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Introduction: Language, inequality and global care work

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1 Introduction

Language functions as a symbolic, interactional, material and ideological resource. On the one hand, it can perpetuate inequality by facilitating modes of domination and subordination between individuals of different status. On the other hand, those with access to linguistic and other semiotic resources may exploit them for their own empowerment. These considerations are relevant to every communicative context; however, they are particularly salient to workplace settings (Moyer 2018). These considerations are further accentuated in care work contexts, which function as prime sites of both privilege and marginalization. Within these sites, extremely asymmetrical power relations stem from unequal access to economic, material, linguistic and social capital (Bourdieu 1991) and, in some cases, also citizenship.

A sociolinguistic investigation into the largely under-investigated sites of care work contexts merits attention for a number of reasons, three of which receive mention here. These sites' primary situatedness within private residences that, by definition, function outside of the realms of institutional oversight and control, represents the first of these reasons. Here, the linguistic tools of discursive discrimination can flourish as a direct result of their embeddedness in these hidden domains (Ladegaard 2017). The methodological challenges associated with both attaining access to these sites and collecting data from these often marginalized participants – with their ethnic, racial, socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds that typically differ from those of researchers (Anderson 2001; Lutz 2011) – intensifies the invisibility of these domains. In conjunction with the aim of increasing their visibility, a second justification that drives this special issue's inquiry into care work includes the potential to reformulate conceptualizations of market dynamics based on a fuller understanding of the magnitude and influence of this sector. Recent work that addresses language and the workplace is often framed according

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to its fit within the new knowledge economy; however, this perspective largely neglects the *reproductive economy* (McDowell and Dyson 2011), which has long existed in the margins and continues to be a common occupation worldwide. Accounting for the place of care work within the global economy, thus, casts light on an under-represented source of capital, which finances individual households, national markets and migrant care-work-focused trans-national companies. A third motivation for focusing on care work is grounded in its capacity, as a sector that regularly pairs workers and employers of highly divergent socio-economic backgrounds, to advance the understanding of connections between privilege and oppression. As these dynamics vary according to specific cultural settings, the current issue presents a range of contexts, including those which reinforce systemic and systematic differences and asymmetrical relations of power and inequality in which issues surrounding language, class, sexuality, gender, age, nationality and ethnicity *always* matter.

This issue's focus helps to magnify and, simultaneously, problematize employee-employer power asymmetries, which may be neither clear-cut nor traditionally ordered. This is the case, for example, in instances in which migrant employees' proficiency in the overtly prestigious language surpasses that of their employers (Lan 2003; see Ladegaard this issue), yet they remain powerless. The additional variable of workers' tenuous migration status – present in two of the four articles – also acts to compound these asymmetries: granting employers the power to terminate the contracts that allow workers to remain in the country (as in Hong Kong) or to report undocumented workers to the authorities (as in the United States) increases the likelihood of exploitation. Given current socio-political factors that have given rise to an “emergent class of itinerant, impoverished and insecure laborers” (Pennycook 2020), such migration status is increasingly common. The heightened sense of instability, unpredictability and inequality that characterizes the experiences of many individuals at the lower end of the socio-economic scale (Gonçalves and Kelly-Holmes 2020) motivates Pennycook's call for a renewed look at the mechanisms through which language and labor operate in tandem at this precise historical juncture. The articles presented in this issue attempt to provide one piece of this picture by highlighting – through language – inequality in care work contexts, an important yet often ignored segment of the working class.

2 Transnational labor migration

Within the current context of an already globalized world where instability prevails, citizenship and socio-economic status help to determine individuals'

movement across borders. These structures that determine mobility are inherently unequal (Giddens 2003; Baynam 2013; Canagarajah 2017). In addition to other traditional causes of migration such as economic collapse, natural disaster, war and transformations of socio-political systems (cf. Lutz 2007), a scarcity of viable employment options in less developed nation-states often makes foreign salaries the only conceivable source of income for many of these nations' citizens and, for this reason, catalyzes external migration (Ladegaard this issue). According to Castles (2013: 122), the “growing inequality in incomes and human security between more-and less developed countries” represents the most prominent basis for movement and migration. Nevertheless, precisely this population of economic migrants from less-developed countries tends to encounter the largest number of constraints imposed by receiving nations (Gogia 2006; Codó 2013). Employers in wealthier nations profit from such mechanisms, which alleviate labor shortages and, when left unregulated, counteract the wage increases that normally accompany such shortages. At the same time, however, the demographics of workers within many wealthier countries suggest that a viable local workforce, especially within care work contexts, is not large enough to satisfy demand (Romero et al. 2014; Lorente 2017; Strömmer 2020). This phenomenon can sometimes result in increased competition and stagnant compensation for locals and their services. In this way, analysis of these dynamics highlights divides between the rich and the poor on global, national, regional and local scales.

The uniqueness that characterizes each migration experience brings into focus the varying degrees and speeds of existing social processes that are connected to different political, economic, social and cultural systems (Appadurai 1996; Urry 2007; Blommaert 2010; Coupland 2010; Duchêne and Heller 2012; Duchêne et al. 2013; Block 2018) which, in many ways, reflect existing asymmetries. For this reason, an analysis of the recent shifts in geographical flows as well as the mobility (and immobility) of individual migrant workers of certain linguistic and cultural backgrounds necessarily considers the regulation of specific national markets. In addition, the maintenance and perpetuation of economic control over the global economy also represents an important part of this picture (Duchêne et al. 2013; Romero et al. 2014; Canagarajah 2016; Block 2018). Imperialism, nationalism, colonialism, capitalism and the globalized new economy (Heller and McElhinny 2017) – with their connections to privilege, marginalization and inequality – frame the analyses featured in the articles here.

The ubiquity of these unequal structures across socio-political settings has given rise to the social class distinctions that shape the interactions discussed in this issue. While social class may be regarded as one dimension of societal

structure (Weber 1958), a Bourdieusian approach to class analysis envisions society as a multidimensional space of social positions in which classes are regarded as social collectivities whose boundaries may be contested, reproduced and redrawn. The mediating structure of the habitus also plays an important role as it connects specific social practices and processes to objective positions. Employers and care workers realize and negotiate these boundaries discursively by participating in conversations, issuing orders and making requests. By highlighting the precariousness and austerity of such a vulnerable group of people, the articles here show examples in which classification, legitimization and evaluation are also accomplished through silence (cf. Jaworski 1993). The different sociolinguistic ways in which these processes take shape in these articles magnify social class differences with respect to their socio-cultural embeddedness in general as well as their relevance to the individual lives of the real people (and in this case, predominately women) studied. Although the need for a common language to serve individuals in multilingual contexts may be frequently invoked (See May 2014 for a discussion), the sum of the findings presented in this special issue suggest that such a focus only addresses part of the picture and, in following Block (2015, 2018), contributes to *social class erasure*. In these contexts, language may serve as merely a convenient proxy to justify criticisms rooted in social class difference. Indeed, many of the authors' contributions that follow investigate social class as one of many historically salient categories in addition to gender, age, race, ethnicity and nationality, all of which are mutually constitutive within the social processes linked to inequality.

2.1 The global “female” care chain

To date the transfer of female labor within the *global care chain* (Hochschild 2000) has grown to comprise “the largest labor market worldwide” (Lutz 2011: 15). Currently, women constitute approximately half of the world’s migrant population; moreover, migrant women involved in the Global Care Chain account for the single largest female occupational group migrating globally (ILO 2013, ILO 2017; Romero et al. 2014). To be clear, reference to care work in the following discussion includes child-care, health care and cleaning services in both institutional and private settings. Figure 1 provides a clearer picture of these different components.¹

¹ As some private care work contexts are coordinated through institutions, the separation of the two in this figure does not capture some of these connections.

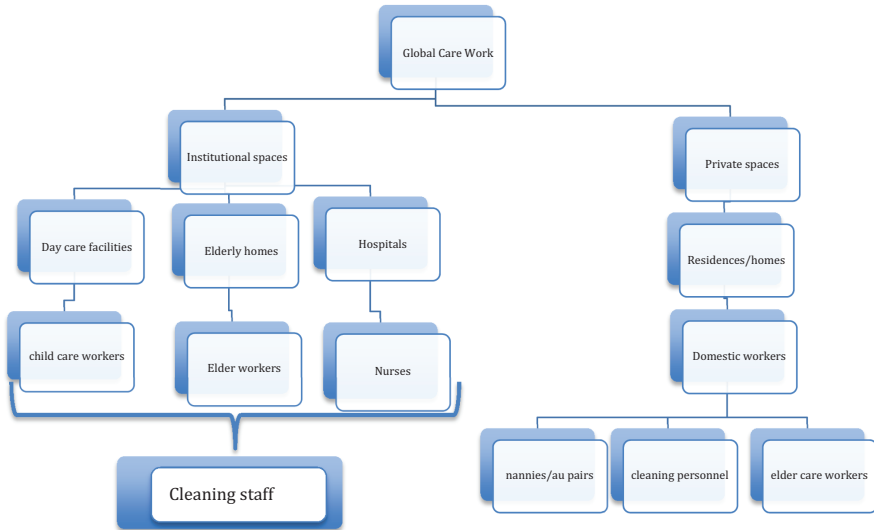


Figure 1: Global care work and organizational divisions.

Over the last few decades, the rise of care work has emerged alongside the new international division of labor (Lan 2006). While policies, like provisions for maternity leave, which differ across nations or in some cases (like the United States) are even non-existent, undoubtedly influence the degree to which the care work industry has grown or stagnated in certain nation-states, the heightened geographic patterns of female migration point to an increased global demand for care work. This demand stems from several contributing factors. First, diminished government funding for paid care work has reduced these jobs' attractiveness to local, regional and national workforces; predominantly migrant women have filled the resulting labor shortages. (Romero et al. 2014). Second, neoliberal government and social policies have, in conjunction with the reduced budgets for publically-funded child or elderly care programs mentioned above, opened up the market to individualized home health and child care (Mahon et al. 2012). Such measures have effectively reduced the care worker-care receiver ratio and increased the demand for more workers. Changing family dynamics and kin relations represents a third cause: women's re-entry into the workforce following childbirth, together with larger geographical distances between extended family members, has both diminished the ability of family members themselves to engage in this kind of work and, simultaneously, contributed to a growing number of elderly individuals living on their own (Romero

et al. 2014: 7). Although the magnitude of these dynamics differs according to the specific national context, an international perspective indicates that, together, they have stimulated a global trend.

As care work has often been connected to emotional labor, which is largely associated with women's stereotypically nurturing nature, many nation-states have traditionally not prioritized the education of care workers (Parreñas Salazar 2011). Recent years, however, have brought changes. In recognition of the increased demand for care work due to the factors outlined above, some wealthier welfare states like Sweden have implemented formal care worker-training programs (Williams and Brennan 2012; Jansson and Majlesi, this issue). Most of the students in these programs are migrant workers whose mobility has been assisted through bi-lateral agreements between the sending and receiving countries. In fact, both of these countries rely on institutionalized, national policies and programs, which increase the scope of a state's political, economic and social bureaucracy to include emigrants in highly regulated manners (Goldring 2002: 64).

To illustrate this relationship, a prominent example of a sending country that participates in such bi-lateral agreements merits a further look. With its system of trade that considers human labor as an important export commodity (Aguilar 2003), the Philippines is currently the largest exporter of labor in the global economy (cf. Ladegaard, this issue) and a well-known example of a labor brokerage state (cf. Lorente 2012, Lorente 2017) that helps to drive the global care chain. In 2017, the total remittances accrued by Filipinos working overseas accounted for an estimated 32.8 billion U.S. dollars, or, 10.2% of the country's GDP; furthermore, the World Bank predicts that this figure will rise in the coming years (Ratha et al. 2018: 25). Since the mid-1970s, the Philippines has prioritized the production of flexible, English-language proficient workers (including *super maids*) to meet the growing demands of both the local and export labor market (Lorente 2012) by handling recruitment processes, training courses and job placement assistance. Touting its workers' "nimble [English-speaking] tongues", the state actively markets and sells the Filipina brand (Tinio 2013) internationally. While the country exports both male and female labor migrants, females – the majority of whom work as care workers – outnumber male overseas workers each year, often at a 2:1 ratio (Tinio 2013). Such structures implemented by the Philippines have, thus, contributed to the increased marketization and feminization of migration and exported labor, most of which supplies the global care chain.

As a part of the system described above, immigration policies and particular codes of practice of both receiving and sending countries regulate the lives of women involved in the global labor market. International agreements between

states that, on the one hand, facilitate labor migration may, on the other hand, restrict laborers' rights within the receiving country. In this way, these policies not only define eligibility and the right to work through specific visas and contracts, but they also stipulate individuals' level of inclusion within the symbolic boundaries of nations by regulating their access to civil rights (Satzewich 1991; Lan 2006) and social benefits. Many of these individuals have few avenues for participation at their disposal, resulting in what Parreñas (2011) refers to as *partial citizenship*. As the preceding discussion suggests, larger-scale considerations both influence and exacerbate local inequalities for migrant care workers as well as the existing autochthonous labor force. For this reason, an in-depth look into individual care workers' experiences helps to provide a fuller picture of these processes and their consequences. Such a focus squarely addresses issues of language, power and inequality that has, until recently, remained largely underexplored.

3 Previous studies on care work

Studies on care work and domestic labor in particular have often been theorized from a feminist perspective by analyzing the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and citizenship. Such studies find women's subordination to be a by-product of both capitalist and patriarchic structures, which, within a global economy, act to reinforce asymmetrical relations in often exploitive ways (Rollins 1985; Chang 2000; Hochschild 2000; Anderson 2001; Lan 2006; Parreñas 2008; Yeates 2009; Lutz 2011; Romero et al. 2014). For Lutz (2011), domestic work – owing to its highly feminine-gendered nature – defines global, ethnic and gendered hierarchies. A limited number of studies, however, investigate the power dynamics of care/domestic work contexts and consider language as a key factor in the production and maintenance of inequality between employers and employees, most of whom are women.

Sociolinguistic studies addressing language learning, language use and/or the commodification of language within care work contexts are in their relative infancy; the following work represents the bulk of the literature: Duff et al. (2000), Schwartz (2006), Lorente (2010, 2012, 2017), Levin (2011), Ladegaard (2012, 2013, 2015, 2017), Dashti (2013), Divita (2014), Kwan and Dunworth (2016), Gonçalves (2015), McDowell et al. (2011), Mick (2015), Jansson (2016); Otomo (2016), Strömmer (2016, 2020), Gonçalves and Schluter (2017), Jansson and Wadensjö (2017), Jansson et al. (2017), North (2017, 2018) Kaiper (2018); Muth (2018), Ben Said (2019), Guinto (2019), Piller and Takahashi (2013) and

Tang and Kan (2019). The heightened attention to these topics in recent years parallels the growing prominence of the global care industry that is increasingly pairing employers or clients together with employees who do not share a common language or cultural background.

4 Overview of the issue

Foregrounded by the above discussion of global care work and the sociolinguistic implications of the resulting asymmetrical relationships, this issue adds to the above literature by working toward a two-pronged objective: to cater to the researcher's interest in theoretically grounded work on language, inequality, ideology and hegemony and, simultaneously, to provide meaningful insight to the activist-minded sociolinguist (in line with the aims of Phipps and Kay 2014). The diverse theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches of these articles provide different lenses through which to view these themes. As we see from the articles featured here, power can assume different forms, including overt, covert, legitimated and/or symbolic (Foucault 1980; Grillo 1989; Bourdieu 1991). Drawing on the work of Weber (1958), Grillo (1989) understands authority as "legitimated domination" resonating with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power, both of which are considered to be "invisible" in practitioners' ability to exercise control without exerting force. As discussed in Gonçalves and Schluter (2017), minority language-speaking migrants often experience such domination as a result of their subordinate social, cultural, economic, political and linguistic statuses. Within the context of care work, we may also add the marginalized statuses of gender, race and age. Through the analysis of narratives, interviews, ethnographic observations, language-learning manuals and patient-caregiver role-plays, the contributions that appear in this special issue grapple, from a sociolinguistic perspective, with the construction, exercise, reinforcement and, even, recasting of the corollaries of power, including prestige, authority, class and privilege as well as domination, marginalization and oppression.

Through these themes and vantage points, the articles in this issue provide snapshots into care workers' experiences with language and inequality that result from the larger socio-political and economic development of the global care chain. Given the local-situational scale of each of the cases described in the articles, this issue's focus on the global labor dimension of care work fosters exploration – in line with Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) – into the uniqueness of language practices that emerge from the specific arrangements of situated

sociolinguistic spaces. This perspective provides insight into existing links across scales vis-à-vis language and power.

In some cases, state actors attempt to mitigate the effects of the emergent power asymmetries. In Jansson and Majlesi's work, the state aims to protect the vulnerable through policy; however, the state's vision of the dementia patients – rather than the care workers – as the vulnerable parties amplifies the voices of the vocational trainers while silencing the voices of the migrant care workers.

In addition to state-initiated policy, socio-cultural and socio-political structures also help to shape the ways in which the language and power dynamics of the global care chain are realized in individual care work contexts. By informing choices about the register of Spanish featured in domestic Spanish-language handbooks, widely held socio-cultural stereotypes about Spanish-speaking migrants in the United States, according to Divita's contribution, directly influence the nature of employer-domestic worker communication. A classic Bourdieusian perspective points to a strong alliance between the dominant language (English in this case) and power.

Moving beyond the American context of Divita's study, English, of course, holds considerable prestige outside of English-dominant nations as a global lingua franca. For territories with a history of British colonial rule, this prestige predates the influence of global English. Indeed, in India and Hong Kong, the settings of the final two articles, this status is both long-standing and preserved in official present-day language policies (Cf. Mohanty et al. 2010; Haider 2017 for India; Cf. Chan 2002; Lai 2010; Hansen Edwards 2018 for Hong Kong). Moreover, proficiency in a standard British or American variety of English in both settings indexes an educated, middle-class status (see Donner 2011 for India; see Lai 2012 for Hong Kong). Such considerations, grounded in the theoretical notions of language ideologies (Woolard 1998) and indexicality (Eckert 2008), help to frame the final two studies in which English plays an important role alongside Bengali (in Kolkata, India) and Cantonese (in Hong Kong).

In Chatterjee and Schluter's study, the prestigious status of English in India drives domestic workers' desire for their daughters to acquire this language as symbolic capital. Moreover, the English-language tutorials to supplement domestic workers' low salaries demonstrates the elevated value of this language that is on par with employee benefits. In Hong Kong, however, the participants in Ladegaard's study cite their limited Cantonese-language proficiency as a factor that, regardless of their English-language abilities, deepens their asymmetrical power relationship with their employers. While it is clear that English holds a privileged status in Hong Kong (Cf. Hansen Edwards 2018), this study's findings suggest that the marginalized positionality of English-speaking foreign domestic helpers diminishes the symbolic capital of English through the process

of *decapitalization* (Martín Rojo 2013; Moyer 2018). When removed from the contexts that reinforce the structures of marginalization, domestic workers tap into the symbolic capital of English in Hong Kong to position themselves – albeit temporarily – as superior to their limited English proficient employers.

As care work includes an increasing percentage of the female migrant and autochthonous workforce, the embedded structures that create, perpetuate and maintain social inequalities are becoming relevant to a growing number of sociolinguistic spaces across national boundaries. The articles in this special issue represent a collaborative effort to examine critically, across different national settings, the language-related knowledge and sensitivities that are both rooted in these inequalities and exacerbated by social class, gender, nationality ethnicity, age and race. The smaller-scale experiences highlighted in these articles provide different vantage points from which to consider the robustness of macro-level claims about such topics as they apply to micro-level practice. While the feminization of migration with respect to Global Care Work deserves further academic scrutiny as a global trend, it is also essential for scholarship to detail the communication between people involved in such work on a local level. Only through this focus across multiple settings is it possible to consider fully the sociolinguistic factors, consequences and realities that shape individual care work experiences. The articles that follow work together to bring this discussion to the fore.

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