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More than Language:
The Work of an English Training Centre in Delhi

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Abstract

English language training centres are increasingly ubiquitous in urban India and are seen as the consequence of a renewed demand for English proficiency in the wake of the 1990s economic liberalisation. Such centres offer students not just the promise of fluency in the language but also a ticket to professional 'success' in the urban job-market. This comes at a time when the precarity of labour in the urban economy and the emergence of newer forms of embodied and aesthetic labour are the subjects of much scholarly discussion. The present ethnographic case study of an English language training centre in Delhi highlights the impact of post-liberalisation ideas of labour, skill and training on language acquisition, and its implications for language power and hierarchy in urban India.

Keywords: English Language, Urban India, Economic Liberalisation, Embodied Labour, Aesthetic Labour, Language Power, Skill, Training, Delhi.

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Introduction

It is not an uncommon sight in big cities like Delhi to come across entire neighbourhood walls plastered with twenty or more of the same black-and-white posters. Often, these are advertisements promising discount rates for spoken English classes. Some of these are for big training institutes and feature monotone images of smiling people wearing formal clothes and sitting in front of computers- a picture of the 'success' that joining these English classes can bring. Others are more modest text-only affairs from local 'coaching centres' or individual tutors, ending with a mobile phone number on which to contact for enrolment. They also make their way to people's homes as flyers pushed under front doors or slipped inside morning newspapers. Their sheer abundance is not only a testament to the proliferation of a diverse array of English language training centres (henceforth, ETCs) in urban India but also of a strong association between English proficiency and workplace success. Catering to adult learners who have had at least a high school education, these are spaces where the end-goal of language classes appears to be not so much linguistic proficiency as professional 'success'. The purpose of this study is to understand how this pursuit of professional 'success' shapes English language acquisition at ETCs and the implications of this on the wider political economy of English use in India. The present study is an attempt to unpack and understand what goes on inside such spaces through a case study of an ETC in Delhi using primary data collected from fieldwork.

The significance of this study lies in the intersectional location that ETCs occupy, the first instance of which is its association with employment and professional 'success'. In this context, the gradual liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s was a significant development that transformed urban centres in India and brought in new industries and employment opportunities (Cayla and Bhatnagar 2017; Dickey 2012; Krishnan and Hatekar 2017). The ongoing expansion of the urban private sector, particularly in the service economy, has

generated demand for new forms of labour in cities and a perceived need to 'prepare' a workforce suitable for such jobs (Gooptu 2013; Maitra and Maitra 2018). These processes of preparation are often articulated under the framework of 'human resource management' wherein terms like 'skill' and 'training' are commonplace. These are also distinct ways in which the post-liberalisation workplace constitutes, organises and regulates itself, its labour productivity and hierarchies (Cayla and Bhatnagar 2017). Employment opportunities ranging from that of a store assistant at a shopping mall to managerial positions at multi-national corporations now demand skill-training that goes beyond regular educational qualifications (Gooptu 2013). The perceived demand for English language proficiency at ETCs must be seen within this new paradigm of 'skills' and 'training' where the popularity of English as a 'desirable skill' is representative of both its co-option into a post-liberalisation notion of 'professionalism', as well as a certain 'global outlook' of the contemporary urban economy (Cayla and Bhatnagar 2017). Most importantly, as ETCs occupy a space where language-acquisition comes in contact with post-liberalisation conceptions of labour, skill, and training, this also engenders possibilities for the cultivation and consolidation of new subjectivities in the process of creating a 'desirable' workforce, and this forms the first focus area of this study.

The 'empowering' project of ETCs is also imbricated on the politics of English language use in India, informed by the particular historical, sociological and linguistic experiences that have shaped its continued presence in the country. As the language of the erstwhile colonisers who sought to cultivate an English-speaking native intermediary class through the higher education system, it continues to be viewed as a language of power, aspiration and social mobility (Bhattacharya 2017; Jayadeva 2018; LaDousa 2014). Its legal retention as a co-official language of independent India was the product of widespread, violent and ultimately successful resistance to the imposition of Hindi (Bharadwaj 2017). More recently, a resurgence of interest in the language since the end of the Cold War has been attributed to technology-driven

globalisation, the dominance of Anglo-American popular culture, and the uncontested hegemony of American capitalism, all of which have made increased inroads in India since economic liberalisation (Pennycook 2000; Nault 2012). The present-day currency of English language use at sites like ETCs must therefore be viewed within the existing negotiations of language politics and linguistic power in the country. While its historic presence in India has certainly been an 'elite' preserve, characterising the English language as a monolith of power or an elite lingua-franca fails to capture the plural ways in which the language can be used to both maintain and challenge hegemonic discourses (Sonntag 2000; Sonntag 2003). In the case of ETCs, one of the questions this study asks is if the proliferation of such spaces has democratised access to English, and what the impact of this may be on disrupting the power of existing English speakers of the country. Engaging with the impact of ETCs on language power forms the second focus of this study as it seeks to understand the kind of English taught at ETCs, how that sustains or disrupts language hierarchies, and what newer ways of conceptualising language power such findings might generate.

The cultivation of new subjectivities through the interaction of language acquisition with post-liberalisation market demands, and the impact of this process on the operations of language hierarchies and power in the city, form the two main strands of enquiry of the present study. In order to capture the everyday workings of an ETC, this study adopts an ethnographic approach in order to elicit how the students, teachers and the management view their own engagements and roles in the organisation. The following sections of the introduction discuss the methodology used to gather primary data before giving a more detailed context of the scholarly discussions that inform this study. The findings from the case study are then presented in two chapters organised thematically with the first one focussing on the facilitation of new embodied subjectivities in the process of language acquisition, and the second on language power and hierarchy. An overview of the key arguments emerging from both chapters is presented in the

conclusion which also discusses the limitations of this case study and the potential for future research.

Methodology

The primary data for this study was gathered through fieldwork conducted at an ETC in Delhi over the months of March and April 2019. The ETC chosen for the study is one of the more prominent of such institutions in the city and the Indian franchise of an international chain. The ETC has several branches in the National Capital Region (NCR) where Delhi is located, and fieldwork was conducted at two of their largest and busiest centres in South Delhi and Central Delhi. This involved interviews with students, teachers, management and front-desk staff of the centres, classroom observations of various courses, and an analysis of material practices including textbooks, assessment, registration and certification processes, and pedagogical manuals used for teacher-training.

The choice of this particular ETC was based on two important considerations, the first of which is its relative standing among other players in the ETC industry. Its scale and longevity of operations has enabled it to both develop pedagogic standardisation as well as evolve by adapting to local needs in a manner that smaller or newer ETCs cannot. Moreover, as a bigger player in the ETC industry, smaller and neighbourhood ETCs often try to emulate its organisational structure, pedagogy, and marketing strategy, which makes the findings of the present study more relevant for a broader understanding of how ETCs work, at least in the NCR. The second consideration for the choice of this ETC was my own familiarity with the site as a former English language teacher at the institute. My experience of having taught there for over three years was not only instrumental in gaining access to the ETC but has also enabled me to add depth and insight to the ethnographic data presented here.

As an institution that claims to help individuals on a path to 'success', the ethnographic method was found particularly useful for this study because the experiences, expectations and reflections of the agents and subjects of this process are critical in piecing together an understanding of what happens inside an ETC. An ethnographic method involving interviews and non-participant observation is also used in other similar case studies, most notably by LaDousa (2007), Bhattacharya (2017), and Jayadeva (2018). During the course of the fieldwork, individual interviews were conducted with ten English teachers and managers in charge of teaching and teacher-training at the ETC. Two group discussions with eight enrolled students each were conducted and followed up by eight individual interviews. Over thirty hours of classroom observations were also conducted. Five former students were also interviewed in order to gauge how students look back at their experiences at the ETC. The everyday functioning of the ETC was observed for a period of four weeks and supplemented with chats with front-desk staff at the centres who are responsible for registering and counselling students. Textbooks, classroom aids and other material made available by the ETC was also analysed in the course of the fieldwork.

Interviews conducted were semi-structured with broad introductory questions that allowed respondents the flexibility to talk about aspects of their experiences that they felt most strongly about. Teachers were recruited for interviews through a recruitment poster put up in the staffrooms of both centres of the ETC, while students were selected through individual outreach. Both for the group discussions and the interviews, the students selected were evenly distributed between the upper elementary, lower intermediate, and upper intermediate levels of English proficiency as assessed by the ETC's own criteria. All respondents were given the choice of English or Hindi, or a combination of the two, as the medium for the interviews and while the students used both languages, all the teachers and front-desk staff used English. Care

was taken to highlight the impartial nature of the study to the respondents to allay any fear of their critical opinions reaching the teachers and/or the management. The author's neutrality and non-endorsement of the ETCs marketing of English as the normative language of business and employment was also emphasised throughout. The names of all respondents have been pseudonymised in all mentions in this study. Written consent was obtained from all respondents after briefing them about the study, their involvement, and their rights, including their right to withdraw their consent at any point in the future. Prior approval and ethical clearance were obtained from the University of Oxford (CUREC) before the commencement of fieldwork.

Context and Background

Recent scholarship on the effects of economic liberalisation has increasingly focussed on the social and cultural impact of the wide-ranging changes that have occurred in the last three decades. A rapid expansion in the retail and service sectors of the urban economy, coupled with a desire to project Indian private enterprise as 'global' and aspiring to 'international standards', has led to a demand for new 'qualities' from employees that incorporate "embodied capacities and attributes", including "dress code, bodily deportments, personality traits, speech/accent, voice modulations, etc." (Maitra and Maitra 2018: 342). Such workplace requirements are broadly conceptualised under the framework of 'aesthetic labour', and the ability to speak and interact with clients and customers in the English language is an important component of this (Maitra and Maitra 2018). Jobs as diverse as those of baristas, gym instructors, store assistants, security guards, clerical staff and customer service agents now expect varying levels of English proficiency from employees, ranging from the ability to speak a few stock phrases when interacting with customers to the ability to write and record official communication in the language (Cayla and Bhatnagar 2017; Gooptu 2013; Maitra and Maitra 2018). As the wealth, aspirations and mobility of the emerging middle class are used to

exemplify the ‘success’ of economic liberalisation, the move towards an English-speaking service industry is an important way in which this transnational consumer class asserts its own success and upward mobility (Cayla and Bhatnagar 2017; Dickey 2012; Jayadeva 2018). These changes, coupled with demands of aesthetic labour from employees, have led to what has been termed a new ‘service style’ in urban centres, where certain ways of dressing, behaving, appearing and interacting are deemed essential for employability (Maitra and Maitra 2018). The prevalence of this ‘service style’ in cities is such that one study in Bengaluru found people identifying physical spaces of private enterprise and consumerism like corporate offices and big shopping malls as the ‘English spaces’ of the city (Jayadeva 2018).

The emergence of this new service style in urban India has subsequently opened up a perceived need to ‘skill’ and ‘train’ prospective and existing employees. Scholars have noted that ‘training’ and ‘skill’ programmes are premised on characterising the existing subject as ‘deficient’ in performing the actions necessary for employability in urban workplaces (Cayla and Bhatnagar 2017; Maitra and Maitra 2018). Existing employees in companies are often made aware of their ‘deficiencies’ through a process of ‘counselling’, which is an increasingly popular way in which communication and control within organisations is exercised (Gooptu 2013). Overtly meant to convey a sense of pastoral care between an employer and an employee, ‘counselling’ often works as a form of indirect job appraisal for the identification of ‘deficiencies’ that require training interventions to help an employee ‘upgrade’ their skills (Gooptu 2013). Such training programmes can either be in-house interventions within an organisation or outsourced to others.

The dyad of ‘counselling’ and ‘training’ in the context of aesthetic labour like English proficiency is said to work in tandem to ensure labour ‘productivity’, efficiency and keep employees motivated at the workplace, but scholarship on training programmes and corporate

‘counselling’ has also noted that such mechanisms are imbricated on notions of self-improvement and self-management that constitute a new paradigm of ‘politics of the self’ in the post-liberalisation landscape of urban India (Gooptu 2013). Such paradigms of self-management and self-improvement may also be seen as propelling a particular type of individualisation at the cost of organised, collective, structural and state action (Gooptu 2013; Gooptu 2016). Moreover, in the case of job skills, the suitability and employability of an individual is held to be the individual’s responsibility that they need to constantly demonstrate through self-management and skill-training, or face the risk losing their jobs to other, more suitable individuals. This may be seen as an effort to consolidate a new labour subjectivity that simultaneously legitimises and obfuscates the precarity of labour in the post-liberalisation workplace, and has wider implications on labour rights, citizenship, and democratic engagement (Gooptu 2013; Maitra and Maitra 2018). This study attempts to map overlaps and crossovers between how the post-liberalisation workplace conceptualises skill-training and self-management and the workings of an ETC, and how this might inform the cultivation of particular subjectivities at the ETC.

In the context of English language proficiency, ETCs may also be seen as building on other existing infrastructures of ‘training’ in urban India. Cities like Delhi have long had a large industry dedicated to ‘training’ and ‘coaching’ individuals for various professions, educational institutions and competitive examinations like those conducted by the Union and State Public Service Commissions (Nambissan 2017, Salovaara 2017). Indeed, some ETCs are newer additions and extensions of existing ‘coaching centres’ that have incorporated spoken English courses in their wider training curriculum. The practice of private ‘tuitions’ has not only been an extra-institutional space of education for school and college students, it has also been guided by a moral economy where parents encourage their children to go to such places instead of ‘wasting’ their time on what are seen as frivolous or morally-questionable activities (LaDousa

2007; Salovaara 2017). The tuition economy also works on the perceived quality, professionalism and respectability of individual teachers, which generally encourages more teacher-centric classrooms and the blurring of lines between teacher, mentor, life-coach and role model (Salovaara 2017). Thus, while the contemporary notions of 'self-cultivation' and skill-training are rooted in the demands of aesthetic labour and urban 'service style', they may also represent a convergence with older and existing forms of private 'preparatory' coaching and mentoring found in the tuition economy.

Besides the exigencies of the post-liberalisation workplace, ETCs are also products of the history and politics of English language use from the colonial period onwards. The rise of linguistic nationalisms aided by a massive expansion in vernacular print cultures in the late colonial period cemented the association between language and identity across the country (Bharadwaj 2017; Nault 2012). The Indian National Congress party at the time of independence was largely in favour of adopting either Hindi or Hindustani as the sole national language and phasing out the use of English in all official communication. This was unacceptable for most non-Hindi speaking regions that had by then had a history of mobilising mass movements around linguistic identities. The fear of 'Hindi imperialism' in these regions precipitated the language crisis of 1950-1967 which was a pivotal moment in the language debates of the country, culminating in the indefinite retention of English as a co-official language (Bharadwaj 2017). Constitutionally, the recognition of an ever-expanding list of 'Scheduled languages' was meant to further allay any fears of Hindi imposition, and the federal structure of India's polity, especially after the creation of linguistic states, allowed every state government to preserve, 'develop' and regulate their own languages. Furthermore, under the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, minority communities had the right to preserve and protect their own languages and cultures, most importantly in their educational institutions. This was particularly significant in the case of English as the Anglo-Indian community moved

the courts to have English recognised as a minority language of the community, enabling its continued use as the medium of instruction in their private schools across the country (Bharadwaj 2017).

The question of language education in public schools was more complex, and while the Kothari Commission's 1966 recommendations included a 'three-language formula' for Hindi and non-Hindi speaking areas, this has largely been considered to have been a failure in the Hindi speaking areas where it collapsed into a two-language Hindi-English formula (Bharadwaj 2017; Bhattacharya 2017). Moreover, between a Union government charged with the promotion and consolidation of Hindi and state governments keen on promoting their own languages, English in the vast majority of public schools languished due to lack of resources, training and, with a few notable exceptions, political will. This has resulted in a situation where, by and large, an education in English is far more expensive than in Hindi or other vernacular language-mediums, and 'good' English-medium schools tend to be more often private than public schools (Bhattacharya 2017; LaDousa 2005; 2007). This divide in language-mediums is further exacerbated by the fact that institutions of tertiary education, especially the more renowned technical and professional ones, tend to implicitly favour English in their curriculum and English-speaking candidates for admission, resulting in students from non-English educational backgrounds often faring poorly due to the difficulties of the 'language barrier' (LaDousa 2014).

The 'elite' associations of the English language are therefore not only a legacy of the colonial experience but also products of policies and language debates in independent India. However, neither are all speakers of English necessarily 'elite', nor is the English-speaking elite the only one. Selma Sonntag (2000), in her analysis of English language policies of the 1990s observes that underprivileged and lower-caste leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav of Bihar actually tried to

counter the hegemony of the sanskritised Hindi-speaking upper-caste elite by reintroducing compulsory English in public schools. Sonntag argues that Yadav "shifted… the discourse of language in North India… for him the debate on language needs to be indigenised, just as the English language needs to be indigenised" (Sonntag 2000: 144). She adds that in making English accessible to the masses through his education policy, Yadav demonstrated that the English language could be used as a counter-hegemonic tool. In her own categorisation of elites in the country, Sonntag identifies three such formations- the English-speaking elite, the Sanskritised-Hindi elite, and the vernacular elites. Thus, while there is undoubtedly a metropolitan English-speaking elite that has benefitted from controlling access to English education, the politics of English language in the country is keenly contested even in the realm of elite politics and democratising access to the English language can be significant in disrupting its power and hegemony.

In fact, Sazana Jayadeva's (2018) ethnography of ETCs in Bengaluru demonstrates that while people perceive English as a prerequisite for claiming a space in the new middle classes of urban India, the use of English remains a highly diverse practice with its own internal stratification. Her concept of 'many English lines' highlights that it is not just the use of English but the 'type' and context of English use that defines one's relative standing in the urban social order. Her respondents identify various 'types' of English- 'local', 'normal/good', and 'hi-fi/professional' English, suggesting that even as ETCs market themselves as providing unlimited mobility through access to the language, such mobility is circumscribed by various other socio-cultural and economic factors (Jayadeva 2018). This echoes Bourdieu's conception of linguistic power which is embedded (and embodied) in specific speech acts and effects between a *habitus* and a linguistic field or market (Bourdieu 1991). The *habitus* of English embodied by the abstract idea of it as a marker of social mobility is then subject to the linguistic field and market in which specific speech acts are expressed, and the latter may produce

varying effects of mobility depending on the dynamics of the specific field where it manifests. In the context of this study, the role of ETCs in sustaining or disrupting/democratising language hierarchies is therefore subject to the kind of English that is taught and learnt, what context it is spoken in, and most importantly, what the larger ecology is in which such a process is both conceptualised and expressed. These are some of the key critical frames within which the findings of the present study will be analysed and discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 1: English and Embodied Subjectivities

This chapter maps the impact of the post-liberalisation 'service style' on the English language taught at the ETC through the experiences of its teachers, students and management staff. Divided into two parts, the first section looks at the ways in which a certain 'global' outlook of the current urban economy combines with local demands and aspirations. The second section then takes a more in-depth look at the question of 'confidence' that most students at the ETC seek to gain from their engagement there, and how the 'teaching' of that 'confidence' may be premised on the cultivation of a new subjectivity.

The Global and the Local: A Case of Appearances and Aspirations

As I entered the South Delhi centre of the ETC on my first day of fieldwork, I immediately noticed that there was something different about the place. The freshly painted walls, the sleek new reception area, the minimalist wood panelling, the new glass doors- none of this was there when I last visited the centre over two years ago. Even the staircase had been completely renovated and was no longer the creaking wooden one that I was accustomed to. When I asked Nandita (interview, 18th March 2019)[1], one of the managers in charge of teaching, about these changes later in the day she said that the extensive renovations were felt necessary (and "long overdue") to give the ETC a "facelift", adding that "People expect a place like ours to look modern." The 'modern look', I realised as soon as I walked into the staffroom, was primarily for the consumption of the students because the staffroom, which students usually never entered, looked exactly the same, with its old wooden shelves overflowing with paper. The

[1] NB: All individual fieldwork interviews are pseudonymised throughout the study. If the same interview is used twice in the same paragraph, then the relevant interview is referenced only once at the first instance of its use. Some respondents were interviewed more than once and on different dates, but for convenience, the interview dates referenced are those of the first interview when their written consent was first obtained. A full list of interviews conducted during fieldwork is available in Appendix I.

inside of the staffroom was more akin to a government office while the rest of the centre could have been the office of a multinational corporation. Even the coaching centre next door had a new glass façade and shiny neon signboards, while several other establishments in the vicinity were at various stages of a similar metamorphosis.

The emphasis on a 'modern' appearance took a more global dimension when it came to the classrooms of the ETCs. At both the South Delhi and Central Delhi Centres, every classroom was named after a different city in the world. Over the course of my fieldwork, I conducted my interviews in Moscow, Dhaka, Rome, Athens and Cairo, and discovered that the air-conditioning in Athens works the best. This nomenclature was despite the fact that neither Russian nor Bengali, Italian, Greek or Arabic were taught at these centres. Besides being an overwhelmingly English language training institution, they did offer courses on French, German, Spanish and, due to demand from their international students more recently, Hindi. Some of the classrooms even had greetings in the appropriate language of the city it was named after drawn on its walls. I imagine the majority of them were as unintelligible to the students as they were to me, but they certainly made the impression of a space that was 'global' and where the knowledge of English could open doors to an international career. This imagined cartography of classrooms where Moscow sits next to Ottawa could also be meant to convey the international affiliation of the ETC itself, which is the Indian franchise of a global chain. It would appear that this convergence of symbols and discourses of the 'modern', 'global' and 'international' expressed through the material infrastructure of steel, glass and paint all come together to ultimately secure legitimacy for the ETC in the eyes of the local student who goes there.

The 'global' also came up in my conversation on curriculum with Nandita (interview, 18th March 2019). When I asked her about the colonial and elite associations of English and their

relevance in the present, she underplayed the importance of such perceptions, saying that those were in the past and "things have changed now… students come to us because they want to be part of the globalising world." She went on to talk about how, over the course of her many years at the ETC, she has seen students becoming more confident and less apologetic about their lack of English proficiency. "There is a renewed confidence," she says, "it is no longer about inferiority but about learning a language to get things done… to be successful." To further demonstrate that Indians now learnt English on their own terms, she told me about how the original textbooks sent to the ETC from the global headquarters had all been 'very European' in their images and contexts. To make the books more 'relevant', the ETC brought out its own Indian editions of the textbooks which are the ones now used there. "It's not about the colonial hangover anymore", she adds, "we are very much in favour of indigenising the language for jobs and businesses here."

The combination of a 'global' appearance and indigenous adaptation does indeed play an interesting role in the ETC's textbooks. There are now more Indian-sounding names in the books alongside Anglo-American ones, and references to rugby or basketball in the exercise activities have been changed to cricket. There is even mention of the Hindu festival of Diwali in one of the books where previously, I was told, it had been a page on Guy Fawkes Night. But as I went through the elementary and intermediate level textbooks, one striking and remarkably consistent feature I observed was the overwhelmingly consumerist slant in the vast majority of the language lessons. While a significant portion of the lessons directly dealt with English use in professional life, set in offices and covering topics ranging from general workplace communication to even subtle lessons on economic concepts and liberal market dynamics, the lessons with a more 'social' and 'recreational' purpose were the ones that really stood out in their choice of contexts. Lessons on 'leisure activities' had people going to shopping malls or on holidays to Europe, and the 'target language' to be learnt was on asking for your way around

a mall or a city, asking and answering questions about restaurants, cafes, bars, bowling alleys and the like, buying a variety of goods and products, ordering a meal at a ‘food court’, navigating an airport, making hotel reservations, etc. Even when a specific classroom activity was about conversation between friends, it was almost inevitably about sharing experiences of doing these very things. While they are all undoubtedly real-life situations one may find oneself in, and information-gap activities (requiring question-answer exchanges) are the staple of language lessons, what is remarkable about these lessons is that a vast majority of these information exchange activities are premised on the consumption of goods and services which, in an Indian context, are all set precisely in the spaces that people identity as the ‘English spaces’ of the city. The indigenisation of these books therefore represents the projection of ‘global’ aspirations and appearances on local sites and spaces in a way that creates a blueprint of the imagined ‘lifestyle’ of the ‘ideal’ Indian English-speaker/consumer.

“It is what they [the students] aspire for,” says Bhavesh (interview, 27th March 2019), a young English teacher at the ETC. He tells me that it is often the novelty of these experiences in such activities that draws his students’ attention. “You have to keep them engaged” he says, “and these activities… [aren’t just] teaching new language but giving them new information about the world.” Another English teacher, Christine (interview, 28th March 2019), tells me that the ETC even encourages teachers to take their students out on one of the classes for a ‘real-life’ lesson based on these textbook examples. “I took my class to [a nearby café/snack-bar] where they practised ordering food and drinks in English… they had a lot of fun.” In my group discussions with students, almost everyone agreed that such experiences were an important part of learning English, and they wanted more such lessons. Ravi (interview, 29th March 2019), a college student enrolled at the ETC, said that he felt a new sense of “being accepted” at such places if he spoke and ordered in English even though he says that he had managed perfectly well previously, and faced no discrimination, speaking in Hindi. To compare the

textbook contexts with the life experiences of the students I interviewed, six out of eight had never taken an international flight and four had never used air travel. All of them had been to malls but only three of them said they went there to buy something. Five of the eight mentioned feeling uncomfortable if they couldn't speak in English at such places, especially when the store assistants initiated a conversation in English. One of my student respondents even said that learning about 'brand names' and how to "say them correctly" was very useful, while another mentioned that he realised the importance of wearing 'branded clothes' after attending the English classes at the ETC (Sangita, interview, 29th March 2019; Pravin, interview, 30th March 2019). "There is a way of doing things," Ravi explained to me in Hindi, "we do things [without English] in one way… but with English, we have to learn how to look, behave, think… that's how I want to be, just like my teacher."

The desire to emulate their teachers (the 'good' ones, at least) was in fact something nearly every student mentioned in their interviews. The ETC is aware of this, which is why the final touch in projecting a certain appearance involves their teachers. "It's not just about their teaching qualities," Nandita told me when I asked about the recruitment of teachers, "that's something we can train them here. When I look for a teacher, I look at their personality… how well they can fit into our classroom… if the students will like them..." (Nandita, interview, 18th March 2019). 'Energetic', 'dynamic', 'smart' are some of the qualities she mentioned, but what is also implicit is that the ideal teacher is one who is familiar with, and indeed embodies, the consumerist 'lifestyle' of the textbooks. Bhavesh (interview, 27th March 2019) acknowledged this and said, "My students like me and look up to me because they think I am well-travelled, have a good command over English, know about all the things [they see] on television and internet." Whether the life-experiences of the students match the textbook 'lifestyle' or not, the ones of the teachers have to, or at least appear to be, so much so that there is even a dress-code for the teachers- 'smart casual'. "It's semi-formal," said Christine (interview, 28th March

2019), "just like what you would expect in a corporate office." However, the name 'smart casual' captures much more than what clothes one is required to wear, as another teacher explained. "In today's world everyone needs to be smart," Manoj (interview, 29th March 2019), a veteran English teacher at the ETC, told me, "businesses need smart people… and flexibility, that's why 'casual'." In this convergence of 'global' appearances and indigeneity, 'smart casual' captures an important paradigm shift in the contemporary urban economy, where the emphasis is, in Nandita's words, on "getting things done", through cultivated and individual 'smartness', in a conducive environment governed by 'flexibility' that echoes popular corporate demands like minimising regulation, cutting oversight, 'reforming' labour protection laws, etc. Alongside the rise of 'casual labour' in the urban economy and projects envisioning 'smart cities' in the country, the currency of 'smart casual' at the ETC, as indeed its unique hybridity of global and local appearances and aspirations, partakes in legitimising the new-normative of the post-liberalisation political economy, premised on certain modes of being, behaving, interacting and consuming (Gooptu 2013; Cayla and Bhatnagar 2017; Maitra and Maitra 2018). The English language, it would appear, works as a useful tool in consolidating such a paradigm at the ETC, not so much by building on students' aspirations as by manufacturing such aspirations through cultivated appearances and textbook lifestyles.

Teaching 'Confidence': The Cultivation of an Assemblage

As in most other ethnographies of English learners in India (Bhattacharya 2017; Jayadeva 2018), one of the main factors in joining English classes that I encountered in my interviews and discussions with students is what they identify as their 'lack of confidence'. A part of the reason they claimed for this is the lack of knowledge of English- not being able to string 'proper' sentences, absence of suitable vocabulary, mispronouncing words, etc. But the largest deterrent was the fear of being 'judged' by others for their lack of proficiency. "I can

understand everything [in English],” Sumedha (interview, 31st March 2019), a student at the ETC who works as a hairdresser, told me, “but beyond ‘yes’ ‘no’, I am not confident speaking more... [in such situations] it is better to stay quiet.” Sumedha explained that it is not that her clients at the fairly affluent salon she works for expect her to speak in English, and neither does the knowledge of English translate into better tips for services. It is the difference in the relationship one establishes, she told me, as her colleagues who can speak English “have a different relationship with their clients… they laugh, joke, share experiences… like equals. I just quietly do my work and nothing more.” In Sumedha’s case, the yearning for ‘confidence’ is a yearning for a certain acceptance in a space where she spends the majority of her time; a yearning to be ‘seen’ as a certain individual who can be an ‘equal’ to her clients even for that brief moment.

Nearly all the teachers interviewed brought up the issue of confidence as an important element of what they try to teach in their classes. “But it is difficult,” admitted Tamanna (interview, 29th March 2019), a teacher at the ETC, “because we can teach structures, words, pronunciation, but not change their personalities or intelligence.” Another teacher, Akash (interview, 31st March 2019), agreed that while an improvement in one’s English proficiency can boost their confidence, what the students desire is something that can only happen if they “open their eyes, go out and see the world, read up on things… I can’t teach those things to them.” Some of the teachers even characterised their students as ‘lazy’ and ‘unenthusiastic’ individuals who expect English classes to magically ‘transform’ them, while a few acknowledged that the ‘confidence’ that their students desire might be difficult to achieve given their ‘backgrounds’. In fact, there was a keen awareness among the teachers of the ‘class divide’ between themselves and their students, a majority of whom they claimed either came from smaller cities or towns, or had had a poor public school (presumably ‘Hindi-medium’) education, or simply lacked the necessary ‘exposure’ to English (and the accompanying

‘lifestyle’). It is clear that the teachers, and students like Sumedha, recognise that there are socio-cultural factors beyond the linguistic or even economic ones that shape the ‘confidence’ that students at the ETC ‘lack’. As in Sumedha’s experience, this ‘confidence’ is the ability to *be* a certain individual who can claim acceptance and participation, even momentary equality, in the ‘English spaces’ of the city and, as a corollary to this, the ‘lack’ of this confidence is the ‘deficiency’ of this particular kind of individualism demanded by such spaces.

How does the ETC address this concern and teach ‘confidence’ to its students? One part of this is certainly through the simulated exposure to such a ‘lifestyle’, as discussed in the previous section, that the textbooks provide. Another is through the presentation of teachers in the classrooms as embodiments of this confidence, something that is actively supported and kept in check through an interlinked system of student-feedback, classroom observations and teacher-training that ensures teachers are knowledgeable, likable, and sustaining their students’ attention/admiration. Some of the feedback given to teachers from their classroom observations include their ‘presence’ in the class, how ‘dynamic’ they are, and if their classes are ‘interesting’. Such subjective parameters are only perplexing if we don’t factor in the economy of ‘confidence’ that sustains such classes, where the teacher’s confidence in class is meant to do half the trick. “It definitely feels like a performance,” Christine (interview, 28th March 2019) conceded, “if you don’t bring energy and confidence with you to the class, whatever else you are trying to teach would fall flat.” The students, on their part, are also discerning of ‘good’ teachers from the ‘bad’ or boring ones. Teachers who are younger, ‘professional’, dress ‘smartly’ and speak ‘confidently’ are the ones who everyone seems to like. In this system of teachers being held up as role models for emulation, it is also important to keep in mind that for many of the students, even the opportunity to interact with someone like their teachers is something largely unavailable to them outside the ETC.

Besides textbooks and teachers, another significant way in which the ETC facilitates the teaching of ‘confidence’ is through their own pedagogic conceptualisation of ‘skills’. The academic layout of the ETC is divided into general courses on spoken English and more specialised ‘skill’ courses on particular aspects of communication. There are courses on ‘interview skills’, ‘presentation skills’, ‘telephonic skills’, ‘conversation skills’ and recent efforts to start courses on ‘personality development skills’. These are in addition to group discussions, debates, and other ‘activity classes’ regularly organised at the ETC. On the one hand, these courses are products of the demands of urban workplaces that require certain employees to specialise in certain skills more than others, in this case perhaps representing a linguistic variant of the post-fordist model of workplace organisation. On the other hand, this constellation of ‘skills’ beyond basic spoken English characterises competence and proficiency in the language as an assemblage of several individual pieces. The enumeration of language competence into discreet components helps quantify, standardise and regulate the otherwise intangible and amorphous notion of ‘proficiency’. This is then held up to the students as a roadmap for achieving ‘confidence’ in the ‘counselling’ interventions that the front-desk staff make when students come to them at the end of a particular course, often disappointed that they haven’t acquired the ‘confidence’ that they thought they would.

In contrast to the overt advertising and marketing of the ETCs that emphasises the ease and speed of learning English at their centres, most front-desk staff who I interacted with told me that they make it clear to the students during the counselling and registration processes that gaining mastery over the language is a sustained process. Using the metaphor of a long road, one front-desk staff told me that she tells the dissatisfied students that while they have covered ‘one stretch’ of the road, there is more ahead (Radhika, interview, 27th March 2019). This is usually followed by a recommendation to sign up for a new ‘skill’ course to cover the ‘next stretch’. Another front-desk staff said she used an anatomical illustration for this, telling

students that every part of the body needed to be ‘treated’ one-by-one, and while some ‘skills’ will help the hand, others will help the feet, head, eyes, and so on (Pooja, interview, 27th March 2019). Besides the revealing characterisation of the non-English speaking individual as a diseased body in need of ‘treatment’, this illustration also captures the centrality of the student’s own actions in pursuing a long-term goal. They will acquire ‘confidence’ gradually, if they procure the necessary parts to complete the whole through a process of self-cultivation. In this case, the counselling offered affirms the ‘deficiency’ of the student as the main reason for their lack of confidence, pitting the student as responsible for their own cultivation and, by extension, their own lack of success at getting jobs or their alienation and marginalisation from the ‘English spaces’ of the city. If ‘confidence’ here works as an alibi for a particular kind of consumerist individualism required for full participation in these spaces, then by that logic, such individualism too becomes an assemblage of various components that need to be actively procured and cultivated.

On the merits of such a cultivation, Varun and Ahmed, two ex-students, had contrasting experiences. Ahmed (interview, 31st March 2019) was happy that he had completed the ‘set’ of courses recommended by his counsellor at the ETC and changed jobs to a better paying, senior position in a different company. “I feel more confident here, because I see others in my new office who can’t speak good English… and lack confidence” he told me, adding that while he feels bad for their situation and that it’s unfair, “because English is not intelligence”, he still feels a reassuring sense of superiority for being “better than them, at least in English.” Varun (interview, 28th March 2019), on the other hand, felt that while his time at the ETC was fun and memorable for the friends he made there, the courses didn’t really help him much. “I am still bad in English,” he informed me, “and even if I did a hundred courses, I won’t be able to reach the level of my seniors who had private school education.” Ahmed told me that he found the advice given to him by his teachers very useful, and how things like watching English

movies and TV shows really helped. The intended transformation that they both aspired for is something Varun cannot see in himself, even though he admitted that he might resume English classes at some point in the future. But more tellingly, Ahmed's own reflection on his transformation best captures the relationship between 'confidence' and a certain sense of individualism that this section has tried to map. "I can see it in how I talk, how I walk," he told me happily, "I feel like a different person now."

Chapter 2: English Speakers and English-Speaking Employees

The focus of this chapter is on the relationship between the workings of an ETC and the question of language power. The two sections of this chapter are based on two key observations from the field, namely, a pedagogic preference for monolingual classes that often spills over to an insistence on 'only English' from students, and differences in how the students and teachers perceive each other's and their own 'fluency' and use of the language.

Communicative Competence and the Hard Boundary

The pedagogy followed at the ETC is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method of second language (L2) teaching that has been widely popular around the world since the 1970s (Atkinson 1999; Savignon 2002; Sheorey 2006). The three main components of this pedagogy are monolingual classrooms in the target language (in this case, English), the eschewing of grammar teaching in favour of learning through practice, and classes that are less teacher-centric and more focussed on students and activities (Richards and Rodgers 2001). Shelves full of training manuals and resources for teachers in the ETC's staffrooms are all based on this pedagogy. All the teachers at the ETC undergo compulsory in-house training to use this method in their classes and there is a system of workshops that teachers must attend periodically to improve specific aspects of this method. Nandita (interview, 18th March 2019) told me that this method is the fundamental advantage the ETC has over its competitors because "it's effective, it's not dull, and it shows results." Six of the ten teachers interviewed also supported this claim, while others conceded that teaching grammar directly was sometimes necessary and unavoidable. What all the teachers and the management agreed on was the need to keep the classrooms 'English only' spaces and encourage students to talk more and 'practice' the language they have learnt. In scholarship on L2 acquisition, this complete segregation of

the target language from the wider multilingual context in which it may be taught is often termed a ‘hard boundary’ (Gorter and Cenoze 2013). This hard boundary at the ETC extends beyond the classroom to the other spaces of the ETC, like the reception areas and cafeterias, where one routinely encounters teachers or front-desk staff reprimanding students for speaking in languages other than English. The most common and routine offender of this hard boundary at the ETC is Hindi, and every effort is made, at least on the surface level, to keep the ETC free from its presence and a truly ‘English space’.

Suresh (interview, 31st March 2019), an older student at the ETC, felt that this is the right environment to learn English and that “if I had such an environment when I was younger, I would have been very good by now.” Another student, Payal (interview, 27th March 2019), also agreed, adding that “we can only start speaking good English… and thinking in good English… [if] we remove our minds from Hindi.” In fact, ‘thinking in English’ was a major concern for half the students I interviewed. Even in the group discussions, both groups agreed that this was an important step in becoming a fluent speaker of the language. “It is for them to avoid translating from Hindi to English,” explained a teacher, “because that can slow you down” (Manoj, interview, 28th March 2019). Two other teachers also mentioned asking their students to proactively switch to English in their conversations with friends outside the ETC so as to get more ‘practice’ using the language. But convincing all the students to do this is not easy, as front-desk staff and counsellor Radhika (interview, 27th March 2019) informed me. “I keep catching them speaking to each other in Hindi,” she said, “so sometimes I just tell them that if they keep speaking in Hindi, they will never learn English.” Maintaining the hard boundary at the ETC, it would appear, becomes an exercise in controlling and admonishing the use of Hindi not just at the centres but extending it to the everyday lives of students. The logic of ‘thinking in English’ that the students seem to have inferred from these efforts may also potentially exclude the possibility of reconciling multiple language use in the multilingual lives

that they lead. Most importantly, and regardless of any pedagogic wisdom in reprimanding students for speaking in Hindi at the ETC, the very act of an English-speaking teacher admonishing students for speaking the language they are comfortable in outside the classrooms is an exercise in surveillance and control that not only reinforces language hierarchies but also the alienation that students experience in such ‘English spaces’.

On the question of language hierarchy, the students largely reject the idea that any one language is superior or inferior than another. In most cases, the comparison in their minds was between Hindi and English, and what seven out of eight students emphasised on is the different roles they played in their lives. English was characterised as ‘necessary’ and ‘useful’, while Hindi was spoken of as ‘our language’. One student, Kavita (interview, 27th March 2019), saw things differently and argued that Hindi was far superior, but lacked the international appeal that English had. More interestingly, she felt that if there were training centres for Hindi around the world “just like this one [is] for English” then Hindi would become a far more “powerful” language. What is worth noting here is that, at least for Kavita, the work of ETCs was not just providing access to a language based on pre-existing demand but creating and cultivating that demand and playing an active role in augmenting the power of English. The teachers, on the other hand, saw their role as ‘helping’ students get what they want, and where they want to be professionally. Most of the teachers too disagreed on the existence of a hierarchy between languages, but one teacher, Gauri (interview, 31st March, 2019), believed that English is inherently a more ‘logical’ language than Hindi and therefore slightly superior. When I asked her to elaborate, she said, “you can solve problems in English faster… it takes time in Hindi.” While I cannot entirely fathom what that means, and questioning her further didn’t elicit any clearer explanation, what this is certainly indicative of are the kinds of associations that the formulation of ‘English-for-success’ at ETCs and elsewhere have spawned, and their potential classroom implications, seeing as this comes from a teacher.

The focus on policing a hard boundary between Hindi (or other languages) and English in not just the classrooms but the lives of students also appears odd given that many of the teachers admitted to using a combination of Hindi and English in their own personal lives. 'Hinglish' is a portmanteau often used to describe a variety of hybrid speech practices including code-switching and code-mixing between Hindi and English, writing Hindi in the Latin script, or using direct translations that infuse the flavour of one language into the other. Seven out of the ten teachers interviewed said that they use such a mix of languages in their lives, and four reported doing so regularly. Gauri, the teacher who felt English was more 'logical', said that code-switching between English and Hindi was very common in her circle of friends because "it comes naturally, and it's more relaxed and comfortable to communicate like that with friends." Another teacher, Bhavesh (interview, 27th March 2019), agreed and said that Hinglish is an important expression of "our multilingual identity… and comfort in mixing languages like that generally indicates a level of proficiency in both." None of the teachers I spoke to have any problem with Hinglish and code-switching in their personal lives, but all of them were against its use by students. "I can't encourage that here," said one teacher, "It is not good for students who want to learn" (Manoj, interview, 28th March 2019) The consensus on this was that Hinglish, when it came from an inability to speak in English (as was perceived to be the case with students) was not desirable, but its use by those who had a 'fair command' of both languages was permissible or indeed a sign of that individual's 'comfort' and proficiency.

The students agreed with their teachers that Hinglish was not something to be encouraged and saw it as a sign of not being fluent in English. Both Suresh (interview, 31st March 2019) and Payal (interview, 27th March 2019) understood 'Hinglish' to imply 'broken English', something that they had in fact come to the ETC to rectify. Moreover, 'Hinglish' was seen as being at odds with the practice of 'thinking in the language' when speaking it which was a

notion almost all the students had accepted to be an important building block in developing fluency. “It doesn’t sound good,” said another student, “people will think you don’t know English, or have a bad education” (Pravin, interview, 30th March 2019). The effect of this hard boundary on the students was evidently a purist notion of language use and a fear of mixing languages which they understand to be something that they have to actively resist and disavow. But using only English in their lives also had other effects as Ravi (interview, 29th March 2019), a student, explained, “If I suddenly start speaking in English with my friends, they will either laugh at me or think I am trying to show off… they may even stop being friends with me.” But even the fear for losing his friends doesn’t deter Ravi from agreeing with his teachers, “I know I will improve more if I practice English with friends… but it’s not practical with the friends I have.” He does not know how he will resolve this dilemma, but he will “keep trying”. Pravin also admitted that he had to do more, saying, “I also catch myself using Hindi words in English, but I keep telling myself to stop doing that… I have to discipline myself.” The fact that Pravin understands this as a question of ‘discipline’ speaks volumes about how at least some of the students have internalised the importance of this hard boundary. The overall significance of this, whatever the pedagogic merits of a hard boundary, is the manner in which the notion of ‘self-cultivation’ of language discussed in the previous chapter, is compounded here by a system of linguistic control that not only alienates students from the multilingual contexts of their friends and family, but also holds them responsible for ‘disciplining’ themselves in order to improve their English.

Unequal Plurilingualism, Unequal Speakers

The contrast between the teachers’ embrace of Hinglish in their own lives against the prescription of a hard boundary and ‘only English’ for the students has another interesting dimension. Talking about how they prepare for their classes, many teachers mentioned that

they teach a particular lesson in a way that their students understand. When asked what these considerations might be, the teachers spoke about ‘thinking’ from a Hindi-speaker’s perspective and teaching what might be intelligible to them. “I sometimes think about what the Hindi equivalent of something in English is,” said Tamanna (interview, 29th March 2019), “and then see how best I can illustrate that equivalence in class through English.” Asked if this contradicts the pedagogy that prohibits translational teaching, most teachers didn’t seem to see this as translation per se. “I am not translating in class,” argued Christine (interview, 28th March 2019), “I am doing [this] in my head to find the most effective way that a Hindi speaker can grasp something.” In fact, understanding how their students ‘think’ was an important consideration in planning lessons for nearly all the teachers interviewed, and the overwhelming consensus on this was that the students ‘think in Hindi’. The teachers therefore felt that this mental exercise was useful in anticipating the impact of a lesson and modifying their lesson plans accordingly.

These responses from the teachers reminded of my own time at the ETC when I would regularly overhear conversations in the staffroom where other teachers would try to understand a particular error that a student made in class and how that stemmed from Hindi. While this is undoubtedly a clever way to trace why a student might repeatedly make the same mistake, what is fascinating about this is that it is the knowledge of Hindi, and not English, that enables English teachers to do so. Eight of the ten teachers interviewed considered themselves fluent in Hindi, and the other two claimed to have spent enough time in Delhi to have picked up a fair command over the language. When I put this observation to two of the teachers, and asked how things might be different if they didn’t have a knowledge of Hindi, then one of them admitted that, “things would be difficult… I would have a hard time… understanding the context from where my students came [from]”, while the other claimed that, “I won’t understand the reason for half their mistakes” (Gauri, interview, 31st March 2019; Akash, interview, 2019). This is

clearly something that the teachers consider important and represents a further blurring of the 'hard boundary' between Hindi and English that the ETC otherwise upholds.

Plurilingualism is a term that denotes a person's ability to use two or more languages, and access two or more linguistic and/or cultural contexts, simultaneously (Lüdi and Py 2009). It is different from multilingualism which is the simultaneous existence of two or more languages in a society. Plurilingualism is an individual's negotiation of multiple languages. A plurilingual speaker, most importantly, has a blended grasp of both languages whose competence is construed as a combination of both languages and not separately for each language (Lüdi and Py 2009). The teachers, both in their use of Hinglish in their personal lives and in planning their lessons, are using precisely this plurilingual competence. Even in L2 teaching scholarship, there is increasing recognition that a 'hard boundary' between languages in multilingual settings might be less favourable than a 'soft boundary' that enables the cultivation of plurilingual (and pluricultural) competence (Canagarajah and Ashraf 2013; Gorter and Cenoze 2013). The teachers' use of their plurilingualism and the denial of it to the students strikes as an oddity that may have a significant impact on how these two groups access language(s) and the concomitant symbolic power that they exercise in their use.

When I asked students if they envision themselves speaking as well as their teachers in the future, all of them agreed that it was entirely possible if they 'worked hard' and followed the advice given to them by their teachers and counsellors at the ETC. It appeared that they accepted their own primary responsibility in this and didn't see any particular circumstantial or structural inhibition. Only one student, Sangita (interview, 29th March 2019), raised the issue of lack of 'support' back home saying that it was difficult for her to become fluent given that none of her family members spoke the language and neither did her friends. "But if I try hard, I can also speak like [my teacher]," she said, "with enough dedication… anyone can be who

they want." There is a blurring in this statement between speaking like her teacher and *being* like her teacher, indicating that students themselves understand the embodied nature of language learning that the ETC seems to facilitate. Moreover, the overwhelming admiration that the students had for their teachers, as mentioned in the previous chapter, and their perceived centrality in the classroom according to their students, sits at odds with the ETC's desire to have less teacher-centric classes and more focus on the standardised pedagogy. Pravin (interview, 30th March 2019) even mentioned that he joined the ETC after his friend who had enrolled earlier told him about this particularly good teacher at the centre. "I insisted on joining [that particular teacher's] class," he said, "without a good teacher, you can't learn anything."

The same question of fluency, when put to the teachers, elicited a greater variety of responses. Two of them seem to think it was completely possible for their students to become as fluent as themselves but, again, only if they worked hard enough. Three others felt that the kind of fluency they possessed was due to their formative education in English and that such long and early exposure to the language could not be replicated easily. They imagined that their students could come very close but not be 'equal' to them. The other five felt that it was an unnecessary comparison because what mattered was for the students to gain the 'level' of English they needed to get the jobs they wanted. Rajesh (interview, 25th March 2019), a senior teacher with many years of experience at the ETC, even went so far as to say that the students didn't want that in the first place, arguing that his students understood that every individual's 'level' was different, and everyone had 'limitations'. He was unclear in specifying what these 'limitations' might be and ended by saying, "but you know what I mean."

Ethnographies of ETCs have already noted the existence of gradations and hierarchies within speakers of the language and that Indian English speakers does not denote a homogenous category (LaDousa 2005; Jayadeva 2018). What I wanted to understand was the kind of English

speakers that the ETC was producing, and how they related to other speakers of the language outside the ETC. Diverse as they are in themselves, if one were to consider the teachers and the students as two separate categories of English speakers, it appears that while the students aspire for and envision themselves becoming like their teachers one day (an aspiration that is at least in part actively promoted by the ETC itself), the teachers themselves recognise the limitations in this actually happening. Nandita (interview, 18th March 2019) summed this up well when she said, "we are empowering them for work… for jobs… they need to know what their employers demand from them." She informed me that several companies were asking the ETC to train their employees and that they were all demanding 'customised' courses that catered to what the companies required from their employees. The requirement, it appears, is not training fluent English speakers but producing *customised* English-speaking employees.

Discussion and Conclusion

The two main areas that this case study undertook to explore were the impact of job-market considerations and the pursuit of professional 'success' on the English language taught at the ETC, and whether the work of the ETC maintains, disrupts or democratises language power and hierarchy in an urban Indian context. The present discussion highlights the key findings that emerge from the two chapters of the study and attempts to answer these questions and analyse their wider implications.

The findings from the first chapter indicate that there are several overlaps and crossovers between issues raised in the scholarship on the post-liberalisation urban economy and the way in which the ETC seeks to project itself and its work. Right from the way it emphasises a 'modern' appearance to the consumerist slant in its textbooks, the professional 'success' that the ETC promises seems to be premised on much more than just learning the English language. The ETC's incorporation of post-liberalisation consumerism and an aspirational 'lifestyle' in its language teaching serves to both lend it legitimacy in the eyes of its students as well as make the process of language acquisition also a process of individual transformation. For the students, the English language becomes indistinguishable from the other embodied qualities promoted by the ETC in its portrayal of the 'ideal' English speaker- an 'ideal' best embodied by the teachers at the ETC who are also keenly aware of their own class superiority over their students. Such an ecology also draws further strength from the pre-existing 'tuition' economy where teachers are also role-models to be emulated. The overall effect of this could well be that students understand 'success' and 'acceptance' in the 'English spaces' to imply not just being proficient in English but being and embodying an individualism that is premised on certain ways of behaving, interacting and consuming. This is not just an aspiration that the students come to the ETC with, but one that the space actively promotes and indoctrinates

through its workings. While the perception of English as a vehicle for personal transformation and class aspiration is well documented in existing scholarship (Bhattacharya 2013; Jayadeva 2018; LaDousa 2007), what this case study adds to this scholarship is the important and active role played by ETCs in producing such a perception.

On the post-liberalisation dynamics of skill-training, the findings from the first chapter corroborate existing scholarship that highlights self-management and self-improvement as new paradigms of 'politics of the self' that facilitate a new kind of individualism (Gooptu 2013; Maitra and Maitra 2018). This case study demonstrates how, in the context of English language acquisition, the constellation of communication-skill courses offered to students as a way of gradually gaining 'confidence' works through the characterisation of an individual as 'deficient' and that this additive logic of skill-training becomes a metonym for an additive, self-cultivated and consumption-based individualism. Moreover, the 'lack of confidence' experienced by students at the ETC may be seen as an emotional embodiment of the precarity of labour in the urban economy that is thrust back on the students as their responsibility that they need to rectify within themselves rather than seek structural or collective action and change. Overall, the findings from the first chapter indicate that the ETC represents a co-option of the English language into a post-liberalisation political economy where acceptance, integration and equality are premised on individual transformation and cultivation. An individual's inability to do so, and their subsequent disenfranchisement from this new political economy represented by the 'English spaces', is ultimately rendered to be their own personal failure.

The findings from the second chapter highlight how the pedagogic 'hard boundary' of the classrooms spills over and gives way to a system of surveillance and control at the ETC. The 'hard boundary' not only fails to adequately address and imbibe the multilingual context of the

students' lives, it also compounds their precarity by characterising their failure to observe this 'boundary' as a lack of 'discipline'. But what this fundamentally does in an urban Indian context is to lend further credibility to the 'English spaces' of the city being 'only English' spaces. As a space where non-speakers of the language come to learn and improve their English, and therein hope to include themselves in the English public sphere of the city, this insistence on monolingualism only throws their exclusion in sharper relief. The findings of this case study demonstrate the harmful ways in which, particularly in a place like India where English is perceived as an aspirational language, such a pedagogy places undue strain on students to disavow their plurilingualism and runs the risk of reinforcing language hierarchies and stereotypes. While this was not a pedagogical study to compare the relative merits of language teaching strategies, the findings here certainly corroborate the need for a more plurilingual approach to language teaching found in existing scholarship (Canagarajah and Ashraf 2013; Gorter and Cenoze 2013).

On the question of democratising access to English, this study finds that the overall work of the ETC not only engenders the creation of unequal speakers of the language but actively maintains language power and hierarchy. Under Bourdieu's (1991) conception of symbolic power, the ETC may be seen as institutionalising a kind of symbolic violence in its promotion of an idea of learning English that demands 'discipline' and self-control in addition to its equation of a particular type of embodied English-as-subjectivity with 'success'. While individual students may indeed have a liberating experience learning English, the project of the ETC itself seems not so much about 'empowering' students with English as it is about helping employers get suitable English-speaking employees. The mobility promised by the ETC is circumscribed by a combination of job-market considerations and the unwillingness or inability to grasp the importance of plurilingual competence as mentioned previously. In fact, the plurilingual and pluricultural competence exhibited by the teachers in their negotiation of their

teaching role indicates the need for a plurilingual conception of language power in multilingual settings like urban India. The power that the teachers exercise in their role is not just based on their knowledge of English but on their competence across two languages that lets them access the cultural context of both 'English spaces' and their students' lives. This case study would argue that the emerging transnational middle class is also a translingual and plurilingual class that embodies the combined symbolic capital of multiple languages and contexts, just as the teachers combine Hindi and English. The ability to reconcile different languages and blend their contexts is what might constitute language power in the contemporary landscape, whereas the isolated knowledge of different languages may only leave an individual more alienated and disempowered.

In conclusion, I hope that this study has been able capture some facets of what goes inside an ETC and add to existing scholarship on the impact of such sites on language politics and the dynamics of urban industry. As a case study of a single ETC, there are several limitations to the findings presented here. The findings here need to be corroborated with the work of other ETCs since this term represents a diverse array of institutions and some of them may have vastly different pedagogies and approaches. The short duration of the fieldwork on which the study is based is another limitation, and a more longitudinal ethnography of an ETC with a larger number of respondents would certainly yield more conclusive findings. As multidimensional sites, ETCs also offer interesting opportunities to analyse other facets that were beyond the scope of the present study. In particular, the dynamics of gender, caste, economic migration and urban socialisation at ETCs are all extremely relevant lines of enquiries that I hope are undertaken in the future. This study also highlights the need for more ethnographic studies on English language use at post-liberalisation urban workplaces and other 'English spaces' in urban India. The use of English by those who acquire English language skills at ETCs in the wider public sphere, as indeed that of other first-generation speakers of

the language, is another interesting avenue for future research. How the increasing participation of such speakers of English impacts the already heterogenous composition of the English public sphere, and how this shapes discourses of 'youth', consumption, popular culture, media and politics are other significant areas that would benefit from scholarly scrutiny.

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Appendix I: List of Fieldwork Interviews

Interviews with Teachers and Managers:

1. Akash, interview with author, 31st March 2019.
2. Bhavesh, interview with author, 27th March 2019.
3. Christine, interview with author, 28th March 2019.
4. Ganesh, interview with author, 26th March 2019.
5. Gauri, interview with author, 31st March 2019.
6. Jonathan, interview with author, 31st March 2019.
7. Manoj, interview with author, 28th March 2019.
8. Nandita, interview with author, 18th March 2019.
9. Rajesh, interview with author, 25th March 2019.
10. Sheetal, interview with author, 26th March 2019.
11. Tamanna, interview with author, 29th March 2019.

Interviews with Students:

1. Akshay, interview with author, 26th March 2019.
2. Kavita, interview with author, 27th March 2019.
3. Payal, interview with author, 27th March 2019.
4. Pravin, interview with author, 30th March 2019.
5. Ravi, interview with author, 29th March 2019.
6. Sangita, interview with author, 29th March 2019.
7. Sumedha, interview with author, 31st March 2019.
8. Suresh, interview with author, 31st March 2019.

Interviews with Ex-students:

1. Ahmed, interview with author, 31st March 2019.
2. Poornima, interview with author, 2nd April 2019.
3. Sandeep, interview with author, 2nd April 2019.
4. Varun, interview with author, 28th March 2019.
5. Vivek, interview with author, 5th April 2019.

Interviews with Front-desk Staff:

1. Harsh, interview with author, 24th March 2019.
2. Pooja, interview with author, 27th March 2019.
3. Radhika, interview with author, 27th March 2019.