

Language Learning as Linguistic Entrepreneurship: Implications for Language Education

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Abstract The growing emphasis on accountability, competitiveness, efficiency, and profit demonstrates how language education has been impacted by neoliberalism. To bring out the implications of neoliberalism on language education, we explore how language learning is increasingly constructed as a form of linguistic entrepreneurship, or *an act of aligning with the moral imperative to strategically exploit language-related resources for enhancing one's worth in the world*. To critically examine the political conditions that promote such an ethical regime, we focus on how linguistic entrepreneurship can be indexed through two distinct aspects, the motivation for and the mode of language learning. We then discuss under what circumstances the notion of linguistic entrepreneurship might be invoked and what kind of contradictions this entails. We conclude by considering the implications for language policy and language education.

Keywords Linguistic entrepreneur · Neoliberalism · Language learning · Motivation

Introduction

The current conditions of neoliberalism, in which market-based freedom is promoted as the ideal guiding principle for all domains of human life, have led to the emergence of what many have called enterprise culture—where attributes of ‘entrepreneurship, self-reliance, and sturdy individualism’ are valued (Evans and Sewell 2013, p. 37). Under enterprise culture, characteristics such as autonomy, innovation, creativity, strategy, and the ability to respond quickly to competition (du Gay 1996) and to work in self-directed teams (Gee et al. 1996) are lauded, as they allow workers to quickly adapt to the demand of capital in times of declining profit and increasing competition, instead of relying on state support in the form of welfare or modes of solidarity grounded in organized labor. As Keat (1991, p. 3) observes:

Here one finds a rather loosely related set of characteristics such as initiative, energy, independence, boldness, self-reliance, a willingness to take risks and to accept responsibility for one's actions and so on. Correspondingly, then, an enterprise ‘culture’ ... is one in which the acquisition and exercise of these qualities is both highly valued and extensively practiced.

Thus, an entrepreneur should not necessarily be understood in the narrow sense as someone who starts her own business. Most, if not all, identities (e.g., employee, educator, student, and citizen) nowadays tend to be filtered through the lens of entrepreneurship so that everyone is increasingly expected to be ‘an entrepreneur of himself or herself’ (Ong 2006, p. 14).

In this context, language is also increasingly used as a technology through which actors are guided to discursively

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project various entrepreneurial attributes (Cameron 2002; Scheuer 2001).

As the neoliberal turn in education results in a growing emphasis on accountability, competitiveness, efficiency, and profit, language learners, particularly those learning global languages such as English, are positioned as “global citizens/cosmopolitan consumers” (Block 2010, p. 300). Such branding of language learners is closely tied with the development of an entrepreneurial spirit, as it (1) understands language learning as an activity that the learner engages in as a path to better outcomes, such as better employment opportunities, and (2) highlights the investments (Norton 2013) and motivations (Dörnyei and Chan 2013) of language learners as reflections of their rational choices in pursuit of profit. This is particularly a pronounced phenomenon in East Asia, where countries like China and South Korea are constantly reinventing themselves and their education systems in order to keep abreast with the new economy. Not surprisingly, learners in these countries and elsewhere are pressed to mold themselves into neoliberal subjects who brand themselves for better positions and maximize their potential on the global stage (Bernstein et al. 2015).

To bring out the implications of this mobilization of language learning in the formation of neoliberal subjectivities, we focus on how language learning is increasingly constructed as a form of entrepreneurship. We explain what we mean by linguistic entrepreneurship, examining specific manifestations of linguistic entrepreneurship and focusing on how it can be indexed through two distinct aspects, the motivation for and the mode of language learning. We then discuss under what circumstances the notion of linguistic entrepreneurship might be invoked (even if the term itself is not actually used), and what kind of contradictions they entail. We conclude by considering the implications for language policy and language education.

Locating Linguistic Entrepreneurship

The term “linguistic entrepreneur” is not itself new. Researchers have used it to describe individuals who act as brokers between linguistically and culturally distinct groups (Holmes 2013, p. 227; Miles 1998, p. 232). In these cases, these brokers move beyond the safety of their own linguistic community to seek new contexts in which linguistic resources may expand in their utility. Our use of the term diverges from such usage. We focus on how language in neoliberalism is appropriated as a key for enhancing the value of one’s human capital. Thus, we suggest that linguistic entrepreneurship is *an act of aligning with the moral imperative to strategically exploit language-related resources for enhancing one’s worth in the world*, and a

linguistic entrepreneur is an actor who demonstrates such alignment. Understood in this way, linguistic entrepreneurship is one specific manifestation of commodification of language (Heller 2010). The commodification of language is a broad notion that does not necessarily result in economic or material gains, since there are different kinds of capital (Bourdieu 1986). As our definition of linguistic entrepreneurship makes clear, it is about exploiting language to serve in the construction of a specific persona. Our definition also captures how neoliberal society not only makes us see language as a resource that can be exploited for profit (material or symbolic), but also makes such exploitation an ethical imperative where becoming a linguistic entrepreneur is seen as the responsibility of an ideal neoliberal subject.

Here is one example. In their website ‘The entrepreneurial linguist’,¹ Judy and Dagmar Jenner, who specialize in translation and interpretation services, exhort fellow linguists to become entrepreneurial:

We would like to turn every single one of our colleagues around the world into an Entrepreneurial Linguist instead of “just” a linguist. ... Linguists are very much in demand in the global marketplace, we have very specific skills that are of utmost importance for any corporation that does business on a global scale. Start thinking of yourself as an essential part of the international communications chain, and price your services accordingly.

What we have here is a call to start thinking about language-related resources as marketable commodities. Of course, translators and interpreters have always made a living through the services they provide. But the example does more than pointing out the economic value of the linguistic services that translators provide; it urges those with skills in interpretation and translation to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset, and not let the economic potential inherent in their skills go to waste through under-appreciation. Presenting yourself as ‘just’ a linguist is unimaginative or even irresponsible; a moral burden is thereby placed on translators to actively seek ways to increase the value of their service, and by implication, their own worth.

Truly salient examples of linguistic entrepreneurship, however, might be found in domains where, unlike that of translation and interpretation, actors are not simply urged to reimagine the value of their linguistic resources, but to take up new linguistic skills as a way of becoming new selves. Indeed, this is precisely how language learning is given renewed importance in the context of neoliberalism; while people learning a new language for the potential

¹ <http://www.entrepreneuriallinguist.com/about/>; accessed August 9, 2015.

economic benefit it may bring is not necessarily something new, linguistic entrepreneurship implies that the act of learning a language itself can now serve as an important index of becoming a good neoliberal subject. We turn to a discussion of such cases in the next section.

Language Learning as Linguistic Entrepreneurship

In this section, we focus on two different ways in which language learning may be presented as linguistic entrepreneurship: (1) through the learner's motivation for language learning and (2) through the learner's mode of language learning.

Motivation for Language Learning: Toward Valued Opportunities

The Korean early study abroad phenomenon, known as *jogi yuhak* (Bae 2013; Gao and Park 2015; Lo et al. 2015; Park and Bae 2009), is closely tied with the idea of linguistic entrepreneurship. Since the 1990s, it has been common for middle class parents to send their preuniversity children abroad to study in foreign countries. Those destination countries are typically English-speaking ones (such as the US, Canada, Australia, and sometimes southeast Asian countries like the Philippines or Singapore), for one of the primary goals of early study abroad is to acquire valuable competence in the English language, which will help the student get ahead in the competition for better educational and job opportunities upon returning to Korea, where good English language competence is seen as one of the most crucial skills for white-collar work. In this sense, language learning is central to the idea of Korean *jogi yuhak*.

However, it is also important to note that *jogi yuhak* is not purely about acquiring linguistic competence in English per se. Immersing the student into an English-speaking environment is meant to trigger the young student's innate capacity to become a 'native speaker' of English—something that is deemed not possible in the space of Korea—thereby awakening the hidden potential in the student's body so that she can fully realize the value of her human capital in the global stage (Gao and Park 2015). This is precisely why *jogi yuhak* serves as an effective strategy for competition in Korean society—because its entrepreneurial motivations, in which acquisition of English is pursued as part of a project to enhance the value of human capital in the body of the student, position the student as a good neoliberal subject.

This can be illustrated by the following two examples, from a research project that Bae Sohee conducted in 2008, as part of an investigation into how transnational

experiences of educational migration shaped and contested dominant ideologies of language (see Park and Bae 2009 for details). Jiyeong is a 10-year old *jogi yuhak* student studying in a Singaporean government school, and has been living in Singapore with her mother for about a year. In example (1) below, Jiyeong's mother talks about how linguistic competence will contribute to Jiyeong's 'realizing of her dreams' on the global stage, such as pursuing higher education abroad (line 2) or working in foreign multinational companies (line 6). But she does not present these as fixed goals for Jiyeong, instead suggesting that English will enable Jiyeong to pursue whatever goals that she may set for herself (line 4). In other words, to Jiyeong's mother, acquiring English is important because it allows the *jogi yuhak* student to access a much wider set of valued opportunities associated with further self-development and branding.

(1)

1. Bae: Do you think English will play an important role in realizing her dreams in the future?
2. Jiyeong's Mother: Language, either Chinese or English, will be important, when she wants to study abroad later, as she might go abroad when she goes to university. We're providing the foundations now, so that she won't struggle later.
3. Bae: So after that she has to...
4. Jiyeong's Mother: Once she goes to middle school, she will know what her dream is, and then she'll be responsible for it.
5. Bae: So once she masters the languages, it will be easy to do whatever she wants to do?
6. Jiyeong's Mother: Her generation is much more globalized than our generation. Even if she does not go abroad, there are many foreigners in Korea now. And there are foreign companies in Korea. In her father's company, too, there are a lot of foreigners, so there are opportunities for interacting with them.²

Similarly, in example (2), Jiyeong (with some prodding from her mother) conveys to the researcher her specific desires about English. Presenting one of her cousins, who was also a *jogi yuhak* student and went on to attend an elite high school back in Korea, as her model, she discusses her dream of writing a book in English and attending prestigious schools in Korea ('foreign language schools' (line 8) are specialized high schools that are seen as new elite schools that provide a strong advantage for university admission). This example is interesting in the way the student displays her admiration for achievements that arguably require the qualities associated with enterprise

² Example from previously unpublished data; translated from Korean by Park and Bae.

culture (writing a book in English and publishing it) and entrepreneurial models (a cousin who has ventured overseas to improve herself and accumulates achievements). And according to Jiyeong, English is what makes such entrepreneurship possible.

(2)

1. Bae: If you were to improve English more, how much would you hope to develop it?
2. Jiyeong's Mother: You said you want to write in English.
3. Jiyeong: Oh, that's right. My cousin wrote her diary in English and published it.
4. Jiyeong's Mother: She published the diary she wrote in English.
5. Bae: In Korea?
6. Jiyeong's Mother: Yes. I think she was envious of that.
7. Jiyeong: I'm envious of my cousins because they all study well.
8. Bae: So you want to go to a foreign language school like your cousin?
9. Jiyeong: And I'd like to talk more with her.³

Such motivation, i.e., *jogi yuhak* students' and parents' association of language learning with better educational and employment opportunities as a means of self-development and enhancement of human capital, is what makes language learning through early study abroad not simply another strategy for learning English, but an evidence of linguistic entrepreneurship. What an experience of *jogi yuhak* shows to university admission officers or future employers is that the student has strategized her language learning efforts to maximize the value of her own human capital, and that she is a responsible neoliberal subject who carefully managed the potential hidden in her in the form of linguistic competence. Indeed, early study abroad that can be suspected as driven by other motivations (e.g., a slacker student from a wealthy background who went abroad to study because he simply could not adjust well to the competition in the Korean school system) is condemned and criticized in the national media (Kang and Abelmann 2011; Lo and Kim 2012).

Mode of Language Learning: Resourcefulness and Risk-Taking

Singapore, as a country which aggressively seeks to attract highly skilled workers so that it can maintain its global competitiveness despite its declining birth rate, actively recruits high-performing students from neighboring

countries through scholarships, with hope that they will become a contingent of new citizens that will contribute to the nation's further economic growth (De Costa 2016a). These scholarship students, in the words of one such student, are expected to be "very smart and industrious and able to conduct excellent work" (De Costa 2016a, p. 22), and are usually placed in the nation's top schools. Such initiatives create social tensions in Singapore, as some worry that the opportunities given to these foreign students mean less spots for local students in prestigious schools. As a result, scholarship students feel much pressure to demonstrate academic rigor and discipline, as well as an alignment with Singapore's neoliberal ideology of meritocracy, which privileges individual achievement and competition over welfare and equity, in order to justify their presence.

Language learning plays an important part in this process. Foreign scholarship students are selected according to rigorous criteria, including proficiency in (what the Singaporean education system deems) standard English. Yet, most of them come from non-English-speaking countries in other parts of the ASEAN, which makes mastering such standards of English a challenge for them. After all, English is not only the medium of instruction in Singaporean schools, but it is also an important curricular subject in which the students need to do well. In this context, the students studied by De Costa (2016b), which is based on a year-long critical ethnographic case study situated within an English-medium secondary school in Singapore, often employed characteristics associated with entrepreneurship. These characteristics included resourcefulness, semiotic dexterity, and willingness to take risks in their English language learning, as a way of presenting themselves as subjects that align well with the personhood expected of scholarship students.

For instance, in example (3), a scholarship student from China named Jenny describes to the researcher (Peter De Costa) the difficulties she faced in learning English and how she tried—ultimately with great success, given that she went on to top her class—to overcome them.

(3)

1. Peter: What is the hardest thing about learning English for you?
2. Jenny: Vocabulary.
3. Peter: How do you remember new words?
4. Jenny: I have no idea, but if I remember it just like in China, I will forget it very fast. In daily life, I have free time just for remembering it. In daily life if I cannot understand the word, I have to learn how to use it, how to use it in a sentence. So I think it is difficult.
5. Peter: So using a new word helps?

³ Example from previously unpublished data; translated from Korean by Park and Bae.

6. Jenny: Words have many meanings. Maybe here has a meaning and there has another meaning. (De Costa 2016b, p. 99)

Here, Jenny describes how, in dealing with the problems of acquiring new vocabulary, memorization initially seemed to suffice, but she later realized that for a word to sink into her long-term memory, she needed to be able to apply it to the context of a sentence. Jenny was not exaggerating when she explained that vocabulary was her greatest source of difficulty. For instance, she was often seen using her electronic dictionary in class, furiously keying in words unknown to her and waiting for an answer in Mandarin Chinese to be generated. Jenny's teacher, Madam Tay, also noted: "she's literally checking the dictionary for every other word and writing the translation on top of the word" (De Costa 2016b, p. 99). But by reflecting on the effectiveness of her own language learning practices, and taking on a more adaptive approach of using a new word "in daily life" (line 4) and paying attention to its "many meanings" (line 6), Jenny demonstrates resourcefulness and semiotic dexterity through which she expands her language learning to outside of the classroom.

Example (4) below also shows Jenny's adaptability, as she engages in a classroom activity of orally describing a picture with her Singaporean classmate Rui Min.

(4)

1. Rui Min: Okay, you can start first.
2. Jenny: I think there's a thing, they're celebrating their, their...
3. Rui Min: ...victory?
4. Jenny: Yes, victory at some competition. All of them look very excited and very e-elated. Uh, I think it's a sports competition because they're all in shorts and t-shirts. And there's a coach in the front. He's wearing a cap. He seems to ... how do you say it? He, he seems to be asking, the others to pose and take uh, the er, photo. See this boy (points to the picture), er, he is in the middle er...
5. Rui Min: ...being carried by another boy?
6. Jenny: And the boy in the middle who's being carried by another boy, is holding the trophy. He smiles very happily and (pause), and maybe he's the captain of the team, and they're all, maybe they all try to get the champion, so all of them are very excited.
7. Rui Min: Okay.
8. Jenny: I think this is, er, competition within residential area, oh, how do you say that? People living...
9. Rui Min: ...in a residential zone?
10. Jenny: Yes, er, a residential zone competition. Because in the background, the buildings look like HDB flats.⁴ (De Costa 2016b, p. 110)

The help that Rui Min provides for Jenny by offering appropriate candidate words and phrases (lines 3, 5, 9) precisely at points where Jenny seems to have difficulty coming up with words, particularly local cultural categories such as 'residential zone' (line 9), clearly places Jenny in the position of an English language learner, as opposed to the more legitimate status of Rui Min as an English speaker. And given the controversial position that scholarship students like Jenny occupy in the Singaporean educational landscape, being in a position in which she could be seen as having less legitimacy compared to her Singaporean peers, amounts to a significant degree of risk. Nevertheless, Jenny actively takes on the learner role without shying away from the learning opportunity, which is evidenced by her quick uptake of Rui Min's assistance. In other words, her willingness and ability to enlist Rui Min's assistance throughout the class activity serve as an indication of her active management of her own language learning endeavor.

It is worth emphasizing that Jenny's achievements should not be underestimated. This is because even though many students see vocabulary building as one of their biggest challenges in language learning, they are often at a loss as to how to go about improving on their vocabulary (Stroud and Wee 2011). And precisely for this reason, her active management of her own language learning can be a powerful strategy for sustaining her own distinction as a scholarship student. The resourcefulness and active risk-taking that Jenny displayed, then, can be understood as part of her linguistic entrepreneurship. More than simply a strategy for developing her vocabulary, it demonstrates her commitment to enhancing and justifying her worth in the competition-oriented educational context of Singapore.

Contradictions of Linguistic Entrepreneurship

In considering the relevance of linguistic entrepreneurship for language policy, it is important to recognize that linguistic entrepreneurship is not simply something that an individual opts for, but often bestowed upon certain individuals through conditions of power. Thus, in the case of Korean *jogi yuhak* above, it is the structure of competition in the Korean educational and employment market as well as the class-based interest of parents that drive students like Jiyeong to take up an entrepreneurial stance toward their

⁴ HDB = Housing Development Board, a statutory public housing organization in Singapore.

language learning. Also, in the case of Singapore, the state's ideology of meritocracy and the rationalization of its policy of attracting highly skilled labor puts pressure on foreign scholarship students like Jenny to be entrepreneurial in their mode of language learning.

To look at a more striking case, we might turn to Gao's (2015) account of how a tour guide in a rural Chinese village was portrayed in the Chinese media as a hard-working and honest humble folk whose multilingualism was acquired in order to better perform her job. Xu Xiu Zhen, allegedly able to speak German, French, Hebrew, Danish, Italian, Korean, English, and Swedish, was featured in a local documentary whose aim was to develop "moral values, record social change, and foster nationalism" (Gao 2015, p. 14).

Xu initially had help from her daughter-in-law, who had learnt some English in high school, but later relied more on her own memory work and interactions with foreigners. According to the documentary:

When she learnt several [English] phrases, she would not go to sleep, because she feared that she would forget everything after sleeping. But even so, she still felt worrisome in the early hours of the morning, and woke up her daughter-in-law to check if she had remembered everything correctly. ...Then through her interactions with tourists, Xu also managed to pick up many other foreign languages. (Gao 2015, p. 15)

Here, we have a media construction of Xu as a linguistic entrepreneur. Xu was presented as relying solely on her persistence, hard work, and eagerness to learn different languages, and in that process overcoming a number of difficulties, such as low social status, low levels of education, and lack of access to systematic or 'proper' language instruction.

It is this determination, initiative, and commitment to learning multiple languages that the Chinese government aims to highlight as indicators of national loyalty and good citizenship in the context of the country's recent socio-economic transformation. Historically, the learning of foreign languages tended to raise questions about the learner's 'morality' because it was associated with the danger of 'Westernization' (Gao 2015, p. 6, 8). However:

Since the late 1990s, China has become more integrated with the world, in particular with its joining of the WTO in 2001 and its successful bid for the 2008 Olympic Games in the same year. These two historical events marked China's repositioning of itself as a member of the international community. It is also against this context that major media in China have started to represent new figures of good citizenship in

relation to foreign language learning. (Gao 2015, p. 12)

In President Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream speech delivered late 2012 at the Politburo Standing Committee Members' meeting, one of the key concerns emphasized was the need to harness the energy of the common man because 'It is the people who create history. The masses are the real heroes. Our strength comes from the people and masses.'⁵ Against this backdrop, it becomes relevant to ask how the figure of the linguistic entrepreneur is constructed in Xi's speech. Xi's attempt to revitalize Chinese nationalism takes place in an interesting time, when transnationalism, cross border economic and cultural exchanges, and diasporic imaginations are much more common, harder to ignore, and even accepted as potential opportunities that an enterprising nation-state should capitalize on. This does not necessarily mean that the traditional trappings of nationalism are no longer relevant. Rather, what it suggests is that phenomena that might have once been considered undesirable or problematic are now acceptable or even desirable, provided these can be construed as assets (as opposed to liabilities) in the nationalistic project.

This opens up the possibility that the language abilities of individuals may be variously and temporarily selected or exploited by various others. To return to the case of Xu Xiu Zhen, it is important to ask just what the media and government might hope to gain by selectively lauding her specific kind of multilingualism while ignoring or even denigrating the multilingualism of other more affluent Chinese. This is an especially interesting issue, since Xu's multilingualism is quite likely to consist of a smattering of words and phrases from different languages, and in other contexts her multilingualism might be dismissed as not being 'actual/proper' multilingualism. This means that the apparent promise of linguistic entrepreneurship is not likely to bring rosy outcomes for those who invest in it, particularly if that person comes from a less privileged background as Xu does.

Such contradictions of linguistic entrepreneurship point to an underlying assumption regarding language prevalent in neoliberalism. In the context of neoliberalism, skills, including language and communicative skills that are supposed to be pursued through linguistic entrepreneurship, come to be understood as 'embodied capital' (van Doorn 2014, p. 357). As van Doorn (2014) emphasizes:

the neoliberal analysis of labor effectively eviscerates the very concept of labor, instead positing a vision of economic conduct in which enterprise units

⁵ 'Full text: China's new party chief Xi Jinping's speech,' November 15, 2012, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china; accessed August 12, 2015.

perpetually seek to invest in their human capital in order to retain their competitive edge and thereby secure a future income in an insecure environment, whose variables are always in flux and thus remain opaque to each individual competitor on the market ... the neoliberal worker is not the object of capitalist exploitation but is a rational subject who aims to benefit from the future exploits generated by her own capital. (pp. 357–358)

Yet, learned abilities cannot be divorced from the individuals who are in possession of them. In the case of language learning, this is of course entirely consistent with a practice-based view of language, which emphasizes the embodied and material grounding of language as a necessary correlate of language use in social context (Park and Wee 2012). The embodied nature of linguistic skills means that it is simply not possible to evaluate learned language abilities, while bracketing out the speaker and her sociolinguistic histories. But this bracketing out is exactly what does happen under neoliberalism, so that language competence becomes ideologically constructed as a commodity that can bring economic and material benefits for the speaker. It is precisely this tension and contradiction that open up opportunities for speakers qua linguistic entrepreneurs to be valorized as well as exploited. Keeping this in mind provides us with the answer to the question of why and under what circumstances the notion of linguistic entrepreneurship is invoked and by whom. As the Chinese case illustrates, linguistic entrepreneurship may not only simply be a notion that individuals themselves aspire toward, but also often something bestowed on selected individuals, commonly in the service of social or political goals of institutions, states, and capital.

Implications for Language Education

The fact that cases of linguistic entrepreneurship are open to exploitation as well as reward highlights the importance of providing language learners with a critical meta-perspective on the social dynamics by which language skills can be differentially valued in contemporary society. In this regard, we conclude by highlighting three implications for language policy and language education.

First, the discourse of neoliberalism can be seductive, especially for those individuals who feel empowered by the emphasis on individual effort and competition. However, this means that it is even more important for policymakers to be sensitive to the fact that historical and social backgrounds of learners do significantly influence their chances of success. Relevant here is Tollefson's (1991) call for a historical-structural approach to language policy, which

highlights the historical conditions of domination and exploitation between groups that have persistent effects, instead of focusing only on the individual and ahistorical. The influence of neoliberalism on language education, especially in the form of selectively lauding instances of language learning achieved under the rubric of linguistic entrepreneurship (and thus, by the same token, dismissing or penalizing other instances of language learning), only increases the relevance of Tollefson's ideas.

Second, as linguistic entrepreneurship becomes an ethical regime—where it is “construed as a style of living guided by given values for constituting oneself in line with a particular ethical goal” (Ong 2006, p. 22)—it is important to focus critical attention on how it may normalize stress and competitiveness to unhealthy levels (see De Costa 2015, 2016a, for a discussion of the emotional toll that such stress and competitiveness have on language learners). As Piller and Cho (2013) point out in their discussion of the impact of neoliberalism on South Korea's education system, the pursuit of English, for example, is generally acknowledged to be the “cause of immense social suffering,” yet “this linguistic burden is simultaneously embraced as natural and incontestable” (p. 24). These authors point out that programs informed by neoliberal ideology have often been able to overcome any opposition or resistance because of a “cultural guise” where “cut-throat competition” gets “mistaken for individual liberty and responsibility” (2013, p. 28). As a consequence, students are compelled to measure their self-worth and have this sense of self-validation by just how well they are able to competitively overcome, through their own perceived individual efforts, the difficulties or ‘challenges’ associated with language learning (Piller and Cho 2013, p. 30).

Third, we feel that students can benefit strongly from being asked to take a critical approach to their own language learning experiences as well as those of others, particularly on the ways in which various social fields encourage different strategies by which actors can aim to accumulate the symbolic capital of linguistic entrepreneurship. In this way, language learners are encouraged to heighten their reflexive awareness of both the motivations and modes of language learning that they or fellow actors subscribe to. One way to cultivate reflexive awareness, as suggested by Norton (2013) and Alim (2010), is to have students engage in classroom-based social research with a critical and social justice agenda. Such critical interrogation of linguistic entrepreneurship would not only alert students to possible injustices but would also better prepare them to work with and against neoliberal expectations. We see this is in essence a more specific instantiation of a general educational conundrum: how to prepare students for the world that they live in while

also encouraging them to think about ways of changing it for the better.

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