DE GRUYTER MOUTON IJSL 2020; 262: 67–95

Anindita Chatterjee* and Anne Schluter

# "Maid to maiden": The false promise of English for the daughters of domestic workers in post-colonial Kolkata

https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2019-2070

**Abstract:** Drawing from a larger ethnographic study, the current article examines, through interactional sociolinguistics, interview and observation data related to English-language tutorials between two employers and their domestic workers' daughters in two households in Kolkata. The post-colonial, South Asian context represents a site in which such scholarship has been underrepresented (see Mills and Mullany's 2011 *Language, gender and feminism*). The focus of analysis is two-fold: it evaluates the existing power structures between participants, and it assesses the degree to which widespread Indian discourses about the upward mobility of English (see Graddol's 2010 "English Next India", published online by the British Council) are relevant to the current setting. In terms of power structures, *legitimated domination* (see Grillo's 1989 *Dominant languages*) of the employer over her domestic worker emerges as a salient theme; however, *affective attachment* (adapted from Hardt's 1999 article "Affective labor", published in *Boundary*; McDowell and Dyson's 2011 article "The other side of the knowledge economy: 'Reproductive' employment and affective labours in Oxford", published in *Environment and Planning*) and reciprocal dependencies help to both reinforce and diminish the severity of the power asymmetry. With respect to the applicability of popular Indian discourses that equate English-language proficiency with upward mobility, the study finds little evidence of their relevance to the current context in which the subordinate positioning of gender intersects with social class to compound its constraining influence.

**Keywords:** symbolic capital, gender, legitimated domination, English, affect

***Corresponding author: Anindita Chatterjee,** Max Weber Stiftung, India Branch, New Delhi, India, E-mail: anindita.jnu2004@gmail.com
**Anne Schluter,** Department of English, Research Centre for Professional Communication in English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China,
E-mail: anne.schluter@polyu.edu.hk

# 1 Introduction

The current article examines the domestic spaces that serve as training grounds in which Bengali employers in Kolkata give informal English-language lessons to their domestic workers' daughters. The employers possess a position of authority over their workers and are also privileged in terms of class and education. They are locally referred to as *bhadramahilas*, a term coined in nineteenth century colonial Bengal to refer to a portion of the Indian population that was educated and wealthy (Banerjee 2004; Bagchi 2005; Majumdar 2009). In this way, the workers' high status is rooted in a long-standing cultural tradition. By coaching their workers' daughters on English-language forms, the employers attempt to make some of their symbolic capital accessible to their workers' daughters, who otherwise have limited access to it. Analysis of this activity, informed by interviews and participant observations, provides insight into power relations that do not always conform to a clearly definable hierarchical structure; for, in this case, women of disparate identities collectively negotiate affect as a tool for agentive representation of their own selves (Ehrenreich 2000). This study focuses on a paradigm of mutual dependence in which both the employer and worker fulfill the needs of the other albeit within the confines of a clearly defined power structure in which the employer exercises authority over her workers.

The current article departs from the growing body of scholarship on the new, skills-centered labor market that places a high monetary value on English (Cameron 2000; Grin 2001; Grover 2018; Lorente 2010). Instead, it focuses on the aspirational value of English to the domestic workers themselves as a vehicle through which they can imagine a higher status. The study builds on Gonçalves and Schluter's (2017) work on employee-employer communication that takes place in the private, highly personalized workplaces of employers' homes. These sites have thus far received limited attention in the workplace literature due in large part to the challenges of gaining access. Similar to the findings from Gonçalves and Schluter, *legitimated domination* (Grillo 1989) emerges as a salient theme. At the same time, the diminished social distance that comes out of intense, daily professional contact between employers and workers in the intimate household setting also fosters *affective attachment,* a concept developed here that builds on *affective labor* (Hardt 1999) and the feminist interpretation of this concept (McDowell and Dyson 2011). In this way, this example reflects Piller's (2018) observation that employer-employee relationships in the home tend to be more complicated than in other workplace contexts.

Noteworthy in the analysis of these data is the choice to introduce the workers' daughters to English, which, according to popular and official discourses at national and local levels, functions as a tool for upward mobility in Indian society (Patel 2010; Dhawan 2010; Graddol 2010; Vaid 2016). Throughout its colonial past, a command of the prescriptive norms of standard British English was directly linked to class: members of the Bengali *bhadralok* (educated middle class) were distinguished by their access to English-language education and participation in the colonial economy. This stratification persists today through the education system's inequitable structure. The present-day *maddhyabitto sikkhito sampraday's* (intelligentsia's) privileged access to quality education that emphasizes the learning of high status English varieties (Cowie and Murthy 2010), reconstructs this colonial hierarchy. The legacy of this hierarchy is observable through the status of English-language proficiency as a symbolic marker of class in India (Agnihotri and Khanna 1997) that can be considered from a Bourdieusian perspective as a mark of distinction. In these ways, the tracing of power relations as they relate to English-language lessons between two employers and their workers' daughters within a household in Kolkata complements the other contributions to this special issue by providing a post-colonial perspective, which, following Mills and Mullany (2011), represent an area in need of further investigation.

This consideration, together with the theoretical and setting-specific background described above, drives the focus of the current article, which queries the existing power dynamics between the employers, workers, and the workers' daughters that foreground the English-language tutorials. The role of these tutorials will be further analyzed to investigate the relevance of popular discourses about English to the students of these tutorials.

## 2 The local context

Data collection took place in Kolkata, the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal. Kolkata, a city with a history of domestic service (Banerjee 2004), has witnessed a significant increase in female employment in recent decades. Following the partition of British India in 1947, the city received an influx of migrants from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Migrant families struggled financially and, in an effort to supplement their family's income, were compelled to send their wives, aunts, and daughters into the workforce (Mitter and Banerjee 1998). Although the career path diminished their social status (including for some who were from higher castes), many of these women sought

employment as domestic workers. This trend has continued into this century with the feminization of domestic service. Out of the 3.05 million female domestic workers in urban India in 2004–2005 (the most recent report on these trends), the largest portion were in West Bengal due to large-scale instability in the agriculture and industry sectors that pushed workers into the informal economy (Sen and Sengupta 2016: 36). West Bengal has one of the highest proportions of children out of school, and girls constitute a large segment of the drop-outs (Sen and Sengupta 2016). With economic stresses placed on working parents in India, parents more frequently choose to send their sons rather than their daughters to school. For, it is easier to justify a girl's departure from school to help with domestic chores and potentially marry early (Chanana 2008). For these reasons, Chanana (2008) underlines poverty and gender as the two most important variables that contribute to denial of education in India. This failure for poor girls to receive formal education in India is reflected in women's low rates of employment across formal sectors (Ghosh 2013); few alternative prospects for employment exist beyond domestic service (Ganguly-Scrase 2003). Although the domestic workers highlighted in this article see little opportunity for themselves to escape their subordinate social positioning, they hope that their daughters' acquisition of English-language terms and refined manners from their middle-class employers will enhance their social mobility.

## 3 Methodological framework

Within the framework that considers language as an important mechanism to understand societies and the construction of identities, the current study's methods were informed by language socialization research, which places importance on the sociocultural framing of language in tandem with individuals' capacity to deploy linguistic conventions in novel and creative ways (Bakhtin 1986; Ochs and Scheiffelin 2008). In particular, we conducted content analysis of the data through the lenses of interactional sociolinguistics and activity-based approaches. An interactional sociolinguistics approach in the traditions of both Gumperz (1982) and Goffman (1981) allowed us to examine details of the utterances at different levels, including the discourse and lexical levels. A focus on activities – the socially constructed practices and affective stances that emerge during interactions, often between interlocutors with unequal levels of expertise (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002) – was especially salient to the emotionally charged tutorials between the employers who possessed the sought-after symbolic capital and the workers' daughters who did not.

## 3.1 On methods

The current article focuses on data collected from two households in Kolkata as part of a larger ethnographic study. The first author, a resident of Kolkata and L1 speaker of Bengali, accessed these households by means of personal contacts and snowball sampling. The second author did not participate in data collection but is contributing here with analysis of the data. The languages featured in the data include Bengali (spoken by all of the participants) and both English and Bengali (spoken primarily by the employers and the researcher).[1]

The participants featured in this article include two employers, two domestic workers, and one daughter of each of the two workers as displayed in Figure 1.[2] A look at this figure shows that the worker in the East Kolkata household, Karuna, is a full-time worker who resides with the family. In the South Kolkata household, the worker, Sushila, works at the house for two-three hours each day and resides with her family in a nearby slum. In both employer-worker pairings discussed here, the length of employment has lasted at least ten years. Because of this long-standing relationship, the domestic workers and employers have had a history of prolonged contact with one another, during which time both trust and interdependence have developed. With an awareness of the complexities of everyday social practices in India (including caste) in which different indicators of status may overlap or appear to contradict one another, we envision membership in a subordinate class as just one aspect of domestic workers' social positioning. The relative status of the employers, workers, and their daughters informed decisions about inclusion in the sample. Figure 1 provides a visual display of each household and the working hierarchy. As noted above, however, it is important to note that the hierarchy shown here is more simplistic than the actual power relations between participants that emerge through analysis of the first topic of query.

### 3.1.1 The two households

The first household is located in East Kolkata in a five-story building which contains built-in apartments that allow residents to retain a joint family structure. Munna, the oldest daughter-in-law, is responsible for the household duties. The domestic workers help her to carry out these responsibilities, and she

**1** For reasons of limited space, the Bengali portions of the transcripts have been translated into English; nevertheless, instances of code-mixing are still indicated through the use of bold face.
**2** All of the names used to refer to this study's participants are pseudonyms.

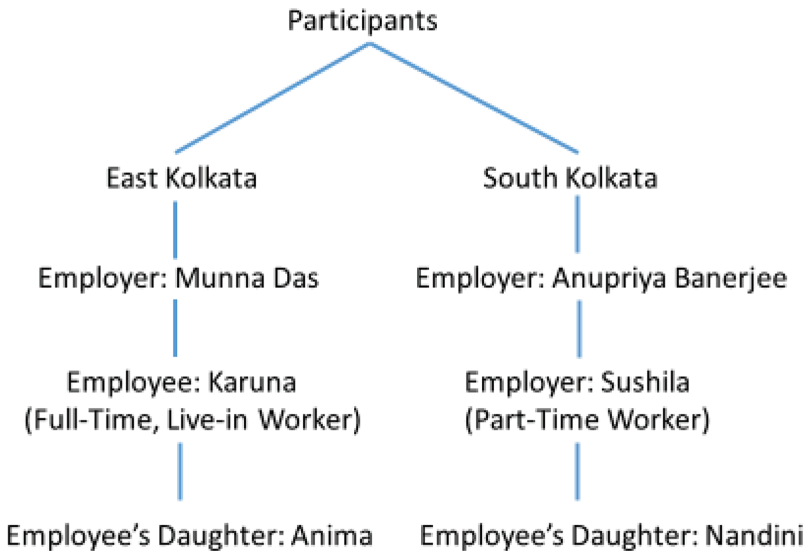


**Figure 1:** Visual description of the study's participants.

functions as their primary employer. Munna has an M. A. in Philosophy, but she has reluctantly worked as a housewife since getting married. Her L1 is Bengali, but she is fluent in both English and Hindi; moreover, she believes that everyone should be multilingual. She employs four live-in workers and three part-time workers. Here, we limit our focus to Karuna, one of her live-in workers. Together with her daughter, Karuna migrated from Pathar-pratima, a rural village in West Bengal, to East Kolkata after her husband had abandoned her. She has worked for Munna and lived in her house since her arrival to Kolkata. We estimate that Karuna's daughter, Anima, is fourteen years old. Anima has vague memories of attending school, but she has bitter memories of her past life. Now she is happy with Munna mashi[3] who gives intermittent tutorials about the refined manners of *bhadramahilas*.

The second household is located in South Kolkata in a new apartment that houses only one nuclear family. Responsible for duties in this household, Anupriya serves as the workers' employer. Similar to Munna, she has a graduate degree but works as a housewife. Bengali is her L1, and she has developed her English to a high level of competence. Anupriya has two part-time workers:

3 The domestic workers refer to Munna as "Didi", which translates to elder sister in Bengali; their daughters refer to her as "Mashi" (mother's sister). For Anupriya, the workers refer to her as "Mami" (mother's brother's wife), and the worker's daughter calls her "Dida" (grandmother).

Basanti, who has served as the household's cook for twenty years and her daughter-in-law, Sushila, who provides general cleaning services.

After getting married, Sushila migrated from rural West Bengal to the South Kolkata shanty slum where she resides. Her husband earns no income, so she supports the family through her domestic work. Sushila's daughter, Nandini, who is approximately seven or eight years old, is enrolled in the government school near her slum; however, she does not attend because the teachers rarely show up for class. To avoid leaving her young daughter unaccompanied in the slum, Sushila takes her to the households she serves, including that of Anupriya. At Anupriya's house, Nandini takes part in the tutorials featured in this article.

## 4 English, symbolic capital, and upward mobility in India

The power and prestige of English that foreground such research strands as the global English paradigm (Crystal 2012; Meyerhoff 2006; Birsch 2014) have a long-standing tradition in former British colonies, and India is no exception (Mohanty et al. 2010; Haidar 2017). As in colonial times, English-language proficiency is strongly linked with the identity of India's middle-class (Bhattacharya 2005; Donner 2011). Furthermore, the high symbolic value placed on English by the elite has, conforming to a Bourdieusian conceptualization of the periphery's focus on the center, greatly influenced attitudes toward English across socio-economic strata. English speakers' linguistic capital is associated with employment success, especially in the new work order that has emerged in India (Patel 2010; Gooptu 2013) and on a more global scale (Heller 2003). The resulting popular discourses index, across the Indian population, "the extraordinary belief in the transformative power of English" as "a symbol of a better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression" (Graddol 2010: 124). This vision of English, also described in Joshi (2004) and Neetha and Palriwala (2011), helps to contextualize the workers' hopes for the tutorials presented in this article.

Official discourses about language policy in India are in step with the beliefs stated above, and English-language instruction currently represents a compulsory component of school curricula throughout India (Mohanty et al. 2010). Nevertheless, quality English-language education is disproportionately available only to Indians who can afford to live in urban centers and pay for elite schools (Annamalai 2001). The ability to speak English, thus, continues to be linked to socio-economic status (Scrase 2002). This effect is intensified in Kolkata, which,

by suspending English-language instruction in public schools between the 1980s and 2000, limited access to this instruction to private school students only.

### 4.1 Gender and language in the local context

Historically, women have sought upward mobility in one of two ways: through marriage or, depending on the opportunities presented by the specific socio-cultural setting, through education and earned income. Language is salient to both of these trajectories (Labov 1990), but it is arguably more important in the case of upward mobility through marriage; for, symbolic status that is attained through symbolic capital takes on greater meaning in the absence of concrete skills and activities that are exchanged for material profit (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; Eckert and Rickford 2001).

Within the context of Kolkata, parents exhibit a disproportionately higher tendency to pull their daughters out of school rather than their sons (Sen and Sengupta 2016). A greater number of women than men who come from this system, therefore, lack the educational background to pursue careers. The strong influence of gender roles that link women with household duties further diminishes the likelihood of women's social mobility in Kolkata through an earned income. For these reasons, the practice of pursuing upward mobility through marriage is quite widespread.[4] It is, thus, within this socio-cultural context that the importance of symbolic capital (English in this case) can be understood: proficiency in English can potentially build symbolic status, a powerful resource for becoming upwardly mobile (Neetha 2004).[5]

## 5 Findings

Analysis begins with one worker's (Karuna's) positioning vis-à-vis her employer's (Munna's) tutorials with her daughter (Anima) and Munna's description of Karuna's role in the household. Following this focus on employer-worker positionality, the embedded power structure is further explored with respect to two of the tutorials themselves. One session takes place between the employer,

4 Cf. Khanna (2009) and Jeffery et al. (2011) for work on the successful strategies employed by members of the officially declared Other Backward Class to facilitate their daughters' marriage into wealthy, urban professional families.

5 Conversations with participants suggest the same: refined manners and English words help their daughters to marry into respectable families since everyone likes English.

Munna, and her worker's daughter, Anima; the other, between the employer, Anupriya, and her worker's daughter, Nandini. Finally, one excerpt from each of the employers, Munna and Anupriya, provides further insight into the employers' visions of their own positioning within this situated power structure. The choice to include these excerpts represents an attempt to incorporate voices from each level of the hierarchy and to give equal attention to the perspectives of workers, employers, and daughters.

## 5.1 Worker-employer positionality

The most widespread expression of the workers' aspirations of enhancing their respectability is through their children's education, which, they hope, will allow the next generation to quit manual labor. The workers, therefore, encourage the English-language tutorials and willingly support their employer's mentorship of their daughters. In Excerpt (1), Karuna, one of Munna's domestic workers and the mother of Anima, discusses her loyalty to Munna and her deliberate choice to give Munna full control over decisions about her daughter's future.

Excerpt (1)[6]

1 Karuna: ***Munna di*** has done a lot for me. She has trained<br>
2 me…I know I am a **servant**. **Munna di** has never<br>
3 treated me like a **servant**. I cannot leave **Munna**<br>
4 **di**. She gave me protection, I have given my<br>
5 daughter to her, she will decide what is best for **Anima**.

Without money or a husband, Karuna's position in Kolkata as a single parent without any property is extremely vulnerable. By treating Karuna with respect, training her to become an effective worker, and providing her with housing and an income (however nominal it may be),[7] Munna has allowed Karuna to achieve a more secure position. With her acknowledgement of the *protection* that Munna has given her (line 4), Karuna's valuation of such non-pecuniary benefits as improved security becomes clear. Such a focus on the employer's service to the worker is striking in the Kolkatan setting in which it is common practice for

**6** For transcription conventions used for this and other excerpts, please see the Appendix.

**7** The researcher did not inquire into the workers' salaries because of cultural taboos about such disclosures. Nevertheless, knowledge of local wages for domestic labor suggests that Karuna's salary does not exceed three thousand rupees plus non-monetary compensation like food and shelter.

heads of household to define and reinforce existing power asymmetries through hurtful everyday interactions (Gimlin 2007; Kang 2010). Karuna's constructed attachment to Munna as a benign *protector* also generates trust in Munna to serve in a similarly protective capacity with her daughter, who she has "given … to [Munna]" (lines 4–5). Even though Karuna is the mother, she considers Munna to be the best judge to make decisions for her daughter. For this reason, Munna "will decide what is best for Anima" (line 5).

Karuna's description of her loyalty to Munna provides an example of an asymmetrical power structure that is entirely free from coercion. In this case, in fact, the subordinate individual helps to maintain this relationship by fully accepting it and complying with the will of the dominant individual, who has earned her respect. Moreover, there is considerable space for exploitation as the class, internal migration, and marital status differences that contribute to Karuna's vulnerability help to intensify Munna's dominant position over her: Karuna is highly dependent upon Munna because she has few alternatives for employment and accommodation. Following Weber (1958) and, later, Grillo (1989), Karuna *legitimatizes* Munna's *domination* over her by volunteering her obedience to an employer who she believes to be fully worthy of it. With her discovery that her employer, in fact, appears to be invested in her well-being and personal development, Karuna develops *affectual ties* to her employer who, in Weber's (1958: 215) terms, she envisions as "exemplary" in "character". Karuna, thus, grants Munna *pure authority* based on *charismatic grounds*.

Within the context of the very clearly defined roles of dominance and subservience outlined above, diminished social distance between employer and worker emerges as a force that helps to mitigate the severity of the power asymmetry. According to Sen and Sengupta (2016), such a relationship is not uncommon among domestic workers and their employers in the Indian context: some employers manage to purchase a greater sense of obligation and care from their workers by giving material gifts and/or provisions for food and credit. Such gestures suggest employers' interest in the workers' well-being, removing strict capitalist measures from the relationship and introducing the element of *affective labor* (Hardt 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Sassen 1991). In line with Blackett (2011), this finding is in part likely rooted in the setting of the household, which serves the dual function of both workplace and personal dwelling. In it, affect may influence the employer-worker relationship as personalized and working relations come into contact with one another. Moreover, a connection exists between the gendered context of the current study and the emergence of affect as a salient theme; for, personalized services carried out by women, whether in the home or more professional settings, tend to draw on the ideological celebration of feminine skills (Ghosh 2013; McElhinney 2007), including,

for example, maternal benevolence (Arnado 2003; Ray and Qayum 2009), which do not have a clear market value.

A look at Munna's perspective also points to a worker-employer relationship that is not governed by a strictly unidirectional power asymmetry. Through descriptions of her workers as her "support system", Munna underlines the importance of their assistance in allowing her to achieve her goals for the household. Although Munna clearly gives herself the dominant role, she simultaneously acknowledges her workers' collaboration. Such a description is noteworthy: collaboration tends to take place between independent, able-bodied individuals who act in conscious coordination, which contrasts visions of domestic servants who simply follow orders from their superior. Moreover, observation data suggest that workers' exposure to the intimate details of the family's life also puts them in a position to provide occasional emotional support to family members in addition to their primary housekeeping duties. Such extensive knowledge of their employer's private lives increases the workers' relative power in the worker-employer relationship. In these ways, bi-directional engagement, in conjunction with affective labor (discussed above), becomes affective attachment, which helps to redefine the employer-worker power relationship.

While both of these findings represent important considerations for analyzing the overall power structure, it is also important not to underestimate the ever-present influence of class differences. For this reason, the term *ally-ship* is preferable to *sisterhood* for describing the solidarity that emerges from diminished social distance. Shah (1999) proposes the term *precarious dependencies* to articulate the mutual – yet asymmetrical – reliance of employers and domestic workers on one another within a highly salient, class-based structure (Block 2015). However, we propose the term, *reciprocal dependency*, as a more accurate alternative. It highlights the sustained and not-particularly-precarious existence of employers' and workers' bi-directional engagement in working relationships that span multiple years. Observations from the data set from the larger study cast further doubt on the precarious nature of the participants' interdependence: bi-directional engagement is most common in the working relationships that have endured over long periods of employment.

Munna mentions in an interview that she was trained in a private school and her training incorporated all of the activities – including those that promote English-language proficiency – that she is trying to pass on to Anima. This offer to share symbolic capital represents an appealing non-pecuniary form of compensation for the mothers who are fully aware that the absence of such knowledge helps to distinguish them from the *bhadramahilas* they serve. In interviews with Sushila and Karuna, they acknowledge that the tutorials may not lead to

real social mobility for their daughters; the tutorials' real value lies in the satisfying moments in which they can envision their daughters as members of Kolkata's English-speaking middle-class. In this way, this example represents a deviation from the traditional asymmetrical power imbalance in which powerful individuals simply dominate the marginalized. While this domination is clearly present in the current setting, it is not the only force: these data provide a small-scale example in which the powerful individual acts to appeal to the lower status individual. Moreover, by granting the powerful individual full authority over the daughter of the subjugated, the subjugated individual has the potential to gain some power indirectly – if only momentarily – through her daughter. In this way, Karuna's decision to turn over authority of her daughter to Munna does not represent an example of exploitation. On the contrary, by willingly accepting the power structure and allowing her daughter's future to be guided by her employer, she is, in line with Dhawan (2010), displaying her social ambition for her daughter. This vision of English-language tutorials as an investment into her daughter's future is shared by Sushila, the other worker in this study. In her conversations with the first author, Sushila directly links her daughter's exposure to a middle-class household and the accompanying opportunity to learn some English to her aspirations for Nandini's improved future prospects.

Legitimated domination, thus, takes the form of an implicit contractual bond between employer and worker in which the employer acts – albeit in a small way – to offset social inequalities. More insight into the complex nature of this relationship comes through a look at the actual tutorials between each employer and worker's daughter. Similar to the above analysis, the power structure appears at first look to be relatively straight-forward; however, a focus on the daughters' perspectives suggests that a more nuanced interpretation is in order.

## 5.2 The tutorials

The tutorials occur weekly, albeit at different times each week, depending on the employer's disposition and availability. Both Anima and Nandini receive practice exercises to complete during their spare time, but they regularly fail to complete them. For this reason, much of the material in each lesson is repeated from the previous one. Both excerpts featured below begin shortly after the employers, Munna and Anupriya, have started to ask questions and both Anima and Nandini have failed to respond correctly.

Excerpt (2) shows an exchange between Munna and Anima in which Munna emphasizes the importance of target-like pronunciation. Munna takes Anima inside her bedroom and starts to teach her material from English vocabulary books. Anima[8] is clearly distracted by the setting of Munna's bedroom, which she explores with a wide-eyed gaze as a pleasing, fanciful sight. Immediately preceding the excerpt, Munna has demanded to see the homework that she assigned earlier but grows angry when she learns of Anima's failure to complete it. Munna tries to make an agreement about the homework policy through a request for a promise:

Excerpt (2)
1 Munna: Are. You sure? **Promise?**
2 Anima: Promise (pronounced as [**po:r:o:misi]) (.)**
3 Munna: See? YOU? cannot even pronounce **promise** properly
4 Listen?. And see. how? I am uttering the word.
5 (Munna mouths the word). **Okay?**
6 Anima: **mashi.** you?. tell me that if I do correctly then you
7 will buy me a **mobile?**
8 Munna: **Oh!** Now you could **pronounce mobile** very well?
9 First learn to utter words like **Promise? Thank you**.
10 **welcome.?** first learn to utter these words? And then
11 **mobile Ooff!**

This excerpt begins with the employer, Munna, asking a yes/no question in which she emphasizes the word "promise" with a rising intonation (line 1). This pairing of a yes/no question with rising intonation, in line with Clayman (2001) and Holmes (2008), is often perceived as ambiguous by the listener. This ambiguity confuses Anima, who, instead of providing a yes/no reply, attempts to pronounce the word "promise" (line 2). Her pronunciation, which features epenthesis (the insertion of a vowel between the consonants /p/ and /r/) and a trilled /r/, differs considerably from the epenthesis-free, non-trilled target form. Munna issues a direct criticism of this pronunciation (line 3) in her response. She summons Anima's attention by instructing her to listen and watch her model the target word as she mouths it (line 4) in a stylized manner (Cameron 2000).

After modeling the target pronunciation of the word *promise*, Munna demands a response from Anima by asking "Okay?" (line 5). In line 6, Anima responds by referencing their low social distance through the kinship term, "Mashi". She then proceeds to inquire into a material reward – a "mobile"

8 Anima and Nandini were not recorded since they were not adults.

phone – for her English-learning efforts. As a result of this product's high visibility in the local (and global) market and Anima's frequent exposure to it, she shows no difficulty with its pronunciation. Her ease with the sounds of this word and simultaneous difficulty with those of "promise" further angers Munna: it draws attention to the source of Anima's English-language input, which is clearly neither the English-language classroom nor their informal tutorials. Munna recommends that Anima prioritize acquisition of a lexicon that contains "promise" over one that contains "mobile" (line 9) and, in addition, identifies the words, "thank you" and "welcome", as part of this acquisition-worthy lexicon (lines 9–10). Analysis of this excerpt suggests the importance of socio-phonetics in this context: mastery of the lexicon, based on the forms that Munna emphasizes, includes the acquisition of the target-like pronunciation.

Munna's mixing of codes in Excerpt (2) also helps to reinforce the importance that she attaches to academic – rather than commercially available – English. Although it would be easier for her to use the shared code of Bengali to discuss "pronunciation" (line 8), Munna's use of English allows her to model this word for Anima. Acquisition of the verb, "to pronounce" can serve as a tool for learners to engage in the meta-linguistic discussions that take place in language classrooms. The likelihood of such classroom-like discussions occurring in English is extremely low in the current setting; moreover, there is minimal evidence of uptake by Anima. Nevertheless, through introduction of this term, Munna furthers her aim of exposing Anima to English-language forms that, as she learned in private school, hold currency in the local middle-class context.

In addition to functioning as a request for a reward and showing off her English-language pronunciation ability, Anima's reference to a "mobile" also serves as a means of changing the subject. Excerpt (3), which is a continuation of Excerpt (2), shows the continuation of this topic shift. Anima directs Munna's attention to aesthetics, a theme that is constantly present because of the gendered role of the refined *bhadramahila* which in itself is not just a class formation, but a social category, used for women who are refined, respectable and married in a *bhadra paribar* (reputable family) (Bannerjee 2004; Bagchi 2005; Ray and Qayum 2009). Here, Anima attempts to appeal to Munna by uttering some familiar English words that express her admiration for Munna's beauty, but Munna rebukes these attempts.

Excerpt (3)
12 Anima: **Mashi?.Fair and lovely** (pronounced as
13 [fær ɛn lʊbeli:]) also?
14 Munna: It is **FAIR AND LOVELY()** first you learn to say

15 these words… **PHHAIR and LOBELII huh! okay?**
16 Why do you need to use that cream? It is bad for your
17 skin, and it will never make you fair(()) all T.V.
18 commercials?.
19 Anima: I want to be **beeutiphoo**l like you.

In Excerpt (3), Anima repeats her emotional appeal to Munna with the kinship term "Mashi" (line 12). She attempts to heighten this appeal by tapping into her English-language repertoire that she has learned through exposure to skin care product advertising. She suggests that Munna get her a fair and lovely (pronounced according to the conventions of Indian English phonology [fær ɛn lʊbeli:]) cream as a reward for pronouncing the target words correctly (line 14). Similar to her pronunciation of "promise" in the previous excerpt, Anima's deployment of this English-language resource incorporates epenthesis, a feature that displays her inexperience with the pronunciation of consonant clusters and represents a marked deviation from more prestigious English varieties. Munna reprimands Anima by correcting her pronunciation in favor of the middle-class, epenthesis-free phonetic target "fair and lovely" (lines 14 and 15). Munna, thus, attempts to improve Anima's pronunciation by drawing attention to the target. With the question, "okay?" (line 15), Munna requests that her student not commit this error again.

Following this correction, Munna shifts her focus to the skin care product to which Anima has been referring. She discourages Anima from using it because she claims that it is both harmful (line 16) and ineffective at lightening Anima's skin color sufficiently to adhere to local standards of beauty (line 17). As lighter skin in the Indian context is associated with higher socio-economic status (Parameswaran and Cardoza 2009), Munna's comment suggests that Anima will never be able to attain the skin standards of a *bhadramahila* and that it is futile for her to try. This connection between light skin color and high social status has a history in India that dates back to colonial times when, in 1901, the British commissioned an all-India census that linked race together with caste and, further, considered caste as a primary classification category (Prashad 2000). The underlying ideology that links race and social status persists today through the demand for skin whitening cream like "Fair and Lovely". Embedded within this cultural context, therefore, Munna's comment indicates an aesthetic boundary to upward mobility that works in conjunction with the existing class and linguistic boundaries to exclude Anima. Anima's aspirations of being beautiful like her Munna mashi (line 19) through the use of skin whitening cream suggests that she has bought into these associations between beauty, light skin, and social status.

Similar to the Munna-Anima pairing, the informal English-language tutorials between Anupriya and Nandini also feature the employer's modeling of target forms that are not taken up successfully by the student. In both cases, too, the employer tries to rectify her student's performance, and the student redirects her tutor's attention to a product that is familiar to a cross-section of the local population because it is marketed in English. The theme of aesthetics and its relationship to linguistic capital re-emerges in the exchange between Anupriya and Nandini featured in Excerpt (4). This excerpt begins with Anupriya's attempt to teach through phonics, but she encounters resistance from Nandini, who redirects her attention to her colorful nail polish.

Excerpt (4)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Anupriya: | See this picture **book**. **A for apple, B for bat.** |
| 2 | | What is happening? Where are you looking? |
| 3 | Nandini: | No (.) I am seeing (scared) |
| 4 | Anupriya: | **NO.** You are not listening? You just don't want |
| 5 | | to learn. What are you looking at? |
| 6 | (Nandini in tears) | |
| 7 | Anupriya: | Don't cry. See again? |
| 8 | Nandini: | **ae** is **aapel**.? (scared) |
| 9 | Anupriya: | **iissh**!? Stop studying? Tell me what you want? |
| 10 | Nandini: | Dida? Your **nail polish** colors are nice, we |
| 11 | | don't have. |
| 12 | Anupriya: | take them?. No need to study, apply **nail polish** |
| 13 | | **and lipstick forever**! |

Anupriya rebukes Nandini for her apparent lack of focus during the phonics lesson (lines 1–2). In response, Nandini attempts to defend herself by reassuring Anupriya that, in fact, she is not distracted and that "[she is] seeing" [paying attention] (line 3). However, her negative response disrupts the power relation, and Anupriya dismisses Nandini's self-defense (line 4–5). Anupriya simultaneously states her belief about the underlying reason for Nandini's behavior: "You just don't want to learn" (lines 4–5).

Anupriya's authoritative stance is temporarily softened by Nandini's crying, which causes Anupriya to shift away from her phonics lesson for a moment to urge Nandini not to cry (line 7), and then to return to the lesson by calmly repeating her earlier pedagogical points (line 7). With Nandini's inadequate response, however, Anupriya becomes audibly frustrated, which she verbalizes as 'iissh'[a Bengali word often used to show disgust] (line 9). She then decides to suspend the lesson and ask Nandini "what [she] want[s]" (line 9). In her response, Nandini attempts to appeal to

Anupriya by addressing her as "Dida" (grandmother) and complimenting her on her nice nail polish colors (line 10), to which she refers in English. This strategy, however, does not appease Anupriya, who rejects the shift in topic to beauty products. Instead, it confirms her belief that Nandini does not value education, (line 12), but, instead, attaches her aspirations to aesthetics: "apply nail polish and lipstick forever" (line 12), which she states in English. Anupriya's sarcastic response underlines her fundamental disagreement with Nandini's valuation of aesthetics over education. Through her mixing of codes, Anupriya indexes the English-language lexicon of popular marketing campaigns to which the vast majority of the Indian population has been exposed. This technique of paralleling Nandini's code choice functions as a tool to draw attention to Nandini's prioritization of beauty over education and the commercial source of her English-language input.

Within the context of the tutorials featured above, Anupriya and Munna, serving as teachers, view the lexicon of polite society (promise, thank you, and welcome) and academic metalinguistic discussions (pronunciation, word, and the arbitrary words used to show letter-sound pairings in the phonics lesson) as worthy of acquisition. This target lexicon contrasts that of product marketing, including "mobile" and "nail polish", which the employers do not deem appropriate for an English-language lesson. Such preferences are also present in Anupriya's and Munna's judgments about pronunciation: they emphasize the importance of pronouncing "promise" and "apple" in ways that are consistent with a refined middle-class standard but consider the same pronunciation target to be of minimal importance when applied to "mobile". In this way, the above excerpts show a tension between the employer who emphasizes the lexicon and pronunciation of prescriptively oriented academic English vs. the daughter of the worker who extends the English-language focus to the acquisition of the English of popular commercial products and bodily aesthetics,[9] which she considers of equal value to academic English. Anupriya's reaction, like that of Munna, is negative because her student's incorporation of product names and slogans suggests the collapsing of the two categories – advertising English and academic English – into one and, thus, suggests no recognition of the unequal status of different English varieties[10] that Anupriya and Munna attach to them.

**9** The English variety used for marketing campaigns varies according to the specific product. American English is commonly used to form associations between expensive products and sophistication. However, Indian English tends to be used for all other products, such as the ones to which the girls refer.

**10** According to local language ideologies, academic English is considered a "neutral" standard for pronunciation (see Gargesh 2006); Indian English is considered a lower-status, colloquial variety.

Such a perspective reflects the presence of *Unequal Englishes* (Tupas 2015; Tupas and Salonga 2016) in the current setting: among the principal gate-keepers, the specific variety of English favored by the elite holds far more currency than other varieties. Furthermore, unequal access represents a defining characteristic of the preferred variety. While a cross-section of the general population gains regular exposure to English-language marketing, only those with access to high quality education have the opportunity to acquire the prescriptive norms of the middle-class variety, which serves as linguistic capital. Proficiency in the target variety, thus, functions as a mark of distinction (Bourdieu 1991), of which Munna and Anupriya are keenly aware.

These observations deviate from popular discourses that construct general English-language proficiency as a key component of upward mobility that is open to all who learn it. Instead, proficiency in the specific English-language lexicon and target pronunciation of the local middle-class standard holds a disproportionately higher potential for accumulating more capital. Indeed, the identity of the Indian woman within the household and society in recent years has been linked with discourses of education (Chanana 2008). In line with Annamalai (2001), the practice of valuing a particular variety of English, cultivated during India's colonial past, persists today. These characteristics are marked by the absence of mother-tongue influence, which, according to Kachru's (2006) analysis of English varieties in non-native national contexts, elevates a local user's English from the less prestigious *mesolect* to the more prestigious educated variety (referred to by Kachru as the *acrolect*). As with many other post-colonial settings (including that of the Philippines discussed in Bautista [1996, 2000]), this hierarchy favors the few who are well versed in the academic English variety transmitted through private education. The preference for one variety of English reflects Tinio (2013) and reinforces existing social inequalities (Tupas and Salonga 2016).

Indeed, Anupriya's and Munna's knowledge of the target variety grants them the authority to serve as language police (Blommaert et al. 2005) who enforce their students' adherence (or lack thereof) to standard norms. Moreover, through Munna's warning that the use of skin whitener will not allow Anima to approximate the skin tones of *bhadramahilas* and Anupriya's mockery of the notion that Nandini can achieve *bhadramahila*-like appearance through the use of nail polish and lipstick, the two employers remind the girls of the existing class structure and the impermeability of class boundaries.

With Anima and Nandini's understanding of beauty as central to their aspirations and their admiration of Munna and Anupriya as images of beautiful bodies, the above excerpts suggest that the body acts both as pragmatics of symbol as well as communication. As the content of the training sessions comes

from the employers' own private school training background, the daughters likely perceive the primary aim of the tutorials to be *bhadramahila* training sessions; furthermore, they envision attention to aesthetics as an important aspect of achieving *bhadramahila* status. For these reasons, it is not possible to separate gender from the prescriptive linguistic norms of the prestige variety of English that is dictated by higher-order power structures and favored by Munna and Anupriya. Within the situated context of a domestic setting, therefore, talk and gender are inextricably "intervolved" (Goodwin 1984).

## 5.3 Employers' perspectives on the tutorials

The excerpts featured below extend the above analysis by highlighting the employers' reflections on the daughters' English-language instruction. Karuna's earlier comments about Munna emphasize the valuable skills she has acquired and the protections she and Anima have gained through her employment. In an example of legitimated domination (Grillo 1989), Karuna accepts Munna's authority and extends the purview of this authority to decisions about Anima's future. Munna's comments below reflect this legitimated domination over her workers; however, her respectful treatment of her workers and their daughters, as highlighted by Karuna, is absent from her explanation. Instead, her words draw attention to the extreme salience of the power structure. Excerpt (5) comes out of a query into the importance of learning English for Anima:

Excerpt (5)
1 Anindita: why do you think Anima needs to learn **English**?
2 Munna: **yes**… because she will have to **show**
3 You need to read the ingredients before you cook a meal?
4 Ways to serve? I have trained them[11] in dressing
5 styles, manners… They are my domestic workers,
6 their work is recognized by all **visitors?.**

In response to the question about Anima's "need to learn English" (line 1), Munna confirms emphatically that, "yes (line 2), English-language learning is necessary for Anima; Munna's mixing of the English word, "yes", helps to underline the importance of English. She reasons that English language skills are important for Anima because, as a member of the working class, "she will have to show" (line 2) to members of the middle-class that she understands the

**11** Referring to Karuna and Sita: full-time, live-in workers.

conventions of language in the household. She groups Anima together with her domestic workers when discussing these conventions, one of which is the ability "to read the ingredients before cooking a meal" (line 3). With reference to such conventions, Munna moves from a discussion of linguistics to embodied expression, including the "dressing styles" (lines 4–5) and "manners" (line 5) that she has taught her workers to help them "serve" (line 4) the household. She claims ownership of her workers' skills with the comment, "they are my domestic workers" (line 5). Munna has fashioned her domestic workers in many ways like a sartorial charge; the "recognition of their work by all visitors" (line 6) places this recognition of the workers' refined technique on her.

In Excerpt (5), the question about the necessity of English for Anima prompts Munna to discuss the ways in which she trains her workers. The merging of English-language proficiency with the serving style that, when mastered, allows Munna's workers to represent her well suggests that, at least for her workers and their daughters, Munna categorizes English language ability similarly to feminine, refined dress style and manners. For Munna, this grouping together of language and comportment is rooted in her own instruction: they both come out of her private school education, where they were likely taught together. For the domestic workers, they act as resources upon which they draw to fit into the domestic environment they serve. The emphasis on appearance that emerges in Munna's initial response about the need for Anima to "show" (line 2) reemerges in line 6 with mention of visitors' recognition of the workers' work. This practice of mixing language with extra-linguistic characteristics of self-presentation provides additional evidence of the intervolved nature of language and gendered bodies.

In looking at different participants' comments with one another, therefore, the above discussion of the links between English and feminine comportment highlights an area of agreement between Munna, Anima, and Nandini. In terms of interpretations of the local power structure, however, a comparison of Munna's (Excerpt 5) and Karuna's earlier comments (Excerpt 1) show some deviation. Karuna describes the skills she has learned from Munna as an investment into her employability; furthermore, she considers her position as a resident worker to be a source of protection. Munna focuses instead on the positive manner in which her well-trained workers ultimately represent her. She also includes Anima as part of this group of workers. In this way, Munna's comments suggest that, in line with Bagchi (2005) and Scrase (2002), her attention to language norms in her tutorials reflects her vision of fitting Anima into a middle-class household as a female domestic worker: the primary purpose of the tutorials is to prepare Anima for the job that best suits her current social status rather than to provide a tool for rising above this status. Munna, thus,

restricts her vision of Anima to that of a domestic worker's daughter with limited options beyond domestic employment. Such findings reinforce the top-down nature of the existing power structure and the importance of legitimated domination (Grillo 1989) in the current context.

In an interview with Anupriya that addresses her tutorials with Nandini, Anupriya considers the constraints of social mobility and gender far more explicitly than Munna. Similar to Munna, she does not envision English as a vehicle for Anupriya's potential upward mobility. Her understanding of the rigidness of social constraints informs her conclusion – which departs from that of Munna – that English-language proficiency holds little value for Nandini and other workers' daughters. This perspective appears in Excerpt (6) in which Anupriya responds to a question about the role of her English-language tutorials with her workers' daughters.

Excerpt (6)
1 Anupriya: I am **frustrated** teaching… I know that they will
2 never get any job so I really do not find any use
3 in teaching them English, because after all they
4 will get married?. have to do the same job, they
5 might not be **domestic servants**, but still you
6 know(.) I mean?."

In Excerpt (6), Anupriya expresses her "frustration" about the rigidity of the job market that offers no employment opportunities (line 2) for uneducated females like her workers' daughters. Although she tries to tutor Nandini in English, she emphasizes that "there is no use": due to firmly established gender roles that define married women's duties with respect to their service within the household, the cultural expectations placed on the daughters render the tutorials ineffective for upward mobility. For, even if an uneducated woman of low socio-economic status achieves upward mobility through marriage, Anupriya reasons, she is still unable to achieve independence because wives "have to do the same job [as domestic servants] (lines 4–5)". In this way, Anupriya refers to the existing societal structures that keep women in a subordinate position to men, even if their socio-economic status may suggest otherwise. Such an emphasis on the similarity between the domestic chores required of married women and those of domestic workers reflects the unclear boundary between paid and unpaid work described in Romero (2002).

Anupriya's keen awareness of the class and gender dynamics in the local setting, together with their limiting effect on her own career, suggests a degree of alignment with her female domestic workers. At the same time, it is important

not to overstate the strength of Anupriya's alignment with her female workers' daughters. Her private school, MA-level qualification distinguishes her from her uneducated workers and improves her prospects of finding a job that does not involve manual labor and is not required for financing her basic needs. The educational advantages that come with wealth help to alleviate some gender-based disadvantages. Poverty, however, compounds them. Although English-language tutorials appear to carry potential for the daughters' upward mobility, neither of the employers characterizes their function in this way. In line with Munna's earlier comment that highlights Anima's inability to achieve a refined *bhadramahila* status because of the color limitations of her complexion, Excerpt (3) suggests Munna's deep awareness of class distinctions. For her, training her workers to speak the target forms of English improves their ability to perform their domestic duties and, simultaneously, reinforces Munna's status as an effective manager of domestic workers. For Anupriya, the combination of the girls' socio-economic status and gender keeps them trapped in their subordinate position: poor, uneducated females remain servants, either to an employer who pays them or, eventually, to a husband who supports them financially.

Based on Anupriya's and Munna's comments, the tutorials serve primarily as a supplementary form of compensation to workers for their services rather than as a tool to facilitate the daughters' upward mobility. Furthermore, in line with Sen and Sengupta (2016), they also help to maintain affective attachment and preserve the top-down power structure by enhancing workers' loyalty to their employers. Similar to the employers, the workers are aware that merely learning polite English terms may not alter their daughters' future prospects; however, due to the symbolic status of English, their daughters' ability to deploy these forms provides the pleasing momentary illusion that, in line with discourses about English and upward mobility, there is a space for their daughters within the middle-class. Interpretations of Anupriya's comments from Excerpt (6), together with analysis of gender and language during the tutorials, suggest that it is not possible to extricate gender, class, and language from one another in this context. As uneducated females with low socio-economic status, Anima and Nandini can realistically use their acquired knowledge of academic and polite language forms for two purposes: to enhance their ability to work as domestic workers in middle-class households such as that of Munna or to improve their eligibility as potential brides in the matrimony market. The two scenarios, in line with Romero (2002), are not dissimilar; they perpetuate the existing cycle of female subjugation. Given the strong influence of gender and class, the above analysis provides an example in which enlarging an individual's English-language repertoire is unlikely to empower her or lead to upward social mobility.

## 6 Discussion and conclusion

The employers and their workers featured in this study are well aware of the constraints – based on gender and class – that act to maintain and compound the domestic workers' and their daughters' subordinate positioning. Such larger socio-political structures have contributed to the asymmetrical employer-worker relationship in which the worker is beholden to her employer for protection; however, based on interview and observation data, the influence of affective attachment and bi-directional engagement bring nuance to this asymmetry. The English-language tutorials come out of this relationship. They play into the workers' aspirations for their daughters' futures; for, the prestigious status of English is both long-standing (it stems from India's colonial past) and persistent (it continues both through the socio-political hierarchy that remains from colonial times as well as the current neoliberal era that favors English).

Analysis of these tutorials as a means of exploring the power structures within the household setting reflects one of two primary aims of this article. This focus is framed by an acknowledgement that English-language tutorials function primarily as a means for employers to pass on symbolic capital to their workers' daughters; moreover, accumulation of this symbolic capital in other contexts potentially allows the daughters to improve their relative power. Grillo's (1989) notion of legitimated domination is quite relevant in this context: the workers are aware of their subordinate positioning and accept their employers' authority over them to the extent that they extend the purview of this authority to relationships with their daughters. The teacher-student pairing in the tutorials reflects this asymmetry, which is further reinforced by the socio-economic mechanisms that have allowed the employers to acquire the valued linguistic forms and to serve as authorities on the material.

At the same time, the influence of affective attachment and reciprocal dependency also influence these power dynamics. In terms of reciprocal dependency, the agreement to provide tutorials for the workers' daughters comes out of a professional relationship with diminished social distance in which the simple exchange of domestic services for monetary compensation becomes less suitable. The tutorials emerge as an alternative form of compensation that demonstrates the employers' personal interest in the daughters. The employers' attempts to equip the daughters with some linguistic tools that offer the potential to overcome gender and class-based constraints ultimately serve as gestures that enhance the employers' image as benevolent authority figures. In this way, the tutorials simultaneously foster the workers' enduring loyalty to their employers. This loyalty results in the workers' full acceptance of the

existing power asymmetry, a trend that has been noted in investigations of other domestic worker-employer relationships in India (Sen and Sengupta 2016). While the workers may fully accept their subordinate positioning, they work – in line with Dhawan (2010) – together with their employers to improve their daughters' positioning. In these ways, the findings reflect Piller (2018)'s observation that the employer-worker relationships in such household workplace contexts is hierarchical but is far more complex than a simple top-down system of power distribution.

This complexity develops further with respect to the tutorials in which the daughters' contributions do not reflect full acceptance of their subordinate positions as students. Their voices, instead, show instances of resistance (Giroux 1983) to the local hierarchy. Although the employers' promotion of specific prestige forms and simultaneous delegitimization of the English of commercial advertising demonstrate their reproduction of higher-order middle-class norms, the daughters' alternative orientation to the commercial market dominated by global trade allows them to be less influenced by their teachers' reprieves. Both of the employers emphasize the impenetrable nature of the existing class divides for women with low socio-economic status who give attention to aesthetics alone. Moreover, they use language to reinforce existing class distinctions. However, an analysis of the daughters' language choices and negotiation strategies suggests that they endow themselves with more power than the employers and larger social structures would otherwise dictate. Of course, their age likely plays a role here, and the reality of their social positioning will become clearer to them as they grow older and more aware of their limited future prospects. Only a future longitudinal study can fully capture this aspect.

In terms of the employers' descriptions outlined in the last section of the analysis, it becomes apparent that neither of the employers envisions the possibility of social mobility for the daughters. Munna points to the utility of the tutorials for training future domestic workers who will ultimately represent her well while Anupriya collapses domestic labor and marriage – whether paid or unpaid – into the same category: English language proficiency may help to improve girls' marriage prospects, but, without education, they remain subordinate to their husbands and expected to engage fully in domestic duties. This finding undermines the purported purpose of the English-language tutorials with respect to language and power dynamics.

Such considerations about the workers' and their daughters' socio-cultural positioning and the tutorials' potential to bring upward mobility foreground this article's second primary aim, which entails evaluating the degree to which the findings validate/invalidate popular and official discourses that promote

English-language proficiency as a "pathway out of poverty and oppression" (Graddol 2010: 124). Addressing this focus merits returning to the daughters' language choices during the tutorials. Here, they associate the forms of English introduced by the employers with their existing English-language repertoire, which they have gained through exposure to commercial advertising. Such a practice makes sense in a national setting that routinely exposes its population to the English of global trade and promotes language ideologies that emphasize the importance of an unspecified variety of English. The employers, however, attach little value to this English-language variety that is more widely accessible to the local population. Instead, they insist that the daughters develop their proficiency in the standard variety preferred by the local middle class. Such attitudes point to the presence of *Unequal Englishes* (Tupas 2015; Tupas and Salonga 2016) and reflect a continuation of the old colonial hierarchy Annamalai (2001). In this way, analysis of the employers' language attitudes suggests a contradiction to popular discourses, discussed in such pieces as Dhawan (2010), that link proficiency in an unspecified variety of English to upward mobility.

The popular discourses referred to here come out of the parallel social hierarchies that are emerging throughout India as a result of participation in the global market; for, material capital is accumulated on a daily basis with the help of proficiency in the English-language variety of globalized commerce and advertising. In this way, India's openness to the global economy provides substantial space in the marketplace for alternative English varieties (Mirchandani 2004; Patel 2010). Nevertheless, as the above analysis suggests, the daughters' ability to access this marketplace is extremely limited. Moreover, the less discriminating vision of English in this context does not extend to the household domain in which cultural norms of female refinement favor Indian women's use of a variety that is guided academic norms (Chanana 2008). These findings suggest that, while it is possible that the popular discourses that champion the power of an unspecified variety of English to lift people out of poverty might hold true for some, they are largely irrelevant to the daughters featured in this study. In this way, the promise of English is, in fact, a false promise.

These findings highlight, in line with Goodwin (1984), the ways in which gender and language in the current setting are "interwoven". The contrast between the workers and their female workers helps to show that class also works to impede social mobility. Such considerations suggest the *intersectional* influence of gender and class on the language and power dynamics discussed here. For this reason, future studies on this topic would benefit from adopting an intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2015). English language proficiency, together with social practices that are associated with middle-class

identity, continues to represent a form of cultural capital; however, such aspirations are largely out of reach to the average domestic worker of Kolkata due to the constraining influences of gender and class.

**Acknowledgements:** This research was funded by The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi.

## Appendix: Transcription conventions

| | |
|---|---|
| **Bold** | original words (in English) used by the speakers |
| Underlined | pronounced with emphasis |
| ? | question/rising intonation |
| . | falling intonation |

## References

Agnihotri, Ramakant & A. L. Khanna. 1997. *Problematizing English in India*. New Delhi: Sage.
Annamalai, E. 2001. *Managing multilingualism in India: Political and linguistic manifestations*. New Delhi: Sage.
Arnado, Janet M. 2003. Maternalism in mistress-maid relations: The Philippine experience. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 4(3). 154–177.
Bagchi, Jasodhara. 2005. *The Changing status of women in West Bengal, 1970-2000: The challenge ahead*. New Delhi & London: Sage Publications.
Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1986. *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
Banerjee, Swapna. 2004. *Men, women and domestics: Articulating middle class identity in colonial Bengal*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Bautista, Lourdes S. 1996. Notes on three sub-varieties of Philippine English. In Lourdes S. Bautista (ed.), *Readings in Philippine sociolinguistics*, 93–101. Manila: De La Salle University Press.
Bautista, Lourdes S. 2000. *Defining standard Philippine English: Its status and grammatical features*. Manila: De La Salle University Press.
Bhattacharya, Tithi. 2005. *Sentinels of culture: Class, education, and the colonial intellectual in Bengal*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Birsch, Douglas. 2014. *Introduction to ethical theories: A procedural approach*. Long Grove, Ill: Waveland Press.
Blackett, Adelle. (ed.). 2011. Regulating decent work for domestic workers [Special Issue]. *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 23. 1.
Block, David. 2015. Social class in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 35. 1–19.

Blommaert, Jan, James Collins & Stef Slembrouck. 2005. Polycentricity and interactional regimes in 'global neighborhoods'. *Ethnography* 6(2). 205–235.
Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991 [1982]. *Language and symbolic power* [transl. by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson]. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Cameron, Deborah. 2000. *Good to talk?* London: Sage.
Chanana, Karuna. 2008. Gender inequality in primary schooling in India. In Mary E. John (ed.), *Women studies in India*, 336–343. New Delhi: Penguin Books India.
Clayman, Steven. 2001. Answers and evasions. *Language in Society* 30(3). 403–442.
Collins, Patricia Hill. 2015. Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology* 41(1). 1–20.
Cowie, Claire & Lalita Murthy. 2010. Researching and understanding accent shifts in Indian call centre agents. In Gail Forey & Jane Lockwood (eds.), *Globalization, communication and the workplace*, 125–144. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989(8). 139–167.
Crystal, David. 2012. *English as a global language*, 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Graddol, David. 2010. English next India. https://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/english_next_india_-_david_graddol.pdf (5 March 2018).
Dhawan, Nandita. 2010. The married new Indian women: Hegemonic aspirations in the new middle class politics? *South African Review of Sociology* 41(3). 45–60.
Donner, Henrike. 2011. *Being middle-class in India: A way of life*. London: Routledge.
Eckert, Penelope & John. R. Rickford. 2001. *Style and sociolinguistic variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Eckert, Penelope & Sally McConnell-Ginet. 1992. Think practically and look locally: Language and gender as community-based practice. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21. 461–490.
Ehrenreich, Barbara. 2000. Maid to order: The politics of other woman's work. *Harper's Magazine* April 2000. 59–70.
Ochs, Elinor & Bambi Scheiffelin. 2008. Language socialization: An historical overview. In Patricia Duff & Nancy Hornberger (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2nd edn. 3–18. Springer Publications.
Ganguly-Scrase, Ruchira. 2003. Paradoxes of globalization, liberalization, and gender equality: The worldviews of the lower middle class in West Bengal, India. *Gender and Society* 17(4). 544–566.
Gargesh, Ravinder. 2006. South Asian Englishes. In Braj Kachru, Yamuna Kachru & Cecil Nelson (eds.), *The handbook of world Englishes*, 90–114. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
Garrett, P. & P. Baquedano-Lopez. 2002. Language socialization: Reproduction and continuity, transformation and change. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31(1). 339–361.
Ghosh, Jayati. 2013. The plight of domestic workers in India. http:www.macroscan.com/cnro/jan 13/pdf/Domestic_workers.pdf (5 August 2017).
Gimlin, Debra. 2007. What is 'body work'? A review of the literature. *Sociology Compass* 1(1). 353–370.
Giroux, Henry A. 1983. Theories of reproduction and resistance in the new sociology of education: A critical analysis. *Harvard Educational Review* 53(3). 257–293.
Goffman, Erving. 1981. *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Gonçalves, Kellie & Anne Schluter. 2017. “Please do not leave any notes for the cleaning lady as many do not speak English fluently”: Policy, power, and language brokering in a multilingual workplace. *Language Policy* 16(3). 241–265.
Goodwin, Charles. 1984. Notes on story structure and the organization of participation. In Max Atkinson & John Heritage (eds.), *Structures of social action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gooptu, Nandini. 2013. *Enterprise culture in neoliberal India: Studies in youth, class, work and media*. London & New York: Routledge.
Grillo, Ralph. 1989. *Dominant languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Grin, Francois. 2001. English as Economic Value: Facts and Fallacies. *World Englishes* 20. 65–78.
Grover, Shalini. 2018. English-speaking and educated female domestic workers in contemporary India. *Journal of South Asian Development* 13(2). 1–24.
Gumperz, John. 1982. *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Haider, Sham. 2017. Access to English in Pakistan: Inculcating prestige and leadership through instruction in elite schools. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Advanced online publication. 10.1080/13670050.2017.1320352.
Hardt, Michael. 1999. Affective labor. *Boundary* 2. 89–112.
Heller, Monica. 2003. Globalization, the new economy, and the commodification of language and identity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7(4). 473–492.
Holmes, Janet. 2008. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 3rd edn. London: Longman.
Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierette. 2001. *Doméstica: Immigrant workers cleaning and caring in the shadows of affluence*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Jeffery, Roger, Patricia Jeffery & Craig Jeffery. 2011. Are rich rural Jats middle-class? In Amita Baviskar & Raka Ray (eds.), *Elite and everyman: The cultural politics of the Indian middle classes*, 220–245. New Delhi: Routledge.
Joshi, Seema. 2004. Marriage, migration and labour market: A case study of a slum area in Delhi. *SALISE 5TH Annual Conference*. sta.uwi.edu/salises/workshop/csme/paper/sjoshi.pdf (February 15 2017).
Kachru, Yamuna. 2006. *Hindi*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
Kang, Miliann. 2010. *The managed hand: Race, gender, and the body in beauty service work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Khanna, Sunil K. 2009. *Fetal/fatal knowledge: New reproductive technologies and family-building strategies in India*. Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning.
Labov, William. 1990. The interaction of sex and social class in the course of linguistic change. *Language Variation and Change* 2. 205–254.
Lorente, Beatriz. 2010. The making of “workers of the world”. In Alexandre Duchêne & Monica Heller (eds.), *Language in late capitalism: Pride and profit*, 183–206. New York and London: Routledge.
Majumdar, Rochona. 2009. *Marriage and modernity: Family values in colonial Bengal*. Raleigh, N.C.: Duke University Press.
McDowell, Linda & Jane Dyson. 2011. The other side of the knowledge economy: ‘Reproductive’ employment and affective labours in Oxford. *Environment and Planning A* 43. 2186–2201.
McElhinney, Bonnie. 2007. Language, gender and economies in global transitions: Provocative and provoking questions about how gender is articulated. In Bonnie McElhinney (ed.), *Words, worlds, material girls: Language and gender in a global economy*, 1–38. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Meyerhoff, Miriam. 2006. *Introducing sociolinguistics*. London & New York: Routledge.
Mills, Sara & Louise Mullany. 2011. *Language, gender and feminism*. London: Routledge.
Mirchandani, Kiran. 2004. Practices of global capital: Gaps, cracks and ironies in transnational call centers in India. *Global Networks* 4(4). 255–373.
Mitter, Swasti & Nirmala Banerjee. 1998. Women making a meaningful choice. *Economic and Political Weekly* 33(51). 3247–3256.
Mohanty, Ajit, Minati Panda & Rashmi Pal. 2010. Language policy in education and classroom practices in India. In Kate Menken & Ofelia Garcia (eds.), *Negotiating language policies in schools: Educators as policymakers*, 211–231. New York & London: Routledge.
Neetha, N. 2004. Making of female breadwinners: Migration and social networking of women domestics in Delhi. *Economic and Political Weekly* 39(17). 1681–1688.
Neetha, N. & Rajni Praliwala. 2011. The absence of state law: Domestic workers in India. *Canadian Journal of Women and Law* 23(1). 97–119.
Parameswaran, Radhika & Kavitha Cardoza. 2009. Melanin on the margins: Advertising and the cultural politics of fair/light/white beauty in India. *Journalism and Communication Monographs* 11(3). 213–274.
Patel, Reena. 2010. *Working the night shift: Women in India's call centre industry*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.
Piller, Ingrid. 2018. Review of Lorente, Beatriz. (2017). Scripts of servitude: Language, labor, migration and transnational domestic work. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 22(2). 250–261.
Prashad, Vijay. 2000. *The karma of brown folk*. Minneapolis, MN: University Of Minnesota Press.
Ray, Raka & Seemin Qayum. 2009. *Cultures of servitude: Modernity, domesticity and class in India*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Romero, Mary. 2002. *Maid in the U.S.A.* New York: Routledge.
Sassen, Saskia. 1991. *The global city*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Scrase, Timothy J. 2002. Globalization and the cultural politics of educational change: The controversy over teaching of English in West Bengal, India. *International Review of Education* 48(5). 361–375.
Sen, Samita & Nilangana Sengupta. 2016. *Domestic days*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Shah, A. M. 1999. Changes in the family and the elderly. *Economic and Political Weekly* 34(20). 1179–1182.
Tinio, Pablo. 2013. From artistic creation to aesthetic reception: The mirror model of art. *Psychology, Aesthetics and the Arts* 7(3). 265–275.
Tupas, Ruanni (ed.). 2015. *Unequal Englishes: The politics of Englishes today*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Tupas, Ruanni & Aileen Salonga. 2016. Unequal Englishes in the Philippines. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 20(3). 367–381.
Vaid, Divya. 2016. Patterns of social mobility and the role of education in India. *Contemporary South Asia* 24. 285–312.
Weber, Max. 1958. *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* [translated by Talcott Parsons]. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications.