



# Language Management/Labor

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## Abstract

How language is conceptualized as labor is a function of the economy within which profits are made and businesses are structured. Under capitalist regimes, language practices have been conceptualized as apart from labor, as part of the means of production, and as the product. Under neoliberal regimes and conditions of globalization, and depending on the language worker's job description and status as managed or managing, ethnicity/race, gender, and affiliation with national or nonnational language practices are conceptualized as skills subject to Taylorization, as natural abilities for employers' occasional use, or as indexes of authenticity. What ties all this together is how language workers are imagined in relation to the organizations for which they work, a key element being the degree to which language labor represents an internalization of the organization. In this way, language labor is conceptualized in relation to agency as a technology of self.

**Register:** a language variety specific to a set of social actors engaged in some defining form of interaction (social, occupational, etc.)

**Enregisterment:** the process by which registers continually develop from preexisting registers

**Metasemiotic:** general semiotic (interpretive) principles organizing specific acts of cultural action and interpretation

## WHAT MAKES LANGUAGE INTO LABOR?

As any good Marxist knows, what counts as labor is the place of work in an economic order. Under capitalism, workers exchange their labor for wages. In an earlier capitalism, wage labor generally went into the production of material goods, which were sold as commodities. Work, then, was generally thought of as physical labor and commodities as material goods. Under contemporary conditions of capitalism [or late capitalism or, after Harvey (1989), post-Fordism], the work may take the form of (rather stylized) interactive linguistic practices, as might the commodities. The difference lies in whether that practice is imagined as an act of communication emerging from social relations or imagined as what Cameron (2000a) calls communication skills, a form of linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1991, Irvine 1989) valued in relation to its workplace utility (making such knowledge a specialized instance of cultural capital). In short, whether linguistic practices are social interaction or job skills depends on whether they are performed as labor and the extent of the speaker's agency in their production. Insofar as people sell their labor power, and insofar as the value of their labor power depends on their knowledge of particular linguistic practices, such practices become commodified (Heller 2010a,b; Heller & Duchêne 2012, Duchêne et al. 2013b). The commodification of language as labor, like other dimensions of the commodification of language, is nested firmly in the conditions of contemporary neoliberal capitalism (Harvey 2005) that structure the places and options available to workers. Language as neoliberal labor further presupposes the reimagining of the person of the worker as an assemblage of commodifiable elements, i.e., a bundle of skills (Urciuoli 2008).

Language as a form of labor (like language as commodity) has material dimensions (Shankar & Cavanaugh 2012, pp. 360–62). If people are paid for language work, what constitutes work is likely to be objectified, especially when such work is considered a skill set subject to monitoring and assessment. Linguistic practice as a form of cultural capital is convertible to economic capital: People get paid for doing it. If they get paid for doing it under conditions that demonstrate an authentic or classy performance, their linguistic practices accumulate symbolic capital that can further maximize the conversion to economic capital (Bourdieu 1986). Recent work on branding (Moore 2003, Foster 2007, Meneley 2007, Manning 2010) examines the discursive work involved in the provision of market value to commodities, a process in which semiotic and material value are interdependent (Kockelman 2006). Comparable semiotic work is also evident in the production of discursive constructions of experience, especially touristic experiences of ethnic authenticity, a business in which it is advantageous to interpret linguistic elements iconically and to erase variability (Irvine & Gal 2000).

People experience language practices as registers, as co-occurring linguistic elements and patterns specific to the conditions, as participant structures and roles, and as social ends in which they operate. Thus, speakers participate in continual processes of register formation, i.e., enregisterment (Silverstein 2003a, Agha 2007). Although particular performance elements—a turn of phrase or vocal inflection—might seem like those of ordinary conversation, in a neoliberal regime of language work they might be enregistered with other elements distinct to and connected with specific work settings and goals and interests. In this way, such elements can index the processes by which they have been scripted for situations or conditions of profit-maximizing use. Language work, particularly in neoliberal regimes, presupposes the channeling of employee sociality and (in varying degrees) subjectivity into company interests. Employees thus operate in work-specific (and neoliberally governed) regimes of metasemiotic regimentation: “metamesages delimiting the range of possible interpretations, but which do so indirectly, implicitly, or inductively. The regimentation found in these contexts is all the more powerful because social actors are not confronted with explicit metasemiotic forms” (Parmentier 1994, p. 134, after

Silverstein 1993). Insofar as discursive activity in such regimes is continually guided by (generally profit-oriented) metamessages, it participates in metacultural shift, the accelerated circulation of metasemiotic regimes into social spaces where they were not previously found (Urban 2001). In this process, linguistic elements are guided toward new patterns of standardization, specific to the enregisterment processes under which they develop.

Gal (2012) outlines the ways that language ideologies mediate neoliberal conditions, producing metamessages about how to use language to what end: Whereas use patterns and valued forms may have changed, the metamessages channeling use and value grow from language ideologies rooted in those of modernity (Bauman & Briggs 2003). Efficiency and productivity are notions central to modernity. Much design of language performance, as for call center workers, is oriented to that end. Standardizations of language work involve considerable entextualization (Silverstein & Urban 1996) of performance scripts, manuals, source books, websites, etc. The dominant metamessages underlying standardized literacy practices, particularly in the United States, have been utilitarian efficiency, self-improvement, and a striving for perfect communication (Heath 1983, Peters 1999, Collins & Blot 2003), all of which are coherent with the American ideology that language forms should be clean and clear of impurities to best channel meaning (Silverstein 1996).

### WHAT MAKES LANGUAGE WORK NEOLIBERAL?

Neoliberal regimes of linguistic production are a contemporary capitalist spin on F.W. Taylor's late-nineteenth-century industrial philosophy of scientific management, or Taylorism. Its premise is that to maximize profits and develop "every branch of business to highest state of excellence" (Taylor 1972, p. 9) the worker's performance must be developed to a state of maximum efficiency. This goal is achieved best through the segmentation of tasks. Instead of production relying on an employee's knowledge and experience (skill in an older-fashioned sense) acquired over time, engineer managers reconstitute tasks as operations designed to be performed as quickly as possible, an approach that removes the design of skills from the employee's control and treats as interchangeable all employees answering to the same job description. Taylor developed this mechanism initially as a solution to the problem of unequal production results, but its appeal to employers was enhanced by its promise of labor management, though its application was also often the cause of labor resistance.

Taylorism emerged in the 1890s, an era of massive manufacturing expansion and corporate growth. Since then, corporate forms have shifted from vertically structured businesses based largely on localized production of material goods to globalized enterprises based on continually expanding searches for new markets, cheaper (and nonunion) labor, and cheaper, more corporate-friendly production processes. Although such shifts emerged largely in the 1970s (Harvey 1989), they are not historical breaks but ongoing processes of ever-restless capitalism taking new forms, including a neoliberalized business climate and labor practices and ideologies. Harvey (2005, p. 2) characterizes neoliberalism as "a theory of economic political practices" in which the state's role is to maximize the potential for the market to operate. In such a regime, all social practices are imagined as subject to the laws of the market (Rossiter 2003, p. 109). Ideally, individual workers require minimal management because they internalize a management model that reflects the company's best interests (Martin 1997). Such entrepreneurialist ideology quickly lends itself to what Foucault (1988) has characterized as a technology of self, a means for fashioning a subjectivity compatible with dominant practices, institutions, and beliefs.

However, evidence of Taylorist management techniques remains alive and well. A regime in which all social practices are imagined as subject to the market predictably produces many

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#### Standardization:

the explicit, top-down, ideologically informed imposition of norms for correct, appropriate, or valued language form and use

#### Entextualization:

the perception of discourse segments as autonomous units independent of the social processes producing them

**Taylorism:** the management practice of segmenting labor into standardized, repeatable tasks in order to maximize efficient production

**Neoliberalism:** the notion that the state should maximize the market's operational potential, making any social practice subject to market processes

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commodified social practices, including services or intellectual products that rely largely on linguistic labor and produce a language-based product; Heller (2010a) provides a most useful review of the commodification of language. The linguistic labor that goes into such production is readily governed by Taylorist management techniques, as Cameron (2000a) notes regarding the linguistic labor of call centers and service encounters; in these settings, workers follow specific scripts under considerable pressure to turn over as many calls or encounters as possible in as short a time possible. Under contemporary conditions, globalized economic flows render such work in all times and places equally subject to the same regimes of assessment and control, as can be seen in the call center discussion below.

As Gee et al. (1996) indicates, the neoliberalization of the workplace means that all institutional positions are veneered with the philosophy of total quality management: the idea that everyone from CEO to the lowest line worker is equally involved in the task of customer satisfaction. Terms such as “motivated partner” or “committed worker” generate an image of a “flat” workplace in which all are assumed to participate with equal self-motivation. This assumed egalitarianism is belied by the fact that the communicative tasks and scripts assigned to workers are designed largely by experts toward particular ends (Fairclough 1995), a clearly Taylorist management practice.

### LABOR, MANAGEMENT, AND SUBJECTIVITY

The notion of subjectivity can be used to explore the laborer’s disposition within different institutional spheres. In Foucault’s formulation, subjectivity is constituted by discrete technologies that rarely, if ever, operate alone. Technologies of the self involve language and labor in multiple modes, including the manipulation and production of things, the use of sign systems, engagement in forms of domination and submission, and the involvement of the self in becoming an ethical subject (Foucault 1988, p. 18). The notion that a subject position requires effort stresses that each technology of the self has transformative potential that informs the others. Such relationships in modern subjectivities (such as in a neoliberal framework) Foucault (1991) calls governmentality, wherein technologies of the self can themselves proliferate in institutional spheres.

A point of contention for many scholars of discourse inspired by Foucault is his argument that power in the formation of modern subjectivities is dispersed, partly because it emerges within the various and discrete technologies of the self on which subjectivities depend (Fairclough 1992, 1995, 2002, 2006). Chouliaraki & Fairclough join many others in drawing attention to “causal links between institutional social practices and the position of subjects in the wider social field” (1999, p. 24). Attention to relations of power and forms of institutional embeddedness within discursive production differentiates critical discourse analysis from a tradition of more strictly ethnomethodological discourse analysis.

Transformations in subject positions can be manifested in changes in the institutional dynamics of labor. Ball (1990) argues that education in England and Wales has undergone a transformation in moral technology from what he calls “professional/collegial” to “managerial/bureaucratic,” a Taylorist process enabling the notion of a flat workplace amid increasing specialization. Teachers are relegated to execution, whereas managers operate in the domain of policy. Execution is governed, in part, by the emergence of “graded assessment schemes” whereby teachers can be compared and rendered in need of attention and improvement. Examinations become an exercise in power as teachers become individuals by virtue of their assessments and are urged to do better in subsequent performances. Such developments are reminiscent of “audit culture,” a discursive regime in which surveillance is exercised in the interest of efficiency (Strathern 2000b). Shore & Wright (2000) use the concept to assert that “seemingly dull, routine, bureaucratic practices often have profound effects on social life” (p. 57). Audit culture emerged in the 1980s and, in the 1990s,

underwent “conceptual inflation,” a discursive proliferation in “virtually every field of modern working life” (Shore & Wright 2000, p. 59). This notion is manifested, for example, in skills and leadership training.

Also emergent in the 1990s was what Gershon (2011) calls neoliberal agency, whereby one is beholden to oneself not as property, but as a business. Subject positions in a neoliberal conception of labor do not seem to emerge from the kind of top-down relationships involved in audit culture. “Soft skills” attain value in a neoliberal conception of labor where efficacy is derived from the ways that skills “align their users with other users, organizations, and specific sets of interests” and not from the ability to describe a contribution to an already defined set of tasks (Urciuoli 2008, p. 213). Culture too is often treated as an “asset, skill, or commodity” in a rendering of selves as market actors (Gershon 2011, p. 542). The self can come to be the locus of such activity because selves are imagined to engage other selves as “autonomous market actors” (Gershon 2011, p. 540), though not everyone is equally entrusted to act with much autonomy.

Many scholars have explored specific moral technologies and the institutional domains from which they emerge. They emphasize that various forms of labor in late capitalism involve workers in subject positions that are emergent, unsettled, and sometimes unsettling. Ethnographic cases reveal a neoliberal process whereby the worker becomes the agent of self-production, but they also reveal the ways that workers are enmeshed in situations of transition. The discursive effects of late capitalism often stymie the very results that workers seek or, at least, are promised. New technologies of the self can indicate a shifting relationship between labor and subject position. This shift can be seen clearly in a study that compares linguistic resources brought to job-interview role-playing exercises offered to job seekers from former East and West Germany after the German unification. The former East Germans drew on what seemed appropriate, the German Democratic Republic bureaucratic style that foregrounded hierarchy and downplayed agency, a style ill-suited to their new labor situation (Auer 1998). In another instance, a workshop for curriculum vitae writing in the Slovak Republic in 2001 encouraged workers to present evidence of accomplishment and expertise in ways that differed from the socialist republic’s genre, which was characterized by presenting a life chronicle. Resting on a new mode of the presentation of the self as a worker, the postsocialist curriculum vitae presupposes that Slovak workers come to engage with notions of risk and self-reliance (Larson 2008). Tokyo workplace gender equity programs in the 1990s give evidence of a “responsibilized self,” a subject position wherein a feeling of achievement coincides with a shift from external to internal control. An attendant effect is that attention shifts from the corporate structure to workers’ responses to it and conduct compared with others’ (Inoue 2007, 2013).

Explicit revitalization and reform efforts outside of particular work contexts can become the object of discursive effects of contemporary capitalism. Basque gets presented to potential learners as “useful language for all spheres of life,” as Urla quotes one of her informants (2012, p. 84). Revitalization efforts, however, rest on an ideal of total quality language (see prior discussion of total quality management) lacking indexical connections to historical events and regimented for use in workshops. The “Gaelic in the Community Scheme” in Scotland, an initiative to disburse grants to community groups to encourage “Gaelic activities,” encourages rather than reduces the languages’ ideological separation (McEwen-Fujita 2005). Participation in language revitalization efforts often entails engagement with measures of success—based on quantifiable entities and actions—that are not useful in describing the ways that minority languages are used (McEwen-Fujita 2008). The means of defining language, its users, and its uses that are necessary to participate in the Gaelic in the Community Scheme works to thwart the very goals of participation (McEwen-Fujita 2011). Participation in the scheme rests on notions of language, its users, and its uses that depart from a sociolinguistic emphasis on context. Home Office officials in the

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**Indexicality:** semiotic process by which social signs, especially language, are understood as context-specific, carrying social, cultural, and historical meaning

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United Kingdom are also led to ignore sociolinguistic context as they accept or reject asylum applicants' claims to citizenship (Blommaert 2009). Joseph Mutingira's claim to be a Rwandan national is rejected by the Home Office because the linguistic elements of his claim do not index recognized modes of national belonging. Never apparent to workers at the Home Office, of course, is that their means of rendering Mutingira as a subject puts him in an impossible position (see the discussion of language and social indexing of code value below). People must engage with schooling in India to attain employment credentials amid shifts in national economic policy (Ramanathan 1999, 2005). Education in English is newly tied to older notions about the need to move to find employment. Movement, however, can mark the person as having peripheral origins. The self, the family, the school, the town, and the region can all become ways that the aspiring laborer's English can be rendered suspect (LaDousa 2005, 2007). Aspiring workers thwart the attainment of workers' goals because the technologies of the self with which they engage shift. Such technologies are not just unstable but unreliable.

### **IMAGINING LANGUAGE IN RELATION TO LABOR: A RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES**

Boutet (2012, pp. 208–9; see also 2008) talks about the historical emergence, in the course of the Industrial Revolution, of “the language part of work,” the implementation of linguistic competencies needed to do a job. In the Industrial Revolution, factory owners specified and prohibited linguistic and verbal practices considered antiproduktive: language defined in opposition to work. Industrial configurations of language emerged with “telephone ladies,” operators whose very articulatory activities were disciplined. Such discipline is now characteristic of heavily Taylorized call centers.

Conceptualizing “the language part of work” entails conceptualizing the worker and the social world into which the worker fits, a world defined by capitalism. Before and outside the scope of jobs defined by what became global capitalism, people have made livings involving language practices and performances. Malagasy and Moroccan market women (Keenan 1974, Kapchan 1996), Wolof griots (Irvine 1989), and Texas dog traders (Bauman 1986) all engage in language that is work insofar as it involves market exchange. But all do so in genre-specific expressive oral performances reflecting local norms that matter as much as the money. Comparable principles of locally oriented marketplace social production apply to textual work by “literacy brokers” in Mexico City (Kalman 1999). Although these situations operate within a larger capitalist order, the social actor's persona is not part of a company or nation or some comparable configuration nor is their language practice subject to judgment by an authority outside the immediate transaction. Nor do those situations represent linguistic labor in a capitalist sense: These jobs do not exist as part of a company or entrepreneurial or investment structure. So the language involved in doing that work is not subject to the kind of meaning that language work takes on in a capitalist order.

Imagining language in relation to the job often means imagining language in relation to the nation-state within which the company (however globalized) operates. The lamination of language onto the nation state is likely to be imagined in hyperpure terms, subjecting workers to judgment about the “wrong” language or language elements interfering with their labor. This is especially true in the United States. Workplace discipline may involve banning minority languages (as Zentella 1996 documents and Rodriguez 2006 challenges). Elements of language may be seen to prohibit communication work: People whose accents index racialized social categories may be considered “unintelligible” and denied jobs as teachers or broadcasters without legal recourse because “clear” communication may be legally ruled as part of the job (Matsuda 1991, Lippi-Green 1994). Such judgments about workplace language discipline index a cultural fetishizing of code



common among nation-states, but occurs especially in the United States. Alternative models can exist: The work may get done on a multilingual shop floor (Goldstein 1997, Hewitt 2012), or a multilingual workforce can find its own way to a lingua franca (Clyne 1994) without the imposed discipline of ESL or, in a parallel case, “skills,” including “literacy skills,” training (Cameron 2002, Hull 1997). But the cultural logic of fetishized code and fetishized skills (often conflated) as inherently disciplining and transformative seems too easily “natural.” Blaming workers for lack of skills becomes a way to deflect attention from structural labor problems (Hull 1999). English and communication skills classes offered to professional immigrants shift attention from economic and social barriers onto individuals who are seen as entirely responsible for their own integration as worker citizens (Allan 2013). The imposition of language or skills training presupposes that linguistic capital comes in the form of specific segments, whereas it is at least as likely to take the form of pragmatic understanding and performance elements operating outside social actors’ awareness, as people find all too often in gatekeeping situations (Akinaso & Seabrook Ajiro 1982, Roberts 2013).

If language is part of the job, but not itself the job, occupational structure is a central consideration. An employee’s degree of linguistic autonomy varies with the nature of the job, the organization, and the employee’s organizational position as manager or managed (Cameron 2000a, p. 129). To take one striking example, the Salk Institute study by Latour & Woolgar (1979) demonstrates the oral and textual language work of an elite knowledge-production team that required specialized training, experience, and credentials. Although knowledge production is embedded in linguistic practice and form, participants do not perceive it as language work. At a less exalted level, much the same can be said of any kind of knowledge work. Recent corporate ethnography demonstrates the role of talk among fellow workers in industrial research (Jordan 2009) and the shared activity of project teams that meet, talk, take notes, project data, write on whiteboards, and otherwise engage in a process of joint spoken and written labor in which individual actors are effectively decentered (Nafus & Anderson 2009). Recent corporate focus on the idea of “communities of practice” allows for new venues of previously unmonitored interaction and talk (lunch, hallway, etc.) to be regarded as a source of productivity (McElhinny 2012). Unlike the Taylorized language labor force, elite knowledge producers start with maximum linguistic capital and have maximum authority over their scripts. They are positioned to produce and be identified with what Bernstein (1975) termed “elaborated code” (see also Kuipers 2013, in this volume; Gal 1989, pp. 350–52) characterized by syntactic complexity, specialized lexicons, and referential explicitness, in contrast with the highly presupposed usages and implicit understandings of “restricted code.” The latter generally characterizes group-internal discourse but is readily masked by the former in contexts of elite knowledge production.

The close study of workplace language owes much to the ethnographic study of discourse contextualization pioneered by Gumperz (1982). The Drew & Heritage (1992b) edited volume draws from that approach to provide analyses of interaction in task-related contexts; at least one participant represented some kind of formal organization and work was performed through exchange of talk, i.e., institutional talk as the job (Drew & Heritage 1992a, pp. 22–25). The volume’s case studies focus on the roles of questioners and answerers and cover such topics as news reporting, psychiatric interviews, court proceedings, job interviews, and health care negotiations. Other edited volumes of institutional discourse analyses follow an analytic shift from conversational analysis to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995), examining the impact of the “new work order” (Gee et al. 1996, p. 1) on medical, social work, and other professional identities (Sarangi & Roberts 1999), and the emergence of corporate identities in the process of people doing their work (e.g., as team members and leaders or as meeting chairs and attendees) in ways framed by corporate structures and values (Angouri & Marra 2011). Growing accountability concerns are

reflected in a study examining child welfare social work discourses with an eye to formulating better practices (Hall et al. 2006).

Although we see in this literature the emergence of increasing specification and regulation of conditions under which one performs one's professional job, these jobs are still possessed by people who have considerable cultural and linguistic capital. Such people acquired their jobs through institutional, education, and professional affiliations that carry considerable symbolic capital. That symbolic capital may of course be continually subject to negotiation, given the never-quite-determinate fit between linguistic practices and the ideological (especially entrepreneurial) frames shaping interpretation (Wasson 2004). Some emerging areas of language work involving innovative applications of linguistic capital on the part of skilled language workers include professional interpreters and translators in institutional contexts (Wilson et al. 2012), heritage language teaching requiring fine dimensions of cultural selection (Blackledge & Creese 2012), and the establishment of Web-based communication in multiple languages (Kelly-Holmes 2012). One example of linguistic entrepreneurialism is provided by immigrant owner/managers of small communication technology shops (Sabate 2013) who help immigrants integrate into Catalan society while challenging multinational service suppliers. Creative linguistic labor designed to fit very particular enregisterment requirements is evident in brand development (Moore 2003), in specialty upscale ethnic advertising (Shankar 2012), and in the process of marketing higher education (Urciuoli 2003). We also note the persuasive discourse work of those entrepreneurs who sell communication skill packages and seminars on the Internet (Urciuoli 2008). In addition, creative linguistic labor, in effect, turns consumers into language workers: product users urged to create narratives about beloved products ("lovemarking"; Foster 2007) and media users urged to contribute their own creative texts through media channels (mediatization; Kelly-Holmes 2012). Such contributions ultimately fit top-down interests of brand and media management.

Cameron (2000a) notes that "communication skills" as language labor is conceptualized contradictorily for unmanaged versus managed employees. For those in occupations and institutional positions of relative autonomy, the language part of the job is relatively unscripted, oriented toward task management and completion, and organizational harmony, in contrast with the relatively Taylorized nature of the tasks of managed workers and the scripted nature of their linguistic routines. This mechanism can be seen in the routinization of linguistic practices in service provision at places such as McDonald's, which is interestingly contrasted with the highly scripted and standardized nature of the work of door-to-door insurance salesmen (Leidner 1993). Where fast-food employees are subject to immediate supervision and largely involved in disseminating information and taking orders, the insurance salesman's job is to explain and persuade. In addition to the gender difference (fast-food workers are more likely to be women; insurance salesmen are mostly men), insurance salesmen internalize their task to a considerable degree. Philippine recruitment agencies present Asian female domestic workers with highly scripted presentations of self in which national stereotypes and English abilities are presented within (agency-authored) "scripts of servitude" and, in so doing, present the domestic worker as a universal product to fit any local need (Lorente 2010, 2012). In all these scripting scenarios, the most salient consideration is probably cost-effectiveness in terms of time allotted to each task. Nowhere is this clearer than in call center scripting.

## **TECHNOLOGY, LABOR, AND COMMUNICATION**

There has been a recent proliferation in studies of the technological mediation of communication in contexts of labor. Hall's (1995) investigation of 900-lines (premium-rate numbers) in the United States introduces a number of themes relevant to telephone-mediated labor, including the spatial



and temporal constraints on the worker, the disconnection of the visual channel from identity performance and recognition (Hymes 1974), and the worker's need to engage and perform identities. Hall investigates two kinds of 900-line fantasy services: one using prerecorded messages and the other using customers' live interactions with workers. These services find the worker deploying elements from a highly stereotyped repertoire of clothing, voice quality, sexualized personae, and fantasy scripts. One training manual commands, "*Be* someone else. You should be creative enough to fulfill *anyone's* fantasy" (Hall 1995, p. 191, emphasis in original). Such commands and the notions of sexual inequality and accommodation on which they are based do not represent the subjectivity of workers. For example, men are able to recreate women for customers remarkably successfully. Furthermore, workers generally describe themselves as feminist, they long for better pay and benefits, and they view the engagement in sexualized and seemingly powerless positions as a form of expertise and even domination.

Gender is relevant to call center work in the United Kingdom, but workers do not perform a scripted identity so much as they become involved in a process Cameron (2000a,b) calls "stylization." To extend their assessment and surveillance of workers, managers and supervisors have begun to listen for qualities of workers' language production alongside the scripts that guide workers' interactions with customers. Checklists and training manuals elaborate qualities (such as smiling) that are not units of discourse production (and see Boutet 2008 on French telephone operators). Emphasis is partially shifted from the information shared between worker and customer to the inculcation of a feeling in the customer. Workers become involved in emotional labor (Hochschild 1983) that is gendered though never made explicit. Male call center subjects in the United Kingdom do not see gender, but rather "artificiality" and "inauthenticity," in the scripts and stylization that guide their labor, but Cameron reports anecdotal evidence from the United States indicating that men involved in the scripts and stylization of the service industry sometimes do feel that their gender is implicated.

Another line of research on call center work considers how workers are implicated in and oriented to labor via notions of standard language that inform how workers' language production is monitored and evaluated by managers and callers. Bilingualism can become a resource that makes workers particularly attractive (Duchêne 2009). Ultimately, however, they can occupy a subordinate position in the company because of their role in customer service (Roy 2000, 2003; Heller 2011). In southwestern Ontario, the call center labor marketplace is shifting what it means to be bilingual from the ability to use two languages in various contexts to the ability to use two languages separately and in a way deemed appropriate for customers (Roy 2003, p. 284). Drawing on Dubois et al. (2006), Heller (2011) notes the more general tendency across call center work to commoditize language by fixing (low) rates of compensation. She also notes the ways that call center work is scripted such that interaction in French is often based on translations from English. Some call center employees in Canada report being "terrified to answer calls from Quebec" (p. 169). They feel that such callers will find their French awkward. They also know that Quebec is a province that supports institutions wherein standardized varieties can be found (Heller 2011, p. 169).

The literature shows that the search for cheap labor has brought call service work to places outside Canada, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (Friginal 2009, King 2009). In call center work in India, workers are implicated in notions of difference in especially complex ways because they must accommodate to expectations of customers abroad (Sonntag 2009) and because their work can serve as a metonym for social changes at home resulting from processes of economic liberalization and globalization (Patel 2010, Nadeem 2011). Call center work in India entails that workers grapple with their difference from and likeness to their customers, "constructing themselves as foreign workers who do not threaten Western jobs, as legitimate colonial subjects who

revere the West, as real Indians who form an offshore model workforce providing the cheap immobile labor needed in the West, as flexible workers who are trainable and global, and as workers who are faraway yet familiar enough to provide good services to their customers” (Mirchandani 2012, p. 8; see also Mirchandani 2004, 2010). Furthermore, call center training constructs “Indianisms” to describe what should be avoided by the worker, including discourse units identifiable as Indian, regional Indian languages, a quick rate of speech, and anything deemed politically incorrect. Elaborate scripting and the necessity of worker assessment are justified by “stereotypes of traditional, unimaginative, backward Indians” (Mirchandani 2012, p. 86). At the same time, regional and class distinctions come to the fore in judgments of workers’ English abilities, differentiating those who are suitable for call center work from those who are not. These dynamics are often hidden in Indian companies’ advertising abroad for investors (Morgan & Ramanathan 2009).

In sum, corporations have used technological shifts to extend the possibilities of labor, but these shifts also involve workers in new regimes of surveillance. Such regimes give new life to forms of difference and inequality while offering new modes of assessment.

### **AUTHENTICITY AND ADDING VALUE**

In language work, the degree of scripting depends in part on the degree to which the overall production process has been designed and engineered to maximize profitable transactions by minimizing the amount of time any one transaction can take. Discursive function plays some role: Is the desired outcome referential and instrumental, or experiential and persuasive, or both? The referential/instrumental certainly lends itself to streamlining, and work in valued languages seems more likely to be scripted, particularly for provision of service and information. When the production of experience becomes an important end in language work, scripting may be less important, even in lower-status language work. Phone sex workers have some freedom to construct a fantasy narrative (Hall 1995). Costumed interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg are oriented (by training manuals and Colonial Williamsburg historians) to answer questions and produce narratives that explain colonial practices that seem unambiguous to modern audiences while producing “good vibes” for tourists, but they do have some latitude in how they do so (Handler & Gable 1997, p. 173).

Work involving service and information provision in less valued languages may simply not be worth the investment for producing a script, as with the Swiss airport—which does its official front line work in languages valued in the global order but expects employees speaking more local, less valued languages to be available for unscripted and occasional needs (Duchêne 2011)—or with Japanese flight attendants recruited by an Australian airline with an English-only policy whose primary native-language job is to ward off complaints from Japanese passengers (Piller & Takahashi 2013). In that case, the workers’ language plays an important role in image creation; the glamour of a major language (e.g., English) may also draw workers into jobs (Piller & Takahashi 2010). Native language also plays a role in establishing authenticity in the tourist industry (below).

Bi- and multilingual language work indexes the social, political, and economic ordering of code value and meaning (Irvine 1989, Gal 1989, Silverstein 2003b, Jaffe 2007, Heller 2010a, Duchêne & Heller 2012b, Duchêne et al. 2013b). In the neoliberally ordered Canadian-language industries, Canadian French has shifted from indexing cultural nationalism to indexing added value, the ethnic and political specificity of French speakers displaced or reframed by their status as flexible workers (Heller & Duchêne 2012). This observation is especially evident in the call center literature (Roy 2000, 2003; Heller 2003, 2010b, 2011; Dubois et al. 2006; Heller & Boutet 2006): Native-language ability that signifies ethnic belonging becomes reframed as a soft skill, a human capacity valued for its market potential and standardized accordingly. The language industry becomes

part of the global flow such that Francophone men go on the road to pick up English, whereas Francophone women are located in a place designated (or constructed) as “home” (Heller & Bell 2012). Operators in the Swiss multilingual tourist industry are valued for their capacity to handle standardized major languages and to add authenticity in nonstandardized local languages (Duchêne 2009). Tour guides, people setting up tourism sites, and people managing language on tourism sites all do added-value language work by making choices about language elements that authenticate the tourist experience (Moïse et al. 2006, Pujolar 2006, Jaworski & Thurlow 2010, Pujolar & Jones 2012). Working out the relations and tensions among code values is an ongoing workplace process (e.g., in nongovernmental organizations and in media production; Kahn & Heller 2006, Lamarre & Lamarre 2006) and appears in the compartmentalization of communicative tasks aboard a Canadian naval vessel (Daveluy 2012). Even deeply politicized language revival can be revalued to suit a neoliberal order, as with Taylorizing Basque-language planning for bilingual businesses (Urla 2012). Local languages that do not easily fit such an order become languages in which “real work” does not take place (Vigouroux 2013).

## CONCLUSION

Much of the literature on language labor has emerged within a larger critique of labor under contemporary capitalist regimes of production surveillance and quality control. Neoliberal discourses about workers as entrepreneurial bundles of skills reflect assumptions that good workers internalize organizational values. The language work itself reflects pervasive ideologies of language and nation, linguistic purity, ethnic authenticity, and the primacy of standardization and referentiality as the basis of good communication. Just as laborers who do this work are conceptualized in ways quite distinct from actual human beings, the language work itself is conceptualized as forms and practices that are, in fundamental ways, the opposite of actual living language.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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