Universitat de Lleida

Social class, life stories and English learning: critical realist case studies from Barcelona

Carly Collins

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Universitat de Lleida

Tesi Doctoral

Social class, life stories and English learning: critical realist case studies from Barcelona.

Carly Collins

Memòria presentada per optar al grau de Doctor per la Universitat de Lleida
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Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Abstract

In recent years, research on English language learning and social class matters in Spain has focused on the place where it is most readily identifiable – primary and secondary school education. Research exploring the relationship between social class and English learning outside the education system is sparse. Equally, little research explores attitudes among adults to social class and class inequalities in education in the Spanish context. The present qualitative thesis contributes to addressing this gap, exploring life stories, experiences and attitudes relating to both social class and English learning among three different adult participant groups (a total of twenty-three participants) in the context of Barcelona, Spain.

Participant groups are categorized according to Robert Reich's (1992) broad occupational groupings of in person-servers (those who do simple and repetitive tasks for hourly pay) and symbols analysts (professionals skilled in problem-solving, -identifying, and brokering). In this study, symbols analysts, with a total of six, included lawyers, one mechanical engineer and a risk manager in investment banking, while in-person servers, also six in total, included mostly restaurant staff, a restaurant owner, and a hotel receptionist. A third participant group consisted of eleven first year business students at a private university in Barcelona (here considered future symbols analysts). A life story interview approach was taken to data collection among the in-person server and symbols analyst groups, while a focus group was held with the private university students. The methodological framework adopted for data analysis was van Langenhove and Harré's (1999) Positioning Theory (PT), while the epistemological approach underpinning the overall study design was that of critical realism (e.g. Bhaskar, 2014). Research questions explore three main areas, looking at how participants make sense of their experiences and position both themselves and others in terms of 1) social class dimensions and privilege 2) the role of English in their lives and the world around them and 3) the influence of social class dimensions and self-responsibility in English language learning.

Findings show that while all participants today lead middle class lives, only the two participants who self-identify as having working-class family backgrounds explicitly mention their (past) class status, corroborating previous research which suggests that middle classness is rarely celebrated (e.g. Friedman et al., 2021). Also corroborating existing research, participants who were highly proficient in English for the most part described their language proficiency as self-cultivated, coupled with denial of parental investment and ordinary middle-class privilege. Nationality was found to have important bearings on class mobility for participants born outside Europe (from South America and North Africa), whose middle-class resources and capital had been devalued upon moving to Spain.

English language emerged as a marker of social prestige and global citizenship. English learning was widely perceived by participants as a career investment, while lack of English competence was found to represent a burden for some younger participants, as well as a source of shaming the self and other in Spain. In terms of the influence of class dimensions and self-responsibility, a small number of participants deny the possibility of inequality in English language education in Spain. On the other hand, some adopt what I call a 'sociologist like stance' displaying an understanding of inequality in education, convinced of the importance of economic capital to successful English learning. Other participants acknowledge the existence of inequality in English language education, while at the same time verbalising common platitudes about the importance of motivation and character. It is argued here that reproduction of such neoliberal tropes erases any true understanding of inequality in education.

Resumen

En los últimos años, la investigación del aprendizaje del inglés en relación con la clase social en España se ha centrado en el área donde es más fácilmente identificable: la educación primaria y secundaria. La investigación que explora la relación entre la clase social y el aprendizaje del inglés fuera del sistema educativo es escasa. Del mismo modo, también lo son los estudios relativos a la actitud de los adultos hacia la clase social y las desigualdades de clase en la educación del contexto español. La presente tesis cualitativa contribuye a abordar esta laguna, explorando biografías, así como experiencias y actitudes relacionadas tanto con la clase social como con el aprendizaje del inglés entre tres grupos diferentes de participantes adultos (un total de veintitrés) en el contexto de Barcelona, España.

Los grupos de participantes se clasifican según las amplias agrupaciones ocupacionales de Robert Reich (1992); es decir, los *in-person servers* (los que realizan tareas sencillas y repetitivas en presencia del consumidor a cambio de un salario por hora) y los *symbols analysts* (profesionales cualificados tanto en la identificación de problemas como en su intermediación y resolución). Este estudio cuenta, por un lado, con un total de seis *symbols analysts* (abogados, un ingeniero mecánico y un gestor de riesgos financieros) y por el otro, con un total de seis *in-person servers* (la mayoría personal de restauración, además del propietario de un restaurante y del recepcionista de un hotel). Un tercer grupo de participantes se compone de once estudiantes de primer curso de ADE de una universidad privada de Barcelona (considerados aquí futuros *symbols analysts*). Para la recopilación de datos se llevaron a cabo entrevistas biográficas de los grupos de *in-person servers* y los *symbols analysts,* mientras que con los estudiantes de la universidad privada se celebró un grupo de discusión. El marco metodológico adoptado para el análisis de datos fue el de la Teoría del Posicionamiento (TP) de van Langenhove y Harré (1999), mientras que el enfoque epistemológico que sustentó el diseño general del estudio fue el del realismo crítico (p. ej. Bhaskar, 2014). Las preguntas de investigación exploran tres áreas principales, observando cómo los participantes dan sentido a sus experiencias y cómo se posicionan a sí mismos y a los demás en términos de 1) varias dimensiones de clase social y privilegio 2) el papel del inglés en sus vidas y en el mundo que les rodea y 3) la influencia de las dimensiones de clase y la autorresponsabilidad en el aprendizaje del inglés.

Los hallazgos muestran que, si bien todos los participantes llevan hoy una vida de clase media, solo los dos participantes que se autoidentifican como provenientes de familias de clase obrera mencionan explícitamente su (anterior) clase social, corroborando así investigaciones previas que sugieren que la pertenencia a la clase media rara vez es motivo de orgullo (p. ej. Friedman et al., 2021). También corroborando la investigación existente, los participantes que tenían un alto nivel de inglés describieron en su mayoría su dominio del idioma como autodidacta, junto con la negación de la inversión de los padres y del privilegio de la clase media ordinaria. Se constató que la nacionalidad tenía una influencia importante en la movilidad social de los participantes nacidos fuera de Europa (de Sudamérica y el norte de África), cuyos recursos y capital de clase media se devaluaron al trasladarse a España.

La lengua inglesa surgió como un marcador de prestigio social y ciudadanía global. El aprendizaje del inglés fue ampliamente percibido por los participantes como una inversión profesional, mientras que se observó que la falta de conocimientos del idioma representaba una carga para algunos participantes más jóvenes, así como un motivo de vergüenza tanto para ellos mismos como para otros en España. En cuanto a la influencia de las dimensiones de la clase social y la autorresponsabilidad, un pequeño número de participantes niega la posibilidad de desigualdad en el aprendizaje del inglés en España. Por otro lado, algunos adoptan lo que yo llamo una "postura sociologista" que muestra una comprensión de la desigualdad en la educación, convencidos de la importancia del capital económico para el éxito del aprendizaje del inglés. Otros participantes reconocen la existencia de desigualdades en el aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa, al tiempo que verbalizan tópicos comunes sobre la importancia de la motivación y el carácter. Se argumenta aquí que la reproducción de tales tropos neoliberales borra cualquier comprensión verdadera de la desigualdad en la educación.

Resum

En els últims anys, la investigació de l'aprenentatge de l'anglès en relació amb la classe social a Espanya s'ha centrat en l'àrea on és més fàcilment identificable: l'educació primària i secundària. La investigació que n'explora la relació entre la classe social i l'aprenentatge fora del sistema educatiu és escassa. De la mateixa manera, també ho són els estudis relatius a l'actitud dels adults cap a la classe social i les desigualtats de classe en l'educació del context espanyol. La present tesi qualitativa contribueix a abordar aquesta llacuna, tot explorant biografies així com experiències i actituds relacionades tant amb la classe social com amb l'aprenentatge de l'anglès entre tres grups diferents de participants adults (un total de vint-i-tres) en el context de Barcelona, Espanya.

Els grups de participants es classifiquen segons les àmplies agrupacions ocupacionals de Robert Reich (1992); és a dir, els *in-person servers* (aquells que realitzen tasques senzilles i repetitives en presència del consumidor a canvi d'un salari per hora) i dels *symbols analysts* (professionals qualificats tant en la identificació de problemes com en la seva intermediació i resolució). Aquest estudi compta, d'una banda, amb un total de sis symbols analysts (advocats, un enginyer mecànic i un gestor de riscos financers), i de l'altra, amb un total de sis in-person servers (la majoria personal de restauració, a més del propietari d'un restaurant i del recepcionista d'un hotel). Un tercer grup de participants es composa d'onze estudiants de primer curs d'ADE d'una universitat privada de Barcelona (considerats aquí futurs symbols analysts). Per a la recopilació de dades es van dur a terme entrevistes biogràfiques dels grups de in-person servers i dels symbols analysts, mentre que amb els estudiants de la universitat privada es va celebrar un grup de discussió. El marc metodològic adoptat per a l'anàlisi de dades va ser el de la Teoria del Posicionament (TP) de van Langenhove i Harré (1999), mentre que l'enfocament epistemològic que va sustentar el disseny general de l'estudi va ser el del realisme crític (p. ex. Bhaskar, 2014). Les preguntes d'investigació exploren tres àrees principals, observant com els participants donen sentit a les seves experiències i com es posicionen a si mateixos i als altres en termes de 1) diverses dimensions de classe social i privilegi 2) el paper de l'anglès en les seves vides i en el món que els envolta i 3) la influència de les dimensions de classe i l'autoresponsabilitat en l'aprenentatge de l'anglès.

Les troballes mostren que, si bé tots els participants avui porten una vida de classe mitjana, només els dos participants que s'autoidentifiquen com a provinents de famílies de classe treballadora mencionen explícitament la seva (anterior) classe social, cosa que corrobora investigacions prèvies que suggereixen que la pertinença a la classe mitjana és rarament motiu d'orgull (p. ex. Friedman et al., 2021). En la mateixa línia, també corrobora la present investigació el fet que la majoria dels participants que tenien un alt nivell d'anglès describissin el seu domini de l'idioma com a autodidacta, juntament amb la negació de la inversió dels pares i del privilegi de la classe mitjana ordinària. Es va constatar que la nacionalitat tenia una influència important en la mobilitat social dels participants nascuts fora d'Europa (d'Amèrica del Sud i del Nord d'Àfrica), que van patir una devaluació dels seus recursos i capital en traslladar-se a Espanya.

La llengua anglesa va sorgir com un marcador de prestigi social i ciutadania global. L'aprenentatge de l'anglès va ser àmpliament percebut pels participants com una inversió professional, mentre que es va observar que la manca de coneixements de l'idioma representava una càrrega per a alguns participants més joves, així com un motiu de vergonya tant per ells mateixos com per d'altres a Espanya. Quant a la influència de les dimensions de la classe social i l'autoresponsabilitat, un petit nombre de participants nega la possibilitat de desigualtat en l'aprenentatge de l'anglès a Espanya. D'altra banda, alguns adopten el que jo anomeno una “postura sociologista” que mostra una comprensió de la desigualtat en l’educació, convençuts de la importància del capital econòmic per a l’èxit de l’aprenentatge de l’anglès. Altres participants reconeixen l’existència de desigualtats en l’aprenentatge de la llengua anglesa, a la vegada que verbalitzen tòpics comuns sobre la importància de la motivació i el caràcter. S’argumenta aquí que la reproducció de tals trops neoliberals esborra qualsevol comprensió vertadera de la desigualtat en l’educació.

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Chapter 1: Setting the scene

1.1 Introduction

As an Irish expat who has lived abroad for well over a decade, I have remained a frequent listener to RTÉ, Ireland's most popular radio station. While writing this thesis, I have followed with particular interest content related to social class (even if the word class most often goes unused). On various occasions guests on RTÉ have made reference to class. Novelist Kevin Power spoke of his working-class background and how class figured in his writings, while another Irish author, Jo Spain explained her leftist leanings by reference to her background (see Burke, 2019). Well-known playwright Paul Howard was refreshingly honest about the chip on his shoulder he had growing up, and how some of his characters were born of his disdain for posh Dubliners. Ray D'Arcy, the popular, charismatic radio presenter at one point mentioned his upbringing in a large family in a council house. Even the lead singer of Simply Red, Mick Hucknall, gave an account of his upbringing of relative poverty with only his father, speaking of how his musical talent went unnoticed for most of his youth.[1]

Less well-known guests with successful careers were also interviewed about their trajectories from modest backgrounds. In May 2021, one such guest was a legal barrister who spoke of having worked all sorts of jobs over the course of her studies, and of how she had become a barrister against all odds, having come from a humble background. Listeners wrote in, sharing stories to the same tune. That conversation eventually ended with one listener commenting on how great it was to hear the 'myths about the bar being busted', to which the radio presenter heartily concurred. I sent an email to the show suggesting that the myth of the bar was not such a myth after all. In it, I pointed out that, statistically, fewer working-class than middle-class youth in Ireland attend university despite almost free education (McGuire, 2016; O'Brien, 2022); that the field of law is among those with lowest mobility – dominated by those of middle-class descent (Nicolson, 2005; Sommerlad, 2008; Cook et al., 2012); and that not only are there financial barriers, but psychological factors, like feeling out of place, which are by now well documented in sociology (e.g. Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Ball et al., 2002).

As half expected, the email went unmentioned (likely because the 'fast-paced, entertaining and informative' Ryan Tubridy show (RTÉ, 2022) is not the place for boring academic pontificating!). Still, it was all much food for thought. The fact is that radio discourse - and media discourse more generally - is largely dominated by middle-class voices. Moreover, as has been pointed out by scholars like Park (2010), social class very often features in media discourse when there is a rags to riches type story to be shared about someone who has ‘made it’ or ‘done well for herself’ from a humble background. It is hard not to be inspired by these accounts. People love such stories and admire their protagonists - myself included. However, this tendency reflects how coming from a working-class or some vaguely defined ‘humble’ background is akin to a badge of honour[2] for people who have experienced social mobility, and now live middle-class lives.

Absent from such talk is often the less celebrated side of the story, a reality neatly captured in the title of Sennett and Cobb’s book, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. This is probably partly because it is unlikely that a person harbouring the kind of emotional issues a sociologist would relate directly to class[3], would frame it in that way, or would want to broadcast their story publicly even if they did. They would sooner understand any lack of comparative success as personal failure, lack of motivation and self-management, as underscored by a long line of scholars (Walkerdine, 2003; Abelmann, Park and Kim, 2009; Reay, 2005, 2017; Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, etc.). Equally absent from the many popular success stories circulating in the media is how most of the successes experienced by middle class people are thanks not only to hard-work, motivation, creativity, and various other personal attributes, but *also* thanks to family resources and support. We tend to be quicker to think and speak about personal qualities than family resources and other forms of support. In fact, as I will endeavour to show in the data chapters of this thesis, many of us are considerably blind to the help we receive and support networks that have been in place throughout our lives - most importantly in childhood.

The tendencies towards class blindness outlined above are, in many ways, rooted in the fact that ‘although class divisions are persistent, the idea of ‘class’ has lost its importance as a central discourse, or political organizing principle, in contemporary societies’ (Crompton, 2008, p.3). Class blindness is, in turn, linked to a widespread shift to neoliberal social and economic policies, as well as the concomitant rise of individualization in recent decades, in most advanced societies (e.g. Beck, 1992; Putnam, 2000). The tendencies pointed to above are also connected to more complicated matters around how class is a complex, perhaps even misunderstood, topic, as I discuss in due course. Before dealing with these issues however I will briefly outline the present study and the research gap it addresses.

1.2 Why this study now?

The present thesis is about social class and English language learning in the context of Barcelona, the capital city of Catalonia (in the northeast of Spain). The apparent socioeconomic divide in English language education is an increasingly popular topic among researchers in Catalonia (e.g. Codó and Patiño-Santos, 2018; Moore et al., 2021) and Spain more generally (e.g. Hidalgo McCabe and Fernández-González, 2019 Relaño-Pastor, 2018; Bruton, 2011). A good deal of this research focuses on educational settings like classrooms, since this is perhaps where a socioeconomic divide can best be captured statistically. Little if any research focuses on how people outside the school system view these matters, and how their own class location might influence their views. The present thesis seeks to address this gap, exploring how adults in different walks of life (including university students) experience and understand matters of social class and English learning. It examines the way social class plays out in the lives of participants, how class might influence their English language learning trajectories, as well as documenting their views on class inequalities related to English learning.

The study contributes to an existing body of empirical research that highlights how English learning is tied up in complex ways with class or socioeconomic inequality in other geographical contexts (e.g. Blommaert, 2010 on Rwandan refugees in the UK; Gazzola, 2015 on Italy, France and Spain; Price, 2014, on Taiwan; Erling, Radinger and Folz, 2020 on Austria). In addition to all of this, David Block's book entitled *Social Class in Applied Linguistics* was published in 2014. It highlighted how social class as a topic has largely been 'the object of erasure' (2014, p.x) in applied linguistics, and called for more scholarly attention to the issue of class in the field overall. The present study was thus also intended as a step in that direction. Below and in the sections to follow, I turn my attention to why class is such a complex, highly contested construct in the first place.

1.3 The complexity of class

For David Harvey (2005, p.31), class 'is always a somewhat shadowy (some would even say dubious) concept'. He continues:

> [but], as the contrasting cases of the US and Britain illustrate, 'class' means different things in different places, and in some instances (for example in the US) it is often held to have no meaning at all. In addition there have been strong currents of differentiation in terms of class identity formation and re-formation in different parts of the world
>
> (2005, p.31)

Class as a topic and a form of inequality (always, one of many) is undeniably complex, indeed for some even dubious. Class groups are no longer as distinguishable and separate as they once were. Binary oppositions like ruling and working classes have, according to many, collapsed (e.g. Jean Baudrillard, cited in Cole 2009). Parkin's observation that '[it] would take an unusually sharp eye to detect the social class of Saturday morning shoppers in the High Street, whereas to any earlier generation it would have been the most elementary task' (1979, p.69) is difficult to dispute some forty years on.

That said, most of us have a clear idea of how an upper-class individual would look, speak, and generally live. While Parkin was writing in the late 1970s (about the decline of working-class collective identities), the quote speaks to debates about class consumption and cultural preferences that have appeared in more recent decades. Peterson (1992) for example wrote of the opening up of middle-class and elite cultural tastes in a bid to debunk the 'elite-to-mass' theory, or the common parlance notion of 'snob' versus 'slob' (p.244). Based on statistical analyses of people's preferences in music, art and leisure activities in the U.S., Peterson reports that cultural tastes of high-status groups are more wide-ranging than hitherto argued by cultural sociology theorists, while he terms those in lower occupational groups 'univores' given that 'unlike the high status 'omnivore', members of this group tend to be actively involved in just one, or at best just a few, alternative aesthetic traditions' (p.254).[4]

Peterson's work has not gone unchallenged (e.g. Warde et al., 2007; and see Bottero, 2005), however it raises important questions about how accelerated consumerism may obfuscate our view of class inequalities. Many, if not most, people in advanced countries have enough to eat, can be clothed relatively cheaply, can have a smartphone (for example, some would argue, to learn a language on). Most have some degree of spending power in what Reich calls 'the new global bazaar' (2001, p.14). As pointed out by Block (2014), travel and holidays around Europe have also been made more affordable for most people on modest incomes in recent decades by competitive low-cost airlines. All of which serves to muddy the waters in terms of class stratification, in many respects less discernible than it perhaps was even a few decades ago.

Class differences and inequalities are also fading from our line of vision on account of a more worrisome trend whereby people live increasingly separate lives from others in different class groups. This separation is fuelled by increased residential and educational sorting in various geographic locations. For instance, in the US ‘it is becoming increasingly common for privileged professionals and managers to live in secluded enclaves and suburbs (often behind locked gates) . . . while marginalised sectors of the populations are crowded into increasingly dangerous inner-city areas’ (Hout, Brooks and Manza 1996, p.53; and see Reich, 2001 for an in-depth discussion). As a result of such mechanisms and a tendency toward class segregation more broadly, people in the U.S. and elsewhere:

> [A]re better able to compare, and are more likely to be conscious of, the differences between how they themselves have fared in life and the achievements of others from the same neighbourhoods and schools, than how their entire classes’ achievements compare with those of other classes. (Roberts, 2001, p.199)

Roberts’ point is well illustrated by Savage (2015) in more recently published interview excerpts from the Great British Class Survey (GBCS) which show that many informants seriously misjudge how their economic situation compares to that of fellow citizens in the UK. People in the lowest category (i.e. in the group with the lowest 10% of earnings) place themselves somewhere ‘in the middle’ as do people in the top 10% category (pp.60-61). The importance of this issue is also suggested by the OECD’s provision of an interactive survey tool on their website where users from OECD countries can compare their household income to the rest of the population. This section of the website states that ‘[m]ost of us have no idea – or the wrong idea – of how we compare with the rest of the population’ (OECD, 2018), lending further support to Roberts’ point above.

In addition to the matters outlined so far, there is much variation within groups of people that qualify as part of a particular class. By way of example, I come from a nominally working-class family background (as so defined in vague layman terms – more on this below). When I think back to the working-class friends I had as a teenager it is clear that there was considerable difference among our families. Although we all lived in council estates, there were differences in terms of property ownership (some parents had purchased their home from the local council), schooling (our parents took different levels of interest in our education; some but not others verbalized ambitions about us attending university), occupation (some had two parents working, some had a permanently unemployed lone parent). There was also considerable variation in other class markers like patterns of consumption – like owning a car and taking foreign holidays - pastimes, lifestyles, social connections, and so forth.

Equally, in elitist social circles there is always some variation. For example, the Barcelona based private university featuring in Chapter 8 (a former workplace of mine) is an institution most would regard as elitist, not least given its expensive tuition fees. From time to time students whose family would classify in Piketty's (2014) famous top 1% are enrolled - although that is not the norm - and there are also students who have received scholarships to attend. This makes it unwise to assume there are no students from working class backgrounds attending, and no doubt there are some. Similarly, there were a few professors from working class backgrounds teaching at the institution - myself included - but neither is that the norm (see Friedman and Laurison, 2019). The point is that arguments which highlight differences or exceptions to class trends are always valid. However they should not blind us to overall patterns and tendencies, such as, in staying with this example, the fact that 'working and lower class students' are far less likely than their middle and upper class peers to attend private universities and prestigious schools (Martin, 2010).

1.4 Class as a marginalized, contested construct

There are more factors contributing to our clouded view of class inequalities. In observing that the 'vocabularies of class have lost much of their purchase in both public and political life' Bennett et al. (2009, p.1) ask whether 'other types of social division – gender, ethnicity, age – [have] assumed greater significance in relation to differences in cultural tastes and practices?'. The answer would be affirmative for Reay (2012), who argues that social class is marginalized in the discussion of diversity. Clear evidence of this point can be found in the field of human resources (HR). For example, the textbook, *Human Resource Management*, made freely available by the University of Minnesota, defines diversity as 'the differences between people [including] race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, background, socioeconomic status, and much more' (2016, p.55). The (unnamed) author notes that 'oftentimes the privilege we have is considered invisible, because it can be hard to recognize one's own privilege based on race, gender, or social class' (ibid). However, while this is followed by ample discussion of gender and racial inequality, and how to address them, there is no further mention of socioeconomic or class inequality. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in fact provides no legislation related to class discrimination despite the existence of such academic commentary in the HR field (E.E.O.C., n.d; and see Evans Peterman, 2018 on this general point). Clearly, to try to legislate for class discrimination would be a near impossible feat. This is not only because it would be difficult to prove instances of such, but because class discrimination is basically an acceptable part of how capitalist employment markets function. In the area of recruitment, class discrimination is built into ideas like ‘fit issues’ whereby recruiters are justified in choosing candidates who not only have the necessary qualifications, expertise and experience, but also who fit company culture. The result is that the difficult to define idea of ‘culture fit’ often serves to justify ‘biased (non)hiring decisions, irrespective of whether bias is overt or implicit unconscious’ (Dali, 2018). In other words, class bias can easily masquerade as finding a person of the right ‘cultural fit’ for the company, in a practice that is all round perfectly acceptable.

The acceptable nature of class discrimination is also readily identifiable in how ‘working-class people are increasingly being represented in the media as excessive, repulsive or silly on the basis of both of how they behave and also as regards style choices’ (Eriksson, 2016, p. 304). Examples of such are television shows, criticized by academics, are *A Mighty Journey with Morgan and Ola-Conny* and *Ullared* in Sweden (ibid) and *Benefits Street* in the UK (Tyler, 2015). In Spain, programs like *Callejeros* similarly broadcast, in a shamelessly sensationalist manner, the struggles of people living with addiction, poverty and other issues on primetime television for national viewing. As Tyler cogently argues with regard to *Benefits Street*, these programmes partly serve as rhetorical devices for political agendas:

> From the programme’s title, Benefits Street, through to the montage of images of rubbish-strewn streets, unattended children, loitering youths, cigarettes and alcohol, hooded tops and baseball caps, interposed by a soundtrack of ‘unemployed, unemployed, unemployed’, the audience is instructed to reimagine the welfare state as a ‘benefits culture’ that impoverishes citizens, feeds addictions and creates what government ministers describe as fatal dependencies amongst ‘those trapped in its clutches’. (Tyler, 2015, p.494)

Despite the almost bizarre prominence of class matters in ways like these, the claim that ‘class is dead’ regained some momentum in academia in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Wright, 2015). The marshalling of these ideas was prompted by changes in the structure of employment, most significantly the decline of the ‘old (male) working class’ (Crompton 2008, p.73). Scholars like Pakulski and Waters (1996) declare through their bold book title *The Death of Class,* that class is no longer a useful heuristic with which to understand societies, arguing that class analysts nowadays ‘manufacture class where it no longer exists as a meaningful social entity' (p.667). Kingston (2000) writes along similar lines about matters in the US context (see also Clark and Lipset, 1996; Beck, 2007 and Atkinson, 2007).

Discussing the 'epochal' changes to the work structure, and society as a result, Beck (2000, p.91) notes that '[e]conomic growth in today's world-market conditions is rendering obsolete the idea of classical full employment, lifetime jobs and everything that went with them'. His observations raise valid questions about the possible declining relevance of class analysis, as do those of Lash and Urry (1994) and Castells (1996) in their respective commentaries on the vast societal transformations taking place in diverse countries. Castells, for instance, writes that '[t]he struggle between diverse capitalists and miscellaneous working classes is subsumed into the more fundamental opposition between the bare logic of capital flows and the cultural values of human experience' (1996, p.476).

Suffice to say that class is a 'slippery construct' (Block, 2012b). The various debates highlighted so far are important to acknowledge, because they contribute to the lack of understanding of class inequalities discussed in later chapters. In this thesis I side, rather, with scholars for whom 'class counts' (Wright, 1997) and remains important, 'not only heuristically in terms of making sense of the world, but also in terms of an objective social reality' (Gray and Block, 2014, p.46). This is not to say that class has primacy over other forms of inequality, nor to ignore arguments about the declining relevance of class as an explanatory category. It means taking the position that albeit changed, class is still important as a social entity - one that constitutes 'a salient causal structure with important ramifications' (Wright, 2015, p.145). In the next section, accordingly, I turn to the ways in which class still matters, beginning with what is, for many (especially many Marxist) commentators, the single most influential factor: economic capital.

1.5 Why class still matters

Thomas Piketty's (2014) renowned work revealed how half of the entire national income of the United States was owned, in 2012, by the wealthiest 10% of the population, with most of this wealth concentrated in the top 1%. Economic anthropologist Jason Hickel (2017) publicizes the fact that globally, the richest eight people controlled the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the world combined in 2017. These facts are by now known to many. Less well known is that among those who possess the highest levels of wealth it is in fact ownership of capital assets – not income - that constitutes the largest source of wealth. In research on the permeability of class boundaries in the US, Canada, Sweden and Norway,[5] Erik Olin Wright (1997, cited in Wright 2015) reports that property ownership emerges as the least permeable of the boundaries studied (property, expertise, authority – e.g. manager vs nonskilled employees). He concludes that 'the relationship of people to the pivotal economic assets of the capitalist economy continues to shape life chances and exploitation, and these in turn have wide ramifications for other social phenomena' (2015, p.156; see also Savage, 2015 for empirical findings in the UK context). Such findings are important as they underscore the importance of inherited wealth and assets at a time when there is much faith in the paramountcy of ambition, hard work and motivation in determining one's financial destiny.

Patterns of income and wealth disparities, and growing poverty in Spain, the context of this research, have also been shown in recent decades (Gethin et al., 2019). An OECD (2018) report entitled *A Broken Elevator?* reveals that in Spain, only 19% of sons with low-earning fathers make it into the top earnings group while '34% of the children whose parents have high earnings grow up to have high earnings themselves'. In terms of income mobility, studies found that those in the lowest 20% of earnings category had little chance of moving up (over a four-year period), 'with 64% remaining stuck there' while among the group with the top 20% of earnings, 72% remained there (ibid). When compared to other OECD countries the preceding figures show that in Spain these indicators of inequality are above average. More striking is that 53% of people surveyed in Spain agreed that having well-educated parents is important to get ahead in life (higher than the OECD average of 37%), suggesting a perceived decline in meritocracy (ibid).

Findings like these suggest a 'collective realization that we are living in times – neoliberal times – in which societies are becoming more socioeconomically stratified instead of less so' (Block, 2014, p.8). This may partly explain why 'many social scientists are returning to social class as a useful [construct]' (ibid). Not only that, but the strong polarization in the possession of economic capital outlined above suggests the continued validity of an approach to social class underpinned by Marxism, despite great changes to the occupational structure, a point I return to in Chapter 2. For now, Crompton's observation that class is 'primarily an economic concept, and class *locations* are largely (although not entirely) generated by economic processes' is fitting (2008, p.115; italics in the original).

Even if we momentarily set aside the importance of economic capital there is still good reason to care about class. To begin with, Bottero writes in convincing terms of the links between class stratification and social networking patterns:

> Stratification analysis looks at how where we start in life affects where we end up, and the impact of parents' social position on that of their children. However, the persistence of inequality is represented in more ways than inter-generational transmission, since stratification also has an important impact on our social relations. Whom we fall in love and settle down with, and the friends and social contacts that we make throughout our life, are all affected by our hierarchical position. (Bottero, 2005, p.4)

Social connections loosely configured around class are important not least because, as we will see in the data chapters, they can facilitate opportunities like employment. Further, we tend to be only vaguely aware of the configuration of our social patterns as regards class, and thus may be unaware that we live within relatively confined social circles, spending time largely with people like ourselves, as touched on earlier. Another area in which class differences are manifest is our choice of activities, pastimes and interests, which despite the blurred boundaries of class nowadays, between-group differences still show surprising regularity. As Bottero writes elsewhere:

> Although there are some 'mass' activities in which almost everybody participates (swimming, for example, or going to the cinema) there are many others in which participation is much more unevenly distributed, showing a clear stratification gradient; with higher-level groups much more likely to go to the theatre and restaurants, to play squash or ski, to watch public service television channels rather than commercial ones, to read broadsheets rather than tabloids, for example. (2005, p.156-157)

In other words, class groups tend to have more broadly similar interest and engagement than we might at first imagine - a point famously made by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and to which I return in Chapter 3.

Turning to a different set of concerns, the topic of health is crucial in highlighting class inequalities. Bennett et al. (2009, p.152), writing of a nationwide survey in the UK, conclude that 'differential health status is probably the most enduring and incontrovertible indication of class', a point supported by more recent publications and cross-national comparisons (see Adams, 2016; Dorling, 2013; Wilkinson, 2002). A 2016 study by Bambra reported that women from the poorest European communities live up to ten years less than those in the richest. At the time of writing, the world is still dealing with the aftermath of the COVID19 pandemic. The effects of socioeconomic inequality in this regard have been widely publicized. One United Nations article reported that the impact of COVID19 fell 'disproportionately on the most vulnerable: people living in poverty, the working poor, women and children, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups' (UN News, 2020).

Closer to home in Barcelona, one study (Baena-Diez et al., 2020) reported the district of the city with the lowest average income (Nou Barris) to have 2.5 times more incidence of the virus compared to the district with the highest average income (Sarrià-Sant Gervasi). Should any further evidence of the strong correlation between class - in particular economic capital - and health matters be necessary, we need only look to impactful statistics on poverty and life expectancy. One striking example is the fact that during the 1990s, Russian per capita income declined at a yearly rate of 3.5 per cent, during which time a large proportion of the population fell into poverty and male life expectancy consequently declined by five years (Harvey, 2005, p.154).

1.6 English language education, class, and the context of Barcelona

The purpose of the preceding discussion is to point out some of the ways in which class still matters. It is also important to mention early on – particularly for readers unfamiliar with educational sociology - how the area of education is also embroiled in class inequalities, despite the potential of education to facilitate social mobility. Indeed, while it is widely recognized that university credentials are correlated with higher earnings (e.g. Reich, 2001), scholars like Reay (2006) Reay et al., (2009), Plummer (2000) among others, rail against the ways in which inequalities are often reproduced through education systems - as Bourdieu famously did - being from a working-class background himself. Some scholars are equally sceptical that a university degree can serve as a ticket to middle-class prosperity for students of underprivileged backgrounds (see Martin, 2010 for a review of this debate). As regards English language learning more specifically, there are clear correlations around socioeconomic status and English competence. Gazzola (2015) in a quantitative study of France, Spain and Italy reports a positive correlation between citizens' English language competence, their level of income and education. Erling, Radinger and Folz (2020) also discuss educational disparities along socioeconomic lines, in the English learning outcomes of middle school students in Austria.

Scholars around Spain have been voicing concern in recent years about the increasingly apparent correlation between English competence and socioeconomic background (Hidalgo McCabe and Fernández-González, 2019; Relaño-Pastor, 2018; Bruton, 2011; Codó and Patiño-Santos, 2014; Moore et al., 2021). A good deal of this work highlights – among other things - how English bilingual programs are largely dominated by and benefit middle class students, who also tend to fare better with school English. Meanwhile, Shephard and Ainsworth (2017) report that students of less advantaged backgrounds tend to be less motivated with English learning (see also Bruton, 2011). Researchers like Codó and Patiño-Santos (2018) make the important point that promoting English teaching in schools is far from free of the dictates of market driven competition:

> The adoption of English as one of the assets to compete in this education market represents, for schools located on the periphery and with poor reputations, the possibility of attracting more academically-orientated students. (2018, p.495)

Especially relevant to the current study, recent official indicators report that English is one of the school subjects most telling of social inequalities in Catalonia (Moore, 2021). Just over a quarter of ESO (*educació secundaria obligatoria*) students attending schools categorized by Catalan educational authorities as 'high complexity' fail to attain minimum required competences in English.[6] This figure is striking in comparison to the figure for 'low complexity' schools which stands at less than five percent (*Consell Superior d'Avaluació del Sistema Educatiu*, 2019). In reference to this report, Moore comments that:

> English is the subject area with most difference in achievement levels between students from high and low complexity schools. These results are particularly noteworthy because while the outcomes of students from high complexity schools for English are consistently low, the English results of students from low complexity schools are higher than their results for all other subjects and this is a tendency that has been sustained over the years. (2021, p.7)

As impactful as these findings are, they were not available early on in this research project, when the study was being designed. However there was already a substantial body of sociolinguistics literature from the context of South Korea that drew attention to how socioeconomic inequalities played out in the field of English learning (e.g. Park, 2010, 2011, 2013a; Abelmann et al., 2009; Park and Abelmann, 2004; Piller and Cho, 2013; and see Block, 2012a). Some of this work discussed so-called English frenzy – the crazed pursuit of English language competence across the population, that in South Korea, 'reproduces and reinforces classed relations and subjectivities that lurk beneath the glamour of the new economy' (Park, 2010, p.25). For me, this bore resemblance with the context of Barcelona, where I was working in the early stages of this study - and still work - as an English teacher. (This perception is apparently shared by Codó and Patiño-Santos (2018), who employ the wording 'linguistic frenzy' in their discussion of English learning in Catalonia). Like in South Korea, for many individuals in Barcelona and Spain in general, English learning serves ´as a key channel through which [citizens]...endlessly seek to maximize their human capital, continuously bettering and improving themselves´ (Park 2010, p.27).

Widespread investment in English learning does not necessarily reflect a matching widespread love of English learning in the Spanish context (while no doubt that is the case for some). Many if not most people invest in English for academic or work purposes, be they real or imagined. Based on a recent study conducted in Spain, The Adecco Group Institute reports that 67% of job offers that require languages in 2020, and 89% in 2019, specify English. The report ranks Catalonia as fourth among autonomous regions where language skills are most sought after by employers, explained by its 'connections and closeness to Europe' (The Adecco Group Institute, 2022). In Catalonia, one media report suggests that a third of job offers require a good level of English, also citing a study by the company Education First which finds English levels in Catalonia to be slightly higher than the rest of Spain (Vicens, 2021).

As regards university, there have been ongoing political debates in Spain about requiring undergraduate students to prove a certified B2 level of a foreign language (most choose English) in order to graduate. In Catalonia, the local government issued a decree in 2014 enforcing this requirement, but it was later rescinded due to intense debate. Some objections to this proposal relate directly to socioeconomic issues. For example, those not in favour point to the lack of state support to facilitate students' acquisition of a B2 level (Rovira, 2019), or argue that most students would need to invest in private lessons to acquire an accredited B2 level since the highest level school leavers can attain having completed the full school cycle to *bachillerato* is a B1 (Balart et al., 2018). At the time of writing, Catalan universities are at liberty to require degree students to provide certification showing a B2 level of attainment in a foreign language in order to graduate, and differ as regards these requirements (ibid).

English frenzy in Spain is evidenced by the fact that just over 42% of parents prefer a childminder who will speak English to their children, according to a 2017 study of users of an app called *Queirocanguro* (García, 2017). Further, according to a 2016 survey by the Sociological Research Center (CIS)[7], 23.5% of Spaniards reported *mainly* learning English at a language school or through private classes (CIS, 2016). Finally, English frenzy is also evidenced by the exponential growth of bilingual programs, known in Europe as content and language integrated learning or CLIL (which in Spain officially began in the early 2000s in primary schools and the late 2000s in secondary schools). These programs however are not without their fair share of controversy and problems – a matter I will not expand on here for space reasons (but see e.g. Martín Rojo, 2013; Relaño-Pastor and Fernández-Barrera, 2018; Bruton, 2011; and Torres Menárguez, 2021; Martín-Arroyo, 2017 for media articles).

At the root of these various debates and discussions is the reportedly low competence among the overall Spanish population in English, as indicated by statistical comparisons to other - especially European – countries. A 2021 report published by teaching company Education First, based on a global study of language exam results in 2 million exams in over one hundred countries, ranks Spain 25th out of a total of 35 European (including some non-European Union) countries. These findings resemble those of European Commission field work, whereby 22% of just over 1,000 respondents said they spoke English well enough to hold a conversation - despite 92% citing it as the most important language for children to learn for their future and 82% saying it was the most useful language for their personal development (Eurobarometer, 2012). More recent figures from Spain's sociology research institute report that 60% of those surveyed said they could not speak, write or read English (CIS, 2016)[8]. From such findings spring media articles from time to time, lamenting the lack of progress in English as a foreign language in Catalonia (Pueyo Busquets, 2019; Vicens, 2021) and in Spain more generally (e.g. Meneses, 2021). Commentators on the issue offer reasons like Spain being a large country with a large domestic market (smaller countries appear to fair better in language learning stakes overall)[9], the fact that Spanish is widely spoken worldwide, and that there is a longstanding tradition of dubbing and translation in the publishing and audiovisual industries (e.g. Zafra, 2019). Martín Rojo also points to 'the public belief that the monolingual tradition inherited from the Franco era created a burden on the educational, cultural and scientific development of the country, and an obstacle to the personal and occupational advancement of its people' (2013, p.122).

1.7 English hegemony, globalization, and neoliberalism

None of this of course, is happening in a vacuum. As Blommaert writes:

> The EU has a self-image of multilingualism, which it enforces through nationally ratified educational policies. The growing emphasis on the use of English in education…articulated in national language and educational policies in several countries, is based on an image of globalization as monocentric, with an English-dominant economic, financial, and political center. And the promotion of English in countries…where English used to be a marginal linguistic commodity, is motivated by a desire of national governments to align themselves with the United States and international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. (2006, p.241)

Oft-cited work by Crystal reminds us that the unquestioned global dominance and expansion of English is unlikely to cease without significant changes to the balance of global power (Crystal, 2012, p.123). All of which is part of how '[t]he international role that English plays today has often been associated with, and explained as a consequence of, globalization (Haberland, 2009, p.19). Space does not allow for in depth discussion of globalization here, but it is important to underscore the issue of English hegemony connected to globalization. Put briefly, since hegemony - in the Gramscian sense - is 'the organization of consent' the ubiquitous demand for English competence 'presents itself as the obvious, as the natural, unquestionable way of looking at things' (ibid, p.20). This is certainly the case in Spain, where, as we saw earlier, people deem English learning critical for personal development and for children's future success. Since the need to learn English is seen as an obvious fact, '[t]hose who ignore English are neglecting their responsibility as a neoliberal subject to engage in their project of human capital development. In this sense, lack of English skills is not a mere risk one may choose to take, but a transgression.' (Park, 2010, p. 26). That, or, as Haberland concludes, those who opt out are considered 'sectarian, cantankerous or simply difficult' (2009, p.20).

The common-sense nature of English dominance - or anything else from which ruling classes might stand to benefit - might elsewhere be framed in terms of Foucauldian neoliberal governmentality, which has much in common with (but is distinct from) Gramscian approaches to hegemony. Of relevance to the present discussion of English is what Martín Rojo and Del Percio write of as neoliberalism 'as a political rationality that informs the contemporary governance of populations, institutions and practices, including language and subjects' (2019, p.3). Taking stock of the socio-political landscape of neoliberalism is integral not just to understanding English hegemony, but to understanding modern day class inequalities. For David Harvey, 'neoliberalization' has in fact entailed the redefinition of class (2005). As he argues:

> Progressives of all stripes seem to have caved in to neoliberal thinking since it is one of the primary fictions of neoliberalism that class is a fictional category that exists only in the imagination of socialists and crypto-communists….The first lesson we must learn, therefore, is that if it looks like class struggle and acts like class war then we have to name it unashamedly for what it is. (2005, p.202)

Following scholars like Harvey and Park, I return repeatedly in the data chapters, to the ways in which neoliberalism 'produces specific subjectivities', or 'specific ways of understanding the self', always with an underlying interest in how neoliberal rationalities 'shape our current understanding of languages, skills, and competences, and how this is affecting social classes and ethnic groups in social fields such as education and the labour market' (Martín Rojo and Del Percio, 2019, p.3-4).

1.8 The present study

In her classic text *Class and Stratification*, Rosemary Crompton (1998), explains four distinct sociological approaches to class and stratification analysis, which are as follows:

1. The study of processes of the emergence and perpetuation of advantaged and disadvantaged groups or 'classes' within society - what Wright (e.g. 2015) would refer to as class structuration and formation. Such studies seek to understand classes as well as the complexities of group formation.

2. The study 'of the consequences of class location whereby class is treated as the independent variable or constant factor, and its contribution to other factors – health, educational opportunities, social mobility etc. – is that which has to be explained'
3. The discussion of the significance of 'class' and class processes, for macro theories of societal change and development. This includes debate about the relevance or even the continued existence of class as a concept in postmodern societies.
4. A strand of debate 'which focuses largely on the actor and relates to the investigation of the development of class and status cultures and identities…this approach has many overlaps with poststructuralism and postmodernism' but as a tradition of social enquiry predates these recent developments. One such example is Willis's Learning to Labour, which derives much of its theoretical framework from Marxist debates of the 1970s.

(adapted from Crompton 1998, p.203-205)

Because the present study explores the consequences of class location, it falls into the second category; class is treated as a constant factor, while its contribution to English learning is explored. This sociological approach is blended with a linguistics approach, whereby the study also explores participants' views and experiences related to English learning, as well as their views on class inequalities in the field of English learning. In order to investigate these issues empirically, the following research questions were formulated:

How do participants make sense of their experiences, and position themselves and others in relation to:

1) Various dimensions of social class and privilege?
2) The role of English in their lives and the world around them?
3) The influence of social class dimensions, and self-responsibility in English learning?

With the first question exploring how participants position themselves and others in relation to social class dimensions, I hoped to gain insight into the informants' class backgrounds and how they positioned themselves in relation to various class markers (set out in the literature chapters). The second question was intended to explore participants' views and experiences with English (learning) in their lives and the world around them, while the third research question, building on the first two, was intended to investigate participants' embracing of neoliberal subjectivities (or not) and attitudes to class inequalities as regards their own and others' learning of English.

These research questions are explored in contexts that I had access to as an in-company English teacher and university professor during the project's earlier stages. Participants included three groups of people expected to be broadly different from one another as regards class location. Six people recruited from the hospitality sector were placed in an occupational category called in-person servers, a category first coined by Robert Reich (1992), which basically refers to those who do repetitive tasks which are carried out in the presence of those consuming their products, for hourly pay. Another six who worked in law, investment banking and engineering were recruited for the category Reich labels symbols analysts - professionals skilled in problem-solving, -identifying, and brokering - while a third group of eleven private university students were recruited for a focus group discussion. This latter group are expected to be future symbols analysts given that they are pursuing English medium instruction (EMI) degrees at an elite private university - the kind of institute that tends to 'foster cohesion among high status groups, maintain connections with the top echelons of the occupational structure, and channel students into lucrative careers' (Martin, 2010, p.4).

Data collection methods included one-on-one life story interviews with in-person servers and symbols analysts (twelve in total) and one focus group with the private university students (eleven in total). Adopting a small-scale approach like this responds to calls among sociologists like Diane Reay and Rosemary Crompton for more qualitative explorations of class to complement existing quantitative studies. It was hoped that a small case study on social class and English learning, would contribute to illuminating 'different parts of the whole' (Crompton, 2008, p.6). The methodological framework adopted for data analysis was van Langenhove and Harré's (1999) positioning theory (PT), while the epistemological approach underpinning the overall study design was that of critical realism (e.g. Bhaskar, 2014, 2016), explained in chapter 5.

Finally, the present work aims to embrace the contradiction and plurality of class as a construct while, importantly, taking ´the basic parameters of Marxist class analysis as a given' (Wright, 2015, p.xi). One way in which this is attempted is in homing in on economic capital when it arises, usually spontaneously, in participant talk. While this approach does not entail a thorough assessment of participants' economic capital (income, property, wealth, and assets), it does explore their talk about financial matters as far as possible (i.e. without being intrusive). Sociolinguistics studies of this kind tend to draw heavily on the work of Bourdieu as opposed to Marx, probably because one would be hard pressed to find concepts as fitting as Bourdieu's for the task of describing the tangible and less tangible resources unequally distributed among people. For sociologists like Bennett et al., 'Bourdieu's general approach still offers a powerful and incisive account of the relationship between cultural tastes and activities, and contemporary social inequalities' (2009, p.10). Like previous studies of this nature, the present study thus also draws heavily on Bourdieu's different forms of capital (discussed in Chapter 3).

1.9 The author's relationship to class and education

I would be remiss, in a thesis about social class and education, if I did not speak of my own class and educational background, not least because we all 'enter our research sites under particular sociohistorical conditions and they have an effect on what we see and perceive and understand' (Blommaert, 2015, p.5). As mentioned earlier, I grew up in Ireland. I come from a white Irish family that would qualify - according to sociological indicators like parental occupation, education and so forth as working class. In Ireland, despite free university fees, less young people from working class backgrounds attend university (McGuire, 2016). As is the case in most Western countries, numbers of university attendees have risen in recent decades (Martin, 2010; Reich, 2001), which has seen an increase in the overall numbers of working-class students getting university degrees (e.g. Bottero, 2005). My chances of attending university therefore - while lower than those of peers from middle-class backgrounds - were still statistically greater than they would have been just a few decades ago, attesting to overall social mobility trends. As Roberts writes of the UK context:

> [m]ost working-class adults who became parents in the second half of the twentieth century would have seen one of their children ascend at least into the intermediate classes… upward mobility has been quite a common experience, nothing exceptional (2001, p.201)

I was mostly a high achieving student throughout primary and secondary school even if as per typical trends, middle-class peers tended to be the best performers consistently. I was fortunate to have had very supportive teachers throughout most of my education, and in some respects, I think I was simply lucky. My first primary school was a tiny country school with just thirty students in the entire school. This made for a good educational foundation since I was already a hard working, motivated student by the time I moved to a bigger primary school (in a small town called Tralee in the west of Ireland)[10]. For secondary school, again I think luck was on my side when I made a last-minute decision to change from a 'normal' English speaking school to *Gaelcholáiste Chiarraí,* an Irish immersion school too small for streaming.[11] In this sense, sociologist writings of how working-class students can feel disempowered and marginalized by the workings of the education system (e.g. Charlesworth, 2000) tend to resonate little with me. Unlike the working-class students in one of Reay et al.'s (2009) studies who 'rarely reported focused academic support from teachers', I can recall many examples of teachers over the years showing genuine interest in my progress.[12]

Attending university however brought about challenges I was, in hindsight, ill equipped for. This is not necessarily a class related experience – no doubt university students of all backgrounds struggle to find their feet at the beginning. However, educational sociologist Diane Reay's observations of how 'working-class students felt a great deal of stress and anxiety when encountering the unfamiliar field of higher education' aptly describes much of my experience. Based on her field research, Reay writes of 'clueless serendipity' and 'the chancy, uncertain process [working class students] are caught up in' (2005, p.922). This she compares to the 'determined ambition' and discourses of 'entitlement and self-realization' of middle-class students, and the 'extensive familial reserves of expertise and support' available for the latter to call upon Reay (ibid).

Today, a decade and a half after graduating with a (fully state funded) degree in Applied Psychology from University College Cork, these observations strike me as accurate. However, Reay et al.'s observations of 'a strong investment in the academic field' in the place of 'anger and resistance of the status quo' among some working-class students in their study also resonates (2009, p.1114). This might well be because (unlike many working-class participants in Reay's various studies) I had an overall positive school experience which in part motivated me to continue further on an academic path.

Studying sociology has opened my eyes to the discourse of individualism. Upon hearing about my family background people would often comment on my supposed strength of character or say I must be very motivated and hardworking. But I now know that my attaining a good education has just as much to do with support as it does with personality traits. My Phd journey has brought about great recognition of the help I have had throughout my education, much of which has come from outside my immediate family. Teachers, guardians, my grandmother and even friends' parents have been an important source of educational support and encouragement, some right through to Phd level (and the foregoing kinds of relationships are, to the best of my knowledge, still under-researched in educational sociology). Support in the form of state education funding has also been important and, to my mind, not to be underestimated. Indeed, Crompton makes the point that life chances of citizens ‘are to a substantial extent dependent on state policies and as a consequence vary dramatically’ among countries (2008, p.83).

This is not to say that I believe we are passive victims of circumstance and should depend on help from the state or otherwise. On the one hand it must be recognized that children do not have the same agency - that is ‘the ability to take action in the light of a conscious assessment of the circumstances’ (Layder, 1997, p.35) - as adults do. Those of us who insist that it is an uneven playing field may be right (Ted, 2021), but that does not mean that individual responsibility and agency should be abandoned. If we wish to succeed, we must take individual responsibility - as adults - and figure out what we can do to better our circumstances and work towards goals. Ideally, our understanding of our own and others’ circumstances takes account of both agency and structure. As popular psychologist Angela Duckworth puts it, adopting such a stance means seeing these apparently irreconcilable perspectives instead as ‘I have an effect on my situation and my situation has an effect on me’ (Ted, 2021). Well known for her books on the importance of grit, perseverance, and passion, Duckworth here discusses how inequality can be accounted for in theories like her work on grit. As she puts it, the ‘tug-of-war’ either/or metaphor needs to be replaced by the metaphor of a dance between the two, whereby both matter.

One fundamentally important point Duckworth makes – one that is often lacking in the overall field of self-help literature - is that we can acknowledge that it is ‘a deeply unfair playing field’ (ibid) and still take responsibility as adults for whatever we are in a position to do about our particular situation. This position is echoed in academia by Bradley (1996) on inequality, and by Crompton, who argues that the persistent divide in class analysis debates between action (agency) and structure should be seen ‘rather as an *interdependence*. It is not a case of ‘either/or’ but ‘both/and’’ (2008, p.6, italics in the original). Such an approach is right at the heart of critical realism, the epistemological framework underpinning this thesis. Critical realism is a philosophical approach that allows us to investigate individual agency in the world while recognizing the reality of ‘non-semiotic social structures’ (Flatschart, 2016) within which agency arises. This epistemological approach provides for moving back and forth between the structure and agency (action), without denying the importance of either - while we may decide to choose to focus on one or another at any given time. It also sheds light on the ways in which agency can shape and reproduce existing structures or produce new ones (ibid) making it perfectly aligned with Duckworth's position mentioned above; 'I have an effect on my situation and my situation has an effect on me'. Chapter 5 deals with the topic of critical realist epistemology in more depth.

1.10 Terminology and other matters

Before proceeding to the literature on social class, some comments on terminology and a few other matters are in order. Throughout the chapters to follow – most importantly, in the data chapters - I adopt broadly defined notions of social class groups, as opposed to specific categorizations of class location according to class scales, maps or class schemes based on occupation. Middle-class here is generally understood to mean 'people who are more or less in the broad middle of the economy and society [who] have enough education and money to participate fully in some vaguely defined "mainstream" way of life' (Wright, 2015, p.4). Because the participants chosen turned out to be almost all middle class (which is not to say they are a homogenous group - there is substantial variation in their respective class locations), the term middle-class features most often throughout the data chapters. The term working-class is used in a few instances, based on participants' descriptions of their family background, and some participants use the term directly. Terms that describe other class locations, importantly, those that refer to other more underprivileged class groups, are not employed. In sociology there is for instance the term 'underclass' – a highly contentious label 'used to stigmatize the poor and deprived for decades' (Savage, 2015, p.171) but a term which might best reflect the reality of those in poverty, and a growing group of 'chronically unemployed have-nots [who] live off welfare hand-outs or criminal forays or both' (Beck, 2000, p.107). The term 'lower class' also appears in sociology papers - often in defending the said group – and is sometimes used as shorthand outside sociology circles. Although I don't necessarily employ these terms in arguing certain points, people whose class locations can be described as working class, or whose situations might fit any of the above categorizations are ultimately who I have in mind when I discuss those lacking resources and privilege.

Important to mention from the outset is that this research focuses almost exclusively on social class, with comparatively cursory mentions of other demographic factors like race, nationality, age, gender and so forth. Social class is the primary focus of the study, notwithstanding the fact that race is understood to be inextricably linked to class, and despite the importance of various identity inscriptions besides class in shaping a person's life trajectory and life chances.

On a final note, while APA referencing and formatting guidelines have been adhered to for the most part throughout this thesis, endnotes - called endnotes rather than footnotes – are used to add any information deemed tangential to the discussion. Endnotes are numbered consecutively across the entire thesis and can be found together at the end of Chapter 9, before the list of references. Finally, all translations into English, of transcriptions, or literature in French or Spanish, are my own. Following Weber (2009), I tried to keep any transcription translations as literal as possible, at the risk of them sounding somewhat 'wooden' at times. The last section of this chapter, section 1.11 below, provides a summary of the thesis chapters to follow.

1.11 Summary of the chapters

Writing nearly three decades ago, Bradley maintained that it was 'impossible to review theories of class without considering [Marx's] influential classic legacy' (1996, p.51). In my view, this still applies, and befitting of a thesis on social class, it is with the legacy of Karl Marx that I begin my first literature review in Chapter 2, before moving to a comparatively brief discussion of the work of Weber and Durkheim respectively. Chapter 3 then discusses key work of the prominent French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu on social class. This discussion is followed by a number of remaining points considered necessary to include in engaging with class analysis, notably the issue of social mobility. The last literature chapter, Chapter 4, focuses specifically on the matter of social class in education, surveying the work of some (particularly UK based) educational sociologists, before turning to the specific topic of English language learning and inequality in various parts of the world, including South Korea - where much research has been done in this regard - and Spain, the context of this research. These first three chapters set the foundations for the remainder of the study, which draws almost exclusively on this range of literature. Chapter 5, on methodology, sets out the study design, explaining in detail the epistemological underpinnings of critical realism (CR) and methodological approach of positioning theory (PT) which first originated in the field of social and cultural psychology. This chapter provides a detailed account of the data collection decisions and procedures, and the handling of ethical concerns is also discussed.

The subsequent three chapters are based on data analysis. In Chapter 6 I turn first to interviews with the group of in-person servers. Chapter 7 then explores data from interviews with the symbols analysts group. Finally, Chapter 8 examines a focus group interview with private university students. These chapters take a primarily cultural approach to class analysis that draws on Bourdieu’s notion of cultural, social, and economic capital, while at the same time an effort is made to tease out economic matters, in a more Marxist-inspired (and thus economic), approach. Given the importance of family in the reproduction of class inequalities – a point most often agreed on by class theorists who disagree on other matters (Crompton, 2008) - considerable attention is accorded in these chapters to participants’ family backgrounds and emergent class markers. The final chapter, Chapter 9, considers what has been learned in the data chapters, and from the study overall. Here, I cast an eye back over findings from the data chapters, bearing in mind the research questions guiding the study. In this last chapter I also add some comments about other matters of interest (i.e. intersectionality), discuss implications of the study, and make some suggestions for future research. In addition, I address the study’s limitations and include some autobiographical reflections on my own journey as a researcher. The last section sets out the conclusions of the study.

Chapter 2: Marx, Weber and Durkheim

> Contemporary class theories and analyses are grandchildren of Marxism….they share with their classic antecedent a broad explanatory aspiration. They aim at charting and explaining the structure of inequality, especially in economically defined life chances, by linking these inequalities with the patterns of property and employment relations. (Pakulski, 2005, p.152)

> Embedded in the ways that language is used are class positions linked to individual's relations to the means of production (pace Marx), their position in the social division of labour in society (pace Durkheim) and their differentiated access to and positions in the markets (pace Weber). (Block, 2014, p.82)

In the first quote above, summarizing the activity of those engaged in the study of social class and inequality, Pakulski frames his critique of the sociological concept of class by stating the fundamental importance of Marxism to contemporary class analysis. For Pakulski, Marx's writings well over a century ago paved the way for scholars that followed, from Weber all the way to contemporary sociologists. The second quotation denotes how class positions are embedded in the use of language, pointing to work by Marx and two well-known later scholars, the aforementioned Weber and Emile Durkheim. This quotation is taken from a discussion of Basil Bernstein's sociolinguistic work on differential language use among class groups in the UK context (see Brandis & Henderson, 1970). The quote has clear application not only to the study of native language use and class positioning, but equally to the learning of English as a foreign language. Central to this thesis is the argument that social class is an important influential factor in education, and has real ramifications for the study of English in different contexts. This first literature chapter begins with a brief foray into Marxism, where I argue that some key components of Marxist theory are still important to class analysis, and the analysis of capitalism in modern society. Since Marx and Weber are frequently considered two of the most important thinkers on social class, I then turn to the work of Weber, comparing and contrasting important aspects of their respective theories. The end of the chapter is dedicated to a comparatively brief discussion of Durkheim's key contributions to class literature.

2.1 Marx’s legacy

In a 2018 BBC broadcast, radio host Laurie Taylor takes listeners back to his days as a sociology lecturer in the UK during the late 1960s, recalling how at the time it seemed almost everyone around him was some kind of Marxist. In contrast, at the time of broadcast in early 2018 (around the two hundredth anniversary of Marx’s birth) Taylor remarks that self-identifying British Marxists, are ‘almost as rare as flat earthers’ (BBC, 2018). Elsewhere, the Marxist sociologist Erik Olin Wright would seem to agree, commenting as follows on the decades pre-neoliberalism:

> In the 1960s and 1970s…the idea of Marxist class analysis anchored in the possibility of an alternative game seemed compelling to many people. Social and political movements embodied visions of an alternative, and the ideological battle between capitalism and various concepts of socialism was an important dimension of political life, even in places like the United States where socialism was never a real political threat. (Wright, 2015, p.123)

With reference to the 1950s era of McCarthyism in the US, Heller and McElhinny write of how for sociolinguists like Dell Hymes it was ‘risky to discuss Marxist thought with people you did not trust, that as a graduate student he kept Marxist books off his shelves and out of sight’ (2017, p.175). At this time, a veritable witch hunt for defenders of Marxism led to some linguists in the U.S. being investigated by the FBI, losing their academic positions, and in some cases even being subjected to public loyalty trial.[13] Even those subject to criticism from the Russian communist party were not immune from FBI surveillance (ibid). In the UK in the 1990s, media reports of a couple accused of brainwashing and enslaving three women for thirty years in a political commune, linked their far-left ideologies to an extreme form of revolutionary, Marxism influenced by Maoism. One clip from a news piece at the time reported that ´experts believe that some Marxist groups did have the potential to become like political cults´ (BBC Radio 4, 2000). It is little wonder, given these kinds of dramatic and no doubt exceptional events, that associations with Marxism sometimes raise suspicion or carry connotations of dangerous extreme-left ideologies for many. It therefore seems necessary to clarify how certain aspects of Marxist theory is useful and applicable in analysing class and capitalism still today.

Marx himself could probably never have imagined the impact his writing was to have on the world. His life's work was in fact the analysis of capitalism, from which flowed his revolutionary ideas on socialism, class and also communism (with which he is perhaps most commonly associated). According to David Harvey, while his main concern was the analysis of capitalism, Marx never in fact used the word capitalism, only the word capital (BBC, 2017). Neither did Marx ever actually define social class. It appears he was about to write a definition prior to his death at the end of the third volume of *Capital*, where the text breaks off (Giddens, 1973). One of the less well-known facts about Marx is that he was a newspaper journalist. According to Johnathan Sperber, the volume of his journalistic work outweighs all other pieces of writing. Sperber (2013) even goes so far as to say that Marx struggled to finish bigger treatises, a surprising claim about a man who came to write long tomes such as *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*, as Wheen (2013) puts it, 'Books that shook the world'.

Harvey points out that at the time of Marx's writing, the capitalist mode of production was established only in a very small part of the world, Britain, Western Europe and the Eastern seaboard of the US (BBC radio 4, 2017). Since then, the occupational landscape in most countries has changed dramatically, with the kind of factory labour that Marx and his close friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels, wrote of having declined in most advanced capitalist countries, now replaced by a complex array of labour varieties and very distinct global contexts (Harvey, 2018). It becomes easier to understand then why there are those who see the work of Marx as heuristically ill-suited for understanding today's capitalist societies. Harvey (e.g. BBC, 2017) however argues, as would most contemporary Marxists, that it is difficult to beat Marxism as a way of doing exactly that, understanding and explaining capitalism.

One of the most widely contested aspects of Marxist theory is the extent of importance of material, economic factors. This debate derives from Marx's well-known base and superstructure concept, his belief that 'it is the socio-economic process that is basic to human society and that other activities—political, legal, religious—are secondary and derivative.' (McLellan, 2000, p.142). This idea is articulated in oft-cited lines from the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of

> these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx, 1993/1859, p.4)

Here, ‘the economic structure of society’ is clearly set out as the foundation for what Marx referred to as the legal and political ‘superstructure’, which thus corresponds to ‘definite form of consciousness’ in a given society. Block (2014, p.29) points out that while this distinction between base and superstructure is the ‘essential groundwork for’ the author’s class theory, it is also a source of debate and criticism, a point ‘where many readers part company with Marxist thought’ due to perceived deterministic overtones. Particularly the final sentence, which states how the social existence of men ‘determines their consciousness’, seems to preclude the possibility of individual agency (ibid). Marx’s position in this respect is made clear elsewhere, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. (Marx, 1972/1852)

The idea that men make their own history under circumstances passed down from previous generations runs almost contrary to the postmodern creed of individualisation whereby, ‘each person’s biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her own hands, open and dependent on decisions’ (Beck, 1992, p.135). The belief that we are masters of our own destiny holds sway in self-help literature and mainstream media. Furthermore, the idea that contemporary identities are ‘primarily shaped by cultural (that is, status or consumption), rather than economic, factors’ (Crompton, 1998, p.205), is also widely accepted in the social sciences. To suggest, as many Marxists would, prevalence of economic factors in shaping identities and life chances would, for some, constitute a radical or absurd idea.

2.2 Marx on exploitation

Matters of worker productivity and labour management have also changed dramatically over the last century, which for some commentators, also renders Marx's writings on the phenomenon of exploitation outdated. Friedrich Engels, Marx's friend and coauthor, writing during the industrial revolution, depicts scenes of industrial capitalist exploitation, widespread in London and Britain's other 'great towns':

> Everywhere barbarous indifference, hard egotism on one hand, and nameless misery on the other, everywhere social warfare, every man's house in a state of siege, everywhere reciprocal plundering under the protection of the law, and all so shameless, so openly avowed that one shrinks before the consequences of our social state as they manifest themselves here undisguised, and can only wonder that the whole crazy fabric still hangs together. (Engels, 1845)

Some might argue that exploitation, as described by Engels, is now an antiquated concept, given the evolution of labour management from coercive measures of slavery, to more measured and tightly controlled production methods (e.g. Taylorism), to relatively recent developments such as human resource management and organizational psychology. Yet as Harvey (2018) observes, in parts of the world like East Asia, factory labour is still commonplace. Recent news articles from the UK call out working conditions in the fashion industry that are tantamount to 'modern slavery', with alleged hourly rates as low as three pounds sterling (Kelly, 2020), while in Ireland a similar article on a meat processing plant reports 'severe physical and emotional exhaustion' (Pollak, 2020). In Spain, factory workers' reports of harsh treatment - including strictly timed trips to the toilet - and threatening verbal abuse from supervisors have made their way into national media (*La Sexta*, 2019). Such articles serve as reminders that in developed countries, conditions not worlds apart from those described by Marx and Engels in their accounts of factory labour during capital industrialism still occur.

According to Cole, capitalism is 'objectively a system of exploitation, whether the exploited realize it or not' (2009, p.138). Wright (2015) argues that exploitation is an integral concept to class analysis, despite the fact that it was disputed by neoclassical economists, and that there are those like Goldthorpe (2000, p.1574) who would 'gladly see [it] disappear from the sociological lexicon'. Wright (2015) maintains that the Marxist concept of exploitation adds a specific dimension which helps us better understand the functioning of class relations, characterised by what Bradley calls 'mutual dependence' between the exploiter and the exploited (1996, p.51). According to Wright, the notion of exploitation 'emphasizes the ways in which exploiting classes are *dependent upon* the exploited class for their own economic well-being, and [hence] the ways in which exploited classes have *capacities for resistance* that are organic to the class relation' (2015, p.54, italics in the original). Crucially, this sets up relations whereby 'exploiters must seek ways of responding to resistance of the exploited that reproduce, rather than destroy, their interaction with the exploited' (ibid), a point which forges a link between contemporary personnel management strategies and industrial exploitation as described by Marx and Engels. When viewed from the vantage point of interdependence, and the way in which capitalist employers need to proactively find ways to forestall and respond to resistance, Marx's theory of exploitation becomes a more fitting lens for the world of work today. Exploitation also goes hand in hand with another of Marx's well-known ideas – that of alienation, discussed next.

2.3 Marx on alienation

McLellan (1972, cited in Claeys, 2018) writes that the theory of alienation runs through 'the whole of Marx's writings' and is 'central to Marx's whole thought', while for Cole refers to it as 'a fundamental condition of labor under capitalism' (2009, p.81). In Marx's writings[14], the term alienation describes the way in which work or labour leads to physical and/or psychological suffering in the worker, producing feelings of discontent:

> [It] mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind. Hence, the worker feels himself only when he is not working; when he is working, he does not feel himself. He is at home when he is not working, and not at home when he is working. His labour is, therefore, not voluntary but forced, it is *forced labour*. It is, therefore, not the satisfaction of a need but a mere *means* to satisfy needs outside itself. Its alien character is clearly demonstrated by the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, it is shunned like the plague. (Marx, 1844)

Marx wrote of four different kinds of alienation, which Marshall explains as follows:

> alienation of the worker from his or her 'species essence' as a human being rather than an animal; alienation between workers, since capitalism reduces labour to a commodity to be traded on the market, rather than a social relationship; alienation of the worker from the product, since this is appropriated by the capitalist class, and so escapes the worker's control; and, finally, alienation from the act of production itself, such that work comes to be a meaningless activity, offering little or no intrinsic satisfactions. (Marshall, 1998)

Still today, this process clearly manifests in common workplace dissatisfaction, complaints about managers hired to oversee the capitalist employer's affairs, and is equally manifest in conflict among coworkers. Marshall argues that this 'generates the psychological discussion about the process of alienation as a subjectively identifiable state of mind, involving feelings of powerlessness, isolation, and discontent at work—especially when this takes place within the context of large, impersonal, bureaucratic social organizations' (ibid).

It is just these kinds of large impersonal organizations that have featured in a number of sociolinguistics studies in recent years. Call centers have been the focus of research carried out by Holborow (2007; see also Holborow 2018) and Bunting (2004), who provide salient examples of how language issues connect to Marxist theory (see also Seabrook (2003) for an incisive opinion piece on call centres). Participant accounts of regimented working conditions and extreme demands on staff chime of the 'twin evils of alienation and exploitation' (Block, 2018, p.6). Writing of 'language workers' (those whose language skills are used in sales and service work, like call center staff), Holborow shows that alienation and exploitation are alive and well:

> High levels of staff turnover bore witness to just how frustrated employees became. This particular employee was quite cynical about any loyalty to the company, particularly when the company had threatened several times to close down and open up under another name. From this account, and others, the dull monotony of the phone assembly line is the overriding sentiment and not compliance or acceptance of the customer philosophy. (2007, p.69)

Lack of trust in the employer, lack of work enjoyment, and silent resistance to the customer philosophy impinged upon these workers, are all characteristic of Marx's theory of alienation.

Studies like these attest to the fact that although the theory of alienation may not be accepted in some academic circles such as economics, it is a reality at least for 'those who actually experience it' (Block, 2014, p.70).

2.4 The theory of value

The concepts of alienation and exploitation are both derived from a more technical point in Marx's work which is the labour theory of value. According to Cole (2009, p.5), Marxists believe the labour theory of value to explain 'precisely the way in which workers are exploited under capitalism'.[15] The labour theory of value 'derives directly from the work of Smith (1982) and Ricardo (2013) and at its simplest level, it means that value of a commodity derives from the labour expended in its manufacture' (Block, 2014, p.31). Marx elaborated on prior ideas in this regard with his observations of how in capitalism, workers now produce goods that are 'of no direct use value for them' (ibid).[16] A pivotal point in the labour theory of value (and key to explaining exploitation) is that of surplus value. That is, how the source of profit for the employer rests in extracting surplus value from workers. As Bradley explains:

> These two [capitalist and proletariat] classes were linked together in a relationship of exploitation, in which the subordinate class provided the labour that generated a social surplus and the dominant class then appropriated the surplus…The wage is only equivalent to some of the value of the work performed by the labourer; the remaining 'surplus value' is taken by the capitalist in the form of profits. What is going on is concealed from the labourers under the idea of 'a fair wage for a fair day's work'. Thus, in a capitalist society, the power and wealth of dominant class is seen as legitimate (1996, p.51)

While in Marx's writings this refers to the capitalist and proletariat, the idea is still applicable to the functioning of most capitalist enterprises today, with the existence of some exceptions like cooperatives entailing alternative models.

2.5 Marx on Ideology

Finally, another of Marx's ideas which stands the test of time is his interpretation of ideology. To quote an oft-cited passage from *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels wrote of the ideas of the ruling class as follows:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. (2004/1846)

In this account, the ideas of the dominant class are those which inevitably win out and are adopted by those who lack the material (and thus mental) means of production. This of course happens, as many like Cole (2009) have noted, whether the latter realize it or not. This produces a 'false consciousness' (Engels, 1968/1893) in those dominated by the ruling class whereby they are basically less aware of the macro processes at play. Holborow (2012, p.24) writes that 'ideology in its Marxist sense is precisely the theoretical recognition of the interaction between the material and the representational, between class and view of the world, between what happens in society and what appears to be common sense'. The appearance of ideas being common sense is central to understanding how ideology in this sense works since sociologists (like Crompton and Wright, as we saw in Chapter 1) point to the real importance of class location in shaping the life chances of individuals. Some sociologists (e.g. Scase, 1992) also argue that people tend to show little awareness of class, while others highlight how research participants often believe that having the right attitude or character traits trumps class origin (Abelmann et al., 2009; Khan & Jerolmack, 2013). A mismatch thus arises between empirical findings on the causal mechanisms of social class, the workings of capitalism, and what many people believe as common sense. This point is ironically well articulated by Mills in what is an overall critical account of Marxism:

> The United States [for example] is a *class* society in which class, defined by *relationship to the means of production*, is the *fundamental* division, the bourgeoisie being the *ruling* class, the workers being *exploited* and *alienated*, with the state and the juridical system not being neutral but part of a super-structure to maintain the existing order, while the *dominant ideology* naturalizes, and renders invisible and unobjectionable, class domination. (2003, p.158)

The dominant ideology of the ruling class thus naturalizes and renders class domination mostly invisible, since common sense belief in the unlimited potential of individualization prevails. The process of exploitation (in Marx's terms) is seen as legitimate rather than as being enforced through coercion. As Marx put matters 'the more a ruling class is able to assimilate the foremost minds of a ruled class, the more stable and dangerous becomes its rule' (Marx, 1996/1894).

So far, the case has been made for contemporary relevance of several aspects of Marxist theory. There are those who reject Marxist theory, like Mills for whom Marxism is 'largely seen as dead' (2009, p.271). However, there are also some valid critiques which are difficult to dispute. To begin with, Marx's ideas about class emancipation and 'deterministic prediction of the transcendence of capitalism and the disappearance of classes and the state' (Wright, 2015, p.32) are frequently contested as idealistic, labelled 'utopian' (e.g. Scase, 1992, p.89). Indeed, as Scase points out, it is no longer a question of whether or not capitalism but of what variety (ibid). Criticisms levelled at Marx's writings over lack of concern with intersectionality are also fair game. As Mercer writes, 'the monologic concept of class struggle is inadequate to the plurality of conflicts at work in contemporary society'(2013, p.263-4). Mills critiques not only lack of intersectionality, but the priming of class over color - the fact that 'white Marxism [is] predicated on colorless classes in struggle' (1997, p.111), a point also made by Crenshaw et al. (1995).

The changing face of complex post-industrial societies since Marx's death in 1883 has meant significant changes in class relations and the composition of class groups. Marx's bourgeoisie-proletariat dichotomy is often deemed too simplistic to describe modern class relations. However, as Bradley and others point out, many other class groups such as peasants and aristocracy were included throughout the entirety of Marx's work (Bradley, 1996, p.51). Fundamental changes to the composition of global markets, occupational trends, and traditional family structures have also led post-Marxist thinkers to elaborate on Marx's theories. One such thinker, for many commentators the most important one, is Max Weber, to whose writings I turn in section 2.6 below.

2.6 Weberian class theory

If Marxists are, as Laurie Taylor claims, 'as rare as flat earthers' (BBC 4, 2018) the opposite might be said of Weberian theory, which has gained currency in sociology at a time Marxism is purportedly on the wane. As is often noted, Weber had the advantage of writing in the decades ensuing Marx’s death, by which time industrial societies had matured into a more stable state (Giddens, 1973). This allowed him to develop a more pluralistic, multifaceted approach to class, better suited to contemporary society and a fast-changing employment landscape. Weber´s work not only addresses, to varying degrees, the above listed critiques of Marx´s work but is regarded by many as a ‘key source of alternative ideas to Marx for class theories’ (Block, 2014, p.37).

Weber’s major influence on social class literature is however somewhat surprising in light of Sørensen’s observation that ‘[c]lass simply seems not to have been an important concept for Weber’ as opposed to Marx, who ‘has class as the central concern of analysis in all of his writings’ (2000, p.1527).[17] This view is underscored by Wright’s claim that Weber only really referred to class in order to ‘describe inequality as generated by market interactions’ (2015, p.122). It is worth noting that while, as mentioned earlier, Marx never got to define class, Weber did do so, writing of class and class situation respectively. The latter he defined as a situation ‘in which there is a shared typical probability of procuring goods, gaining a position in life, and finding inner satisfaction’ (Weber, 1978/1924, p.302), while social class ‘makes up the totality of these class situations within which individual and generational mobility is easy and typical’ (ibid, p.302).

There is some debate about the extent to which Weber was influenced by Marx, with the likes of Schroeter (1985) writing of the Marxian character of particularly his earlier work, while Cole expresses the more popular view that Weber ‘is credited as being the first prominent *sociologist* to dispute Marx’s arguments in a serious way’ (2009, p.153, italics in the original). Either way, as Edgell (1993) points out, there are many overlaps between them. Advocating a view of Weber’s class theory as an extension rather than a rejection of Marxism, Edgell posits that the two classic theories together provide ‘the essential conceptual tools for analysing contemporary class structures’ (ibid, p.15). Wright has observed that while Marxist and Weberian traditions are most often ‘pitted against one another’, there are in fact ‘a number of striking similarities’ (2015, p.21) between their conceptualizations of class. To begin with, as one might expect, Weberians, like Marxists ‘see class as ultimately tied up with social inequality’ (Savage, 2000, p.58). Both conceived of class as a ‘relational’ (as opposed to gradational) phenomenon emerging from social activity (Block and Corona, 2014). Holton & Turner observe that Marx and Weber’s writings are similarly concerned with ‘market relations in the constitution of classes' (1989, p.181). Weber however defined class (and thus understood inequality) more in terms of people's opportunities in the market, which in turn related to rationalized economic interactions, a salient theme in his work.[18]

Marx's ideas on ideology are in places echoed in Webers' most influential work, *Economy and Society*. Weber posits that while it is possible for the ideological (over the material) to drive action 'it is even more certain that the mass of men do not act in this way and that it is an induction from experience that they cannot do so and never will' (1978/1924, p.203). This not only chimes of Marx, but also taps into what many class sociologists argue; there is a substantial difference between possibility and probability. When it comes to class, mobility and life chances, ideology looks to the possible, while the probable is often downplayed or dismissed. Weber also writes that 'the [empirical] concept of class-interest….is ambiguous as soon as one understands by it something other than the factual direction of interests following with a certain probability from the class situation for a certain average of those people subjected to the class situation' (ibid, p.929). In segments like this, claims are hedged with language like 'a certain probability' and 'a certain average', denoting agreement with Marx in certain respects but eluding accusations of determinism.[19]

There are also significant differences between the two class theories. As Esping-Andersen puts it, essentially: '[i]n Marxism [class attributes] relate principally to ownership, consciousness and collective action; in the Weberian tradition, they usually include authority, rewards, status and life-chances' (1993, p.18). A fundamental contrast is that of exploitation (in Marx) versus life chances (in Weber) as lens with which to understand class relations. That is to say, Weberians generally reject the notion of exploitation, instead focusing on the idea of life chances as related to market interactions. Life chances for Weber were about 'differences in opportunities, lifestyles and general prospects' (Bottero, 2005, p.38). In addition (and contrary to Marx's concept of exploitation), Weber understands the problem of extracting labor effort within capitalism as 'an instance of technical inefficiencies reflecting a tension between formal rationality and substantive rationality within capitalist economic relations' (Wright, 2015, p.21), again underscoring the importance of rationality, and pointing to a fundamental divergence from Marxist thought. In terms of market interactions and their bearing on life chances, Weber was ultimately more liberal, and his writings took into account cultural matters such as upbringing, skills and education as well as style of life (as it related to consumption). He recognized the increasing credentialisation of industrialised societies (Block, 2014) and how this was affecting the labour market, having had the advantage of writing many years after Marx.

Wright highlights the centrality of property relations for both, writing that ‘Weber, like Marx, sees propertylessness as an essentially coercive condition’ (2015, p.33). However, the differences arising in this regard may be more significant to class analysis. Weber no doubt shared Marx’s views on the powerlessness of those without property, who ‘have nothing to offer but their labor or the resulting products and…are compelled to get rid of these products in order to subsist at all’ (Weber, 1978/1924, p.927). However Weber’s description was more nuanced. He went a step further than Marx, writing of divisions within the groupings of propertied and propertyless, the former split into subgroupings ‘according to the kind of property’, the latter in terms of what they could offer the market, that is, ‘the kind of services that can be offered in the market’ (ibid, p.928). Weberians are also generally more interested in the middle classes, such as managers and white-collar workers, which Marx paid less attention to especially in earlier, more renowned work such as the *Communist Manifesto* (Bradley, 1996). This is somewhat of an expansion on Marx’s work and a major strength in terms of application of Weberian class analysis to modern societies.[20]

Another major distinction is how for Weberians, capitalism is ‘the only viable game in town’ (Wright, 2015, p.122). Weber (and Durkheim, discussed below) rejected Marx’s activism ‘whereby social theory…was seen as a means of critiquing capitalist societies and the foundation for political movements established to change them’ (Block, 2014, p.37). Marx’s predictions of future social revolution were thus rejected. While Weber was on the same page as Marx as regards economic relations being ‘inherently conflictual’, he believed that such conflicts ‘could be accommodated within a democratic pluralist system’ (Bradley, 1996, p.53). As Bottero notes, for Weber, processes of group conflict and subordination instead ‘take form in a variety of routine and everyday social activities, such as the choice of lifestyle items, place of residence, friends, or marriage partners, and allow for social subordination to occur through a range of competitive struggles, which often fall far short of overt conflict’ (2005, p.66). This means that class differences are tacit and subtly woven into actors’ daily lives, with class consciousness often diminished as a result. Class action is less likely than other forms of collective action, since it is only when the ‘real conditions and the results of the class situation’ are recognized that class action will occur (Breen, 2005, p.42, citing Weber, 1978). In this sense, Weber’s ideas better correspond to the tendency in contemporary society toward less discernible class divisions, (thus) less class consciousness and less class action, than Marx's visions of revolution and overturning capitalism.

Marx's notion of base-superstructure is supplanted in Weber's writings by four social structures; economic, political, legal and religious, which he saw as interrelated but independent of one another. While Weber agreed with Marx up to a certain point about the importance of economic factors, he did not see them as paramount. Instead, Weber pinpointed aspects of class in his work which were technically separable from the economic, identifying more cultural elements related to status and race, and to a lesser extent (political) party (Wright, 2015, p.25). Weber saw stratification as related to socially differential power distribution. Power, he famously defined as 'the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests' (1978/1924, p. 53). This definition makes it easy to think of power differences without prominent economic bases, such as child-parent or student-teacher relationship.

Weber's version of power was about status, status groups and party rather than solely economic factors. Status groups are basically those who share common aspects of their demographic or occupational profile which (positively or negatively) affect their status or social prestige, for example certain ethnic groups are ascribed a negatively privileged status (Parkin, 1979). Party, in turn 'seems to refer to a variety of groupings, including, but not confined to…political parties, which mobilize for political power and influence' (Bradley, 1996, p.53). Weber may have defined it in this way bearing in mind groups of persons who come together on highly politicized matters, without necessary membership of a given political party (although this is likely). A local example from Spain is that of groups mobilizing against mortgage evictions, such as *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (The Mortgage Victim's Platform), (see e.g. Menna, 2016 and Block, 2018).

This distinction 'challenges the Marxian view of political power as ultimately derived from economic power', since a party can exist without the latter (Bradley, 1996, p.53). Parties and status groups and are also more likely than classes per se to engage in collective action, since collective action for the former is their 'raison d'être', while for the latter, membership of a status group (such as a racial group or profession) is 'more likely to figure in individuals' consciousness' and serve as a basis for collective action (Breen, 2005, p.42). This point has been well illustrated by movements in recent years such as Black Lives Matter and demonstrations taking place around the globe on International Women's Day, the 8th of March. Status in Weber's work was not entirely unrelated to economic factors, since consumption was also central; status groups were 'stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special styles of life' (Weber, 1978/1924, p.937).

This leads to the important question of the primacy of class over race. While scholars such as Cole, a Marxist, and Parkin (1979), a neo-Weberian, among others take a more class (and economic) centric view of race, others disagree. Crenshaw et al. for example argue that 'subsuming race under class' entails 'the typical Marxist error' (1995, p.xxvi), while Mills in a similar vein, argues that there is 'no transracial class bloc' (2003, p.157). What is clear, regardless of where one stands on this matter, is the importance of intersectionality and bearing in mind various identity inscriptions, race and nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.[21] It is not class alone that shapes a person's life chances and sense of self, race is also fundamental, as is gender, geographical context of birth, and sexual orientation, albeit all to varying degrees and in different ways. Since Weberian theory provides for consideration of such groupings and other factors, in tandem with class, for many it proves a suitable lens of sociological analysis for modern, fragmented society. I turn now, in the last sections of this chapter, to the work of Durkheim.

2.7 Durkheim class analysis

Emile Durkheim is the third scholar in what is sometimes referred to as the 'holy trinity of European sociology' (Block, 2014, p.26). Like Marx and Weber, Durkheim contributed much valuable theory to class literature, although like Weber wrote little of class per se, instead focusing on the makeup of society in terms of occupational categories and social groupings. Writing after Marx's death (but years before Weber), Durkheim, as is often noted, had the advantage of observing societal change such as the industrialization of many countries. Durkheim importantly, discussed predictions social mobility, as did Weber. This mobility, as Grusky and Galescu (2005) observe, would revolve around individual achievement, as opposed to absolute mobility which derives from improved overall living standards in society (see Crompton, 1998) although the latter kind would also play a role. Durkheim shared with Weber a part rejection of Marx's economic-centred understanding of how societies function. As Kenneth Thompson, writes:

> [Durkheim] was as realistic as Marx in seeing that the economic structures were the dominant structures of industrial society, but he also believed that they had to be more than just economic if they were to produce social stability and integration. (1982, p.74)

Thompson touches on a key distinction between Durkheim's work and that of Marx and Weber. While Marx and Weber explained societal inequality in terms of conflict (exploitation for Marx, opportunity hoarding for Weber), Durkheim turned his attention to congruity and stability in society. Durkheim was more interested in understanding what Engels had marvelled at years before in observing England's industrial workers – how the 'whole crazy fabric still hangs together' (Engels, 1845).

Durkheim believed that the social (status) hierarchy remained intact as it was 'generally regarded as legitimate…based on a broad consensus about the "respective value of different social services"' (Lockwood, 1992, p.76). In other words, general acceptance of the status quo led to acceptance of various occupational (thus class) positions and differential access to resources, wealth etc. As Bottero (2005, p.45) explains, Durkheim saw 'wants and interests of particular groups' as socially regulated through a kind of system of shared norms. Rather than focusing on conflict, Durkheim examined 'the relationship between the individual and society, and how diverse individual interests are reconciled' (ibid, p. 43). Conflict, he recognised as integral to the labour market, but only partly able to account for inequality since there were other factors at play. Dissent or conflict emerged only exceptionally, when tacit agreements between groups broke down (ibid).

In a rather optimistic framing of things, Durkheim saw occupations as capable of bringing people together in community, providing a source of common ground and even purpose. This he called 'organic solidarity' (Durkheim, 1984/1892). Durkheim thus homed in more on the idea of occupation than class as key in organizing society. Neo-Durkheimian scholars, Grusky and Galescu write that:

> The starting point for a modern Durkheimian analysis is accordingly the "unit occupation," which may be defined as a grouping of technically similar jobs that is institutionalized in the labor market (2005, p.66)

Grusky and colleagues, later following this occupation-centred rationale, advanced the idea of micro-classes, subgroups within occupational groupings, arguing that this is a more realist manifestation of causal mechanisms in individual class locations (Grusky et al., 2001). There is clear value in this structuring of class, since occupations and all that they entail, socially, economically, legally etc. are far more tangible and comparable than other measures such as culture or skills for example. However, this theoretical approach does have its limitations. For example, it fails to include 'substantial holders of wealth or capital, arguably one of the most important groups in any class system', nor does it incorporate 'cultural dimensions, which many sociologists regard as central to the discourse of 'class analysis'' (Crompton, 1998, p.68). Neither does it account for the unemployed, nor is it particularly fitting for the group Guy Standing labels the precariat, those who, although employed, 'lack access to non-wage perks, such as paid vacations, medical leave, company pensions…state benefits, linked to legal entitlements', and so on (2014, p.18), a group on the rise in many capitalist countries. Solely focusing on occupation bears the risk of blind spots in our understandings of class matters. Hence, Crompton suggests, as we saw in Chapter 1, an approach to social class that recognizes plurality and tolerates contradiction, as the best way forward (Crompton, 1998).

2.8 Final comments

In this chapter I have provided an overview of Marx and Weber's most well-known theoretical segments on social class literature. Weber's ideas in many respects prove difficult to argue with and are valid and sensible alternatives (or add-ons) to those of Marx, but that does not mean that Marxism is to be done away with, deemed antiquated. As Cole writes, 'Marxism is not, as some would have it, a moribund set of beliefs and practice' (2009, p.153). The earlier parts of this chapter have emphasised how there are still aspects of current capitalism best captured by Marxist thought. For example, recognition of capitalist exploitation of workers, as discussed above, still valid today although manifest in very different ways to in Marx's epoch, or alienation. Both authors published ground-breaking ideas of fundamental importance to class analysis at the time and well beyond, hence are here considered equally valuable in different ways, rather than approached in an either-or fashion.

The chapter has focused almost exclusively on Marx and Weber followed by a briefer account of the work of Durkheim. This is partly due to space reasons, and also given that of the two, it is Weber 'who is generally considered the sociologist who most reconfigured class in light of changes taking place in industrialized European societies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (Block 2018, p.87). Marx and Weber's theories feature more often in class literature, with some authors paying little or no attention to Emile Durkheim.[22] This is also the case in sociolinguistics (with some exceptions like Khan, 2011; Blommaert, 2018; and various works by Block, e.g. 2012b, 2014, 2022 etc.). Despite this comparative invisibility, Durkheim is still considered a major contributor to classical sociological thinking. All three authors have made important contributions to class theory, making it difficult to prefer one over another. Block (2018) proposes an approach to class analysis called a constellation of dimensions model, which could potentially incorporate theory from Marx, Weber, Durkheim and others. Such a model means drawing on:

> the foundational political economic work of Marx ([1867] 1990) and, later, more sociocultural models of class elaborated, successively, by Durkheim (1984 [1892]), Weber ([1922] 1968) and Bourdieu (1984). It frames class in terms of a long list of factors, including property owned, material possessions…income, occupational, education, social networking, consumption patterns, symbolic behaviour, pastimes, mobility, neighbourhood and type of dwelling inhabited. (Block, 2018, p.139)

The purpose of the present chapter focusing on three foundational thinkers, Marx, Weber and Durkheim, is to chart the history of social class theory, and to serve as a background for data analysis work in later chapters. The approach to analysis here was initially inspired by the aforementioned constellation of dimensions model, meaning class analysis could be informed by any potentially relevant class theory. The data chapters (Chapters 6-8) refer occasionally to Marxian, Weberian, and Durkheimian theory, but they draw far more on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, a major French sociologist who followed in later decades. Chapter 3, accordingly, is devoted largely to the work of Bourdieu.

Chapter 3: Bourdieu, mobility and other facets of class

3.1 Introduction

When it comes to class theory in contemporary social science, Pierre Bourdieu is by far the most frequently cited scholar – perhaps to the point that as Hey (2003) puts it, his well-known concepts like habitus are used like 'intellectual hair spray' in academic literature. According to Weininger (2005, p.82), he was perhaps 'the most prominent sociologist in the world' by the time of his death in 2002. Well known for having called out the myth of meritocracy, Bourdieu's own start in life was from a working-class background. He was son of a postman from the Béarn region of south-western France, who attended the prestigious Parisian graduate institute, École Normale Supérieure, and went on to achieve considerable notoriety in the field of academia and beyond (Heller and McElhinny, 2017). His lengthy monograph *Distinction* (1984, originally published in French in 1979) 'can fairly claim to be the single most important monograph of post-war sociology published anywhere in the world' (Bennett et al., 2009, p.9).

Bourdieu's work was significant in restating the importance of class, particularly at a time when some scholars were questioning or denying its importance (Aron, 1969; Gorz, 1982; Bell, 1976, 1987; Blau and Duncan, 1967).[23] Bennett et al. (2009) maintain that his novel contribution to ideas on culture such as art, music or literature, 'rewrote the stakes of cultural analysis both inside and outside academic life' (p.10). He was the first prominent scholar to not only forge strong empirical links between cultural and social spheres, but to argue that culture plays a key role in the reproduction of privilege and advantage. Thus, Bottero considers that 'his most significant contribution to recent debates [is] the placing of cultural processes at the heart of class analysis' (2005, p.137). Beyond the sphere of class analysis, Blommaert concludes that Bourdieu established sociology 'on a different footing, providing a fundamental set of images of man and society deeply different from those advocated by Durkheim, Weber, Parsons or Lévi-Strauss' (2015, p.10). Suffice it to say that Bourdieu's work is fundamental in charting key class theory, particularly as regards education. In certain respects, it makes up for what is lacking in Marxism by bringing to light less tangible, more subtle markers of class since Bourdieu's writings tease out factors of a more cultural, social and psychological nature.

Bourdieu is also regarded as one of the scholars who was 'instrumental in the rise of sociolinguistics as a field of inquiry', even if he never would have self-identified as sociolinguist (Block, 2018, p.4). Most of the present chapter focuses on Bourdieu. The sections to follow will outline the Bourdieusian constructs most often used in social science research, the ‘conceptual trinity of field, capital and habitus’ (Devine and Savage, 2005, p.13). Subsequently some common critiques levelled at Bourdieu’s theories are surveyed, before finally turning to several other facets of social class which merit consideration.

3.2 Bourdieu’s approach to class

Bourdieu defines class:

> not only by its position in the relations of production, as identified through indices such as occupation, income, or even educational level, but also by a certain sex-ratio, a certain distribution in geographical space (which is never socially neutral) and by a whole set of subsidiary characteristics which may function, in the form of tacit requirements, as real principles of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated (this is the case with ethnic origin and sex). A number of official criteria: for example, the requiring of a given diploma can be a way of demanding a particular social origin. (Bourdieu,1984, p.102)

A number of points are worth commenting on. Firstly, there is tacit reference to Marx and Weber contained in the declaration that class goes beyond relations of production and class indices such as occupation, income or education.[24] Clear reference is made to gender and ethnicity, although Bourdieu’s purported lack of attention to such matters has fuelled some critique, as we will see in due course. His definition refers to geographical space, that is, geographical distribution of class, which can be interpreted in terms of, for example, how certain areas of cities and towns become affluent or upmarket districts, while others are regarded working-class neighbourhoods. This aspect of class, far from being purely conceptual, is manifest in objective, real worldly things like housing prices, crime rates and the presence (or absence) of certain types of shops, cafes, and businesses. The ‘whole set of subsidiary characteristics’ is about how just about anything can be a class marker, from ‘a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting’ (Bourdieu, 1977a, p.87), to how a person eats and speaks, one’s leisure interests, or the here mentioned ‘official criteria’ such as formal qualifications.[25] Absent from the definition but important in contrasting Bourdieu’s approach to traditional class theory is that it is a ‘relational’ model of ‘social space’ (Bottero, 2005, p.143). Clearly illustrating this relational aspect, Weininger summarizes the distinctive features of Bourdieu's approach as follows:

> These include its conceptualization of the class structure as a multidimensional social space; its emphasis on consumption, viewed as an arena of social life in which the possession of economic and cultural capital can be "theatrically" displayed; and its relentless focus on the symbolic dimension of practices (Weininger, 2005, p.107)

Weininger here points not only to the centrality of the social in Bourdieu's work, but, to its intertwined relationship with consumption, cultural and economic capital, as well as the symbolic dimension. In a similar vein, Brubaker highlights the social, among other aspects that set Bourdieu's ideas apart, in particular from those of Marx:

> The conceptual space within which Bourdieu defines class is not that of production, but that of social relations in general. Class divisions are defined not by differing relations to the means of production, but by differing conditions of existence, differing systems of dispositions produced by differential conditioning, and differing endowments of power or capital (Brubaker, 1985, p.761)

Distinction (1984) is where Bourdieu wrote most of his ideas on social class. As mentioned above, he articulated novel, especially cultural dimensions of class that expanded on Marx and Weber's previous conceptualizations, a move that proved somewhat of a game-changer for class analysis. In the following oft-cited lines from this seminal work, Bourdieu parts company with Marx's view of class as dominated by economic, material factors:[26]

> [E]conomic barriers – however great they may be in the case of golf, skiing, sailing or even riding and tennis – are not sufficient to explain the class distribution of these activities. There are more hidden entry requirements, such as family tradition and early training, or obligatory manner (of dress and behaviour), and socializing techniques, which keep these sports closed to the working class (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 217)

Bourdieu's understanding of social class included class as embodied, manifest in behaviour and implicitly understood in social etiquette. It is not only 'economic barriers' that determine access to what are typically upper middle class leisure activities, but also ‘more hidden entry requirements’ which relate to certain ways of being, usually brought about by early socialization. This is about what Bourdieu calls cultural, social, and economic capital. These different forms of capital, to which I now turn, are almost certainly Bourdieu’s most influential contribution to class theory.

3.3 Bourdieu’s forms of capital

Bourdieu’s metaphors of capital clarify the process through which people can (or as the case may be - cannot) maximize their overall value in social groups through inheriting and accruing various kinds of capital over the course of their lives (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012). Basically, the notion of capital for Bourdieu was about ‘the set of actually usable resources and powers’ (1984, p.114), and these can come in economic, cultural, social or symbolic forms. The first of these, economic capital refers to material wealth and income, financial inheritance, and assets, such as property or land (Cook et al., 2012). It is the closest to a Marxian concept of capital[27], and Bourdieu seems to assume its axiomatic nature, a faux pas for commentators like Callinicos (1999).

The second kind, cultural capital is by far the one to which Bourdieu devoted most attention in his writing, not least since it is very much interwoven with other well-known concepts he wrote of, such as habitus and field (discussed below). Cultural capital can be described as ‘the possession of legitimized knowledge and know-how, which might be transformed creatively and generatively into sub-capitals or derived capitals such [as] ‘educational capital’, ‘linguistic capital’, ‘artistic capital’ and so on’ Block (2018, p.89).[28] While most often discussed in terms of credentials and cultural knowledge, cultural capital can take on three forms: ‘an embodied state, that is in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body: in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods; and in the institutionalized state, resulting in such things as educational qualifications’ (Skeggs, 1997, p.8). Those in more dominant social groups typically have high volumes of both economic capital and cultural capital.

This being the case, Bourdieu expanded on traditional class theory, in agreement with Weber’s ideas on opportunity hoarding, while also sharing Marx’s views on the divisive power of property ownership. Contrary to his predecessors however, Bourdieu viewed cultural phenomena as central to stratification. That is, ‘[c]ultural capital works rather like property:

those with it can gain at the expense of those without' (Bennett et al., 2009, p.11). Originating in some of Bourdieu's earliest work (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964), cultural capital was seen as a mechanism through which privileged classes could define their cultural practices as superior to the less privileged, not because of any inherent value, rather, as Robbins (2005) well notes, because of its exchange value. Part and parcel of cultural capital then is the idea of taste, which in itself becomes 'a resource…deployed by groups within the stratification system in order to establish or enhance their location within the social order' (Crompton, 2008, p.147). Important to understanding cultural capital is the notion of what is deemed 'legitimate culture' (Bourdieu, 1984) at a given time and place. Bourdieu connects legitimate cultural capital to the privilege of dominant classes not only in terms of the varied preponderance of cultural capital they may possess, but also in relation to what is termed 'aesthetic disposition'. Drawing on philosophical readings of Kant[29], Bourdieu appropriated the concept of 'Kantian aesthetic' to argue that 'cultural capital, in its most valorized forms, comprised a distinct 'aesthetic disposition'' which is at odds with the everyday world of urgencies and necessity, more characteristic of working-class groups (Bennett et al., 2009, p.11). In other words, these valorized forms of cultural capital are most often 'constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practise of activities which are an end in themselves, such as scholastic exercises or the contemplation of works of art' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.55).

Education was a fundamental aspect of cultural capital for Bourdieu. This is clear for example in how he regarded those with professions like primary school teachers and university professors as endowed with cultural capital (while they may not necessarily possess much economic capital).[30] Education as a form of cultural capital has increased in importance in recent decades, so much so that according to Swartz (1997) it may now be on a par with property in its capacity to transmit privilege inter-generationally. That is, the increased value of education has led to 'a shift in upper-class inheritance practices from one of direct transfer of property to reliance upon the cultural transmission of economic privilege: investment in education gives upper-class offspring the chance to appropriate family privilege and wealth through access to the more powerful and remunerative institutional positions' (Swartz, 1997, p. 181). Unfortunately, acquiring educational credentials does not hold the same guarantees all round. As Robbins reminds us:

> There is no one Culture with a capital C to be acquired by the socially deprived which will remedy their supposed deficiencies. Cultural capital does not possess absolute

> value which is quantifiable. It only possesses value in exchange and the exchange is a social struggle as much as a struggle of cultural value judgement. (2005, p21)

The third form of capital, social capital, is essentially about ‘connections to and relationships with equal or more powerful others’ (Block, 2012b, p.192). Social capital is at the root of the oft-heard adage that it is ‘not what you know but who you know’. While economic and, especially cultural capital, featured more prominently in Bourdieu’s writings, the ‘social space’ is nonetheless central to his work. Social capital is intertwined with the latter two forms of capital, to the extent that they shape and contribute to its trajectory, like ‘aces in a game of cards’:

> The social world can be conceived as a multi-dimensional space that can be constructed empirically by discovering the main factors of differentiation which account for the differences observed in a given social universe, or, in other words, by discovering the powers or forms of capital which are or can become efficient, like aces in a game of cards, in this particular universe, that is, in the struggle (or competition) for the appropriation of scarce goods of which this universe is the site. (Bourdieu, 1987, p.4)

In the class structure models elaborated in *Distinction* (1984) and elsewhere, Bourdieu bases his analyses of occupational division of labour on a complex array of correlations between various indicators of cultural capital (e.g. taste in food, music, art and entertainment) and economic capital in the French population samples studied. This entailed not only quantifying the volumes of economic and cultural capital an individual possessed, but also compositions (i.e. ratios) of each, and individual trajectories, documenting changes to their capital over the course of a lifetime (Weininger, 2005, p.87). In this way, Bourdieu was the first prominent scholar not only to insist on the importance of cultural capital in class dominance, but also to forge links between cultural and social capital, showing how the latter is partly a product of the former. Economic capital is also key, since it most often goes hand in hand with cultural capital for those in dominant social groups (but some critiques of Bourdieu as regards his lack of attention to economic capital follow below).

Another facet of how economic and cultural capital work to mould social capital is how ‘people actively invest in cultural capital to realise economic capital – and vice versa. The complex interplay between these two forms of capital give rise to the emergence of a number of different social groups' (Savage et al., 1992, p.100). These forms of capital are thus integral to patterning of the 'social space' or 'space of relationships' (Bourdieu, 1985). And having a clearer picture of one's social relations is important to gaining a clearer picture of their class location, since:

> On the basis of the knowledge of the space of positions, one can separate out classes, in the logical sense of the word, i.e., sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar positions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances. (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 725)

Hence, we see that although social capital features somewhat less in Bourdieu's writings overall, it is firmly embedded in his understandings of class formation. The final form of capital, symbolic capital is a little less straightforward to define, not least since it entails a kind of emergent surface-level embodiment of the other forms of capital. For Bourdieu, symbolic capital is 'another name for distinction', and constitutes:

> nothing other than capital, of whatever kind, when it is perceived by an agent endowed with categories of perception arising from the incorporation of the structure of its distribution, i.e. when it is known and recognized as self-evident (Bourdieu, 1991, p.238)

Close in meaning to Weber's status groups, symbolic capital is about 'the recognition [agents] receive from a group' (ibid)[31], that is, 'respect and reputation' (Crompton, 2008, p.101). It tends to more often be discussed from rather cynical perspectives that highlight the potential for misrecognition that comes with the territory of capital. Weininger's reading of Bourdieu in this regard is worth quoting in full:

> When differences of economic and cultural capital are misperceived as differences of honor, they function as what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital…This function can be understood as a "legitimizing theatricalization which always accompanies the exercise of power," and which "extends to all practices and in particular consumption." Consequently, according to Bourdieu, "[t]he very lifestyle of the holders of power contributes to the power that makes it possible, because its true conditions of possibility remain unrecognized…" (1990a [1980], p. 139). Insofar as this is the case, the

> misperception of social space – which characterizes both the dominant and the dominated, but to the advantage of the latter – is also “symbolic violence.” (Weininger, 2005, p.102)

Hence, symbolic capital is partly about status and honour contributing to power. But the ‘true conditions of possibility [of power] remain unrecognized’. Hidden from view is the crucial role of capital. That is, intergenerational transmission of privilege, through economic capital and cultural capital. Power and privilege of dominant social groups can thereby be naturalized through the idea of meritocracy, and discourse that ‘defines the ‘valuable’ and the ‘not valuable’ [the latter] invariably associated with ‘inferior’ social groupings’ (Crompton, 2008, p.102). Thus, ‘‘symbolic power’ (the capacity to define the good and valuable) can also constitute ‘symbolic violence’ via the ‘dis-identification’ of inferior groups’ (ibid), all of which is wrapped up in the notion of symbolic capital. As a result, ‘objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in symbolic relations of power’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p.238).

Holborow connects these ideas to language, writing that ‘[d]rawing on the Bourdieusian theoretical framework of language as cultural and symbolic capital, language skills in late capitalism…have shed their cultural and educational associations in favor of their value potential in the production process’ (2015b, p.3). This point is taken up again in the next chapter, where English learning and social class are central. So far, we have seen how these various forms of capital interact with each other to shape life chances and social trajectories. We have gained insight into how people use these resources, as Crompton puts it, ‘in a continuing struggle for advantage that will also (in part) define what is to be seen as ‘valuable’ (2008, p.2). In addition, Crompton explains that for Bourdieu, ‘various combinations of capital constitute a habitus’ (ibid, p.100) - another of his central concepts, to which I now turn.

3.3 Habitus

The concept of habitus dates back to Aristotelian thought, and was thereafter employed ‘sparingly and descriptively by sociologists of the classical generation’ including Weber, Durkheim and Veblen (Wacquant, 2006, p.318). It featured in philosophical theory, most notably Husserl’s phenomenology, but it is in Bourdieu’s work that one finds a ‘thorough sociological revamping of the concept’ (ibid). Habitus has been written about and defined over the years by numerous scholars including by Bourdieu himself. The way in which different scholars have written of habitus has emphasized different points of interest. Heller and McElhinny (2017, p. 210) refer to habitus as ways of thinking, doing and being that we are socialized into as children, that become deeply rooted and normalized; ‘an enduring orientation to how to make sense of the world and what to value in it’. Crompton writes of ‘a set of acquired patterns of thought, behaviour and taste, that is, a system of dispositions (or competences) shared by all individuals who are products of the same conditionings’ (2008, p.100), emphasizing the tendency for patterns to emerge across similar profiles and experiences. Loïc Wacquant - a former student of Bourdieu’s - defines habitus as ‘the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting *dispositions* or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu’ (2006, p.318, italics in the original). This definition takes into account ‘society’, and what is ‘social structure turned mental structure’.

Habitus is therefore about how certain social norms, ways of being, doing and thinking, become instilled in us and tend to guide our thought and behaviour patterns. Bourdieu (at least nominally) allows scope for agency in his conceptualization of habitus, writing that ‘the conditioned freedom [habitus] secures is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from a simple mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings’ (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 95). In other words, we are neither destined to become what is engrained in us by ‘initial conditionings’ nor are we free to create with ‘unpredictable novelty’ the self as we please over the course of our lives. It is a combination of both. While habitus is ‘enduring’, it is ‘not static or eternal: dispositions are socially mounted and can be eroded, countered, or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces’ (Wacquant, 2006, p.319). Along similar lines, Weininger, (2005, p.90) describes the purpose of habitus as that of ‘escaping both the objectivism of action understood as a mechanical reaction ‘without an agent’ and the subjectivism which portrays action as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention...’. Bourdieu’s attempts to find the middle ground between objectivity and subjectivity, action and structure should serve to vindicate him somewhat from accusations of determinism, which are discussed shortly. However before turning to some of his critics, in the next section I look to another of Bourdieu’s well-known concepts, that of field. The concept is directly related to habitus, since ‘[p]eople’s competence to participate in fields is critically related to their habitus, and their socially and historically acquired dispositions’ (Divine and Savage, 2005, p.13).

3.4 Field

Fields may be understood as ‘domains of social activity and practices constituted and shaped by particular ways of thinking and acting and what is considered tasteful and distinctive’ (Block, 2018, p.89). Examples of such include politics, art, religion, philosophy, philology, and so on (Bourdieu, 1993b, etc.). In Bourdieu’s definition:

> Fields present themselves synchronically as structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of the characteristics of their occupants (which are partly determined by them). (1993a, p.72)

This means that fields are not just any kind of domains of social activity but involve acquired skill and levels of competence among actors (Divine and Savage, 2005), as well as the struggle for positions, power, distinction, and legitimacy (Block, 2014). This is implicitly understood by those operating within the field since those involved are most often ‘endowed with *habitus* that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes and so on’ (Bourdieu, 1993a, p.72). Such an implicit and shared understanding of interests within a given field may even seem ‘absurd, irrational, or sublime and disinterested’ to those on the outside (ibid). Thus, for Bourdieu, a particular cultural field ‘has its own autonomy and can only be understood in terms of the relationships that are internal to it’ (Bennett et al., 2009, p.12). That said, Bourdieu also observed that ‘there are homologies across fields so that similar principles can be detected across different worlds and thereby general principles of classification and distinction unravelled’ (ibid). And so:

> [w]henever one studies a new field, whether it be the field of philology in the nineteenth century, contemporary fashion, or religion in the Middle Ages, one discovers specific properties that are peculiar to that field, at the same time as one pushes forward our knowledge of the universal mechanisms of fields (Bourdieu,1993a, p.72)

Thus, on the one hand, fields have their internal relations, ways of operating and immanent rules, yet as Bourdieu argues, there are also similarities, patterns or ‘universal mechanisms’ to be found across fields, a point which is crucial in spelling out how exactly fields become ‘sites of both the reproduction and creation of sociocultural and socioeconomic stratification' (Block 2014, p.55). As Bennett et al. explain:

> The fact that he was able to show that diverse cultural fields had similar properties, and that they also overlaid each other, so that those who aspired to 'intellectual' positions with respect to (say) music might take up similar positions with respect to (say) the visual arts, sporting preferences and home décor, is central to his argument that advantage and privilege accumulate in the overlaps and homologies between differentiated fields (2009, p.13)

Elsewhere, Swartz comments on how field 'permits an impressive mapping of social positions and their continuity over time' (1997, p.290), which brings us back full circle to social capital, and how the various forms of capital interact with each other through the mechanism of habitus, within and across various fields, to reproduce privilege and advantage, or lack thereof. Having moved from a more micro focus of the various types of capital to habitus, and on to the more macro perspective of field and how differential advantages and 'homologous sets of distinctions' are yielded across them (Bennett et al., 2009, p.13), I turn below to some of the critiques made of Bourdieu's work.

3.5 Bourdieu's critics

Whilst there is considerable discussion of agency throughout Bourdieu's writings, some scholars maintain that Bourdieu fails to expand on the topic much beyond this (Lamont, 1992; Halle, 1993; Jenkins, 2000). Crompton, for instance, surmises that:

> despite Bourdieu's apparent emphasis on the importance of transcending the binaries of action/structure, subjectivism and objectivism, his analysis ultimately reverts to the embedded structures of material and cultural inequalities and is thus in fact determinist
>
> (2008, p.102)

Bourdieu is also taken to task by Goldthorpe (1996) for overlooking social mobility trends, particularly in western societies. Swartz writes that '[t]he concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and field stress the tendency to perpetuate structures inherited from the past' (1997, p.290). Habitus however seems to generate most debate. Given that '[t]he propensity of habitus is clearly to address new situations in habituated ways' (ibid), it does not leave a whole lot of room for agency, or 'unpredictable creation' to use Bourdieu's language. Elsewhere, in rather scathing criticism of Bourdieu, DeLanda (2019, p.63) laments the 'high degree of automatism' bestowed upon habitus. Writing that '[o]ne may wonder why a theorist of the stature of Pierre Bourdieu can commit himself to the existence of such an unlikely master process like the habitus', the author asks '[i]n what worldview…can such a move make sense?' (ibid).[32]

Despite the fact that the definition of social class by Bourdieu cited earlier on page 45, refers to gender and ethnicity, it has also been argued that his treatment of these matters is inadequate. For Bennett et al. (2009, p.1) the 'shortcomings of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of gender…proved a compelling challenge' to overcome in their research – the authors claim Bourdieu paid little attention to the abundant feminist literature in circulation at the time of his writing. McNay (2000) similarly argues that Bourdieu's account 'appears to miss or perhaps to suppress the abiding incongruity' in the ways in which men and women occupy gender roles and the conflictual subject positions that can arise. On another note, as regards ethnicity, French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2004, p.197) laments how immigrants - who increasingly made up the proletariat in France around the time of Bourdieu's writing were absent from much of his work - particularly *Distinction*. In fairness to Bourdieu, one does find a considerable number of references to gender and ethnicity throughout his writings and there are also those who defend him on these counts. Derron Wallace, for example maintains that the topic of ethnicity is addressed by Bourdieu more than he is generally given credit for - particularly in his later work (BBC Radio 4, 2019; and see Wallace, 2019). Bourdieu's consideration of ethnicity is also readily apparent in remarks such as the following:

> the principles of vision and division of the social world at work in the construction of theoretical classes have to compete, in reality, with other principles, ethnic, racial or national, and more concretely still, with principles imposed by the ordinary experience of occupational, communal and local divisions and rivalries. (Bourdieu, 1987, p.7)

Likewise, Weininger observes that Bourdieu gave far greater attention to the topic of gender in later years. Still, it is the primacy of class over other demographic characteristics that is difficult to deny in Bourdieu's work and is problematic in light of increasing awareness among social scientists as regards the importance of intersectionality in research.

On another note, David Harvey (2005, p.35) makes the point that '[i]t never did make much sense to speak of a distinctively US versus British or French or German or Korean capitalist class'.[33] Harvey would probably agree with those who lament Bourdieu's 'conception of society as a nationally bounded entity with class being approached as a set of relations necessarily internal to the [French] nation' (Bennett et al., 2009, p.2). Such an approach ignores the transnational nature of (capitalist and middle/upper) class connections, and while, as Harvey argues, it may never have made much sense to do so, it makes less and less sense given the increasingly transnational character of 'relations between culture and society' (ibid).

Finally, is Bourdieu's purported tendency to gloss over the importance of economic factors. That is, his treatment of economic capital as 'more or less self evident' (Weininger, 2005, p.87; a point also made by Callinicos, 1999). According to Bottero (2005, p.138), 'cultural resources [play] an equivalent role to economic resources in generating stratification position' in Bourdieu's work. From a more Marxist standpoint, Holborow also writes of 'Bourdieu's intention …to reassert the force of the cultural and symbolic, including language, over and beyond the economic' (2015a, p.59). Shortcomings in Bourdieu's theory in this respect, can perhaps only be remedied in contemporary research by adding Marxist underpinnings, which emphasise the unequivocal importance of economic capital.

The foregoing critique notwithstanding, Bennett et al. (2009, p.10-11) maintain that while sceptical commentators may 'have made telling criticisms, they have also often obscured Bourdieu's major achievement, his concern to think in relational terms, by linking cultural capital to an account of the cultural field and the formation of social groups'. There is no denying the value and the prevalence of Bourdieu's concepts, now common currency among social scientists. The critiques of Bourdieu surveyed here do little to change the fact that his work is 'canonical' and will 'continue to be relevant not as a fixed codex but as a flexible source of inspiration allowing exploratory confrontation with new relevant data, methodologies and theoretical concepts' (Blommaert, 2015, p.10). Have so far reviewed the work of Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Bourdieu in relation to social class and more, there are still some facets of class that have not yet been dealt with. In the final sections of this chapter I thus turn my attention to a few remaining class matters.

3.6 Class, nationality, occupation and social mobility

As discussed earlier, class is best considered in tandem with the other identity inscriptions which influence opportunities and life chances - age, gender, race, nationality, sexuality, and so forth. The way nationality, for example, can constrain or facilitate possibilities for the accrual of different forms of capital, is readily apparent when one considers matters of passports, visas, and border controls. Global migration makes it important for us to move 'beyond the framework of purely national frames of reference to understand how social relations of distinction are formed and operate once national boundaries are extensively traversed by international movements of both people and cultural forms' (Bennett et al., 2009, p.4). This applies especially to the so-called ruling or capitalist class. As Harvey writes:

> '[t]he case that the ruling class anywhere has ever confined its operations and defined its loyalties to any one nation-state has historically been much overstated…..The international links were always important, particularly through colonial and neocolonial activities (2005, p.35)

The cross-national character of upper-class advantage and power is important to bear in mind, not least because it contributes to the widening gap 'between the haves and have-nots in contemporary societies' (Block, 2014, p.65). Because 'this disparate group of individuals…exercise immense influence over global affairs and possess a freedom of action that no ordinary citizen possesses' (Harvey, 2005, p.36), class inequalities are best understood as part of a complex cross-national web, as opposed to happening within isolated nations. This discussion connects with the matter of English language and social class, not only in terms of English as a class marker (discussed next chapter), but also the role of English as a lingua franca on the global stage, and its capacity to expedite access to various forms of capital. Similarly, travel and mobility can act as markers of distinction (see Block, 2014), a point related to John Urry's writings on what he terms 'the new mobilities paradigm' (Urry, 2007, p.290; and see Elliot and Urry, 2010).

Technology is of course key to facilitating global connection, and mobility. Recent work by Melissa Gregg (2018; BBC Radio 4, 2020) also calls attention to how modern use of technology retraces familiar lines of class and stratification. Discussing the shifting notion of servitude in society, Gregg points to how timesaving technology-based services (like the delivery of take-out food or online purchases) creates delegated work whereby the user's privileged use of time puts workers in the position of waiting for these algorithmic decisions to be made. This ultimately constitutes unequal power - while some individuals use technology advantageously to free up time, others ultimately wait for and depend on their decisions as a source of income (ibid). Although not Gregg's focus, class, race and nationality clearly play a role in who gets what jobs, and thus who gets to make decisions and who must wait.

Occupation is fundamental to the study of class. Marshall sees the occupational approach to class analysis as one which 'has proved most illuminating…and shows greatest promise for further sociological understanding' (1997, p.27). It has been foundational to class analysis since early on, having clear links to economic capital (pace Marx), status (pace Weber) and social patterning (pace Durkheim and Bourdieu). The mapping of class groups derived from occupational groupings began with Marx's well-known bourgeoisie-proletariat dichotomy and has carried on into recent decades in more elaborate forms, ranging from the work of Dahrendorf (1959) to Goldthorpe and colleagues (e.g. Goldthorpe et al., 1987) and the work of Marshall (1997), among others. Such mappings can result in vast numbers of occupation-derived class groupings, as is the case with Weeden and Grusky's neo-Durkheimian model of occupations as micro-classes (see Weeden and Grusky, 2005a, 2005b). New models of occupation-based class categorization are continuously emerging, in line with evolution of the occupational structure itself (e.g. see Hugrée et al., 2020).

These types of class categorizations and focusing exclusively on occupation have some drawbacks, including lack of attention to the unemployed, the precariat, holders of wealth and may also overlook additional cultural dimensions and artefacts (Crompton, 2008, p.68). They also fail to address the fact that, as Marshall and Firth observe, 'how people feel about or experience changes in their class standing is an issue that has been almost entirely overlooked' (1999, p.29). All of that said, placing occupation at the centre of class analysis has the major advantage of yielding useful, factual data which can ultimately inform us about 'the extent of equality of economic and social opportunity' in a given society (Blanden et al., 2005, p.2).

Blanden et al. (2005) are above discussing the process social mobility, which, 'in common parlance is generally seen as a comparison across generations – between a person's family background and his or her adult career achievement' (Payne, 2017, p.vi). Research into social mobility accordingly measures 'the mobility of individuals between occupations and/or occupational origins, both between generations and over the lifecycle' (Crompton, 2008, p.208). Given its capacity to gauge the openness of societies, mobility research 'has long been a corner-stone of class analysis' (Bottero, 2005, p.13). Such research can investigate mobility over the lifetime of an individual or cohort(s) of individuals, or it seeks to identify trends among the population over varying time frames. Sociologists therefore can work on two different axes, termed relative mobility and absolute mobility, that is, investigating differential mobility trends among different class groups (the former) and/or total mobility including changes to the occupational structure over time (the latter). Absolute mobility, in other words, happens when 'a broader range of jobs emerges, which in turn necessarily means that large parts of the population move up in terms of income, status, prestige and ultimately power' (Block, 2014, p.46).

Some scholars use evidence of high mobility rates to argue that equal opportunity prevails, and that 'true meritocracy is in operation' (Crompton, 2008, p.208). Around the time when some of Bourdieu's earliest work highlighted reproduction of elite advantage in French schools (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964), U.S. sociologists Blau and Duncan declared, to the contrary, that '[o]bjective criteria of evaluation that are universally accepted increasingly pervade all spheres of life and displace particularistic standards of diverse ingroups [and] intuitive judgments' (1967, p.429). Saunders (1996) similarly argued that ability and effort trump class background in his longitudinal study in the UK which registered children's intelligence test scores, measures of motivation and work attitudes (at age 11) as a predictor of occupational success later in life (by age 33).

Other UK based studies around the same period however showed quite the opposite. Marshall and Swift (1993) for example found that men from working class origins were significantly less likely than their middle-class counterparts to reach the occupational category of service class, even when they held the same level of qualifications. Goldthorpe's study of relative and absolute mobility in the UK, despite confirming extensive absolute mobility, reported 'inequalities' at the level of 'relative mobility rates [which had] remained generally stable in modern British society' (Goldthorpe et al., 1987, p.328). The findings, it was concluded, reflected 'inequalities of opportunity that are rooted in the class structure' (ibid). There is by much consensus among social scientists on the fact that the conditions which gave way to post-war social mobility have all but disappeared (Wilby, 2006; Roberts, 2001, etc.), and cross-national comparisons of intergenerational mobility from the field of economics confirm that

‘Britain, like the United States, is at the lower end of international comparisons of mobility’ (Blanden et al., 2005).

The emergent picture is thus complex. While in Britain, those like Saunders argue that the very fact that there is ‘more room at the top’ (1996, p.16) denotes overall better standards of living being enjoyed by middle and working classes alike, others emphasize that relative disadvantage and differential opportunity persists nonetheless (e.g. Marshall and Swift, 1993, 1996; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992, etc.). Others point to how ‘family influence on social position has remained remarkably buoyant in the face of these changes’ (Prandy and Bottero, 2000, p.276; see also Blanden, Gregg and Machin, 2005). Research also indicates that much of the upward mobility documented is short range, which means that moving minimally upward to the next class location is common, but moving upwards (or downwards) to a class location very different to one’s family of origin is still far less likely to occur (e.g. Worsley, 1970; Giddens, 1973; Roberts, 2001).

Changes to the occupational structure and the social significance of different occupations serve to further muddy the waters. For example, researchers report that accountancy in the UK is the profession which shows the least social mobility over the last three decades (Duff, 2017, p.1083). Similarly, the unchanging socially exclusionary nature of law firms (in London) has been documented (Cook et al., 2012). On the other hand, occupation categories like that of ‘clerk’ have been associated with declining levels of social exclusivity from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, linked to vast expansion of positions (Bottero and Prandy, 2001). Intergenerational mobility measurements, that is, comparing father/mother to son/daughter, are complicated by such differential progression across occupations. Furthermore, ‘if movement between two jobs (say 'clerk' and 'manager') is routine and typical (such that 'clerks' can reasonably expect to become 'managers' in due course) then it is not clear in what sense real social 'mobility' is taking place’ (Bottero and Prandy, 2001). In addition, gender differences greatly complicate the measurement of mobility, one reason being that women tend to be ‘employed in exclusively female forms of work (notably routine white-collar employment) . . . [which] entails daughters being more mobile than sons in relation to their fathers’ (Savage, 2000, p.80). Space does not allow for further discussion of this topic (see Baxter, 1988; Crompton and Sanderson, 1990; Payne and Abbott, 1990; Crompton and Harris, 1998), but suffice to say that the ‘collective confusion’ (Payne 2017, p.vi) observed in relation to social mobility, is not without good reason.

Several points can be drawn from the foregoing discussion. First is that ‘western industrial societies have been characterised by extensive social change, forcing very high levels of absolute social mobility’ (Bottero, 2005, p.223). Still, many class theorists argue that even so, inequality between generations persists (ibid). While social mobility is a research topic in its own right, being informed as to its multifaceted, complex nature can only serve to enrich any kind of class analysis work. That is, despite the complexities it opens up, contemporary mobility ‘should be at the heart of our understanding of class identities and class formation’ (Savage, 2000, p. 82). For this reason especially, the discussion of mobility is pertinent to the present study.

3.7 Affective elements of class

There are other facets of class which have featured little in the discussion so far. In Chapter 1, we saw some facts related to class inequalities and health. Important to note also is that some studies report mental health issues to be more prevalent among the disadvantaged or so-called ‘socially excluded’ (e.g. Morgan et al., 2007).[34] The psychological and affective impacts of class have been the focus of a number of qualitative studies in recent decades, Bourdieu’s work *La Misère du Monde* (in English: *The Weight of the World*) (2007/1993) being one such example. Illustrating his ‘underlying interest in the phenomenology of the affective encounter’ (Robbins, 2005, p.22), this qualitative study of working class groups in France documents the suffering, despondency and misery associated with participants’ low social standing, and lack of economic, social, cultural and capital (Reay, 2005; Crompton, 2008).[35] Disappointment, shame and self-deprecation are also part of the picture conjured up by studies like those of Rubin (1976), and Sennett and Cobb’s (1972) oft-cited U.S. based study. Throughout his work, Bourdieu also wrote of the ‘ease’ manifested by those in the ruling classes, associated with ‘self-assurance (the exact opposite of insecurity)’ derived from ‘real competence’, while the working classes ‘are forced to choose between negatively sanctioned outspokenness and silence’ (1977b, p.659). This idea of being at ease is taken up by various sociologists who discuss their observations of privileged students and participants in educational contexts (e.g. Khan, 2011; Vandrick, 2011; Shin, 2012, etc.). By the same token, various studies that document the affective elements of class note a sense of being ill at ease among working class participants in certain social circles (Sennett and Cobb, 1972; Reay et al., 2009; Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, etc.).

The other side of this coin is explored by Lamont (1992, p.175), who observes that the character traits most valued by the upper-middle-class men she interviewed are more characteristic of middle- and upper-middle-class cultures. Noting how these men 'participate unwittingly in social reproduction', Lamont writes of socio-economic excluders which serve to marginalize working and lower-class people when 'financial standing, class background, or power are taken into consideration when evaluating whether people are interesting'. Cultural excluders, 'less direct but nevertheless palpable' contribute in a similar fashion to social reproduction. For example, 'a high level of education, the upper-middle-class attribute par excellence, is one of the most valued signals of high cultural (and socioeconomic) status' (ibid). Crucially, Lamont's observations negate conceptualizations of class that relegate it to a mind made construct, such as that of Bourdieu's contemporary Raymond Aron, which 'regards the psychology of individuals, with all the contradictions it may allow for, as the essence of the phenomenon' (1969, p.75).

3.8 A constellation of dimensions model

The discussion up to this point is far from exhaustive, and much more could be added to the list of class dimensions and important factors, for instance consumption (Veblen, 2007/1899; Goldthorpe et al., 1969; Peterson, 1992; Roberts, 2001), the widening gulf between one parent and two parent households (Crompton, 2008) an elaboration of class as embodied and multimodal (Bourdieu, 1990), as well as further discussion of structure and agency (e.g. McNay, 2000; Reay and Wiliam 1999; etc.). Class dimensions can potentially extend to a very broad range of factors. In proposing a constellations of dimensions approach to class that responds to the need for a 'unified framework for understanding class' (Block, 2014, p.50), Block (2022) suggests that class dimensions can include (but not be limited to) the following list:

- education (access to, level of formal education attained and knowledge/skills acquired)
- technological knowhow (access to, familiarity and ability to use evolving technologies)

- social contacts and networking (regular and routinised social encounters e.g. colleagues, friends, acquaintances, etc.)
- societal and community status and prestige
- consumption patterns (the brands one buys, shopping in particular places or spaces)
- embodied behaviour (bodily movement and posture, clothing, how one speaks, eats, etc.)
- pastimes (e.g. from sports and games to social media activity like Facebook, Twitter)
- relative position in political hierarchies in society
- quality of life in terms of physical and psychological comfort and health
- the type of neighbourhood one lives in
- neighbourhood and the type of dwelling (caravan, flat, house, etc.)
- mobility (both highly-localised, public and private transport, and that which constitutes 'travel' – both work-related and tourism)
- proximity to other people during a range of day-to-day activities
- dimensions and sizes of spaces occupied, and type of dwelling (caravan, flat, house, etc.)

(based on Block, 2022)

This means that class analysis could potentially draw on anything contained in these chapters so far, and more. A constellations of dimensions approach treats class as a multifaceted construct upon which diverging lines of thought and theory converge, and ultimately entails:

> a constellation of interrelated dimensions of class [that] aims to capture a long list of factors that may be seen to index class, bearing in mind that such indexing occurs in different ways in different contexts, cultures and societies (Block, 2018, p.91)

A similar kind of approach is advocated by Crompton, who discusses class theory in terms of plurality, tolerance of contradictions, and how we might see class analysis 'as addressing a series of different topics as well as reflecting a variety of theoretical perspectives' (2008, p.207). Adopting a constellations of dimensions approach means maintaining a 'Marxist analysis' as a base, but also 'adding elements that derive in the first instance from Weber, but that many would associate with Bourdieu and a long list of contemporary scholars' (Block, 2018, p.91). This means being on board with the notion that class is:

> first of all a materially based phenomenon, grounded in the relationships of individuals and collectives to the means of production, as well as the circumstances of the provision of labour power to (and the exploitation of individuals and collectives by) those who own and control the means of production (Block, 2022, p.58)

Rather than seeing the above list however as a definitive representation of class the list and proposed unified framework should be regarded ‘a heuristic, something that helps [us] think about class…and as such it is constantly being revised’ (Block, 2018, p.91). In other words, the complex phenomenon of social class is ‘something of a moving target that evolves as societies themselves evolve’ (ibid) and is best understood and researched with this in mind.

So far, I have charted out many of the key topics in class analysis literature, moving from traditional class theory in Chapter 2 to the work of Bourdieu in Chapter 3, where I have also discussed occupation and mobility as key to class analysis. Finally I have here surveyed several other class dimensions that can inform our understanding of class, looking to recent work by Block (2018, 2022) which proposes a unified framework, a constellation of dimensions approach to class. This approach is on board with Wright’s view that rather than seeing Marxism and Weberian class analysis ‘as rival schools’ we might best consider how ‘they tap different kinds of causal mechanisms that are appropriate for different contexts of analysis’ (Wright, 2015, p.114), as discussed last chapter. In the next and final literature chapter, I turn to the topics of social class in education, English learning and class, and Barcelona, Spain, the context of this research.

Chapter 4: Class inequalities in education, neoliberalism and English

> Was it possible that the children of the working class, however fortunate, however plucky, could hold their own later with those who in the formative years drank deep and long of every fountain of life? No. It’s impossible. Below every strike, concealed behind legislation of every order, there is this fact – the higher nutrition of the favoured few as compared with the balked childhood of the majority. Nothing evens up this gross injustice. (McMillan, 1912)

Education is central to the discussion of class and inequality in various ways. It constitutes an acquirable form of cultural capital, since a high level of education is, as Lamont writes, the ‘upper middle class attribute par excellence’ (1992, p.175). It plays an important role in the intergenerational transmission of privilege (Swartz, 1997). The discussion of mobility in Chapter 3 relates directly to education since ‘educational credentials [are] a key mechanism for access to good jobs’ (Bottero, 2005, p.152), although as will be argued here following Bottero and others, they are necessary but not always sufficient to achieve (relative) success. The attainment of educational qualifications is enmeshed in market competition for work, and the concomitant struggle for the most valued skills, abilities, and credentials, as dictated by a changing market. For much of the world’s population, this includes learning English, given its role as global lingua franca in the corporate world, in academia and beyond, and also that English language qualifications are increasingly a requirement for graduation from or entry to higher education, for example in Spain. This places many individuals under increasing pressure to improve their English and/or attain relevant language qualifications, a matter decidedly linked to class, since possessing resources often facilitates success. Accordingly, the first sections of this chapter are devoted to the topic of social class in education, paving the way for the discussion of class, inequality and English that follows in the latter parts of the chapter. In the first sections I present various arguments put forth by educational sociologists, many of whom are equally as convinced as Bourdieu was of ‘the necessary unit of relations between home life, education and occupational destiny’ (Bennett et al., 2009, p.29). The sections thereafter embark on the topic of neoliberalism, providing an overview of what it is and how it affects education today. That done, I zoom in on the case of South Korea where a good deal of research on English and inequality has been done, before turning to the topic of English and inequality more generally in the final sections of the chapter.

4.1 Social mobility, the attainment gap and class struggle

Well over a decade ago Rosemary Crompton noted that despite much overall change and improved standards of living in industrial societies, in some respects little has changed:

> One important feature of advanced industrial societies which despite legislative efforts (such as educational reform etc.) to achieve greater 'openness' and equality of opportunity, this has not as yet, been completely achieved. Although overall rates of upward mobility have risen, the different relative rates of class mobility prospects have proved remarkably resistant to change (2008, p.214)

As noted in Chapter 2, social mobility research is something of a blurred landscape. But what is certain is that education has direct causal links to any continuity or change in relative mobility patterns. This is of course because, as scholars have argued in Bourdieu's footsteps, academic or educational capital 'constitutes a commodity that can be traded for access to higher level study or for employment' (Block, 2014, p.61). There is much agreement that university education is a strong predictor of occupational success (Lamont, 1992, p.11; Bottero, 2005), and that the attainment of university credentials is correlated with higher levels of income (e.g. Reich, 2001). Many educational sociologists also point to the palpable consequences for those who forego higher education qualifications (Halle, 1984; Collins, 1979).[36]

In the UK context, a narrowing of the gap between overall rates of working- and middle-class students staying in education (Blanden et al., 2005, p.2), is in line with vast expansion of the higher education field and greater numbers attending university globally overall (Pujolar, 2018; Reich, 2001).[37] This fact notwithstanding, there has been a further widening in the inequality of access to higher education in the UK (Blanden et al., 2005; Reay et al., 2009). As a result, 'universities themselves remain the focus of social mobility debate where highly selective, elite research academies have been consistently censured for their lack of progress in encouraging wider access' (Duff, 2017, p.1083). Even in countries like Ireland, where there are largely free tuition fees and substantial funding is made available to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the numbers of working-class students enrolled in higher level institutions is relatively low (McGuire, 2016). Clearly the issue is not only about acquiring the financial means to attend university, but that there are more complex psychosocial factors at play. In the UK context, government agendas in recent years have sought to address inequalities in education (see Morrison, 2014). Nevertheless, much talk of the attainment gap between pupils from affluent and deprived backgrounds persists both in the media (McInerney, 2013; Wilby, 2006) and in sociology literature (Reay 2006; Reay et al., 2009, etc.).

Various studies over the years in a range of contexts have documented the lack of success, disengagement and/or resistance of working-class students to academia (Willis, 1977; Eckert, 1989; Sennett and Cobb, 1972; Reay, 2005, 2006; Pichler, 2009; Crozier and Reay, 2011; Sears et al., 1957; etc.). Reay points to the perennial worry over underachieving children, in particular white working-class boys, also reporting 'the black and white working-class girls agonizing' and fraught with worry about their future prospects (2006, p.301). Willis' oft-cited work of the 1970s *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* illustrates how school-going boys of working-class background implicitly accept their fate as being destined for working class manual jobs later in life. Among other things, Willis maintains that it is 'their own culture which most effectively prepares some … for the manual giving of their labour power' (1977, p.3). An anti-authority stance is adopted by these 'lads', and disdain shown for fellow school goers who strive for success. In her study over a decade later in the US, Penelope Eckert writes of a group of high school students (so-called 'burnouts') who similarly have 'an adversarial relationship' with and are generally 'focused on transcending the school context' (1989, p.3 and p.22). This group is juxtaposed with the so-called 'jocks' who are more school oriented and generally play by the rules. Willis' and Eckert's respective findings echo other research on working-class adults from around the same period and earlier. Vanneman and Cannon (1987) for example found that men of working-class background looked down on middle class office white-collar workers whose jobs entail 'pushing paper' as opposed to 'really working'. Bronfenbrenner refers to 'the traditional image of the casual and carefree lower class' (1958, p.423) as opposed to the rational and controlled middle class, 'guided by a broader perspective in time' (ibid, p.422, citing various studies). Drawing on earlier studies, Lamont later wrote that working-class individuals 'frequently replace the standard achievement ideology with physical toughness, emotional resiliency, quick-wittedness, masculinity, loyalty and group solidarity' (1992, p.176).

Older studies from social psychology also debated in the past the extent to which permissive parenting was responsible for the apparent lack of academic motivation among lower-class children. A highly influential study which was widely accepted in educational circles around the post-war period concluded that middle-class parents 'place their children under a stricter regimen, with more frustration of their impulses than do lower-class parents’ (Davis and Havighurst, 1946, p.698-710). This was later contested by Sears et al. who argued that the first interpretation had been readily accepted since it ‘provided an easy explanation of why working-class children have lower academic achievement motivation than do middle-class children – their mothers place less restrictive pressure on them’ (1957, p. 446-447). Research thereafter tended to lend support to the latter findings (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Bernstein, 1975), that middle-class parents tend to be ‘more permissive and less punitive toward their young children’ than those in the lower classes (Sears et al., 1957, p.446-447). Noteworthy here is a certain blaming of working-class parents, which as Reay (2006, p.303) argues, has still has not gone away. Reay presents teachers’ comments about parents who are purportedly ‘more interested in watching TV and slobbing out’ than helping with homework, underscoring not only how some teachers can lack true understanding of class issues, but also how parents are fully blamed for issues that are highly complex and in part systemic.

In the US context, Sennett and Cobb (1972) discuss fieldwork carried out in an American grammar school. Similar to Willis’ and Eckert’s studies above, they discuss the so-called ‘ordinary’ masses of students from working-class (but, they specify, not poor) backgrounds, who wait out school years ‘as though serving time’ (1972, p.82). Averse attitudes to teachers and school, in Sennett and Cobb’s understanding, had developed as ‘an attempt to create among themselves badges of dignity that those in authority can't destroy’ (p.84). They argue that this ‘counterculture’ comes about not as an inevitable corollary of the boys’ putative working-class characteristics or dispositions, but partly as a result of teachers’ disapproving attitudes towards them. Teacher disapproval of these students was palpable in the classroom, as was their subtle preferential treatment of a few exemplary pupils. Sennett and Cobb link such displays of teacher preference to sentiments of frustration among the so-called ‘ordinary’ students.

Similarly, in presenting more recent data from second level institutions in the UK, Reay finds that working-class students can and do apprehend teachers’ preferential treatment and encouragement of their middle-class peers. In one such secondary school, ethnic minority students of working-class background spoke of perceived unequal classroom treatment and teacher´s validation of classroom input from their (middle-class) peers while largely ignoring their attempts to engage. Reay reports their general frustration and ‘sense of alienation’ (2006, p.298). Elsewhere, younger children of working-class background interviewed in a primary school spoke of teachers’ disapproval of their language use and put downs that ‘make you look stupid' (Reay, 2005, p.918). Earlier research carried out by Charlesworth involving young people of working-class background in Rotherham, England registers much of the same – feelings of disempowerment in the education system, and the 'invisibility of lacking an identity invested with a value recognized by others' (2000, p. 93).

Overall, the foregoing studies convey how the educational experience for many working-class students means feeling negatively judged and overlooked. They also bear witness to how teachers, are not only, as Bourdieu (1984) maintained, endowed with cultural capital, but also get to be veritable gatekeepers of same. That is, their capacity to define what counts as legitimate goes well beyond curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation (Bernstein, 1975), and extends to more personal aspects like language use and speaking style (as Bourdieu, 1991 argued). This is not to suggest that the teachers are wrong to encourage correct language use or otherwise in a classroom, rather to call attention to the processes through which middle-class values are deemed legitimate and superior, perhaps even sometimes unbeknown to the teacher. As Sennett and Cobb observe, far from being 'intentionally mean' teachers can 'unwittingly set in motion in the classroom a vicious circle that produces exactly the kind of behavior they expect' (1972, p.83). Such classroom dynamics are more likely an unintended consequence of the fact that middle-class children simply 'come to the task of education in schools more consonant with what schools expect' (Block, 2014, p.148).

In fairness to teachers, they themselves may not come to the task of education with class inequalities to the forefront of their minds. As Reay (2006) points out in the UK context, teacher training completely neglects matters of class. Some may also subscribe to popular meritocratic ideals circulated by the media and much political discourse, despite likely awareness of educational inequalities. The worrisome consequence of these dynamics, as Reay makes clear, is how working-class students clearly internalize lack of validation. When coupled with poor academic achievement, many such students interpret their place within the system as proof of their own 'stupidity' (Reay, 2006). This no doubt exacerbates the issue, since the state of being riddled with self-doubt hardly makes for a smooth path to achievement nor is it conducive to the self-direction and mental clarity necessary for (academic) success. Needless to say, in cases where proactive support and guidance is not forthcoming from family, these issues bear all the more weight.

4.1.1 Privilege and struggle

Scholars have also turned their attention to more privileged students in education, exploring their struggles and positioning as regards class inequalities. Reay for instance writes that her data illustrates ‘the depth of the psychic damage social class inequalities can inflict on both working and middle-class children’ (2005, p.917). Her classroom observations document for example ‘working-class children’s resentment and antagonism’ towards one middle-class student, which Reay maintains ‘was a consequence of class envy, resentment and anger towards the most socially privileged child in the classroom’. This boy was even subject to bullying of sorts, ‘universally called ‘poshie’ by the other children’ (ibid, p.915). In their fieldwork, Sennett and Cobb (1972) observed similar interpersonal dynamics between students. They write of how those on the receiving end of preferential treatment from teachers were marginalized by the majority of ‘ordinary’ students, whose anger generated by this lack of recognition is likely displaced onto these classmates (since as Sennett and Cobb point out, it is not the successful students who are to blame, but the overall workings of the system they find themselves in). In this school context ‘the split between the many and the few who are expected to "make something of themselves" is out in the open; the aloofness developing in the second grade has become open hostility by the sixth’ (1972, p.82), thereby generating suffering for middle-class students too.

The difficulties class inequalities generate for middle-class individuals is only part of the picture, however. In the same study cited in the previous paragraph, Reay uses different data excerpts to show the ‘contempt, arrogance and sense of being better [displayed by] a group of white middle-class girls in a social mixed classroom’ (2005, p.918). The teenagers complain about being unfairly seated next to ‘the dumb kids’, deemed a waste of their time since its sole purpose, as they understand it, is to help their struggling peers. Elsewhere, drawing on Bourdieu’s work, Khan and Jerolmack (2013) capture how in St. Paul’s, an elite US high school, feeling at home in this kind of social sphere goes hand in hand with the frequent successes experienced by these students:

> within these elite institutions, it is those students from advantaged backgrounds who are most likely to succeed because throughout their lives, before ever crossing the threshold of these spaces, they have developed the dispositions and cultural capital that give them an advantage over others. They feel at home within the institutions that reward them for exactly the type of behavior that is “native” to them (2013, p.11)

Not just academic skill and knowhow, but the ‘knowledge of how to carry oneself within the world is a very challenging resource to acquire’ (p.16) for those not endowed with it early on. This ability to embody valued middle-class norms come from early socialization, and echoing the earlier discussion of habitus, are ‘learned through repeated experiences in elite institutions’, which as Khan and Jerolmack point out, are simply more likely if one is wealthy. Like the previous authors, Khan and Jerolmack document the struggles of some privileged adolescents in this environment. Nonetheless, one of the points that clearly emerges from their account of St. Paul’s is that by dint of being born into upper middle-class families, these students are streets ahead in the stakes of fitting in socially and acquiring the knowhow to navigate academic environments and challenges.[38]

4.1.2 Working-class struggle and self-elimination

The obscure and unspoken workings of validation, selection, and generally fitting in, can amount to legitimate rejection of and/or unintentional discrimination against working-class students. Perhaps worse, it can lead to self-elimination. The idea (or perhaps, the visceral feeling) that university is not for ‘the likes of us’ is among the reasons education researchers commonly cite for working-class students opting out, choosing a lower-level institution, an apprenticeship, immediate paid employment or otherwise (e.g. Ball et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2009). These are examples of what Bottero calls ‘class differentiated choices’ (2005, p.152). Bourdieu of course, drew attention to these mechanisms early on:

> The sense of one’s place, as a sense of what one can or cannot ‘permit oneself’, implies a tacit acceptance of one’s place, a sense of limits (‘that’s not for the likes of us’) or, which amounts to the same thing – a sense of distances, to be marked and kept, respected or expected. (Bourdieu, 1985, p.728)

Yet the problem is more complex than a straightforward matter of access. In earlier work in 1960s France, Bourdieu and Passeron posed the question as to whether those persons not eliminated from higher education had escaped the effects of disadvantaging factors:

> The simple statistics of gaining entry to higher education in relation to categories of social origin shows clearly that the scholastic system continually eliminates a high

> proportion of children originating from the most disadvantaged classes. Does this mean to say that those who have escaped elimination have completely escaped, once and for all, the effects of disadvantaging factors? (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964, p.13)

The short answer for Bourdieu and Passeron, was no, and still today, educational sociologists draw attention to the challenges faced by working-class students who make it to higher level education. These challenges may be related to ‘the disconnection from family and cultural backgrounds’ upon entering university (Wentworth and Peterson, 2001, p.10). Challenges faced can be affective and self-esteem related, as per Diane Reay’s findings that some students felt they ‘failed to be the right person for traditional universities’ even when fully qualified to be there (2005, p.923). Drawing on poignant data excerpts, Reay illustrates that some such students ‘still often have to deal with the shame and embarrassment of not being good enough’ throughout their university years (ibid). A later study by Crozier and Reay reports that ´even experience of earlier academic success and a positive learner identity did not protect [working-class students] entirely from anxieties about their ability and the notions of their ´clever 'and very self-confident peers´ at university (2011, p.150-1). Reay et al., (2009, p.1105) write that ‘the mismatch between high-status university and a low-status social background produces a dearth of opportunities for self-affirmation at university, creating tension and unease’. The said mismatch between low-status social background and high-status organizations has been investigated in relation to occupational outcomes by Friedman and Laurison (2019), who report in the UK context, that those from working-class families in prestigious occupations earn up to 16% less than coworkers from privileged backgrounds, even when they have followed similar trajectories (for example attending Oxbridge universities).

Students from working-class backgrounds are also less likely to be well connected socially. According to Fischer’s (1982) findings, people with higher education and income tend to have broader, deeper, and richer networks. More specifically, in terms of wealth he notes that ‘[t]he more income, the more nonkin respondents named, and the more secure the practical and companionable support they received’, while the more educated reported ‘more companionship, more intimate relations and a wider range of geographic ties’ (1982, p.251-252). These findings may also be significant for working-class students who attend university since parents’ education level is likely to influence their social network and opportunities. On that note, Reay et al. find that their working-class informants are so focused on working hard that ‘they have foregone wider cultural accomplishments’. For these students, ‘[e]ducational success comes, if it comes at all, through visible industry and intensive single-minded application' (2009, p.1109). In one UK university with a high percentile of working-class students, Crozier and Reay (2011) report that attendees are also more likely to have part-time jobs and avail less of the social opportunities that come with life on campus.

The latter point is also taken up by Celeste Kinginger in her account of an American student from a disadvantaged background named Alice, who moved to France for a study abroad program as part of her degree. Kinginger, who taught Alice French for some time, describes her as a 'diligent, engaged student who earned high grades, though she worked the equivalent of a full-time job' while attending public university in the US (2004, p.224). This full-time job continued right up to before she left for her study abroad program in France, in order to save the necessary means to get by. Upon moving to France Alice finds herself 'both an insider and an outsider within the group of American students' given that she is not from a middle-class background. She has fewer material resources and has 'an acute awareness of the privileges afforded to her as a study abroad participant' (ibid, p.232-3) which also means her strife to improve her French is channelled through somewhat out of the ordinary social encounters. Kinginger's insightful account illustrates how as a working-class student, Alice is almost always on the fringes of 'normal' middle-class student life in the study abroad program.

None of this is to suggest that the individuals in question are simply passive victims of their class related circumstances. Indeed, 'agency is always there, even if it may be not always be immediately evident or effective in any perceivable way' (Block, 2022, pp. 65-66). In discussing the hard work and dedication of university students from working class backgrounds, Kinginger, Reay, and other scholars illustrate just that. In fact, Reay et al. discuss how as a result of succeeding against all odds, coming from backgrounds lacking in resources, the working-class university students they interviewed 'had developed an impressive array of internal resources, and display a self-reliant independence' (2009, p.1107). However, if, as Robert Reich claims, 'the real value of a college education to one's job prospects has less to do with what is learned than with who is met' (2001, p.130), unequal access to social capital may well leave working-class individuals at somewhat of a disadvantage. As Lamont writes:

> How do people get access to valued professional resources such as well-paying jobs, interesting assignments, and promotions? Degrees, seniority, and experience are essential, but also important are being supported by a mentor, being included in

> networks of camaraderie, and receiving informal training. Getting access to these informal resources largely depends on sharing a valued cultural style. (Lamont, 1992, p.1)

We are reminded once again of the importance of social capital, and other forms of cultural capital and shared (middle-class) values. As Bennett et al. observe, the various forms of cultural capital are not equivalent 'in the degree of advantage or 'profit' they afford those who hold them' (2009, p.31). Since, as Holborow observes, 'the human capital promise that learning is earning is forever crashing on the rocks of oversupply' (2015a, p.23), educational credentials combined with other forms of capital is a surer bet than credentials alone. In his 2001 book *The Future of Success,* Reich similarly concedes that 'as the numbers of degree-holders mount, the mere possession of a college degree is less useful as a selling tool'. A college degree is helpful, but perhaps 'not as much as many ambitious parents assume' (2001, p.129). In fact one of Reich's main arguments throughout the book is that knowledge and skill are no longer sufficient to achieve occupational success in the 'new economy'. He maintains that creativity is now more than ever, key to getting (and staying) ahead. However, honing such creativity has a lot 'to do with the families and circumstances you're born into' (2001, p.49). Unsurprisingly, there are strong correlations between family income and educational attainment (Blanden et al., 2005). As Crompton (2006) observes, the crucial role of family in education, class reproduction and mobility is recognized across diverse accounts of class, be they 'economic' or 'culturalist'.[39] The crucial role of family, in particular parenting, is the focus of section 4.1.3 below.

4.1.3 Middle-class parenting

A long list of researchers draw attention to the tendency toward highly proactive parental involvement in middle-class education (e.g. Reay, 2012; Lamont, 1992; Lareau, 2003; Ball, 2003; Bennett et al., 2009; etc.). Even if, as Reich (2001) reports of the US context, parents are busier than ever and statistically spending less time with their children, middle-class parental involvement is manifest in ways that are unspectacular to most. This includes run of the mill activities like keeping an eye on grades, helping with homework, and showing up to parent teacher meetings (Wallace, 2017; Ball, 2003). It may also extend to arranging extracurricular activities and/or private tuition, educational summer camps, time abroad to improve language skills, or choosing a private school in a 'good' catchment area, with the best resources (Reay, 2012; Reich, 2001). Parental involvement for some may mean assisting sons or daughters financially throughout university and during early career endeavours like apprenticeships and otherwise (Wilby, 2006; Friedman and Laurison, 2019). Of the US context Lamont writes:

> Competition permeates everything in the American upper-middle-class world. It even permeates the world of children: parents often make considerable financial sacrifices and efforts to have their children admitted to the “best schools,” not only at the college level but at the elementary and high school level as well (1992 p.42)

Indeed, as Saunders suggested of the UK context over two decades ago, private schools ‘may offer middle-class parents some means of insuring their less able offspring against downward mobility’ (1996, p. 54). For Reay (2012), the very existence of private schools exacerbates the attainment gap. As she vehemently argues, ‘private schools have been one of the principal means by which elitism and social divisions are produced and perpetuated in England’ (p.591). In a similar vein, Bottero writes that educational credentials from highly ranked institutes are part of the ‘competitive struggles over resources (and the symbolic legitimation of claims to resources) which position groups in social space’ (2005, p.151). But as has been argued here, it is such education credentials coupled with other forms of cultural capital, including intangible knowhow, and the right kind of connections that best ‘secure and perpetuate access to economic capital’ (Crompton, 2008, p.101). The end result, is that middle class children are ‘always likely to do better than equally bright, hard-working working-class children’ (Bottero, 2005, p. 152).

On another note, Reay also calls attention to the fact that while there is growing recognition of the salience of class processes within health (see Chapter 1), the field of education is ‘routinely presented as classless’ (2006, p.290). This is consistent with what Bourdieu and Passeron argued early on, that ‘milieu of social origin’ is among ‘the most concealed and denied’ factors of differentiation (1964, p.13). What Reay aptly labels the ‘thorny area of attitudes’ means that ‘the majority view is that class position and poverty are lifestyle choices: that anyone who wants to be, and tries hard enough, can be middle class’ (2012, p.593). The excessive focus on social mobility and the need to raise ambitions thus becomes an ‘ideological whip with which to beat’ those unable to compete or get ahead in the current system (ibid). Rather than recognizing class inequalities and struggles in education, people often deny or are simply unaware of the importance of class. Instead, they draw on scripts derived from the kind of behaviouralist individualism outlined above, harshly judging those who do not emulate mainstream, middle-class ideals. This is all, as Reay well notes, ‘classic neoliberalism’ (2012, p.588). Education systems, institutions and classrooms cannot be wrested from the context of global neoliberalism in which they are embedded. In the next section I turn to the topic of neoliberalism, which serves as a broader backdrop to the discussion of English learning and inequality that is taken up in the latter parts of this chapter.

4.2 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism, a term which has only begun to be heard in public/lay realms in relatively recent years has been described in shorthand terms such as ‘market fundamentalism’ (Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009)[40], ‘economic ideology’ (Piller and Cho, 2013) and ‘the voice of global capitalism’ (Holborow, 2015b, p.1). The doctrine of neoliberalism has its earliest associations with the Mont-Pèlerin Society, founded in 1947 by influential Austrian political philosopher Frederick Von Hayek. A diverse group of scholars including well known figures like Karl Popper, Raymond Aron, Ludwig Von Mises, and Gary Becker met regularly in Mont-Pèlerin, Switzerland to share ideas on the future of economic liberalism on an international scale (Stewart, 2017).[41] Von Hayek and associates advanced classical nineteenth century ideals of laissez-faire entrepreneurialism (Holborow, 2007) which was to later inspire influential British and US based economists like Milton Friedman of the Chicago School neoliberalism following the global financial crisis of the 1970s. The economic model ‘that would come to sweep the world’ (Klein, 2007, p.117) was first rolled out in Chile in the 1970s under Pinochet’s military government, unleashing devastation in the process of radical economic reform. Today, neoliberal policies have come to dominate in countries as improbable as China, once opposed to free-market principles (Holborow, 2015b). Neoliberalism can be summarized as:

> an economic philosophy or doctrine which rests on the belief that market exchange is the guide for all human action and, therefore, that states should ensure that conditions are created for the “free” market to thrive. The privatization of state services, greater labor flexibility, protection of corporate interests and, in the advanced capitalist economies, a further increase in the size and importance of a country’s financial sector relative to its overall economy are all outcomes of neoliberal policies (Holborow, 2015b, p.1)

Like Holborow, David Harvey also emphasises that under neoliberalism ‘the role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices’ (2005, p.2), which includes basic public services, necessary security, legal structures and otherwise. But ‘beyond these tasks the state should not venture’ (ibid). This is not to say that the state has disappeared, since as Wallerstein argues, capitalists require a large market, but also ‘need a multiplicity of states’ in order to ‘gain the advantages of working with states’ while circumventing states hostile to their interests in favour of those friendly to their interests (2004, p.24). It is, rather, the distributive function of governments that have declined, through ‘policies that have transferred public wealth to private corporations through favorable tax breaks, significant reduction of subsidies for social welfare programs, protective tariffs, and the financialization of natural resources and other goods and services’ (Ricento, 2018, p.229).

As McGroarty notes, ‘the varieties of neoliberal reforms implemented to date have often had uneven outcomes’ (2017, p.235). At the extreme, more egregious end of this, Klein (2007) connects stress-inducing competition and the increasing rich-poor divide, to dramatically increased suicide rates in societies like South Korea and Russia where economic reforms and shock therapy programs have been imposed. In terms of education, the impact of neoliberal values and policies has had far reaching effects across the globe, albeit in different ways. The said ‘elimination of the public sphere’ (Klein, 2007, p.18) has seen restructuring of education systems around the globe, with extensive privatization and marketization of educational institutions, as well as significant reductions in funding for the public sphere. In other words, states seek to reduce the costly burden of education through free market privatization, in doing so displacing the onus of financing education primarily onto the shoulders of middle- and working-class households, often resulting in significant student debt (Tollefson and Tsui, 2018). Full university fees payable nowadays by students in Britain and Australia for example, epitomize such mechanisms. In South Korea, as documented by a range of scholars, introduction of neoliberal policies across the entire education system has seen the erasure of former egalitarian strategies which sought to ensure equality in education between students from different backgrounds (Abelmann et al., 2009; Park, 2013a).

Various reforms brought about by neoliberal policies in education have also been the source of social disquiet in many parts of the globe. In Chile for example, country-wide protests erupted in 2011 over privatization and accusations of corrupt for-profit education, a movement which saw the occupation of elite high schools by students in protest, and in 2014 even theft and public burning of tuition contracts (i.e. student debt records) from one university (Franklin, 2014). In Ireland, government proposals to introduce full tuition fees in third level education have also given rise to protests in recent years (Walshe, 2008). In South Korea, plans for English immersion instruction in all public schools were introduced by the Lee Myung-bak administration (2008 - 2013) but abandoned due to fierce public opposition (Park, 2013a). As we will see in due course, the relentless drive for better English in South Korea's education system is embedded within neoliberal projects and policies whereby mastery of English is seen as synonymous with individual and national competitiveness in the global market (McGroarty, 2017; Park, 2013a).

The redirecting of responsibility onto individuals, coupled with the discourse of individual choice which is part and parcel of neoliberalism, is fitting for free market economic policies. Importantly, this logic of unremitting individual responsibility requires a mentality of compliance. According to neoliberal logic, individuals are treated as 'rational and self-interested beings who seek material advancement, while rejecting public or social intervention in their lives' (Howard, 2007, p.3). In order for this logic to function, certain modes of personhood or subjectivities must prevail as common sense. These so-called neoliberal subjectivities, which accept the logic of total self-responsibility, market primacy, and give rise to the prevalence of certain kinds of attitudes, are discussed next section.

4.2.1 Neoliberal subjectivities and attitudes to success

Neoliberal subjectivities essentially 'proclaim personal responsibility and authorship for one's economic and general wellbeing' (Abelmann et al., 2009, p.232) and are by now pervasive in many if not most parts of the world. Those who aspire to these prevalent ideals should be autonomous, independent, self-made entrepreneurs who 'produce (themselves) as having the skills and qualities necessary to succeed' (Walkerdine, 2003, p.240). Much self-help literature is a source of neoliberal ideals. Likewise, much media content frequently features such discourse. Neoliberal subjectivities give rise to the prevalence of certain thought patterns. For instance, as Reich highlights, tending to view our own challenging situations 'in solely personal terms', blaming ourselves for being 'inadequate', and overlooking 'the larger forces that are making all such personal attempts to achieve "better balance" more difficult or complicated' (2001, p.245). These are also the often harsh standards by which people frequently judge others, heard in common turns of phrase such as 'if (s)he really wanted to…' and so forth.

These statements may well be true, but they can also deny or downplay genuine disadvantage, various forms of struggle, and inequality - class based or otherwise.

Such manner of thinking can be subsumed under a doctrine better known as individualization or individualism, whereby ‘each person’s biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her own hands, open and dependent on decisions’ (Beck, 1992, p.135). While taking responsibility and seeking our own agency is surely a good thing, the individualist creed, when taken to the extreme, puts forward the idea that people have unlimited possibilities to be who they decide, and to achieve whatever they wish – one just needs to work hard, have the right mindset, and make the right choices. This is however to oversimplify matters, since often overlooked reality is that ‘true individualism is the privilege of the wealthy nations far more than the less wealthy nations, and the wealthy within single nations more than their poorer fellow citizens’ (Block, 2015, p.25).

In their aptly entitled article ‘Saying Meritocracy Doing Privilege’, Khan and Jerolmack discuss how their research participants at St. Paul’s, albeit just teenagers, subscribe to an individualist view of the world, characterized by limitless possibility and a focus on total responsibility. Such a worldview is coupled with a genuine lack of insight whereby ‘inequalities are increasingly acquired by the action of individuals and decreasingly ascribed by belonging to a class, race, or gender’ (2013, p.14). Khan and Jerolmack’s findings are consonant with Lamont’s (1992, p.78) observation that the middle-class adults she interviewed almost never referred to class, race or gender when asked about their feelings in relation to inferiority/superiority. By instead discussing personal characteristics and individual behaviour, these topics can be eschewed in favour of more legitimate preference and selection criteria, even when class (or race, gender etc.) is very likely to shape perceptions - consciously or not.

Over fifty years ago, Coleman et al. observed that ‘it is one of the characteristics of the class structure in the United States that lines of demarcation are not sharply or clearly perceived by the average citizen, and many are not known about at all by people whose lives they do not touch’ (1978, p.120). It appears that no major changes have come about in this regard. Studies show that the relatively privileged instead tend to attribute their own successes to hard work, motivation, independence, and other personal characteristics without concomitant recognition of resources or supports they may have also availed of (Lamont, 1992; Abelmann et al., 2009; etc). As Max Weber famously argued, ‘[t]he fortunate man is seldom satisfied with the fact of being fortunate, beyond this he needs to know that he has a right to his good fortune (1978/1924). In other words, most of us want to believe we are deserving of our good fortune (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). Meanwhile, as we have seen, those without such supports often blame themselves for lack of ambition, motivation, self-discipline or hard work (Sennett and Cobb, 1972; Reay, 2006; etc.). This is not to suggest that hard work, and various other personal characteristics are unimportant to success and achievement. No doubt they are extremely important. The issue is rather, the widely shared denial of the support and resources that form a commonplace, banal part of mainstream, middle-class lives and thus the equally prevalent inability to recognize class privilege. Because we are all endowed with varying amounts and forms of capital that is tied up in complex social networks, referring to hard work, motivation, and personal characteristics by way of explaining one’s successes (or failures) amounts to a part truth. To put the point in Marx’s terms ‘[s]ociety does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand’ (1973/1939, p.265). Prevailing neoliberal subjectivities however tend to downplay the interrelational and amplify the individual as a rational, controlled being, almost independent of one’s relations with others.

4.2.2 Human capital and the shifting employment market

Regardless of one’s resources, position in social space, or attitude to privilege, most people today are left with little choice but to take total responsibility in all areas of life, and to embrace the need for continuous self-improvement. Nowhere is this more evident than in education and employment, where individuals of all profiles find themselves under immense pressure to engage in life-long learning and upskilling to keep up with constant, fast-paced change. This is especially advantageous to corporations and employers who have a ready supply of educated, skilled and adaptable workers at ever-lower costs (Holborow, 2015a) and stand to benefit not only from compliance with neoliberal logic of total self-responsibility. This brings us to the idea of human capital, a term first coined by Gary Becker, and which is basically about investing and engaging in ‘activities that influence future real income through the imbedding of resources in people’ (Becker, 1962, p.9). Human capital investments can be made by companies in their personnel, by parents in their children, or by individuals in themselves professionally, educationally, in terms of health and emotional wellbeing. The necessity to procure and maintain a livelihood means jobseekers and workers must adapt to the shifting requirements of corporations and the jobs market. It also often means being under pressure to emulate an ideal candidate in the eyes of the corporate world. This, even if as Holborow (2015a) notes, the individuals themselves do not always actually believe in the script that requires parroting in order to secure employment. On the topic of human capital, Park writes:

> In the neoliberal reconceptualization of labour as human capital, the individual worker is seen not merely as the seller of one's labour, but as a possessor of skills, competences, and aptitudes that have the potential for producing value. Thus, such human capital must be carefully nurtured and managed so that its potential can be realized maximally (2015, p.2)

Park argues that investing in human capital necessitates learning English as part of the ideal person profile South Koreans are faced with ubiquitously. In Asia, neoliberal personhood typically entails being well travelled and competent in English, and/or other languages such as Mandarin Chinese or European languages (Lo and Kim, 2012; Piller and Cho, 2013). Language skills are therefore often part and parcel of the upskilling and investment in human capital deemed necessary to get ahead, or even just to keep up. Here, English takes centre stage, given its present global dominance as a lingua franca in the academic and corporate world, and given the widely shared perception of English as the main language of social mobility (Blommaert, 2010; Ricento, 2018). Practicality aside, Park notes how:

> good English skills point to the speaker's previous transnational trajectory…constructing the speaker as an experienced cosmopolitan, someone who has been able to travel beyond the traditional bounds of Korean society and internalize some aspects of the global (2013a, p.297)

In this way, English itself becomes 'a key expression of' neoliberal, individualistic and highly competitive cultures, and a 'key terrain where competition is played out' (Piller and Cho, 2013, p.28). Furthermore, as various scholars have pointed out, not only is 'the right' kind of English desirable in crafting a self that ticks the boxes of neoliberal personhood, but the language itself is also enmeshed in the very processes of neoliberalism. Holborow for instance writes that '[t]he global market and its dominant neoliberal ideology, increasingly expressed in English have led some to hold that the language itself constructs the hegemonic order of global capitalism' (2007, p.51).

Elsewhere skeptical of ‘the functionalist, neutralizing accounts of language which have often prevailed in global English tropes’, Holborow (2015a, p.31) is on the same page as others who see this spread of English as greatly beneficial to some, while others stand to lose, ‘forced to bear the burden of underperformance’ (Piller and Cho, 2013, p.31). This process is very well documented by Piller and Cho in a landmark article discussing the context of South Korea, where they maintain that English has come to be ‘widely perceived [as] the cause of immense social suffering’ (2013, p.24). In the next section I zoom in on the case of South Korea, where a good deal of research has been done on the effects of neoliberal reform in education, in particular relating to pressure to improve English among the general population.

4.3 English Frenzy in South Korea

> That some people must learn English to get a job is a result of unequal relationships of power - not a solution to them.
>
> (Tollefson, 1991, p.210)

Tollefson’s words emphasize the point that English is yet another tool for drawing lines in the sand between the global haves and have nots, a point which is the focus of the remainder of this chapter and is also the focus of many scholars in South Korea, where there has been ‘unprecedented levels of English language learning’ in recent decades (Piller and Cho, 2013, p.28). The current state of affairs is such that Piller and Cho believe that not only is English ‘widely perceived to be the cause of immense social suffering in Korean society’ but that ‘this linguistic burden is simultaneously embraced as natural and incontestable’ (p.24). While South Korea is a country characterized by a high degree of national monolingualism - with Korean as its sole official language - English has come to occupy a relatively strong position in recent decades, particularly since the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997/1998 (Park, 2011, 2015). English medium instruction (EMI) classes have been introduced in most if not all universities, in line with a wider trend across the Asia-Pacific region (Kirkpatrick, 2014), and much of Europe. Preparing for and sitting standardized English language tests such as the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is very often a requirement for university students to secure a place as an undergraduate (Park & Abelmann, 2004). Several third level institutes have also introduced specific English language qualifications as a requirement for graduation, with some top-tier universities like Seoul’s Koryô University stipulating a minimum TOEIC grade of 800 (of 990) in order to pass

(Abelmann et al., 2009). Unsurprisingly, English is described by many third level students as the necessary 'base (*beisû*)' on the path to academic and/or career success (ibid, p.230). Beyond the university context, sitting such language tests are par for the course for South Koreans, with English required in the corporate world and competitive jobs market.

The population's 'near obsessive-quest' (Park, 2009 p.2) for competence in English over the last two decades is attested to by impressive statistics on TOEIC examinations. Koreans made up for more than 1.68 million of the total 4 million people who sat the exam in 2005, with a high number of those scoring in the top percentile of above 900 (Park, 2011). In accordance with global trends, many multinationals have introduced English-only policies over the last two decades, which entails conducting job interviews partly in English (Faiola, 2004). Through his interviews with mid-level managers in one such multinational, Park (2013b) shows how discrimination in the form of non-promotion is exercised against those not comfortable using English. In other words, this pressure is not only felt by South Korean citizens, but it can have very real (economic) ramifications. English is thus at the heart of corporate demands for continued investment in human capital.

Pressure to be competent in English is equally prevalent in primary and secondary education, evidenced by developments in South Korea since the late 1990s which have seen much social, political and economic change, and a major globalization project. The latter included the dismantling of trade barriers and marked the beginning of a turn towards neoliberalism in South Korean politics (Park, 2011, 2013a; Song, 2010; Piller and Cho, 2013). From these years onwards South Korea experienced a boom in the private after-school English education market, English-only kindergartens, and elite 'special schools' with classes through English, some with native-speaking teachers (Park, 2013a). Study abroad (*jogi yuhak*) opportunities became available for those who could afford it (Park, 2015; Song, 2010; Shin, 2012). Theme parks and English villages have also been established in recent decades where students can experience 'authentic' English language immersion without leaving South Korea (Faiola, 2004; Piller and Cho, 2013). On a more perturbing note, Park and Abelmann write of frenectomy, 'one of the more notorious items speaking to the English craze' (2004, p. 669), that is, tongue surgery carried out on some young children to help them better pronounce the letters 'r' and 'l' in English, reportedly difficult for Koreans to articulate.

South Koreans have also been migrating in droves over the last two decades to Anglophone countries like the US, Canada and Australia with the goal of obtaining ‘authentic’ English in mind (Shin, 2012, p.186). Partly attributable to the popularity of early study abroad, numbers migrating are so extensive that Yuyoung Song describes the trend as a ‘massive education exodus’ (2010, p.24). The pursuit of English fluency has also led to common split family arrangements often referred to as ‘wild geese families’ whereby one parent (usually the mother) takes the children to an Anglophone country while the other (usually the father) remains in South Korea sustaining the role of breadwinner (Park and Lo, 2012). By having their children reside in Anglophone countries from a young age, parents hope to inculcate them with a much coveted ‘native accent’ through early exposure (Park, 2011, p.446). Since middle class families unsurprisingly account for the vast majority of study abroad participants, early study abroad is frequently criticized ‘as a way in which the more affluent middle-class members secure their own privilege, embittering those who are “left behind”’ (Park, 2013a, p. 294).

Opportunities to study English are more restricted for those with limited financial resources, who sometimes reside further from the urban central locations where most English teaching institutions are clustered. In line with what has been discussed so far, such inequality is frequently viewed through the rather unforgiving lens of neoliberal subjectivities and total self-responsibility. Abelmann et al., (2009) for instance show how many of the students they interview subscribe without question to these ideals, to the point of lacking empathy. One interviewee at the elite Koryô University, for example, when asked about the less fortunate, responded that ‘they should work hard and make themselves rich too’ (2009, p. 235).

Such denial of privilege characterizes reports of exceptional English learners which frequently appear in the South Korean media. Park (2010) shows how these stories, which typically celebrate the learners’ endurance and effort on their English learning trajectories, are also patently neoliberal in their focus on unlimited individual potential, hard work and persistence, while downplaying social and material advantage. As Park argues, this kind of discourse serves to fuel widespread belief in the power of English in furthering social and career advancement but is devoid of recognition of the important role of privilege. Combined with the real need to learn English in South Korea, and its prominence as global lingua franca, such discourse helps to diffuse the idea that English is an indispensable tool in the creation of an imagined cosmopolitan self, ‘free to circulate in a wide and increasingly global arena’ (Abelmann et al., 2009, p. 230). Parents in South Korea pin high hopes on their investments in children’s English education, describing English as ‘wings to enable children to fly freely and high in a wider world’ (Bae, 2013, p.422) and ‘the most valuable asset in my children’s life’ (Song, 2010, p.31). The effect of such stories, as Park remarks elsewhere, is that ‘the middle-class desire for English and larger discourses circulated by institutional actors feed each other, the image of neoliberal personhood more firmly attached to the index of English with each reciprocation (2013a, p.298). While there may well be practical utility to learning English for educative and career purposes, English is somewhat nefariously embedded in the very expression of neoliberal personhood:

> not merely a practically useful language in the global age; neither is it a straightforward marker of one’s class. What is significant is that English becomes a language that fits the profile of a “neoliberal personhood” – a language that indexes individuality and mobility, some of the very essences that define the ideal person imagined according to the neoliberal worldview, one who seeks autonomy and independence from traditional structures and surpasses their constraints through a life full of mobility and vitality
>
> (Park, 2013a, p.297)

Song (2010) takes a similar tack. In questioning widespread faith in the value of English, he notes that unlike in some other Asian countries, South Koreans do not use English for daily communication. Park (2011) emphasises that English is not needed in the day-to-day work of many Korean citizens, apart from specific jobs entailing contact with foreigners. More concerning, Park (ibid) points to something of a moving goalposts phenomenon when it comes to English learning requirements for the employment market, documenting the rise and fall of TOEIC in the corporate world over the course of a decade. Around the mid nineties, TOEIC was the predominant means of assessing job candidates’ English levels in South Korea. However, once exam scores on a national level had improved greatly, rather than acknowledging that overall levels of English had improved, corporate spokespersons were heard publicly lamenting the persistent lack of oral competence and basic conversation skill in English among South Koreans. The media publicized complaints about how people had simply ‘learned to beat the system by developing test-taking skills, rather than competence in English’ (Park, 2011, p.450). Corporate entry requirements subsequently shifted away from TOEIC scores to verbal assessments and in-company devised methods, since a high TOEIC score was no longer trusted as an index of English proficiency. This is reminiscent of how, as Block (2018) remarks, field in Bourdieu’s terms is constantly in flux:

> Illustrative of their characteristic instability is the way in which what is deemed to mark taste and distinction can change over time. This occurs in the field of art, when far too many people have come to understand and appreciate an art form. It happens in the field of education, when too many people have acquired particular academic credentials (p.89-90)

In other words, the case of TOEIC in South Korea outlined by Park illustrates how what constitutes highly valued capital can change, standards can be raised, requirements recalibrated. Fields and markets are in constant flux, dictating the current requirements and what becomes outdated, of lesser value. This means that capital has relative value across different contexts, and that success in itself is always relative (Crozier and Reay, 2011). Be that as it may, dominant market trends intertwined with ideological discourse in South Korea continue to propound the notion that speaking English well enough will serve as 'a key for unlocking the hidden potential of the individual' (Park, 2015, p.1).

Scholars thus describe current affairs with English in South Korea terms of *yeongeo yeolpung*, 'English frenzy' or 'English fever' (e.g. Park, 2010, 2013a, 2015). The very real necessity to learn English for educational and occupational advancement may well be a fact of life for many Korean citizens. However, the massive investments in English are also in part driven by fear mongering, and anxiety about 'keeping apace, and not falling behind' (Block, 2012a, p.278). Even for those who question the dominant discourse, there is little choice but to take part, since English is 'heavily favored as a gatekeeping mechanism at various educational and employment transitions' (Piller and Cho, 2013, p.29). South Korea may be an extreme case, but unwavering faith in the 'mobility-endowing potential' of English (Blommaert, 2010, p.97) is not unique to this context. Indeed, the case of South Korea speaks to trends in other locations and the desire for English mastery among citizens of other countries. In the final pages of this chapter, I turn to the matter of English, class, and inequality in a range of other geographical locations, including Spain and Barcelona, the context for this research.

4.4 English, social class and inequality

Scholars in various contexts beyond South Korea have traced the links between English and socioeconomic inequality. In the Anglophone context of the US, Tollefson and Tsui (2018, p.258) write of how English medium of instruction (MOI) policies can provide ‘opportunities for powerful groups to further their own interests at the expense of others’, typically supported by anti-immigration lobbying groups. Stephen May makes a similar point in terms of *English Only* movements, which have endured in the US for well over a century, fueled by ‘the construction of the ideal nation-state as ethnically and linguistically homogeneous’ (2018, p.237). In postcolonial contexts, it is well known that English is more often fluently spoken by the wealthier middle classes, as is largely the case in India and Pakistan. In Malaysia, also a former British colony, Tollefson and Tsui note that graduates from privately funded English-medium institutions have enjoyed an advantage over fellow public university graduates in the stakes of the private sector employment, where ‘employers preferred workers with highly prestigious varieties of English’ (2018, p.264). Moving to Europe, from a language economics perspective, Gazzola (2015) reports a positive statistical correlation between English language competence and levels of income and education among French, Italian and Spanish citizens.

In the Spanish region of Castilla-La Mancha, Relaño-Pastor (2018, p.512) calls attention to what she labels the ´bilingual craze and pressure´ with reference to English-Spanish content language integrated learning (CLIL) programs in schools. In line with scholars like Codó and Patiño-Santos who see CLIL programs in Spain as ‘constructing or reinforcing unequal power relations’ (2018, p.483), Relaño-Pastor engages in a critical discussion of the CLIL programs. These programs - first rolled out in Spain in 2016 - are obligatory at primary level but have seen an unequal uptake among students at private/semi-private and public schools (that is, the latter have more freedom to choose and thus partake less). Relaño-Pastor’s ethnographic study demonstrates how social categorization processes directly related to these programs lead to ‘academic hierarchies and social exclusion´ implicating schools, teachers and students (2018, p. 514). One participant reports the widespread perception that ‘ghettos’ reflecting elite and non-elite groups are created. The participant also reports parents´ rejection of certain schools due to the perception that there are classrooms ‘for smart and dumb students’ (p.519) where bilingual groups are associated with smartness.

Relaño-Pastor also brings to light how non-CLIL teachers end up with a more challenging workload despite their fellow CLIL colleagues being younger and often less experienced. English thereby ´becomes a mark of distinction having to do with improved teaching conditions (i.e. a lower ratio of students per class, best students in terms of academic and social behaviour, and more academically involved families)’ (2018, p.516). Notably, all of this occurs despite national and regional language planning efforts ‘to democratize English language learning for all’ (2018, p.513).

On a related note, Piller and Cho report actual financial incentives being offered to professors in South Korea who lecture in English which they see as ‘exposing the myth of English MoI as the result of free choice as a lie’ (2013, p.36). Elsewhere, in China, Tollefson and Tsui (2018) document how teachers with appropriate English language qualifications earn higher salaries and even bonuses, paid in part by (middle-class) parents who prefer English MOI schools. Here, the increased numbers of classes in English in recent years, particularly in elite institutions, has ‘led to a widening gap between the schools in wealthy and poor regions and between the Han and linguistic-minority populations’ (2018, p. 266-7). The latter groups have lower university enrollment, in part due to difficult entry level language exams (in English and/or Chinese) and requirements for high levels of proficiency. Elsewhere in Malaysia, middle-class Chinese immigrants are at an advantage in terms of their offspring acquiring English as linguistic capital. These parents have overall remained supportive of Chinese MOI, since, according to Tollefson and Tsui, they are confident that their children ‘will be able to gain a highly prestigious English repertoire’ (2018, p.264) largely because they can financially afford bilingual Chinese-English schools or superior Chinese-medium schools.

A starkly different picture is painted by Garrido and Codó (2017) in the context of Barcelona, where they follow the progress of seven well-educated migrants from various countries of northern and western Africa over a period of five years. In contrast to the middle-class Chinese in Malaysia, these men find themselves unable to capitalize on their resources in the context of Catalonia, despite ´elite multilingual repertoires´ (p.34) attained through higher education and which mostly include fluency in English. Garrido and Codó show how the men, recruited through their involvement in a local NGO (a ´settlement agency´), are subject to deskilling and downward mobility processes. Furthermore, despite their adherence to popular ideas about the value of English in connecting with people from all over the world, the reality for most is that it plays little or no role in their day-to-day lives, nor has it helped them to secure paid work. As such, the language ´belongs either to their past or their future, but not to their present´ (2017, p.37). The question of paramount importance, therefore, is: ´(h)ow is it that in Spain, a society obsessed with the economic impact of its population´s lack of English language skills, the linguistic resources of these skilled migrants are not considered?´ (p.38). Garrido and Codó attribute this to:

> The process of practical and ideological deskilling to which these individuals are subject (of which delanguaging is but a facet)…the segmented and to a large extent racialised nature of the Spanish labour market but also…the role that social organisations play in ignoring or devaluing these migrants´ capitals and to their ideologies of integration, which are founded on the central role of local language learning. (2017, p.38)

Some have even acquired a good command of the local languages, Catalan and/or Spanish, but their job searches in Barcelona and elsewhere in Catalonia are still fruitless, apart from sporadic and short-lived ´survival employment´. Garrido and Codó´s findings are thus consistent with one theme recurrent in the present chapters. That is, various forms of capital combine and complement each other to produce the kind of worthy profile associated with neoliberal personhood. One form of capital such as educational credentials without other forms of social and economic capital is unlikely to have the same potential to further one's career and/or in terms of overall mobility.

These findings also underscore the importance of intersectionality, whereby race, gender and other demographics interlock with social class to shape who we are in the world. Moreover, we see how English - a highly valued form of global linguistic capital - here offers meager advantages, despite widespread celebratory discourse and claims to it being a language that unites and ignites potential. Sadly, Garrido and Codó´s case study informants had internalized what the authors refer to as 'tabula-rasa discourses' which ´largely categorise African men as unskilled, inexperienced, and language-less labour´ (2017, p.44). They reported wanting to become labourers, cleaners, or agricultural workers, despite being overqualified for these jobs. The authors conclude that such migrants are construed as lacking in many respects, thus not seen as ´possible possessors of valuable (upper) middle-class capitals, such as English´. They argue that ´[b]ecause of the class indexicalities of this language in Spain, even our informants with normative, standard English are not perceived to be legitimate speakers of the language´ (2017, p.46). In other words, English as a class marker is incumbent on other factors, namely, other forms of capital and demographic characteristics like race and nationality.

A shadow of doubt is thus cast over the true power of English to provide wings ´to fly freely and high in a wider world' (Bae, 2013), and the question of language ideology comes to the fore.[42] Tollefson and Tsui observe that in India, even groups without opportunity to use English for employment are persuaded that English MOI is ‘the key to social mobility’ owing largely to the ‘ideological foundation’ of MOI policy (2018, p.273).[43] In Hong Kong, the same authors document how implementation of Cantonese MOI in secondary schools following the British handover to China in 1997, saw a marked improvement in state exam scores (2018, p.264-5). However over the same period, English language scores on national pre-university exams showed a decline, which led to parents demanding a return to EMI. This change back to English was implemented in 2009 despite evidence that Cantonese medium of instruction (CMI) had raised exam grades, improved class participation and access to higher education. Tollefson and Tsui explain that CMI policy ‘was widely rejected by parents who believed that EMI schools offered better employment opportunities for their children, by businesses concerned about their ability to compete in a globalized economy that required English, and even by many CMI schools which were widely perceived as inferior to EMI schools and thus were unable to compete for students’ (2018, p.265).

In work from 2010, Jan Blommaert looks to the geographic context of Wesbank, a township in Cape Town which was among the first post-apartheid housing projects for low-income families. He finds, like others, that both teachers and learners deem English the ‘most important’ language in South Africa, a ‘prestige resource’ which will open doors to a better future (2010, p.96-7). For the high school students he talks with, dreams of imagined upward trajectories (of becoming rich, having a house bigger than a shack, or even just moving out of Wesbank) are predicated on knowledge of the right kind of English (2010, p.99). However, Blommaert makes the case that the varieties of English attained through their schooling (i.e., varieties that display ‘peripheral normativity’) will not serve them if they intend to move on to higher education. Rather, it will become an object of exclusion. Discussing center-periphery inequalities in terms of English, Blommaert emphasises the ‘unattainable nature of ‘ideal’ norms, the norms of the center for people in the periphery’ i.e., those like the youth of Wesbank, (p.96). Such gaps between the ideal normative English and the English used by his participants, he maintains, are systemic. That is, ‘they do not depend on the individual efforts (or lack thereof), intrinsic capacities and possibilities of subjects, but they are elements of social structures of inequality and the reproduction patterns of such structures’ (2010, p.99).

Blommaert also tells the harrowing story of a Rwandan refugee he names Joseph, in the process of asylum application in the UK. Joseph’s long affidavit submitted to Home Office ‘reads like a horror story and it grimly testifies to the profound distortion of the social fabric in Rwanda in the 1990s leading to the genocide of 1994' (2010, p.156). While a summary could hardly do justice to the intricacies of Joseph's poignant story, of relevance to the present discussion is his fluency in English, his 'best' language. Joseph's fragmented multilingual repertoire consisted of various African languages including Runyankole, some Kinywarwanda, bits of Swahili, French, and spoken fluency in English owing to his father's strict insistence on the children speaking English which he thought 'set us apart from other people and showed that we were more civilised' (affidavit excerpt, 2010, p.167). He was also however basically illiterate, having never attended school apart from some early years of nursery in Rwanda, following which his family fled the escalating political crisis. In Joseph's dealings with the Home Office bureaucrats deciding his fate as a refugee, spoken English fluency proved decidedly useless to him. Far from serving as even a minimal advantage to his asylum application, his command of English proved extraneous. Officials doubted Joseph's affidavit which attested to his reasons for ending up in the UK under 'deeply disturbing' circumstances. His atypical language repertoire was used against him, to accuse him of dishonesty about his country of origin, deciding that he 'could be a Ugandan national' (p.164), therefore should be deported to Uganda (where he had never lived).

Blommaert's detailed account of one refugee's application for asylum bears much weight for our understandings of how globalization 'generates immense wealth for some and *also* immense misery for others' (2010, p.153 italics in the original). It illustrates the reality that in extreme cases like Joseph's, English is of little assistance in opening doors - or as his father had hoped - in setting him apart from others. Rather, this case runs counter to the claim that English 'enables not only the rich and powerful, but also the poor and the powerless to communicate, debate, network, cooperate, lobby, demonstrate effectively across borders' (Van Parijs, 2000, p.31). While life stories like Joseph's may seem worlds apart from the day to day lives of most researchers, English learners, and job seekers in Barcelona, Spain, Blommaert reminds us that this insight can be 'sobering for those who believe that globalization only offers opportunities. It does to some people…who can deploy their mobile resources across different spaces and scales' (2010, p.179). The same rationale can be applied to English learning. As Ricento puts it, 'knowledge of certain varieties of English, coupled with particular skill sets obtainable only through high levels of education that are not universally accessible, is likely to enhance the social mobility of some individuals' (2018, p.233). Ricento posits that the inevitability of English dominance is too passively accepted by sociolinguists like Van Parijs and others who deem it ‘the best and only choice for the global lingua franca’ believing that ‘everyone should accept that fact and get busy learning English’ (Ricento, 2018, p.223). Others, as we have seen, are skeptical when it comes to English and the fact that ‘real language choice hardly exists anywhere in the unequal world of today’ (Holborow, 2007, p.55). With little alternative currently available even to those who question what Park (2011) calls the ‘promise of English’, many individuals have little choice but to jump on the bandwagon if they wish to climb the social and career ladder of a modern competitive and globalized arena, in Lamont’s words, ‘this-worldly world’ (1992, p.xxix). That, or opt out and perhaps be considered ‘sectarian, cantankerous or simply difficult’ in the eyes of those who show ‘good common sense’ (Haberland, 2009, p.20). In the data chapters of this thesis, we will encounter examples that support what Blommaert, Ricento, and other scholars argue: that the extent to which fluency in English may enhance social mobility is intertwined with and shaped by other factors including nationality, race, gender, and of particular concern here, social class.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the relationship between class, education, and social mobility, explored the attainment gap between middle- and working-class students, and charted a number of the key scholarly arguments put forward by educational sociologists in this regard. Following Reay and colleagues, I have made the case that ‘success in the education system is arguably predicated on having the right kinds of cultural and social capital’ (Crozier and Reay, 2011, p.146). Equally, in terms of English language learning, it has been argued that the likelihood of acquiring more valued varieties of English is conditioned by having other forms of capital (social, economic, etc.) at one’s disposition. The research drawn on exemplifies how what English can ‘do’ for a person depends to varying degrees on their pre-existing capitals, as well as what passport(s) they hold, their race, gender, age and so on. Viewed in light of what has been discussed here, English is one form of symbolic, cultural, or linguistic capital that may constitute one aspect of (most often middle-class) educational advantage.

Being proficient in English can, in many global contexts, signify the profile of neoliberal personhood, and it is worth bearing in mind that those with more resources to invest in English learning are more likely to acquire more coveted varieties of English through educational knowhow, private education, stays abroad and so forth. As Park well notes, ‘it is the middle class who holds a greater desire for English, for they are the ones who can benefit maximally from increased investment in English' (2013a, p. 295). Hence, we have the same cycle highlighted by Bourdieu and Passeron (1964), whereby educational processes constitute instruments of cultural differentiation, apply equally to English language learning. Seen through the lens of cultural capital and consumption, 'if it symbolises refinement, is a potential mechanism for social exclusion' (Warde, Martens and Olsen, 1999, p.124). Here, the extremes of English language dominance, for example in South Korea where there is such intense competition that it has led to 'social suffering' (Piller and Cho, 2013), have been highlighted, as well as how English is implicated in class inequalities in different contexts. Finally, following various authors, it has been argued that English is not a magic wand for individual mobility nor a panacea to global inequality, and certainly 'not the ticket to social or economic mobility that it is claimed to be, either overtly or implicitly, by supporters and apologists of the current world neoliberal economic order' (Ricento, 2018 p.233).

This brings us to the end of the literature review chapters which have firstly surveyed social class from a historical perspective, looking back to the seminal work of Marx, followed by Weber and Durkheim respectively (Chapter 2). Subsequently, Bourdieu's widely cited writings on class and other class related topics like social mobility (Chapter 3) were discussed. The present chapter has turned to more specific concerns of this thesis – social class in education and English language learning, as well as the related topic of neoliberalism. The remainder of this thesis, specifically chapters 6-8, are devoted to exploring the relationship between English learning and social class, in the context of Barcelona, Spain. This exploration entails drawing links between the literature presented so far and the stories participants in this study told, in a bid to tease out what might be learned about social class and the role of English in their discrete worlds, as well as how class and English learning interconnect. First however, the study design and methodological framework chosen to explore these issues is explained and justified in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction and research questions

Hollway and Jefferson write that in researching any topic, 'there are two overarching questions that have to be addressed: *what* is the object of enquiry and *how* can it be enquired into?'(2000, p.7 italics in the original). The 'what' is the theoretical while the 'how' is methodological. The former having been discussed in the literature chapters hitherto, the present chapter deals with the latter. The following research questions were formulated in order to explore themes addressed thus far, connecting the notion of class with English language learning:

How do participants make sense of their experiences, and position themselves and others in terms of:

1) Various dimensions of social class and privilege?
2) The role of English in their lives and the world around them?
3) The influence of social class dimensions, and self-responsibility in English learning?

The present methodology chapter sets out full details of how data was collected, handled and analysed. I first turn to the epistemological orientations and the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach before describing the data analysis methods chosen and why. Then I turn to research design and go through step by step details of how I went about participant recruitment and data collection. Towards the end of the chapter some space is devoted to reflections on validity and reliability, as well as to some important ethical considerations.

5.2 Epistemological and methodological framework

Miles and Huberman (1994, p.4) maintain that it is 'good medicine...for researchers to make their preferences clear'. It is important to not only reflect on which epistemological orientation most resonates with our world view, but to also endeavour to put together a research design which is compatible. Accordingly, in the following pages I discuss critical realism as a suitable philosophical framework for this piece of research.

5.2.1 Critical realism as an epistemological orientation

Miles and Huberman position themselves as 'transcendental realists'. That is to say, they believe that 'social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also in the objective world – and that some lawful and reasonably stable relationships are to be found among them' (1994, p.4).

While transcendental realism is a reference to the field of philosophy and often to the early work of philosopher Roy Bhaskar, I take a similar tack, favouring Bhaskar's later emerging doctrine of critical realism, which extends to the social sciences. This means that while I do recognize the importance of wide-scale quantitative approaches, I do not fully subscribe to a positivist approach which treats 'social facts as existing independently of the research' (Silverman, 2010, p.102). Neither, however, do I fully subscribe to the kind of constructivist approach which 'assumes that knowledge is constructed by the individual, without reference necessarily to objective data or innate ideas/categories' (Cole, 2002, p.10). Critical realism (CR) holds that there is room for both, without having to conform to either 'positivist or social constructionist protocols' (Elger, 2012, p.2).

CR was first introduced by Roy Bhaskar in the 1970s and 80s. As an epistemological framework, it looks beyond science into the related philosophical matters often overlooked by researchers, an oversight lamented by some scholars. Harré and Secord, for example, suggested some years ago that an 'adequate social psychology' can only be developed as a 'co-operative enterprise' between philosophers, sociologists and psychologists (1972, p.2-3). They wrote of a certain 'sense of strangeness' that arises from psychologists' readings of philosophy, and how sociologists, 'despite great breadth of conception, have been unable to develop adequate theories of individual social action, and have suffered, with psychologists, from conceptual naivete' (ibid). Similarly, Danermark et al. (2002, p.97) posit that 'there is no reason to leave this way of asking questions to the philosophers'. They observe that 'there is no sharp dividing line between philosophy and social science…Nor is there any reason why strict boundaries should be called for. It is a matter of differences in degree'. In his early work, Bhaskar questioned this division as follows:

> [T]here can be little doubt that our theory of knowledge has scarcely come to terms with, let alone resolved the crises induced by, the changes that have taken place across the whole spectrum of scientific (and one might have to add social and political) thought. In this respect our present age contrasts unfavourably with both Ancient Greece and Post-Renaissance Europe, where there was a close and mutually beneficial relationship between science and philosophy. (1978, p.7)

Bhaskar was critical of much Western mainstream philosophy and the prevailing idea that the so-called real world can only be knowable through our perception. He deemed such a view mistaken and anthropocentric, claiming that CR revindicates ontology (Bhaskar, 2014). CR holds that ontology (being) precedes epistemology (knowledge) in other words, what *is* shapes what we know, and how we know it (Bhaskar, 2014; Oxford Conversations, 2016). Neither can ontology be reduced to epistemology. Danermark et al. (2002, p. 8) maintain that if only one feature of CR were to be highlighted it should be 'the criticism of that reduction of reality which does not take into account deep structure with its underlying mechanisms, and thus restricts our understanding of the world'.

One of Bhaskar's main contentions with empirical realism in particular was how, ontologically, it collapses what he saw as interconnected levels of reality into one, disregarding how 'mechanisms, events and experiences…constitute three overlapping domains of the real, the actual and the empirical' (1978, p.56). As illustrated in figure 5.1 below, the first of these, the real domain refers to 'inherent properties in an object or structure that act as causal forces to produce events' (Fletcher, 2016, p.183). This domain is about 'objects, their structures or natures and their causal powers and liabilities', a political institution being one example of such (Fairclough et al., 2003). The actual refers to what Bhaskar called intransitive dimensions, that which exists and unfolds irrespective of human perception or experience. The empirical domain, lastly, refers to transitive dimensions which are filtered through our experience such as 'social ideas, meanings, decisions, actions', or interpretations.

Bhaskar also took issue with the so-called fallacy of 'ontological monovalence' (1993, p.40), which was about the general reluctance of Western philosophers to speak of (ontological) absence, in other words, what is not. Bhaskar saw this as a 'purely positive account of reality' (1994, p.54) since 'to understand the nature of an absence is to understand its causal relations and effects within a totality' (Wallace, 2012, p.54). This is of importance to social science investigation, since absences are very real in human experience, and matter in tangible ways. Absences have, in other words, 'causal powers and produce effects and outcomes that may include presences as well as other absences' (ibid, p.54).

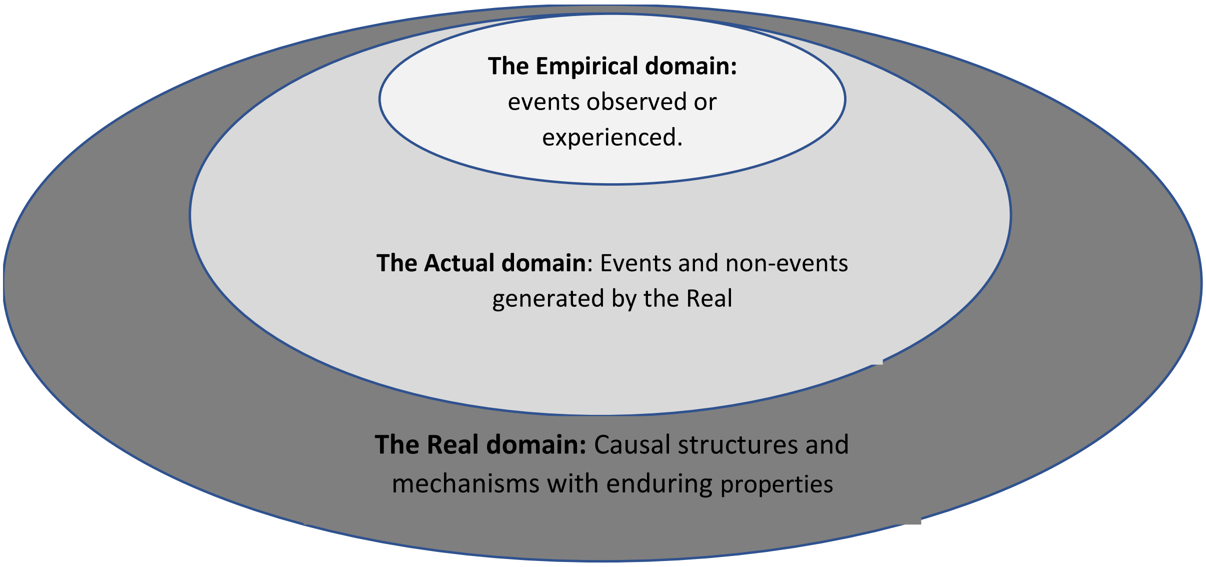
The Empirical domain: events observed or experienced.
The Actual domain: Events and non-events generated by the Real
The Real domain: Causal structures and mechanisms with enduring properties

Figure 5.1

The interconnected domains of the real, the actual, the empirical in critical realist ontology. Source: Adapted from Saunders (2019)

In more general philosophical terms, Bhaskar deemed both rationalist and empiricist strands unsatisfactory. Given that Immanuel Kant's writings from over two centuries ago combined both strands (Cole, 2002), one might expect that Kant's work would be positively influential. But while Bhaskar held that empirical realism led to what he called 'the epistemic fallacy' (1978, p.36) he critiqued Kant's theory of transcendental idealism for how the natural world therein becomes a construction of the human mind (Archer et al., 1998). He also lamented its implicit 'quiescence and de-agentification' (Bhaskar, 1993, p.44)[44]. The alternative he proposed early on was transcendental realism, distinguishing between the two doctrines as follows:

> both transcendental realism and idealism see [explaining a regularity in science] as involving creative model-building, in which plausible generative mechanisms are imagined to produce the phenomena in question. But whereas for transcendental idealism the imagined mechanism is imaginary, for realism it may be real, and come to be established as such. (Bhaskar, 1978, p.145)

Here we find important links to the later emerging doctrine of CR. The mention of creativity and generative (or causal) mechanisms are referents to some of its key components. The concept of generative mechanisms is an important distinction relevant to the social sciences. Rather than solely providing in-depth accounts and so-called thick descriptions of empirical experience as in social constructivist approaches, critical realists seek to uncover the underlying causal mechanisms that drive social events, activities and phenomena. These mechanisms often appear on the level of the real i.e. structures, inherent properties which produce things, but equally, as Fletcher observes, 'ideas and knowledge in the transitive world can be real and causal: people's knowledge, reasons or motivations for doing things can have a very real effect on the intransitive world' (2016, p.189).

This process of seeking causal mechanisms is helpful to the process of analysis. Since critical realists do not shy away from hypothesising in relation to cause and effect even in qualitative studies, it means they are well placed to explain social events and make suggestions to address problems (Fletcher, 2016). Elger however also warns that given human capacity for reflexive innovation, the 'isolation of causal mechanisms' is 'more problematic in the social realm' (2012, p.254). Critical realism's answer to this issue is recognition of the 'socially constructed and fallible character of scientific knowledge' (ibid, p.253), and how the capacity for reflexive innovation has the power to shape structure. This leads to another key distinction in terms of the social sciences. Rather than priming individual agency, critical realist theorists see structure as pre-existing agency, but in a recursive manner, since agency is also acknowledged in its capacity to reproduce and transform structure (Bhaskar, 2014). Structures are taken to be relatively enduring but not permanent features of the social world (Fletcher, 2016). It is therefore particularly apt for sociological work which often highlights the structures that tend to disappear in much qualitative work for example in sociolinguistics, and in much psychology research which can treat of the individual as a lone entity. As regards applied linguists a CR approach is especially useful because it provides a balance to the large quantity of research there has been based on the notion that identity is discursively constructed, and has tended to prime agency over structure (Block, 2014). Acknowledging social structures is not necessarily tantamount to taking a deterministic stance, rather that of a realist. Also, in line with the general dictates of CR, both agency and structure are valued rather than an either/or approach.

Two final points are important to note about structure in CR. Firstly, Bhaskar points out that generative mechanisms 'exist only in virtue of the activities they govern and cannot be empirically identified independently of them' (1979, p.48), in other words they are obviously inseparable from human activity. Secondly, as Danermark et al. (2002) point out, structures are not directly observable therefore knowledge of them requires theory. Since theory can be categorized in the empirical domain, both points reiterate how the domains of the real and the empirical are closely intertwined (as opposed to the actual, intransitive domain which remains independent), and these domains are the focus of social science research.

CR (unlike interpretivist approaches) allows for how interpretation can be guided and informed by theory (instead of fearing that it may produce bias). This is made possible by means of a flexible deductive approach to interpretation (Fletcher, 2016), as well as two different strategies of inference called abduction and retroduction.[45] A flexible deductive approach (as opposed to inductive) is preferred by many who espouse a critical realist framework (e.g. Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Fletcher, 2016). This means we come to the research with a hypothesis in mind (more common in positivist approaches). As Bhaskar puts it, ‘once a hypothesis about a generative structure has been produced in social science it can be tested quite empirically, although not necessarily quantitatively’ (1979, p.62). However deductive inference is analytical, it reveals nothing new about reality (Danermark et al. 2002) which is why a flexible approach is specified. This means critical realist approaches avoid ‘commitment to the content of specific theories and recognise the conditional nature of all its results’ (Bhaskar 1979, p. 6).

The term abduction was originally coined by American philosopher C.S. Pierce and taken up by Bhaskar in his writings. In the context of critical realism, in social science, it has been defined as an ‘inference or thought operation, implying that a particular phenomenon or event is interpreted from a set of general ideas or concepts’ Danermark et al. (2002, p.205). Also called theoretical redescription, since empirical data are ‘re-described using theoretical concepts’ (Fletcher, 2016, p.188), it proposes a dialectic process whereby existing theory is developed through case studies and subjective experience, recognizing in turn how theory informs our understanding, asking ‘[w]hat do the events say about the theory?’ (Danermark et al., 2002 p.95). Abuction thus provides the researcher leeway to add his or her own insights to a participant account with the intention of providing ‘fuller or more adequate interpretations’ of reality (Parr, 2013, p. 10) drawing on existing theory.

Retroduction, on the other hand, is about establishing generative mechanisms, and also entails ‘trying to attain knowledge about what internal relations make X what it is’ (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 97). Its core is transcendental argumentation which seeks to clarify the conditions for actions, reasoning and social relations. Counterfactual thinking is also fundamental to retroduction (ibid), meaning that the interpretation process can consider hypothetical scenarios, or to take into account what is not (i.e. absence). When analysing discourse, we can therefore consider those absent from our study (or studies like ours), or what is notably absent in the talk of those we interview if deemed relevant. Again, all explanations of reality are treated as fallible and seen as contributions to theory and (social) science knowledge rather than ultimate truths or complete answers (Bhaskar, 2014).

The foregoing means that creativity also has more of a place in CR than in positivism, without the extremes of constructivist approaches whereby words and thoughts are paramount in understanding the participant’s world. It is as though the pendulum swung too far in recent decades with challenges to positivism widespread in the social sciences, and with CR it settles somewhere closer to the middle. It is about finding tendencies, not laws (Fletcher, 2016). All of these various aspects come together to make possible another general way of viewing matters, judgmental rationalism, which CR favours over judgemental relativism. The latter, more common to interpretivist approaches, might be thought of as sitting on the fence, or ‘the inability to take sides because there are no better or worse grounds for preferring one theory to another’, at worst leading to ‘inaction in the face of injustice.’ (Block, 2013, p.37). The alternative put forward in critical realist theory proposes recognizing that while ‘science is a social process...[in which] views and opinions change through time’, we should bear in mind that ‘at any one moment of time there will be better or worse grounds for preferring one rather than another theory’ (Bhaskar, 2002 p. 211-212). CR thus becomes a ‘philosophy we can use’ which Bhaskar (2014) saw as a part of striving collectively for human flourishing on an ailing planet.

Finally, a number of scholars lament the apparent lack of applied critical realist studies which demonstrate how CR can be used in practice, and what exact methods might best align with this paradigm (Elger, 2012; Yeung, 1997; Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014; Fletcher, 2016). Fletcher notes that grounded theory has been used as a critical realist approach by some scholars to date, however is unconvinced of its suitability in terms of epistemological orientations, since it is primarily data-driven and inductive, avoiding ‘active engagement with existing theory’ (2016, p.186), a feature which is central to critical analysis. In her own interview-based research with female farmers interviews in the Canadian prairies, Fletcher attempts to show how real world causal mechanisms - in this case agricultural policies - have an impact, while following the ‘typical stages of qualitative research’ (ibid, p.181). CR thus allows for causal mechanisms to be established in qualitative research. This makes it ideal as an epistemological framework for exploring matters related to social class, since it permits us to examine words and thoughts of participants while also recognizing structures in their lives and seeking to establish causal mechanisms where appropriate. In the next section below I discuss the rationale for taking a qualitative approach within a critical realist paradigm.

5.2.2 Qualitative inquiry

The present study was guided, particularly at the beginning, by what Hollway and Jefferson term ‘starting questions’ (2000, p.1) rather than by a set of exact predetermined hypotheses. This approach is compatible with critical realist underpinnings, as it allows the researcher to avoid ‘any commitment to the content of specific theories and recognise the conditional nature of all its results’ (Bhaskar 1979, p. 6). Rather than working to prove specific hypotheses, as is common in quantitative research, qualitative research tends to take ‘an interest in subjectivity and the authenticity of human experience’ (Silverman 2010 p.6). Critical realism, as discussed earlier, values both. Qualitative allows us to dig deeper, to delve into the how and why behind quantitative figures, finding more causal factors (Miles and Huberman, 1994), shedding light on emergent patterns. While quantitative research allows us to survey matters on a broader, macro level, through qualitative we can gain more in-depth, granular perspectives. Both are useful and can bring significant insights to research problems in different ways. Silverman writes that there is ‘nothing intrinsically superior’ about qualitative research. Rather than being at loggerheads with one another, the respective approaches instead make up ‘complementary parts of the systematic, empirical search for knowledge’ (2010, p.8).

On a less positive note, doing qualitative research can also in many respects be ‘complex and downright chaotic’ (Silverman, 2010, p.14), more often than not involving overwhelmingly large data sets for sorting, coding, transcription, and/or translation before the time-consuming analysis process can begin. Nevertheless it has many redeeming features that make such intensive efforts worthwhile. We are rewarded with the opportunity for insightful person-centred (as opposed to number-centred) data, as well as rich and detailed analysis. Qualitative research methods make harder-to-get-at, private, complex affective matters and abstract phenomena more accessible. Another compelling feature is the way in which ‘words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader – another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner – than pages of summarized numbers' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.1). Importantly, qualitative approaches can hold space for contradictions and paradoxes, more in tune with the lived human experience and the often-contradictory nature of thought itself. Perhaps this is part of the reason why words can often resonate far more with many readers than numbers. We think and talk in words, not numbers. Participants in qualitative research have real voices that are not 'muted by the deadening 'thud' of an aggregate statistic' (Day-Miller, cited in Silverman, 2010 p.6).

Needless to say, there are certain limitations to qualitative approaches, the most obvious one being representativeness, that is, the limited potential to generalize or extrapolate from findings derived from relatively small samples. I believe that this shortcoming is more than offset by the capacity of qualitative approaches to celebrate richness, depth, and nuance, (Mason, 2002) and more importantly, to treat of people for scientific purposes 'as if they were human beings' (Harré and Secord, 1972, p.6). In section 5.3 below I turn to describing the methodological approaches chosen for this particular qualitative study.

5.3 Study design

The present study draws primarily on one-to-one individual interviews as a source of data, as well as a focus group with first year students at a private university in Barcelona. This section describes the overall plan, and how I went about exploring the research questions set out above. Coming from a critical realist perspective meant working from theory as a starting point but required methods which would allow for a 'flexible deductive approach' (Fletcher, 2016, p.182). In the next sections I outline the methodological approaches chosen and why, beginning with case studies before discussing the use of narrative, life story interviews, and focus groups.

5.3.1 Case study approach

Case studies, according to Miles and Huberman 'are the stuff of much qualitative research', (1994, p.26). The case study approach is a useful way of delimiting research focus, also one that turns out to be suitable for a qualitative study design with critical realist underpinnings. Ackroyd and Karlsson maintain that (realist) case studies 'are important because they provide a situation in which mechanisms may be to some extent isolated and then studied, allowing abductive logic to be brought fully to bear' (2014, p.25). Referring to an illuminating example of the study that 'definitively solved the problem of the cause of malaria' through deductive inference, by successfully identifying the ultimate key generative mechanism, they cogently argue the rightful place of such case studies in research. Elger elsewhere writes of how ‘critical realism values several standard features of case study research design: investigation of actors' discourses and negotiated meanings’ (2012, p.255).

A case study is an in-depth inquiry into a topic or phenomenon within its real-life setting (Yin, 2018). A case study approach, is thus characterized by investigation of a small number of cases, while a case may refer to a person, group, organization etc. (Saunders et al., 2019). Such studies normally use qualitative, more interpretive (as opposed to positivist), methods thus providing the opportunity for rich and detailed accounts of individuals or small groups, rather than claims to representation. They allow for ‘*multiple sources and techniques* in the data-gathering process’, compatible with primary research and/or secondary sources such as government publications and can also be carried out over any length of time (Hua and David, 2008, p.99 italics in the original). Unlike wider-scale research, case studies are always carried out in ‘a particular social and physical setting’ and are highly flexible since a case can be as narrowly defined as an individual, or as broadly defined as an organization, even an entire country (Miles and Huberman, 2014, p.27).

The present is a multi-case study, whereby each case is a small group of persons (three groups in total) who share general profile traits of interest to the research at hand. These cases were construed initially based on their being seen as typical rather than based on uniqueness. Rather, the uniqueness of each individual’s story revealed itself over the course of their interview. While this study relies largely on self-report, as opposed to naturalistic, data, insights from real-life, particularly teaching, contexts provided inspiration for the overall study and research design. The study focuses on one specific context, that of Barcelona, Spain.

5.3.2 A narrative, life-story interview approach to eliciting data

A life story interview entails ‘the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it’ (Atkinson, 1998, p.8). In this study, a narrative, life-stories approach was adopted for one-on-one interviews, whereby informants were invited to speak about their life stories, with a part focus on their English language learning experiences. While life-story interviews were the main method of eliciting data, participants were also asked questions, designed to explore particular areas of interest to the study. In this sense, the research design entailed a combination of personal narrative and life stories, since ‘elicited narratives can be controlled for topic’ and matters of interest (Pavlenko, 2008, p.311), unlike the latter approach which tends to yield uninterrupted life story accounts. This approach to data elicitation seemed suitable for a sociolinguistics study since the life story mode is very much ‘an interdisciplinary approach to understanding not only one life across time, but how individual lives interact with the whole’ (Atkinson, 1998, p.4). It can also ‘provide the researcher with information about a social reality existing outside the story’ (ibid, p.13), as well as yielding insight into the individual’s understanding of that social reality. This kind of one-to-one interview approach was used for two of the three participant groups. With the third group of participants, data was collected by means of a focus group, a method discussed in the next section below. I return to interviewing once again in section 5.5, where full details of the actual interviews that took place are provided.

5.3.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups - two decades ago almost inexistent in the social sciences (Morgan, 1997)[46] - are now common in sociolinguistics and sociological research alike (e.g. Weber, 2009; Dyers and Abongdia, 2010; Kingsley, 2009; Ige, 2020; Skeggs and Loveday, 2012). Morgan broadly defines a focus group as ‘a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher’ (1997, p.6). Much has been written about the virtues of focus groups, many of which overlap with those of interviews as a data collection method. For instance, the advantage of eliciting different perspectives in the participants’ own words, or how they can yield first-hand insight into people’s views, attitudes, feelings, beliefs and so on (Litosseliti, 2003, p.18). Focus groups are uniquely beneficial in ‘allowing more individuals to be reached at once’ (Morgan, 1997, p.5). They are unparalleled in their ability to prompt conversation and interaction among participants themselves, the result of which the discussion that comes about is more likely to be ‘framed by categories and understandings of’ the informants themselves rather than those of the researcher (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 219). Such fertile ground for more dynamic participant interaction can mean that a focus group discussion may branch unpredictably into topics and viewpoints previously not considered by the researcher (ibid). This is typically based on the researcher’s pre-prepared topics, and (s)he can still intervene as moderator to clarify or tease out certain discussion points. These aspects no doubt prove advantageous to all kinds of research, including those of critical realist nature which are guided by theory but remain open to the fallibility of researcher knowledge. Since critical realist research is not about seeking a complete answer, rather, a more complete answer (Bhaskar, 2014), gaining fresh perspectives which are more independent of the researcher's views and input can only enrich the study.

In this study, the focus group method was used with first year undergraduate students at a private university. It proved a very convenient means of data collection, not least since it could have been difficult to arrange one-on-one interviews with these students since the focus group took place towards the end of semester, a time of looming exams and deadlines. Furthermore, one-on-one interviews would not have been a good fit since, as discussed later in section 5.8, this group required additional measures in terms of confidentiality and anonymity. Having explained the overall method of focus group, I return to this topic again in section 5.5.6 where actual data collection procedures with the university students are described. The following sections describe the processes of participant selection and recruitment, as well as the data collection procedures followed for each respective group.

5.4 Participants, data collection and the context of Barcelona

One-on-one interviews took place in two separate rounds of data collection. These two participant groups are categorized into broad occupational profiles coined by Reich (1991), *symbols analysts* and *in-person servers* (explained below). The second type of data collection entailed a group discussion among first year students attending a private university where I had been teaching in an English medium business degree program for three years prior. As Lanza (2008, p.77) points out, the selection process is often 'influenced by the researcher's identity and linguistic competence'. Barcelona was the obvious site of my research, a practical choice given that I had lived there for four years prior to commencing data collection. I had established a network of contacts through freelance teaching work at various locations around the city in offices, language schools[47] and at a private university.

Barcelona is a highly multilingual city and has a high degree of immigration. Official local census figures indicate that just over 21 percent of Barcelona's population is of non-Spanish nationality (Idescat, 2021). Catalan and Spanish are the local languages with co-official status, while English is visibly and audibly present around the city centre, particularly in tourist locations. As discussed in Chapter 1, English is being learned as a foreign language by a high percentage of the Spanish population. In Barcelona, official sources indicate that in 2018, 37.5

per cent of the population could reportedly speak English (Idescat, 2019a) while only 0.4% reported it to be their usual language (Idescat, 2019b). For Spanish, these figures were 99.5% (speaking ability) and 48% (usual language), while for Catalan 81% (speaking ability) and 36% (usual language) was reported (Idescat, 2019a). While these figures give us an indication of language use among the population, it is important to take into account that the extent to which Spanish or Catalan is spoken in different parts of Catalonia is complex and dependent on geographic, institutional, interpersonal and social factors (Codó, 2015).

The pool of participants selected for this study (outlined next section) partly reflects Barcelona's multicultural, multilingual reality, in that it includes not only Catalan/Spanish locals but also some non-Spanish born migrants, particularly present in the hospitality sector (see table 5.1 below). While the study does not entail ethnography in the anthropological sense of the term, it is ethnographically oriented in that I had the chance to get to know some participants to varying degrees – and in varying contexts - as their teacher before interviews took place. This afforded me a certain degree of so-called insider status, albeit limited by the fact that I was born in Ireland and had lived for less than five years in Barcelona by the time interviews were carried out. Important to mention finally, is that participants were not known to one another, since they were recruited in different contexts, as explained in the next section which describes the processes of participant selection and recruitment.

5.4.1 Participant recruitment and selection

Interview and focus group participants were selected based on Robert Reich's categorization of three different occupational groups, *routine producers, in-person servers* and *symbols analysts.* The first of these, routine producers entail 'the kinds of repetitive tasks performed…in the high-volume enterprise', for example blue collar jobs, information processing roles 'routine supervisory jobs performed by low- and mid-level managers-foremen, line managers, clerical supervisors, and section chiefs' (1991, p.174). In-person servers, like routine producers, do simple and repetitive tasks for hourly pay. A high education level is not necessary for either line of work. In-person servers however provide 'person-to-person' services which 'are not sold worldwide' (unlike the other two categories) (ibid, p.176). This category includes 'retail sales workers, waiters and waitresses, hotel workers, janitors, cashiers, hospital house cleaners, home health-care aides, taxi drivers, secretaries' among others. The third group is that of *symbols analysts* which entails 'the problem-solving, -identifying, and brokering of many people who call themselves research scientists, design engineers, software engineers, civil engineers, biotechnology engineers, lawyers, real estate developers, and even a few creative accountants' among others (ibid).

Only two of Reich's categories were used here, those of in-person servers and symbols analysts. Specifically, I have chosen hospitality staff for the in-person server category, while the symbols analysts group is made up mostly of lawyers, as well as one engineer and an investment banking worker, since these groups are notably under pressure to use English at work in Barcelona, and Spain more generally. Furthermore, in my experience as a teacher in Barcelona, there also is a high demand for English classes in the field of law and in the investment banking sector. While there are no doubt plenty of other groups of interest in this regard, these professional profiles were also accessible for me as a researcher around the time of participant recruitment.

Reich's occupational groupings refer to a pattern he argues is observable in North America and other countries whereby 'three broad categories of work are emerging, corresponding to the three different competitive positions' (1991, p.174). The broad categorizations are helpful in that they point out differences and similarities between these groupings in terms of economic and market patterns, and also differential resources which I consider useful without being too restrictive. By choosing participants in terms of these broad occupational groups I was more likely (but not guaranteed) to be choosing people falling into different social class groups since one of the least disputed indicators of class status is income. This approach is otherwise known as purposive sampling, when 'the researcher already knows something about the specific people or events and deliberately selects particular ones because they are seen as instances that are likely to produce the most valuable data' (Denscombe, 1998, p. 15).

In choosing Reich's categories rather than specific occupational groups I was also able to access groups of a shared profile in terms of my research interest (rather than choosing only, say, waiters and lawyers). Noting Miles and Huberman's advice to 'admit that the boundary is never quite as solid as a rationalist might hope' (1994, p.27) meant being cognizant of within-group differences. I am alert to the risk of overgeneralizing, one might argue for example that graduating as a lawyer may not qualify a person for the category of symbols analyst, nor can we assume that all hospitality workers will be in-person servers for life (students with part time jobs being one obvious example). There are also those who have experienced downward mobility due to migration to a country where their social/economic/symbolic capital becomes devalued. For these reasons, different dimensions of class analysis featured in interview discussions, which helped to tease out individual circumstances. That is, I assigned participants to broad categories (explained below) for theoretical exploratory purposes, noting that they may be both fitting and transient to varying degrees. Finally, participants were also selected on the basis of willingness to partake, which varied from context to context, as discussed in the following subsections. An overview of participant profile is provided in table 5.1 below.

5.4.2 Symbols analysts - recruitment

Participants in the symbols analyst group were all previously known to me to varying degrees having been my private students from English classes at different city centre offices. All worked in Barcelona and lived in the city or surrounding areas. I knew them quite well but learned a lot more about their lives during the interviews (since conversation in English classes usually oriented around learning material, also some had lower intermediate or beginner levels). These individuals agreed to an interview without hesitation, so no real effort was needed in recruitment (I offered a free class in exchange for an interview, but most declined). As shown in table 5.1 below, four in this group were lawyers, one worked in private investment banking, another was an engineering project coordinator.

5.4.3 In person servers - recruitment

As detailed in section 5.4.1 above, in person servers, in Reich’s terms are those who do simple and repetitive tasks for hourly pay, providing ‘person to person’ services, jobs which (like routine producer jobs) do not necessarily require a high level of education (1991, p.176). In this study, hotel and restaurant workers in customer service roles e.g. waiter or barista, were recruited for the category of in-person servers. This group of participants were almost all strangers to me. They were recruited primarily based on their willingness to participate, as it proved very difficult to recruit through word of mouth. My first attempts to recruit in-person servers entailed walking into city centre cafes and restaurants bringing handprinted leaflets advertising free English lessons in exchange for an interview (see appendix D). This proved an overall fruitless effort. Waiters and restaurant staff were usually extremely busy and had little or no time to talk once they realized I wasn’t a customer. In addition I found engaging with staff in chains and franchises to be impossible given how these workers were under time pressure and seemingly strictly managed. During these first attempts to recruit in-person servers, I was frequently declined and encountered some false leads. So, in the days and weeks that followed I went to restaurants or cafés in between teaching hours and listened out for baristas or waiters who switched to English while serving me or another customer and invited that person to participate in my study about their experiences with learning English. This proved a little more successful, particularly in smaller, locally owned places.

Table 5.1

Participant overview

Group	Gender	Age	Profession	Nationality	Education level
Symbols analysts (6)	Male (2)	60-65	Lawyer /partner	Spanish	Máster
		40-45	Computer Engineer	Spanish	Licenciado
	Female (4)	50-55	Lawyer /partner	Spanish	Licenciado
		55-60	Risk manager, investment bank	Spanish	Licenciado
		30-35	Lawyer	Spanish	Máster
		30-35	Lawyer	Spanish	Máster
In-person servers (6)	Male (4)	25-30	Waiter /student	Spanish	E.S.O.
		25-30	Restaurant owner	Italian	Bachillerato
		25-30	Waiter/ Undergraduate student	Peruvian	Bachillerato
		30-35	Waiter	Moroccan	Licenciado
	Female (2)	25-30	Hospitality (unemployed-sporadic work)	Colombian	Bachillerato
		20-25	Waitress /undergraduate student	Spanish	Bachillerato
Private university students (11)	Male (11)	17-20	Undergraduate student	Spanish (8)	Bachillerato
		17-20	Undergraduate student	Non-Spanish (3)	Bachillerato

Total participants: 23

Note: Nationalities of private university students are vague in order to protect their identities.

These efforts resulted in the recruitment of three of the six in-person servers. I also posted in a number of Facebook groups for learning English in Barcelona which led to an additional interview. One participant was recruited through a chance encounter at a bus stop, and another was recruited after a family member stayed at the hotel where he worked. Most of the participants in this group - unlike the last group - were born outside of Spain (only two of the six were Spanish). Such a participant group, including both locals and foreigners may better represent the diverse workforce in Barcelona´s hospitality industry than would say, a group of only locals. However this diversity was random rather than intentional since recruitment was more a result of individuals' willingness to participate than specific screening efforts on my part.

5.4.4 Private university students (focus group)

Eleven first year students of an English-medium business degree at a private university in Barcelona were recruited for a focus group discussion towards the end of their spring/summer semester. Being university students, these participants do not easily fit into Reich's occupational categories. Before inviting students to participate, consent of the program coordinator was sought (see section 5.7 for more on ethical considerations). Once approved, an invitation to participate was sent via email to the two groups of first-year students I had been teaching that semester - approximately 60 in total. Doodle, an online schedule coordinating tool was used to select a date and time suitable for a maximum number of participants. Initially just four students signed up. A week later I created further incentive to participate by offering an extension on an approaching assignment the students had in my subject, HR, in exchange for research participation. (This type of recruitment may have carried a slight conflict of interest with my teaching work, but I believe it was minimal since all that was granted was extra assignment time).

Following the offer of an extension, more students signed up which in the end meant a total of eleven students. As shown in table 5.1, nine of these students were locals and three were from countries outside Europe. All were non-native English speakers, while Spanish and/or Catalan were the first languages of local students. Although I had not been teaching English in this context, I could assess in broad terms from the students' classroom interactions and from grading their work, that some had near-native levels while others had more intermediate spoken and written production (this can be verified in the transcript since the discussion was held in

English). I return to the focus group again in section 5.5.3 below, where data collection procedures are discussed. First, I turn back to the one-on-one interviews, describing the data collection processes for these two participant groups.

5.5 Interviews and focus group procedures

5.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi structured interviews are the most popular approach in qualitative research given the necessity to steer interview talk towards areas of researcher interest, while avoiding the pitfalls of tightly controlled structured interviews which risk yielding data of ‘limited richness’ (Dörnyei, 2007, p.135). In their discussion of interviewing approaches within a realist epistemology[48], Pawson and Tilley (1997) persuasively make the case for a theory-driven approach to interviewing. In this study, the interviewing process took on a semi-structured format which included a pre-prepared list of theory-derived questions. This meant having the flexibility to ‘explore and update the existing literature…while still allowing new ideas to emerge’ (Fletcher, 2010, p.185). The list of questions (written in English and translated to Spanish with the help of a native speaker – see appendices A and B) was written bearing in mind the research questions. For example, asking about participants’ free time activity constituted a probe about cultural capital, while asking about past school experiences might shed light on parental investment in education, and so forth.

The ability to draw points of comparison between participant data is also one of the obvious benefits of writing out broad topics and questions in advance. The interviewer may, as Dörnyei (2007, p.136) notes, ask all informants mostly the same questions, albeit worded differently. I found that I had more questions than I could get to in one hour, so grouping them by theme was especially helpful in ensuring not to miss a broad topic. Finally, interview data with in-person servers and symbols analysts were collected in two separate rounds, which allowed for exploration of emergent themes, commonalities and differences, with the intention of ‘taking them out to the field in the next wave of data collection’ (Miles and Huberman, 2004, p.9). The time in between also brought about learning in terms of which questions to focus on more, and how to carry out better interviews.

5.5.2 Interview procedures

Interviews with symbols analysts who were my English students at the time, took place during normal class time in the students' workplace, where classes were always held. This was very advantageous, since finding a suitable place for interviews elsewhere was challenging. One of the symbols analysts group - a former student - was interviewed in a café which turned out a poor choice; since ambient noise was amplified by the recording device it made for difficult comprehension and transcription later. In the second round of data collection, finding a suitable interview space for the in-person servers group was not easy. Most were interviewed in (quieter) cafés, one in the gardens of the Universitat de Barcelona, and two took place in my home.

All interviews began by presenting participants with an information sheet (see appendix C), which outlined the research and requested some basic details. They were asked to sign this document with initials only (see section 5.7 for ethical considerations). A simple iPhone voice memo app was used to record interviews. Since I did not intend to analyse 'active non-verbal data' (Clemente, 2008, p.178), audio seemed a perfectly good choice. As well as producing good quality recordings, a smartphone is easy to use for voice memos, easy to transport, discreet, and easy to backup. Heeding Dörnyei's advice 'to take Murphy's Law very seriously: if it can go wrong it will' (2007, p.139), it was crucial to remember to bring a portable charger, to check recordings at the start, and back up data online immediately afterwards. Once safely backed up, voice memos recorded were deleted from my phone as an extra confidentiality precaution. During interviews, the recording device was briefly mentioned at the beginning, then placed in 'as unintrusive a place as possible' (Clemente, 2008, p.187), on the table in front of me.

Every effort was made to create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere from the outset (Codó, 2008, p.163). One participant in fact mentioned feeling more relaxed at the end of the interview. This was a good reminder for me as a researcher not to become desensitized to the fact that people can get nervous at the prospect of interviews, which make for somewhat artificial interactions, particularly with strangers. In order to break the ice at the beginning, closed-ended questions intended to elicit shorter, more factual information were used, followed by open-ended questions which allowed for expansion into different topics and to let the informant speak at length if so inclined (ibid). Less personal topics came towards the end, asking about general opinions around English language learning and education. Some interviews were drawn to a close, following Dörnyei's helpful advice, with specific closing questions for example, 'is there anything else you would like to add, or 'what should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask'? (2007, p. 138).

Following much of the advice on interviewing, I tried to listen more than talk (without shying away from redirecting conversation back to the research agenda). This meant allowing participants to voice opinions I didn't always agree with, in a bid to keep my own opinions and ideological biases in check. As McCracken (1988, p.38) writes, it is 'better to appear slightly dim and too agreeable than to give any sign of a critical or sardonic attitude'. In hindsight, I believe that I took an honest, empathetic stance in interviews as far as possible, sometimes relating to challenges brought up by participants. For example, that I remembered waitressing to be very demanding physical work, that I struggled in the first year of university, or that I understood what it's like to grapple with language learning. Showing understanding as researchers and relating to our interlocutors can be important in eliciting honesty and openness, all of which can only prove helpful, since an interview is after all a co-constructed social exchange (e.g. Mishler, 1986; Codó, 2008).

One-on-one interviews were carried out for the most part in Spanish, however, one was done in French and four were done in English.[49] This was a straightforward matter of practicality, in choosing the language that both interlocutors could most easily converse in, and hopefully allow participants to communicate more freely. While this may often 'enhance the value and depth of responses' (Codó, 2008, p.166), it can also complicate matters. As Pavlenko points out, it can require the use of a translator, which can 'compromise the integrity of the narrative' (2008, p.319). Here a translator was not needed, but opting for interviews in Spanish, and one in French, certainly made for a far more laborious and time-consuming transcription process.

Speaking in Spanish also prompted a role shift in some cases from native speaking teacher who corrected language, to non-native speaker. This inevitably shaped the power dynamics of these interactions, evident from the transcripts at times, such as when I needed to resort to clarification questions or seek validation of language correctness. In Spanish and French it also meant having to consider which verb form to use; the formal 'usted' signalling formality and respect or the informal 'tu' usually interpreted as being on more equal footing with the person. I began many interviews - even with my own students - using the 'usted' form, but most participants signalled preference of 'tu'. One interview continued using 'usted', fitting of the more formal relationship we had in classes in the setting of a law firm, where for example a handshake from the student upon arrival was not unusual. In the next section I discuss how the focus group with private university students was carried out.

5.5.3 Focus group procedures

As set out in 5.4.4 above, a focus group was held with university students at a private university where I had been teaching in a business program for two years prior. This was composed of a rather large group of eleven students (larger than I had anticipated, - see 9.4 for methodological reflections). In an attempt to set up the focus group in a way that would maximize its value (Morgan, 1997), an hour had been scheduled for the discussion and a separate list of questions prepared in advance (appendix E). Students were handed these questions at the beginning - unlike in interviews where only I had them together with the information and consent forms as shown in the appendices. Two smartphones (both mine) were set at either end of the table to record the discussion in an attempt to avoid issues with recording a rather large group, given participants' varying distances from the device.

As with one-on-one interviews, students were asked to read and sign the consent form before they were verbally informed of ethical and practical matters, for instance that I would be recording and transcribing the discussion, that pseudonyms would be assigned, and that they were welcome to ask for more information about how data had been used at any stage, or to read the final thesis. I reassured them that I was interested in everything they had to say and asked the students to speak to each other about the questions listed. I remained present throughout, guiding the discussion from time to time steering them back to the questions if the conversation strayed too far from primary research interests. I would also ask for elaboration on interesting points at times throughout the conversation but contributed much less than I had in the one-on-one interviews. I will have more to say about ethical considerations, which were of special importance for this group, towards the end of the chapter in section 5.8. In the next section I turn to the data analysis method.

5.6 Data organization and analysis

The main objective of data analysis in this research was to explore how people think and feel vis-à-vis topics set out in the research questions, while staying within the epistemological moorings of critical realism. This meant exploring how people construct a world of thought, ideas and emotions without letting this aspect of individual agency cause me - in the capacity of researcher - to lose sight of the societal structures shaping and constraining their lives. The objective was therefore not to analyse what people say in a bid to get at some kind of objective truth, but to approach what people say in light of various influencing factors (who, when, where) including, for example, the interviewer-interviewee interaction. An exploratory method which would allow for analysing speech as relative to context was called for. I found positioning theory, widely used in sociolinguistics and sociology studies, eminently suitable for these purposes. Before data analysis could commence however, I needed to organize the overwhelming amounts of data I found myself with once all interviews and the focus group had been transcribed. In the next section below I briefly summarize how I went about organizing themes pertaining to the research questions, before turning my attention in the section thereafter to an in-depth explanation of positioning theory.

5.6.1 Data organization

All interviews were transcribed verbatim using a program called TranscribeWreally (appendix G provides a link to the full transcripts as transcribed initially; see appendix F for transcription conventions used eventually for the excerpts selected to appear in the main thesis). That done, the next step was to condense the many potentially interesting excerpts into what would eventually appear in the data chapters. A broad preliminary list of relevant themes had been established earlier in the study, having been used to write the interview and focus group questions. A rather basic method of pencil and paper was used during the first rounds of iterative transcript readings (I had tried first to use an excel sheet to organize data but with this method I found it harder to survey everything together). I drew columns on a large A3 sheet -– one column per preliminary theme – and carried the next rounds of listening to interviews with the transcripts open in the software program TranscribeWreally. (Although the transcripts had been completed, much editing of minor details also happened during this process.) The first column to the left of the A3 sheet was used for participant pseudonyms. As I relistened to the interviews with the transcripts on the screen, each time something relevant to any of the themes was mentioned I put the start time and approximate duration in the column under that theme (the software program made it easy to rewind and fast forward to the second and time stamp the data accurately). When I found new recurrent themes, I added a new column to the A3 sheet. I used different colours for different datasets and put key words next to the times listed down along the column to facilitate easy recall of which data fragment each timestamp corresponded to. I continued with this process, using new sheets of A3 paper and relistening to all data as often as was necessary, until I was satisfied that most themes of interest and relevance to the research questions had been sufficiently captured. Once this had been done, I used mind maps to decide how best to approach data analysis and writing organization, which resulted in further condensing the data excerpts into those that would eventually appear in the data chapters. This process entailed not only analysing each theme in the data sets, but exploration of the data from the vantage point of the chosen analysis method, positioning theory, discussed in detail below. More detailed transcription - according to the conventions shown in appendix F - was later carried out on the excerpts chosen to include in the main thesis.

5.6.2 Positioning Theory

Positioning Theory (PT) originated at the crossroads of social, cognitive and discursive psychology. While the concept of positioning was first used in feminist writings by Wendy Hollway to describe how ‘discourses make available positions for subjects to take up’, (1984, p.236) the analytical framework of PT was elaborated thereafter by psychologist Rom Harré and collaborators. Since it first appeared in the collection *Positioning Theory* (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999), PT has seen widespread application across a broad spectrum of empirical research. It has been employed as an analytic tool in the field of medicine (Sargeant et al. 2017), education (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2014) and management (Hirvonen, 2016). It has also been used increasingly in the field of linguistics in recent decades, as evidenced by Kayi-Aydar’s recent book *Positioning Theory in Applied Linguistics* (2019).

Positioning theory constitutes a move away from an earlier framework, role theory, which highlights roles as shaping factors in communication, but which are ‘relatively fixed, often formally defined and long lasting’ (Harré, 2004, p.5). In contrast, PT shifts the focus from roles to positions, described as ‘conventions of speech and action that are labile, contestable and ephemeral’ (ibid, p.6). This development took place within a broader context of a shift towards a ‘new ontological paradigm within the social sciences’ (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999 p.14). Van Langenhove and Harré (ibid) observe that the Humean aspects of theory and research in this ambit had been the subject of criticism in the decades prior to the publication of *Positioning Theory,* with attempts to rethink ways of doing social science research afoot. Bhaskar for example questions empirical realism in the work of philosopher David Hume, for ‘an eminently sensible realist methodology in almost total dislocation from, and certainly lacking any foundation in, his radical epistemology' (1978, p.41). Van Langenhove and Harré instead advocated a 'persons/conversations' focus whereby 'people are seen as locations for social acts' (1999). This, they deemed a better alternative to the earlier relied upon time/space grid, in order to best locate and understand social phenomena, understood as the activity and practices of persons, institutions and society.

In PT, all communication is treated as fundamentally relative in that utterances have meaning only vis-à-vis the context in which they come about, and vis- à -vis other interlocutors' talk and/or behaviour. To adopt a position 'involves the use of rhetorical devices by which oneself and other speakers are presented as standing in various kinds of relations' (van Langenhove and Harré, 2010, p.465). For example, 'one can position oneself or be positioned as e.g. powerful or powerless, confident or apologetic, dominant or submissive, definitive or tentative, authorized or unauthorized, and so on' (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999 p.17). Furthermore, positioning is always simultaneous. In other words, 'whenever somebody positions him/herself, this discursive act always implies a positioning of the one to whom it is addressed' (ibid, p.22). This happens in all interpersonal communication, even without the exchange of words. A raised eyebrow, a hand gesture to signal silence, a facial expression (or even a lack thereof) is sufficient to position oneself, or to position another.

Positioning theory can be employed in many ways. It can point out how identity is ascribed to one individual by another, as in what Sabat (2003) calls 'malignant positioning', in an example where Alzheimer's sufferers were found to be positioned as denied the right to be heard, within a storyline of their general non-humanity. It can look at the active construction of a particular identity, as set out by van Langenhove and Harré (1999) in their categorization of self and other, forced or deliberate positioning types. It can be about taking a certain stance on topics to hand or positioning oneself as a particular kind of person or professional, as in Vanassche and Kelchtermans' (2014) study of teacher educators' professionalism in practice. Examining positions can include looking at researcher/participant interactions, thus addressing one of the issues inherent to qualitative (and quantitative) research, that of the influential role of researchers. As van Langenhove and Harré note, even a researcher's writeup itself is tantamount to adopting a position, albeit a more unilateral one with any eventual responses postponed for later, as opposed to oral conversations which, in the here and now, 'always imply some reciprocal positioning' (1999, p.31). PT is thus flexible as an analytic framework and can be used to shine a light on many simultaneously occurring features of communication, both in research contexts and in everyday interactions.

While the PT framework may have been originally intended by Harré to explore ‘the fine grain of the encounters of daily lives’ (2004, p.4), it is still suitable for the less natural setting of a research interview, given that the researcher is invited to reflect not only on how his or her turns contribute to the unfolding storyline, but also on the matter of rights and duties between interlocutors (more on this below). Positioning theory expands from simply studying what people think, feel and do, to uncovering ‘the normative frames within which people actually carry on their lives, thinking, feeling, acting, and perceiving—against standards of correctness’ (Harré et al., 2009, p.9) which also makes it suitable for use within a critical realist framework. Such ‘normative frames’ are theoretically represented and visually depicted within in a triad of three ‘mutually determining facets’ (van Langenhove and Wise, 2019). This triad is made up of 1) rights and duties, 2) storyline and 3) the speech act, as can be seen in figure 5.2 below.

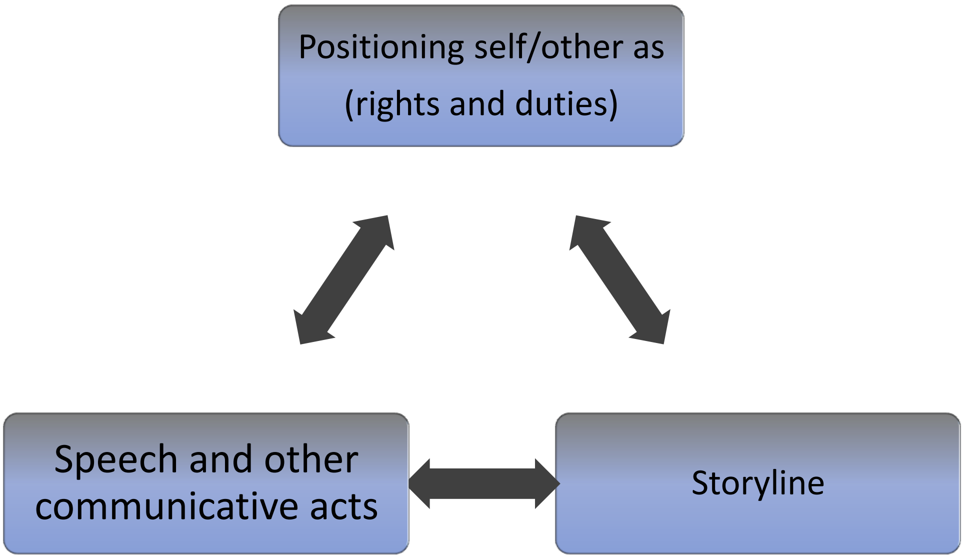
Positioning self/other as
(rights and duties)
Speech and other communicative acts
Storyline

Figure 5.2

The mutually determining triad of Positioning Theory

Source: based on Harré et al. (2019)

The first of these, rights and duties introduced above, is basically about a moral dimension, ‘what people are allowed’ or expected to do, what is deemed appropriate behaviour (ibid, p.1.2). It is strongly linked to, but is not only about, role (for example teacher - student). It is also about other aspects such as social necessity (Harré, 2012), personal attributes (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999) and expertise (Hirvonen, 2016). To provide an example of such, in a research seminar those present have different roles. An expert in the topic is more likely than a non-expert to position him/herself as knowledgeable, while an extrovert might be more likely to contribute to the discussion (that is, position oneself as confident, unapologetic, having the right to be heard) than an introvert, regardless of role or knowledge, and so on. Social necessity, according to Harré is the impulse behind rights and duties whereby 'my rights are what you (or they) must do for me….my duties are what I must do for you (or them).' (2012, p.11). The context of a research seminar, for example, presents certain social necessities, e.g. to speak informatively, to ask questions or receive feedback, to listen/be listened to, to manage time and so on. These are in effect, all social necessities which underlie participants' rights and duties, leading them to position or be positioned (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999 p.31). As with all three aspects of the triad, rights and duties are fluid in nature. While a role may be to a certain extent fixed, the interaction between two persons (e.g. student - teacher) arising from role can change, for instance by presenting challenge to authority where acquiescence once existed. As van Langenhove and Harré (1999, p.17) put it, 'fluid positionings, not fixed roles, are used by people to cope with the situation they find themselves in.'.

Patterns of rights and duties are not random, isolated phenomena, but are emergent within an ongoing storyline. Storyline, in a nutshell, is about the context and nature of the interaction. It is about what has been said before (Harré, 2006), and is, like rights and duties, dynamic in nature, continuously unfolding. In the above example, the storyline is one of a research seminar which generates context specific rights and duties. Harré provides us with the example of nurse and patient whereby 'there are positions such as a "right to be given care" and a "duty to provide care."' (2012, p.11). Here, storyline constitutes the backdrop to rights and duties (and social necessity). Since nurse and patient are obviously roles, we could add to Harré's explanation additional elements that might shape positioning, such as institution, race, age, gender, economic capital (for example health insurance) and so forth. Hollway's (1984) research - which reports that women speak less in mixed gender groups than in groups with only females, and that for men it is typically vice versa – is a clear example of how gender might play a role in positioning. No doubt other elements like race, class status, or age could be unpacked in a similar interesting fashion as regards positioning. Finally, storyline can also be about a biography in the story a person tells of their lives (Harré, 2012), as in the case of life story interviews.

The third facet of the triangle is the speech act or the social act. Worded differently in various pieces of writing, this aspect, along with PT itself, has been developed and expanded over the years. The speech act is basically about the ‘meanings of people’s actions’ (Harré et al., 2009, p.8). It is about communication ‘in various modes of presentation - words, signs, gestures, architectural conventions’ etc.’ (ibid, p.10) which plays out between individuals. Drawing directly on Austin’s (1962) oft-cited speech act theory, the speech act takes into consideration illocutionary force (the social force of what is said and/or done) and perlocutionary effect (consequence of what is said and/or done). A speech act means little if anything without knowledge of storyline and rights and duties. For example, the word ‘sorry’ can mean a whole host of things - including ‘please move out of my way’. A simple sentence such as ‘he likes it here’ carries no essential meaning of its own without knowledge firstly of storyline and secondly, implicit or explicit rights and duties.

The three facets of the triad are mutually determining, in other words, shape each other in a recursive fashion - in order to use the framework to its full potential all three should be included (e.g. van Langenhove and Harré, 2010). For example, the speech act is preceded by rights and duties while in turn, rights and duties are made explicit by speech act(s), both verbal and non-verbal, and so on. The scope for subtlety of speech-acts can be exemplified in the hypothetical storyline of a formal job interview where the interviewer chooses to remain silent and expressionless, giving little in the way of verbal cues. Since both speech acts, and rights/duties spontaneously unfold on a moment-to-moment basis within an emergent storyline, all three need to be considered. Van Langenhove and Wise (2019) stress that rights and duties constitute a fundamental pillar of the framework, lamenting that this important aspect is lacking in some empirical research where PT is employed. The authors maintain that this oversight on the part of scholars results in ‘watered-down’ versions of the framework (p.1.3) where the positioning concept is used, but rights and duties are generally neglected.

Less commonly appearing in PT literature are the various forms of positioning written about early on by van Langenhove and Harré (1999). They distinguish between ‘first, second and third order positioning, (ii) performative and accountive positioning, (iii) moral and personal positioning, (iv) self and other positioning and (v) tacit and intentional positioning’ (van Langenhove and Harré, 2010). First order positioning is usually tacit, ‘not intentional or perhaps even conscious’ (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999, p.22), while second order positioning happens in response to another's first order positioning. A clear example of second order positioning is the interrogation of an alleged criminal by police, or a court hearing, 'the most dramatic form of forced other-positioning by an institution' (ibid, p.28). A media interview with a politician carried out by a presenter well accustomed to pressing evasive respondents is another such example. Finally, another noteworthy kind of positioning is that of 'moral positioning', often linked to roles and institutions. As one might expect, 'several forms of positioning are likely to be occurring simultaneously' (ibid, p.24).

The analysis chapters of this thesis draw on PT as the methodological approach to exploring participants' talk around the topic of social class and English learning - more specifically, the research questions set out in 5.1 above. Speech acts are thereby treated as an unfolding interaction within a given storyline that involves established rights and duties, in which people take up various positions on a moment-to-moment basis relative to their interlocutor(s), the topic at hand, and more. Before turning to the data chapters some final matters are necessary to address – the most important of these being ethical considerations, to which I turn below in the penultimate section of this chapter.

5.7 Ethical considerations

In their good practice recommendations, The British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL), states that as researchers we should 'respect the rights, interests, sensitivities, privacy and autonomy' of participants (2021, p.4). I am confident that I have endeavoured at all times to be transparent, fair and honest about the details of conducting this research, as well as in my interpretations of participant talk that features in the data chapters to follow. Throughout the research process, the basic ethical principle of 'do no harm' was followed. This meant respecting participants' confidentiality, showing sensitivity in my role as researcher, and providing them with sufficient necessary information. A participant information sheet was given to participants and informed consent was obtained before data collection commenced (see appendix C). This information and consent sheet outlined the overall purpose of the research, the format of interviews, stated that interviews would be recorded and how data would be handled. Participants were verbally informed that I may need help checking the accuracy of transcriptions, which could require that a Spanish teacher listen to some interview clips, to which all agreed. [50] The information sheet also stated that pseudonyms would be used, and that informants had a right to withdraw at any time prior to the final thesis being submitted.

Participants were invited to read the work, should they wish to do so, and thanked for their participation. Some basic details about the participant's profile such as postal code, qualifications and current occupation were requested on this form. An individual code was assigned to each participant on their information form to make it recognizable for myself. An addendum form (appendix C) also stated that the participants' data could be used for publications and/or conference talks, but that identities would remain anonymous. Participants were given time to read the information, then asked to sign the form with initials only, by way of consent. Participants were also told that they could decline to answer any question they wished, and that they were free to ask questions themselves. Care was taken in all writing to apply pseudonyms, not only to the participants themselves but also to any identifying information such as workplace, other people mentioned, etc. I am, to the best of my knowledge, the only person who knows the identities of the informants in this thesis, since there was no research team involved.

With regard to the group of university students, the same procedures as above were followed for the most part. Here however the matter of anonymity was somewhat more delicate - the fact that I was teaching at the university at that time meant that there was a more direct link to student's identity (more than with other participants, who worked in different places, and were unknown to one another). Following Miles and Huberman´s observation that each study 'calls for the researcher to bend the methodology to the peculiarities of each setting' (1994, p.5), it was decided here, as an extra precaution to safeguard anonymity, that nationality and other basic profile details would be excluded in writing about this group given the special concerns about anonymity. I do not believe that omitting such information negatively affected the potential for meaningful insight, since data collection with these participants entailed a focus group discussion rather than life story interviews.

5.8 Validity, reliability and epistemology

The construct of validity is about how well a tool, method or construct measures what is intended to. Reliability, in theory, refers to the degree to which data collection technique(s) yield consistent findings, and similar observations would be made by other researchers (Saunders et al., 2019). This means that transparency is required in terms of how sense was made from the data, or how our results were arrived at (ibid). In business and classroom contexts this may be somewhat more achievable by being specific and granular about what is being compared and how, for instance in preparing questions to ask job candidates with rating scales for comparability or setting detailed grading criteria to evaluate student assignments. Yet even where standardized criteria are used, there is always room for subjectivity. In academic research, these kind of clear comparison bases are more difficult to achieve, firstly for the obvious reason that no two research studies are ever the same, nor do they conform 'exactly to a standard methodology' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.5). While reliability and validity are more achievable in quantitative studies that can seek comparability through techniques like test-retest correlations, Potter in fact maintains that the important constructs of validity and reliability are 'largely unworkable' in discourse focused qualitative investigation, due to 'the different theoretical assumptions in such work' (1996, p.20).

Triangulation is often treated as a panacea to the issue of validity and reliability in qualitative research - seen as an almost failsafe way of producing 'a more accurate, comprehensive and objective representation of the object of study' (Silverman, 2006, p. 291). Miles and Huberman, however, remind us that matters are not so straightforward. For starters, triangulation has its origins in mathematical certainties, hardly fitting for qualitative research. The authors also point out that we may end up with inconsistent or even conflicting findings, 'stuck with a deeper question' of which one to believe (1994, p.266). As a more comprehensive solution, they call for consideration of different types of triangulation; of different data sources, methods, researcher and/or theories.

Despite these issues, qualitative researchers can still strive for high standards in terms of validity and reliability. Firstly, the researcher's commitment to rigour and transparency helps in this process. Aside from the obvious basics like ensuring accuracy in citing sources, and transcribing data, rigour and transparency is required in descriptions of the research processes, for example in reporting things like false leads and dead-ends (Alasuutari, 1995). More time-consuming efforts such as presenting full data sets to enable the reader to come to his or her own conclusions about the findings arrived at are worthwhile (Hua and David, 2008). As Lanza (2008) well notes, considerations of validity and reliability do not just crop up in the methodology and data analysis process, but begin right at the outset, ideally built into the research design throughout. Potter (2006) suggests that deviant case analysis, participant understanding and reader's evaluation are markers of validity and reliability of qualitative work. The first of these, deviant case analysis, is about paying attention not only to pattern confirmations, but also disconfirmations, within the data. This means being aware of our bias as researchers to find what we expect or hope to, and honestly presenting cases which run counter to our expectations. The second, focusing on participant understandings and responses means carrying out extra checks on the analysts' interpretations. Finally, reader's evaluation is about presenting 'rich and extended materials in a way that allows readers…to evaluate their adequacy' (ibid).

Many of the foregoing suggestions were taken into consideration in the present study's research design. For instance, false leads and dead-ends are reported transparently in section 9.4, as well as equally important study limitations, reported in section 9.3. Full data sets for interviews and the focus group are made available in the appendices for the reader's reference (a link to an online document is provided). Any participant opinions, experiences or general findings that ran counter to my research biases and expectations were, to the best of my knowledge, presented transparently and honestly. (For instance, finding that some participants took what I call a sociologist-like stance on inequality in education - see section 9.2.3 - ran counter to my expectations.) Focusing on participants' understanding felt an important responsibility for me in carrying out data analyses that I hoped would best represent participants' intended meanings. My efforts in this regard required much back and forth between the analysis write up, the transcript and the recordings. Finally, I have sought to be rigorous in the process of transcribing data accurately according to the words spoken by participants, in my translations, and naturally, in citing sources accurately throughout the thesis. Bearing in mind Potter's caveat that such attempts do not 'singly or in combination guarantee the validity of an analysis', and even if, as Potter concludes, sociologists of science have repeatedly shown that 'there are no such guarantees in science' (1996, p.22), I am confident in my honest dedication to rigour and transparency throughout the entirety of this research project.

5.9 Conclusion

In the present chapter I have mapped out the methodology of this study, following a funnel-like progression from broad overarching paradigm down to specific details. This began with the justification of critical realism as an epistemological framework, followed by the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach. The specific methods selected, over others were then described. The research design and details of data collection were subsequently set out, followed by the data organization procedures. That done, some necessary consideration in terms of ethical issues and validity and reliability matters were discussed. What follows in the analysis chapters, Chapters 6 – 8, is an attempt to address the research questions set out in section 5.1 above, using the methodology of positioning theory, described earlier this chapter.

Chapter 6: In-person servers, class and English

The present chapter explores data from one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with six individuals who are categorized here as in-person servers. In-person servers, as we saw last chapter are, according to Reich (1992, p.176), those who provide 'person-to-person' services which are 'not sold worldwide'. This category includes 'retail sales workers, waiters and waitresses, hotel workers, janitors, cashiers, hospital house cleaners, home health-care aides, taxi drivers, secretaries' among others. The individuals whose talk features in this chapter were mostly recruited while at work. One person (Catalina) was recruited through a post to a Facebook group for English learning in Barcelona. In this chapter I aim to understand the interview discourse within a broader context of structure, class, and past/present life circumstances, also exploring how a participant's English learning trajectory fits into that broader, historical context. Participant profile information for this group is provided in table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1
In-person servers

Gender	Pseudonym	Age range	Profession	Nationality	Post code	Education level
Female (2)	Catalina	25-30	Waitress/student	Colombian	08004 Eixample	Bachillerato
	Paula	20-25	Student/food counter server	Spanish	08029 Las Corts	Bachillerato
Male (4)	Giuseppe	25-30	Restaurant owner	Italian	Eixample 08036	Bachillerato
	Ibrahim	25-30	Hotel receptionist	Moroccan	Eixample (n.p.)	Licenciado
	Juan	25-30	Student/waiter	Peruvian	Sant Andreu 08030	Bachillerato
	Pablo	25-30	Student/waiter	Spanish	Eixample (n.p.)	E.S.O
Total participants: 6						

Note. n.p. = none provided

As shown in table 6.1, all participants were in the age range of 20-30 years, all were working in hospitality (one was a restaurant owner), and their nationalities varied. The present chapter is organized around each person's story. Each section begins again with a ‘rhetorical redescription’ (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999) where I sketch out a picture of the social class background discernible from the participants’ respective stories, following which interview excerpts are examined. The concluding section emphasises some key findings from the data overall, in light of the research questions. In the first part below, I begin with the life story of Ibrahim, a male participant from Casablanca, Morocco.

6.1 Ibrahim: ‘the biggest mistake of my entire life’ was not choosing English

Ibrahim had been living in Spain for nearly ten years at the time of our second interview, which took place a few months after the first[51]. He had four years of experience in the hotel industry and was working as a receptionist doing day and night shifts at a small four-star hotel in Sant Gervasi, an upmarket district of Barcelona. Ibrahim speaks Arabic, French, Spanish, and has an intermediate level of English.[52] He holds a degree in tourism and finance from the university of Seville, and a master’s in hotel management which he completed online while working full time. Ibrahim is from a broadly middle-class family in Casablanca. His late father was a bank manager who spoke French to his children, having completed much of his education in France, while his mother worked in the home, taking care of their five children. For primary and secondary education, Ibrahim had attended a public school in Morocco, where according to Bogaert (2011), classes can have anything up to 50 students. He described himself as a high achieving student and spoke very positively of his parents and their unwavering support, as we see in extract 6.1 below:

Extract 6.1

Carly: mmhh et tes parents ils t'ont encouragé de pour étudier ils t'aidaient beaucoup ou eh ils étaient comment ↑?

Ibrahim: oui oui j'ai uh j'ai j'ai trouvé uh je dirais dans mes parents fin j'ai trouvé j'ai trouvé ce qu'on appelle le le le câlin le le le support de de de de uh de continuer d'avoir des bons résultats et de de de réussir je dirais dans ma vie personnelle et professionnelle

Carly: mmhhh

Ibrahim: ahhh je crois que ça se voit jusqu'à maintenant et uhhh

Carly: et ils voulaient que tu aies des bonnes notes uh a l'école↑? ils faisaient des efforts pour que tu fasses de ton mieux ou toi tu faisais ça toi-même ou ils voulaient↑? …

Ibrahim: effectivement ben c'était uh si on parle clairement c'était un mix uh c'était uh un mélange des deux des deux choses mes parents ils m'ont bien soutien ils m'ont bien uh uh

Carly: encouragé

Ibrahim: encouragé c’est ça c'est ça le verbe que je voulais chercher que je voulais utiliser
Carly: si oui parce que c'est très important aussi le support le soutien des parents quoi
Ibrahim: effectivement

Extract 6.1 (English translation)

Carly: mmhh and your parents did they encourage you to study or what were they like ↑?
Ibrahim: ya ya I eh I I found eh I would say in my parents well I found what is called affection support to to to eh continue to have good results and to to to succeed I would say in my personal and professional life
Carly: mmhhh
Ibrahim: ahhh I think that it still shows today and ahhhh
Carly: and they wanted you to have good grades eh at school↑? did they make efforts so you would do your best or did you do that yourself or did they want↑? …
Ibrahim: well really it was if we talk frankly it was a mix it was eh a mix of the two the two things my parents they supported me well and they ehm eh
Carly: encouraged
Ibrahim: encouraged that’s it that’s the verb I wanted to look for I wanted to use
Carly: ya ya because it’s very important also the support the support of parents right
Ibrahim: indeed

In this extract Ibrahim positions himself not as a lone individual, but as part of a family system, expressing gratitude not only for educational support but the warmth and affection he had received from his parents. He views his personal and professional success as owing to a ‘mix’ of personal effort and parental support and encouragement, and he believes that it ‘still shows today’. Later when Ibrahim spoke of his choice to pursue a university education in Seville, he mentioned having obtained his father’s approval first. His parents had supported him financially for his first year at university, but after that he said he had worked to support himself. Upon starting university in Seville things became more challenging for Ibrahim, who had been a high achiever throughout his school education. Despite having studied Spanish in secondary school, his degree in biochemistry proved a challenge due to ‘difficulties with the language’, which led him to drop out and switch to finance and tourism the following year. Ibrahim then found himself facing a new challenge, that of learning English as a beginner among classmates who had been learning it since primary school. He said he worked very hard to catch up with the required level, but despite his efforts failed the two English-medium subjects at the end of his first year in finance and tourism. The following year he spent in Liège, Belgium, on Erasmus, where he hoped to improve, but ended up failing the English language subject that year. He discusses these struggles in excerpt 6.2 below:

Extract 6.2

Ibrahim: niveau c'est ça et euh j'ai commencé le premier quand j'étais en Belgique c'était pendant mon Erasmus en Belgique à Liège c'était vraiment compliqué vraiment très difficile de de faire suivre je dirais les leçons de faire suivre les les classes eh puisque les les eh les autres élèves ils ont fin ont eu je dirais dans ce moment-là à mon mon donné ah un niveau d'ang- fin d'anglais que est supérieur à mon niveau et c'était vraiment compliqué parce que j'ai fait le double travail j'ai fait eh eh le le double des exercices et c'était vraiment vraiment vraiment::: difficile

Carly: et tu as fait comment pour apprendre eh [l'anglais]↑?

Ibrahim: [l'anglais] fin alors on a commencé eh fin j'ai commencé moi-même je dirais de de réviser tout ce que on a tout ce qu'on a eu faire je dirais dans les dans les cours et eh … et pour avancer plus ce que j'ai fait c'est de de d'étudier des mots le vocabulaire parce que ce que j'allais faire c'est de d'apprendre cinq mots en français et en anglais et puis après de l'apprendre de de de les mémoriser ça ma ça m'a fait euh ça m'a beaucoup aidé mais eh c'est pas c'était pas suffisant à ce moment-là parce que j'avais besoin je dirais euh de quelques expressions de quelques tout ça et eh alors c'était un très bon commencer c'était un très bon début c'était difficile parce que eh j'ai pas j'ai pas j'ai pas réussi je dirais eh la la {laughs} matière en anglais c'était la seule moyen la seule matière eh pendant mon Erasmus que j'ai pas réussi que j'ai pas pu::: réussir c'était l'anglais

Extract 6.2 (English translation)

Ibrahim: level that's it eh I started the first when I was in Belgium it was during my Erasmus in Belgium in Liège it was really complicated very difficult to to follow I would say the lessons to follow the the classes eh because the eh the other students they all well they had I would say at that moment in my my opinion ah a level of Eng- English that was superior to my level and it was very complicated because I did double the work I did eh eh double the exercises and it was really really really::: difficult

Carly: and what did you do to ahm learn [English]↑?

Ibrahim: [English] well so it started eh well I started myself I would say ahm revising all that we had to do I would say in the lessons and ah … to progress further what I did was to to study words the vocabulary because what I was going to do was to learn five words in French and in English and then to learn to to memorize them that that eh that helped me a lot but eh it's not it wasn't enough at that time because what I needed I would say eh was a few expressions some- all that and eh well it was a good start it was a good beginning it was difficult because I didn't I didn't I didn't pass I would say eh the the {laughs}subject in English it was the only way the only subject eh during my Erasmus that I didn't pass that I couldn't::: pass was English

Recalling here his hard work to catch up in English, describing how ‘complicated’ and ‘difficult’ it was to follow lessons, Ibrahim presents himself as a stoic and resilient person. Upon revealing that despite these efforts he still failed English on his Erasmus year he laughs, possibly suggesting nonchalance. However, elsewhere in the interview Ibrahim referred to his choice to study Spanish over English at age fifteen as the ‘biggest mistake of [his] entire life’ because upon arriving in Spain he realized that English was the ‘most important most privileged language’. He eventually passed his university degree in Seville, including the language requirement and had since been trying to make up for lost time because having a good command of English was imperative in hospitality work. Personifying the kind of ‘wise language learner’ advocated by Benson (2011), Ibrahim had been taking group lessons at a language school in Barcelona and sought opportunities to practice speaking at language exchange meetups around the city. Despite being a late starter and experiencing some failure along the way, he was highly motivated to improve his English.

Ibrahim’s hard work and persistence with English during and after his university years point to his embodiment of neoliberal personhood ideals. An ambitious attitude, coupled with relentless hard work was put forward throughout his story. Ibrahim was humble in the telling of his successes and failures, and he never complained about his situation. Rather, his talk was filled with positivity. He even spoke in glowing terms of an employer for whom he had worked illegally under low paid, highly questionable conditions. I had first met Ibrahim when a relative visiting Barcelona stayed in the small B&B type hotel where he worked at the time. This had been his first proper job in hospitality after completing an apprenticeship in Andalusia, but the establishment - run by a Mexican American couple - had since been shut down due to tax evasion. Ibrahim had had full responsibility there for the day-to-day running of the B&B, handling bookings, administration and housekeeping. During the interview he explained that he had worked for six hundred euros a month cash in hand and full board with meals included, but had no place of his own to sleep and had to move around every few nights depending on bookings. Nevertheless, he spoke of his former employers with great fondness:

Extract 6.3

Ibrahim: … euh c'était vraiment euh un de de mes de mes expériences les plus euh les plus vivantes parce que c’est euh c’est euh c’est naturel parce que on a fait ce qu'on a fait ce qu'on a fait dans la {hotel name} c'était toujours naturel c'était toujours euh accueillant parce que euh mon expérience c'était euh responsable je dirais d'un appartement euh euh responsable ça va être je je voulais dire de faire le nettoyage de tout ce

qui est euh euh fin de toute de tout l'appartement et puis après de faire la gestion et l'administration de l'appartement alors euh je suis le responsable de faire le check-in mais en même temps je suis le responsable de de nettoyer la salle de bain alors {laughs}
Carly: {laughs} tu étais le responsable de tout en fait↑?
Ibrahim: de tout {laughs}
Carly: mais c'était une bonne expérience↑?
Ibrahim: c'était une très bonne expérience
Carly: parce que tu as beaucoup appris↑?
Ibrahim: j'ai beaucoup appris euh euh et à mon mon donné eh j'espère ne pas oublier pendant toute ma vie ce que j'ai eu je dirais dans la {hotel name} parce que c'était vraiment toute est est eh est eh naturel toute est accueillant chaleureux euh vraiment bien

Extract 6.3 (English translation)

Ibrahim: … eh it was really eh one of my of my most eh the most lively experiences because it's eh it's eh it's normal because what we did what we did what we did at the {hotel name} it was always natural it was always eh welcoming because eh my experience eh was eh in charge of I would say an apartment eh eh responsible that'll be I I wanted to say for doing all of the cleaning for all that is eh eh well for all the apartment and then the management and the administration of the apartment so eh I am in charge of the check ins but at the same time I am in charge of of cleaning the bathrooms so {laughs}
Carly: {laughs} you were in charge of everything in fact↑?
Ibrahim: of everything {laughs}
Carly: but it was a good experience↑?
Ibrahim: it was a very good experience
Carly: because you learned a lot↑?
Ibrahim: I learned a lot eh eh and in my my opinion eh I hope to never forget for the rest of my life what I had I would say at {hotel name} because it was really everything is is eh is natural everything is welcoming eh really good

As explained here, Ibrahim was responsible for the full range of administration, booking and housekeeping duties at this B&B. After a long turn listing all his duties he laughs, making light of the situation. He speaks of his former employer, who set up illegal working conditions and refused him sick leave (Ibrahim left after one year due to back pain and unresolved visa issues), with heartfelt gratitude, describing the experience in language like 'lively', 'warm' and 'welcoming' and says he hopes to never forget what he had there. Importantly, he insists that it was his choice to accept the working conditions, as we see in extract 6.4 below:

Extract 6.4

Ibrahim: ben en fait eh à {hotel name} c'était vraiment eh un cas spécial parce que c'était ma décision d'aller à {hotel name} et de vivre là-bas eh je m'explique

Carly: tu vivais là-bas tu dormais aussi là-bas↑?
Ibrahim: exactement eh bien définitivement ce que j’ai fait c’est de dormir de travailler de manger de faire tout là-bas dans fin à l’intérieur de {hotel name} à l'intérieur de l'établissement euh alors c'était ma décision premièrement c'était ma décision euh en savant que il y en a il y en a des occasions que j’ai que je que pourrais pas je dirais dormir dans une chambre je dirais euh normale alors c'était ma décision d'accepter je dirais les conditions d'avoir six cents euros au mois par mois alors six cents euros par mois d'avoir la nourriture fin d'être nourri dans le même établissement et puis après d'être dormi le fait c’est que j’avais pas une euh j’avais pas une chambre je dirais standard pour moi ce que j’ai fait c’est [de changer]
Carly: [de changer] par rapport à:::
Ibrahim: de changer de chambre {sounds as though smiling} à chaque deux trois nuits

Extract 6.4 (English translation)

Ibrahim: well in fact at {hotel name} it was really eh a special case because it was my decision to go to {hotel name} and to live there I’ll explain
Carly: you lived there and you slept there too↑?
Ibrahim: exactly eh well definitely what I did was to sleep to work to eat to do everything there inside of {hotel name} inside the establishment eh so it was my decision first and foremost it was my decision eh knowing that there are that there are times when I that I would not I would say sleep in a room I would say eh a normal room so it was my decision to accept I would say the conditions of having six hundred euros per month so six hundred euros a month per month so six hundred euros per month for food well to be fed in the same establishment and then to be put up the fact is I didn’t have an eh I didn’t have a room I would say a standard room for myself what I did was [to change]
Carly: [to change] according to:::
Ibrahim: to change rooms {sounds as though smiling} every two or three nights

With unwavering positivity, Ibrahim presents himself in these lines as a flexible, loyal and stoic worker. Rather than take the opportunity to criticize any aspect of what happened in this workplace, he takes responsibility for his decision to be there, ‘knowing that there [would be] times’ when he wouldn’t have ‘a normal room’ to sleep in. He repeats four times in this extract that it was ‘his decision’ to accept the conditions. While Ibrahim did of course accept these conditions, his status as a Moroccan immigrant without a permanent visa at the time clearly placed him in a low power position vis à vis his employment rights.

In Spain the vast majority of employed male migrants from Morocco work in agriculture or construction and are largely absent in the tertiary sector (Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine à l'étranger, 2009). Low secondary education completion levels in Morocco overall (see

UNICEF, 2013) mean that Ibrahim is among a relative minority of Moroccan citizens given his educational and professional trajectory. While he came from a middle-class family and had good support behind him, here we see how class intertwines with nationality and race to shape rights and duties (Harré, 2012). Ibrahim's employers neglected their legal and moral duties to him as a worker, taking advantage of his status as a Moroccan immigrant seeking a permanent visa, and as a young university graduate who had low social capital in Spain. Still, he takes personal responsibility for accepting the job, embodying the neoliberal ideals of total responsibility and perseverance. In Ibrahim's case, migrating to Spain meant the weakening of middle-class resources at least in the short term, leaving him with less social, economic, and cultural capital. Another example of such weakening of middle-class resources surfaces in the story of the next participant, Juan, from Peru, to whom I turn below.

6.2. Juan – 'those with less money settle with a lower level'

Juan is a twenty-six-year-old waiter from Peru who had lived in Barcelona for almost ten years by the time I interviewed him. He came from a middle-class family, had been well educated, and was enrolled in an engineering degree at a public university when our conversation took place. In his hometown Trujillo, he said school dropout and delinquency were common. Juan spoke of the problems in Peru with drug trafficking, violence, and homicide which he and his family had witnessed first-hand.[53] He spoke openly and directly about social class, and of the polarization between the haves and have nots in Peru. He placed his family in the former category, explaining that many family members had worked abroad and had earned in euros and dollars (as opposed to fellow citizens, whose money he said came from drug trafficking and other illegal activity).

Juan's father was a retired pilot in the air forces. He had had no contact with him since age thirteen when his parents had divorced - a development which Juan attributed directly to his father's issues with alcohol. His father had served in the war in Afghanistan where he had lost his hearing in one ear and following which he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. For high school, Juan had been sent to private boarding school in a military barracks where he said strict, unjust punishment like being locked up and left without food was not uncommon. He held no positive memories of his time at the boarding school, loathed the military and called it corrupt. Being sent there was, as he saw it, an effort on his parent's part to avoid him getting mixed up in delinquency around Trujillo.

On account of his father's work, his family had moved to California when he was five years old, and stayed for eight years, until his parents' divorce. His mother had then moved to Barcelona, leaving him in Peru at age fourteen to live with his grandparents, of whom he spoke very fondly. Juan had moved to Barcelona upon finishing secondary school at eighteen. At the time of the interview, he was studying to be a mechanical engineer at a public university, having followed a rather meandering path to get there. Although he had spent some years in California, he said he spoke English *'más o menos bien'* but had forgotten a good deal since he had stopped learning it upon returning to Peru.[54] Although Juan said he couldn't write well in English, he had enough to get by as a waiter. He worked in a pizzeria in Sarrià, an upmarket district of Barcelona, but lived at the other side of the city near his mother in a neighbourhood called Sant Andreu, traditionally a working-class neighbourhood (see Moyer, 1991). Juan told me that things work differently in '*la zona alta'*, referring to the exclusive districts of Barcelona. He spoke of his perception of how people from such areas expected to be treated, pointing to strong class consciousness and a sense of otherness. Discussing his interactions with customers in Sarrià, he said 'you have to be very careful to speak to them well'. In excerpt 6.5 below, Juan recalls a bus trip where in his perception, passengers from Sarrià were treated better than those from his neighbourhood, Sant Andreu:

Extract 6.5

```
Carly: y tenías ideas acerca de Sarrià antes↑?
Juan: no de hecho cuando fui a la entrevista cogí un bus y claro el
      bus lo cogí en mi casa y los buses por mi casa
Carly: en tu↑?
Juan: la maquinista por Sant Andreu eh los buses por mi casa lo-
      el conductor suele ser demasiado eh malcriado no lo- sabes lo
      que es [malcriado]↑?
Carly: [sí malcriado]
Juan: [borde] o sea habla contesta mal
Carly: ya
Juan: y era borde con la gente por el barrio pero cuando íbamos
      llegando aquí a Sarrià le cambiaba la cara
Carly: no↑?
Juan: era educado
Carly: no me digas
Juan: sí o sea es cuando llegan aquí a la zona alta se xx son más
      educados
Carly: la misma persona↑?
Juan: la misma persona sí xxx son así
```

Claiming that a bus driver on public transport was, in this instance 'rude' and bad mannered towards people getting on the bus near his house, but later polite to passengers boarding in

Sarrià, Juan positions himself as separate to people from the upmarket neighbourhood. This, together with his feeling the need to be 'careful' how he spoke to people at work in Sarrià, indicates a strong sense of otherness from people in the 'zona alta', and a seeming sense of mistrust. People of this neighbourhood are also distinguished from others along the lines of English competence. Juan spoke elsewhere in the interview of the high concentration of private schools around Sarrià, and said he believed that young people in the area tend to speak English well. He explains why this is so in extract 6.6:

Extract 6.6

Juan: no lo sé yo bueno en Sarrià sobre todo los niños cuando xxx entrar a comprar muchas veces hablan de sus deberes del colegio y hablan [en inglés]
Carly: [hablan] en inglés sí lo he oído también[55]
Juan: o cuando hablan con lo- sí
Carly: y por qué dices en Sarrià sobre todo↑? en comparación con
Juan: xxx trabajo hoy porque porque vienen no sé vienen de colegios pub de colegios privados pues aquí los colegios privados suelen tener un nivel alto en enseñanza en inglés y pienso bueno la verdad es que se ve que dominan bastante bastante el inglés

Juan maintains that the children he often hears speaking English in Sarrià must attend private schools where he believes there is a higher standard of English teaching. Later in the interview I asked him directly about socioeconomic matters related to English learning, to which he replied as follows:

Extract 6.7

Juan: yo pienso que cualquier persona que quiera aprender inglés le es posible puede hacerlo lo que es verdad que en en lo que es el nivel socioeconómico en los colegios privados o la gente que tiene más dinero se paga bueno no sé tiene puede pagar una mejor enseñanza para que sus hijos o para que ellos mismos aprendan el inglés más rápido más fácil la gente que tiene menos dinero que va a colegios públicos pues se conforma con un nivel más más bajo y aprende pues más despacio pero yo pienso que una persona tiene la misma capacidad de aprender inglés si lo quiere xxx va a aprender inglés

A contradiction of sorts is discernible here. Juan says that those in private schools and 'people with money' can pay for better teaching so they or their children learn English faster and easier while those 'with less money' attend public schools, learn slower and 'settle for a lower level' of English. However, despite these strong statements about how learning is directly facilitated by possession of economic capital, the turn opens and closes with the idea that if a person wants to learn English they will. Awareness of socioeconomic differences in English education sits side by side with individualist-rooted belief in the power of motivation and ambition. Neither is there any further elaboration on how simply wanting to learn English overrides the socioeconomic differences acknowledged in the same turn, all of which serves to contradict the understanding of socioeconomic inequality verbalized.

At the time of interview, Juan was in his second year of a mechanical engineering degree at a public university. Getting a place on the course had not been straightforward – he had failed the entry exams in Catalan a few years before, despite much preparation. After that he took a back door entry route, completing a professional training which allowed him to reapply and secure a place at university. Shortly after that the global crisis came about, which saw his mother's work hours and salary cut. This meant she could no longer afford to send him to university, as Juan explains below:

Extract 6.8

Juan: con la edad de veinte años entré a la universidad eh pública y bueno aquí en España estaba la crisis que ardía mucho xxx dos mil::: doce era el pico más alto de la crisis

Carly: sí sí sí

Juan: mi madre bueno mi madre tenía un buen trabajo en ese [entonces]

Carly: [en qué]trabaja tu madre↑?

Juan: era enfermera pero trabaja bueno trabajaba en dos en dos sitios que ganaba bueno entre los dos sitios ganaba casi tres mil quinientos euros que bueno [era]

Carly: [que] está bien en Barcelona no claro [sí sí]

Juan:[más] o menos está bien sí en Barcelona está bien pero ehhh hicieron recortes de trabajadores dejó un trabajo y en el otro trabajo ya recortaron el sueldo las horas por tal motivo mi madre no me podía pagar la universidad valía tres mil euros y no podía permitírselo

Carly: uff wow

Juan: y nada pues mi madre solo podía pagar el alquiler del piso y bueno y la comida y los recibos de agua y luz y xxx y es ahí donde yo dije bueno pues voy a trabajar y pensé dije voy a trabajar un año ... y bueno me fui quedando {laughs} me fui quedando me [me]

Carly: [dejaste] los estudios↑?

Juan: sí dejé los estudios empecé en verano en dos mil doce a estudiar a trabajar [perdón]

Carly: [de ingeniero] de ingeniería pero dejaste ingeniería

Juan: sí dejé los la ingeniería y empecé a trabajar en hostelería y se me daba bien por desgracia se me daba bien

Juan recalls how following crisis cutbacks, his mother, just about managing to pay rent, food and bills, could no longer afford to send him to university. This prompted him to quit his studies and find work in hospitality where he ended up staying longer than planned. Juan directly invokes economic capital by revealing his mother’s earnings prior to the cutbacks, subsequently positioning himself as lacking in economic capital - at least that time. At the end of the excerpt, he laments the fact that he turned out to be good at hospitality work. Juan had since returned to the engineering degree, which he said he was now doing gradually due to work commitments. He spoke of plans to work as a mechanical engineer and considered English ‘critical’ to his future career. He would need to achieve a B2 level by his final year in order to graduate (at the time of writing this is a requirement in some but not all Catalan universities, as discussed in Chapter 1). However, Juan was not actively learning English and apart from the basics required at work, had little to do with English in his daily life. He said he would like to learn it again, knowing how important it would be to future employment prospects in engineering, but there was no apparent urgency in that regard:

Extract 6.9

Juan: por qué↑? porque hoy en día el inglés es el idioma del mundo actualmente en el mundo existen tantos países tantas culturas tantas lenguas que el inglés es el idioma universal creo que si no sé inglés no voy a poder buscar conseguir trabajo en ninguna parte ni siquiera en mi propio país por qué en mi propio país España me exigen tener conocimientos de inglés o hablar bien inglés

Carly: claro he olvidado preguntarte me he olvidado preguntarte no necesitas el inglés para para sacar la carrera↑?

Juan: sí xxx ya

Carly: B2 no↑?

Juan: sí me lo piden me lo piden al final de me lo piden ah de aquí en °°me faltan tres años todavía dos años más

Juan says that if he doesn’t know English, he won’t be able to get work anywhere, not even in Spain, where he feels he is expected to speak English well. He articulates awareness of the real academic requirements he would soon face, having to pass an exam to show he had B2 level, but he didn’t have plans to improve his English (and unlike other participants, he didn’t watch movies or series in English either). In other words, despite his belief in the importance of English for his future career, taking action to improve his level is put off for the future. Like the working-class students in Crozier and Reay’s study (2011) who were ‘tied up more with competing against the demands of their busy lives’ than worrying about academic competition, Juan was seemingly more engaged with his full-time work which he spoke about far more than university. His account in this regard is perhaps also reminiscent of Reay et al.’s observation of ‘clueless serendipity’ (2009, p. 1108) of some working-class students in their study as regards career plans and achievement, as opposed to the proactive planning the authors observed among many middle-class students. The fact that Juan was working full time no doubt diminished his focus on his studies. It also likely influenced his lack of attention to English, despite deeming it 'critical' to his future career. Juan's views on the importance of English are echoed by the next participant, Catalina, also from South America. They are notably different however as regards the urgency of English learning, as we see in Catalina's story, discussed below in section 6.3.

6.3 Catalina – 'a person earns more just for speaking English'

Catalina is a Colombian woman in her late twenties who was officially unemployed when I interviewed her.[56] She had moved to Barcelona a year earlier with her six-year-old daughter, to be with her Catalan partner who she had met at university in Bogota a few years earlier. Catalina came from a middle-class family in Colombia. Her mother was a nurse while her late father's occupation went unmentioned. Catalina spoke about the exorbitant cost of attending university in Colombia, and how higher education was therefore only available to a minority of the population. Unlike many fellow Colombians, she and her brother had attended university and had had private English classes at the British Council. That said, she did not regard herself as privileged. She criticized the 'super posh' class she said was running Colombia, describing them with broad brush strokes, as people from elite families who study in London or Oxford, who 'lack values' and do not understand 'the real problems in society'.

Catalina had quit her degree in industrial engineering, having decided to instead leave for the United States to join a friend. Her short time in the U.S. however made her realize that 'the first world disappointed her'. Far more than any other participant, Catalina invoked economic capital in discussing the cost of living and education in places she had lived and visited; Barcelona, Bogota, Venezuela, the United States. For much of the interview she gushed about the problems of life in Spain such as the high cost of living, low salaries, and poor treatment of staff in hospitality, an industry she labelled 'impoverished'. Fed up with it, she had enrolled in an online post graduate course in legal administration in the hopes of fighting inequality (although she said the course would not make her a qualified lawyer). Importantly, Catalina saw English as a panacea to the financial and career problems that she felt were part of living in Spain. If a person could just attain a proficient English level, they would have far more opportunities for better paid jobs across all sectors. She even deemed English more important than Catalan. Her partner – a civil engineer with a masters in his field – she believed was limited to a low salary on account of his intermediate level of English. In the next excerpt

Catalina discusses the opportunities she believes would be open to her if her English level was higher:

Extract 6.10

Catalina: inglés mi- claro eh tendría la opción de optar por diferentes trabajos porque he visto por ejemplo eh auxiliar en oficinade abogados en horario de tres de la tarde hasta siete de la noche nueve cientos euros está::: genial porque son solamente cuatro horas pero necesitas inglés C1 y más
Carly: C1 pero también supongo que que necesitas experiencia en ese campo
Catalina: no no aquí sobre todo España en España no son muy bilingües {laughs} y y valoran mucho que tu realmente tengas un inglés muy fluido y usualmente las personas tienen un inglés muy medio o sea::: que se comunican sí pero y entonces podrían trabajar en mejores empresas pero si no manejan el inglés no

Catalina speaks here about job advertisements she had seen for legal assistants requiring C1 level English. Convinced that relevant work experience was not necessary, since English proficiency is so highly valued, she states that in Spain, people ‘are not very bilingual’ and usually have a ‘very average’ level of English (Catalan is apparently not included in this assessment). The Spanish overall are thus positioned as inadequate in the stakes of English competency. Catalina spoke of plans and efforts to improve her own English level (attending state subsidized classes, reading in English). Right after the above excerpt, Catalina suggested that English competence was valued more by prospective employers in Spain than a university degree, a point on which I probed further:

Extract 6.11

Carly: ya es muy interesante pero cómo lo sabes↑? qué valoran más cómo sabes que lo valoran más↑?
Catalina: porque por el salario el salario en las ofertas de empleo que piden un inglés fluido sube mínimo quinientos euros en su campo en su [campo]
Carly:[quinientos] euros↑? ah estás hablando de [tu novio]
Catalina: [sí]y en mi campo
Carly:[y en tu] en el campo en el que has estado eh buscando el campo es más legal digamos legal no↑?
Catalina: sí sí y no necesito experiencia entonces piden más que tu puedas comunicarte en inglés tengo una amiga que estudió pocos eh no terminó:: no terminó leyes pero
Carly: no terminó↑?
Catalina: no terminó derecho
Carly: derecho
Catalina: pero habla inglés perfectamente y consiguió un trabajo fenomenal solamente por por hablar inglés porque el abogado le

dice como bueno redácteme esto en inglés llame a tal persona en
inglés porque muchas veces el propio:: abogado {laughs} no maneja
cien por ciento el inglés y acá eh yo me he dado cuenta que
valoran pero muchí::simo que tú
Carly: sepas inglés
Catalina: sí

When asked how she knows that English competence is valued over educational qualifications, Catalina claims that salaries shown on job offers requiring English proficiency are 'at least five hundred euros more'. She reiterates that such job offers in the legal field, only need English expertise. Experience she says is not necessary, since 'they require more that you can communicate in English'. By way of evidence, she offers the example of a friend who got a 'phenomenal' job in a law firm thanks to her 'perfect' English. Catalina says that some lawyers can't manage in English themselves and so need someone they can rely on just for work in English. Later, when asked if she knew anyone who had learned to speak English very fluently, Catalina referred to Pakistanis, Indians and Filipinos. Their proficiency in English meant they could 'get a better job' but she maintained that their culture impeded them from 'going a bit further':

Extract 6.12
Catalina: es su cultura es que ellos aceptan su situación social a
pesar y yo creo que saben evidentemente y deben de saber que por el
hecho de hablar inglés podrían trabajar en otro lugar pero es
que no:: o sea como que su cultura no les permite ir un
poco más allá
Carly: que ellos no se esfuerzan quieres decir↑? o::
Catalina: porque no quieren es que lo aceptan veo a los inmigrantes
en restauración que hablan inglés mucho mejor que yo que
muchas veces conocen un idioma extra y están en este sector
donde los tratan su::per mal o sea yo lloraba los primeros mes
es yo:: o sea mi xxx pfff
Carly: sí lo he visto también cuando trabajaba en Francia me acuerdo
Catalina: cómo cómo cómo puedes tu hablar inglés tener tal vez un
idioma extra y trabajar en esto↑? cuando si yo tuviera inglés
sé que hay una o sea de verdad tu entras a infojobs a indeed o
lo que sea y te das cuenta de que muchas veces gana más una
persona solamente por hablar inglés que por tener un xxx de
profesional

According to Catalina, Filipinos, Pakistanis, and Indians with excellent English accept their social situation because 'it's their culture' - with their English level they 'obviously know' that they could get out of hospitality work. She expresses heartfelt sadness at having observed such colleagues being treated badly – she says she 'cried for the first few months'. At the same time, Catalina thinks that they 'don't want to [do better]' and they 'accept it'. The people she refers to are thereby positioned as pitiful victims, but at the same time as unwilling to take action to better their lives. In contrast, Catalina says that if she spoke English as well as these people do, she would take full advantage, thereby positioning herself as responsible, proactive, and savvy enough to do better – if she only 'had English'. Once again, awareness of structural inequalities sits side by side with neoliberal ideals of total responsibility. Further, there is an oversimplification in terms of how easy it is to 'get a better job' and change one's circumstances, coupled with an exaggerated faith in the capacity of English competence to act as a catalyst for such changes. This hyperfocus on English crowds out other factors which shape one's trajectory, like race, nationality, age, gender, class and so forth. While reference to racial inequality is implicit in talk of unequal treatment in the workplace, it is ultimately explained by individual responsibility and aversion to take action. As with Juan´s talk earlier, this serves to counter the recognition of inequality initially verbalized. Juan and Catalina are not alone in favouring a view of self-responsibility over a view of circumstance and structure in understanding people´s trajectories. Self-responsibility is a strong theme in the talk of Giuseppe, an Italian restaurant owner in his late twenties, to whose interview I turn in section 6.4 below.

6.4 Giuseppe: 'each person decides'

Giuseppe is the owner of a newly opened bar-restaurant in Barcelona's city centre. Originally from Veneto in Italy, he had lived in Barcelona for nearly ten years by the time I interviewed him. Before Barcelona, he had lived for four months in East Sussex, England, but left when he lost his job around the time of the global crisis. He said he learned some English there, but lamented not having made more of an effort. Giuseppe had completed his education to Italian *bachillerato* level, having pursued a tourism program which included English as a subject. He had been learning English since the age of five since his parents – fashion designers who travelled a lot - both spoke English and encouraged Giuseppe and his brother to also do so. His father, who had more recently turned his attention to art, had invested financially in the restaurant since there had been a downturn in the economy, Giuseppe said art was difficult to sell and his father wanted an investment for himself and his son. When asked if his father had influenced him, Giuseppe said no, but that his father had helped him 'to have an open mind'.

Giuseppe had a Rastafarian hairstyle, and told me that this meant that he was unacceptable in the Italian hospitality sector. He believed that in England and Spain things worked on the basis of meritocracy, while in Italy, one's physical appearance and family background were of utmost importance. Accordingly, Giuseppe's account of his life since moving to Spain was a story of meritocracy. He had moved to Spain post-crisis, with little money, had slept rough for some time, and eventually found work in a restaurant by the beach where he worked for below minimum wage. With this, he managed to pay rent in a shared house with many tenants whom he described as being 'in social exclusion'. From there, Giuseppe worked his way up to being manager of a busy restaurant, until he decided it was time to start out as an entrepreneur. Working as a manager he said had allowed him to save up to open his own restaurant in his late twenties. Giuseppe attributes any success he has had, to hard work and good decision making. In extract 6.13 below, he contrasts his choices upon moving to Barcelona with those of a friend from home, who had moved around the same time:

Extract 6.13

Giuseppe: cuando encontré el trabajo ya estaba en mi último último dinero si no hubiese encontrado ese trabajo en este momento probablemente hubiese tenido que volver a Italia y él amigo mío ... yo elegí una casa feísima vivía con un pakistaní que alquilaba a gente un poco [digamos]
Carly: [chunga]
Giuseppe: no chunga pero digamos en exclusión social gente sin papeles y entonces yo encontré esa casa por dos cientos euros al mes y ahí pude pues pagarme unos:: los tres los dos meses hasta que encontré el trabajo pues me costaron solo cuatro cientos euros
Carly: mmhh mmhh
Giuseppe: sin embargo el amigo mío con quién vine él se buscó un piso un poco mejor con gente joven estudiantes y tal y el pagaba tres cientos cincuenta y al segundo mes se tuvo que volver a casa él ahora vive en Turín
Carly: y todavía ahora está en Italia y ya está [okay]
Giuseppe: [sí] no- sí él estuvo aquí de febrero a final de abril
Carly: wow pero qué suerte no↑? tener tuviste [bueno sí]
Giuseppe: [bueno es] es cada uno elige no si yo me hubiese elegido una casa de tres ciento cincuenta euros
Carly: sí sí
Giuseppe: probablemente no hubiese llegado
Carly: mmhh
Giuseppe: mientras he hecho:: un elegido un camino un poco más duro pero que me permitió pues poder seguir

Notwithstanding the fact that Giuseppe refers to people he lived with at the time as 'in social exclusion' at the beginning (correcting my use of the word 'dodgy'), great emphasis is placed on personal choice throughout this extract. Choosing 'very ugly' but cheap accommodation meant being able to afford another month's rent. Giuseppe was therefore able to stay on in Barcelona, in contrast to his friend who had chosen a nicer place to live. When I comment that he had been lucky, Giuseppe invokes personal choice, saying that ‘each person decides’. Not only does this extract tally with Giuseppe’s faith in meritocracy, it also presents him as a good strategist, someone who choses ‘a slightly harder path’ and decides what happens in life. The importance of personal choice and decision making extends to English learning. This can be seen in the extract below, where he discusses the importance of doing a stay abroad:

Extract 6.14

Carly: bueno vale crees que obtener un muy buen nivel de inglés es posible para cualquier persona que quiera conseguirlo↑?
Giuseppe: yo creo que sí yo creo que sí sí que sé que hay personas que son más portadas para podar hablar idiomas y personas que menos pero yo yo creo que sí
Carly: mmhh [con fluidez]
Giuseppe: [y hasta] haría falta un poco de práctica todo el mundo debería de vivir unos meses en Inglaterra
Carly: sí okay pero no todo el mundo puede tampoco sí
Giuseppe: cada uno bueno sí pero cada uno puede hacer lo que se se fije como objetivo o sea yo no pude:: hasta que me lo pude pagar yo
Carly: sí
Giuseppe: trabajando y yendo ya cada uno

When asked about those who may not be able to do a stay abroad, Giuseppe says that each person ‘can do what they set themselves as an objective’. He points out that he couldn’t go on a stay abroad to England until he was able to pay for it himself, once again emphasising personal responsibility. Although Giuseppe said he loved English and wished he could better understand song lyrics, he was not actively learning it he said due to lack of time. He did however speak English on a daily basis in the restaurant. The fact that he had come to Spain having an intermediate level of English he felt gave him an advantage work wise. This is partly because according to Giuseppe, Spanish people were more reluctant (than Italians) to speak English:

Extract 6.15

Giuseppe: [en mi] país es eh …digamos como que se enseña un poquito más yo creo un italiano casi siempre te puede hablar en inglés un español te dice no no no en inglés no
Carly: {laughs} sí↑? no he tenido esa [experiencia no]
Giuseppe: [no↑?] ah muy bien
Carly: bueno yo sigo normalmente suelo hablar en castellano pero no sé debería intentarlo una vez
Giuseppe: sí ves a restaurantes a mí en estos siete años el camarero eh
Giuseppe puedes ir tú:: que no [entiendo]
Carly: [sí] {laughs} ah sí sí sí
Giuseppe: o el cliente *speak English* no cómo que no

```
Carly: {laughs} sí pues sí es verdad es verdad
Giuseppe: yes a little bit not no
```

The Spanish population is again - as in Catalina’s talk above - cast under a wide generalization of being unwilling or unable to speak English. Here Giuseppe positions himself as better at English, having better ability to communicate than Spanish coworkers in hospitality. Like most other participants, Giuseppe viewed English as important in accessing opportunities globally, invoking the oft-cited ‘it opens doors’ metaphor. He saw study as important to attaining a high English level. Despite lamenting the fact that he had not studied English more and no longer had time to do so, he also positions himself as generally quite carefree about any pressure to improve English - content to know enough to get by at work. Giuseppe’s views on the importance of formally learning English coincide with those of Pablo, a Spanish waiter and university student, whose story is discussed below.

6.5 Pablo: ‘English makes you a citizen of the world’

Pablo is one of just two Spanish participants featuring in this chapter. Born in a small village near Zamora in the west of Spain, he had moved to Barcelona to pursue a degree in Languages and Modern Literature at a public university as a mature student. Pablo was in first year and had started his degree at age twenty-seven (since he had not completed the *bachillerato* he had taken an alternative route to get a place at university). He had taken up full time work as a waiter in a local café to support himself financially. Like most participants in this study, Pablo is from a (modest) middle-class family. His parents were farmers who had turned to shopkeeping to make a living in a small village of less than one thousand inhabitants. Both of his siblings had studied at university, one at a private university. Pablo’s mother was eager for them to be educated, as he said it was an opportunity she had been denied growing up during the Franco period. His father on the other hand placed more value on work.

Pablo presented himself throughout the interview as somewhat of a rebel, particularly when it came to his school years. He had been sent to boarding school at age nine as his parents apparently ‘couldn’t cope with him’. There he completed the ESO (education in Spain is compulsory to ESO level which finishes at around age sixteen) and attempted the subsequent *bachillerato* stage twice before quitting. Pablo describes himself as ‘a very bad student’ during these younger years and said he did not enjoy language learning at school. At age twenty-one after a few years of living what he labelled ‘an unorthodox’ life in Salamanca, he moved to Germany because he ‘didn’t see any other way out’. There he stayed for two years, learned some German and worked as a grape picker. Pablo was aged twenty-seven when our interview took place. He wanted to get a university education, motivated by the fact that he ‘didn’t like work’ and similarly to Catalina, saw hospitality work as ‘a kind of slavery’. He had come to realize that his dream of never having to work was impossible, and was considering a possible career in teaching.

Pablo worked nearly forty hours a week on evenings and weekends at a city centre café. This he combined with attending university, but said he had no time to study, and missed most of the early morning classes - including English. Around the time of the interview, he had taken a week off work to study for his final exams and hoped to pass everything. When asked if this was difficult, he responded ‘this is what I have chosen’. In terms of English, Pablo described his level as intermediate. He wasn’t actively learning the language apart from watching series. A basic level of English was necessary for work, and he said - tongue in cheek - that the most important thing was to be able to ‘fake it’ and appear fluent. At the café, English use was limited and repetitive, so he didn’t feel the need to improve it for work purposes. However, like most other participants, Pablo spoke of the ways in which English ‘opened doors’ professionally. He went a step further, discussing how knowledge of English gives a person access to ‘another social level’ as we see in the below:

Extract 6.16

Pablo: el inglés te hace ciudadano del mundo no↑? o sea hablas inglés
ya eres ciudadano del mundo entonces ya entras en otro nivel
social el otro día veía un programa *you've got talent* el de aquí
y me hacía gracia como el Risto se reía de otro jurado Jorge
Javier Vázquez creo que se llama o Jes no sé cómo se llama
Carly: no sé no lo he visto
Pablo: bueno el caso es que se reía por su pronunciación en inglés es
eso es acceder a esa otra categoría a ese otro nivel no …en plan
la élite de los que hablan inglés y::: los que lo hablan bien

Discussing a TV program he had seen recently, Spain’s version of You’ve Got Talent, Pablo mentions Spanish celebrities (notably, mocking one another’s English) and refers to an ‘elite’ other, indexed by a certain English level. He connects good English pronunciation to ‘accessing another category’ and another social level. At the end of the extract he refers to the elite in terms of ‘those who speak English and those who speak it well’, positioning himself by default as not in that elite group, not in possession of that form of symbolic capital. Achieving such a level, in Pablo´s view is directly related to stays abroad and economic capital (albeit he didn’t call it that). At one point he said that he didn't know anyone who spoke English fluently 'who had not lived in some English-speaking country'. On the question of socioeconomic differences in English learning, Pablo held firm opinions as we observe in extract 6.17 below:

Extract 6.17

```
Pablo: bueno sí o sea:: hace falta hace falta tener un buen nivel
     económico porque si quieres hablar un inglés o para hablar un
     buen inglés lo importante sería viajar asistir a clases no creo
     que con las clases las clases obligatorias y normales te valgan
     tendrías que ir apoyarlo con más no creo que simplemente o sea
     volvemos a lo de siempre no↑? el individuo hay gente que tiene
     unas actitudes unas habilidades qué oye bueno también lo puedes
     aprender por tu cuenta con el ordenador pero:::
Carly: mmhh sí sí
Pablo: nunca es lo mismo que ir a clases pero yo creo que contra esto
     pues ya se está luchando bastante no porque además teniendo en
     cuenta lo que hay que es tan necesario pues hay más inversión
     de parte de de parte de los que mandan no el gobierno ya
     invierte más en todo esto
Carly: sí sí sí
Pablo: entonces ya se va apoyando porque se ve que es necesario al fin
     y al cabo pues todo el país se dedica xxx a esto y es el principal
     ingreso entonces más le vale invertir en ello
Carly: sí sí sí
```

Pablo is convinced that 'a good economic level' is necessary to speak 'good English' since both travel and attending classes are important. The normal, required classes are deemed insufficient to attain such a level. He mentions the individual, and differences in attitudes and skills, concedes that one can go the self-taught route via technology, but maintains that it is 'never the same'. Pablo thus positions himself on the side of sociological arguments (although again not framing it as such), verbalizing awareness of the need for financial resources to get ahead in the Spanish EFL context. He also however believes there is an ongoing battle whereby the government is investing more and more in English given that it is 'so necessary' and that 'the whole country is dedicated to' learning English'. As regards his own English level, Pablo appears quite relaxed – he says he can manage fine, but would like to improve his speaking. As he puts it, he would like to be able to speak 'more or less correctly':

Extract 6.18

```
Carly: sí con el castellano y tal y tú que mh tienes plan o plan para
     el inglés como:: algo en la mente para aprender el inglés o es
     como más a ver lo que toca {sic}
Pablo: eh la verdad es que me gusta o sea por lo que- he empezado
     esto es porque quiero hablar inglés bien o sea alemán también
     quiero tener un nivel que xxx sí puedo puedo hablarlo bien
```

puedo entenderlo y defenderme en los idiomas pues más o menos
correctamente no↑? ese es el fin o el propósito que espero luego
por otro lado::: pues no sé
Carly: pero tienes tienes ganas de hablar al nivel muy alto
Pablo: sí me gustaría hablar muy bien pero claro por otro lado también
me tocaría ir a vivir en Inglaterra ya he vivido en Alemania y
la verdad es que estoy más a gusto aquí {laughs}

When asked if he had any plans with regard to English learning, Pablo says he likes English and he has chosen to study language and literature because he wants ‘to speak English well and German too’. He would, in theory, like to achieve a higher level of English but sees living in an English-speaking country as imperative to doing so. He says he is ‘more at ease’ living in Spain, at this point laughing, which seems to suggest he is relatively carefree about the trade-off. The next participant, Paula comes from a different perspective, since she had an advanced level of English before ever doing a stay abroad, upon finishing her *bachillerato*. In section 6.6 below I turn to Paula, the final participant in this chapter.

6.6 Paula: ‘I can do it myself’

The youngest of the in-person servers in this chapter, Paula, a first-year university student, was born in Barcelona, where she had always lived, apart from spending a few months in England before starting university. She had attended a public school for the first years of primary, then at her parents’ wishes had changed to a private school in Barcelona’s ‘*zona alta*’ (see section 6.2 above). Paula’s mother was an artist, and her father - whom she said had an intermediate level of English - worked in IT. Paula had an above average level of English, judging not only by her native-like accent but her spoken English level (readily visible in the excerpts – this interview took place in English). She had sat the Cambridge Advanced exam before beginning university and planned to sit the Proficiency exam eventually. When I interviewed her, Paula was in her first year of a psychology degree at a public university in Barcelona. Alongside her studies she was working less than ten hours a week at an over-the-counter burrito restaurant in a touristy area, where she said she spoke English a lot. A friend of her mother’s who knew the restaurant owner had recommended her for the job, which I interpret as evidence of social capital and parental support. It was clear from Paula’s account of her earlier life that her parents had made sacrifices to prioritize her education. She had gone to one of the top schools in Barcelona for some of primary and all of secondary education. She said her parents wanted her to change to this school so as to attend primary and secondary in the same place (no other reasons were offered as regards why her parents moved her from a state school to an expensive fee-paying school). During the interview Paula positioned herself as not privileged, invoking her family's financial limitations. One example of this is provided below, in a discussion about travel:

Extract 6.19

```
Carly: ahm ok ehh have you travelled to a lot of places in the last few
       years ↑? or actually not even in the last few years in general
       in your life have you travelled [a lot]
Paula: [mmmmm] not really or not as much as I would like because
       [moneywise]
Carly: [ya well] you're a student it's normal isn't it
Paula: ya well
Carly: and did you travel a lot when you were younger with your
Paula: [not really]
Carly: [family] no
Paula: no it started like in bachillerato and university England Greece
       well Madrid it's not that far away [and Germany]
Carly: [you went to] Greece on holiday?
Paula: yeah with my school
Carly: oh cool ok and so did you go on holidays with your family when
       you were younger in Spain or
Paula: not really
Carly: no you stayed here [for your holidays]
Paula: [ya ya ]
Carly: so your parents are homebirds
Paula: ya but not because they don't want to travel they would love to
       but because my dad is the only source of money let's say it that
       way
Carly: the breadwinner [ya ya ]
Paula: [ ya then] we can't do a lot of travel
Carly: ya well I suppose when you were doing your education and
       everything as well when you were younger I guess ya
Paula: ya everything is expensive {laughs}
```

Paula directly invokes economic capital here, saying that she hasn't travelled as much as she would like 'because moneywise'. Also, since her father 'is the only source of money', her parents can't travel a lot although 'they would love to'. When I mention her education in this regard, Paula responds that 'everything is expensive', positioning herself overall in these lines as not privileged and even lacking economic capital (following this excerpt she also continues to talk about the expense of higher-level education in Spain). This discussion points not only to parental investment but parental sacrifice for her education. In terms of private and public schools, Paula believed that 'there's not really a big difference' apart from that in private schools, most students put in a bit more effort while in public schools students are 'just like ok just get a five we're gonna be happy', (an interesting observation given Shepard and Ainsworth's (2017) claim that more affluent students tend to be more motivated). Paula attributed some of her success with English to teachers, 'the way they taught', and stimulated students' interest. Her parents also encouraged her with English learning, as she recalls in extract 6.20 below:

Extract 6.20

Paula: ya ya and I was like I need to get at least the First uh Certificate when I have my degree and I was like ok like just xxx this level exam and I did and I think I got a forty four out of forty six and they were like are you sure you want to do the First don't you want to do the Advanced and I was like I thought I had a First Certificate level instead of like more advanced but I was like ya sure let's just do it
Carly: your parents said that to you is it
Paula: well my teacher the one that was correcting the exam of the academy and I was like ok let's do it
Carly: go for it ya and did your parents ever have any input or any comments to make about that or
Paula: they were like oh see you are good in English I don't know why like we don't know why you think you are not good enough and blah blah blah
Carly: oh so you didn't think that you were really that good at English it's only recently you've started to realize
Paula: well I'm still thinking I'm not good enough because like I don't know know a lot of vocabulary I don't know a lot of grammar I just know the basics
Carly: the basics?
Paula: ya for me at least ya I wanna learn more

Paula did an English level test some time before starting university and was advised to sit the Cambridge Advanced instead of the First Certificate Exam. She positions herself as a humble student, saying she wants to learn more English, showing awareness of what achieving high proficiency entails, and pointing to academic knowhow. She also speaks of her parents' encouragement, and how they would tell her she was better at English than she thought she was. However the parental investment and encouragement highlighted thus far contrasts with Paula's talk elsewhere in the interview, when she positions herself as extremely independent, unwilling to receive help. Leading into extract 6.21 below she had been telling me about how she wanted to do homework herself and not seek help when she struggled. This was because she didn't want to be like some classmates with Asperger's, whom she thought were lazy and counted on people pitying them. When I asked her about her parents' approach to her independent learning style, the following conversation ensued:

Extract 6.21

```
Paula: they tried to help me but I was like no I can do it myself but
      then I had private lessons
Carly: I didn't get it sorry
Paula: I think they're called private lessons
Carly: oh private lessons ya sorry and your parents insisted on you
      having private lessons
Paula: ya because I was really struggling
Carly: in which subjects
Paula: ahm mathematics chemistry::: and I think that's it
Carly: and did you get on better with those subjects then
Paula: mmhh
Carly: just about {laughs}
Paula: {laughs}ya
Carly: oh well that was good↑?
Paula: ya
Carly: and did they ever encourage you with English language learning
      your parents or anyone else in your family
Paula: not really but because they saw that I was speaking more in
      English and I was really interested in English and I had a like
      a girlfriend from England ah they were like ok
```

Paula here presents herself as a totally independent learner, explaining how she didn't want help or to admit when she was struggling at school. She recalls how her parents tried to help her, insisting on her having private lessons in math and chemistry which she says was of only minimal help. It is clear from Paula's account that she had a 'genuine, agentive interest in learning English' (Pratginestós and Masats, 2021, p.69). Since she liked English and also had a native English-speaking girlfriend for some time, she says her parents didn't really need to encourage her to learn the language. Still, comments here and elsewhere in the interview sit in direct contrast to the encouragement with English learning that Paula also received from her parents (extract 6.20), and the high parental investment discernible from her story overall. In other words, there is low recognition of parental investment and their influence over her education. This is not to criticize Paula, it is rather to emphasize how we often fail to recognize our own privilege. This tendency is part of a broader neoliberal personhood discourse whereby foregrounding of personality traits like independence and motivation happens while downplaying or denying the importance of family support and resources, a point on which I will have more to say later. In the final section of this chapter below, I comment on what can be made of these excerpts overall.

6.7 Concluding remarks

It is clear from these data, firstly, that orientations to class and the influence of class background are inseparable from nationality and race. This is especially salient in the accounts of Juan, Catalina and Ibrahim. Although Juan was from a middle-class background in Peru, he did not position himself as middle class. Rather, as we saw in extract 6.5, he distinguished himself as separate to those living in Barcelona's *'zona alta'*, and elsewhere positioned himself as unprivileged. Catalina, who had enjoyed some degree of privilege growing up in Colombia - availing of educational opportunities she said were unaffordable to most Colombians - was distressed about her precarious work situation and talked fretfully about the high cost of living and education in Barcelona. Ibrahim had also left behind a middle-class background in Morocco to face precarity upon starting out in Spain with low social and economic capital. This may well change over time since we can presume that, like many migrants, all three moved countries in the hopes of a better future and to gain economic advantage (Norton, 2013). On the latter point, Codó (2015) indeed notes that despite an overall tendency for non-EU migrants in Spain to take up low paid, precarious and unstable jobs, immigrants from South America tend to progress over time towards jobs in the services and business sectors.

In terms of English learning, the influence of nationality, intertwined with class, is also discernible. Ibrahim and Juan for example were late starters with English, primarily due to options available on the national school curriculum. That is, English had not been a compulsory subject as it had for other participants of their age. Those from Spain and Italy – Pablo, Paula and Giuseppe – had been learning English since early primary school, although only Paula had acquired an advanced level of competence.

In these interviews, privilege – albeit moderate privilege – most often goes unrecognized. While Paula's parents appear to have invested a great deal in her education - sending her to an elite fee-paying private school and arranging private lessons – she positioned herself largely as independent, not needing their help or encouragement. For Catalina, the privileged in Colombia were the 'super posh' elites running the country, from who she positioned herself as separate, not privileged. Giuseppe, whose parents encouraged him to learn English, and whose father had invested in his first restaurant at the age of twenty-eight, denied that his parents had been an influence for him (although he said his father helped him have an open mind). Rather, Giuseppe's talk centred around the importance of good decision making and his faith in meritocracy. In this regard, Ibrahim stood out as the exception, voicing much gratitude for his parents' support and encouragement.

As regards lack of privilege, understanding of the workings of inequality often goes hand in hand with neoliberal personhood ideals, like total responsibility and faith in the power of drive and motivation. This can be seen in relation to English language learning specifically, and inequality more generally. Catalina for example spoke of people she had worked with from countries like Pakistan, India and The Philippines whom she had witnessed being mistreated at work, thus pointing to racial inequality. However, she claimed that their culture impeded them from wanting to get a better job, certain that many great options would be open to them given their English proficiency. Juan discussed the potential impact of economic capital on English learning, but in the same turn invoked the oft-heard platitude that if people 'really want to they will'. This, in my view mitigates true understanding of the very inequalities he had explained. Giuseppe also verbalized awareness of inequality in discussing former flatmates as 'in social exclusion' but at the same time was adamant about the importance of making good choices, offering his own story of becoming a young restaurant owner as an example of meritocracy at work.

Ibrahim's case is particularly striking. He describes his previous employment, under illegal, substandard conditions uncritically, sometimes even with laughter. Full responsibility is taken for deciding to work at an establishment where his employers neglected their duties to him, not least legally. Total responsibility is also voiced in relation to his late start with English learning. Choosing to study Spanish over English at fifteen years of age for Ibrahim was 'the biggest mistake' of his entire life. However this was of course a decision guided by the national school learning curriculum, and the fact that Spanish is widely spoken in Morocco especially in the north (Aneas et al., 2010) where he attended public school. In other words, Ibrahim does not relate decisions made by his younger self to the overarching context of (in this case educational) institutions and the 'constraints which they impose on thought and behaviour' (Block, 2015 p.21). Had he attended an American or private school like a minority of his compatriots, or had there been more government attention to English in Morocco two decades ago he would likely have had a better English level upon starting university. Instead of looking to factors beyond his control, Ibrahim showed enthusiasm, humility, and resilience in the face of challenges encountered over the ten years he had lived in Spain, fully embodying the ideals of neoliberal personhood.

Overall, hospitality workers in this study do not feel the need to improve English for that line of work. Although they use it regularly, the vocabulary required is limited. The notable exception to this is Ibrahim, a hotel receptionist with ambitions to move up the ladder within the industry, who is also highly motivated to improve his English for work. All participants however deemed English extremely important to their careers, unsurprising given how in the Spanish context, it is typically viewed as ‘useful, politically neutral, [its learning] extensively perceived as somehow guaranteeing more successful schooling and future employment’ (Corona et al., 2021, p.44). Paula planned to sit the Cambridge Proficiency exam sometime in the future. Ibrahim and Catalina had recently taken lessons and sought out opportunities for learning beyond the classroom (e.g. attending language exchanges, watching series in English). Juan on the other hand had stopped learning English as an adolescent when he moved back to Peru from the US, and had apparently not found the time, need or motivation to learn it since – despite seeing it as crucial to future employment. Likewise, restaurant owner Giuseppe deemed English important but said he had no time to dedicate to it. Pablo’s attention to his full-time job meant he had been skipping many university classes including English, while he also saw English as extremely important, paving the way to another ‘social level’.

It is noteworthy that almost all participants in this chapter invoke economic capital, most often in talking about the expense of education. This is no doubt partly because they are younger than most of the symbols analysts to come in Chapter 7, some are still university students and/or do not have stable work. Still, many of these participants are doing what Roberts refers to as lower tier jobs, which entail ‘irregular, low-paid, insecure work with the poorest conditions, often done in unsocial hours, rendering the workers invisible’ (2013, p.81). Not only that, but there are little if any employee benefits like in-company language classes available to in-person servers. This is also a key difference between this group and the symbols analysts group, as regards time spent learning and general focus on English.[57] The latter group, symbols analysts, are the focus of the next chapter, Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Symbols analysts, class and English

The present chapter explores data from one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with six individuals categorized here as symbols analysts. In Reich’s conceptualization, symbols analysts are a substantial subset of the population whose occupations entail ‘problem-solving, -identifying, and brokering’, these are people like ‘research scientists, design engineers, software engineers, civil engineers, biotechnology engineers, lawyers, real estate developers, and even a few creative accountants’ among others (1992, p.176). Recruitment and data collection details have been set out in Chapter 5. In keeping with the study design, the data is considered here through the lens of positioning theory, and within a broader overall framework of critical realism. In contrast to the focus group (next chapter), participants interviewed individually spoke more about themselves, told their life stories, invoking class dimensions in the process. The individuals whose talk features in this chapter were all my private students at some point, having done English classes in Barcelona for different lengths of time, ranging from a few months to a few years. The major advantage of having my own students participate in the study, accessibility aside, was the fact that a rapport had already been built up prior to interviewing them (ethical issues are discussed in Chapter 5).

Participant profile information is provided in table 7.1. As shown, four were lawyers, one an engineer, and one was working in private investment banking. All are white, of Spanish nationality, and born in Catalonia, apart from one woman who was originally from Castilla–La Mancha. The chapter is organized around each person´s story, with the exceptions of Pascual and Maria, a married couple who are written about in the same section since they were interviewed together during their weekly class time. Each section begins, like last chapter, with a ‘rhetorical redescription’ (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999, p.21) where I sketch out a picture of social class discernible from the participants’ stories. This is followed by analysis of interview excerpts, while the concluding section addresses the research questions more directly, drawing together key findings. I begin in the first section with the story of the youngest of the symbols analysts Pati, a thirty one year old Catalan female.

7.1 Pati: ‘English is something that always goes against you’

Pati is a qualified lawyer who specializes in commercial law. Originally from a small town in Vic, a Catalan province outside Barcelona, she has worked in Barcelona for nearly a decade. She is a bilingual Catalan-Spanish speaker who has invested a good deal in learning English, and to a lesser extent, French. Her mother is a French teacher and her father, now retired, was the owner of a mechanics garage. In terms of class dimensions, the picture emerging from Pati's talk is one of a broadly middle-class childhood. She attended a *colegio concertado* (a privately owned, fee paying but partly state subsidized school) and she recalls her mother's insistence that she and her younger brother would attend university regardless of career choice. During their primary school years, her mother would send Pati and her brother to extracurricular lessons and on summer courses. She had also enrolled Pati in English lessons before the subject had started at school, characteristic of the parental concern over education frequently noted of middle-class parents (e.g. Crozier and Reay, 2011; Lareau, 2003; Vincent, 2017).

Table 7.1
Symbols analysts

Gender	Pseudonym	Age range	Profession	Nationality	Post code	Education level
Male (2)	Pascual	60-65	Lawyer/ partner	Spanish	08006 Sant Gervasi Barcelona	Máster
	Hugo	40-45	Computer engineer	Spanish	08800 Vilanova i la Geltrú	Licenciado
Female (4)	Maria	50-55	Lawyer/ partner	Spanish	08006 Sant Gervasi Barcelona	Licenciado
	Carmen	55-60	Risk manager, investment banking	Spanish	08172 Sant Cugat	Licenciado
	Pati	30-35	Lawyer	Spanish	08015 Eixample Barcelona	Máster
	Marta	30-35	Lawyer	Spanish	08950 Esplugues de Llobregat	Máster
Total participants: 6						

In Pati's view, the level of English taught at the *colegio concertado* she attended was insufficient. She and her classmates were thus required to attend private lessons during exam preparation for the *selectividad* exams (which students planning to go on to further education sit around the age of eighteen having studied at *bachillerato* level normally for two years). Her views about the education she received are significant, as we will see below she refers to this in explaining incidents at work when her English level was criticized. As regards parental investment and economic capital, Pati also invokes limitations, recalling that her first preference for undergraduate studies – to do medicine at a top private university - would have cost around 60,000 euro which says she could not ask her parents to pay, and was reluctant to take a loan for. Nonetheless, these various snippets of information about her education point to her middle-class belongingness and strong parental investment.

At the time of interview, Pati was working for a medium-sized law firm on a temporary contract which was soon to end. In recent years she had held several short-term positions, due to being hired on temporary contracts or having permanent contracts terminated. The last time she was dismissed from a job, a number of months before our interview, she had been told that her English was not up to standard, as one of the justifications for letting her go. In our interview Pati spoke of being troubled by this and said she felt English was her main weakness when it came to employment. Since graduating from university almost a decade ago she had invested considerable time and financial resources in improving her English, having recently attended an intensive summer course, and having attended private lessons for nearly two years prior. Pati is convinced that ultimately, the better one´s English, the better chances one has of securing 'a good job' in the field of commercial law. This observation came about while she was (indirectly) discussing the importance of social capital in hiring practices, as we see in the first two extracts:

Extract 7.1

Pati: pues es un poco esto no↑? en esto en estos despachos entran gente::: eh por ejemplo ah al lado mío cuando yo estaba trabajando en {name of lawfirm} al lado mío había un chico que su padre era el director jurídico de una empresa multinacional que era cliente de {name of lawfirm} y este chico había ido internado dos años en colegio inglés y cuando volvía claro tenía un nivel de ing- bueno cuando [era más pequeño]
Carly: [el acento también]
Pati: claro...tenía un inglés perfecto porque había estado viviendo en un internado durante dos años
Carly: sobre todo cuando era joven que es

Here Pati speaks of a former younger colleague in a large Spanish law firm she used to work at. His 'perfect English' - in Pati's view - boils down to the fact that he had been sent to an English boarding school for two years. She mentions that his father was director of a company which was a client of that law firm – the implicit claim is clearly that this was instrumental to his son’s employment at the firm. The conversation then turns to competition amongst workers based on their English competence, and her perception that ‘you cannot compete’ with these people:

Extract 7.2

Pati: sí sí antes de antes de la universidad lo había hecho luego claro mmhh hay gente así en el despacho y tú no puedes competir con esta gente porque no sabes tanto inglés como ellos y siempre es algo como que te [va en contra]
Carly: [pero] y al nivel de su trabajo?
Pati: ya ...pero como por ejemplo el socio no tiene un buen nivel de inglés y si tiene alguien que tiene muy bien- buen nivel de inglés eh el socio ya corregirá las cosas técnicas jurídicas sabes a veces les dan cómo::: más importancia porque hablan bien el inglés y a lo mejor no son tan buenos abogados
Carly: y crees que es porque hay menos gente que habla con ese [nivel] ↑?
Pati: [sí sí sí]
Carly: entonces me pregunto si es realista que te digan tienes que tener este nivel que sea un nivel tan:::
Pati: cómo más alto tienes el inglés en jurídico y en mercantil más probabilidades tienes de encontrar un buen trabajo sí sí sí...y los despachos grandes se exigen un *advanced*[58] a partir de un *advanced* hacia arriba te contratan a partir de un *advanced* hacia abajo no

Pati positions herself as separate from the privileged other, using ‘me-versus-them’ language in relation to those who go to good schools and have family contacts to ensure good employment. Indeed, just before making the comments above, she had referred to this general person profile as *hijos de papa* (the children of the privileged elite, literally ‘daddy’s boys’). Pati positions herself as essentially defeated by these people: ‘you can’t compete’ with people like that and so ‘English is something that always goes against you’. Those with exceptionally high levels of English, she speculates, may not always be good lawyers, since, if the business partner’s English level is low, he will correct the technical legal aspects for a junior lawyer with an advanced English level. The implication, in other words, is that English is more important than expertise.

When probed further on the high standards being set, Pati explains that the higher the level of English the higher the probability of getting a good job. In her understanding, larger firms require certification of the Cambridge Advanced exam in order to hire a lawyer. She believed it would be necessary to sit the Advanced exam herself to prove her English level to prospective employers, and at the time of interview was planning to do so, as discussed in extract 7.3:

Extract 7.3

Pati: pues eso que pensaba que el curso de la EOI me iba a dar pues mmhh ...
Carly: nivel para xxx [después ya]
Pati: [nivel] para hacer un examen ehh no me lo ha dado y lo que voy a hacer es a partir de de septiembre pue::s intentar prepararme cuando me sienta preparada como hay exámenes cada mes voy me quiero sacar un examen porque un poco a consecuencia del año pasado que he estado pues con distintos trabajos

The language used around her expectations for the summer course just finished suggests that doing such a course should 'give' a certain level such that one is ready for an official exam. She explains that the decision to sit the Advanced is as a result of having had different jobs the year before. Pati has come to the conclusion that an exam certificate will set her English level in stone for prospective employers, since as we see below, she believes they are not able to judge a candidate's level adequately:

Extract 7.4

Pati: [creo que] es bueno poder ponerlo en el currículum porque cuando un abogado te hace una entrevista de trabajo siempre hay una parte que te pregunta alguna cosa en inglés y tú tienes que responder pero no sabe cómo es abogado y no es lingüista no sabe exactam::ente qué nivel tienes
Carly: que nivel pero eso también depende de su nivel no↑? de la persona haciendo la entrevista [xxx]
Pati: [sí sí sí] pero normalmente yo creo que la mayoría no tiene un nivel muy alto
Carly: ya me lo imagino he oído incluso que [las::]
Pati: [o si ellos] ellos hablan bien el inglés y lo usan bien no saben detectar el nivel de otra persona no sabe [si está esforzando el acento]
Carly: [tendrías que tener] un nivel muy bajo
Pati: sí tendrías que tener nivel muy bajo para que pueda decir si sabes o no

Pati contends that most of the lawyers giving interviews do not have a high level of English, and may fall prey to candidates with 'forced' (elsewhere she uses the word 'fake') accents who have the ability to appear that they know more than they actually do. These comments are perhaps best understood in the context of Pati's professional experiences with English. She had quite recently been dismissed from a small law firm and told it was partly on account of her 'insufficient' English level. Although she was continuing to study English and had decided to sit a Cambridge exam, Pati did not entirely accept these explanations. Rather, she was harbouring some ambivalence around the whole issue. On the one hand she said she felt terrible (‘*fatal*’) and told herself that they must be right, her level of English must be inadequate. On the other hand, as we see in extract 5 below, she questioned their justifications, saying it was likely ‘an easy excuse’ since other colleagues with lesser competence in English are still employed there:

Extract 7.5

Carly: te dijeron que fue por el inglés xxx
Pati: yo creo que realmente fue otras cosas [y:::]
Carly: [quién sabe] nunca se sabe un motivo
Pati: [fue un fue un]
Carly: [que tienen] algún motivo
Pati: yo creo que la de inglés era la excusa más fácil que tenían para justificar el despido que no tenía tanto peso el inglés porque había gente en el despacho por ejemplo el junior que estaba trabajando conmigo casi no entendía las calls de la gente cuando hablaba inglés aún sigue trabajando en este despacho qué quiere decir es que no es tan importante el inglés como ellos lo quisieran hacer ver por el despido pero sí que [usaron]
Carly: [como una] contradicción entonces
Pati: sí sí
Carly: pero has dicho también que cuando pasó eso que que empezaste a decirte que igual tiene razón↑? tendré que ponerme entonces xxx cómo dirías ambivalencia↑? que lo crees pero no lo crees que sabes que realmente no es por eso que no es::
Pati: que sabes que no tiene toda la razón pero por otro lado sabes que es tu debilidad no↑? y que tienes que mejorarlo mmhh

Here Pati refers to how a junior male colleague who, in her estimation, could barely understand conference calls in English is still working at the law firm she had been fired from. This had led her to conclude that management used English competence as an easy excuse to terminate her contract. I questioned her as to how she felt about this event, suggesting ambivalence on her part. Confirming this suggestion, Pati said she knew they are not completely right, but that on the other hand it is ‘your weakness and you have to improve it’. This, coupled with her denial, indicates a lack of clarity about the extent to which those negative judgements of her English competence are accurate. Pati had mentioned earlier in the same conversation that since the beginning of her professional career she had felt under pressure to improve her English, to speak and understand conference calls. When I asked her about other instances when she had felt such pressure, it became apparent that she had been on the receiving end of put downs over her level of English on other occasions. She explained that it was felt generally in day-to-day work, that she had been ‘told off’ by older lawyers for her mistakes in English:

Extract 7.6

Pati: yo creo que es un poco en general día a día no? es eh tu inglés debería ser mejor y es algo que los abogados mayores siempre te dicen a los abogados más juniors teniendo en cuenta de que mi nivel es ...mmhh pues:: qué ha sido normal que los lo he aprendido en el cole dónde he ido cada día no↑? que no he ido a aprenderlo al extranjero eh yo creo que sobre todo en {name of lawfirm} todo el mundo te exigía que tuvieras un nivel de inglés muy alto
Carly: que te dirían↑?
Pati: Ahhhh
Carly: qué te decían ...
Pati: ahh por ejemplo si ah lo escribías mal te reñían por escribirlo mal ...o::
Carly: xxx xxx sé que lo estoy machacando mucho pero quiero xxx [xxx xxx experiencias]
Pati: [sí sí no no no] está bien pues por ejemplo de llamarte decirte oye esto no tiene ningún sentido esto no se dice así en inglés eh↑? has hecho esta falta que es muy básica y deberías saberlo y claro te quedas un poco en plan tiene razón pero no he estado estudiando tanto:: inglés para saberlo tan bien como tú lo sabes

Pati justifies her English level here, citing reasons of not having lived abroad, having a level that is ‘normal’ for what she learned at school, and not having studied English as much as those doing the criticizing. Her apparent defensiveness entails a contested third order positioning – whereby first order positioning is for example contested in relaying or commenting on what was said in the conversation (Warren and Moghaddam, 2016). Also evident is a part rejection of workplace and labour market dictates around English, but this rejection is intertwined with acceptance: she also says they are right and later mentions plans to sit the Cambridge Advanced some time in the future. This is what Parsons, following Durkheim, called ‘pragmatic acceptance’ without genuine consensus (Parsons, 1951, p.37). Pati may have little choice for now but to keep working on her English if she wants to get ahead, but that does not mean that she is fully on board with current market dictates or the way she has apparently been treated. Here she conveys an experience of being treated as inferior by senior lawyers directly because of her English level and being ‘told off’ about things she ‘should know’ (instead of being given basic feedback on what needed improving).

As Vanaasche and Kelchtermans (2014) point out, perceptions – like the urgent necessity to improve English – come from meaningful interactions within the working context and importantly, how one is positioned by others. Pati’s account shows how it is difficult not to let others' positioning of us impinge upon our self-perceptions, even where there is evidence to the contrary. Her story also exemplifies how 'person-like entities exercising agency', such as law firms 'navigate between what they can do and what they are allowed to do' within a local moral order - and this includes cultural and legal order (van Langenhove and Wise, 2019, p.1.2). Clearly, there is an incumbent duty on Pati to improve English, but her rights – like the right to stable employment, basic feedback, the chance to improve, or the right to know why her contract was terminated - are few. The inescapable duty to better one´s English came up in the accounts of other participants like Marta, also a lawyer in her early thirties, to whose interview I turn to next.

7.2 Marta: 'for the money we paid we were supposed to talk a perfect English'

Marta is a thirty-year-old Catalan woman, born and raised in Hospitalet de Llobregat, who had worked as a lawyer in Barcelona for around ten years by the time of our interview[59]. Like Pati, Marta is a bilingual Catalan-Spanish speaker, who has invested a lot in English learning. She described her family as 'normal'. Neither of her parents were university educated: both were local business owners who saw themselves forced into salaried employment as large shopping centres took over the market where they previously had stands. Marta spoke of how her parents had sacrificed a lot for her and her sister, sending them to one of the most expensive schools in neighbouring Barcelona, even after their businesses had been sold. As an adult she had invested considerable time and effort in English, taking private lessons with different teachers over the years. She had also spent a month in Ireland studying English after finishing university. Not long before our interview she had completed her second masters – an English medium instruction course in legal tech at a private business school in Barcelona. Marta was also in the process of starting a new business venture with a former classmate from her first masters. During the interview she spoke openly about the high cost of English classes and education for both herself and her parents. In the below excerpt she is speaking about English learning at her primary school, which she had previously described as one of the top schools in Barcelona. (Marta wished to have the interview in English in order to use it as an opportunity to be corrected).

Extract 7.7

Carly: yeah yeah and do you think that where you went to school
{name of school} is it↑? you said do you think that that
helped you in terms of English or can you tell me about your
experiences of English or in any other way at all not
necessarily with English but anything

Marta: it's supposed to be a very good school in English but I think we had bad luck with this and we got ah teachers that were not good enough for the pay the money our parents paid
Carly: okay
Marta: and the people at class who speak a [better English is]
Carly: [in class]
Marta: in class because they were to extra scholar lessons but for the money we paid
Carly: yeah
Marta: we were supposed to talk a perfect English

Attending this prestigious, expensive school is conveyed here in terms similar to a business transaction, whereby they were ‘supposed to talk a perfect English’ given what her parents paid. This is reminiscent of Heller’s (2003) well-known concept of language as a commodity - here one that can be purchased at the right educational institute. Acquiring ‘perfect’ English was not achieved through attending this school, which Marta puts down to ‘bad luck’ and getting ‘teachers that were not good enough’. Classmates who had ‘better English’ she says attended extracurricular lessons.

Ending up with less than ‘perfect’ English had proven somewhat of a battle on occasion for Marta. She admitted to having felt insecure among international classmates at university on account of her command of English. She also however spoke favourably of her English level, mentioning for example how in her current workplace she was almost the only person with a high level. She said she had improved a lot in recent years and didn’t worry about writing since she could find resources to write to a ‘more or less acceptable’ level, laughing about this. When I suggested that English did not seem like a burden for her, she pointed out that still she had had to fight over her ‘not perfect English’. Early on in the interview she told a story about a time when a lawyer from another company insisted on correcting her written English:

Extract 7.8

Carly: ok and how did he make you feel like what ehm what happened that made you feel that made you feel bad about your English
Marta: I was introduced in front of
Carly: introducing
Marta: introducing
Carly: yeah
Marta: amendments to the contract and he corrected my English
Carly: okay
Marta: instead of paying attention on the
Carly: to the content
Marta: legal content
Carly: okay
Marta: and it was like when my my client did not say anything but I was I feel ashamed

Carly: yeah
Marta: and I tried to say to explain to my client well there are different ways of writing this is not a spelling mistake or it makes sense
Carly: preposition or something or
Marta: yeah
Carly: yeah
Marta: obviously maybe this sounds more English than what I wrote
Carly: yeah
Marta: but it's not wrong
Carly: it’s not changing the content basically
Marta: and it's not wrong you prefer it also happens in in
Carly: Spanish

Marta reports feeling ‘ashamed’ in front of a client when the lawyer (who was based in Luxembourg and not a native speaker) repeatedly corrected her English. But she also unequivocally contested being positioned as the one with inferior knowledge of English. Confident that the legal content was more important, on this occasion she explained to her client that what she wrote made sense. Engaging in third order positioning, in doing ‘talk about talk’ (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999), she evaluates the other lawyer’s correcting as excessive, saying that he was ‘doing it on purpose’. Later she said her client did not judge her and made it ‘super easy’. For Marta, there were no consequences other than short-lived humiliation. However, she also believed she had lost professional opportunities in the past directly on account of her command of English. In charting her career path and speaking of how she got into working with technology start-ups, she linked some lost opportunities directly to English. Below she speaks of how a former colleague, who had worked for eight years in London, had a major advantage over her and other colleagues:

Extract 7.9

Marta: especially in the other law firm where I used to work because eh related with these new technologies there were foreign companies foreign investors who wanted to invest their money and I had ehhh to review contracts and advise clients and eh was in English many things and it's interesting but I felt that ehm I lost some opportunities to advising some special issues to my clients because there was another ehhh senior lawyer or manager who had better English than me ahm he was eh he he he lived in London like eight years so he's absolutely bilingual and for having these ehm English conversations in which are hard to keep in Spanish imagine in English for a foreign people so this manager took advantage of all of us because [eh he]
Carly: [you mean like] he had the advantage you mean like *se aprovechó* or he he he like had the [advantage]
Marta: [no no no]
Carly: no like he had the advantage
Marta: he had the advantage

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Carly:  over all of us
Marta:  ya because it's better to being these deals negotiated by
        him than from me or from another of my colleagues who had eh
        did mistakes and {laughs} also do mistakes in English{laughs}
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A former colleague who, in Marta's estimation, was 'absolutely bilingual', she believes had the advantage over her and other co-workers. Towards the end of the excerpt, she laughs about the fact that she and other colleagues make mistakes in English, positioning herself as rather carefree about the matter of opportunities related to who had 'better English'. After this excerpt Marta mentioned how it was 'not easy to find someone who speaks English perfectly', implying that there were advantages afforded to those with above average competence - all of which speaks to matters of demand for English in Barcelona´s jobs market. We saw in Chapter 2 how Durkheim saw 'wants and interests of particular groups' as socially regulated through a kind of system of shared norms (Bottero, 2005, p.45). Marta´s acceptance of how colleagues with higher English levels get better opportunities is likely to reflect shared values operating in wider society whereby English competence is thought to lead to better opportunities - opportunities that are understood to be open to everyone once they have the right skills. Rather than engendering conflict or discontent, this is by and large accepted as the status quo.

Marta does not hold any formal English qualifications beyond secondary school level, and was unconcerned about doing any such exams at this stage. In her experience, companies don't look for specific English qualifications from prospective job candidates. She often positioned herself very confidently as regards her competence as a lawyer and entrepreneur, speaking of knowing 'perfectly about the legal aspects', and saying that her current company needed her. She was hopeful about her new business venture in legal tech, suggesting that in future it might expand to other countries, where English would be even more necessary. Despite her seeming nonchalance about imperfect English and how this plays out in terms of business opportunities, she had a clear opinion on how socioeconomic matters might influence English education, as we see in extract 7.10 below:

Extract 7.10

```
Carly:  it's all relative yeah no that's so:: it's really good and
        then that confidence gets you feeling more confident ...the
        other question is about more generally in terms of Barcelona
        like socio economic factors going back to like the socio-
        economic education thing crees que existe una división en
        terminos socieconomicos en lo que respecta al aprendizaje
        del inglés en Barcelona
Marta:  yes yes I think that people with more acquisitive power
```

Carly: like recurs resources
Marta: yes resources like *poder adquisitivo como dirías eso*
Carly: {sighs}I don't know I can check I can transcribe it as well like acquisition power to acquire financial financial resources
Marta: resources yeah they they speak better English for sure
Carly: yeah
Marta: I have no doubt I can't well in general education with education it happens
Carly: yeah
Marta: but with English it's more evident
Carly: yeah yeah in what sense↑?
Marta: in the sense that people with money send his sons their sons abroad to study English they pay extra scholar lessons and they bring their childrens to a private school well they pay a lot of attention to the English to the language and all those things and also in these schools sometimes:: I'm not the one better to speak about public and private school
Carly: ya okay
Marta: but in general in private school teachers pay much more attention to the students and they make sure they learn in general but in this includes English

According to Marta, a definite divide exists not only between public and private schools in terms of English education, but between ‘people with money’ and the rest of the population. Using the pronoun ‘they’ she clearly positions herself as outside the group of those with ‘purchasing power’, notwithstanding the fact that she had attended one of Barcelona´s top private schools. Marta states that ‘they speak better English’, that this happens in education in general but is ‘more evident’ with English. These people she says, pay for extracurricular lessons, send their children to private schools where teachers pay more attention to students, and send their children abroad to learn English. Marta does not have children, but at the end of the interview spoke of the importance of English learning for children generally and for her own imagined future children. The rest of the participants in this chapter are parents who are also keenly aware of the importance of English. The next participant, Hugo, a technical engineer, is the father of an eight-year-old boy who had begun studying English at age three. I turn to Hugo´s story in section 7.3 below.

7.3 Hugo: ‘either you speak English or you have a problem’

Hugo is a technical engineer in his late forties who works at an American multinational in Barcelona, having acquired an advanced level of English (he is a native speaker of Spanish and learned Catalan in the school system). In describing his family background Hugo referred directly to social class, telling me that his grandparents were ‘pure working class’, and that only his uncle had attended university, with a state funded grant, while neither of his parents had been to university. Raised by his grandparents, Hugo spoke of how his mother did not finish second level education and had never had a clear profession or stable work. He had had almost no contact with his father, who he said had addiction problems. Hugo had completed all of his education in the public system, later pursuing a degree in Technical Engineering of Computer Systems for which he told me he received a grant since his family income was ‘not excessive’ and his grades were good. He also mentioned that he financed his own post graduate education since his family did not have the means. As a child Hugo attended extracurricular English lessons for some time with *Opus Dei* which he said were offered at a low cost in order to attract people to the organization. Like Pati and Marta, Hugo had invested a good deal of time and effort in English learning as an adult. At the time of our interview he was preparing for the Cambridge Proficiency exam, having passed the Cambridge Advanced exam with a high grade years earlier.

In his current workplace Hugo speaks English on a daily basis with managers and colleagues in the United States, and with suppliers in other countries like Sweden. At various points in our conversation he stressed the importance of English nowadays, and said that he couldn’t do his job without it. Despite his high level of English which he acknowledged as above average in the Spanish context, Hugo spoke of personal and professional motivations for taking the Proficiency exam, as we see in the following extract:

Extract 7.11

Hugo: entonces el tema de hacer el *proficiency* es un poco para marcar una meta para forzarme a mantener el esfuerzo xxx o sea:: básicamente personal aunque sé que me ayudará que me ayudará en el trabajo también
Carly: te ayudará en el trabajo también↑? cómo en qué sentido
Hugo: yo creo que me puede abrir posibilidades eh pues de promoción por ejemplo ahora eh la persona con quién trabajo el jefe del de de este equipo el jefe funcional está en Estados Unidos yo sé que él me lo ha dicho está pensando en que si él se cambia de sitio o atrae alguna promoción yo me quedaría seguramente yo promocionaría a su posición claro esto:: implica mucha más comunicación por ejemplo xxx muchas algún nivel más estratégico más alto ya no tan técnico seguramente el la interlocución cambiaría al nivel de o sea:: nivel a quién tienes que justificar cómo se hacen las cosas pues xxx el *C level*
Carly: sí
Hugo: entonces él me ve ahí pero yo creo que:: en esa posición mis mi capacidad de comunicación debería dar un salto
Carly: vale

Personal motivations for doing the Proficiency exam such as having a set goal to work towards are first cited here. Then Hugo reveals that he has been informally selected to replace his current boss and believes that having a higher level of English to communicate using more strategic language would be necessary to carry out such a role. The language required for his current job he says is more technical and somewhat repetitive. Before this he had spoken of having around 95% understanding in English, saying he wanted to have 100% understanding. Here he also says that his competence would need to 'take a leap forward' in order to do this job well. Unlike Pati and Marta, Hugo said he had never experienced being made to feel bad about his English at work. He said that his current level is unlikely to impede promotion, but nonetheless he strives to improve his English for work purposes. Convinced of the importance of good English education early on, Hugo had enrolled his son in private lessons at age three. His son, who was eight years old and attending the local public school when we spoke, had not been excelling to the level Hugo expected. His concerns are discussed in extract 7.12 below:

Extract 7.12

Hugo: él ahora eh ni de ni de {tuts} cómo se hace una pregunta ni del verbo ni de la conjugación del verbo *to be* en presente nada entonces hablé con- de hecho hablé con la profesora eh me preocupa le digo porque según lo que veo en el libro o sea bueno no lo que veo es que no tiene ni el más mínimo concepto y la última nota que me disteis es un notable

Carly: notable↑? [que es muy alto]

Hugo: [una nota sí] no es una excelente es una buena nota no puede ser que el niño tenga un notable y no me sepa decir yo soy es no no puede ser entonces bueno se excusó y demás

Carly: se excusó↑?

Hugo: sí se excusó porque ella era nueva y sí veía que había unas unas carencias pero a mí me pareció que en tercero de primaria después de haber hecho inglés de aquella manera durante primero y segundo y tercero no puede ser no puede ser que tenga este nivel entonces no sé si es de esa escuela en concreto pero también tengo claro que él recibirá clases adicionales de he hecho ya lo llevamos cuando tenía tres años pero que igual::: era muy jovencito

Parental investment in his son's English is readily apparent in the above lines. Hugo refers to the discrepancy between what his son should know and does know at this stage, and his direct involvement is illustrated in the words 'you gave me' when complaining about his son's grade to his teacher. Hugo questioned the high grade awarded since his son 'can't even say I am' in English. He positions himself as knowledgeable about English education, enough so to question classroom processes and the teacher's grading. In fact, he recalls that the teacher in this instance even apologized, further enhancing his position as (more) knowledgeable – his right to question her in this case owing especially to his English competence. He says his son will attend more extracurricular lessons, unsure if it is ‘a problem of that particular school’. Thus, Hugo presents himself as assertive and agentive, responsible for his son’s English education in the face of an apparently incompetent other - the teacher or even perhaps the school. English teaching, for him, is not to be left in the hands of the education system. While Hugo may not have experienced put downs or feeling bad over his English competence like Pati and Marta, the fight for better English is being fought over his son. Not only does this short excerpt display parental investment but also genuine parental concern for his child’s English level. English is, for Hugo, the single most important thing for his son to learn. This apparent anxiety over children’s English is not unique to Hugo’s story. A similar kind of concern or anxiety around English learning has been observed by the next participant, Carmen, who discussed how parents in her town monitor and manage their children’s English.

7.4 Carmen: 'you can’t escape’

Carmen is a university-educated Catalan woman in her late fifties who works in risk management at a private investment bank in Barcelona. She is a bilingual speaker of Catalan and Spanish. Her father was a university-trained draughtsman whom she says had a good reputation and was sought after for his work. Carmen spoke of her mother – who had little formal education – as someone with vision who greatly encouraged her children academically and advised Carmen in her youth to study English, at a time when French was more common. Carmen spent a short time studying English in her twenties, but then discontinued her studies until she was in her fifties, when she restarted at beginners’ level. In fact, she spoke of having felt resistance towards learning English for a long time. Her workplace had adopted English as the official language years before, and at the time of our interview a new in-house system completely in English was being rolled out. Taking up a new language at this point in her career would not benefit her in terms of promotions or otherwise, but she said that it was ‘seen well’, and linked learning English to feeling part of changes happening at the bank, not wanting to ‘live outside’ of things. Carmen clearly possessed a high degree of cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications and knowhow. She had a wide range of reading interests and had completed lots of courses in her free time. English learning was a source of enjoyment for her - she said she usually studied for a few hours at the weekend in addition to her three weekly hours of classes. Despite the fact that she came to English late in life, she saw herself as a capable language learner, and her talk of the nuances of language and different linguistic styles and structures during the interview clearly indicated educational knowhow.

Recently Carmen had moved to Sant Cugat, just outside Barcelona, which she said is known to be an 'upper class' area where 'many people with a lot of resources' went to live, even if she positioned herself as not part of that group, saying 'this is not my case'. These comments came about after I had asked her if she thought there was a socioeconomic divide in terms of English learning locally. A direct relationship between social class and studying English is suggested in the excerpt below:

Extract 7.13

Carmen: creo que el nivel de inglés probablemente en eh que que la diferencia de nivel entre las las escuelas públicas y las escuelas privadas eh en dónde se puede notar más creo que puede ser en el tema del idioma
Carly: sí↑?
Carmen: probablemente en las escuelas públic- privadas eh se harán clases de matemáticas en inglés y a lo mejor en una escuela pública se hace clase de inglés
Carly: todo todo ehh no [solo]
Carmen: [solamente] la clase
Carly: solo la clase
Carmen: de de la lengua inglesa no pero no a lo mejor porque realmente creo que eso va ligado el el estudio del inglés o el profundiza en el inglés es como un poco está ligado a un determinado nivel social no↑?
Carly: sí sí sí sí sí
Carmen: o sea:: si formas parte de una determinada clase social es evidente que tienes que saber inglés porque tus padres ya te han dicho que tienes que saber inglés porque ellos tienen una realidad profesional diferente a lo mejor que si tus padres trabaja::n en una fábrica o en taller mecánico
Carly: sí sí porque no tienen tiempo para pensar en eso o lo que sea
Carmen: claro
Carly: sí eso es lo que veo también
Carmen: entonces yo creo que eso hay esa diferencia el inglés es de aquellas cosas un poco que muestra las diferencias no↑?

Differences between public and private schools are, in Carmen's opinion, most notable in the area of language learning, because she thinks private schools are probably doing subjects through English, while public schools just do English classes. Like Pablo in Chapter 6, she takes the view that English is linked to a 'given social level'. It is deemed 'obvious' that if one belongs to a certain class group, one's parents will have told them they 'must know English' as they have a 'different professional reality'. She says this is perhaps different to someone whose parents work in a factory or mechanics' garage, highlighting differences between professionals and the latter occupational profiles based not only on class, but on their disposition towards English. English, she posits, is among the things that 'show the differences', that is, the class differences. Carmen then turns to how in the 'upper class' town where she lives, parents (mothers) manage their children's education, bringing them to English speaking schools, preschools and so forth:

Extract 7.14

Carmen: yo vivo en Sant Cugat es un pueblo de clase alta hay mucha
gente de clase xxx
Carly: Sant Cugat↑? sí↑? no lo sabía
Carmen: sí:: es el lugar donde ha ido mucha gente con muchos
recursos a vivir no es mi caso pero {laughs} pero es el
caso de mucha gente y y te das cuenta qué para xxx mamás
Carly: xxx vale
Carmen: las mamás eh bueno pues hay muchas escuelas de niños para
que aprendan en inglés entonces parvularios dónde ...
escuela básica de niños de dos años y ya les hablan en
inglés
Carly: sí y todo es en inglés y [todo::]
Carmen: [claro entonces] eso esa eso es algo que determinada clase
social no se puede [xxx]

A keen awareness of social class as an influencing factor in English education is displayed in the above excerpts, with various references to people with resources and 'certain social class' groups, and talk of their disposition to English. Notably, Carmen positions herself as not part of that group. Elsewhere in the interview she said that her employer should better support staff with English learning (the company was offering staff weekly group lessons of 1.5 hours at lunch time). She also referred to a lack of investment by the government in English teaching, taking what I would call a sociologist-like stance on the topic[60]. Indeed, she goes even a step further in positing that the differences between public and private schools are most notable in the area of language learning.

Even if taking up English in the latter stages of her career would not be beneficial in terms of promotions or otherwise, Carmen's motives centred largely around work. At the time of interview there was a new in-house system being rolled out in English, but she was not especially worried about comprehension problems, as she explains below:

Extract 7.15

Carmen: poco a poco a ver mi inquietud eh mi objetivo para el inglés
no era tanto entender porque al final entras te pones tu
traductor y y:: los conceptos enseguida los tú ya sabes

Carly: claro
Carmen: qué quiere [decir]
Carly: [la palabra]
Carmen: en el mundo financiero esa palabra [en inglés]
Carly: [o en *IT* sí]
Carmen: claro entonces no no no me preocupa tanto eso lo que lo que sí que me parecía importante es que el idioma del grupo es inglés
Carly: del grupo el grupo {name of bank}
Carmen: el grupo de {name of bank} entonces cuando viene el presidente viene y ya habla en inglés
Carly: y no en francés↑? [61]
Carmen: no
Carly: a veces en francés no nunca↑?
Carmen: no porque la gran mayoría de gente de aquí habla en inglés
Carly: en inglés
Carmen: los más viejos los que tenemos más edad ahm a lo mejor prefería preferiríamos francés pero toda la gente joven habla en inglés entonces:: el por deferencia por atención a nosotros habla en en en inglés y y y es que además:: el banco está ahora viviendo un momento cómo de unión de todos somos uno compartimos muchas cosas y eso se está viviendo en inglés entonces yo quiero:: estar ahí no quiero vivirme fuera de eso [porque::]
Carly: [wow sí]
Carmen: bueno me interesa este momento pienso que es un bonito momento

Rather than being worried about understanding English in the new IT system, Carmen sees it as important that the language of the group - the bank's offices around Europe - is English. She refers to herself here and elsewhere in the interview in terms of her age, saying 'those of us who are older' would perhaps prefer French when the company director visits, but since all of the younger people speak English they speak English 'out of respect for us' (since French would be the native language of the visiting director). She explains that the bank is at a time of 'union' whereby the idea being put across from management is that 'we are all one we share a lot of things', and that she says, is 'being lived in English'. Thus English is depicted a means of unification and solidarity, and Carmen says she wants to be part of that, not on the periphery of things. This may indicate an imagined future of feeling separate on account of not speaking English. However, she does not self-present as worried at any point in these lines or elsewhere, instead referring to it as a 'lovely' moment. Age is invoked here too, with English as a dividing line between 'those of us who are older' who would maybe prefer French and 'all of the young people', who she says speak English.

Despite the encroachment of English at work and the fact that age as a differentiating factor is present in her mind (age came up a number of times in the interview), learning the language seems a source of enjoyment for Carmen as opposed to a burden. Much of Carmen's account contrasts with that of Pati, for whom the workplace demands around English have very real consequences, and Marta, albeit with less serious consequences. The two final participants in this chapter, Pascual and Maria, who are lawyers working in Barcelona, are closer in age to Carmen. Age intertwines with social class to influence the role of English in their lives, as we shall see in their interview extracts below.

7.5 Pascual and Maria: 'you are illiterate and uncultured if you don't know English'

Pascual and Maria are a married couple who run a small law firm in Barcelona city centre and had been practicing law for thirty and forty years respectively (Pascual was in his sixties, Maria in her late fifties). Maria, a native Spanish speaker who had learned French at school, grew up in Castilla–La Mancha and had studied and worked in other parts of Spain before settling in Barcelona around fifteen years earlier. Pascual – a bilingual Catalan and Spanish speaker who had also learned French at school - had lived in Barcelona all of his life apart from three years spent in Madrid for postgraduate studies. He said he had grown up in a large fourteen room apartment in the city centre where three generations of his family lived, and from where his grandfather's medical practice was run. During the interview Pascual spoke briefly of past parental investment, recalling that he and his siblings had home tutors give after-school lessons in French and math, 'not just encouraged but obliged' to study as a child. Maria, whose mother had died when she was a child, referred more to her self-motivation when asked about education in her younger years. Pascual and Maria had been learning English largely on a self-taught basis for almost ten years (and were doing weekly one-hour conversation classes with me at the time of interview). While English for work purposes was mentioned in the context of needing to understand at conferences, their talk overall suggests that the role of English in their lives centred around leisure time - learning the language was primarily a hobby for them.

Markers of high cultural capital are discernible throughout the interview. As well as being knowledgeable on a lot of subjects such as research, education, and language learning, Pascual and Maria are well travelled and discussed their experiences using English (or not) in countries like Russia, the United States, India, and Japan. They spoke of their summer holidays renting a sailing boat in Greece, where for them English is crucial. Furthermore, Pascual's references to events in his biography (c.f. van Langenhove and Harré, 1999), for example working with the Swedish government on a case of international family law, working with bank CEOs, giving a talk - in French - at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg indicate high status and social capital. At one point in the conversation Pascual veered off into an erudite narrative about Barcelona’s history and the Mediterranean as the birthplace of European civilization, which can also be interpreted as a display of cultural capital.

Like Carmen, Pascual and Maria spoke of dedicating free time to learning English, studying grammar, speaking while out walking together or whenever they could make time for it alongside family and work commitments. They spoke of English learning in terms of Europeanness, cultural superiority and cosmopolitanism. In fact, Pascual associates his wish to speak English fluently with his dream of learning to play the piano. Like Carmen, they linked English to their age, speaking of not wanting to get left behind, or more specifically, not wanting to be reliant on their children to understand things in the world around them. Peremptory judgement was expressed of others who do not speak English, for example the former president Mariano Rajoy who by all accounts does not speak English. According to Maria, learning English is a ‘hindrance’ or difficulty for the Spanish population, something which is ‘shameful’ – ‘we are losers’. Elsewhere in the interview she opined that if a person at a conference in the legal field cannot speak English, they are ‘illiterate’ and ‘uncultured’. The following excerpt shows how they both viewed English learning as a necessary form of cultural capital, just like keeping up with current affairs:

Extract 7.16

Pascual: más que presión una dema::nda
Carly: una demanda pero hay presión también↑?
Maria: yo pienso que sí pero lo mismo que hay presión para leer
un periódico quiero decir en una casa tiene que haber un
periódico hay casas donde no entra un periódico y esa
familia se mantiene en la incultura porque a los hijos hay
que decirles léete el periódico para que sepas quién es
Mariano Rajoy para que sepas
Pascual: política social economía deportes todo
Maria: qué es [xxxx qué es]
Carly: [sí sí sí sí]
Maria: para que sepas claro
Carly: de cultura general no↑?
Maria: claro hay casas donde no entra el periódico en esas casas
probablemente tampoco entra el inglés{laughs}
Carly: {laughs} no [es muy interesante sí]
Maria: [quiero decir que] la presión la presión va un poco con
con la inquietud:: cultural que los padres desenvolvemos
[sobre los hijos]

As Pascual sees it, rather than a pressure to learn English nowadays there is a demand, while Maria equates the pressure to learn English to that of keeping up with current affairs. For her, pressure to learn English, goes hand in hand with cultural inquisitiveness that parents develop in their children. Maria contends that in houses where newspapers are absent, there is probably no English either - a claim which is followed by laughter. Despite the possible mitigating effect of laughter, her use of demonstrative adjectives 'that family', 'those houses' where there is no interest in English or newspapers - positions the uncultured other as inferior (see van Dijk, 2015). This clearly constitutes what Skeggs and Loveday (2012, p.487) describe as the 'middle-class gaze'. Also interesting to note here is the denial of contemporary pressure to learn English, which contrasts with the accounts of other participants, where such pressure is palpable to varying degrees, a source of angst at least for Pati. In the next extract, positioning of an uncultured, ignorant other again contrasts with Pascual's own motivations and reasons to learn English. Both speakers frame motivation to learn English in terms of overcoming obstacles in life and earning the admiration of Pascual's grandchildren:

Extract 7.17

Maria: y los los nietos de Pascual hablan perfectamente inglés y no puede ser que un nieto no te entienda a ti o que tú no entiendas a tu nieto
Carly: claro sí sí
Pascual: los *kids* {jokey voice tone}
Carly: *kids* sí sí {laughs}
Maria: porque el respeto y la admiración también viene a través de conocimiento
Carly: conocimiento vale
Maria: respeto y admiración ellos a su abuelo le respetan y le admiran y yo::: no quiero que digan ah mi abuelo no sabe inglés
Carly: sí hay que ser modelo también para lo que quieren
Pascual: es autoestima también y autosuperación también superación
Carly: sí↑? superación de cómo superar a…
Pascual: como un como un como un reto más de la vida xxx decir objetivo yo no tengo estas habilidades en esta lengua voy a conseguir un mínimo para no ir como un ignorante por el mundo como un cateto como se dice aquí un cateto un ignorante es un cateto no↑? una persona::: {makes mocking noises imitating 'cateto'} que pone aquí en este letrero

Because, in Maria's view respect and admiration come from knowledge, she believes it is important for Pascual's grandchildren to see that their grandfather can speak English. Towards the end of the excerpt Pascual links self-development and self-esteem to learning English, referring to it as 'another of life's challenges' and an 'objective' to work towards. This train of thought once again turns to a disdained other – an ignorant hick or country bumpkin who is here imitated through stylization in the final lines, as one who cannot understand signposts. The imagined or real self who sets goals and overcomes learning obstacles is displayed through English learning, and learning English in turn places distance between self and an ignorant unsophisticated other from whom Pascual wishes to be different. Worth noting too is the frequent use of ‘perfectly’ when speaking about others’ English levels, in this case Pascual’s grandchildren. Elsewhere in the transcript they mention how their office staff and family members speak English ‘perfectly’, which contrasts with the high standards of English, both self-imposed and encountered in the workplace, by earlier participants. Use of the adjective ‘perfectly’ extends to their own command of French, which Maria brings up below by way of arguing that what is taught nowadays in schools is sufficient for anyone to acquire a high level of English:

Extract 7.18

Maria: yo creo que ahora mismo es posible conseguirlo para
cualquier persona que lo quiera conseguir porque el inglés
que se imparte en los colegios bueno es como nuestro francés
del colegio mi francés del colegio me permite hablar fluido
en Francia y entender perfectamente y a él:: igual le
permite dar conferencias y no ha ampliado sus estudios en
francés mantiene lo que aprendió en el colegio

Carly: en francés

Maria: el inglés el inglés que se imparte en los colegios es
suficiente siempre y cuando los alumnos tengan interés pero
además:: te insisto abres un periódico y las páginas
económicas la mitad de la terminología son conceptos [en
inglés ehm]

When asked if there is a socioeconomic divide with respect to English learning in Barcelona, Maria here dismisses any question of socioeconomic difference in relation to English learning. As long as students are interested, she believes, what is delivered in classrooms is sufficient to attain a high level of English, a view which sharply contrasts with that of other participants. In the final lines, her thoughts turn again to reading the newspaper, mentioning how English terms feature in the finance pages, forging another link between English and cultural capital – the kind that the speakers themselves dispose of[62].

The excerpts selected here illustrate how invoking a moral dimension in positioning self and other (Harré, 2012) with regard to English learning forms part of already well-established class patterns in discourse. Therein contained are the very articulations of respect and disapproval of others that many class analysts see as integral to the validation of middle classness itself (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012; Parsons, 1951; Lamont, 1992; Bottero, 2005; Friedman and

Laurison, 2019, etc.). Here we have seen how ideas around knowledge of English can form part of that moral judgement. In the following and final section of this chapter I return to the research questions, considering how what has been discussed here sheds light on the topics at the heart of this study.

7.6 Final comments and conclusions

All six participants in this chapter – in Reich's terms symbols analysts - are university educated, five to post graduate level. All have occupations that fall under the general rubric of middle class: four are lawyers, one is a technical engineer, and one works in private investment banking. Four participants had at least one university-educated parent, two did not (Hugo and Marta). As regards the various class dimensions discussed in the literature chapters, a number of observations can be made.

First, social capital is invoked by Carmen for example in mentioning her father's reputation as a much sought-after draughtsman and the fact that she was originally referred by a friend to her position at the bank. Social capital is invoked by Marta in speaking of a recent business venture with a friend she met on her first masters. This attests to Reich's (2001) claim as to the importance of social contacts made at university. Pascual in this regard refers to his large 'traditional' family and his grandfather's occupation as a doctor. Pascual and Maria's interview in particular is replete with references to the kind of cultural capital that typically goes hand in hand with high social capital: sailing, international business and leisure travel, keeping up with current affairs, giving talks at conferences. References to cultural capital are also present to varying degrees in the talk of the other participants, as discussed throughout the chapter. All participants except Hugo spoke of parental investment in education, in terms of fee-paying schools, extracurricular lessons or just general interest and encouragement from parents. In Hugo's case, grandparents had provided this encouragement and support. Hugo now provides this kind of support and takes interest in his son's education, as illustrated by the retelling of a frank discussion with his son's teacher. Others who were parents (Carmen, Pascual, and Maria) similarly verbalized knowledge of and interest in their children's education and English learning, all rather characteristic of middle-class parenting (e.g. Crozier et al., 2011; Lareau, 2003; Vincent, 2017; Wallace, 2019; Martin, 2010).

The economic capital of these participants can only be inferred from what we know about them (e.g. occupation, property ownership, relationship to the means of production etc.) as opposed to something to be found in their talk. That said, the topic of economic capital was introduced voluntarily by most participants at some point, mostly in reference to costs and expenses. The two individuals who constructed themselves as least privileged, Marta, whose parents made great sacrifices to send her and her sister to an elite private school, and Hugo, who described his family as ‘pure working class’, most frequently spoke about educational costs, as can be seen in the transcript. Pati spoke of her parents not being able to pay exorbitant private university fees, and while Carmen did not refer directly to cost, she did speak of the privilege others around her have in education. Such talk, on the other hand, is absent from Pascual and Maria’s interview. We saw in Chapter 5 how, in his writings on critical realism, Bhaskar advocated for the consideration of absence as an important part of the ontological order in philosophy. Extrapolating from this idea means it is not only permissible but worthwhile to examine absence in dialogue (Menon, 2015; Bhaskar 1993). The absence in this case may reflect a more formal participant-researcher rapport[63] (whereby it could be somewhat impolite or distasteful to talk about money or complain about expenses), or it could indicate comparative lack of concern over educational costs. It may well be that this is simply how the conversation happened to flow, but the absence is worth noting, even if only in raising a question.

Based on the foregoing dimensions, the participants in this chapter can all be categorized as broadly middle class. That is, they are ‘people who are more or less in the broad middle of the economy and society [who] have enough education and money to participate fully in some vaguely defined “mainstream” way of life’ (Wright, 2015, p.4). In terms of how they position themselves and make sense of the various class dimensions in telling their stories, possessing cultural and social capital is constructed as unspectacular and par for the course in this mainstream way of life. It is normal, for example, to be referred for a job in an elite private investment bank, or to have a friend to get on board with a business venture. It is normal for some to read the finance pages in the newspaper (but unacceptable to care little for current affairs or learning English). Despite such middle-class belongingness, it is noteworthy that Pati, Marta, Hugo and Carmen present themselves in their talk as separate from a privileged other. In other words, middle classness is normal, not privileged. I will have more to say on this point in due course.

In terms of individual responsibility for learning English, all participants had been doing private classes for years prior to their interviews, which demonstrates responsibility for language learning as adults. Still, their opinions differ on the role of personal responsibility for learning. Some speak in ways that suggest diminished individual responsibility, discernible for example in Pati's expectation that the summer course would 'give' her an exam-ready level, and Marta's view that if English is a burden for people it means 'it has not been taught properly'. Marta spoke of the *poder adquisitivo* or purchasing power, the educational advantages of the wealthy, and suggested that such advantages are especially pronounced in English language learning. Similarly, Carmen takes a sociologist-like stance on matters of English education, pointing directly to the role of social class and resources in English learning and lamenting a purported lack of government investment in English. Maria's views however are sharply at odds with this stance. She passes moral judgement (van Langenhove and Wise, 2019) on compatriots not learning English, using language like 'illiterate' and 'uncultured'. (Pascual employs the word '*catetos'* or country bumpkins to the same end). In Maria's view, the local education system facilitates the required level of English – students need only have an interest. Hugo, who is from a working-class background, is on the other hand critical of English teaching at public schools, as illustrated by his talk about his own public-school education and complaints made more recently to his son's teacher. He takes full responsibility for his son's English learning, having enrolled him in private lessons at the age of three.

Finally, it is worth highlighting how economic capital is obviously required for the activities participants see as conducive to success in English. Stays abroad, particularly during younger years, are viewed as a panacea to the problem of 'inadequate' English. Extracurricular classes and to some extent private schooling are considered part of successful English learning. For Pati and Marta however, extracurricular classes and private or semi-private schooling (in Pati's case) were not enough to inculcate them with the kind of 'perfect' English acquired by a small number of work colleagues they have found themselves in competition with later in life. Still more responsibility, knowhow, and investment in English are required for them to navigate the demands of a highly competitive labour market. Hugo, while positioning himself very confidently in terms of his English competence and professional experiences, was planning to continue studying English and sit the Cambridge Proficiency exam. This clearly speaks to the manner in which today, the self is 'required to repeatedly reveal its value through its accrual and investment in' various forms of capital (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, p.472). For many people in Barcelona and elsewhere, this means investing in the symbolic capital of English.

Somewhat predictably, all participants see English learning as a necessity, and embrace that in their own lives and in their responsibilities as parents. (Marta speaks about the importance of English learning for her imagined future children). But they differ in the ways in which the need for English manifests in their lives. Marta, Hugo, and Carmen are all under varying degrees of pressure to improve English for work, while Pati faces a threat to her work stability and career progression supposedly on account of her lack of English competence. On the other hand, Pascual and Maria speak of English as a hobby - one that compliments and facilitates international travel. English it seems, is primarily a source of symbolic capital for them. This difference is no doubt moderated by class, in particular occupation[64], and age, since they are older than most other participants and are employers, or in Marxist terms, owners of the means of production.

In Marta and Pati´s accounts especially, English is portrayed as part of an ongoing 'competitive struggle over scarce resources' (Bottero, 2005, p.43). That is, the so-called 'perfect' English possessed by the few colleagues they have encountered is not the norm but the exception. Their talk implies that English learning is not an even playing field, and that the investment required in English goes well beyond the school gates. Worse still, in Pati's case, 'inadequate English' has been a veritable whip with which to beat her, to borrow Reay's (2012) apt metaphor. In her work as a lawyer, Pati has not only been 'told off' over her English but told that her English level is unfit for a job she had already been hired for. While she is aware that this explanation may be a mere attempt to muddy the waters - so management does not have to state the real reasons for her contract termination or take responsibility for poor hiring practices [65] - she sees further investment in classes and sitting English exams as the best way forward. As Ricento points out, 'corporations have the "right" to hire any workers they please, anywhere in the world, at any wage, with few benefits and no job security´ (2018, p.232). Requiring English competence provides another convenient way of justifying the right to exercise this freedom, to hire the most qualified candidates, those with the best English, those who best fit the ideals of some vaguely defined company culture, and so on.

As is the case in Hong Kong, according to Yeung & Gray, participant talk here suggests that in Barcelona it is by now almost 'taken for granted that professional and skilled workers should possess a high level of English proficiency' (2022, p.5). Failure to meet this standard is not understood as 'evidence of linguistic difference' (ibid), rather legitimate reason for criticism, rejection, or both as in Pati’s case. In PT terms, people like Pati, Marta, Hugo, and Carmen have a felt obligation and/or real duty to keep learning English for work. But that duty is not necessarily accompanied by rights like the right to stable employment, to receive reasonable feedback or a chance to improve shortcomings, as Pati’s case illustrates. The next group of participants have not yet had to face the competitive jobs market, although they will certainly have experienced pressure to acquire English competence. In the next and final data chapter, I turn to a group of first year business students at a private university in Barcelona.

Chapter 8: Focus group with private university students

This final data chapter explores a focus group held with eleven first year business students at a private university. As with the last two chapters, this exploration is done through the analytic lens of PT. The present chapter is organized along the lines of the research questions set out above. Firstly, I survey a number of social class dimensions discernible from the students' talk. Then I explore English learning, self-responsibility, and the influence of social class dimensions discernible in this regard. That done, I examine their respective positioning of self and other in relation to the role of English in their lives and the world around them, including how they actually position themselves and others as L2 users and/or learners during the group discussion. The final sections of the chapter entail some final remarks about what can be learned from this data overall. The first section below, section 8.1 provides an in-detail description of the context and roles involved, as well as – from a PT perspective - insights about the storyline within which, the discussion took place.

8.1 Setting the scene: storyline, roles and context

The focus group discussion examined in this chapter was carried out in the context of a private university in Barcelona, with first year students on an English-medium instruction (EMI) business administration and management degree program – more commonly known in Spanish as ADE (*Administración y Dirección de Empresas*). The roles involved were student (all focus group participants) and professor/group facilitator (the author). At the time the focus group took place, I had been teaching these students in a semester long (four-month) course in the subject human resources, attended by approximately thirty pupils. All students in the focus group were male, indicative of the higher ratio of males to females in the class they were recruited from. Focus group participants had varying levels of proficiency in English which I did not formally assess in any way. However, I can say broadly, based on my perception having worked as an English language teacher in various other contexts, that the levels ranged from B2 (most students) to C2 (few students) in terms of the European Framework of Reference for Languages. First-year degree students at this university were also required to pass the Cambridge First Certificate exam during, if not before, their first semester.

I had no preestablished interest in the participants' varying levels of English, but this aspect gained significance over the course of data analysis, in part because of the manner in which design and methods in qualitative research 'are to some extent emergent – rather than pre-specified' (Sim and Waterfield, 2019). The focus group was held in English given that it was an EMI program where English was the language in which students usually spoke to professors in class and around campus. Two of the participants were also from outside Spain so spoke little Spanish and Catalan (participants were still invited to switch to Spanish at any point if they wished). The group was mostly made up of local students, apart from these two study-abroad participants, one from a European country, the other from further afield. As described in the methods chapter, additional measures to protect the identity of the group members were taken here due to the possibility of anyone from the university recognizing the students, and also to reduce the possibility of informants recognizing each other – a valid concern raised by Sim and Waterfield (2019). While the latter may be impossible to completely guarantee, specific details of where informants come from and other such potentially identifying information have been excluded, even if doing so could mean diluting or omitting some points of interest to data interpretation (Kaiser, 2009). The specific year of data collection has been omitted too, as a further means of protecting the students' identities.

Beyond the immediate context of this degree program is a broader macro context of the vast popularity and expansion of EMI university courses. Not so long ago, the English medium classroom from which these students were recruited (and the professor recruited to teach), would have been harder to come by in Spain, where EMI has gained prominence in higher education over the last decade and a half (Wachter and Maiworm, 2014). Now, this university is among the many European universities that strive to 'go global', that is, to achieve status as an international institute by offering EMI courses, study abroad programs and hiring teachers from abroad (McGroarty, 2017). The professors on the degree course in question were either native or highly proficient non-native speakers, accustomed to delivering lectures and so forth in English. It is worth mentioning in terms of PT, and structure and role, that professors would most often have a good rapport with, and know students on a first names basis. This type of context can be juxtaposed with the university experience whereby professors are distant figures with whom students have no personal contact (Kinginger, 2004, p.234; c.f. also Bourdieu et al., 1994 on distancing), more common in state funded universities, particularly on programs with large student numbers.

It should be mentioned too that students were likely to have been aware to varying degrees of my interest in matters related to class inequality, since we had devoted two classes to this topic under the rubric of diversity in HR[66]. Hence, this may have influenced their responses somewhat (as noted in section 9.2 on limitations). Because I interviewed my own students, here

I adopt a critical perspective on my contributions and moderation of the group in the dual capacity of group facilitator and professor. I see this as necessary not only because the choice to use my own students naturally invites critical readings of the findings, but also since I believe that such reflection is critical for anyone in a position of relative power (as researcher, professor, or otherwise), even where this role is enacted by means of low authority and friendly interactions. This approach to data collection, where participants are known to some extent to the researcher can, on the plus side, yield a more 'emic perspective' (Pike, 1955). More importantly, it helps to counter the 'tendency to perceive only what manifests itself synchronically' (Blommaert, 2005, p.128-129), with the researcher being well positioned to provide richer details of context, thus facilitating consideration of how pre-existing structures and events may influence speech acts.

It is also noteworthy, finally, that during the group discussion, the floor is held for the vast majority of the time by three particular students, here renamed Jordi, Miguel, and Sergio. These students, two of whom were locals, and the other a study abroad student (from an EU country), had high proficiency and native-like accents in English. Another frequent contributor to the discussion, Zak was another study abroad participant (from outside Europe) who also had very high English proficiency and a native-like accent. The other students contributed far less frequently. They also had competent - but slightly lower - levels of English in my estimation, without native-like accents, apart from one student I call Albert who also had high proficiency but remained mostly silent. Two students hardly contributed to the discussion at all. While there are no doubt various factors at play like personality traits (e.g. extroversion, shyness), interest in the topic at hand, formality of the setting, power dynamics, and relationship to others in the group[67], I believe that it was no coincidence that the participants who most dominated the discussion had very high proficiency in English. This proficiency very likely helped them to feel more at ease in contributing. They confidently speak, debate, and challenge each other throughout the discussion as we shall see below. Two of the three more loquacious students were also high academic achievers. In the below section, I turn to research question a), exploring some dimensions of social class not only emergent in students' talk, but also discernible from the overall context.

8.2 Various dimensions of social class

The first research question looks at how participants make sense of their experiences, and position self and other in terms of the various dimensions of social class. Differently to the one-on-one interviews approach, where I had a chance to get a sense of the person's life and class situation more generally, the focus group participants were not asked many questions about themselves as individuals. Nonetheless, many references to class markers typically associated with middle-class lifestyles were invoked by this group. For example, they mentioned certain aspects of their families like parents' occupations (business owner, real estate agent); having picked up English from a parent who spoke the language; having changed from public to private school, among other things. The most commonly invoked class dimensions were travel and education.

Before turning to the data, it is important to acknowledge the aspect that is often elided or glossed over in sociolinguistics research, and indeed in day-to-day talk - this group discussion being no exception - that of economic capital. In the Marxist sense, there are always economic factors undergirding and directly or indirectly shaping our social interactions. I have little knowledge in relation to the individual students in this regard, apart from the very significant fact that they are attending a university that was charging enrolment fees of approximately 12,500eur per year at the time of writing.[68] This meant that they were on a path to graduate with credentials from a reputable, high fee-paying university - an investment which would later translate to high cultural capital. It also facilitates certain facets of their education less common to public higher-level education. For example, parent-tutor meetings, obligatory class attendance, graded class participation, frequent feedback (at least in principle), high levels of one-to-one academic support like tutorials, project mentoring, and flagging of frequently absent or floundering students for extra tutor support.

This context can be contrasted in many respects with that described by Crozier and Reay (2011) in their research at a private university they call 'Southern' in the UK. Like those attending Southern, the students in this setting are very likely to have had privileged educational experiences prior to coming to university (ibid). However, unlike Southern, where getting a place on a course is highly competitive, at this private university acceptance for a place on a course was based on students' overall profiles such as extracurricular activities and interests, as well as scholarly achievement. Furthermore, academic grades were not the only important part of evaluation in course subjects. Well behaved students were at an advantage, extroversion was generally favoured over introversion - since class participation was graded - and those who mastered the art of public speaking were at a definite advantage since much of the course work entailed doing presentations (as is the case by now in many universities).

8.2.1 Travel – a highly mobile life

The class dimension most frequently invoked in this group talk was the topic of travel. It came up most often in direct relation to English and the idea that travel is the best way to learn and improve. Two participants present were study abroad students, while others spoke of having travelled abroad in the past for summer courses. They discussed the importance of travelling and conversing with native speakers, as can be seen in the first extract:

Extract 8.1

Student: yeah sure OK so how would you rate your level of English I personally think that my level of English has been has arrived to this point thanks to media and travelling abroad like studying even if it is just four months or five or something like this or half a year it's really helpful for somebody to learn this culture and this language {background talk and sound of chair being moved}

Miguel: you mean studying abroad↑?

Student: yeah

Miguel: uh I went like for summer courses xxx but that was like a month or three weeks {background whispering} yeah it did actually I don't know I believe I believe that if you want to involve yourself if you want to learn it and you start like engaging in the conversations and meeting locals it actually helps a lot

Here, the question of ‘How would you rate your level of English’ on the handout (appendix E) is answered by the first student who speaks of how his level of English improved thanks to media and travel. This evaluation is shared by Miguel, who equates wanting to involve yourself and wanting to learn the language with engaging in conversations ‘and meeting locals’. There is evidence here of some students finding new means of self-representation, constructing new and mixed linguistic identities as L2 users of English (Pavlenko, 2000, p.88). Jordi for instance, in the following extract, speaks of needing to use English on a daily basis in order to keep up a friendship:

Extract 8.2

Jordi: no it's okay:: I just wanted to say that for me the like key point was to develop a relationship with someone who like

```
          would speak only English so well like let's say that my best
          friend is from America so I talk to him every day and that's
          why it kind of like got me in a loop that like now I need to
          use English to like keep advancing with like my friendship
          so in a way it's a necessary tool that you it's like you
          adapt to the situation and  that's how you like day by day
          overcome this like language barrier that exists of course so
Carly:    yeah so like a person that you need to talk to yeah
Jordi     yeah like it's just like engaging some sort of emotion to
          the language I think that's what really helps to me cos I
          mean it would result to like having fun so I would try to
          like improve so I could have more fun
```

This extract suggests the importance of the importance of travel and study abroad to developing the linguistic capital of competent English for these participants, as well as the importance of English for the development of certain kinds of (e.g. international) social capital. Pavlenko (2000, p.91) considers interactional opportunities (such as informal interactions) to be part of the linguistic resources required in language learning, discussing how access thereto is mediated by gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, culture, social status, and more. It is clear to see how class can mediate access to such interactional opportunities, since economic capital and/or knowhow is usually required for travel and access to native speakers (even in one’s own country). We can at least infer from the students’ talk that that they do not appear to have come up against noteworthy obstacles in this regard, given the frequent first-hand references to travel as helpful to improving one’s English level English. Notable also in this extract is how - unlike for previous participants discussed in chapters 6 and 7 - English learning is not construed as a burden for Jordi. Far from being a burden, it is linked to positive emotions, overcoming barriers, and essentially having ‘more fun’.

8.2.2. Parental investment and support

Acknowledgement of parental influence is notably absent from the group discussion. As moderator I brought up this topic on four different occasions, only one of which led to consideration of the influential role of parenting (extract 8.3 below). Two of these instances coincided with a change of topic, while another was met with rejection of the idea that parental investment mattered in language learning. In the first instance, Sergio, a study abroad student with high English proficiency and a native-like accent, said he had picked it up from his parents, suggesting effortless assimilation of English (on which more later), as well as indicating parental influence and modelling in terms of language learning:

Extract 8.3

Carly   and parents no one’s mentioned parents what about parents as well
Student {laughs}
Carly: no I’m just wondering do you think anything parents are important in this process
Miguel   for sure
Sergio   ya personally both of my parents spoke English when I was a child so that’s how I learned it was that and cartoons {laughs}
Carly: {laughs} parents and cartoons

A local student named Miguel, also highly proficient in English, spoke of parental advice on the importance of language learning in the below fairly long narrative:

Extract 8.4

Miguel: Am ya:: ah well I mean my parents have always said that languages are quite important but like they never learned any languages well like not to a proficient level let's say and uh they did uh they did encourage me to do so but they never pressed me like into doing so it’s like they said they are important but you have to you choose whether you want to learn them or not and in school I learned uh English and French and I enjoyed it uhm and I’d say I'm good at English and good in French and I also decided to learn German by myself and to me the differential point between learning German or learning English and then like speaking English and knowing how to speak English I'd say it's basically like you're fo::rcing yourself to watch or consume original content and and basically like ehm forcing yourself to speak in the language or like getting to know people who speak the language and that's like different and no matter if your parents encourage you or they help you like that's something you cannot obtain unless you really wa::nt to do that

Miguel’s recollection of his parents’ advice is reminiscent of what some class literature suggests, as discussed in Chapter 4: that sensitivity and democratic discussion is (more) characteristic of middle-class parenting (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Bernstein, 1975; Sears et al., 1957). Regardless of where one stands on the delicate parenting and class debate[69], the fact such a conversation takes place at all is clear evidence of parental interest and support in education. Miguel says his parents encouraged him but also emphasises that ‘they never pressed’ him, instead advising that languages were important, and saying he had to choose. Not only does Miguel convey his relationship to his parents as democratic and based on understanding, he constructs himself as a reasonable and mature individual who makes good, responsible decisions about his education (Pichler, 2009, p.14). The final lines of this narrative ultimately express denial of any real parental influence over language learning, with Miguel stating the superior importance of individual determination; ‘unless you really want to’. The overall lack of recognition of the role of parenting in education tallies with some observations in the last two chapters and is taken up again in due course. Before however I turn to the last of the class dimensions salient in this data, education.

8.2.3 Education

In terms of education as a class dimension and marker, the most significant point can be drawn not from here and now speech acts, but from the structural context described above, the fact that the students are attending a reputable, high fee-paying university located in an affluent district of Barcelona. That is, as Pichler observes, identities constructed through multiple positionings ‘have to be seen in relation to their dominant or ‘legitimate’ cultural capital in the form of their elite education, whose value clearly goes beyond the local context of [their] interactions’ (2009, p.13). There are immediate class associations that come with attending a university like this one[70]. When I asked the participants in this focus group about the topic of public versus private education in general, those who spoke articulated for the most part quite a good understanding of the benefits of private education. This is at odds with some popular and scholarly perception whereby students in elite education are found to be unaware of their privilege (e.g. Khan and Jerolmack, 2013; Abelmann et al., 2009; Friedman and Laurison, 2019; and see Pichler, 2009). At the same time, this topic generated substantial debate as we will see next section, where the topics of individual responsibility for learning English, privilege, and the influence of social class dimensions are addressed.

8.3 English learning, individual responsibility, and the influence of class dimensions

RQ2 is inextricably linked to the topics of education and parental support which featured in the previous section. The group engaged in quite some debate around the notion of privilege associated with private education and the importance of individual responsibility for successful (English) language learning. In the next extract the students are discussing a public school in an affluent suburb of Barcelona:

Extract 8.5

```
Miguel:  they get one of the best uh state school SATs[71] marks but
         most of the students who go there uh they live in the area
         of course but like they also attend to English classes
Carly:   [private English classes]
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Miguel:  [I mean it’s not]
         ya like uh like uh private English lessons or like aside
         like of the school and its and they also get like good
         grades in English ah but it’s like just because you have
         bigger groups of students and classes like fifty uh let’s
         say fifty kids per class maybe depends on the school of
         course and then also there’s at least like there’s less
         hours than private schools there are less tools like the
         teaching methods are different it’s not so personal I’d say
Jordi:   but my point is that they want:: to go to attend these extra
         English classes it’s not it’s I mean [in]
Miguel:  [and] forced {tuts}
Jordi:   ya I mean some people might be forced to it but in a way
         they ultimately do it cos they want to cos otherwise you
         can just like reject it and no I don’t want to go
Miguel:  but like for example I’ve never needed to go to an extra
         class of English or like to take extra classes
Jordi:   but you had the like the eagerness to study [for yourself]
```

Miguel compares this apparently successful public school to private schools, explaining that there are bigger class, different teaching methods and ‘less tools’. He supposes that it is ‘not so personal’, an interesting observation given that as noted above, the students' current university context is quite the opposite. Interesting here too is that in positioning his public-school peers as successful, Miguel´s use of the word ‘forced’, contrasts with his use of the same word earlier when speaking of himself. In extract 8.4 he discusses his own success with language learning and how one ‘forces’ oneself to speak the language and ‘watch or consume original content’. This can be contrasted with his suggestion that the public-school students who get private English lessons are forced to do so. In extract 8.5 above he also says he never needed to go to extracurricular English classes, positioning himself as an independent and self-driven language learner, in contrast to peers whom he thinks are forced to attend classes. This self-positioning is bolstered by his friend Jordi who adds that Miguel had the ‘eagerness to study’ himself. In the below extract, Jordi engages in similar talk of self-driven success with English:

Extract 8.6

```
Jordi:     well I've talked about this with Miguel because we've
           both sort of like self-cultivated our English so well ya
           we’ve both really like English that's why we're studying
           in English I mean aside from other reasons but yeah well
           I mean Miguel has a really good sound command of English
           so {laughs} definitely {laughs}
Carly and
Miguel:    {laugh}
```

Here Jordi claims that he and his friend Miguel had ‘self-cultivated’ their English, then positioning Miguel in flattering terms, referring to his ‘sound command of English’, a comment which prompts laughter. Miguel in response (extract 8.4 above) launches into a narrative about his parents’ advice, and his own success with language learning. In that narrative he similarly positions himself as a motivated and independent language learner who is ‘good at English’ and French, as well as a German, which he says he also taught himself. Later in the conversation, Jordi brings up a Ted Talk on equality in recruitment by Regina Hartley (2015) which had been shown to them in class as part of the topic of diversity in HR:

Extract 8.7

Jordi: I’m sorry {laughs} ah like from the ted talk so:: ya so if you’re in a private school it’s easier for you to like have a better level but also if you go to a state school you can also achieve even a greater level of someone that went to a private school and in most cases it I mean it really depends on the person at the end so definitely
Carly: okay so do you all agree with that it really depends on the person↑? is that the most important part
Various: no:::
Student: no:::
Student: no definitely not it can be
Student: it depends on the person but also in a private school you have more tools to get to it
Jordi: ya but that doesn’t mean I mean you have an easier access
Sergio: ya xxx
Student: you decide to use them or not but [it’s eh]
Jordi: [ya that’s why] it depends on the person and the eagerness that this person shows towards the language cos if like you don’t have the tools but you want to learn it you’re going to fight to find these tools so ya school plays a really important role but at the end it’s yourself:: spending hours and working for it
Sergio: like no I would disagree I would say give me two like let’s take two twenty like people and put them into two groups of ten when they’re like kids put one group of ten into like public school put one group of ten into private school and like make sure that they’re all uninterested in languages if we could right
Carly: {laughs} how would we do that
Sergio: {laughs} I guarantee that the group in private school would come out better because they just have better teaching staff

Referring to a Ted Talk in which the speaker advocates giving employment opportunities to those from less privileged backgrounds, Jordi starts out by saying that it is easier to ‘have a better level’ if you’re in a private school. He then counteracts this statement by saying that a ´state school´ pupil can achieve a greater level than someone from a private school since ‘it really depends on the person at the end of the day’. In other words, there is some superficial recognition of the benefits of private education, but the commonly held notion that it all ‘depends on the person’ wins out. Also interesting is that the rest of the students express disagreement (notwithstanding the effect of these opinions being directly elicited by the researcher), a unanimous ‘no’ is voiced when asked if they all agree. One student says ‘you have more tools to get it’, while Sergio puts forward a hypothetical scenario of comparing private- and public-school students, confident that the private-school students would come out better ‘because they just have better teaching staff’. The debate continues in the extract below, where Miguel shares an instructive example of how advantage comes about in the stakes of language learning for such students:

Extract 8.8

Miguel: my case uh my school they sort of have like a weird teaching method that is quite new uh basically they teach the kids since they go to like uhm

Jordi: kindergarten

Miguel: uh they teach them French German Chinese Russian Catalan Spanish and English

Various: {laughter}

Carly: wow↑?

Miguel: basically ya well like it’s a mess they get they really get confused with languages they mix a lot when they are young but they end up uhm knowing how to pronounce which is something not that obvious once you’re

Sergio: ooohhhh

Miguel: like especially with Russian and Chinese which are really different languages uhm you need to learn that when you’re a kid to get used to listening the sounds and speaking them and they let later on they choose which languages they feel they find more useful and which ones they want to learn uhm in my case I chose French now they chose two different ones but whatever and uhm so that’s something that there’s no interest like affecting that learning process like no matter what like if you’re interested in it or not like the teachers are speaking to you in Russian

Various: {laughter}

Miguel: you’re going to end up understanding something or learning something out of it

Carly: [so can]

Jordi: [ok but] at that age I don’t feel that you have developed such a will that you can sort of like resist to what is imposed to you

Student: {laughs}

Miguel: but that’s pa::rt of the learning process of any language

Here, Miguel gives details of how exactly students from the primary school he attended can get a head start thanks to early immersion in multiple languages like Russian and Chinese which ‘you need to learn….when you’re a kid’. Although the group’s response is generally a mixture of awe and fascination, Jordi is still not convinced that this constitutes an example of private-school advantage. Inherent in his insistence on the importance of hard work and self-drive is an indirect denial of the advantages Jordi himself is likely to have experienced over the course of his education (which is not to suggest that he did not also work hard). It is equally important to note that the majority of the group is not on board with Jordi’s arguments. As students at a high fee-paying university, they are clearly cognizant of the benefits afforded by private education - in the stakes of language learning and otherwise - albeit it should be noted that they are speaking in general terms about private and public education rather than of their own personal lives and experiences.

Attitudes towards private and public education aside, in the preceding extracts, unlimited self-responsibility (epitomized by commonplace arguments like ‘it depends on the person’) is placed in direct opposition to the head start one is likely to have (e.g. it’s easier to ‘have a better level’ if you’re in a private school). Private school, constructed as the bastion of privilege, is pitted against the ideals of neoliberal personhood, self-management and drive, the latter ferociously defended through language like ‘fight to find’ the necessary tools, ‘spending hours’ working toward a goal, and ‘eagerness’. Despite substantial awareness of common differences between public and private education shown by the group overall, Jordi and Miguel speak of their own language acquisition process in ways that identically mirror the neoliberal subjectivities described in Chapter 4, speaking of ‘eagerness’, ‘self-cultivated’ learning, and how they love English – indicating high motivation.

The foregoing extracts thus provide evidence not only of how English language learning can be ‘part of the re-invention of a successful self’ (McGroarty, 2017, p.233), but can also be a channel through which to display self-management, relentless drive and independence, all highly valued in society and all characteristic of neoliberal personhood. Coupled with the denial of privilege which can also be inferred here, this data serves as further evidence of the (by now rather unspectacular) fact that these ways of thinking are omnipresent across different social groups. In the next section I turn to look at the role of English for these participants, in their lives, and in the world around them.

8.4 The role of English

8.4.1 There is no hope otherwise

The students verbalized expectation of the benefits they hope to reap by completing their degrees in English, discussing for example how doing so will ‘boost my chances’, how ‘as a career opportunity it’s useful’ (extract 8.9 above), and how it will ‘help us when we finish the degree’. This provides further confirmation of the - by now rather banal - observation that English is associated directly in people’s minds with social and economic advantage (e.g. Ricento, 2018; Norton, 2013). For most of these participants, the necessity to gain competence in English is obvious and does not need explaining. It is ‘necessary’ (this word appears four times in relation to English), to the point that for Sergio, there is ‘no hope otherwise’ since everything you do is based on English. English is described as the ‘base’ of any profession, matching the exact wording used by participants in Abelmann et al.’s (2009) South Korean study. At various points in the discussion, English is also conveyed as the language of international opportunity, business and entrepreneurship, through language like ‘abroad’, ‘professional’, ‘foreign trade’, ‘foreigners’, ‘tourists’, ‘big tech’, ‘Fintech’ and ‘Glovo’ (but notably, English fluency is not associated with Glovo’s delivery couriers).

8.4.2 Holding the floor and ‘the right to speak’

It is noteworthy that Sergio, Miguel and Jordi held the floor more than any other participants. This is evident on both a quantitative and qualitative level since they took more turns and spoke in turns of up to one minute or more at a time, which no other student did. The number of turns they took were in the region of forty (Sergio) to sixty turns each (Miguel and Jordi). Another frequent contributor to the discussion, Zak, was a study abroad participant who also had very high English proficiency and a native-like accent (around 20 turns). Other students, in contrast, contributed significantly less, and two remained mostly silent. As stated earlier, multiple factors, such as personality traits, existing friendships, interest in and knowledge of the topic at hand, unequal power relations and so on, contribute to their loquaciousness. I would argue that their high proficiency in English, including their native-like accents, was also a strong factor contributing to their confidence and verbal dominance in the group. In contrast to the few who dominated the discussion, other students often had to be invited to speak, as shown in the next two extracts. In the first, a student I have named Joan was reluctant to contribute, despite an attempt to involve him in the discussion:

Extract 8.9

Carly: yeah for academic for academia what do you think Joan↑?
Joan: uhm ...well I'll pass to the next question
Carly: yeah sure go ahead whatever you think ...anything
Joan: well if there's anybody here that wants to:::
Carly: no no go ahead yeah we need to get through the questions anyway so do you know someone who's learned English to a highly advanced level because of interest and hard work without any help
Joan: okay like learning by themselves because they want↑?
Carly: yeah
Joan: xxxxx °°no I don-
Carly: yeah okay

When invited to give his opinion, Joan (who had not yet contributed to the discussion) decides to turn to the next question on the handout and a pause ensues. After checking if anyone else would like to answer, then (quietly) clarifying the question, he opts out of contributing, saying he doesn't know, accompanied by some indecipherable speech. Once Joan declines what in PT terms is the 'duty' to speak, momentarily placed upon him, his classmate Jordi steps in, speaking about his self-cultivated English (extract 8.6 above follows on from this), and Joan remained otherwise silent. In the below extract Miguel invites a student called Oriol to speak, after an apparent sign that he had something to say:

Extract 8.10

Carly: mhm hmm ok
Miguel: I think Oriol was going to no okay
Carly: what
Miguel: {laughs} no nothing
Carly: what
Carly: Oriol was going to say something↑?
Oriol: I was just going to say that studying in English like at a university here in Barcelona attracts like people from all around the world so as a career opportunity it's useful because we are open to a very cross cultural like environment so companies can see that we are like capable of working with others from wherever the places they come from

Opening with 'I was just going to say', Oriol positions himself on less confident footing - in sharp contrast to with the confident and forthcoming talk of Miguel, Jordi and Sergio throughout. Oriol had also earlier in the discussion put his hand up when he wanted to contribute, taking up the position of a respectful student requiring permission to speak. On another note, it is also interesting that Oriol's comment about the career opportunities afforded by studying through English conveys how social capital of a 'cross cultural' kind is accessible through this university context, where students might meet fellow elites from other countries. I will have more to say on this in due course.

Iterative readings of that transcript show that I positioned myself for the most part as an ‘interested and friendly’ interlocutor (Pavlenko, 2000, p.100), but the students may well have experienced the focus group as a formal interaction, not least given the institutional setting. The person who will carry out end of term grading is after all a gatekeeper, no matter how they position themselves. In other words, role remains relatively fixed (Harré, 2006). Thus, having to communicate in English in what is possibly perceived as a formal context may have contributed to the reticence to participate exhibited by Joan and others, particularly amongst more vocal classmates. Furthermore, since positioning is always relative and context-dependent, how non-native speakers feel about their ability to express themselves in a group setting will always be relative to other interlocutors. The fact that there were varied competence levels is very likely to have been an influencing factor in which participants felt they had the ‘right to speak’ (Bourdieu, 1993a, 1991, etc.) in this context. It is of course overly simplistic to equate degree of L2 proficiency with contribution levels in a straightforward fashion. Those who do not participate may be afraid, ashamed or loathe to speak up in the group for a multitude of reasons that the researcher may never know. But as I endeavour to show here, one of those reasons is very likely to have been disparate levels of English proficiency. It is not English language proficiency in and of itself that can affect group participation, since, as Brutt-Griffler well notes, languages themselves are not social agents (2005). It is how individuals think and feel about their command of a language, which is inextricably linked to how they are positioned by others. Self and other positioning, in turn, is always relative to broader social, historical, and structural aspects. As Blommaert, drawing on Bourdieu, writes:

> The play of different positions in social arenas is the play of symbolic violence, or “misrecognition” and “recognition” of linguistic-communicative resources not because of their “linguistic” features but of the sociohistorical load they carry within a given social field (2015, p.5)

Excerpts presented in the final parts of the chapter further exemplify how self-positioning is continuously negotiated in tandem with positioning of and by others. First, I turn below to how in this discussion, the more loquacious students foregrounded the aspect of self as an accomplished user of English, while other students more often foregrounded that of self as an English learner.

8.4.3 Learners of English vs accomplished speakers

Miguel, Sergio, and Jordi tend to position themselves (and each other) very confidently as accomplished speakers of English, using language like ‘picked it up’ ‘being good at’ and ‘having a sound command of’ English. Talk of formal language learning or of effort is largely absent from their talk. Jordi on one occasion says that maintaining a ‘UK accent’ requires a lot of practice, but this is in discussing travel and socializing rather than talk of study or classes. When Miguel speaks on one occasion (extract 8.11 below) of how English classes can help, he uses the ‘you’ form which serves to distance himself personally from the observation. Coupled with his remarks above about not needing private lessons (extract 8.5), and being ‘good at’ English (extract 8.4), this has the effect of distancing himself somewhat from a learner profile:

Extract 8.11

Miguel: yeah I think that maybe like forcing yourself into an environment that is actually forcing you to speak in English or any other foreign language helps a lot but as Oriol said like taking classes is actually what consolidates your grammar and your vocabulary and what makes your English ahm go from like fluent speaking to proficient in terms of like writing as well

Carly: mhm ya::: what about private lessons like after school and things like that

Sergio: like I can't say anything about English specifically in that case but I found private lessons for other languages haven't been very helpful

Carly: really↑? okay {surprised voicetone}

Sergio: not particularly

Student: for example in my case I have done some private lessons with several teachers and yeah it was like one of the best ways to learn English in my case because it's like when you are one to one and you're not talking with a lot of ahm par- company- xxx

Carly: colleagues [or classmates ya]

Student: [colleagues] or something like that and you- or not talking another language with your colleagues on your- just one to one trying to improve your skills your speaking will get great with that in my case it works so

Carly: yeah

Following on from Miguel´s comments about what is necessary to become proficient, Sergio, who elsewhere speaks of picking English up from his parents (extract 8.3), categorizes his experiences of private language lessons more generally, as unhelpful, also disidentifying him from a learner profile (here speaking of languages besides English). Another student then joins in to comment on the benefit of various private lessons he had taken, and how ‘your speaking will get great’. A moment before, his classmate Oriol had opined that lessons are the best way to learn to write. On both counts these two students position themselves as learners of English:

Extract 8.12

Oriol: in terms of speaking like maybe travelling and going abroad it's very good but actually taking classes in my opinion it’s the best way to learn how to write and like manage [your actual]
Various: [maybe the grammar]
Student: [yeah] the grammar
Carly: yeah it's important as well isn't it

In the above, Oriol’s experience of private classes being helpful is echoed by various students who agree that the grammar is important. While other students besides Sergio, Miguel and Jordi say far less in the group overall, it is noteworthy that they also self-position differently in relation to their English competence and how it was acquired, as is clear above in their talk of the benefits of studying grammar and attending classes.

Later in the conversation, students were asked if locals who had attained very proficient levels of English are seen as more cultured or cosmopolitan. The unanimous response from a few students was yes, and from there the conversation turned to how people who do or do not speak concisely in English are perceived:

Extract 8.13

Sergio: ya absolutely
Carly: ya↑? you think↑? tell me more about that
Sergio: ya like if if someone is speaking to me and they’re like concise in their language they have a clear accent the communication just feels easier right↑? so you’re like naturally tend to think more highly of the person if they speak uh clearly right
Carly: okay
Sergio: whereas if someone is going around in circles constantly not really like missing words missing grammar here and there or their accent isn’t quite clear the conversation tends to be less enjoyable
Carly: okay

Here Sergio positions himself as qualified to make judgements on other people’s English levels. He says his enjoyment of a conversation can be determined by an interlocutor’s command, and admits to the thinking ‘more highly’ of someone who speaks clearly in English, reinforcing the positioning of self as an accomplished English user, similar to Jordi and Miguel’s talk above.

Discernible in the foregoing extracts is how these three students tend to ‘disidentify’ (Pichler, 2009) from a possible English learner profile, instead foregrounding the subject position of accomplished speakers for themselves. The other students do not do so in this discussion, apart from one occasion when a student, whom I call Albert, briefly criticizes the standards of English at the second level institute he attended. Here Albert shares the positioning of self as an accomplished English speaker (like Sergio, in a position to evaluate), but it is the only instance when a student besides Miguel, Sergio or Jordi does so. Albert otherwise refrains from speaking despite having a very high command of English and a native-like accent. Meanwhile, for others like Jordi, having a native-like accent has meant experiencing standing out from the crowd, as we see in the next section.

8.4.4 Being noticed

In the following extract, Jordi discusses perceptions of English versus American accents, recalling how he was seen as smart by people when he ‘would use’ UK accented English on visits to the US:

Extract 8.14

Jordi: also if you’re not a native speaker and well I mean if you uh compare like let’s say the most general accents which would be like the English accent including Ireland and Scotland and all of that and then
Carly: {laughs}Scotland
Student: {laughs} well
Various {laughter}
Student [well::]
Jordi [I know it’s ver-] it’s it’s it’s different but like compared to American it’s a whole different world in a way uh so well I I learned the English like proper not proper but like the UK English
Carly: the UK English
Sergio: {laughs}
Jordi: sorry and then ah whenever I would go to America and I would use that English everyone would feel that I’d be so smart and they would they’d be so much
Carly and Sergio: {laughter}

Jordi´s talk here resonates with what Relaño-Pastor (2018) reports in her studies on CLIL in Spain's Castilla-la Mancha region, that English competence is associated with (or better said, conflated with) smartness. While Relaño-Pastor finds that opting for CLIL is associated with more academic students, in Jordi´s account here, a native-like accent in English was associated with smartness. This statement is followed by laughter, and the turns thereafter reveal that he also stood out in the current university context for the same reason:

Extract 8.15

Jordi: sorry and then ah whenever I would go to America and I would use that English everyone would feel that I'd be so smart and they would they'd be so much
Carly and Sergio: {laughter}
Jordi: I mean in a special way which was sort of like strange also when I came here I remember that like just by using the UK English everyone would think I was a foreigner
Carly: that happened with me I thought you were from the UK ya
Jordi: yes [yes yes]
Sergio: [I was convinced] {laughs}
Jordi: ya everyone was convinced that I was xxx
Sergio: I was like where is this guy from cos he's not quite British but:::
Jordi: {laughs}I know cos I [have]
Carly: [he sounds] British he sounds British

Jordi recalls that upon starting university, people he met often thought he was a foreigner, which prompts me to admit that I also thought he was from the UK at first, echoed by Sergio in humorous tones. While there is a fair amount of laughter accompanying this generally light-hearted banter about Jordi's alleged smartness (and he shares this experience in humorous tones), what is worthy of more sober consideration is how being noticed is here made possible by having English proficiency and a certain accent. The fact of the matter is that in this EMI context, students with native or native-like accents in English often did stand out in a group of mostly local non-native speaking students with varying levels of competence in English[72]. This means that by default, those who do not develop such accents can be akin to the foil against which these people can shine when competing in the jobs market. The last student to speak in the group discussion spoke of the determining power of having 'a good accent or not':

Extract 8.16

Student: well there's a point that sometimes whether you have a good accent or not it can affect on your relationship with other people or whether if

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you're ahm looking for a job they can judge you
if you have a bad accent or a good accent
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In other words, on the flip side of standing out for having the right accent is not being able to stand out, or being negatively evaluated based on one´s accent as a non-native speaker.

8.5 Final reflections

This chapter has examined, through the lens of PT, the dimensions of social class invoked in the talk of a group of private university students in Barcelona, their attitudes to individual responsibility for learning English, and the role of English, as they see it, in their lives and in the world they inhabit. In terms of the role of English, the discussion speaks volumes to present-day ‘global enthusiasm for learning English’ (McGroarty, 2017, p.231). It reconfirms the ubiquity of ideas about English as a ‘vehicle for social and economic mobility’ (Ricento, 2018, p.221). The students vocalized much expectation of the benefits that pursuing their degrees in English would afford them. The necessity to learn English was presented as obvious, attesting to the fact that these ideas are widely shared, and that the spread of English for most observers is indeed ‘natural, neutral, and beneficial’ (Pennycook, 1994, p.7). In terms of the indexicality of English, a consensus was voiced on the associations of cosmopolitanism for locals who had acquired high proficiency in English, paralleling what Park (2013a) has written about the South Korean context.

In this case - where participants can be broadly categorized as privileged in view of the educational setting - having high proficiency in English is integral to being able to tap into certain kinds of international social capital. Again, it is not English proficiency per se that affords advantages in this kind of context (or other contexts like the jobs market), but English proficiency coupled with other factors, such as possessing self-confidence, being accustomed to having one’s voice heard, being extroverted and/or a high achiever. More importantly, the English competence of these students (and what they will be able to do with it) maps on to their demographic profiles as white European, middle-class males.

In relation to various dimensions of social class, the students invoke common markers of middle-class belongingness such as private education, parental support, and travel, among other things. In terms of individual responsibility and privilege, Jordi and Miguel in particular, insist on the idea that where a person goes to school has little effect on academic progress – for them, success clearly depends more on individual characteristics. Furthermore, parents were largely cast a subordinate role where influence over learning was concerned. On the other hand, many students articulated quite a good understanding of the benefits of private education, and some spoke with knowledge as to specifically how advantages can come about - although it should be noted that they were not speaking about themselves. In speaking of the public school he had attended and the successful language learning methods they employed, Miguel was explaining how it works at a state school in an affluent area. This serves as a reminder that generalizations or simple distinctions about public versus private school are best avoided. Public schools in less advantaged areas, of Barcelona or elsewhere, can be very different in terms of the challenges they encounter, the socio-economic backgrounds and resources of students enrolled.

Noteworthy findings arise from examination of the various positionings salient among the group. The three students who most dominated the discussion (who contributed most and spoke in longer turns) positioned themselves throughout as accomplished speakers of English, while other students positioned themselves more frequently as learners of English. I have argued here that English proficiency and having a native-like accent, most likely helped the three most loquacious students to feel more at ease speaking up on this occasion. For Jordi, a native-like accent meant he had experienced being noticed in different contexts. Jordi's talk about being seen as smart because of his native-like accent in English, his assessment of Miguel's 'sound command' of English, and undeniably, my comment about Jordi sounding 'British', illustrate how the positions we take up are always co-produced in relation to our interlocutors. The development of any storyline and recurrent self-positioning such as that of self as an accomplished L2 user, as shown here, requires some collaboration or acceptance on the part of interlocutors present. Perceived context formality and power relations connected to role may also have been an influential factor in who took on the 'duty' to contribute and availed of their 'right' to be heard (e.g. Harré, 2012). This of course has unique manifestations in interactions like the present focus group, where L2 users have disparate levels of English.

The data also provides ample evidence of the discourse of neoliberal subjectivities having been assimilated by these participants, 'colonising to a greater or lesser extent their speech' (Yeung and Gray, 2022). Jordi for example objects frequently to the idea of private school attendance constituting a head start in education, insisting that it 'depends on the person' while Miguel downplays the importance of parental input, favouring the idea that you have to 'really want to [learn a language]'. I consider these speech acts, among others, clear examples of the reproduction of the neoliberal subjectivity ideals discussed in Chapter 4. Again, this is not to criticize the students; it is rather to provide further evidence as to the fact that such ideas are omnipresent. In the Bakhtinian sense, it shows how our speech is filled with the ideas and words of others, or, 'historically configured symbolic power features' (Blommaert, 2015, p.8). These ideas are part of a discourse which is by now prevalent in most societies around the world, a discourse that permeates our thinking, influencing how we think about and judge ourselves and others. Not only has this neoliberal rationality come to be common sense for language learning, but English has become a terrain on which learners can display self-management, perseverance and drive – the markers of neoliberal personhood. Indeed, as observed earlier, acquired English proficiency is by now itself a marker of neoliberal personhood (e.g. Piller and Cho, 2013, Park, 2013a).

One final observation is befitting, bearing in mind the study's epistemological moorings, discussed in Chapter 5. In Bhaskar's writings on critical realism, 'ontological monovalence' is deemed problematic. That is, the tendency (in philosophy) to avoid addressing absence, or what is not (see Bhaskar, 1993). Considered from this perspective, the students' talk is clearly marked by an absence of commentary on those who lack privilege, or the 'have nots' – to say nothing of race and privileged masculinities. Notwithstanding that this may in part be a corollary of the specific questions put to participants, this point is important to the study of social class in education and attitudes to self-responsibility and privilege. Absence is telling in terms of what may or may not be to the fore of our consciousness. This is significant given Bourdieu's well-known argument that less privileged groups 'serve as a negative 'foil' for the other classes' (1993a, p.4) - those like the participants featuring in this chapter. Having come to the end of the data chapters, I turn now in the last chapter to what has been learned overall about social class and English learning in Barcelona, as well as to a number of other final insights.

Chapter 9: Discussion and conclusions

9.1 Introduction

The purpose of the present research was to explore participants' views and life experiences in relation to English language learning and different aspects of social class in the geographical context of Barcelona. Chapter 1 set out an introduction to key topics and discussed their particular significance in the research context of Barcelona. This was followed by three literature review chapters, where I took an approach that started with a historical look at social class literature right back to Karl Marx, continuing on to briefly survey the work of prominent authors, Weber, Durkheim, and importantly Bourdieu. The second literature chapter turned to social class in education, followed by a chapter focusing specifically on inequality and English language learning, including in the context of Barcelona. Chapters 5 to 8 entailed the data analysis chapters, two based on life story (one-on-one) interviews with participants, and the last with a group of first year business students at a private university in Barcelona. In the present and final chapter I now revisit findings from these data chapters in light of the literature outlined in chapters 1-4, discussing what is significant in the work overall, and what has been learned in light of the research questions.

The first section below synthesizes insights and findings from the study based primarily on the research questions. Subsequently, problems arising during the research are discussed, following which research limitations are acknowledged. I then engage in some reflections on the methodological approach and share some personal reflections on the overall research process. That done, implications of the research findings are considered, as well as recommendations for future research in the area(s) of English language learning and class inequalities. The final section concludes the thesis. The research questions at the heart of the study, once again, were as follows:

How do participants make sense of their experiences, and position themselves and others in terms of:

1) Various dimensions of social class and privilege?
2) The role of English in their lives and the world around them?
3) The influence of social class dimensions, and self-responsibility in English learning?

In 9.2 below, I return to these research questions to recapitulate on overall findings.

9.2 Revisiting the research questions

9.2.1 RQ1: Various dimensions of social class and privilege.

Most of the participants in the study were from broadly middle-class backgrounds, apart from two symbols analysts, Hugo and Marta, who both now live middle class lives. Hugo and Marta were also notably the only participants in the study who explicitly spoke of their class background, apart from Juan, who without overtly mentioning his class grouping, constructed his family background as respectable and relatively wealthy compared to others who grew up around him in Peru. Following Pichler (2009, p.345) I do not interpret this overall absence of class talk about the self as 'an indication of the irrelevance of social class to the identity performances' in these interviews, since class status is most often tacitly displayed and understood as opposed to stated overtly. When class was mentioned by participants, it was most often in reference to a wealthy elite other, which might indicate that they seek 'a mid-position on the social scale' (Savage, 2015, p.245).

The absence of class talk about oneself may also point to how it is taboo to talk about one's own class status. It constitutes further evidence of the how most people prefer to define themselves as ´neither terribly affluent nor enormously deprived´ (ibid, p.39) and perhaps even that middle classness is rarely celebrated (see Friedman et al., 2021). The data in this respect suggests that coming from a working-class background is – as argued in Chapter 1 - akin to a badge of honour, but one that can only be invoked by those who Reay (2017) refers to as the 'successful working class'. In other words, being from a working-class background is not something to boast about for those who have little worldly (middle-class) achievement to show. Participants who might illustrate this point are notably absent from the present study (but see for example Sennett and Cobb, 1972; Menna, 2016; Skeggs and Loveday, 2012; Skeggs, 1997; Garrido and Codó, 2017).

In terms of cultural capital, symbols analysts overall position themselves as possessing high cultural capital, in comparison to the in-person servers. However it should be noted (and see research limitations section 9.3 below) that many of the latter group were younger people passing through the hospitality industry on their early career paths. All six symbols analysts were educated to university level (three to MA level), while many in-person servers were in the process of pursuing degrees – apart from Giuseppe who had exited the education system upon completing his *bachillerato*, and Catalina who had dropped out of a degree in Colombia.

Economic capital was invoked most often by in-person servers and younger symbols analysts, who spoke a good deal about the cost of living, the expense of education, and to a lesser extent, travel. Here considered a marker of economic and cultural capital, travel emerged as a key difference between the in-person servers group and the other two groups - symbols analysts and private university students. Symbols analysts Marta, Pascual, Maria, and Carmen had done a good deal of international travel, while many of the private university students also spoke of how important travel had been in improving their English. On the other hand, for some in-person servers (Paula, Giuseppe, and Catalina) the topic of travel arose only in terms of it being unaffordable.

Spanish born participants, as to be expected, invoked social capital more frequently than those who were migrants to Spain. Jordi, in Chapter 8, spoke of keeping up his English with a friend in the US (international social capital). Carmen mentioned that she had, years before, been referred by a friend to the bank where she worked, as did Paula, who had been referred to her part time job by a friend of her mother's. This is important, since as Codó (2015) notes, job-seeking processes in Spain often tend to be unstructured, with many jobs filled and found by means of networking through parental and other acquaintances. The influential role of parents in education, and indeed overall, is most often denied by participants in this study. Private university students Miguel and Jordi in Chapter 8, despite giving clues as to the parental support available to them, vehemently argued that it 'really depends on the person'. Similarly, Paula in Chapter 6 pointed to significant parental investment in her education, yet also presented herself as an independent learner, unwilling to receive help. Giuseppe, whose father had invested financially in his first business venture, said his parents did not influence him - but that they helped him have an open mind. On the contrary, Ibrahim, the only exception to this tendency, speaks in glowing terms of his parents' guidance and support.

9.2.2 RQ2: The role of English in participants' lives and the world around them.

As to be expected, there was much consensus overall on 'the mobility endowing potential' of English (Blommaert, 2010, p.97), its role as global lingua franca, as well as the language of business and academia (Ricento, 2018). Almost all participants repeated the 'common-sense discourse, which circulates in European and national policies and recommendations, in schools and in society, that learning…English, is useful for future employment and international exchanges' (Moore, 2021, p.13). Many participants invoked oft-heard metaphors like that

English ‘opens doors’ to global opportunities, reminiscent of what much literature has already found – English is seen as the language of hope for the future (e.g. Bae, 2013; Piller and Cho, 2013; Pennycook, 1994). Similar to what was found in some of the aforementioned studies, exaggerated faith in English is discernible in some participant talk here, for example in how English competence is thought to lead directly to ‘phenomenal’ jobs with elevated pay, also thought by one participant (Catalina) to be more important than Catalan in Barcelona’s job’s market.

Unsurprisingly, English was seen by virtually all informants as important to their futures (symbols analysts aged over fifty spoke of the importance of English to their present or more immediate future). Most of the in-person servers working in restaurants deemed it less important in their daily lives, aside from the basic, repetitive language needed to attend to customers. This tallies with research by Corona et al. (2021) whereby the young people in their study saw English as important to their imagined future, but the language was hardly present in their daily lives. It is noteworthy that while the private university students shared the same views on English as other participants, it had a distinct importance for them, not least given that it was the main language of their business degree. These students vocalized expectation that the EMI degree would be useful to them in building international social capital and knew it would prove advantageous later in seeking employment. English is viewed by these students as a ‘base’, and indeed for those who had already acquired an advanced level upon entry to their degree, it is a base they can take for granted. This contrasts sharply with other participants for whom pressure to improve English constitutes – to varying degrees - a source of anxiety. For participants like Pati, Marta and Ibrahim, the need to improve English is akin to a burden, while for some of the private university students it appears to represent personal achievement and is associated with having ‘more fun’ (Jordi). The keen awareness of the private university students as regards the importance of English to their futures notably contrasts with participants like Juan and Pablo – both mature students in their late twenties working full time in hospitality – who articulated comparably vague notions about the importance of English in their respective, seemingly more distant futures.

Other significant findings emerged in terms of the role of English particular to the Spanish context. Both Pablo and Carmen point to the social indexing associations with English, Pablo in reference to celebrity TV, and Carmen in reference to the schooling choices of wealthy families. Ibrahim also refers to it as the ‘most privileged language’. This commentary implies that English learning is perceived as a dividing line between different class profiles, not least in terms of tangible aspects like educational achievement. Such talk forges a link between English competence and elitism - denoting that English proficiency is understood as a marker of elitism. In addition, the private university students unanimously agreed that Barcelona locals who learn English to a proficient level were seen as more cultured and cosmopolitan, lending further support to the idea that English signifies cultural or symbolic capital, following the ideas of Bourdieu (1991). None of this is of course new. As McElhinny well notes ‘it is often the use of, or access to, certain languages that differentiates the speech of men and women, or more elite and less elite men and women’ (2016, p.293).

More striking still is what emerged regarding those at the other end of the spectrum – people with a lesser command of English. Pablo’s example of celebrity TV centres around one celebrity making fun of another’s English, an example which speaks volumes about attitudes towards people with low competence in English. Participants from outside Spain engaged in put downs of Spanish citizens linked to their allegedly inadequate English competence, describing the general population as either unable or reluctant to speak English. Those born in Spain equally did so, as neatly encapsulated by comments like ‘we are useless’ (Maria). Households low in cultural capital - as indexed by not reading the newspaper - were thought (also by Maria) to probably be ignorant as regards English. This kind of critique extends into to comparisons of Spain overall with northern European countries like Germany and Denmark (can be found in the transcript - space did not allow for these excerpts). Seen from this vantage point, the role of English is to shame the self and/or other about not living up to the real or imaginary English standards set by other Europeans, and by Spanish and Catalan elite. English competence - or lack of - thus emerges as a source of collective shame. That said, judgement of and responses to ‘imperfect’ English depend on the roles of those involved and the positionings they take up, accept or reject, as well illustrated by Pati and Marta’s experiences of being positioned as inferior as regards English competence.

Given the state of affairs described above, it is easy to see how a person who has grown up in Spain who acquires proficient English, receives praise for it and likely feels a sense of achievement. This, all the more when the person has a native-like accent, which is seen as something unusual or remarkable, as we saw with Jordi in Chapter 8, who had experienced standing out from the crowd and being perceived as smart on account of his native-like accent in English. For Jordi, Miguel and Sergio especially, proficiency in English emerges, I believe, as a contributing factor in feeling at ease and speaking up during the group interview. For those who do possess the much sought-after, ‘right command of’ English (Block, 2012a, p.278), the role of English is thus to bolster self-confidence and a sense of personal achievement, which brings us to the question of self-responsibility and English learning, discussed in research question three below.

9.2.3 RQ3: The influence of social class dimensions, and self-responsibility in English learning

Some participants like Carmen, Marta and Pablo view the matter of English and inequality in what I call sociologist-like terms, pointing out that in Spain, those with more resources often have a head start in English and a better chance of acquiring an advanced level early on. At the other end of scale, Maria was convinced that the English taught in schools is basically enough if students want to learn. Between these two extremes, many more participants display an understanding of inequality in education, remarking on how possessing economic capital can greatly facilitate English learning. However at the same time (and sometimes in the same turn) they articulate commonplace individualist ideals such as ‘if a person really wants to’ and ‘it really depends on the person’ suggesting the capacity of motivation and drive to trump lack of resources. This, I would argue, serves to mitigate any true understanding of inequality in education, since part of the issue is that motivation levels and disposition towards learning in education are affected by being disadvantaged in the first place (e.g. Sears et al., 1957; Willis, 1977; Reay, 2005, 2006; Crozier and Reay, 2011; etc.). In the context of Madrid, Shephard and Ainsworth (2017) find this to be the case specifically with English learning.

The topic of inequality in English language education sparked debate among the private university students, some of whom were clearly cognizant of the advantages afforded by attending private educational institutes. Juan, in Chapter 6, suggested that private schools ‘have better teaching staff’. Paula, who had been educated privately, partly attributed her success in English to good teachers and their ability to motivate students while Marta, who attended a ‘one of the top schools in Barcelona’, in fact lamented the poor teaching of English she felt she had experienced. On the other hand, discussions about state schools raised issues like poorer teaching, slower learning, and bigger classes, less tools, and a tendency for them to be ‘less personal’. One participant supposed that private schools probably do classes through English, while public schools just do English as a subject. As highlighted earlier, recent data indicates that English as a foreign language is the school subject that is most telling of educational inequalities in Catalonia’s education system (Consell Superior d’Avaluació del Sistema Educatiu, 2019). While we cannot rule out the possibility that private schools may well be better equipped to hire more experienced and qualified teachers, the matter of why such disparity exists is complex and multifaceted, and cannot be explained by reference solely to teachers, teaching methods and schools in themselves. The preceding claims as regards the differences between public and private schools do however point to popular layman explanations about why inequality in English learning exists and suggest that people attribute causes primarily to schools rather than a complex array of entangled factors relating to families, neighbourhoods, schools and much more. Noteworthy too is the overgeneralization regarding public versus private schools. As illustrated by Miguel’s example of a state school with high SATs (Chapter 8), a public school in an upscale community can be vastly different to public schools in disadvantaged areas, such as those aptly labelled ‘high complexity’ by Catalonia’s Consell Superior d’Avaluació del Sistema Educatiu (2019).

In terms of self-responsibility for learning, Ibrahim stands out as being full of positivity and enthusiasm about reaching a future improved level of English, despite considerable setbacks and being a late starter (all of which he takes total responsibility for). Certainly, to complain about how he was treated by an employer acting illegally, or about anything else beyond his full control would be at odds with the kind of emotional pedagogies circulating in today’s neoliberally governed societies (McElhinny, 2016). On the contrary, he very much lives up to the standards dictated by neoliberal personhood, making the self ‘flexible and investing in dominant language lingua franca models’ (Moyer, 2018, p.359), like French, Spanish, and especially English.

It is also significant that the most successful and accomplished speakers of English in this study mostly positioned themselves as self-motivated, responsible learners through talk of ‘self-cultivated’ English, ‘eagerness to study’, and not needing support. Paula sought to distance herself from classmates with learning struggles like Asperger’s, voicing little sympathy for their difficulties, while among the private university group there was much talk of how it ‘really depends on the person’, one must ‘fight to find tools’, ‘unless you really want that’ and suchlike. In these instances we find clear expression of alignment with neoliberal subjectivities specific to language learning, whereby ´the speaker’s competence in English is something he or she earned through relentless self-management´ (Park, 2013a, p.298) and the speaker’s privilege is thereby erased. Once again, this is never to suggest that the students in question did not also work hard, rather to highlight how the concomitant support they had – even just having the right conditions to work hard – is very often downplayed or outright denied.

Miguel, Sergio and Jordi presented themselves as accomplished English speakers, speaking of their efforts to get there using wording like 'self-cultivated' and 'eagerness' to construct English competence almost as a kind of trophy to be won. Their self-positioning as accomplished speakers of English throughout the discussion may suggest feelings of superiority in relation to English competence (or we can at least deduce that they don't feel inferior in this regard). It is important to consider how other-positioning contributes to this sense of accomplishment in English. This is evident for example in comments about each other, like having 'a sound command of' English or sounding British, and the fact that I sided with this latter observation in the case of Jordi. To wit, how people think and feel about their command of a language is inextricably linked to how they are positioned by others, as Norton (1995) rightly argues. The present study highlights instances of informants experiencing praise or put downs on account of their linguistic competence, which serves to dispute the popular notion that we are ultimately who we think and decide ourselves to be. Since the commonplace tendency is to highlight 'variables that pertain to the individual rather than the social context' (Norton, 1995 p.10), documenting social influence – that of family, friends, peers, wider society, media – in students' learning trajectories and self-concept as a learner, helps counter this tendency.

9.2.4 Other findings – nationality, gender and age

Nationality and race

Any observations related to one's class location are best made bearing in mind intersectionality, since it is always a combination of class, gender, age, nationality, race, physical ability, among other identity inscriptions, that shape our trajectories and ultimately who we are. Chapter 6 was most telling in terms of how class intersects with nationality, in that the participants who had migrated from Morocco, Colombia and Peru had significantly different struggles to those born in Barcelona. Juan no longer positioned himself as part of the middle classes despite being from a financially comfortable family background in Peru, while Catalina, who had also had some relative privilege growing up in Colombia expressed frantic worry about her precarious work situation and the cost of living. In effect, Juan, Catalina and Ibrahim had all left behind middle class families and lifestyles upon moving to Spain where their previously accrued social, cultural, and probably also economic capital, was weakened. I have no doubt that race as well as nationality is important in their stories. However I did not bring this issue to the fore in interviews, nor did any of these participants explicitly invoke race or experiences with racism in Spain. That is not to say that I was not left pondering how race probably shaped the experiences they shared, for instance in Ibrahim's illegal work situation at the hotel - where to my mind he was treated badly, and certainly in Marx's terms exploited – or Juan's perception of a bus driver being rude to people in his neighbourhood but nice to people in Sarrià. Catalina's belief that her Catalan partner's mother didn't like her '*por ser Colombiana'* (transcript p.32) counts as a direct reference to racism, but Catalina attributed it to the woman's lack of formal education, and we did not much delve further into it.

In terms of English learning more specifically, nationality also proves important, since the issue of whether learning English is compulsory from a young age is obviously determined by national education curriculums. Nationality intersects with class in that possessing economic capital almost always facilitates choice in terms of schooling. Some privately schooled Catalan participants, Paula in Chapter 6, and private university students Miguel and Jordi, were well ahead of the curve where English was concerned, having already acquired an advanced level by the time they finished second level education. For Jordi, advanced English coupled with a native-like accent meant being imputed with smartness on occasion and standing out from the crowd. Such examples can be contrasted with the story of Joseph, Blommaert's (2010) participant (see Chapter 4), whose father had hoped that his son would do well and stand out by learning English. In exile from Rwanda, awaiting the decision of UK authorities, his command of native English did not serve to help Joseph, rather to raise questions around the plausibility of his story. Likewise, in the Chapter 4 we saw Garrido and Codó's (2017) participants who spoke English fluently but who did not experience standing out, instead struggling to find work in Barcelona. To repeat a point that has been made earlier, it is not English competence per se that affords advantages, rather English competence coupled with other demographic factors like nationality, race, age, gender and so forth. The participants with high English proficiency in this study are notably European, white, and middle-class. It is important to bear in mind that English proficiency maps onto these demographic profiles.

Gender

Since gender was not a factor in choosing participants, there was an unequal ratio of males to females in all groups (there were two males and four females in the symbols analysts group, and vice versa for in-person servers, while the private university students were all male). Gender is an interesting angle to consider in terms of English learning overall and – less easy to untangle - in terms of how gender intersects with class. The women in this study speak far more of their desire to improve English than the male participants. More importantly, anxiety about English competence is perceptible only among females, with the exception perhaps of Ibrahim - discussed below. This ranges from Catalina who is fully convinced that acquiring fluency in English would be a ticket out of her current precarious work situation, to Pati whose supposedly inadequate English was cited by her employer as the reason for ending her contract, and Paula who despite having a very advanced level of English feels she only knows 'the basics'. Maria, who is in her fifties, directly compares herself to her husband, who she says speaks without inhibition (see transcription p.156). Carmen is an exception to this trend, speaking of her ability to learn languages in quite positive terms, and carefree about the pressure to improve English for work (this I attribute rather to age, as discussed below).

Sergio, Miguel and Jordi in Chapter 8 position themselves as - and indeed are - accomplished speakers of English, while Hugo also spoke with solid self-confidence about his command of English and said he had never experienced put downs in that regard. Giuseppe, Juan, and Pablo also came across as very laid back about any pressure to learn English. Pablo spoke nonchalantly of always missing English classes at university and having to 'fake it' to appear fluent in English at work, while Juan mentioned the importance of English for his future but had no plans to study or learn it at that time. Finally, Giuseppe harboured some regrets about not having studied more but was content that he knew enough to get by at work. Ibrahim, who felt that choosing Spanish over English was 'the biggest mistake of [his] life', was the only exception to this trend. Having started at a late age, he had dedicated great effort to catching up. Ibrahim had been actively learning English through self-study, group classes, attending language meetups and watching series. Space does not allow for further elaboration on these matters in light of existing research on gender and language learning, but issues raised here provide interesting points of departure for future research.

Age

As discussed in the preceding pages, English represents something of a burden for many participants here in their twenties and thirties. A sense of urgency in this regard is especially palpable among those in more precarious work situations. On the other hand, there are only three participants aged over fifty in the present study. Although they were all late starters with

English learning, they approach the matter with a more relaxed, carefree attitude than many younger participants. This is to be expected, given that all three are in stable work situations, nearing the end of apparently successful careers. As can be seen in the transcripts, those over fifty spoke a good deal about the impact of age on their English learning English. Far more could be said about intersectional matters of nationality, race, gender, age and so forth, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis. This being a study primarily concerned with social class, other identity inscriptions have been necessarily backgrounded in order to focus on class. However this is never to suggest that race, nationality, age, gender, sexuality, etc. are not equally important, or perhaps in some cases or at certain points in time, more important than social class.

9.3 Research limitations

The present study, like all research, has various limitations. To begin with, use of Robert Reich's in-person server and symbols analyst categories appeared an apt and different angle from which to approach class, given that Reich convincingly argued that clear lines could be drawn among these groups in terms of which work categories reflect 'real competitive positions in the global economy' (1992, p.173). For Reich, these categories were primarily a way 'to understand why the economic fates of Americans are beginning to diverge' (ibid). While as a broad orientation to pinpoint work trends among the population the categories of in-person server, symbols analyst and routine production server (not used here) are useful, but they may it seems, lack the specificity required for a detailed exploration of English learning and social class. We saw for example how the only in-person server who worked in a hotel reception (Ibrahim), had far more need to improve English for career purposes than the in-person servers who worked in restaurants. Less difference emerged among the symbols analysts in terms of occupation and the necessity for high competence in English. Carmen, who worked in investment banking and Hugo, a technical engineer had as much need to improve English for work as those who were lawyers. Nonetheless, focusing instead on occupations might have been more beneficial in yielding specific insights about matters related to English learning.

It should also be noted that in the present study, four of the six in-person servers were passing through hospitality work while pursuing higher education (including Catalina, who had enrolled in an online course in legal administration). These participants will likely classify as symbols analysts later in life so do not fit the exact in-person profile Reich had in mind - that of someone who ‘need not have acquired much education’, whose pay is ‘just slightly above the minimum wage’ and will ‘remain relatively low’ (1992, p.176-217). Partly as a corollary of this criteria for participant selection, and despite highlighting certain aspects of inequality in education, this study does not go far enough in unpacking specifically how language learners from disadvantaged backgrounds often have a steeper hill to climb in the stakes of English language learning.

On another note, some readers might also find my approach to middle class categorization of Chapter 8’s focus group as problematic, since in truth I don’t know a lot about the backgrounds of the private university students. Some of them could well have had similar family backgrounds to some in-person servers (like Paula, who was studying at a public university but had attended an elite private school for primary and secondary). In this sense I have followed in the footsteps of academics like Khan and Jerolmack (2013), Vandrick (2011), and Crozier and Reay (2011), who assume the privileged class status of universities students they discuss, given the expensive fees charged by and the elitist nature of the institutes in question. That does not rule out the fact that there is probably substantial variation within this group, including those with parents who have sacrificed a lot to pay for this kind of elite education.

While this study has documented a few cases of high proficiency in English - mostly among privately educated individuals - no major patterns are discernible in terms of class background and success with English learning (nor was that an objective of the study). This is of course because it is a qualitative, small-scale study with some participants born abroad in countries with different educational curricula to that of Spain. More importantly, there are only two participants from working-class family backgrounds (who now live middle class lives). Marta, as can be seen in the excerpts, had a good level of English competence. She spoke of her working-class background but also had attended a costly fee-paying school which suggests high parental investment and upward mobility. Hugo, also from a working-class background, had attained an advanced English level, having passed the Cambridge Advanced with a high grade and was planning to sit the Cambridge Proficiency exam[73]. For Hugo, parental support was largely absent growing up, but his grandparents had stepped into that role. As a child he had also attended extracurricular English lessons run by Opus Dei. These examples serve as reminders that while quantitative class indicators are useful, class location is complex to assess and perhaps best understood on a case-by-case basis with as much information as possible about one’s life trajectory and family background. Put differently, these cases attest to the need for ‘understanding class *historically’* (Savage, 2015, p.48 italics in the original). Still, it would have been helpful to have had individuals who would qualify as working class or so-called underclass, to document their attitudes and lived experiences in relation to the topics at hand.

The present analysis has explored various facets of social class and English learning essentially through interviews. Like any research of this nature, the stories told by participants here are co-constructions, jointly and interactionally produced (Roberts, 2013; Mishler, 1986; Codó, 2008, etc.) with the researcher ever present as the other interlocutor. This means that the stories participants told me were certain to have been at least slightly different to what they would have told another person (Andrew, 2010), and that they spoke more of certain aspects and events in their lives and glossed over or omitted others, depending on how the conversation unfolded. Equally, I have picked out only the data I judged pertinent and interesting to the research questions. While I have endeavoured to be balanced and truthful in reflecting what was said accurately, what I have selected is still but a mere glimpse of the entire interview transcripts, and obviously an even lesser glimpse of participants’ overall life stories. Important to recognize too, is that while everything written about participants in the data chapters is based strictly on what they said during the recorded discussions, much of what is written is still just one possible interpretation of their utterances through the lens of an author immersed in (mostly anglophone) literature on class and sociolinguistics.

To return to an issue raised above, it is difficult to untangle the ways in which demographic factors besides social class, like age, gender, race and nationality play a role in shaping participants’ respective class locations, views, and experiences. It strikes me in writing the final pages of this thesis that race in particular could have been considered and discussed to a greater extent while maintaining the primary focus on class. This no doubt leaves the work fair game for critique on the point that race is fundamentally inseparable from class. While I have focused in this study almost single-mindedly on social class, I am keenly aware that it is tightly bound to race, and that it is one aspect of many that shape a person’s life trajectory, life chances, and ultimately who they are.

Finally, readers who refer to the transcriptions (at the link provided in the appendices) may note that while this is fundamentally a thesis about social class, I did sometimes use the term ‘socioeconomic’ as opposed to ‘social class’ in the questions put to participants. This was given the term’s frequent usage in the media, political discussion and in common parlance, and its resulting capacity to be easily understood. As one reader has rightly pointed out, the word 'socioeconomic' is often employed as a euphemism for social class. In hindsight it may be true that, guilty as charged, I opted for this term early on in the data collection phase given my unexplored sense at the time that 'social class' might have heavier connotations and was a term that flows less easily in everyday conversation, perhaps even slightly taboo. In future research I would be unashamedly deliberate in using the term social class, now that I am a little better read, and far more aware of why it can feel slightly uncomfortable to use this term in some contexts.

9.4 Methodological reflections and data collection problems

Some problems were inevitably encountered in the data gathering phase, especially with recruiting participants for the in-person server group. Simply asking random people at work to participate in the study proved a near impossible means of recruitment. Some were invited to partake after they knew me to see as a customer or after friendly conversation had come about by chance, and Catalina was recruited through a Facebook page for English learning in Barcelona. Two participants' data also went unused. One was a waitress originally from China who worked in her family's restaurant. Unfortunately we had considerable trouble understanding each other due to language barriers (in Spanish), rendering the data of little use. Another male participant – a former student (i.e. English learner) who worked in logistics ended up not fitting the profile of in-person server, which was decided on definitively a short time after his interview had taken place. In this sense it served as an unintended pilot study, but certainly both interviews constituted time that could have been used more productively.

The process of gathering data with the university students in a focus group also proved tricky. As described in the methods chapter, students were offered an extension on a deadline for an upcoming assignment in exchange for participation. Eight signed up, but three more students showed up on the day. In hindsight it was probably a poor decision to allow the last-minute arrivals to stay, as having a large group of eleven participants likely discouraged some from speaking, as discussed in Chapter 8. I did my best as group moderator to invite everyone to speak where possible, but still a few participants remained largely silent. It also meant that some students were not easily identifiable when I later transcribed the audio file, hence some speakers appear as 'student' in the transcript, when it was unclear whose voice it was. These issues no doubt could have been pre-empted, and serve as good learning for future research.

As acknowledged already, the fact that many participants (the symbols analysts and private university students) were known to me before partaking in the study no doubt influenced the data in various ways. I had taught all those whom I call symbols analysts for varying lengths of time from a few months to a few years and had been teaching the private university students for four months before the focus group took place. The university students were certainly aware of my interest in class inequalities, as we had spent two HR classes on the topic (students in these classes frequently disagreed with sociological arguments and statistics presented). This could well have influenced the opinions they voiced. As for the symbols analysts, the fact that I was, or had been, their English teacher almost certainly influenced what they shared with me. Following Andrew (2010) I do not however view my familiarity with these participants as problematic in terms of validity or reliability, rather I see it as something to be openly acknowledged, and its possible influence considered.

The choice of PT as a method of enquiry was fitting for the purposes of exploring participants' experiences and views in relation to English language learning, and different aspects of class and inequality. It facilitated a 'read between the lines' approach to participant talk, looking at their positioning in relation to these topics permitted interpretations about their relationship with class (dimensions) and privilege – phenomena which people tend not to speak about overtly. Using PT yielded insights into how speakers not only positioned themselves, but were also positioned by others within the structures of the world they live in, where roles, especially within institutions and workplaces, can facilitate or constrain the negotiation of positioning. In other words, PT proved suitable for empirical work with critical realist underpinnings, where the researcher seeks to highlight the importance of both individual agency and structures that go beyond the individual and their moment-to-moment speech acts.

All of the above said, it is apparent as I near the end of the thesis that Block's (2022) expanded model of PT might have complemented the study design and some arguments made here. The expanded PT model incorporates eight structuring spheres to the original PT triangle (discussed in section 5.6.2), demonstrating how there is 'movement back and forth between a focus on the minutiae of the unfolding conversation, turn by turn, to a concern with a wide range of sociocultural, institutional and deep-level political, economic, social, cultural and geographical phenomena and events' (2022, p.97). Articulation of institutional positioning in more theoretical terms - namely that of Foucault's gaze - would have been an especially insightful addition since there are a number of instances of institutional gaze being invoked in the data. Carmen for instance mentions how it is 'seen well' to be learning English at her company, while Pati and Marta's reported episodes about inadequate English are also good examples of such. These, among other data excerpts, also count as instances of what Yeung and Gray (2022), using the expanded PT model, term the 'English language gaze'. Such Foucauldian-inspired analysis complements the original PT model, and as Yeung and Gray's work shows, can well capture the impact of this 'English language gaze' on a participant's sense of self.

Lastly, PT is a methodological approach which invites the researcher to reflect on his or her own positioning in terms of role and speech acts, together with those of the participants in co-creating the storyline. This means it is conducive to reflexivity, which Berger defines as '[the] process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome' (2015, p. 219). The impact of my own class background and stance on matters of inequality may also have influenced participants. Upon reflection, I did mention my own so called working-class background (see section 1.9) in some interviews where I felt comfortable to do so and where it was relevant to the conversation. With other participants however it was not relevant and felt inappropriate to mention. I see this as indicative of how class is still to varying degrees a taboo topic when speaking directly about ourselves and our interlocutors – as opposed to speaking about groups in society in more pragmatic fashion - as we do as researchers with a 'sociologist hat' on. In the next section, I continue this reflection on my own involvement as a researcher in this research process overall, not least as regards social class.

9.5 Autobiographical reflection

Having the opportunity to study social class has been a journey of prolonged, often poignant, inner reflection about my own meandering class trajectory and that of family members both living and departed - some of which was discussed in Chapter 1. Studying social class and inequality in education has also been insightful for my role as an English teacher today, although the fact remains that I have little contact with the so-called 'have nots' of Barcelona in the capacity of an English teacher working in the private sector. This reflection leads to the thorny issue of to what extent as researchers we might, even unwittingly, collude with the economic elites (Bourne, 2007). Not only as a teacher working in privileged circles like law firms, private banks and (to a lesser extent) business schools, but more importantly as a white Irish citizen, I am very aware of my relative privilege in many ways today. I have given much thought throughout the research process to the question of ‘what kind of knowledge will my ‘occidental’ eyes produce?’ (Pennycook, 1994, p.184). In highlighting here the pressure many informants are under to improve their English, I hope to have conveyed a sense of how unfair the current situation with English learning is for many, as opposed to the idea that people should learn the language I have – for better or worse - inherited as a native language.

Readers may note that the present work engages somewhat paradoxically in two separate conversations – that of the need to acknowledge and address inequality in English learning, and that of exaggerated faith in English, a conversation which ultimately relates to how global dominance of English is wrapped up in historical colonialism. The latter conversation also highlights how acquiring English competence benefits some more than others – depending on other factors like race, nationality, gender, and indeed various forms of capital a person has accumulated through family and otherwise. I sincerely hope that in advocating for equity in English learning, my voice has not sounded of Western imperialism. Let it be clear that I do not see English for all as a panacea to the problems of unequal access to – for instance - the jobs market since the value of English proficiency turns largely on its relatively short supply in the local market. Should the market become flooded with candidates proficient in English, gatekeepers would employ another filtering mechanism to seek out their preferred candidates. That being so, English will likely remain a key filtering mechanism in the local jobs market as long as the demand for proficient English speakers continues to exceed supply. This is seemingly good news for those of us working as English teachers, but we need to be cognizant of issues of inequality in local and global language learning contexts, and how they affect who, what, when and where we teach.

9.6 Implications of findings and what might be done

The present study contributes to existing sociolinguistics literature in the area of English learning inequalities by yielding new qualitative, critical realist research in the context of Barcelona, Spain. It has built on existing literature by exploring - for two participant groups – the views and experiences of those outside educational contexts, exploring instead the broad occupational groups of symbols analysts and in-person servers, as defined by Reich (1992). With the third participant group of students at an elite private university, the study provides further insight into English learning matters and social class, an area where research is still sparse in the Spanish context. In the present section I discuss the implications of research findings and make some tentative suggestions for what might be done to address emergent issues.

One of the significant findings of the study is that among these particular participants in the context of Barcelona, there is overall, considerable awareness about existing inequality as regards English attainment levels across schools and social groups, and awareness of the importance of economic capital to success in English learning. This differs to similar research in contexts like South Korea, where many researchers document lack of awareness among more privileged participants (e.g. Abelmann et al., 2009; Park, 2010; Park and Abelmann, 2004), but it is only part of the story. Here, a sort of paradox emerged whereby many participants recognized such inequalities, while at the same time subscribing to neoliberal personhood ideals that champion ambition, drive, and individual responsibility. In other words, the latter ideas still hold sway. I interpret this to mean that people tend to look to what is possible, less interested in what is statistically probable for people in discrete class groups. This also means ultimately limited understanding of the real consequences of having less resources. Increasing awareness and recognition of income-based inequality in the field of education is therefore as important as ever. One way to increase awareness would be to target teacher training programs, integrating substantially more content from the field of educational sociology. Since whatever understanding of inequality people do have is often accompanied by total faith in meritocracy whereby lack of educational success is attributed to individuals lacking ‘the right qualities rather than sufficient resources’ (Reay, 2017, p.172), such a move would help deepen understanding among educators of how inequalities really work.

Reay (2017) writes that the ‘primary engines of this pseudo meritocracy’ are elite universities, an argument which the present study’s findings do not contradict. It is plain to see how graduates from elite, privileged educational settings like the university described in Chapter 8, will be favoured in the jobs market. Their English competence and educational credentials (cultural capital) map precisely onto their ability to engage in the kind of ‘vivid personal narrative’ which aligns with recruiters’ expectations during interviews (Roberts, 2013, p.84). More importantly, as a good deal of research suggests (e.g. Abelmann et al., 2009; Friedman et al., 2021; Park, 2010) many are likely to deny their privilege and point exclusively to their individual characteristics and hard work in explaining successes they have had. The findings of the present study cement the importance of raising awareness, focusing first and foremost on recognition in Fraser's (1995) terms, since many of us are apparently unaware of the privileges we have had - privileges that are par for the course in most middle-class lives.

One significant step forward in this regard would be for business programs - like the one the students in Chapter 8 are enrolled in, and where so many individuals bound for entrepreneurship and leadership are being schooled - to incorporate proper sociology modules into their programs. Rather than teaching about inequality in passing as a 'tick the box' exercise in ethics and legal issues as part of subjects like human resources (as I had to do), business students could be taught more in-depth information about class inequalities specifically. (Many business courses already teach economics and would have a module on cross cultural communication or similar). Providing such teachings to those not typically drawn to social sciences – future entrepreneurs, business leaders, employers, and politicians – could be a fruitful means of deepening understanding of inequality and of how, as middle-class actors, we play a role in maintaining working-class and other underprivileged groups on the side lines. It would help to counter the sorting mechanisms in society which 'may have blinded the better-off to the conditions in which the less fortunate actually live, allowing the better off to pretend that almost everyone else is "like them"'(Reich, 2001, p.243).

The findings that emerged in relation to participants' perceptions about private versus public schools suggest that the Spanish context is similar to that of England where the private school system is the ideal: 'the paragon against which state education continues to be evaluated and measured' (Reay, 2017). Existing research indicates that out-of-school English learning is one factor contributing to unequal achievement in English between more and less affluent families (Moore et al., 2021). This points to the necessity for more government funding in the area of extracurricular English activities, particularly for schools categorized as 'high complexity'. This could include for example more educational funding being allocated to developing after school activities in English. It could also include more funding for young people to do stays abroad for the purposes of English learning, since stays abroad are viewed by many - whether rightly or wrongly - as a one size fits all panacea to the problem of 'inadequate' English. Another possible avenue could be to organize for local university students with certified advanced English levels to tutor in public schools in disadvantaged areas on a voluntary basis or in exchange for credits. Similarly, cross cultural tutoring programs that link local secondary schools with European universities could be organized so that degree students with native or proficient commands of English could tutor in schools in less advantaged areas of Barcelona.

In terms of the jobs market, findings here unsurprisingly show that in the context of Barcelona, English is a gatekeeping mechanism kept firmly in place by employers and recruitment agencies. The findings suggest that the level of linguistic competence required to get or to keep a job is sometimes incommensurate with requirements of the job itself (questions have also been raised about language assessment methods used when hiring). While this is not always fair, ubiquitous faith in the importance of English ensures considerable blindness in this regard, fuelling exaggerated belief in capacity for English competence to translate to material gain. Since academic work has low readership, the media would be well placed to expose the unrealistic nature of some English language requirements in the Spanish recruitment context, which in turn might encourage some recruiters to be more accurate and realistic about the actual level of English necessary for various positions and how linguistic competences are assessed.

A more promising approach might also be to develop more speaking based exams, inspired by Cummins’ (2000) well-known distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). This would allow for candidates with high spoken competence to acquire a certificate which would show their suitability for jobs where academically oriented written competence in English is not needed, such as in much of the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry could also be incentivized by means of subsidies to offer English classes to staff. While many companies in Barcelona already offer English classes to employees in office work, few such benefits are available to staff in the hospitality industry.

The suggestions offered here are mere points of departure in what might be done to tackle the issue of inequality in English language education in Barcelona. They would be helpful in raising awareness about these issues, as well improving levels of English overall and attempting to address disparate competence levels across different social groups. However, the best kind of strategies would need to target young learners during primary and secondary school years when learners generally have more available headspace and time (and many would argue, cognitive ability) for language learning. Policy makers in education and enterprise need to invest more resources in the field of English learning. Failure to engage with these issues mean that the chances of acquiring high proficiency in English remain strongly influenced by one´s family resources in the context of Barcelona.

9.7 Research recommendations

Working class backgrounds

Wagner (1996) rightly notes that limitation of scope to one setting obviously only allows us to make inferences about this context. All the findings discussed in this, and previous chapters could be helpfully expanded on by similar studies in other contexts to further our existing knowledge base on English learning and class inequalities in Barcelona, Spain, and beyond. The present research also sheds light on new, slightly different avenues for related future investigation. To begin with, this study features only two participants who self-identify as having working-class origins (and would be so categorized by sociological measurement). Future empirical research could seek adult participants from working-class backgrounds who, like these participants, have acquired high levels of competence in English. Such research could be more selective in terms of class dimensions, establishing participants´ class locations in sociological terms using quantitative methods, and subsequently inviting respondents who fit the sought-after criteria. Of interest would be the participants' English learning as adults, their earlier schooling experiences, as well as exploring the kinds of educational supports that were available to them growing up. An interesting aspect of data yielded by this study is the importance of support and care provided by grandparents, thus pointing to an aspect of family support that tends to get overlooked in research, and would be worth investigating in later work. Similarly, research could further explore all kinds of non-family support that contributes to successful education.

Public and private schools

The informants in the present study frequently refer to the differences between public and private education, the latter believed to be of a higher standard, to have better teaching methods, more tools, while others believe that public schools typically have larger classes, are less personal, have poorer teaching of English, etc. Building on the imperative to better understand not just perceptions, but actual common differences between public and private schools where English language learning is concerned, future qualitative research could firstly look at policies and practices in various public schools in different areas of Barcelona. For instance, it could carry out ethnographic research in classrooms and interview relevant actors like teachers, parents, and students about their views on and experiences with English learning. This would be of benefit since it is crucial to bear in mind that state schools can greatly differ, depending on various factors, not least the neighbourhood in which they are situated. Once again, selecting participants purposefully according to variables pertaining to family background (such as property ownership, parental occupation, and education level) and parental investment (e.g. extracurricular activities in English, parental involvement in learning) should facilitate exploration of the relationship between socioeconomic stratification and English learning in different neighbourhoods. That is, it would go beyond broad generalizations about public (versus private) schools.

Equally, case studies of private school students and classroom observations in private schools would prove beneficial in delving into the common notion that 'they just have better teaching staff'. As mentioned in Chapter 8, in my personal experience of teaching at private universities - run more like businesses with students as paying clients (Reay, 2017; Holborow, 2013) - forms of student support less typical of 'sink or swim' universities include parent-tutor meetings, compulsory class attendance and graded participation, frequent feedback, high levels of one-to-one academic support like tutorials, and flagging of floundering students. In this sense, interviewing private school teachers about support provided to students and carrying out ethnographic observations of classroom interactions would likely prove insightful. Potential research could directly compare and contrast findings in the contexts of private and public schools in a bid to further explore how economic capital facilitates English learning. Specific aspects of interest emerging from the data here would be exploring exactly what is meant by having the 'tools' necessary to become competent in English. In addition, it would be helpful to establish if there is any truth in the commonly held perception that private schools have better teaching staff - quantitative research could compare levels of experience and qualifications of teachers across public and private schools in the Catalan / Spanish context.

Longitudinal and extracurricular work

On a slightly different note, relating more broadly to extracurricular activity, in a recent Barcelona-based project, Moore and colleagues (2021) engaged socioeconomically disadvantaged youth with 'new, inclusive, nonformal English language educational initiatives', which included documenting students' out-of-school English use. Since the long-term probable benefits of involving students in extracurricular activities of a less formal nature remain to be seen, longitudinal studies evaluating such activities are needed. Future research projects could undertake similar out-of-school activities, updating and building on findings from the present study (many participants here emphasize the importance of extracurricular English language activities). In addition, virtually all participants in the present study are fully convinced of the importance of study abroad in acquiring English competence. It would thus be of interest to carry out more research exploring how local students of different class backgrounds experience and benefit from study abroad, along the lines of Kinginger's (2004) insightful study about Alice, a French learner from a disadvantaged class background in the United States.

Private after school classes

Another English learning context which is still under-researched in Barcelona/Spain and beyond, is that of extracurricular classes in students' homes. This is important since according to Carbonell (2016), there has been an increase in after school learning activities in Catalonia in recent times but equally, there has also been an increase in social inequalities. This means there is a lower uptake of after school learning activities, including English, among less well-resourced families. Furthermore, since as Spielberger and Halpern (2002) note, after school learning programs in general tend to have more modest adult agendas and subject children to less pressure, all of which can help foment interest and successful learning. Noteworthy too is that in Barcelona, many private after school classes are being done by native English teachers. Having contact with native speakers may be a way to stimulate interest in language learning, partly because such interactions are also likely to strengthen the 'role of English for communicative purpose' (Shephard and Ainsworth, 2017). Such interactions also constitute a way of connecting classroom content to students' real lives – which is important to successful learning (e.g. McInerney, 2013). This is a field of activity which deserves more attention in sociolinguistics research, in Barcelona and beyond. There are extensive possibilities for research into extracurricular English classes with a particular focus on social class.

English as a gatekeeper in other fields

Citing research on tourism, advertising, language teaching, translation, call centres and performance art, McElhinny notes that language plays 'a key role in a range of enterprises in which language may or may not be imagined as the primary work or commodity' (2016, p.290). It is clear from the present study that English plays a key role in the field of law where it is not only a gatekeeping mechanism in recruitment, but a necessary means of communicating internationally with clients and lawyers. The role that English plays in specific occupational fields in Barcelona, and beyond merits further attention. Such potential research might for example usefully compare the role of English for different actors within the hospitality industry, or within the field of law, to cite just two of many possibilities. There is significant work to do in documenting the current role of English as an all too convenient sorting mechanism in recruitment, a matter which has been only briefly addressed in this study.

Additionally, it is important to investigate the extent to which English is used as a gatekeeping device in different fields, scrutinizing the extent to which proficient English is actually required in these fields (as did Rubio Carbonero, 2016). Without further research into this matter it is difficult to explore ideology specifically relating to English competence and employment, pointed to by scholars like Ricento (2018), Pennycook (1994) and Blommaert (2010). McElhinny writes that what is required now is the investigation of:

> precisely the kinds of dilemmas, challenges and contradictions thrown up in different places and times by, variously, mercantile, industrial, monopoly and finance capitalism that shape, and are shaped by, ideologies and practices of language, with an eye to analyzing the inequities created or rationalized by such ideologies and practices (2016, p.281)

The present study, together with potential research avenues suggested above, it is hoped constitutes a step in that direction.

Finally, an investigation which would focus more on the interplay between class and nationality, and/or race, and/or gender, and/or age would be of great benefit, given that here I have focused almost exclusively on class, with a more cursory glance at nationality, age, and gender which are of importance to the study of English learning. As mentioned at various points in the thesis already, class is one important factor in English learning, but certainly not the only one. Future studies would do well to build on what has been learned here, adding the dimensions of nationality, race, age, gender and otherwise to enrich our understanding of how various demographics - not just individual variables - can play a role in English language learning.

9.8 Conclusion

> Frequently used indicators of social class, namely occupation and educational qualifications, tell only half of the story of class experiences in education. They are more completely understood in terms of confidence and entitlement in relation to education, the amount of knowledge and information about the school system that families have, the social networks that families have access to, wealth or the lack of it; but also whether you come to school with a family history of educational success and recognition, or with a sense that education is not something you and your family are good at (Reay, 2017, p.172)

The above quote from Diane Reay's book *Miseducation, inequality, and the working classes* encapsulates much of what this thesis has attempted to study in relation to English learning. Reay notes that researching middle class attitudes to the issue of inequality is important, since 'no class is an island' and the problems of educational inequality are problems of an entire society not just of one group - not least since inequality can breed discontent and anger over injustice (Reich, 2001). It often also engenders suffering, of the invisible psychological kind that Sennett and Cobb aptly evoke in their book title *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. However it is not just inequality itself that is cause for concern. More insidious perhaps, is how opportunity hoarding by the elite and middle classes masquerades as meritocracy, leaving those who started out from less advantaged positions to believe that they are failures, while those who are in advantaged positions frequently erase the structural privileges that have shaped their trajectories (Friedman et al., 2021).

Issues related to class inequalities in English learning are deeply rooted in broader issues of educational inequality, which are in turn rooted in even broader societal issues of class and other forms of inequality. To employ Reich's apt analogy, the arguments made here are part of a debate which 'surfaces only sporadically and partially like the tip of a giant floating iceberg into which all sorts of other, more particular, debates crash' (2001, p.235). The present thesis has only scratched the surface of the iceberg(s), but it is clear that ultimately redistribution is required to tackle such deeply entrenched problems. Authors like Reich (2001, 1992) Ruane (2019) and Reay (2017) - writing of the U.S., Irish, and UK context respectively - provide worthwhile suggestions at the level of government policy, which would be impactful in addressing income-based inequality in education and beyond. That said, recognition is not to be underestimated. Since it has the capacity to convince people of the importance of redistribution, it can function as a precursor to same. Hence, a good deal of the present work has been about recognition, since, as is often said, awareness is the first step toward change. The findings of this study suggest that people's awareness still falls short of true understanding of how inequality in education operates. Sadly, as Reay (2017) comments on matters in the UK, the current situation 'defies any formulaic approach. What is needed is a sea-change in hearts and minds, not just better policy in education' (p.185).

Many questions remain about how individuals from families with less resources can and do acquire high proficiency in English against all odds, representing the exception to statistical trends. Debates examining agency versus structure remind us that 'agency is always there, even if it may not always be immediately evident or effective in any perceivable way' (Block, 2022, p.65). Indeed, the arguments made in these pages are not intended as denial of the importance of individual agency and our ability as humans to direct our focus, ambition and do hard work. Rather, they are intended to present further evidence of the excessive focus on agency and self-responsibility nowadays, coupled with superficial understanding of the profound importance of family resources and knowhow. This is all the more important in (language) education, where getting a good start in childhood makes all the difference, not least because children clearly have less agency. The denial of privilege - even modest privilege as in most cases here - is important to see clearly. Not in a bid to demonize the privileged, or even those who outright deny their privilege, simply to point out that support and family resources are the norm, woven into the fabric of middle-class lives. Since they are not seen as remarkable, they are often backgrounded in our everyday narratives and self-constructions.

The present study contributes to our understanding of these processes specifically in relation to English learning. The fact that people see English competence solely as hard earned through individual work - without acknowledgement of educational supports that for some are absent - means it is part of how 'legitimation of inequity occurs' (McElhinny, 2016, p.280). Given the importance of English competence at present in employment markets, English is difficult to avoid for anyone wanting to participate in the world of global opportunity. Widespread enthusiasm for English learning (McGroarty, 2017), in the context of Barcelona and elsewhere is not only about personal choice since 'social choices frame personal choices' (Reich, 2001, p.228). It is ultimately tied up in the fact that 'language is central to how domination is achieved, and why subordinate groups accept the power of the dominant as legitimate' (McElhinny, 2016, p.280).

This domination is not just about the ruling classes and their access to English. It taps into Bourdieu's (1991) ideas on native speaker legitimacy whereby those in roles of relative power and native speakers get to decide who is a legitimate speaker and ultimately who deserves to be listened to. It also extends to broader global processes of linguistic imperialism, wrapped up in historical colonialism of the British empire. While from the ivory towers of academia we may adopt a critical stance towards these processes, for people everywhere – in Barcelona and beyond - the constant burden of English learning has real consequences. As academics we have a duty to recognize and call out the pernicious processes that leave people with little choice but to invest in English. But still it seems that the best way forward for now is to work towards the goal of equity in English learning. If widely cited authors like Graddol (1997) and Crystal (2012) are to be believed, the dominance and ubiquity of English is not set to change any time soon. Graddol (1997) for instance predicts that English will occupy an increasingly important role in the coming decades as more countries are influenced by globalization and economic development. This in effect means that access to local and global job opportunities will continue to be strongly determined by candidates' English skills, which in turn means that demand for more-better-best where English competence is concerned is unlikely to change in the near future.

The present thesis has illuminated to some degree how those in less privileged positions with less educational knowhow, often have a steeper hill to climb as regards English learning. As with all research, explanations of reality forthcoming in these pages are understood to be fallible, viewed as contributions to theory and social science knowledge as opposed to ultimate truths or complete answers (Bhaskar, 2014). However, as Reich argues, 'to view what is happening to us and what we can do about it as private matters divorced from the larger trends in our economy and society is to miss much of the truth, and to limit our range of options unnecessarily' (2001, p.220). It is hoped that this work has served as a reminder of how disparity in English language competence is a societal, as well as individual matter, and hopefully also provoked some thought about what might be done to address it.

Endnotes

Chapter 1

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[1] One exception to the trend I am pointing to here was when senator Lynn Ruane, in a political capacity, discussed growing up in Tallaght, Dublin (a large neighbourhood with one of the highest levels of drug related crime in Ireland) as part of her socialist campaign. As Ruane discusses in her memoir *People Like Me*, she struggled with addiction issues in her youth, became a mother at fifteen and left school. She went on to later complete her school education and attend the prestigious Trinity College where she became president of the students' union and got involved in work with local resource centres for drug users. Lynn Ruane's voice as someone who calls attention to class inequalities and intergenerational disadvantage is loud and clear in Irish politics (see Freyne, 2018) although her ideas receive substantial pushback when she speaks on national radio and elsewhere.

[2] I wish to thank Amy Bramley for this very apt wording.

[3] For example 'shame about one's background' (Plummer, 2000, p.164), feelings of inferiority (Reay, 2005) or as Kuhn writes, believing that you 'have nothing to say of any value or importance, that no one will listen to you in any case, that you are undeserving, unentitled, cannot think properly, are incapable of 'getting it right' (1995, p.97-98). Savage et al. also write of 'a shared sense of feeling somehow 'culturally homeless'' among upwardly mobile participants from working-class or 'underclass' backgrounds, who 'each had their own stories of the exhausting emotional labour required to reconcile such contradictory sources of identity' (2015, p.213).

[4] According to Peterson the omnivore has emerged more recently while the univore 'has a venerable heritage'. Peterson humbly adds at the end that what is proposed in the article 'is just that, a proposal. The conception must undergo rigorous testing before it can claim to be an adequate successor to the elite-to-mass conception which was proposed a century ago and was fully elaborated in the 1930s' (1992, p.256).

[5] Permeability being 'the extent to which the lives of individuals move across different kinds of social boundaries' (Wright, 2015, p.146). These studies of boundaries were carried out looking at the 'events' of intergenerational class mobility, cross-class friendship, and cross-class household composition.

[6] The category 'high complexity' is based on indicators including low socioeconomic status, students with special needs, absence levels among students and teachers without substitution, and numbers of students newly incorporated into the Catalan education system (*Consell Superior d'Avaluació del Sistema Educatiu*, 2019, p.28). This last indicator would include students from elsewhere in Spain who often do not speak Catalan.

[7] My translation of *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*.

[8] CIS surveyed a total of 2,466 people in Spain in 2016. The figure for those who did not speak, read, or write English was 61% in 2014. These surveys also provide data for responses to more specific questions about difficulty levels when speaking in various contexts (e.g. in a restaurant vs debating or expressing opinions).

[9] Luxembourg is a particularly interesting example of this, since English is not taught in state primary schools and is optional in secondary schools, but competence levels are among the highest in Europe according to studies by the EU (Eurobarometer, 2012) and Education First (2021).

[10] This move of primary schools came about as I had lived with a foster family until age eight, something which without doubt positively influenced my educational trajectory. In announcing new plans to facilitate access to higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the Irish Department of Education has for the first time in 2022 included students who went through the 'care system' among named disadvantaged groups (O'Brien, 2022).

[11] The Irish education system is largely made up of state run schools with less than one percent private schools (The World Bank Group, 2022).

[12] That said, one of the many things that sticks in my mind is that once towards the end of my time at secondary school a well-meaning teacher - in a one-to-one talk about my substandard performance in his class - opened the conversation with 'I know you're not from the silver spoons but…'. Another time

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during primary school some time in the 1990s, I recall a friend (whose father was a banker) confiding in me that a friend of hers (whose father was also a banker) had advised against being friends with me since I was from a council housing estate. These instances of my social class status being invoked without class being mentioned, speak to how my class background always felt prominent in some vague way. Class differences, in hindsight, seemed to mean to me then that my family and I were somehow inferior.

Chapter 2

[13] See Heller and McElhinny (2017) for a full account of such cases, like Roman Jakobson, Margaret Schlauch, Melville Jacobs and Morris Swadesh.

[14] This distinction is made since in his writings, Marx entered into dialogue with other formulations of alienation such as those of Hegel and Feuerback. Some authors maintain that discussions of the concept can be traced back to Plato. See Marshall (1998).

[15] Cole argues for the teaching of a Marxist analysis of capitalism in schools, wherein the Labour Theory of Value would be central to the discussion. Teaching of the Labour Theory of Value he writes, ‘was in fact, compulsory in secondary schools in the former Yugoslavia’ (Cole 2009, p.142).

[16] This, as opposed to agricultural labourers before them during feudal times who, although of course equally controlled by feudal lords, barely subsisted on some of what they produced from the land. Marx also deemed feudalism a system ‘based on the exploitation of the many by the few’ (Bottero, 2005, p.34).

[17] Sørensen puts this largely down to the fact that his work, like Marx’s but unlike that of other German writers on class, was translated into English.

[18] Rationalization, in a nutshell, was about ‘calculating the most effective way to a given end’ (Bradley, 1996, p.32, and see Levine (1985) for an in-depth discussion thereof.

[19] Weber does, on at least one occasion, write in stronger language such as ‘the fate of the entire working class’ in discussing how the unequal distribution of wealth and goods on the market ‘forces the non-owning group to comply with the authority of others in order to obtain any return at all for the utilities they can offer on the market’ (1978/1924, p.110)

[20] As Bradley (1996) and others point out, Marx did write about these occupational middle classes in later work, calling them the ‘surplus class’ and highlighting how they facilitated exploitation and extraction of surplus value from the proletariat. However, it centered around his conviction of exploitation of a subordinate class by a dominant capitalist class, while Weber’s descriptions appear more fitting of post-industrial jobs markets, thus are more readily accepted.

[21] The idea of intersectionality is thought to have been introduced by Crenshaw (1989, 1991) in her writings on gender and race, but see for example Block and Corona (2014) for a discussion of intersectionality in relation to class and various other demographic profile characteristics, what the authors term identity inscription.

[22] One such example: Esping-Andersen (1993) refers only to the ‘dominant class theories’ of Marx and Weber throughout his thesis on changing classes which is a general critique of traditional class theory.

Chapter 3

[23] Aron, known for his rejection of Marxism especially, had somewhat of a more chequered intellectual relationship with class. According to one French media source (Le Point, 2019), he declared himself ‘*’né à gauche’ y être rester jusqu'à conquérir ‘une pensée propre*’’ loosely translated: (born of the left and stayed there until I conquered my own way of thinking). He also wrote the preface for (his then friend) Bourdieu’s (1962) work *The Algerians*, translated to English.

[24] Unlike some other scholars who never make explicit references to Marx or Weber when such influence is discernible, Bourdieu makes many direct references to Marx and Weber such as ‘contrary to what Marxist theory assumes’ (Bourdieu, 1987, p.7) and ‘the *Weberian Stand* which people so often like to contrast with the Marxist class’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p.238, italics in the original) to cite just two examples.

[25] This quote relates specifically to Bourdieu’s concept of body hexis.

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[26] I write this knowing that the extent to which Marx saw class as determined solely by economic phenomena is a debate unto itself – see Chapter 2.

[27] Robbins (2005) writes of Bourdieu's 'deploying the language of economics ('capital') to explore cultural exchange' which he relates to the author's 'linguistic improvisation' and his 'strategic movement between intellectual discourses'. All of this is part of Bourdieu's conviction of '[t]he need to see social research as involving a continuously creative *ars inveniendi* (art of invention)' (ibid).

[28] See Bennett et al. (2009, p.28) for a discussion of other forms of cultural capital which emerged in later scholarly work following Bourdieu, e.g. technical and emotional capital as assets that are 'convertible into occupational advantage', or subcultural capital 'specific to particular ethnic communities'.

[29] Bourdieu's readings of and the evident influence of Kant in his work (particularly in *Distinction*) have been subject to much criticism. DeLanda (2019, p.63) for example accuses him of being 'led astray by the neo-Kantian approach'. See also Rancière (2004).

[30] And vice versa, Bourdieu considers the bourgeoisie to possess high economic capital and typically low cultural capital (Crompton, 2008). In fieldwork which traces Bourdieu's work years later in the US, Lamont (1992, p.2) also writes of the scorn that businessmen voiced toward intellectualism.

[31] Drawing on the philosophical writings of Sartre and Bertrand, Bourdieu understands this in relation to the act of *percipere*, perceiving one's status or social standing and *percipi*, the condition of being perceived (Robbins, 2005).

[32] There are others who defend Bourdieu against accusations of determinism. Robbins for example writes of how Bourdieu's book *Outline of a theory of practice* (1977) 'was a significant break with objectivist, structuralist explanation in favour of an attempt to acknowledge that structural distinctions are the construction of social agents who are struggling to reconcile their indigenous cultures (their habitus) with those objectified cultures which carry value and power' (2005, p.23). As we saw earlier in the discussion of habitus, Wacquant (2006) and Weininger (2005) make similar points (cf. also Blommaert, 2015).

[33] Harvey does however concede that '[a]s a form of shorthand however it still makes sense to speak about US or British or Korean capitalist class interests because corporate interests like Murdoch's or those of Carlos Slim…both feed off and nurture specific state apparatuses. Each can and typically does, however, exert class power in more than one state simultaneously' (2005, p.35).

[34] I say 'so-called' since, although a key term in Morgan et al.'s (2007) article and elsewhere, there are those like Bennett et al. (2009, p.2) who view 'neologisms like social exclusion [as political lexicon which has] helped to sweep the uncomfortable realities of entrenched inequalities into the placatory discursive registers of the Third Way'.

[35] Crompton notes that there are also interviewees not of working-class descent or status whose documented suffering derives from 'divorce, physical handicap or mental breakdown, or their political views' (2008, p.109).

Chapter 4

[36] Worth noting is that in the U.S., income inequality among the college educated has been increasing since the 1970s. According to Hoxby and Terry (1999), this is owing to factors such as increased demographic diversity of college attendees, increasing self-segregation of students among colleges on the basis of aptitude, and increasing correlation between average aptitude of a college´s student body and its expenditure on education inputs.

[37] Still, as McGroarty (2017) points out, even in prosperous countries only a minority of young people (around 20-30% of those in their twenties) participate in higher education (p.233).

[38] And this does not always mean having to gain hard-earned academic knowledge. Khan and Jerolmack (2013) also write of how these students are seldom seen working hard or even reading. They comment on how the students have learned shortcuts to attaining good grades using online summaries of readings and so forth (possibly an emerging trend at undergraduate level regardless of class background!).

[39] One UK study carried out by Prandy and Bottero (2000) documented a shift away from family influence over individual occupational success but reported this to be occurring at a 'glacial rate'.

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[40] Boas and Gans-Morse cite an email communication from Oscar Muñoz, ‘one of the first opposition economists to use the term in academic writing’ for the term market fundamentalism (2009, p.151).

[41] Commentators date the origin of the Mont-Pèlerin Society in turn to the Lippman symposium in 1938. Noteworthy also, Aron Raymond, a well-known scholar of twentieth-century French liberalism, left the Mont-Pèlerin Society in 1961 reportedly due to the society’s engagement with radical laissez-faire economic policies (Denord, 2007; Stewart, 2017).

[42] I am necessarily glossing over the concept of ideology, a topic in its own right. Blommaert (2006) defines language ideology as ‘socially and culturally embedded metalinguistic conceptualizations of language and its form’ (p.241). In more general but helpful terms, Heller and McElhinny (2017, p.6 italics in original) write that ‘[o]bjectivity is sometimes contrasted with ideology, as here, with ideology thus constructed as something false’.

[43] May however also notes that despite the ‘long-standing promotion of English, and more recently Hindi, as the state’s elite, pan-Indian, languages’ (2018, p.248) local linguistic communities have a good deal of say in matters of public education. In fact, over eighty minority languages are used as MOI in primary schools, making India in his view a good example of how the recognition of language rights, can contribute to ‘social and political stability, at least to date’ (ibid).

Chapter 5

[44] See Danermark et al. (2002) for a list of the differences between Kant’s transcendental idealism Bhaskar’s transcendental realism.

[45] The words retroduction, abduction and deduction are drawn from the field of philosophy. They refer to kinds of reasoning, and are age old ideas in philosophy. In this regard, Bhaskar refers us Norwood Russell Hanson (1965) as one author whose work provides more background on the philosophical context of the terms.

[46]That said, Morgan also points out that group interviews, ‘with auspicious origins’ (1997, p.4) featured in social research as far back as the mid-1900s only to temporarily disappear off of the map.

[47] Working for language schools mostly meant being sent to the homes of teenagers and children to give extracurricular English lessons. In this regard, I could relate somewhat to one of Gray’s participants Liz, who felt ‘a bit like a service provider’ (2022, p.379) working in Barcelona’s private EFL sector - all the more given my research topic.

[48] Realism, in philosophical terms means that ‘there are facts of knowledge independent of our knowing them’ (Cole, 2002) while CR adds the particular aspect of how we are involved in the process of knowing, among other things (Oxford conversations, 2016)

[49] Local participants were also given the option of speaking in Catalan, but this was never really given much consideration. My level of Catalan was relatively limited (I had a high level of comprehension but low speaking competence). Furthermore, while Catalan may have been the real first language of some informants, all of these individuals had a native level of Spanish, which is the norm in Barcelona.

[50] In fact, upon transcription, only minimal help was required for some minor understanding issues. Furthermore, the Spanish teacher who assisted with this resides in Galicia so was unlikely to know any of my participants.

Chapter 6

[51] Two interviews of 30 and 45 minutes respectively were done with Ibrahim while other participants had one hour-long interviews.

[52] Our interview took place in French, which I spoke more fluently than Spanish at the time. Linguistic anomalies on both our parts have not been corrected, and code switching into Spanish and English occurs throughout.

[53] His grandparents for example had been driven from their home decades earlier by drug trafficking mafia who massacred the village population and seized the land for cocaine production.

[54] I found this surprising since Juan had lived between the ages 5-14 in California, when I asked him about it (see transcript p.57) he said that he spoke Spanish at home and that after he returned to Peru he stopped speaking English. He then told me he hated living in California and had had a tough time at high school. He said he disliked the US government and the people. The anti-American sentiment

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discernible here may have given rise to a loathing of English. It is possible that he downplayed his English competence in the interview, but either way it is clear that in Barcelona he almost never spoke English, apart from in the pizzeria.

[55] As can be seen here, the interview took place in Sarrià where I lived at that time. By speaking in this way about 'those' people he positions me by default as outside that group. I had mentioned my working-class origins earlier on in the interview when Juan spoke of where he grew up. Possibly the fact that I was a foreigner – evident in his checking my Spanish comprehension in the same extract - probably contributed to his sense that I was not part exactly of that group.

[56] I say officially since Catalina had been doing some waitressing shifts in different restaurants for cash in hand but did not have stable work.

[57] That said, I know of at least one café/restaurant chain (Pans & Company) in Barcelona which offers on-site English classes to staff. No doubt others exist, but it is not the norm in hospitality. Also relevant, as an English teacher in Barcelona I have never had a student who was working in hospitality, but again, no doubt they exist.

Chapter 7

[58] Here Pati is of course referring to the Cambridge English Advanced exam. In the interviews to follow reference is made to the Cambridge First Certificate and Proficiency exams.

[59] Locally Hospitalet de Llobregat is known as a working-class area (see for example *La Vanguardia,* 2014).

[60] I say this knowing there are also some sociologists like Saunders (1996) who debate findings and arguments about inequality in education.

[61] This question was asked because the investment bank's head office is based in a French speaking country.

[62] In case it appears that the participants are being presented here in a negative light, I should add that I know from conversations in class that they had a good understanding of inequality and certainly cared about these issues. The excerpts chosen are especially interesting in yielding insights as to links between English and symbolic capital.

[63] The said formality is illustrated for instance by the fact that (only) this interview was carried out in formal 'usted' language.

[64] It is possible that their legal domain – family law and litigation – requires less English competence than other areas like commercial and IT law which typically involve international work.

[65] I say this because unlike personality traits, soft skills, or cultural fit, language skills are indisputably straightforward to assess before hiring.

Chapter 8

[66] The HR coursebook we were using mentioned class inequalities briefly under a section about diversity, so I took the opportunity to add some more in-depth sociology research to the curriculum. No doubt there was a clause in my contract about avoidance of 'instructional materials unrelated to the course' (Gray, 2022, p.377), but sociology content didn't seem to be too far removed. It did seem however that it went against the grain of some other business content students had been learning. This became clear for instance when certain ideas – for instance that short term work contracts result in more motivated employees - were voiced by students (this one, as I recall, heard in an economics class).

[67] Gender relations can at least be ruled out as a factor in who had the right to speak in the group, whether real or perceived. I am reminded here of Hollway's (1984) writings on how males contribute more in mixed male-female groups than in male-only groups, while the opposite is purportedly true for females.

[68] Some of the students in the group who were enrolled in a double degree of engineering and business would at that time be paying over 15,000euros per annum. Imaginably, some students may also have been availing of scholarships or other kinds of funding.

[69] Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) are critical of the simplistic categorizing of parenting styles and suggestions that working class parents tend to be more authoritarian and stricter. Obviously, it is a complex topic for which space does not allow sufficient elaboration.

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[70] From classroom discussions on this topic, I can also say that many such students were aware of a commonplace perception that attending this university meant that they somehow had it easier than university students elsewhere, and strongly contested this.

[71] SAT is the well-known acronym for Scholastic Aptitude Test.

[72] This is, in EMI terms, what Dafouz (2014) categorizes as ‘internationalization at home’ programs, whereby an internationalized curriculum is delivered in English mainly to local students.

[73] I contacted Hugo some time during the final write up of this thesis and he told me he had passed the Cambridge English Proficiency exam.

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Appendix A
List of interview questions in English

1. **About yourself**
   - Where were you born and when; where did you grow up?
   - Where do you live now?
   - What is your profession? Can you talk about your previous career(s) or career path?
   - What do you do in your free time? Do you ever need to speak English for that?
   - Have you travelled abroad in the last few years, if so where did you visit? Spoke English?
   - Do you often go shopping? Do you hear much Eng being in shops in Barcelona? Where?
2. **Life history, career and education to date**
   - What did/do your parents do for a living?
   - Did they encourage you to learn English or other languages?
   - How did they influence your education and career path?
   - Please tell me about your family today. What do they do (career/studies/other), are they learning English?
   - If you have children, do you encourage them to learn English? Why/why not?
3. **Experiences with English language learning**
   - For how long have you been learning English?
   - Did you learn English at school? What was your experience of that?
   - Why are you learning English?
   - Where, when, and how often do you use English?
   - Do you need to learn English for work? Can you talk about that?
   - In what kind of ways do you expect to benefit from learning English?
   - Can you tell me about your English learning experience to date?
   - What is your approach to learning English? Do you study regularly?
   - Can you tell me about your English level prior to taking classes?
4. **Personal opinions regarding English**
   - Do you think that improved English translates to better career prospects?
   - Do you know any people who learned to speak English very fluently – how did they get to be so proficient in English? How do you think they have gained from that?
   - Do you think there is a difference in the general levels of English in Barcelona and the rest of Spain? How do you think it might compare to the rest of Europe?
   - Do you think speaking English proficiently can make someone more cultured or cosmopolitan?
   - Do you think speaking Eng proficiently can add to a person’s confidence or self-image in any way?
   - Can you comment on the present status of English in Barcelona? What do you see as the future of English language learning/proficiency for the Catalan population overall?
   - Do you think there is a sense of pressure to learn Eng nowadays? How important is it?
   - Are any of your friends learning English? Can you tell me about that?
   - Do you think there is a socio-economic divide in terms of English learning in BCN, or is attaining fluency in English equally possible for all who wish to pursue it nowadays?

Appendix B

Interview questions translated to Spanish

Cuéntame un poco acerca de ti (trasfondo personal, origen)

1. ¿Dónde has nacido? ¿Dónde creciste…donde vives ahora?
2. ¿Qué has estudiado en la universidad? ¿Qué has hecho después del bachillerato?
3. ¿Cuál es tu profesión? Podrías contarme un poco sobre tu carrera, lo que has hecho antes…

Tiempo libre

4. ¿Qué te gusta hacer en tu tiempo libre?
5. ¿Cuantas horas dedicas a estudiar inglés cada semana, más o menos?
6. ¿Lees a menudo? ¿Qué tipo de lectura te gusta? ¿Lees en inglés?
7. ¿Ves a menudo la televisión o contenido en el internet? ¿Ves 'shows', series o noticias en inglés?
8. ¿A qué países has viajado en los últimos años? ¿Has hablado mucho en inglés durante tus viajes?
9. ¿Vas hacer el 'shopping' a menudo? Oyes gente hablando en inglés a menudo cuando sales por BCN?

Educación & familia

10. Cuando eras joven, ¿cuáles idiomas estudiabas en la escuela?
11. Cuando eras joven, ¿te han animado tus padres u otra persona a estudiar idiomas?
12. ¿Estas personas han influenciado mucho tu desarrollo educacional o tu camino profesional?
13. ¿Cuéntame un poco acerca de tu familia hoy. Si tienes niños, ¿los has animado a aprender el inglés? ¿A que se dedican actualmente?

Experiencias con el aprendizaje del inglés

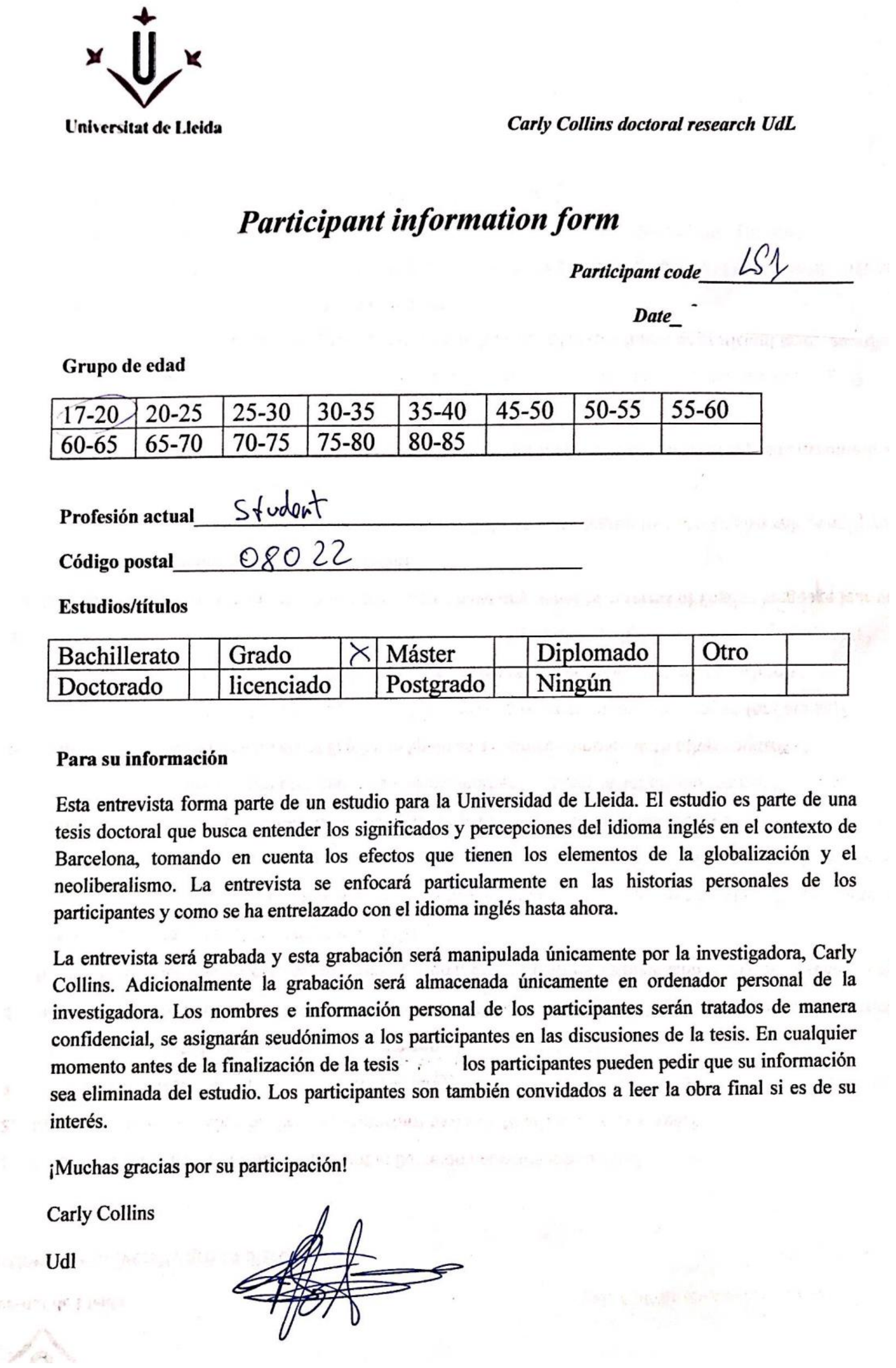
14. ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas aprendiendo el inglés?
15. ¿Por qué motivo quisieras mejorar tu nivel del idioma?
16. ¿Dónde, cuándo y con cuánta frecuencia usas el inglés?
17. ¿Necesitas el inglés para tu trabajo?
18. ¿Qué beneficio esperas obtener al aprender el idioma?
19. ¿Cuál era tu nivel de inglés antes de empezar con las clases?
20. ¿Has hecho muchas clases?
21. ¿Cuál es tu estrategia al estudiar inglés? ¿Sueles estudiar regularmente?
22. ¿Cuál es el principal factor que crees que te impide mejorar en inglés?

Opiniones personales sobre el inglés

23. ¿Piensas que tener un mejor nivel de inglés puede abrir puertas? profesionalmente hablando.
24. ¿Conoces a alguna persona cercana que haya aprendido a hablar inglés fluido? ¿Como es que han aprendido a hablar tan bien? ¿Crees que se han beneficiado de ello?
25. ¿Crees que hay alguna diferencia entre el nivel de inglés que se habla en Barcelona y el nivel en el resto de España? en general.
26. ¿Crees que alguien con un buen nivel de inglés es visto como alguien más culto o cosmopolita?, quero decir alguien que aprendió el idioma a un buen nivel.

27. ¿Crees que el hecho de haber aprendido el inglés a un buen nivel puede mejorar la autoestima o imagen de si mismo en alguna manera?
28. ¿Crees que hay una presión social para aprender el inglés en Barcelona hoy en día?
29. ¿Algunos de tus amigos están aprendiendo el inglés actualmente?
30. ¿Crees que existe una división en términos socio-económicos en lo que respecta al aprendizaje del inglés en Barcelona?, o ¿crees que obtener un buen nivel en el idioma es posible para cualquier persona que quera conseguirlo? (teniendo en cuenta por ejemplo las deficiencias en el sistema educativo público y las oportunidades que brinda la nueva tecnología especialmente el internet para el aprendizaje autodidacta)

Appendix C
Participant Information and Consent Form



Universitat de Lleida

Carly Collins doctoral research UdL

Participant information form

Participant code LS1

*Date*_

Grupo de edad

[✓ 17-20]	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	45-50	50-55	55-60
60-65	65-70	70-75	75-80	80-85			

Profesión actual Student

Código postal 08022

Estudios/títulos

Bachillerato		Grado	☒	Máster		Diplomado		Otro	
Doctorado		licenciado		Postgrado		Ningún			

Para su información

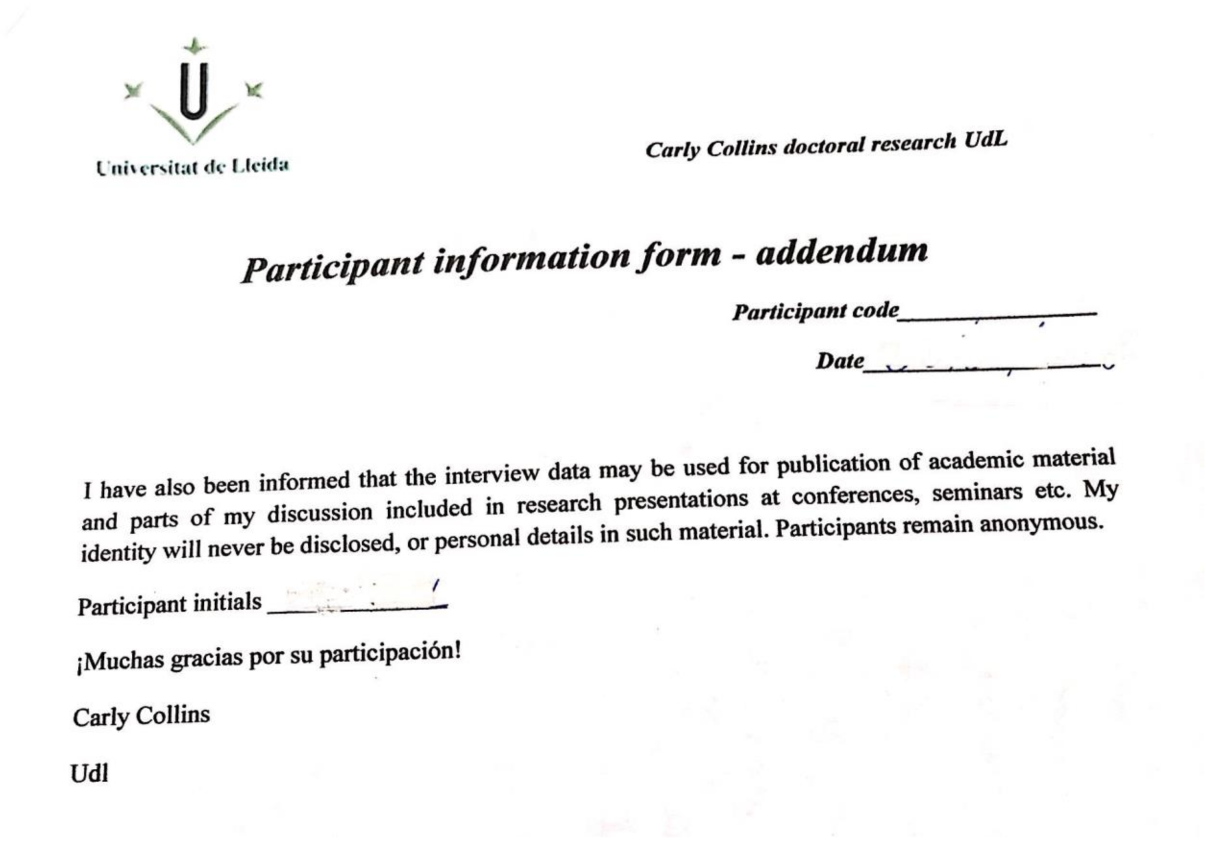
Esta entrevista forma parte de un estudio para la Universidad de Lleida. El estudio es parte de una tesis doctoral que busca entender los significados y percepciones del idioma inglés en el contexto de Barcelona, tomando en cuenta los efectos que tienen los elementos de la globalización y el neoliberalismo. La entrevista se enfocará particularmente en las historias personales de los participantes y como se ha entrelazado con el idioma inglés hasta ahora.

La entrevista será grabada y esta grabación será manipulada únicamente por la investigadora, Carly Collins. Adicionalmente la grabación será almacenada únicamente en ordenador personal de la investigadora. Los nombres e información personal de los participantes serán tratados de manera confidencial, se asignarán seudónimos a los participantes en las discusiones de la tesis. En cualquier momento antes de la finalización de la tesis los participantes pueden pedir que su información sea eliminada del estudio. Los participantes son también convidados a leer la obra final si es de su interés.

¡Muchas gracias por su participación!

Carly Collins

Udl



Universitat de Lleida

Carly Collins doctoral research UdL

Participant information form - addendum

Participant code_______________

Date_______________

I have also been informed that the interview data may be used for publication of academic material and parts of my discussion included in research presentations at conferences, seminars etc. My identity will never be disclosed, or personal details in such material. Participants remain anonymous.

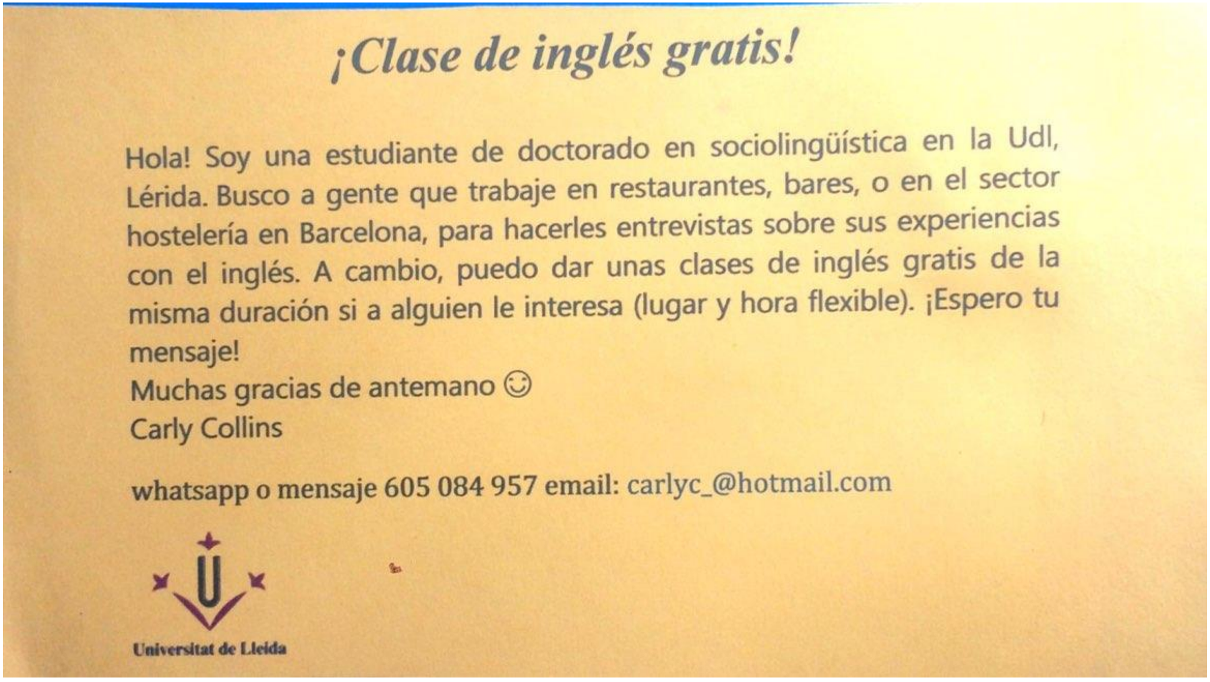
Participant initials ___________

¡Muchas gracias por su participación!

Carly Collins

Udl

Appendix D
Flyer advertising for participants



¡Clase de inglés gratis!

Hola! Soy una estudiante de doctorado en sociolingüística en la Udl, Lérida. Busco a gente que trabaje en restaurantes, bares, o en el sector hostelería en Barcelona, para hacerles entrevistas sobre sus experiencias con el inglés. A cambio, puedo dar unas clases de inglés gratis de la misma duración si a alguien le interesa (lugar y hora flexible). ¡Espero tu mensaje!

Muchas gracias de antemano ☺

Carly Collins

whatsapp o mensaje 605 084 957 email: carlyc_@hotmail.com

Universitat de Lleida

Appendix E
Questions for focus group discussion

1. Is having a good level of English important in Barcelona nowadays and why?
2. In your opinion, is English proficiency important as a skill to advance your career?
3. Do you know anyone who learned English to a highly advanced level because of their own interest and/or hard work without any help (like parents being invested in their education)?
4. How would you rate your own level of English? What has been most helpful in achieving this level? (consider for example: your own effort and/or interest, study, private lessons, regular school classes, teachers, your parents, television, travel, friends, media, other).
5. In a recent article published in the Guardian, Andrea Martínez Celis, a lecturer at Madrid's Complutense University and a Phd researcher in English linguistics is cited as having said that Spanish people who were educated in the Franco era had poor levels of English compared to other countries and faced an extra challenge as their brains aren't trained for speaking another language. What do you think of her view?
6. How do you think general levels of English in Spain as a country compare with other countries?
7. Do you think there are differences in the levels of English taught at public and private schools?
8. Do you think students from private schools achieve better levels of English than those in private schools?
9. Do you think students who attend private schools have any benefits in terms of English language learning that students in public schools may not have?
10. How much do you think attending this university and doing your degree through English will benefit your career prospects once you graduate?
11. Do you think that Spanish/Catalan people who have attained very proficient levels of English are sometimes seen as more cultured or cosmopolitan?
12. What do you think of people who don't speak much English? Do you think they face any advantages/disadvantages?
13. Do you think everybody has the same opportunity to learn English to a fluent or proficient level regardless of their socioeconomic background and nationality?
14. In a 2015 study, Gazzola revealed that across populations studied in France, Spain and Italy, English linguistic skills were positively correlated with income and education level. Do you have any thoughts on this?
15. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you think is relevant?

Appendix F
Transcription conventions

...	pause of a less than five seconds
[abc] [xyz]	approximately overlapping speech
↑?	rising intonation for questions
°°	Quiet speech
xxx	Unclear or inaudible speech
so-	sharp cut off of the prior word or sound
{laughs}	extra-linguistic information e.g. laughter, voice tone or additional comment by transcriber on background noises, long pause, excluded names etc.
Yeah:::::	lengthening of the syllable or sound
Italics:	Use of another language (in the extracts translated from French to English any utterances originally in English or Spanish are italicized)

Appendix G
Link to full transcriptions

Full interview and focus group transcriptions can be found at the following online location: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kyigLFF0xQOm7zrbCUnkuYlvyGFrKl891GsmgRqZcGU/edit?usp=sharing