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Language work and affect in adult language education

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Abstract

This article considers the connection of language work and affect in the exemplary site of a private language education company as part of a larger discourse-ethnography in Vienna, Austria. Using the lens of affect, I analyse the experience, management, and performance of affect as part of language trainers' language work. I theorise on the connection of *affect*, *ideology*, and *emotional labour* to make sense of the tensions that language workers face over their neoliberal selfhood and their precarious and elite forms of employment. These findings show the pervasive role of affect in organizing language work, its costs and effects, and the ways in which affect is tied to 'feeling rules' through which language workers (have to) perform emotional labour by managing their own and others' feelings and performances. The article expands current sociolinguistic engagements with affect as mediated modes of meaning-making in the production networks of the new economy.

KEYWORDS

affect, discourse analysis, ethnography, language education, language work

1 | INTRODUCTION

> THESE GUYS want an ESCAPE from their business [. . .] they ACTUALLY want the antithesis of business English (.) they DO NOT want to know about presentations and emails and so [. . .] I had guys coming down they are twitching physically [. . .] they are

> twitching with the stress of their JOBS (.) for ME to then SIT there and say <fast> now come on i'm gonna tell you how to write an email <3 sec> they wanna PUNCH me what they WANT is someone to CONNECT with whom they can have a relationship which according to their employer and their POSITION ALLOWS them to get away from the DESK and REALITY and be LISTENED to <1 sec> that kind of business English is therapeutic in many cases [. . .] they want a THERAPEUTIC relationship
>
> (John, British, English language trainer)

The above extract, from a conversation with John, a freelance English language trainer in Vienna, Austria, captures some of the affective facets of adult language education that he has experienced. John's example is an important reminder of our current times in the new economy: times of transformation, pressure, precarities, performance evaluations, anxieties, relationships and re-structuring, where language learning and teaching gets imbued with additional meanings and values—here, therapy.

Taking this narrative as an entry point, this article follows the call for a critical sociolinguistic examination of 'language and affect' (McElhinny, 2010) as it manifests itself in the world of work, in this case in the exemplary site of the private language education sector in Vienna, Austria. Adult language education is a proliferating global industry of the new economy, in which language companies have emerged as key sites for investment in multilingualism and as places of customer service provision, with the aim of promoting and selling language (skills) as packaged products for professional success. This sector follows market logics of competition and distinction, neoliberal discourses of life-long learning, and a language-as-skill rhetoric (Flubacher & Del Percio, 2017; Park & Wee, 2012).

John's experience of the therapeutic nature of a Business English course and his required emotional labour (which he displays through showing empathy and enacting care) flags up the changing prerequisites for trainers to do *more* than language teaching by regulating and managing their own and others' emotions (Hochschild, 1979) whilst doing their jobs. These complexities re-direct our attention to the 'lens of affect' (McElhinny, 2010) that has gathered momentum at this particular moment in time.

Despite mounting sociolinguistic work on the connection of language and work in the new economy, with varying foci on inequality, neoliberalism or commodification (see e.g. Allan & McElhinny, 2017; Heller, 2010; Urciuoli & LaDousa, 2013), only limited research has engaged with emotional labour, or the management and commercialisation of feeling (Hochschild, 1983), in the for-profit educational sphere. An engagement with affect and adult language education through a sociolinguistic lens, thus, refocuses our attention on questions about how language figures as a resource and tool for social and linguistic difference at times when the privatisation of (adult) education is a key trend.

The experience, management and performance of affect as part of the language work in adult language education is, thus, the focus of this article. More significantly, following McElhinny (2010, p. 312), I respond to the call for 'further studies on hegemony, emotion and social structure' when studying language and affect in commercial language education. Specifically, I ask how affect is related to the language trainers' elite and yet precarious labour conditions, as well as how we can make sense of, and connect moments of the mobilisation of affect to, the current neoliberal conditions of the language industry. These are issues that prompt further investigation as little research to date has explored how affect and ideology are tied to the performance of language work in private adult education. By means of a critical discourse-ethnographic approach, I track everyday social and discursive encounters in which affect is evoked, exploited, experienced and articulated in the exemplary case of an Austrian language education company. My argument will be less on the growth of affect in language work but rather centred on how the current conditions of work foster affect, how this, in turn, shapes these conditions, and with what effects.

In section two, I provide an account of language work in the new economy and theorise the connection of *affect*, *ideology* and *emotional labour* which, as I argue, underpins the social practice of adult language education. In section three, I present Critical Discourse Ethnography as a methodological entry point and the data. The ensuing sections then analyse affective activities in the institutional site of an Austrian language education company by centring the language trainers and the ways in which they navigate the tensions between their own neoliberal personhood and the elite and yet precarious angles of their employment. The conclusion reflects on the value of an affective lens for understanding and rethinking the sociolinguistics of language work.

2 | LANGUAGE WORK IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

2.1 | Skills, selves and affect

The change from a Fordist to a post-Fordist 21st-century knowledge-based economy has accentuated the value of communication as a workplace skill that can be taught by experts and acquired by people in a measurable way (Boutet, 2001; Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Gershon & La Dousa, 2019). A worker seeks, and achieves, employment, that is, work, while a *commodified* worker approaches the job market as a bundle of skills, attempting to exchange that self-as-skills for capital, not just selling one's labour, but selling oneself and others (Allan, 2013, 2019; Gershon, 2017; Urciuoli, 2008).

That said, the dynamic upheavals of globalisation have produced certain types of institutional arrangements, customers and worker identities that are bound by their formal conditions and which mean workers need to devote 'their hearts, minds and bodies' (Gee et al., 1996, p.7) to succeed in unstable labour markets and their attendant processes of insecurity and precarity (see Sennett, 1998; McElhinny, 2010). In adult language education, then, non-linear career trajectories of language trainers, such as John coalesce, with unstable forms of employment (contractual, short-term, without social protection) to fit around learners' lifestyles, requirements for learning (quick, on-demand, tailor-made), work styles (transnational, flexible, work-as-experience), as well as their desires, feelings and passions (as documented by Codó's (2018) work on lifestyle trajectories in ELT; see also Barakos, 2018). In sum, the transforming labour market conditions require us to ask different questions about how the work of language trainers such as John sit within what scholars have varyingly described as an 'affective economy' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 119) that has developed from current service and consumer work, in which appeals to people's emotions via (self)management is key in both social and professional life.

Building on the concept of *language work* (see Heller, 2010, p. 105), I take the term here to narrowly denote the work performed in language and human-related professions such as adult language education. The term language worker includes those people who make language their profession, spanning from those who teach (such as the trainers in my research site) to those who manage language (such as the administrators and managers of the language company). Under the current logics of a consumer culture, then, we can argue that adult language learners are constructed as consumers, meaning that educational practices (here language training) are co-opted as services, language workers as service providers and language education as resources or products. That said, the focus on the skill-based repertoire of language workers that can be certified and remunerated seems to have somehow downplayed the affective dimension of their labour. As Hochschild (1979, p. 596) notes, middle-class workers' affective efforts are rarely acknowledged and rewarded as labour.

As McElhinny (2016a, p. 290) writes, new configurations of (neoliberal) 'personhood', and with it, affect, have emerged from this resource-based orientation in the new economy, with affect serving as a key site for the construction, negotiation and contestation of people's experiences, feelings and

identities. To make sense of these new configurations of personhood in the context of this study, we first need a fuller explanation of the terms *affect*, *ideology* and *emotional labour*.

2.2 | Affect, ideology and emotional labour

Affect, in how I mobilise the term, encompasses more than personal feelings. It is linked to relationships with people and things, emerges in connection to people's practices and ideologies, is related to power, and is guided by 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979) that structure what people feel and what they are supposed to feel in specific social situations. Here, I use *affect* as a lens to understand the processes through which emotional labour, that is, the management of feeling, is performed by language workers in adult language education, and how this sits within larger ideological and socio-economic forces that produce tensions over desired ideals of self and the compromised realities of the training job.

Affect has been widely analysed and theorised in the context of emotion and motivation in language learning and teaching processes (see e.g. Benesch, 2012; Busch, 2017; De Costa et al., 2019; De Costa, 2019), in linguistic anthropology (e.g. McElhinny, 2010; McEwan-Fujita, 2010), education (e.g. Maxwell & Aggleton, 2013; Zembylas, 2005), sociology (e.g. Ahmed, 2004), as well as discourse studies (e.g. Wetherell, 2012). In conceptualising affect, I align with existing scholarship (Ahmed, 2004; Benesch, 2012; McElhinny, 2010) that sees affect as primarily social and contextual. That is, affect signals relationships and centres questions of how power configurations organize social life. Rather than asking what emotions people have (e.g. 'how do trainers feel about the therapeutic nature of language teaching'), the attention is directed at the performative character of emotions, as part of subjectivities ('what stimulates these feelings and what do they do') in specific discursive milieus and moments in time (see Ahmed, 2004, p. 4).

Affect is also intertwined with *ideology*. As McElhinny (2010, p. 311) argues, affect emerges in connection to language ideologies and practices. And, importantly, it is affect that makes ideology and hegemony stick. Ahmed (2010, p. 29) makes a similar point when she argues that 'affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects.' Whilst definitions of ideology abound, I treat it here as commonly accepted sets of beliefs that are socially situated, multiple, changeable and historically contingent (Eagleton, 1991, p. 114–115) and that materialise in discourse and social action. Ideologies of dominant groups in dominant sites (such as language education) may then become hegemonic when they are accepted as the ideological norms of all groups. To understand how ideology works, then, we need to ask not only how they make meaning, but how they make it stick (Eagleton, 1991, p. 195). Williams' (1977, p. 128) notion of 'structures of feeling' is useful here to understand affect as determined and shaped by social rules and as not purely individualistic but historical, and, I add, ideological. Following this line of thinking, structures of feeling, understood as sitting between ideology and affect, 'exert pressures and set effective limits on experience and action' (Williams, 1977, p. 132).

In the context of language education, then, questions over language training inherently invigorate a seemingly old debate on native-speakerism[1] (Holliday, 2006) and its attending language-ideological inequalities that get naturalised alongside the hegemonic role of global languages, such as English, for mobility and success in the labour market (Park & Wee, 2012; Tupas, 2015). As a sector regimented by frictions over old and new ideologies of language (that is, tying language to identity and de-coupling language from the self), language education remains a site entrenched with hegemonic ideals about the perfect mastery of language that stick. Ideology, in connection with affect, allows us to explore relations between emergent meanings of language in use and its enduring social structures, with language learning and teaching as sticky phenomena that produce affective value and leave affective impressions.

I have argued so far that the serviced-based economy leads language workers to perform various types of labour, one of which being '*emotional labour*' (Hochschild, 1979). Building on Hochschild's theorisation of emotion in the workplace, I broadly use emotional labour to refer to the organization, structure and social relations of service jobs that involve the 'management of feeling' (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). Whilst we may argue that 'emotional labour is part and parcel of the social practice of education' (Loh & Liew, 2016, p. 277), the field of language education specifically is complicated by the fact that the 'lived experience of language' (Busch, 2017) is never neutral but rather socially stratified, hierarchized and valorised. Related to emotional labour are the so-called 'feeling rules' (as developed by Hochschild, 1979/83; see also Gkonou & Miller, 2020; Zembylas, 2005). These latent rules 'are seen as the side of ideology that deals with emotion and feeling' (Hochschild, 1979, p. 551). They capture the institutional expectations and conventions put upon individuals in order to foster certain affects in particular situations and shape professional roles and performances of affect (Benesch, 2018; Gkonou & Miller, 2020).

3 | STUDYING AFFECT THROUGH THE LENS OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ETHNOGRAPHY

This article reports on a portion of a broader discourse-ethnographic study on linguistic diversity in a private language education company in Vienna, Austria, in 2015. The framework employed here is centred on Critical Discourse-Ethnography (see Barakos, 2018 for a fuller account) that is inspired by Institutional Ethnography (IE) (Smith, 2005) and builds on ethnographic work in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) (Krzyżanowski, 2011).

IE is an approach that is interested in examining work activities and how these are coordinated through texts and discourses. Smith's point of departure is that the local is 'an unfinished arena of discovery' (2005, p. 39). Her approach transcends what is directly observable in constrained institutional settings and the experiences of social actors to link the locally observable with broader patterns of translocal organisation (see also Williams (1977, pp. 128–219) who points to the social as an unfinished, formative process). IE is primarily interested in social relationships, which serves well for analysing affect. CDS is a critically motivated form of social analysis. It is concerned with the dialectal relationship of discourse and society, with discursive traits of social, cultural, political and economic processes, with structures and agents, and puts questions of language, power, hierarchisation, ideology and social inequality at the forefront of its enquiries (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

For the purposes of this article, I will use eclectic data extracts, ranging from semi-structured interviews with language trainers to field notes of my on-site observations of office life and in-class observations of teaching practices, and institutional data such as promotional material. The interviews took place at a company I will call Danubia Language[2]. They lasted between half an hour to 1.5 h and involved freelance language trainers of different nationalities. For the transcription conventions[3], see endnotes. The interviews were conducted in English and German, as per the participants' language choice. My experience as a former language trainer at Danubia Language, as a linguist and as a teacher facilitated our conversations and also allowed me access to my fieldwork site. Here, my role as an ethnographer was, following Smith (2005, p. 225), 'to learn from them [the study participants], to assemble what is learned from different perspectives, and to investigate how their activities are coordinated'.

To analyse how affect gets invoked in the interview and ethnographic data sets along with their socio-historical embeddedness, the analytic process orients to different layers of context (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Textual and social relations of discourse were analysed by a thematic analysis, followed by a close discursive analysis, which pays attention to the immediate language or text internal co-text,

the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between discourses and texts, the institutional frames of a specific context of situation, and the broader socio-political and historical contexts and structures.

In what follows, I attend to the stories of language trainers and focus on their *moments* of tension over language work as hope, pleasure, commitment and care alongside frustration, anxiety, flexibility and distinction in the exemplary context of Danubia Language.

4 | THE LANGUAGE EDUCATION COMPANY AS AN AFFECTIVE SPACE

Danubia Language is a for-profit language education company that provides language and intercultural training for professionals. It was founded in 1961 as a language institute as part of the *Industriel lenvereinigung* (the Federation of Austrian Industries), an independent representative of Austrian industries and its sectors. In the 1990s, Danubia Language was privatised and expanded its services to combine intercultural communication with language training and management consulting. This expansion aligns with a growing market for utilitarian language and culture learning that began to appear in Austria, especially upon joining the European Union in 1995, which opened up new transnational work, business and leisure opportunities, and with it the rising currency of language and communication training in hubs such as Vienna (see e.g. the e-platform Weiterbildungsmarkt (n.d.) for an overview of public and private language education providers).

Today, Danubia Language holds the reputation of being one of the most prestigious language education companies in Vienna. It has a multilingual office, with English functioning as the lingua franca alongside German, Slovak, Mandarin, and Spanish. It also prides itself on employing 60 language trainers (both native and non-native speakers, from different cultural, linguistic and professional backgrounds) and offering over 24 languages to study. The company stands out in that it mainly serves highly skilled professionals who seek to advance their language skills and career prospects through language and intercultural training in small groups or on a one-to-one basis, in modern, highly resourced and high-tech classrooms in the heart of Vienna. These upscale and sophisticated premises stand in stark contrast to many private language training competitors but also more conventional public, municipal education centres that lack funding and adequate infrastructures, teach in big classes and cater to mainstream learners, immigrants, students, seniors, or socially disadvantaged cohorts. Danubia Language, thus, attracts and produces a multilingual elite (Barakos & Selleck, 2019) that ultimately gains more competitive and material positions of power in society. As I will show later, eliteness, as the cultivation of a social position of privilege and power (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2017, p. 244), manifests itself in the ways in which different qualities are attached to the language work performed by the trainers as an advantaged, middle-class group of workers. The elite affective space of Danubia Language provides the very architecture for the language workers' participation.

Following conversations with Kerstin, the Marketing Director of Danubia Language, the company has repeatedly re-branded itself as part of their economic activity, thereby re-creating affective relations. In 2015, it introduced a new corporate slogan that invites readers to imagine that language learning will help them become and act 'glocal'. The term 'glocal' is supposed to market the corporate brand in a consumer-engaging way and to integrate perspectives of interculturality and globalisation, while remaining attentive to the local desires of the Viennese-based clientele. We can trace the affective 'audacity' (McElhinny, 2010, p. 309) of the glocal that gets re-contextualised across various sites, from the company's homepage to merchandise such as pens, brochures and postcards. An example of the material context of affect and its stickiness (Ahmed, 2004) via instruments of institutional

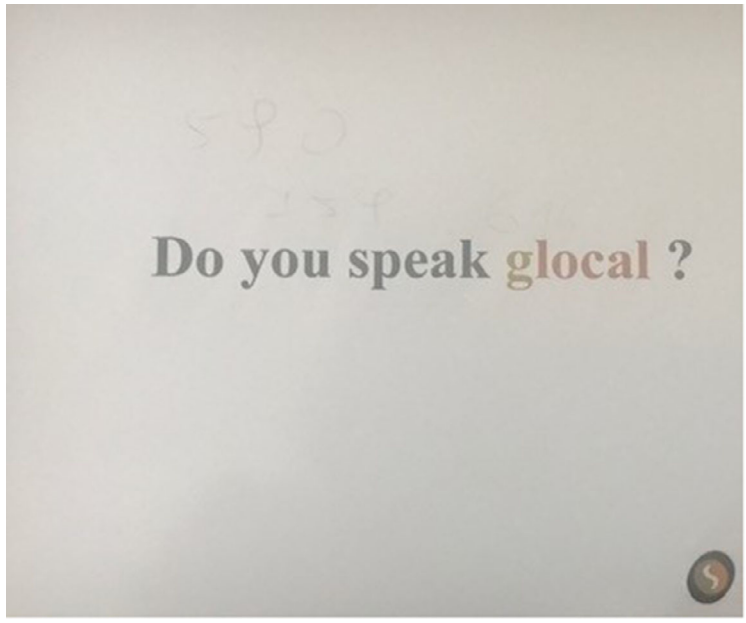

FIGURE 1 Postcard—do you speak glocal?

communication is given in Figure 1—a promotional postcard that can be picked up at the front-desk of the office or found in the various seminar and meeting rooms.

The postcard exemplified here as part of the sloganization of the company entails affective activities. That is, when you speak glocal, certain emotional and character traits are mapped onto those who perform it: language trainers are considered flexible, adaptable, eager to transform, and knowledgeable within and across languages and cultures. Following Ng (2019, p. 136), affect is hence 'instrumentalizable' in specific milieus to position itself as a compelling 'local' company and connect with its audience in an intimate and exclusive training environment.

The eliteness of Danubia Language, the stickiness of the 'glocal' and its ties to affect is illustrated further in Excerpt 1, from my fieldnotes:

Excerpt 1: The training room

I arrive at Danubia's office and greet Lucy, the front office woman. Today, we are in Fiji, Lucy says. Fiji is the name of the meeting room. I follow Lucy into the room. Lucy asks me if I want some coffee, fruit or water. The room is airy and spacious. There are branded pens and notepads laid out on the tables. There are also framed pictures on the wall, which say 'do you speak glocal?' 'Do you respect glocal'? 'Do you inspire glocal?'

Figure 2 depicts the various slogans framed on the seminar room walls, which contribute to making the institutional landscape of Danubia Language 'a place of affect' (Wee, 2016).

Indeed, what we are witnessing here is the development of affect in relation to place as well as the rather tokenistic, affective dimensions of labour. 'Happy objects' (Ahmed, 2010, p. 29), such as fruit bowls, coffee machines, exotic room names (Fiji) and creative slogans, which are loaded with emotional qualities (Ahmed, 2004) and evoke emotional responses, enable an ethos of well-being and satisfaction amongst language trainers and clients. Eliteness here materializes in the physical comfort, wellbeing and appreciation encountered at Danubia Language through all the perks it offers its workers. Relatedly, happiness serves as a key emotion as part of the language company as a desirable place to be and to work for. Since affect circulates between, and attaches to, objects (Ahmed, 2010, p. 29), they become sticky. Affects are then "what connects us to this or that", as Ahmed (2004, p. 11) suggests.

FIGURE 2 The material context of affect

The repetitive nature of the 'glocal' adds a sticky layer to the institution but also the people who work for it, building up affective corporate value.

I have highlighted and discussed these examples in order to flag up the neoliberal logics through which sites such as Danubia Language manage labour processes and their attendant modes of participation (Gershon & La Dousa, 2019), and the ways in which they re-package language learning via well-being strategies and aspirations for a glocal trainer and learner personhood, that is, with a socially desirable outcome. The sticky objects beg the question of what and whose interests they serve. They form part of the feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979) that foster particular affects across all channels of institutional communication. The affective infrastructures we get to see at Danubia Language create a space of sophistication and foster particular kinds of subjectivities: they infuse an exclusive, elite feeling that enhances the employee and customer experience. Affect is put to work in the way that this affective space appeals to people's investment in training and its consequences—as Hochschild would say, 'the proper state of mind' (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7)—and sets the norms for effective job performances.

5 | LANGUAGE TRAINERS AS AFFECTIVE LANGUAGE WORKERS

5.1 | Feeling rules of care

McElhinny asks us what "'habits of the heart' are taken as desirable or normative" (McElhinny, 2016b, p. 187)? In what ways do the trainers' skills become normalized through affect? In what ways do structures of feeling (Williams, 1977) exert pressures and limit the trainers' experiences and practices? Inspired by these questions, I will now draw on the narratives and stories of Danubia Languages's language trainers.

The trainers demonstrate a repertoire of skills, which mainly centre around the presence of *social relations* and the ability to build affective rapport with the clients. Crucially, affect is not only performative but also develops in relation to place and is always caught up in power relations and, as I will discuss, in the commercialisation of feeling (Hochschild, 1979). In my conversations with the trainers, I learned that the training job of the 21st century is linked with desires and aspirations of becoming a holistic 'trainer' who can build rapport with their clients and, crucially, meet their needs. We can,

thus, situate the dimensions of the trainers' lived experience of language work in terms of structures of feeling that guide conscious rapport-building. The trainers' emotional labour is guided by affects that are centred on the *desire* to please clients and on the *quest for success*, realized here through the trainers' capacity for interpersonal and relationship-building skills.

Excerpt 2 serves as an exemplar of the relational and affective nature of language trainer personhood in the context of an elite training company.

Excerpt 2: Kitty

> I: What skills does a language trainer need?
>
> Kitty: um obviously competence in English [. . .] i think <1 sec> TEACHING SKILLS is something that has a lot to do with being able to get ALONG with people easily [. . .] to assess what people's NEEDS are [. . .] to understand what makes people tick a certain WAY <1 sec> exactly by understanding people in your course then you can ACCESS the right material that's gonna HELP them the most (.) so i think that pays a HUGE part [. . .] it's a bit like PSYCHOLOGY <1 sec> i often say it's like THEATRE (.) like being on STAGE as a trainer (.) not in an egoistic way but in a way that it's MY JOB to make sure that my AUDIENCE gets what it needs <fast> and i have to work very HARD to make sure they get what they want <fast> and it's for ME making that strange thing called language FAMILIAR to them

Kitty, who grew up in the UK, has been working as an English language trainer for over 10 years, teaching in Spain, the United Arab Emirates and Austria. As can be seen from her narrative, Kitty's conceptualisation of teaching skills is filled with affect that shapes her emotional labour: addressing needs and wants, creating access, understanding and getting along with people, offering help, providing familiarity.

Kitty's emotional labour plays out not only in the mastering of other people's affective states. It also surfaces through the act of teaching as a performance, exemplified here through Kitty's metaphorical analogy between teaching and theatre and its related lexical choices ('stage'; 'audience'). This type of 'emotion work' (Benesch, 2012, p. 109) has to be seen in the context of today's world of work which promotes an agile character of productive practices and performativity on the education market. The structures of feeling inscribed here reflect an expected holistic presence of trainers in the culture of teaching adult learners via 'affective elements of consciousness and relationships' (Williams, 1977, p. 132). As part of language workers' entrepreneurialism, then, interpersonal and relationship-building skills have become a key for developing a globally and locally valorised trainer entrepreneur. And yet, as Kitty keeps stressing during our conversation, this type of labour will often go unnoticed. She explains to me that 'there is no paid preparation time and often I take on too much', implying that the thrill of teaching gets compromised with its associated costs.

What we are seeing in this example is that trainers are slipping in and out of different roles and comfort zones. Kitty's emotional labour also carries a layer of responsibility and sense of corporate duty ('it's my job to make sure. . . they get what they want'). She needs to manipulate her own feelings and actions in order to satisfy the requirements of her teaching job. Kitty's case exemplifies the adjustment of trainer subjectivities and the struggles of trainers' emotional labour by having to navigate different 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979; Zembylas, 2005), which compel them to exhibit emotions of care to make clients feel good at the same time as embodying the ultimate corporate goal of customer satisfaction. This is particularly acute in the private sector, where such structures of feeling, centred on

customer *appreciation* and the urge to *satisfy*) accompany the materialization of neoliberal ideology within the trainers' performances.

Danubia Language assures such feeling rules of care and its employees' and clients' wellbeing through its own eliteness, which materializes through affective investments (very tokenistically, through bowls of fruit, free water and coffee) and produces affects of *prestige*. In excerpt 3, Ian (originally from the USA) details what makes working at Danubia Language different to other education companies. The example illustrates how the affective infrastructures (as discussed in section 4) are felt and experienced by Ian.

Excerpt 3: Ian

> I: so what is different to any of the other places you've worked before?
>
> Ian: um well <3 sec> it crossed my mind when i first went there and in the first few occasions
>
> I: yeah
>
> Ian: there IS a feminine ENERGY <soft> if that means something <soft> in the cleanliness in the attention to detail <1 sec> that kind of FEMALE DESIRE to have ducks in a row AH because I mean that's really nice <2 sec> the bowl of fruit
>
> I: mhm
>
> Ian: do you know what i'm talking about
>
> I: can you expand?
>
> Ian: AH the coffee machine around the corner <1 sec> and that sort of yes you can help yourself and take a cup of coffee (.) that kind of CAREFULNESS and CARE I think filters through to the client <slow> because the trainers take something OF that <1 sec> to the CLIENT.

The substance of Ian's narrative unmasks the situating of affect within neoliberal visions of corporate culture, femininity and gendered stereotypes of emotional labour. He relates the affective investments of the female-run education company ('the bowl of fruit', 'leanliness', 'coffee machine', 'attention to detail') to feelings of being taken 'care' of and gendered performances. The affective orientation suffusing this discourse fragment is exemplified through positively connoted lexical choices such as 'energy, desire, nice, carefulness, care' which become attached and stuck (in Ahmed's (2004) sense) to the Danubia Language's workers. The 'coffee machine' and 'cup of coffee', visible perks of working at an elite company such as Danubia Language, surface as sticky objects that evoke neoliberal ideologies of wellbeing, care and comfort packaged into work processes.

In the context of Ian's argument of the company's 'feminine energy', his linguistic choices mirror essentialist views of emotional labour in the running of an education company. Ian's idiomatic expression 'have ducks in a row' further contributes to the affective dimension of this discourse through adding a humorous tone but also insinuating that this order originates with what he labels a 'female desire'. With these discursive choices, Ian implies that female-run businesses, such as Danubia Language" perform emotional labour in being organised, clean and well looked-after through demonstrating a detailed level of care and wellbeing. He legitimises this stereotypical affect of female

labour by extrapolating it to the trainers' performance and ultimately the clients' satisfaction. This resonates with Isenbarger and Zembylas' (2006) documentation of the emotional labour of caring in teaching, with the notion of care as a key feature of service work more broadly, especially in for-profit institutions that care about their image and corporate culture.

The feeling rule of care, with which trainers align their emotional labour, as illustrated in John's experience of the classroom as a site of therapy (see introduction), deserves further attention. In my conversations with the trainers, it emerged that the types of trainers who can effectively mobilize their emotional labour and capitalise on it are most successful (see also Gkonou & Miller, 2020 for emotional capital). This also shows that trainers' emotional labour is not distributed equally and is shaped by neoliberal structures of feeling that interfere with trainers' work practices. Kirsty, an American who has been working for Danubia Language for 3 years, is an important actor for the story that unfolds here. She teaches a 4-week intensive English intermediate conversation course targeted at customers with advanced English competency. The following excerpts, 4 and 5, from my fieldnotes of this class, recount the ways in which the trainer needs to navigate various dimensions of emotional labour and its related tensions.

Excerpt 4: English intermediate conversation course

> It's 7.15pm. The four participants and Kirsty are sitting around a table with coffee and water jugs. The room is air-conditioned. It's been a hot day. There is small talk in German about the heatwave. Peter (he is Austrian and works for an accountant firm) arrives late. He is sweaty and out of breath. "Hi Peter, it's great you are here", Kirsty greets him with a smile. She points to the water jug. He nods and sits down quietly, pouring water in the glass in front of him. I can sense there is some tension in the classroom. Kirsty uses an ice-breaker activity, a 3-minute TED-talk about "try something new for thirty days". The participants are taking notes while watching the talk on Kirsty's I-pad. Except Peter. He keeps staring at his phone. He seems to ignore what's going on around him.
>
> After the class, I have a chat with Kirsty to follow up on Peter's apparent disengagement.

Excerpt 5: Kirsty

> Kirsty tells me she has to keep putting herself in their shoes. I think she means the clients. She says "Peter is just trying to get through this class which his employer has asked him to do for four weeks". She tells me that he is bored and doesn't engage. She recounts having seen him exhausted. "It's a fine line between keeping him involved and losing him", she says. I don't understand and ask what she meant. Kirsty shrugs and explains that Peter knows he can't skip the course. So she needs to be extra alert and listen to him, "even when he doesn't talk". She explains that he is supposed to give trainer feedback at the end of the course, which she hopes will be positive.

In these narratives, Kirsty's story signals that she needs to please a resistant and exhausted learner (Peter) who already knows English well and seems to have been forced to attend this course by his employer. As a way of reacting to Peter's emotional wellbeing, Kirsty makes sense of his affective responses of exhaustion, silence and refusal in the classroom by embracing her feeling rules of 'care', that is, by smiling encouragingly, offering a non-threating atmosphere for learning via water jugs, and letting him rest. Displaying such emotions of *compassion*, then, clearly has a use value. The elite setting which allows for the creation of a homey and relaxing atmosphere puts Kirsty at an advantage in her

performance of emotional labour and the management of her clients' feelings. In this sense, eliteness materializes in Kirsty's capacity to act within the special social and cultural context of the training institution. At the same time, her fear of losing this client via potentially negative customer feedback with the consequence of not being booked again by Peter's employer re-produces affect in the form of concern, anxiety and hope. What surfaces is *anxiety* and a deep sense of *insecurity* as structures of feeling in the private adult language teaching sector. Kirsty's external pressure to perform complicates the current affective model of her professional activity as a hybrid figure: a trainer, an entertainer and someone who listens to their clients, 'even when he doesn't talk' (as Kirsty says), similar to the work of therapists. These qualities stick to the trainer, that is, they become part of the profession. And yet, we need to pay close attention here to power imbalances, their affective effects on workers and the emotional tensions Kirsty navigates: she feels professionally required to manage her own feelings and performances in order to manage others' (cf. Hochschild, 1983).

Simpson (2020, pp. 527–528) also points us to the "contradictory forces at work" that teachers need to grapple with, especially over 'the mediation of their own interests, with those of management, institutional evaluative mechanisms, and the student in the role of consumer'. Kirsty clearly finds herself at the very locus of these contradictions. And some trainers are more affectively privileged to cope than others.

5.2 | Flexibility, precarity and distinction

Apart from navigating these complex affects in the workplace that are tied to clients' wellbeing and care, there are related tensions over the flexibilities, precarities and distinctions that are stuck to the profession and the trainers' own self-management strategies to negotiate these. These tensions over flexibility, precarity and distinction need to be situated within structures of feeling (*anxiety*; *insecurity*; *hope*; *aspiration*) that shape the freelance, contractual, flexible employment relationships of language trainers in the knowledge economy. Below, we learn from Kirsty about the perpetual struggles over her salary.

Excerpt 6: Kirsty

> I: and how about the pay here?
>
> Kirsty: if I compare the pay to other institutes, the pay here, well, that's still pretty GOOD I didn't find a higher rate in Vienna (.) I also applied to another institute but then I decided NOT to because I thought I don't want to end up again as a trainer who must work for four institutes [. . .] I did that in the past yes it was INTENSE yeah crazy and the salary is MUCH worse (.)

Kirsty is now in the privileged position of being able to choose to work for only one language company (here Danubia Language), in contrast to the past where she ended up having to work for four different ones, an experience which she labels 'intense' and 'crazy'. What we can gauge from this snapshot of conversation is the material pressures that language training, as a precarious form of labour, exerts and the limits it sets on people's actions. What we see here is a range of structures of feeling that dominate Kirsty's language work (and the profession more widely): *insecurity* and *discontinuity* that arise from the structural conditions of precarious labour. That is, there is a lingering concern over precarious and discontinuous work (and the compulsion to be flexible) that sticks to the trainer personhood someone who always keeps aspiring for something better and needs to weigh what's best

for them. After all, the language trainer is a replaceable language worker. Interestingly, here, the elite dimension of Kirsty's language work, which materializes through a competitive salary, enables her to fashion her selfhood so that she can cope and rid herself of such precarities.

Similarly, Ian's story details how his dissatisfaction with the language training job in Europe, due to the precarities of the occupation, affectively fuels his individual autonomy and desire to move abroad, in the *hope* for transformation and change.

Excerpt 7: Ian

> Ian: in my mid-thirties I decided EITHER I stop flirting with language teaching in Europe <fast> particularly English language teaching <fast> AND stop rejecting it as somehow inadequate because it never seemed to lead to SECURE EMPLOYMENT or to enough work <slow> as I perceived enough by comparison <fast> an accountant or a teacher in a state school who would have much more continuity and stability ANYWAY (.) I then decided to say OKAY to get into it with more COMMITMENT thinking perhaps that's the issue that I need to make more COMMITMENT to it (.) AND indeed early forties I realized that I could be flexible enough and had in fact to go out to somewhere like ARABIA I could have gone to the far east but chose ARABIA because there I found long-term CONTRACTS and as a native speaker you know how it is you GET the jobs there is PLENTY of choices out there

There is a lot to unpack here from Ian's story that highlights the affective dimension of language work as wells as the trainer's managed identity, as part of emotional labour. For one, his discursive choice 'flirting with language teaching' constructs English language teaching as a playful, habitual and not serious profession that (as he adds later) 'never seemed to lead to secure employment'. He then compares the training job with other occupations such as accountants or state school teachers that are stereotypically associated with continuity and stability–something he strives for as well. For Ian, the precarity mainly arises from the contrasting conditions that come with being temporarily versus permanently employed. We also learn that he negotiates the precarities of employment through the performance of transnational emotional labour. His repetitive use of making a 'commitment' to the training career, and feeling obliged ('had in fact to go out'), if not guilty, to go the extra mile by leaving Europe emphasises this point. His *hopes* and transformations are then rewarded via 'long-term contracts'. In other words, Ian talks himself into needing to make more commitment in order to be successful and land a stable job. He embraces the feeling rule of dedication, undergirded by a moral imperative to act (see De Costa et al., 2019) for transformation, and desired a better future. De Costa et al.'s work (2019, 2020) shows us further how neoliberalism nurtures affective regimes and moral imperatives that press individuals to act with entrepreneurial, individual and autonomous attributes. We also see how eliteness materializes in *distinction* and secure employment (long-term contracts, as we have seen with Ian's example). In this sense, transnational moves for professional purposes (which some, but not all language workers can do) serve as a strategy to cultivate privilege on the job market and endow social capital and *prestige*.

Ian's self-management and performance of affect is, however, very much consonant with neoliberal ideology that normalizes the precarity experienced by Ian (and the training occupation more widely, we can argue) through flexibility. That is, Ian's affective *aspirations* for permanency and stability make the neoliberal ideologies of flexibility stick (in Ahmed's sense). The insecurity of his employment is taken as a trade-off for his workplace flexibility (choosing to work in 'Arabia', as he calls it). But how much choice does Ian really have? After all, workplace mobility is institutionally and structurally created and not a mere personal choice. In fact, the de-localised workplace and its reliance on flexibilization

obfuscates the centrality of flexibility and its potential costs and effects. As such, flexibility becomes stuck to the elite trainer persona who is entrepreneurial and privileged enough to escape the existing precarities—a position that not all trainers inhabit.

Finally, we also learn that Ian capitalizes on his native speaker status ('you get the job there is plenty of choices') by drawing on the commonsensical ('you know how it is') privilege his native speaker status affords him. Language, for him, becomes a strategic tool to overcome his precarity, and affords him the joy of *privilege* and *distinction*. The affective language trainer personhood thus gets complicated by questions over speakerhood to which linguistic preferences, desires, norms and favouritism stick. Affects of *prestige* and *distinction*, based on native speakerness, are grounded within broader social structures that operate on the basis of hegemonic language ideals and power mechanisms.

To further elaborate on affective speakerhood and the stickiness of the native speaker ideology, we can trace the distinction afforded to native speaker trainers by following the case of John, who is British and who has been working as an English trainer for this company for more than 10 years. Previously, he taught in the United Arab Emirates. In excerpt 8, he elaborates on the role of English in language training.

Excerpt 8: John

> I: so can you expand on your last point? You were talking about the connection of language and culture.
>
> John: there is the hegemony of the English language which embarrasses me sometimes because I think what RIGHT do I have to IMPOSE MY WAY of speaking <slow> or to have people in front of me and say YES I want to speak like you [. . .] AH I think there is a great BENEFIT in NON-NATIVE speaker teachers <fast> who of course can identify with the difficulties of the learners of a given language AH AGAIN connecting with the previous point about CULTURAL AWARENESS <2 sec> there is a potential DIFFERENCE in that sort of physical sense whereby an exchange is GENUINE for the native speaker [. . .] NATIVE SPEAKERS <1 sec> I HOPE <1 sec> <slow> ARE present and conscious and NOT talking heads out of course books <slow> that publishers have produced for a profit [. . .] but people who can be fully AWARE of THEIR culture THEIR identity THEIR provenience <slow> and INQUIRE authentically into the corresponding characteristics of the LEARNER so there IS an argument for saying that the CHEMISTRY and the AUTHENTIC ah communicative gap is THERE between a non-native and a native [. . .] whereas if I COME authentically using my language there is no question about the relationship that we have to it <1 sec> it belongs to ME but I'm going to try and help YOU INTO it

The affect John evokes here centres around hegemony, legitimacy and ownership. As we can see, he mobilises both legitimising and delegitimising discourses about native speakerism. He starts off with a critique of the hegemonic role of English by questioning the superiority of the native speaker ideal. He then mobilises the classic discourse of the non-native speaker being able to better identify with the learning difficulties. But then there is a rupture (brought about by talking about 'cultural awareness) and John breaks from this discourse and mobilises ideologies of authenticity to define the qualities of a native speaker as 'genuine', 'authentic', 'aware of their culture and identity'. He, thus, constructs the native speaker as someone who can authentically use language–clearly taking up a position of power as someone having greater cultural capital, in Bourdieu's (1983) sense. We can thus situate affect here in the structures of feeling that centre on the linguistic hegemony of English. So, while

native speakerhood invokes a sense of *superiority* and *authenticity*, it has historically acted as a point of reference that carries social consequences. As we can observe, John's narrative flags up hegemonic ideologies about language ownership ('it belongs to me') and enablement ('I help you into it'), which are part of wider social and discursive constitutions of affect that make ideologies of language stick.

There are two central issues at stake here: first, affect is an expression and appropriation of power, here with the obvious power afforded to the superiority of the native speaker; second, trainer emotions, personhood and speakerhood are shaped by wider institutional, social, personal and ideological forces. Who counts as a native speaker and who does not evokes affective responses, as can be traced here in John's case. To recall my earlier argument, corporate educational institutions are sites of hegemonic knowledge production and powerful ideologies that make meaning stick (Eagleton, 1991, p. 195). So, what sticks here is a hegemonic ideal of native trainer personhood. The expressions of authenticity and ownership that we find here forge affective ties of belonging among (those who consider themselves as) native speakers; at the same time, they create boundaries in relation to those who cannot occupy this role. The ideology of the native speaker, as we have seen in the stories of Ian and John discussed here, possesses a sticky (Ahmed, 2004) quality that is historically contingent and keeps sticking to the present.

6 | TOWARDS 'A HEARTFELT' APPROACH OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION?

While the affective dimension of language education deserves further academic scrutiny as a global trend, it is also important for scholarship to critically interrogate the mundane practices of people in such terrain on a local level, and in more niche sites such as private language education. In this article, I have mapped how affect plays out in the exemplary site of an Austrian language education company. Using Critical Discourse Ethnography, I have applied affect as a lens for understanding the structuring processes through which language workers perform emotional labour by managing their own and others' feelings and performances (Hochschild, 1983), and how this sits within larger 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1977) in an affective economy (Ahmed, 2004). While I have identified the presence of affect in language work in this situated site, I have also problematized the nature of the language trainers' educational language work and how they cope with tensions between the possibilities of neoliberal selfhood and the realities of their precarious and elite forms of employment.

I have made the case that a focus on affect in sociolinguistics matters in private adult language teaching on various accounts: to deconstruct the existing linguistic and social dichotomies in adult language education and their effects on action; and to understand how neoliberal logics structure but also naturalise affective forms of personhood, speakerhood and moral conduct, with its potential costs and effects. Whilst affect is not a new terrain in the context of language education, it deserves renewed attention under contemporary neoliberalism, which serves as a structure of feeling that highlights the tensions, uncertainties and contradictions that the language workers navigate, as well as the real constraints under which they operate and what they do to work for or against them. Affect thus becomes a site for mediating social and institutional structures and individual experiences and performances.

In many ways, the findings show how the trainers (more or less successfully) cope with the tensions between their neoliberal self and the realities of precarity in language training. The trainers' stories show how the affective orientations to language training as a service job require emotional labour and affective managerial strategies that relate to meeting clients' needs. As we know, affects of the training job are, however, rooted in broader histories of capitalism and neoliberalism (McElhinny, 2010) that interfere with the trainers' agency. As such, affect is instantiated in the training job and makes

neoliberal and language ideologies stick in the ways the language workers appropriate affect in their everyday labour processes. While the trend of precarious labour is not new (nor the tensions it creates), the stories of the language trainers told here produce a troubling image of a profession that is filled with insecurity and anxiety alongside career aspirations, pride, hope, pleasure, compassion, happiness and privilege, all rooted in a desired better future. The trainers' affective language work features distinct 'layers and domains of privilege' (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2017 , p. 250) which allow them to deal with the tensions these create. The presence of affect within the private sector workplace highlights the importance of locality: the training company as an elite workspace that affords *prestige*, *happiness* and *comfort/wellbeing* for its employees. Importantly, the trainers' elite status affords them a greater capacity to free themselves of precarity than other language workers, for example, via mobile life trajectories. And yet, behind every story told lie real fears and insecurities about the professional trainer persona. In this sense, I would like to push the argument that neoliberalism constructs unequal structures of feeling that re-fashion the language training job via latent feeling rules as part of emotional labour. In fact, the affects produced here are rooted in complex structures of differentiation that accentuate the ideal and valued trainer persona.

Fundamentally, the trainers' stories indicate how they perform emotional labour which re-centres language as a holistic, human and bodily experience. This is a type of labour that often remains unacknowledged (cf. Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006, p. 123) and invisibilizes broader neoliberal hegemonies of work that require a 'heartfelt approach' (McElhinny, 2016b, p. 186) to succeed. In that sense, the trainers emerge as agents of the new economy who provide a tailored learning experience through empathy, enjoyment, commitment and care. And yet, we can see that this commercialised 'heartfelt approach' puts language workers at the locus of power imbalances and continuous tensions over their own agency in order to conform with institutional expectations and norms (cf. Benesch, 2018) through which language training is configured.

Although the phenomena documented here are distinctive, they are limited. They only shed some light on a much broader debate concerning how language work sits within an affective economy that sociolinguistics still needs to grapple with more fully. An affective lens and structures of feeling can serve as powerful vantage points for exploring how socio-political and political-economic forces define and mutually shape the experience of affective language work. In fact, they allow for critique of the commonsensical (such as the constant pressure on trainers to make competitive choices, or their performance of happiness) that is masked by ideologies and power dynamics at play in hegemonic educational sites. Elite sites, such as private language education are, after all, a place of reproduction. In such sites, then, language work happens on a continuum from elite to precarious circles, so the connection of language work, affect and social class strikes me as one that deserves more scrutiny (cf. Block, 2014; also Williams' (1977, p. 134) argument that structures of feeling relate to class). How can dominant structures of feeling that produce *anxiety* or *aspiration* be used to transform labour conditions rooted in the neoliberal organization of work? What classed ways of *being* and *doing* language work exist? How can some language workers rid themselves of their precarities more than others? And how does this connect to linguistic and social differentiation? Precisely such questions press us to interrogate who gets to teach and learn at what institution, under which circumstances, and with which resources, affective performances and effects.

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ENDNOTES

[1] I am aware of the contentious history of the label 'native speaker' (see Holliday 2006). For the purpose of problematizing the label and its affective dimension in this study, I will make use of the distinction native and non-native speaker accordingly.

[2] All names are pseudonyms.

[3] I have followed the transcription conventions of VOICE (the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English). https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/documents/VOICE_mark-up_conventions_v2-1.pdf.

CAPS = capital letters for words or phrases with particular prominence and emphasis
<fast> = speaking mode (e.g. fast, soft)
I = interviewer
(.) = brief pause in speech (up to a half second)
<1sec> = longer pauses
<@> = laughter
[...] = situational noise

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