepts of linguistics to a threefold displacement. In place of *grammaticalness* it puts the notion of *acceptability*, or, to put it another way, in place of “the” language (*langue*), the notion of the *legitimate* language. In place of relations of communication (or symbolic interaction) it puts *relations of symbolic power*, and so replaces the question of the *meaning* of speech with the question of the *value* and *power* of speech. Lastly, in place of specifically linguistic competence, it puts *symbolic capital*, which is inseparable from the speaker’s position in the social structure. (Bourdieu, 1977: 646)

The language commodification literature consequently follows Bourdieu in being concerned principally with *spokenness*, and with the practices, policies and indexicalities around spokenness (Sonntag, 2009; Heller & Duchêne, 2012, 2016; Boutet, 2012; Davuluy, 2012; Lorente, 2012; Park & Wee, 2012; Del Percio, Flubacher & Duchêne, 2017, Schedel, 2018; Van Hoof, 2018; Del Percio, 2018; Pujolar, 2018). In the words of Heller & Duchêne, for example, ‘We draw on Bourdieu (1982) to argue that language can be understood as a social practice that consists of circulating communicative resources’ (2016: 139).¹⁶² In this and related perspectives, the position is taken that ‘language in late capitalism is being transformed’ (Cavanaugh, 2018: 265), and that it is being transformed primarily through the discursive valorization of language as speech. Here, in the realm of spokenness and linguistic phonocentrism, ‘the bounded system cedes ground to the idea of language as a set of circulating, complex communicative resources’ (Heller & Duchene, 2012: 4). Where exceptions exist, and they do exist, they often move in the orbit of the documenting of artefacts in the linguistic landscape, such as iconic landmarks, literary heritage sites, and bilingual signage (Del Percio & Duchêne, 2012; Pujolar & Jones, 2012; Brennan, 2018) but often also in combination with a concern for how policies and practices concerning language as speech are articulated with them.

The phonocentrism of the language commodification perspective, which it shares with superdiverse translanguaging [in which I am still retaining World Englishes and ELF],¹⁶³ recalls

¹⁶² But unlike Bourdieu, they tend to neglect structure (see Block, 2013).

¹⁶³ On linguistic phonocentrism in ELF, see Sowden (2012): ‘[I]t only really takes account of the spoken language; when formal writing is involved, it has little to offer’ (p. 95).

Derrida's critique of western philosophy, or 'metaphysics', and its historical privileging of speech over writing (Derrida, 1976). According to Derrida, writing has been denigrated in the long history of western philosophy because it merely stands in for speech, which since Aristotle has been taken to be the site of essence, oneness and truth. Believing in the primacy of the spoken sign, J J Rousseau for example declared that, 'writing is nothing but the representation of speech' (cited in Derrida, 1976: 27). Saussure's structuralist method, and that of 'all semiological structuralism' (Spivak, 1976: lxxviii), including that of Husserl, Jakobson, Lacan and Lévi-Strauss, is likewise marked by a preoccupation with speech, which is underpinned by Saussure's insistence that in linguistics, 'The linguistic object is not defined by the combination of the written word and the spoken word: the spoken form alone constitutes the object' (cited in Derrida, 1976: 31). Saussure's sign is phonic not graphic, because writing is artifice, whereas speech is natural, and that is why it is necessary to exclude writing from linguistic consideration: 'First, the graphic form [*image*] of words strikes us as being something permanent and stable, better suited than sound to constitute the unity of language throughout time. Though it creates a purely fictitious unity, the superficial bond of writing is much easier to grasp than the natural bond, the only true bond, the bond of sound' (Saussure, cited in Derrida, 1976: 35). That this should matter so much is derived from the philosophical assumption that 'the voice [...] has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity to the mind' (ibid: 11), and is somehow also closer to human essence and the modernist desire for 'a "central" presence at beginning and end' (Spivak, 1976: lxxviii):

The notion of the sign always implies within itself the distinction between signifier and signified, even if, as Saussure argues, they are distinguished simply as the two faces of one and the same leaf. This notion remains therefore within the heritage of that logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning. (Derrida, 1976: 12-13)

This inclination towards speech as a *metaphysics of presence* [i.e. a yearning for a centre, completion, oneness, pure being]¹⁶⁴ has been mapped to the phenomenology of Husserl (Derrida, 1973), and, as we have seen, continues all the way through to the sociology of language of Bourdieu, which has in turn been so influential upon anthropological approaches to 'late modern' language practices (*passim*). The structuralist spillage of phonocentrism into areas such as language commodification, superdiversity, translingual practice, and trans-spatial assemblages seems somewhat out of joint given the often overt anti-structuralism of these approaches. Yet it is also present in translanguaging, World Englishes and ELF perspectives, which are less known for taking up explicit socio-theoretical stances (O'Regan, 2014; Li, 2018a), but which also place a similar emphasis on the dynamic enmeshment of diverse spoken linguistic practices especially when individuals engage in

¹⁶⁴ 'Why is the phoneme the most "ideal" of signs? Where does this complicity between sound and ideality, or rather, between voice and ideality come from? [...] When I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that I hear myself [je m'entende] *at the same time* that I speak. The signifier animated by my breath and by the meaning intention [...] is in absolute proximity to me' (Derrida, 1973: 77). Incidentally, Canagarajah (2018), while criticizing applied linguistics for focusing on language as its unit of analysis, invokes the metaphysics of presence as being about the 'prioritizing the [linguistic] influences that are locally visible [...] in a monolithic and passive notion of "context"' (p. 46). This is not precisely what Derrida means by a metaphysics of presence. It is not so much the foregrounding of language *per se* that is at issue [i.e. to the exclusion of other spatio-semiotic elements as Canagarajah suggests], but the conception and *sentiment* that it is voice which is closest in proximity to mind, that being can be read in terms of knowledge about being, and that signs can be fully present to themselves. It is perhaps the sentiment of human immediacy and essence which attaches itself to phonocentrism that comes closest to capturing the dilemma of linguistic anthropology and applied linguistics in relation to the fetishism of speech.

what appear to be acts of transgression and resistance against the implicit ontology of normative forms (Schneider, 2014; Canagarajah, 2018).

In this respect, the privileging of speech over writing in western philosophy is shared with the above-mentioned approaches so that the innate phonocentrism which structuralism implies is somehow secreted within them, and is revealed by the priority which is given to spoken utterances and exchanges as representing the more authentic voice of multilinguals by being closest to their innermost ‘real-time’ feelings and dispositions (Heller, 2010; Kelly-Holmes, 2016). That these individualist voices are also trampled upon and coerced into ‘finessed’ formulations in call centres, academic presentations, job-seeker interviews and language classrooms, often by processes of power and exploitation, seems only to intensify the drive to phonocentrism as the principal means of identifying in the acts of the speakers themselves a radical politics of resistance to such domination, while also extending ‘the commodification of language in ways that make it available for work it has not had to do before’ (Heller & Duchêne, 2016: 140). While it is good that linguists and anthropologists wish to find paths to resistance in speech, it is with writing that the hegemony of English in the world rests. Speech plays its part as well, but very often – contrary to the dynamic emphasis in superdiverse translanguaging – as both a reflection and a reinforcement of an idealized normative written form, so adding to this form’s seeming permanence and stability, and making it appear ‘better suited than sound to constitute the unity of language throughout time’ (Saussure, cited in Derrida, 1976: 38; parenthesis added). In opposition to Rousseau, it seems that in the present era it is not so much that writing is the representation of speech, but rather the reverse, it is speech that is the representation of writing. This is in the sense that in global English the speech of capital is that of the normative written form, and it is this form which dominates the world-system in all its structural facets.

The normative form as a social relation of capital and capitalism

To find examples is not difficult. Multilingual users of this kind of English are common in international corporate conglomerates, transnational governance institutions, global banking, the transnational university sector, and the higher echelons of international diplomacy. It is these persons and groups of persons who are very often responsible for producing the greater part of the English-medium documentary literature of their organizations and fields, and who are also to be found as these organizations’ public spokespersons, speechwriters, professors and CEOs. At bottom, a ‘native-like’ competence in written English is a pre-requisite, very often honed by means of a suitable linguistic apprenticeship in a postgraduate programme of study in the English medium, and as a desirable addition, work experience in relevant institutional contexts where the use of written and spoken standard English is the norm. In the circumstance of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic it was strikingly apparent just how much of the global information feed in English was delivered in the normative form, by high-ranking European Central Bank officials such as Christine La Garde,¹⁶⁵ who is French, and by senior global health experts such as Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Ethiopian Director of the World Health Organization (WHO). That this may be a ‘truncated multilingualism’ (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck, 2005; Blommaert, 2010; Kubota, 2016; Canagarajah, 2018) which is functional for their users only in the prestige institutional contexts in which they work, is perhaps the significant point, since spoken and written language of an indexicality that is much less normative, or even translanguaging, is of no particular consequence for capital, or for these kinds of

¹⁶⁵ Formerly, La Garde was president of the IMF.

multilingual producers of the normative form. For them, like the respondents in the university-based study of Canagarajah (2018; see above), this may well be their principal repertoire in English, and that is all that really matters. It matters personally, because their jobs and the jobs of those like them, depend upon having this kind of demonstrable competence in the normative form, and it matters structurally since the documentary production of the global governance institutions of the world-economy, along with its corporate, financial and knowledge sectors are historically steeped in this form.

This kind of taken for grantedness is inevitably ideological, and as such, is an example of misrecognition (Bourdieu, 1977). But it is a misrecognition which exists not simply because of the symbolic value of English in the linguistic market – that is too discursive and unilinear – but because of the connection of normative English with a capitalist world-system across the *longue durée*. This should not be misinterpreted as indicating a somewhat crude Marxian determinism as some scholars have suggested (Gal, 2016; Del Percio, Flubacher & Duchêne, 2017; Heller & McElhinny, 2017). It is more an attempt to draw attention to the *dialectical* relationship of capital in its dominant accumulating form to the indexicalities of language. That is to say, it is not so much that ideological misrecognition is mostly or even entirely responsible for the prevalence of indexical normativity in global English. Rather, it is that English as an ideological [or discursive] *practical consciousness* (Williams, 1976; see above) is *dialectically structured* by its instilment – alongside other factors such as race, class and gender – in the material historical dominance of British and US capital in a capitalist world-system. In other words, there are elements in processes of capital accumulation that have become habitually internalized in the social relations of capitalism, which in turn play their part in reproducing the practice of accumulation. As we saw in Chapter 1, the original accumulation of capital was framed by Marx as an act of dispossession or ‘theft’ so as to expropriate into private hands what had been ‘common social wealth’ (Nichol, 2015: 21). Having started down this path, accumulation became a ‘silent compulsion’ (Marx 1976/1867: 899), to be endlessly and expansively pursued through the centuries ‘lest the motor of accumulation die down’ (Arendt, 1968: 28). We recognize this today as the remorseless neoliberal conatus for economic growth at any price, including that of the planet and all of its inhabitants.¹⁶⁶ This has consequences for human social relations and what are considered to be the most important or favourable social relations [including linguistic social relations] for capital and its accumulation. Weber’s protestant work ethic, Schumpeter’s theory of creative destruction, Foucault’s *homo-economicus*, and Becker’s human capital theory, for example, are each interpretations of the human relationship with accumulation, and, in the final analysis, of accumulation’s relationship with nature and all its species (Pennycook, 2018). In the words of Nichol:

What follows from this is that dispossession comes to name a distinct logic of capitalist development grounded in the appropriation and monopolization of the productive powers of the natural world in a manner that orders (but does not directly determine) social pathologies related to dislocation, class [race, gender and language] stratification and/or exploitation, while simultaneously converting the planet into a homogeneous and universal means of production. (Nichol, 2015: 27; [square parenthesis added])

The global spread of English, and then emerging from this, the global spread of English in its normative form, is a dialectical function of capital and its accumulation as this has occurred under the

¹⁶⁶ It was this compulsion which was at the heart of the Trump administration’s extreme socio-pathological reluctance to enforce a nationwide ‘lockdown’ as the Covid-19 crisis enveloped the United States in early 2020: ‘Kill the curve, not the economy!’ he and right-wing TV demagogues railed, as deaths from the virus daily mounted.

auspices of the world-economies of Britain and the United States. From the early seventeenth century, and on into the centuries that followed, the senior overseers of capital's spread have also been the centurion representatives of the normative form, from the factors of the English East India Company, all the way through to the gentlemanly capitalist functionaries of the Bank of England, the National African Company, the Chinese Maritime Customs, the League of Nations, the post-1918 Gold Standard, the Shanghai Municipal Council, Bretton Woods, the Marshall Plan, Multi- and Trans-national Corporations, the World Bank, G7, G20, IMF, Dow Jones, FTSE, Davos, and so on. Capital as an ontological mechanism brings forth normative English as its epistemological other [M^E-C^E-M^{1E}, M^E-M^{1E}], and normative English in turn brings forth accumulation, or at least so it is believed; and that, it seems, is enough for this form of English to have an unrivalled 'abstract objectivism' and hegemonic 'edge' in the capitalist world-economy (Vološinov, 1973: 48; Wallerstein, 2000 [1983]: 257). Whether it is true that English competence really accelerates economic development is less clear (Ricento, 2015b; 2018), although there is evidence to suggest that a government's decision to promote English as part of its national language policy will [for fetish reasons] lead to that country attracting greater FDI (Kim et al, 2014; LeClerc, 2011; see also Chapter 4). In addition, language economists have argued that, under certain conditions, being bilingual and having English in one's repertoire appears to attract an economic reward (Grin, 2001; Gazzola, Grin & Vaillancourt, 2020). This though is not the same as claiming that English is exchangeable in a commodity form, only that bilingualism with English seems to bestow an economic advantage, where monolingualism without it, or even with it, does not (Gazzola et al, *ibid*). Against this history, and on the back of US-dominated capital and US structural power, normative English remains the principal *lingua franca* of the capitalist world-economy. But it is dominant in a world-economy which since the turn of the century has been going through a mounting intensity of systemic shocks, most recently through the Covid-19 pandemic, but also more generally through the rising challenge of China and the relative decline of the United States (see Chapter 6). But even beyond that, there is the sustainability of capitalism itself as its crisis momentum intensifies. If the global hegemony of English is not about to be displaced by a superpower transition from the US to China, then perhaps it is with the demise of capitalism itself that this will occur.

The demise of capitalism and the end of the hegemony of English

Hence the highest development of productive power together with the greatest expansion of existing wealth will coincide with depreciation of capital, degradation of the labourer, and a most straitened exhaustion of his vital powers. These contradictions lead to explosions, cataclysms, crises, in which by momentaneous suspension of labour and annihilation of a great portion of capital the latter is violently reduced to the point where it can go on [...] Yet, these regularly recurring catastrophes lead to their repetition on a higher scale, and finally to its violent overthrow. (Marx, 1973: 750)

This book began with the rise of capitalism, so it seems right to conclude with its predicted demise and what this might mean for English. If the source for the continued global domination of English is, as I have argued, to be found in its free-riding upon capital since the late sixteenth century [M^E-C^E-M^{1E} and M^E-M^{1E}], then with the end of capitalism anticipated [whether this is accurate or not] as coming in the next thirty years (Wallerstein, 2000 [1983], 2011d; Wallerstein et al, 2013), it seems appropriate to ask whether this might also lead to the displacement and 'end' of English itself as the dominant language of the capitalist world-system. This is not, however, English in the misleading sense of English as a Foreign Language, or of Englishes of the inner-circle, or even as the English of native-speakers, but as an English which exists in a normative form that is linked to capital in a capitalist world-system. This form of the language is realized in societies and in the world-system as a *normative grammar*, that is, as 'a governing

stratum [*ceto*] whose function is recognized and followed' (Gramsci, 1975: 2343, cited in Ives, 1998: 40). For Bourdieu (1977), as we have seen, this is more accurately a misrecognition, since there is no ethical or innate basis underlying the selection of this construct as the dominant form. With this in mind, we may note that for reasons of the particular historiography of the world-system and the hegemonic roles of Britain and the US within it, that it is standard English of the kind which is associated with these nations that is the principal reference for this form. It seems relevant to ask then, whether a terminal crisis of the capitalist system could lead to its overthrow.

Throughout the history and movement of capitalism, as this book has documented, crisis has been ever-present. During the past one hundred years of the US hegemony, one dimension of this has been the role of English as the language of capitalist crisis management and its resolution. But that capitalism should end someday and transition to something else has been expected as inevitable by many, and not only by Marx. Much less certain has been the how of that process, and when it might happen. In the above passage Marx reminds us that he did not imagine that the transition would be a smooth one, and that it would involve many explosions, cataclysms and catastrophes along the way. In *Capital Volume I* he notes how capitalism is marked by repeated 'decennial' cycles of prosperity, over-production, crisis and stagnation (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 785). Modern liberal political economists refer to this as 'the cyclical churn of the global economy' (Sharma, 2020: 71). During the past fifty years the US-directed global-economy has quite closely followed this pattern: the 1960s were a boom decade, to be followed a marked slowdown in the 1970s and early 1980s, resurgence again in the 1990s, hyper-financialization running into catastrophe in the 2000s, and austerity and market recapitalization in the 2010s. Until the global pandemic of 2020-21, the markets had been on a strong upward trend since 2010, and the US had even increased its share of global GDP from 23 per cent to 25 per cent (ibid). That the 2010s, from the perspective of the markets, were a 'good' decade for the United States [even if they were not for anyone else], suggested to investors that a secular downturn for the 2020s was already expected, regardless of the shock of the coronavirus, which was entirely unforeseen [in the moment in which it occurred]. Factors of concern were China's reluctance to instigate domestic reform in the way the markets and the US wanted, ongoing regional tensions in the Middle East and Asia, the sustainability of China's growth, the US trade war with China, and the enormous volume of public debt the US was carrying. But despite these concerns, the markets maintained their upward M-M¹ trajectory. This was all wiped out by the declaration of the WHO in March 2020 that the coronavirus was a global pandemic.¹⁶⁷ Stock markets around the world plummeted, and nationwide lockdowns were imposed which brought global economic activity, and the normal circulation of capital, almost to a standstill. The IMF subsequently predicted that the world-economy would experience the worst recession since the Great Depression (IMF World Economic Outlook, April 2020).¹⁶⁸

A pandemic was not the kind of event which Marx was envisaging when he spoke of 'regularly occurring catastrophes', although there seems little doubt that it was capitalism which was the root cause by creating and condoning an economic market in wild animal meat and related products. The propensity of capital to induce concentration and specialization of production in the interests of M¹ was responsible for encouraging the ever more intense exploitation of wild animal habitats and a fatal disturbance of the balance between the fictional market of capital and the real natural world. If capital was going to treat nature as 'a vast store of potential use values' (Harvey, 2014: 250; see also Nichols, 2015), at some point nature was going to strike back, and this is what it did. Capital has always managed through innovation and scientific advances somehow to compensate for the imbalances it creates with nature, but the time

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic> Accessed April 25, 2020.

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/04/14/weo-april-2020> Accessed April 25, 2020.

may be coming when that imbalance can no longer be redressed. It is to be hoped for example that a vaccine can be found for Covid-19, but no meaningful efforts are being made to tackle the climate catastrophe which awaits, and it may already be too late. Whatever remedies are found for coronavirus or for global warming will also be subject to the diktats of capital, which will seek to acquire commercial rights to vaccines, and also to any carbon-reducing or 'atmosphere-cleansing' technology, which can then be sold at a market price. This seems likely unless – and I admit to a certain pessimism about this – an alternative social contract between humanity and nature can be forged, i.e. one that is not based on capital (see Harvey, 2014: 294-7, for what this might look like). But even as capitalism leads the world into another catastrophe of its own making, the response to it, despite its present mass discordance and inter-state 'beggar-thy-neighbour' policies, is being mediated by normative English, through the WHO, the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the G20 and a broad range of pan-regional institutions, including the world's financial markets and its transnational corporations. There is no doubt that alternative Englishes, translanguaging, trans-spatial assemblages and translanguaged practices utilizing English all play their part as well, but from the linguistically-mediated responses which these global organizations produce for dissemination and public consumption it seems evident that it is the normative grammar which is being recognized and followed, and not something else. This is likely to continue until such a time as there is a hegemonic transfer which sees the eclipse of the United States and with it English, or the capitalist world-system itself comes to end.

The history of the capitalist world-system since it began in the sixteenth century has been one of endless brutality, exploitation and suffering for countless billions of people who have lived through it, involving dispossession, exploitation, discrimination, destruction, poverty, famine, terror, violence, cruelty and greed. Its secular rhythm has also ensured massive and enduring inequality between peoples and, in the modern era, between geo-politically defined nations too. Even as the world has advanced in education, literacy, technology and health, enormous economic and social inequality persists. The wholesale relocation of capitalist production processes from the first world to the developing world as capital has gone in search of cheaper labour costs also shows that the essential exploitative dynamic which Marx identified for western capitalism has not abated. As services have replaced factory production in the north, so that there are fewer people forced to labour with their hands, in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Russia and the Middle East, capitalism still has a systematically exploited labouring proletariat, many of whose members live and work in conditions which are every bit as degrading as anything Marx described more than one hundred and fifty years ago. They include the migrant roadworkers of Dubai, the shipyard breakers of Alang in India, and the toxic waste scavengers of Agbogboshie in Ghana. They continue to bear witness to Marx's general law of capitalist accumulation, whereby 'Accumulation of wealth at one pole is [...] at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole, i.e. on the side of the class that produces its own product of capital' (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 799). As yet, immiseration has not proved a sufficient basis for the overthrow of the capitalist world-system, at least not on its own. Part of the reason is that just as capitalism has managed to find solutions to the imbalances it creates with the natural world, so it has also sought to assimilate and neutralize anti-systemic movements and other existential social threats where they arise, principally through the political mechanism of legislation. In many capitalist societies this has brought recognition in matters such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, civic freedoms, public healthcare and workers' rights.

Deeply rooted in the culture of capitalism and its ideological legitimacy has been the idea since the mid-nineteenth century that a combination of science and social inclusion will solve society's ills (Wallerstein, 2000 [1989]: 287). Since the 1960s, particularly in the capitalisms of Europe and the United States, there has been an increasing disillusionment with science because of what its technological

advances – driven by a disembedding capital¹⁶⁹ – have done to the planet (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 76), and also with inclusion, as the promises which legislation was supposed to bring forth have not materialized, or only inadequately so. I am thinking here, for example, of issues around societal racism, religious intolerance, indigenous rights, gender inequality, LGBTIQI politics, and social welfare. In all these areas anti-systemic groups have found themselves distracted by internal division and mutual antipathies, and unable to coordinate their anti-systemic interests. This has enabled capitalism and its advocates to play them off against one another, while also making efforts at assimilation through legal adjustments which accord piecemeal recognition to their various wants. For example, until quite recently, same-sex marriage had no legal basis in any society in the world. Now it is common, particularly in the west. At bottom, there is still great store placed in the supposed ideological rationalism of capitalism, and this translates as an ambivalence concerning the desirability of its overthrow: ‘As long as the anti-systemic movements remain at the level of tactical ambivalence about the guiding ideological values of our world-system [...] we can say that they are in no position to fight a war of position with the forces that defend the inequalities of the world’ (Wallerstein, 2000 [1989]: 287).

Within the capitalist world-system there are various kinds of anti-systemic movements. They include socialist, or ‘old left’, movements of the kind personified by politicians like Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and Bernie Sanders in the US; social movements which represent ethnic minority rights, women’s rights, LGBTIQI rights, human rights, indigenous rights, and the rights of the environmental commons etc.; in the global South there are anti-systemic ‘leftist’ movements, either in power or in opposition, in for example Mexico, Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia; and in many parts of the world, including the western world, there are anti-systemic religionist movements which reject modernity altogether. Some of these anti-systemic movements, such as the religionist ones, are entirely incompatible with the others. If not that, then they have conflicting agendas and struggle to find common cause. Also included in anti-systemic movements are those which campaign on a range of issues under the heading of linguistic rights, such as the protection of endangered languages (e.g. Phillipson, 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2010), and also a looser configuration which advocate a principled opposition to standard English, such as World Englishes, ELF, language commodification, and translingualism. Heller & McElhinny, for example, from the perspective of linguistic anthropology, advocate a politics of refusal. This consists in a refusal ‘to respect the heavily policed boundaries among languages that so many missionaries, administrators, teachers, linguists, and anthropologists have devoted so much work to producing; [and] *a similar refusal to respect the conventions of standardized language?*’ (Heller & McElhinny, 2017: 21; emphasis added). The authors are themselves instinctive ‘native’ users of this form, and so such a refusal does not seem to be within their capacity to produce. In addition, like many of those whom they single out – who are like them also workers in a capitalist world-system – they unfortunately find themselves in the position of endlessly (re)producing these conventions themselves. As Marx puts it with a slightly different emphasis, ‘This incessant reproduction, this perpetuation of the worker, is the absolutely necessary condition for capitalist production’ (Marx, 1976 [1867]: 716). In our context, this incessant reproduction is what makes the standardized language what it is. Capital also shows no sign of taking heed of linguistic refusal, or even of opting for a policy of inclusion. This is because language as a normative written grammar is an elemental capitalist distinction which separates the language of capital from the ‘lesser’ and more diverse linguistic practices of the ‘multitude’ (Gramsci, 1975; Bourdieu, 1984; Hardt & Negri, 2000). The ‘English Only Movement’ in the United States, the ‘Speak Good English Movement’ in Singapore and the standard English prescriptivists in the United Kingdom are good examples, not only of the values of

¹⁶⁹ Capital seeks to dis-embed the economy from the necessity of state administration and regulation. The more nature is left to the market, the more nature is destroyed and defiled (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 75-7).

elitism and supposed educatedness which are associated with this form, but also of its link to capital, and of our complicity, including my own, as the instruments of its domination.

If China seems unlikely to displace the United States as the next global hegemon, and so also to dislodge English from the dominant position it finds itself in, then what is the likelihood that capitalism through its predicted near-term demise will perform that role instead? One of the most fascinating if also unsettling aspects of the present era is the conflict between the belief that we are in living in a permanent present and the belief that capitalism as we know it is soon to come to an end. Capitalism triumphant after 1991 passed into a new phase; one of *endism*. This is ‘the view that history, once real, has come to an end in the present’ (Bhaskar, 2016: 183). The period since then is one of ‘everlasting posthistory’ (ibid): the future proceeds, but there is no alternative to the present. No new ideologies of qualitative institutional or social change appear; only endless market fundamentalism remains (Hartwig, 2011). We see this starkly after the 2007-8 financial crisis when the neoliberal world unable to contemplate another path, sought refuge in the present through the bailing out of the banks and a resetting of accumulation through the imposition of austerity. This worked to reassure the markets, and a ‘fat’ decade of capital expansion followed.¹⁷⁰ The failure of capitalism in 2007-8 was repackaged as a failure of public probity, and by 2010 business resumed as before, with the losses of the financial sector absorbed by the state. In 2020, the coronavirus struck and such was the shock that many voices were raised to the effect that there must now be meaningful institutional and social change because the virus and the number of deaths that followed exposed the extreme poverty and insincerity of the neoliberal social contract. Just at the moment when a coordinated state response was most needed to deal with the crisis, many nations, especially those in the wealthy hyper-neoliberal north, discovered that the services that were most critical to public wellbeing had been so severely denuded and fragmented by neoliberal cuts and competitive outsourcing that they were – through no fault of their own – unable to respond effectively or coherently, and many thousands needlessly died. Despite the mounting death toll, a rising swell of right-wing capitalist opinion in the US and in Europe called for a swift end to state-imposed national lockdowns so that economic activity and accumulation could resume. The clamour was for a return to capitalist economic arrangements as they had been before the pandemic. Adam Tooze has described this as ‘an irrepressible impulse that insists we satisfy its demands regardless of the cost, a symptom not of realism but derangement’ (Tooze, 2020: 6). It is as yet unclear what the fallout of the virus will mean for neoliberal political economy, but the sclerotic and ineffectual responses of the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as the deaths which followed, stand as terrible indictments of the system. In spite of these ongoing failures, there is in the capitalist world order still no serious contemplation of an alternative path to be followed, only the overriding impulse to return to the everlasting posthistory of remorseless accumulation.

The blind retreat into capitalist endism is already widely acknowledged as unsustainable, not least for the reasons of the climate catastrophe which awaits. It is quite bad enough that the most ardent climate change deniers, such as those behind Trump in the United States, refuse to accept that there is a problem. But even amongst those who do realize this, there are many disincentives to doing anything very decisive about it since that would require fundamental political, economic and social change, and many populations have no appetite for what that would entail. There are also few politicians who wish to sell it to them. Their hopes, and the hopes of the politicians, are instead pinned upon a *deus ex machina* that will save the day, ideally sometime after they are all no longer around. We are nevertheless considered to be in a time of transition in the world-system, if not from one hegemon to another, then from capitalism into something else. Xi Jinping’s China is a reluctant world hegemon. In addition to lacking hegemonic preparedness, it is not seriously interested in assuming any of the responsibilities or risks that

¹⁷⁰ <https://www.ft.com/content/cb398952-e6c9-11e5-bc31-138df2ae9ee6> Accessed May 1, 2020.

being the hegemonic power would bring (see Chapter 6). But it does want to be a regional hegemon as well as a global power of high standing, and to be acknowledged as such by the United States and by the rest of the world. Its concern for the present is to avoid not only the middle income trap mentioned in the previous chapter, but also what Graham Allison has referred to as ‘Thucydides’ trap’ (*Financial Times*, August 21, 2012).¹⁷¹ Thucydides’ trap is what befalls a declining hegemon as it finds itself inexorably dragged into war with a competing rising hegemon. In the fifth century BC Athens rose to challenge Sparta, in the seventeenth century Britain rose to challenge the United Provinces, and at the end of the nineteenth century Germany rose to challenge Britain. All three challenges ended in war. Most do. Peaceful outcomes are achievable, but these require ‘huge adjustments in the attitudes and actions of the governments and the societies of both countries involved’ (ibid). A war between the US and China in Asia is unlikely to be a limited war and would destabilize the world-economy even more dramatically than the coronavirus pandemic. However, it is now increasingly acknowledged that with the tensions in the South and East China Seas acting as a catalyst, the US and China risk drifting towards ‘Thucydides’ trap. Some argue that to avoid this the US needs to make concessions to China in Asia, and should make greater efforts to avoid confrontation (Campbell & Sullivan, 2020; Wertheim, 2020). Others believe that increased US assertiveness and visible war preparedness is needed in order that China is contained (Colby & Mitchell, 2020; see also Tooze, 2019). A common theme is US hegemonic decline. World-systems theory sees nothing recent in this: the US hegemony has been in decline since the early 1970s, and in accelerated decline since the early 2000s (Arrighi, 2010; Wallerstein, 2000 [1983]; 2000 [1992]; 2000 [1994]; 2011d; Wallerstein et al 2013). This will either lead to ‘Thucydides’ trap as the competing hegemons fight it out, or if that is avoided, could lead – if sense does not prevail – to structural crisis and a complete breakdown of the world-system through a combination of the stress factors affecting the system as a whole.

Foremost among these stress factors are the persistent inegalitarianism of the world-system and continued high levels of systemic risk. The two feed off one another in potentially destructive ways. Global inequality has not abated. A minority in the developed world live at income levels far higher than those in the rest of the world. Not that this has statistically changed very much in the last thirty years. According to the Gini index,¹⁷² between 1990 and 2015 global income inequality on average remained largely the same.¹⁷³ In some regions, such as North America and Europe, income inequality increased as neoliberalism and then austerity became more prevalent, while in other parts of the world, in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa for example inequality levels have remained fairly constant. Elsewhere, for example in India, China, Indonesia and Tanzania, inequality has risen. In Eastern Europe as a whole inequality has also increased as the countries of this region have transitioned from state-planned to market-led economies. All told, inequality remains a major global problem, which despite greater international consciousness of it has barely shifted in any sense that would make a meaningful difference to most people living in the developing world. Western Europe, North America, Australasia and the oil-rich Middle East are at least three to four times wealthier than the most economically productive nations of Latin America and Africa, and around seventy times wealthier than the poorest.¹⁷⁴

By remaining constant, these polarizations in income and in life prospects have been given heightened resonance for those at the sharp end of that experience, who have either witnessed no

¹⁷¹ <https://www.ft.com/content/5d695b5a-ead3-11e1-984b-00144feab49a> Accessed April 30, 2020.

¹⁷² The Gini index measures the degree of inequality in the distribution of family income in a country. The more egalitarian a country is, the closer its Gini index is to zero. The more inegalitarian it is, the closer it is to 100. Sweden had a Gini index of 24.9 in 2015 for example. Chile’s index by comparison was 50.5.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2172rank.html> Accessed May 1, 2020.

¹⁷³ Is income inequality rising around the world? Joe Hasell, November 19, 2018.

<https://ourworldindata.org/income-inequality> Accessed May 1, 2020.

¹⁷⁴ <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/gdp-per-capita-worldbank> Accessed May 1, 2020.

meaningful improvement in their or their children's life chances, or have seen them deteriorate still further in the face of developmentalist structural adjustment programmes and neoliberal 'free market' economics. In these societies, child mortality, life expectancy, education and income are very difficult to ameliorate. Countries where GDP per capita is under \$1000 and most people live in extreme poverty, such as in parts of Central and West Africa, stand abandoned on the extremes of the capitalist periphery and have no development prospects at all.¹⁷⁵ Grinding poverty and persistent deprivation, in combination with natural disasters and regional conflicts, have seen an explosion in northward migration, especially to Europe and the United States. US culpability in fomenting increased regional destabilization since 2000 and the first world's continued insistence on the developmentalist fallacy (see Chapters 1 and 4) have only exacerbated migratory pressures as populations have been displaced and economic prospects have either stagnated, or gone into reverse; in which one side effect has been increased translingualism amongst those displaced or forced to migrate (Barrera, 2017; Georgiou, 2018). Since 2015, the west has moved more emphatically to a fortress mentality on inward migration which has been accompanied, and encouraged, by a rise in protectionist xenophobic nationalism, nowhere more so than in the US and Europe. Trump has even threatened Mexico with punitive tariffs, despite the USMCA free trade accord (see Chapter 6), if it does not stem the tide of migrants trying reach the US from the poorer Central American nations to its south. The vast levels of debt which exist in the United States and Europe also spell further falling living standards and increased deprivation for those on low incomes or in marginalized groups.

In keeping with endism (see above), a new round of economic austerity is already being predicted, with 'financial repression and higher levels of taxation' but also poor prospects for renewed growth (*Financial Times*, April 25, 2020).¹⁷⁶ Austerity is in contradiction with stimulus since it slashes demand to which the only answer is more stimulus and increased debt. Stimulus will also hit US bondholders as the US government uses up bond repayment money on the stimulus. It is also inflationary, so reducing further the value of the government bonds. The tension between financial probity in the markets and falling bond values and market incomes is likely to put still greater pressure on governments to police the markets less closely. This could lead to the renewed assertion of 'vulture-capitalist' risk. The levels of debt leverage and the pressures this places upon the international monetary system are bad news for the United States, which is not accustomed to being anything other than the global hegemon. It is also bad news for China, where its public debt is three times the size of its GDP. If the US were to lose the trust of market credit, which seems unlikely just now,¹⁷⁷ the dollar would no longer be the international currency of reserve, and the US would be unable to service its debts. A mercantilist financial contagion would follow in which China would lose its largest overseas market and all of its growth – and the rule of the CCP would be put to the question. Around the world, those who are unable to migrate to the north will find themselves locked into increasingly authoritarian and unstable regimes so further exacerbating internal and regional population displacements. Without any global leadership or coordination through international governance organizations such as the UN and the G20 [the dominant nation in these groupings having opted for 'great power suicide' and vacated the stage (Arrighi, 2010: 384)], nuclear proliferation could spiral out of control leading to nuclear confrontations and wars. These would most likely be driven as much, if not more, by clashing ideological and nationalist fundamentalisms as by any geopolitical considerations. Global environmental destruction and economic inequality

¹⁷⁵ <https://ourworldindata.org/income-inequality-since-1990> Accessed May 1, 2020.

¹⁷⁶ <https://www.ft.com/content/e0705292-c9cb-4d4e-8586-4f1174665e83> Accessed May 1, 2020.

¹⁷⁷ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-05-19/future-dollar> Accessed 23 August, 2020.

would also be greatly compounded as the planet took a poor second place to the everyday struggle for survival. There would be nothing remotely Schumpeterian about any of it.

In such a future dystopia, it seems unlikely that capital-centric normative English would continue to have any relevance or meaning for the world, except as a historical linguistic artefact of the era of accumulation. Somewhat prophetically, Wallerstein was predicting thirty years ago that ‘Somewhere down the line, in 2025 or 2050, the day of reckoning will arrive. And the United States (but not it alone) will face the same kind of choice then that it has today, but on a world scale. Either the world-system will move toward a repressive restructuring or it will move toward an egalitarian restructuring’ (Wallerstein, 2000 [1992]: 413). He hoped for an egalitarian restructuring. But now in the 2020s, in Europe and North America, for the first time since the 1930s, western nations [and many others too] have been opting for isolationism and populist crypto-fascism over inclusiveness and egalitarianism. This includes the past and present hegemon of the capitalist world-system, Britain and the United States. In both nations, the old nineteenth-century imperialist alliance between ‘capital and mob’ (Arendt, 1968: 35) has been resurrected and re-applied to an isolationist age. In this world it is once more legitimate to be racist, to beggar-thy-neighbour, and to fall in with ideological extremism and narrow mercantilism.¹⁷⁸ The British right-wing establishment, wishing to cling to the mythical vestiges of past imperial glories, and backed by deeply disaffected elements of the dispossessed [and not so dispossessed] White working class, has thrown its lot in with a Trumpian United States which rails at the narrowing of its economic advantage, and is lashing out.

But what Wallerstein observed in the 1990s, still applies today, ‘Unless [the US] realizes that there is no salvation that is not the salvation of all human-kind, neither it nor the rest of the world will surmount the structural crisis of our world system’ (Wallerstein, 2000 [1992]: 414). And if the US cannot realize this, and is unable find its way out of the Trumpian crypto-fascist labyrinth it finds itself in, then with structural crisis and the collapse of the world-system, the historical era of normative English will also come to an end. And with that, ‘The modern world system will have seen its definitive demise, ceding place to a successor or successors yet unknown, unknowable, and whose characteristics we cannot yet sketch’ (ibid, 2011d: xvii). Whatever English in the world might have become by then, it will not be as the pre-eminent *lingua franca* of the world-system that it will be known. This connection will be finished because the dialectical relation of normative English to capital [as $M^E-C^E-M^{1E}$ and M^E-M^{1E}] will have been severed, and in the absence of any unifying hegemony to sustain it, its fetish nature will be swept away. It may well survive in pockets amongst the *Ancien Régime* of US clientelist elites and their hangers on, as they retreat into isolation, and out of the dollar and into gold. It will also have its place for those who know no other form of English. In English-medium academic research, in literature and in English language education too, there will be spaces where it will still linger. But normative English will no longer hold the same allure or Weberian ‘iron cage’ natural necessity that it once did. Instead, it may be that for the first time we really will be able to dismiss the modernist notion of language, and can talk more meaningfully, without the distraction of capital and capitalism, of ‘the communicative practices of transnational groups that interact using different languages and communicative codes simultaneously present in a range of communicative channels, both local and distant’ (Jacquemet 2005: 265, cited in Pennycook, 2010c: 683). Normative English will not matter in the way that it once did, so allowing superdiverse translanguaging to emerge from its shadow as the ‘practical constitutive activity’ that Raymond Williams and Marx once spoke of, one which is unburdened by the constraints of capital.

¹⁷⁸ The international relations scholar, Barry Buzan, arguing that the 1930s could not be repeated in the modern world-system, reached precisely the opposite conclusion in a lecture given in London in 2012 when he declared that ideological racism and economic nationalism were things of the past. See Buzan, B. (2012). *No more superpowers* [YouTube TEDx Talk]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JC27GMQoM08>

We can but hope that the world which English-inflected translanguaging will emerge into will be less unremittingly inegalitarian, alienating and fixated upon capital than the one which preceded it, but the indications are not promising. The bifurcation point that world-systems theory warned us of is fast approaching, and at the moment it seems that the world in the hands of the United States and China, and abetted by a slew of reactionary governments across Europe, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia, is opting for regressive ideological fundamentalism and irrealism as its preferred destination. If humankind has the wherewithal to act, a new social contract might be achieved, but this requires sustained collective action and a critically conscious *revolutionism* (Fanon, 1967; Gramsci, 1971; Habermas, 1987; Vogler, 2013; Harvey, 2014; Holborow, 2015; Bhaskar, 2016), that is, one which rejects the capitalist alienation of nature and of all living things, and purposefully seeks the essence of humanity not in the inevitable conversion of use values into exchange values, but in ‘an absolute humanism of history’ (Gramsci, 1971: 465). In such a revolutionism, neither hope on its own nor cumulative individuated resistances will suffice; for the point, as Marx so keenly reminds us, is that we exist not only to interpret the world, but also to change it (Marx, 1998 [1845]: 571). Let us hope that it is not already too late, because an unalienated, humanitarian and linguistically-diverse postmodernity which has been absented of the endless accumulation of capital is one that is worth fighting for.

FINIS.

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