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State-of-the-Art Article

Political economy in applied linguistics research

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This state-of-the-art review is based on the fundamental idea that political economy should be adopted as a frame for research and discussion in applied linguistics as part of a general social turn which has taken hold in the field over the past three decades. It starts with Susan Gal's (1989) early call for such a move in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, that is, for 'investigations of the links among language structure, language use, and political economy' (Gal 1989: 346), and moves from a consideration of theoretical bases to the discussion and critique of concrete examples of research. Thus, after a fairly detailed discussion of political economy and the key constructs neoliberalism and social class, the paper moves to a review of research in three broad areas. First, it focuses on how issues and constructs from political economy have been incorporated into discussions of education, work and leisure by a growing number of sociolinguists. This is followed by a review of research which has focused specifically on social class as a central organising construct and then a third section on political economy in language teaching and learning research. The review ends with a consideration of the future of political economy in applied linguistics research.

1. Introduction

Over 25 years ago, Susan Gal published her oft-cited paper 'Language and political economy', stating that her aim was 'to point to a set of themes in current anthropological and linguistic research that can be read as investigations of the links among language structure, language use, and political economy' (Gal 1989: 346). She further noted that this research was either 'explicitly inspired by an array of (neo-)Marxist concepts', or was grounded in Hymes's 'socially constituted linguistics' (Hymes 1974) and interpretative ethnographic research which aimed to provide fine-grained descriptions and analyses of 'local linguistic practices' (Gal 1989: 346). Gal went on to focus on research which, at the time, had brought together language and society issues and political economic concerns such as inequality, social class and ideology, as she very effectively weaved into her narrative the work of scholars such as Hymes (1974), Bourdieu (1991), Labov (1966) and Bernstein (1971), all of whom contributed to the laying of the foundations for what sociolinguistics is today.

The same year, Judith Irvine provided a companion piece to Gal's article. In 'When talk isn't cheap: Language and political economy', she argued that 'the study of economy must include institutions, practices, and values' given that 'the dichotomy that excludes linguistic phenomena from the economic realm' (Irvine 1989: 249) had become obsolete. She called for researchers to relate the study of language practices not only to society and culture but also to political economy. In doing so, Irvine was following Hymes (1974) in suggesting that while linguistic forms no doubt denote and index relations of production and socioeconomic differentiations and inequalities, 'they may also be among those forces, and they may be objects of economic activity' (Irvine 1989: 255). Irvine was calling for the kind of synthesis of the material and the symbolic which has gathered some steam in recent years (see below), even if, some two decades later, Paul Bruthiaux felt compelled to lament how:

> the reluctance of many applied linguists to consider the economic dimension of globalization and the tendency for discussions of that dimension to be cursory and one-sided severely limit the contribution the field might make to key contemporary debate. . . . In the end, it undermines the credibility of applied linguists and makes it unlikely they will play a significant role in solving the social injustices they so rightly deplore.
>
> (Bruthiaux 2008: 20)

Elsewhere, I have expressed agreement with Bruthiaux on this point (Block 2012a, 2014) and now, writing in mid-2016, I face the challenge of finding and discussing current applied linguistics research which explores how language practices interrelate with economic forces and activities (Irvine 1989) and 'can be read as investigations of the links among language structure, language use, and political economy' (Gal 1989: 346). My task is difficult, not least because there has been a lack of theoretical work on what is meant by political economy in applied linguistics. With this gap in mind, I begin this paper with a discussion of political economy, providing a synoptic historical perspective, which ends in the present, and includes the economic crisis of 2007 (the effects of which are still being felt in many parts of the world a decade later). I make the point that the version of political economy which has been taken up by applied linguists in recent years is Marxist (or *quasi*-Marxist) in inspiration, even if authors do not normally engage explicitly with Marxist theory. I then move to consider neoliberalism as the key construct for the times in which we live, including social class in this discussion. All of this theoretical background is then drawn on in the ensuing survey of work in applied linguistics which has contained a political economic angle. I conclude with some thoughts about future research.

Following previous publications (Block 2003; Block, Gray & Holborow 2012), here I understand applied linguistics to be a field of enquiry which focuses on 'real-world problems in which language is a central issue' (Brumfit 1991: 46). Importantly, applied linguistics has expanded and become more interdisciplinary over the past four decades: if initially it was a field of enquiry with a near-exclusive association with linguistics as a source discipline and language teaching and learning as its applied angle, it now includes a great deal of research activity along the lines of what Hymes (1974) had in mind when he wrote about a 'socially constituted linguistics', in which the 'starting point is the study of culture and social organisation and the view is that language plays an integral part in the enactment of social action and communication' (Block 2003: 2). Moving from this more social starting point, applied linguistics has become an umbrella term for the study of a broad range of

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language-related issues, such as literacies, bi/multilingualism, language policy, identity, discourse in society and, of course, language teaching and learning.

Exploring the links of political economy with these different areas of enquiry, in this paper I focus primarily on recent publications. I do this because, in effect, a political economic angle on applied linguistics concerns is a relatively recent trend, very much linked to the early twenty-first century. Of course, before this recent timeframe there were occasional mentions and incorporations of political economy in applied linguistics work. Thus, apart from Gal's article cited above, there is Holborow's (1999) *The politics of English*, which examines the global spread of English, standard English and language and sexism from a Marxist perspective, relating these phenomena to global capitalism, ideology and colonialism. Elsewhere, in Gee, Hull & Lankshear's (1996) *The new work order: Behind the language of the new capitalism*, the authors discuss how the new information/digital age is not so much the harbinger of a new democratic order, but the wingman of neoliberal capitalism, mediating deepening socioeconomic inequality rather than the creation of more just and fair societies. There is also Florian Coulmas's (1993) somewhat forgotten (if one is to judge by the references sections of recent publications) *Language and economy*, in which the author presciently wrote about many of the issues which concern researchers today: how the economy shapes language-related phenomena, how languages may be framed as economically valuable and the interrelationships between languages and inequality. And, of course, even earlier, there was Rossi-Landi's (1968, 1983) suggestion that 'words and messages' are not given naturally, but are the products of labour. Finally, in ethnographic studies which have enhanced our understanding of the sociology of language education, some researchers have provided information about the economic backdrops enveloping the objects of their enquiries. Notable examples are Heath's (1983) exploration of literacy practices in a mill town in the southern United States; Eckert's (1989) study of linguistic variation and change in an American high school in Michigan; Foley's (1990) account of Anglo-Latino relations and sociocultural/linguistic practices in a small-town Texas high school; and Heller's (1999) discussion of bilingual policies and practices in a bilingual French immersion school in Anglophone Canada. These works, along with others published in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, fall outside the scope of this paper (even if they will be mentioned again below) as the discussion will focus above all on publications from 2000 onwards.

2. Political economy

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines political economy as a 'branch of social sciences that studies the relationships between individuals and society and between markets and the state, using a diverse set of tools and methods drawn largely from economics, political science, and sociology'. Elsewhere, Mosco writes that '[o]ne can think about political economy as the study of *the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources*' (Mosco 2009: 24; italics in the original). And, in the introduction to a collection on GLOBAL political economy, Ravenhill (2014: 18) writes of a 'field of enquiry ... whose central focus is the interrelationship between public and private power in the allocation of scarce resources'. In both cases, political economy is understood as an area of enquiry with roots in the work of Adam Smith (2012 [1776]), David Ricardo (2004 [1817]) and John Stuart Mill (2004 [1848, 1865]), who laid out the basics of liberal economic theory which Karl Marx was later to critique (Marx 1990 [1867]).[1] It focuses on and analyses the relationship between the individual and society and between the market and the state, and it seeks to understand how social institutions, their activities and capitalism interrelate. Thinking and writing within a political economy frame means working in an interdisciplinary manner, drawing on work in human geography, sociology, political theory, anthropology and cultural studies. The focus is on the interrelatedness of political and economic processes and phenomena such as aggregate economic activity, resource allocation, capital accumulation, income inequality, globalisation and imperial power (Block et al. 2012).

Part and parcel of any move to adopt political economy as a frame for research and discussion in applied linguists is the belief that the latter should be situated more firmly within the social sciences and that the social sciences should be at the centre of discussions of issues in applied linguistics. If a decade and a half ago I wrote about a 'social turn' in second language acquisition research (Block 2003), today there is space for what we could call a 'political economy turn' in applied linguistics (Block 2017a).This new turn would mean taking on board themes arising in political economy literature and applying them to the study of 'real-world problems in which language is a central issue' (Brumfit 1991: 46).

I see such an approach as entailing a substantial and sustained engagement with (1) the foundational work of Smith (2012 [1776]) and Marx (1990 [1867]); (2) the later work of Gramsci (1971 [1935]) on capitalism and political dominance, Lukács (1971[1923]) on class consciousness, Polanyi (1944) on the market and political responses to it and Baran & Sweezy's (1966) analysis of the domination of corporations and the rise of monopoly capitalism; and (3) more contemporary work, such as Blyth's (2013) Keynesian critique of neoliberal austerity, Boltanski & Chiapello (2006) and Fleming (2015) on the rise of individualism and managerialism in the twenty-first century workplace, Dardot & Laval (2013) on neoliberalism as a rationality, Panitch & Gindlin (2013) on the symbiotic relationship between the United States and global capitalism, Piketty (2014) on inequality in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Duménil & Lévy (2011), Callinicos (2010) and Harvey (2005, 2014) on the rise of neoliberalism and the contradictions inherent to capitalism, and finally, Stedman-Jones (2012) and Mirowski (2013) on the intellectual traditions and activities leading to the rise of neoliberalism. It also means moving away from the practice of merely mentioning in passing key political economy constructs and frameworks to a more in-depth engagement with and utilization of said constructs and frameworks. The literature review that I carry out in this paper will discuss applied linguistics research which has included a political economy angle, although I can advance at this point that this angle is often not very thoroughly developed (a point to which I return in the final section).

[1] A note on references. When citing newer editions of sources first published decades ago (e.g. Marx's *Capital* was first published in 1867 but the edition consulted for this article was published in 1990), I provide the latter year followed by the former as follows: Marx 1990 [1867].

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The turn to political economy in applied linguistics scholarship, timid though it may be at present, is not accidental or a matter of chance. It comes at a time when many people, lay and academic alike, are coming to the collective realisation that we are living in times – the neoliberal era and the economic crisis wrought by neoliberal policies – in which societies are becoming more socioeconomically stratified and unequal instead of less so. In the midst of this realisation, there is an additional realisation that the famous expression 'It's the economy, stupid', which was first coined in 1992 by James Carville, American president Bill Clinton's campaign strategist, is relevant today with even greater urgency. In this sense, no one who has accessed the media (television, newspapers, online publications) at any time since 2007 will have escaped the constant flow of bad news about debt – bailouts, home repossessions, corrupt politicians and bankers, and of course the ubiquitous 'markets' – all of which are political economy issues. In short, we have moved from the heady times of celebratory globalisation of the 1990s and the early part of this century, to the hard-core realities that globalisation, at least in part, has bequeathed. In doing so, we have moved from what might be called a culture-dominant way of understanding events going on around us to a move economics-based one (Block 2012a).

This survey will appear in 2017, a decade after the beginning of the current worldwide economic crisis. And although governing politicians in many of the countries most affected by the crisis have tried to convince citizens that recovery has arrived (my home country of Spain comes to mind), there is by now little doubt that this crisis, of a virulence not witnessed (or felt!) since the great depression of 1929, has left an indelible mark on societies around the world and, of course, academics who attempt to make sense of them. As a consequence, the recent interest in political economy, be it via popularised texts or more academic works, is not likely to subside in the immediate future no matter what kind of economic recovery takes place around the world. In short, the political economy turn mentioned above will become more prevalent and it will take on greater strength through the second decade of the twenty-first century. Indeed, at the time of writing, a fair number of publications with a political economy perspective have appeared as collections and monographs (e.g. Erregeyers & Jacobs 2005; McElhinny 2007; Stroud & Wee 2008; Tan & Rubdy 2008; Grin, Sfreddo & Vaillancourt 2010; Kelly-Holmes & Mautner 2010; Mautner 2010; Block et al. 2012; Duchêne & Heller 2012; Park & Wee 2012; Duchêne, Moyer & Roberts 2013; Block 2014; Callahan & Gándara 2014; Jaworski, Thurlow & Heller 2014; Kanno & Vandrick 2014; Bernstein et al. 2015; Holborow 2015a; Ricento 2015; Gazzola & Wickström 2016; Shin & Park 2016a), as well as one-off articles and book chapters (e.g. Holborow 2006, 2007; Urciuoli 2008; Gerson 2011; Holborow 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Cavanaugh & Shankar 2012; Holborow 2013; Piller & Cho 2013; Urciuoli & LaDousa 2013; Cavanaugh & Shankar 2014; Gazzola, Grin & Wickström 2015; Holborow 2015b; Shin & Park 2016b).

In the midst of this relatively new interest in political economy in applied linguistics, one key question which arises is what political economy we are talking about. As we can see in the definitions with which I opened this section, political economy is, like many academic disciplines, a broad church. In addition, and again like many academic disciplines, it has been sourced (often very selectively) by scholars situated in many other well-established disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences. Thus, there are philosophers (Žižek 2009), literature specialists (Gallagher 2008), communication specialists (Fuchs 2014), geographers (Harvey

2012), sociologists (Cox & Nilsen 2014) and anthropologists (Vaccaro, Harper & Murray, 2016) who have taken a political economy perspective in their work. It should be noted that these and many other scholars have made this move drawing on a line of thought which is directly traceable back to Marx (1990 [1867]) and is variably termed 'Marxist', 'neo-Marxist' or even 'post-Marxist'.

As noted above, over the past two decades applied linguists (in particular, sociolinguists/linguistic anthropologists) have also begun to source political economy and when they have done so, they have tended towards the aforementioned Marxist variety, even if there are very few direct references in their work to Marx, or indeed to prominent scholars and political thinkers who followed in his wake such as Lenin (1987), Lukács (1923) and Luxemburg (2003 [1913]). And, attuned to the here and now, applied linguists have tended to focus on the form of capitalism which has been dominant over the past four decades – neoliberalism – as the key point of departure for their enquiries into language-mediated real-world problems. However, with notable exceptions (e.g. Holborow 2012a, 2015a; Shin & Park 2016b; Block 2017a), these same applied linguists have tended to say very little about their understanding of what constitutes (and crucially, what does not constitute) neoliberalism as a frame for their research. In the next section I discuss what we might mean by the term 'neoliberalism'.

3. Neoliberalism as focus of attention in contemporary political economy

Neoliberalism may be understood as the latest incarnation of capitalism, but this time by more efficient means in more intensively and extensively globalised and technologically advanced circumstances. By most estimations (Stedman-Jones 2012; Gould 2013; Mirowski 2013), it is a variety of economic liberalism which draws its inspiration from a distorted view of Adam Smith's writings on economy and society in the eighteenth century (in particular, Smith's masterpiece *The Wealth of Nations*, first published in 1776)[2] and Hayek's (e.g. 1944) philosophy of liberty and freedom, in which he counterposed liberalism to the encroachment of government and state power on the lives of individuals which he saw as endemic to socialism. It was forged as an international movement through an amalgam of schools of thought in Austria, France, Germany, Britain and finally, the United States, where it came to be known as the 'Chicago school', led by prominent scholars such as Stigler (e.g. 1971), Friedman (e.g. 1962) and Becker (e.g. 1964). This more recent American version famously came to the fore in the mid-1970s when the Agosto Pinochet dictatorship in Chile became its first extensive testing ground. The elections of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in the UK in 1979 and Ronald Reagan as President in the US in 1980 meant that during the decade of the 1980s neoliberalism was implanted as the official economic doctrine in

[2] Giovanni Arrighi (2007) notes how Smith is often cited, but has seldom actually been read, and how he is, on the whole, 'misunderstood'. He outlines three myths which form part of Smith's legacy:

> that he was a theorist and advocate of 'self-regulating' markets; that he was a theorist and advocate of capitalism as an engine of 'endless' economic expansion; and that he was a theorist and advocate of the kind of division of labor that occurred in the pin factory described in the first chapter of *The Wealth of Nations*. In reality, he was none of the above.
> (Arrighi 2007: 42)

these two powerful nations, spreading from them to nations around the world much like a virus. However, we should be wary of accepting arguments that its supplanting of Keynesian economics around the world was somehow a natural outgrowth of the deficiencies of the latter; rather, as Mirowski (2013) explains, proponents of neoliberalism, through organisations such as the Mont Pelerin Society (founded in 1947 by Hayek), proselytised for decades, making conscious and organised attempts to publish their ideas and research in prestigious academic journals and to ensure that their voices were heard in circles of power. These attempts were eventually successful from the 1960s onwards. In this sense, Peck (2010: 20) offers an interesting view of neoliberalism, noting that while the 'neo' in the term is a clear epoch marker (neoliberalism is a recent form of liberalism to be contrasted with, for example, nineteenth century liberalism), it 'also denotes the repeated (necessity for) renewal and reinvention of a project that could never be fixed as a stable formula, and which has lurched through moments of innovation, overreach, correction, and crisis'.

As explained in recent political economy publications, neoliberalism entails a number of collateral phenomena, activities and behaviours. First, it means the active involvement of governments in the adoption of specific measures aimed at reducing, or even eliminating completely, government finance for public services, the by-now well-known 'cutbacks' in spending on education, medical care, transportation, housing and so on. It also means the partial or total privatisation of many of these public services, as in most European countries, utility companies (water, gas, electricity), formerly state owned and operated, were either fully or partially privatised during the 1980s and 1990s. Another practice associated with neoliberalism is the establishment and/or maintenance of regressive income tax regimes which in relative terms put the tax burden far more on working-class and middle-class incomes than on upper-class incomes. These tax policies have marked a definitive move away from the notion of redistributive tax policy as tax regimes are 'simplified' in such a way that the wealthiest today pay less than they did before. Neoliberalism is associated with the partial and/or total deregulation of the financial markets, leading to a 'footloose' or 'casino' variety of capitalism in which practitioners know no territorial limits, nor show any responsibility to national states, communities or individuals. This brand of capitalism, far more than the previously mentioned policies, has become the main focus of government and media attention since the current economic crisis began in 2007–2008.[3] Running parallel to this financial deregulation has been a territorial deregulation; as outsourcing and off-shorisation[4] have become the most common means through which corporations reduce costs by moving most or all of their production processes to parts of the world where labour costs are lower, there is less state-guaranteed protection of workers' rights and environmental regulation is lax (if it exists at all in an effective and actionable form).

[3] One would be forgiven for thinking that attention to this aspect of neoliberalism is motivated at least in part by the desire to protect these policies. Thus there is a need to sell the idea that the crisis was caused by a few bad apples and all that is needed to move forward, and crucially out of the crisis, is more vigilance of markets and individuals without meddling with the main elements of neoliberalism. In practice, this leads to what Colin Crouch (2011) has called 'the strange non-death of neoliberalism', whereby the solution to the problems engendered by neoliberal practices and measures is simply more neoliberalism.

[4] In simple terms, outsourcing is 'the transfer of activities once performed by an entity to a business (or businesses) in exchange for money' while off-shorisation 'involves sending work to companies in other countries' (Ritzer 2010: 226).

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As has been noted by just about all of the scholars cited thus far, neoliberalism has meant the adoption of the market metaphor as the dominant way to frame all manner of day-to-day activity. The notion of the market has been around for some time in political economy: while for Smith, it was the on-the-whole self-regulating site where 'by treaty, by barter, and by purchase ... we obtain from one another the greater part of those mutual good offices which we stand in need of' (Smith 2012 [1776]: 19–20), for Karl Marx (1990 [1867]), it was the site or social space (indeed, an uneven playing field) which compelled individuals (the proletariat) to enter into the processes of buying and selling commodities to satisfy their basic needs and wants. Those who incorporate the market metaphor in discussions of the economy tend to adopt an oversimplification of Smith's version, along with the assumption that the markets are fair and open spaces of activity, in which participants are equal and free to act (and indeed to prosper). One important effect of the adoption of the market metaphor in this way has been that domains of social activity, which had previously been organised according to criteria to do with community and institution building, have come to be framed in terms of economic exchange. And in these processes, the individuals and collectives participating in the practices constituting social activity are positioned in terms of their roles as providers and consumers. In this sense, as Joanna Williams (2013: 11) notes, 'marketisation [is] primarily ... the process by which institutions compete for customers'. Generally, government-led marketisation means that while an institution such as education continues to have as its prime function the socialisation of children to the norms and ways of dominant society through the control and disciplining of a range of knowledge domains (and this, despite the ongoing efforts of academics and educators to make education about reducing inequality in increasingly stratified societies), the ways in which it is planned, delivered and evaluated come to resemble (or, in effect, they are the same as) those which apply in the private sector. Competition and the drive towards ever greater efficiency take over the basic notions of functionality and public service provision for all (Collini 2009; Lipton 2011; Williams 2013; Weis, Cipollone & Jenkins 2014).

Finally, as many authors have noted (Boas & Gans-Morse 2009; Flew 2014), the term 'neoliberalism' is in danger of becoming trivialised and frivolised: on the one hand, it is often used as a default epithet for all things despised by those who position themselves as politically left; on the other hand, it is now used as a baseline referential point for just about every area of enquiry in the humanities and social sciences. However, more serious and rigorous scholarship firmly rooted in political economy remains and it is in this field that one finds an ongoing discussion which avoids the drift into inconsequentiality.

4. Neoliberal effects to consider

One key aspect of neoliberalism that is often marginalised, particularly in discussions which are exclusively about economics, is the way that capitalism in its current dominant form (see the elements outlined above) has had a great and profound impact on individual and collective subjectivities. Dardot & Laval (2013) argue that it is perhaps best to frame neoliberalism, not as an ideology or a set of policies, but as a 'form of existence' or 'rationality' which, while global in nature, is always inflected with the specific histories, sociologies and cultural assemblages of local contexts. By 'form of existence' and 'rationality', the authors mean that

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neoliberalism is as much about a totalising way of conceptualising societies, cultures and ways of life, as it is economic policies undergirded by capitalist ideologies. As Brown explains, 'neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life', adding that it figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for "self-care" – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions' (Brown 2005: 43). Brown bases her views on Lemke's (2001) early discussion of Michel Foucault's renowned lectures on 'biopolitics' at the Collège de France in 1978–1979. These lectures were eventually published in book-form in English in 2008, several years after Brown was writing. In this volume, Foucault shows himself to have been prescient in a way that few others have ever been, even if, as critics have noted (e.g. Fleming 2015; Holborow 2015b), he was not altogether disapproving of the rising neoliberal tide. Writing about 'neoliberalism' when it was a still just a glimmer in Margaret Thatcher's eyes (she was to take office as British prime minister a month after Foucault finished his lectures), he noted how the field of economics had evolved over the twentieth century from a focus on larger social processes to a focus on individual activity. It therefore was 'no longer the analysis of the historical logic of processes'; rather, it was 'the analysis of the internal rationality, the strategic programming of individual activity' (Foucault 2008: 223). Consistent with this turn to 'the strategic programming of individual activity' is Gary Becker's (1964) human capital theory and the notion of the individual as *homo economicus*, as 'one of two partners in the process of exchange', all of which 'entails . . . an analysis of utility of what he is himself, a breakdown of his behaviour and ways of doing things' (Foucault 2008: 225). In Becker's words, 'individuals decide on their education, training, medical care, and other additions to knowledge and health by weighing the benefits and costs' (Becker 1993: 43). The benefits and costs he mentions here are about the 'cultural and other non-monetary gains along with improvement in earnings and occupations' and the 'foregone value of the time spent on these investments' (Becker 1993: 43), respectively.

This is quite a departure from Marx's view that society does not 'consist of individuals, but . . . the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand (Marx 1973 [1858]: 265). And it is certainly a far cry from Norbert Elias's argument that society 'only exists because a large number of people exist, it only continues to function because many individual people want and do certain things, [and] its structure, its historical transformations, clearly do not depend on the intentions of particular people' (Elias 1991 [1939]: 3). Instead we are in the realm of a line of thought elaborated by Ayn Rand, whereby '"[t]he common good" (or "the public interest") is an undefined and undefinable concept: there is no such entity as "the tribe" or "the public"; the tribe (or the public or society) is only a number of individual men' (Rand 1967: 20). In short, we are living in an age in which 'each person's biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her own hands, open and dependent on [individual] decisions' (Beck 1992: 135). In this version of events, an increasing number of life opportunities are less constrained by traditional social structures (e.g. family, organised labour, schools) and are more about individual decision-making and the ongoing construction of one's life trajectory or autobiography.[5]

[5] In writing this, I do not wish to suggest that Beck was aligned with Hayek, Becker and others who were were foundational to the rise of neoliberalism as a dominant economic and social phenomenon. Rather, my point is that his ideas on individualisation could be read in a sideways manner as granting some degree of succour to the neoliberal project.

This move from the collective to the individual, from human beings as social beings to human beings as individuals, leads to a pessimistic view of human existence. Human beings are seen not just as consumers and not just as skills bundles, but as competitors for resources, which, as it happens, are increasingly scarce proportionate to the world population. We thus see the marketisation of an increasing number of fields of social activity under the general umbrella of neoliberalism, mixed with the ideal of the competitive individual to produce a dystopic view of contemporary society. As Foucault explained:

> The society regulated by reference to the market that the neo-liberals are thinking about is a society in which the regulatory principle should be not so much the exchange of commodities as the mechanisms of competition. It is these mechanisms that should have the greatest possible surface and depth and should also occupy the greatest possible volume in society. This means that what is sought is not a society subject to the commodity effect, but a society subject to the dynamic of competition. Not a supermarket society, but an enterprise society. The *homo economicus* sought after is not the man of exchange or man the consumer; he is the man of enterprise and production.
>
> (Foucault 2008: 147)

It is little surprise, then, that in Europe at present, there is great deal of talk about entrepreneurs (Holborow 2015a) and how the entrepreneurship of highly qualified young people is the way to lift countries such as Ireland and Spain (to cite just two examples) out of the profound economic depression in which they are immersed.

5. Class

In addition to the interrelationship between ideology and practices, there is a further consideration to bear in mind when framing applied linguistics discussions in terms of neoliberalism: that is the necessary inclusion of class as a key construct in any discussion of capitalism, a point made by many scholars writing in political economy in recent years (e.g. Žižek 2009; Duménil & Lévy 2011; Harvey 2014; Fleming 2015). Some 20 years ago, Bradley provided the following definition of social class, based heavily on the thinking of Bourdieu:

> Class is a social category which refers to lived relationships surrounding social arrangements of production, exchange, distribution and consumption. While these may narrowly be conceived as ECONOMIC relationships, to do with money, wealth and property, . . . class should be seen as referring to a much broader web of SOCIAL relationships, including, for example, lifestyle, educational experiences and patterns of residence. Class, therefore, affects many aspects of our material lives.
>
> (Bradley 1996: 19)

Moving forward from Bradley's succinct and clear definition, I have drawn on scholarship ranging from Marx (1990 [1867] to Bourdieu (1984), as well as more recent contributions by Atkinson (2015), Savage (2015) and Wright (2015), on the way to an understanding of class as a multi-levelled phenomenon emergent in variable and ever-evolving constellations of dimensions. It is first of all a materially based phenomenon, grounded in the relationships of individuals and collectives with 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. Further to this, there is the ownership of property and other possessions and the collection of a salary, rents and other forms of income. However, either FROM these economic bases, or IN ALIGNMENT WITH them, there emerge a wide range of activities and phenomena which also index class and may be seen as political, social and cultural. Among these are education (level of formal education attained and the corresponding symbolic capital acquired thereof); technological knowhow (familiarity and ability to use evolving technologies); social contacts and networking (the people one regularly associates with as colleagues, friends and acquaintances); societal and community status and prestige (embodied, achieved and ascribed); consumption patterns (e.g. buying particular brands; shopping in particular places or spaces); symbolic behaviour (e.g. how one moves one's body, the clothes one wears, the way one speaks, how one eats); pastimes (e.g. golf, skiing, cockfighting, online fora participation); one's relative position in hierarchies of power in society; quality of life in terms of physical and psychological comfort and health; the type of neighbourhood one lives in; one's mobility (both highly localised and that which constitutes 'travel'); 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.). All of these indicators of class, or what Wright (2015) has termed 'individual attributes', as well as their intersections with well-established identity dimensions such as race, ethnicity, gender and nationality, must be accounted for in any serious account of class in the lives of individuals and collectives (Block & Corona 2014, 2016). In addition, we cannot lose sight of the relational nature of class: it is constituted in and emerges from the 'systematic interactions of social actors situated in relation to each other' and is not necessarily best defined in terms of 'quantitative names like upper, upper middle, middle, lower middle, and lower, but by qualitative names like capitalists and workers, debtors and creditors' (Wright 2015: 33). Finally, these interactions involving social actors are further situated within larger market relations (in the realm of work) and beyond these market relations 'within the relations of domination and exploitation in production' (Wright 2015:11).

6. Issues arising in applied linguistics from a political economy perspective

As I noted at the outset, applied linguistics is a broad church and it is a field which has become increasingly interdisciplinary in recent years. In addition, while some areas of enquiry, such as second language acquisition might be fairly easy to maintain separate from others, such as language policy, keeping the latter separate from bi/multilingualism studies (just to cite an example), would be very difficult indeed. Bearing in mind the kind of criss-crossing and intersectionality that is so common in much applied linguistics research, I have chosen in this section to proceed as follows. First, I focus on how the political economic notions discussed above have been incorporated into discussions of education, work and leisure by sociolinguists who situate their research as firmly grounded in the social sciences and as socially relevant. It is important to consider these areas because they have come to occupy a prominent position in sociolinguistics in recent years, focusing as they do on three important domains of human activity. I then move to consider research linking the notion of social class to language practices. My survey begins with William Labov's foundational variationist work but then moves to more recent work in which class has experienced something of a comeback after some years in the wilderness. I end this section with a focus on language teaching and learning, noting that while there has not been very much work linking issues around the teaching and learning of languages to political economy (and vice versa), there is much fertile ground for such intersectional work.

6.1 Examinations of education, work and leisure in applied linguistics

I begin this section by returning to the notion of the neoliberal citizen discussed above, as this body of scholarship is becoming a common frame in applied linguistics research which focuses on how the English language mediates new ways of being in contemporary societies. For example, many applied linguists have been attentive to how the English language is a key element in increasingly instrumental conceptions of the ideal citizen in different countries around the world. Focusing on the role of English in the lives of Koreans living both in South Korea and in countries such as Canada, researchers such as Park (2009), Park & Lo (2012), Park & Wee (2012), Piller & Cho (2013) and Shin (2012, 2014) have documented how the aspirational middle class and the upper class, given their economic and sociocultural resources, are able to afford a range of behaviours, from paying for extra tuition in South Korea to moving to an English speaking country, as they hope to guarantee that their children will be highly proficient English speakers. The idea is that in a job market which values English as a key skill and communicative resource, individuals must have what is considered a 'good' command of this language (however this is determined) in order to be considered worthy of employment and indeed, legitimised as successful citizens. Of course, not just any English will do, and so there are conflicts arising about accent and fluency; however, the key real-world problem in which language is a factor is that it has become difficult to understand the notion of the neoliberal citizen, as found in the work of Foucault, Brown and others, without exploring how it is linked to the English language. All of this means that 'English frenzy' (Park 2009) is alive and well in South Korea as well as other parts of East Asia, as noted by authors such as Kanno (2008), Kubota (2011) and Seargeant (2009), focusing on Japan; Price (2014) focusing on Taiwan; Lin & Man (2010), focusing on Hong Kong; and Butler (2013) and Gao (2014), focusing on China. Indeed, English language competence, valued as a marketable skill, is a worldwide phenomenon, as witnessed by volumes such as Tan & Rubdy (2008) and Coleman (2011), even if it is also a variegated phenomenon, that is, it plays out in different ways in different locations given the very different historical, political, social, cultural and geographical characteristics of these locations. English, along with other valued competences and skills, becomes the mediator of increasing inequality in job markets and societies at large, as we see the emergence of what is, in effect, an 'English divide' (Terasawa 2012).

Research examining this enhanced role for the English language over all other languages is often framed as a case of 'language commodification' (Heller 2002, 2003, 2010a, 2010b). Here there are clear links to Irvine's work cited in the introduction to this paper. Irvine argues that 'it is evident that linguistic skills can be economic resources, and even if some skills are merely status markers their acquisition may be the focus of economic activity'(Irvine 1989: 256), adding that 'utterances may be commodities exchangeable for material goods' (Irvine 1989: 258). In recent years the term 'commodification' has entered the sociolinguistic lexicon with great force to capture the aforementioned situation whereby languages become key skills in job markets. Those who use the term, usually draw on a baseline understanding of commodification as a process via which objects that were, in a previous timeframe, exclusively for personal use and therefore unsellable, become objects of exchange in economic and symbolic markets and therefore are sellable. All of this is seen as a recent phenomenon and is part and parcel of the transformation of language and identity over the past 40 years in many parts of the world. There is little doubt that during this period of time neoliberalism has shaped all kinds of political, social and cultural changes, language being just one of them. And there is little doubt that language is now treated as a skill which, in effect, can be bought and sold in job markets. However, despite all of this, authors such as Block, (2014, 2017b forthcoming), Holborow (2015b) and McGill (2013) have manifested a degree of scepticism with regard to the claim that language has, as a result of such developments, become 'commodified', unless we are using 'commodification' in the more prosaic sense of a simple process by which an object is situated in a market relation of some kind and exchanged for money, and not in the Marxist sense of a product embodying the congealed labour of workers which, when sold, produces surplus value for capitalists who control the means of production. But, of course, many scholars argue that the Marxist take on commodification is the basis of their research, even if their engagement with Marxist literature is very limited. Foundational to such thinking is the work of scholars such as Heller (2002, 2003, 2010a, 2010b) and Boutet (2001, 2008, 2012) and what the latter calls 'the language part of work (*la part langagière du travail*) labour', that is 'the implementation of the linguistic capacities needed to do a job' (Boutet 2012: 208).

Here we move from the world of education to the world of work, and the favoured site for researchers focusing on 'the language part of work' is call centres. This, no doubt, is because of the very obvious importance of language in the labour power of workers in such contexts. For Boutet, as well as scholars such as Cameron (2000, 2005) and Heller & Boutet (2006), work in call centres is controlled by new variants of Tayloristic management,[6] whereby every action forming part of a task is broken down into a series of segments (sometimes lasting just a fraction of a second). The aim is to control time and movement with a view to increasing calculability, efficiency, predictability and ultimately, productivity. On this basis, there have been publications on English language call centres in India (Morgan & Ramanathan 2009; Cowie 2010) and Pakistan (Rahman 2009), Francophone centres in Tunisia (Boutet 2008) and Anglophone Canada (Roy 2003), and bilingual Spanish/English centres in on the US–Mexico border (Alarcón & Heyman 2013), just to name a few examples. In this body of literature, there are a range of issues which are political economic in nature. First, there is a general concern, shared by those outside of sociolinguistics who have focused on call centres, with ALIENATION, that is, how call centre workers feel unhappy, physically 'mortified' and mentally 'ruined' (Marx 1904 [1859]: 74), as a result of the rigid work regimes to which they are subjected. There is also an interest in EXPLOITATION and how surplus value or profit is extracted from call centre employees after overheads (including rent and interest payments), taxes and depreciation of the means of production have been factored in. Of course, these two processes are possible because of one of the key parameters of neoliberalism cited above, the

[6] The term 'Taylorism' refers to the factory organisation and management procedures for mass production outlined by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the early part of the twentieth century (Taylor 1998 [1911]) in the United States.

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off-shorisation of production, in this case, the provision of information services to businesses in the home country from extra-territorial locations, which in most cases are some distance from those being served.

A slightly different angle on work contexts is research focusing on the discursive and material construction of new workers for neoliberal times and the extreme pressure workers around the world are currently subjected to when they enter job markets. For example, Lorente (2010) describes how Filipino domestic workers in Singapore are trained to adopt what she calls 'the script of servitude' whereby the 'frequent use of politeness formulae ... and of very formal address terms ... index the domestic worker's consistent deference to her employer' (Lorente 2010: 52; see also Lorente 2012). English in this context comes to be conflated with other desirable qualities, such as intelligence, competence and modern-ness, a tendency which Herat & McCloughlin (2010) found in their research on recruitment in the Sri Lankan job market. Here, young Sri Lankans who do not have a good command of English are deemed to be less qualified when it comes to other skills and therefore find themselves marginalised in hiring processes. Another example of conflation of language with other qualities and skills can be found in Piller & Takahashi's (2013) account of how a low-cost Japanese airline requires female attendants to be all things to all people: speaking not only Japanese but also English; showing initiative but being demure; being flexible with regard to timetables; and so on. And in the context of China, Zhang (2008) examines how new cosmopolitan professional identities, in effect the Chinese version of the neoliberal citizen, are inseparable from the new cosmopolitan variety of Mandarin which has emerged in recent years. Finally, Allan (2013) notes how the Enhanced Language Training Initiative, set up in Canada in the 2000s with the ostensive aim of helping new arrivals to Canada learn English and enter the job market, has evolved into a somewhat more sinister personality makeover project, whereby language learning has come to be conflated with attitudes and an overall disposition consistent with the notion of the neoliberal citizen.[7]

Elsewhere, researchers based primarily in Europe have eschewed the ethnographic and discourse-analytic approaches driving the research discussed above, exploring language in the workplace from an economic and quantitative perspective known as the 'economics of language' (EL). This approach to the study of how economics and language interrelate has been defined as follows:

> The economics of language rests on the paradigm of mainstream economics and uses the concepts and tools of economics in the study of relationships featuring linguistic variables. It focuses principally, but not exclusively, on those relationships in which economic variables also play a part.
>
> (Grin et al. 2010: 28)

EL is based on 'optimal resource allocation', which sees the field of economics as 'a tool for weighing the advantages and drawbacks of competing options, in order to identify the "optimal" one – namely, that which promises to deliver the best use of scarce resources'

[7] Although most studies of language in the workplace are based on the idea that the ability to use English, or indeed any other language, is usually a job specification, there is evidence to the contrary. In their research on Filipino immigrant workers in a meat packing plant in Australia, Piller & Lising (2014) observed that in general no language was necessary as 'verbal communication plays a limited role on ... conveyor belts' (Piller & Lising 2014: 49). And when the use of a language was necessary, that language was Tagalog and not English.

(Grin 2015: 121). EL research carried out over the past 25 years (e.g. Grin 1990, 1997, 1999, 2010; Grin et al. 2010; Gazzola et al. 2015; Gazzola & Wickström 2016) has explored links between economic variables such as salary, productivity, costs, sales, profit and market share (and the more global concept of 'economic efficiency') and language-related variables. In this sense, there have been studies in contexts such as Quebec and Switzerland showing how multilingual workers in general command higher salaries than their monolingual colleagues. These higher salaries may be linked to the results of other studies showing that when the use of additional languages in the carrying out of work tasks is isolated from other skills being deployed simultaneously, one can see how language use adds value to the labour power deployed by workers.

One noteworthy aspect of EL research is its rejection of the notion, all too common in applied linguistics, that English is, in effect, the only linguistic show in town (or in any case, the language at the centre of most research). The aforementioned Swiss research shows how languages such as French, German and Italian have different levels of value in multilingual Swiss workplaces independent of English. However, the research also links these languages to English, and thus contributes to ongoing debates about the English divide from an EL perspective. For example, Grin (1999) found that in mid-1990s Switzerland, the economic value of a good command of English (as measured in salaries paid to employees) was greater in German-language predominant work places than in French language predominant workplaces: in the former a moderate to good level of English meant an increase in salary of 18.1% and in the latter, it meant 10.2%. One explanation for this difference might be the more international character of German-language companies (more international contacts means more English language communication), but for the purposes of this survey, the importance of EL research along these lines is that it shows how linguistic diversity, on the rise in counties around the world, has very real economic consequences.

EL research has produced interesting and varied results over the years, even if the use of terminology such as 'the total stock of language competences' (Grin et al. 2010: 107) and 'language related price indexes' (Grin et al. 2010: 109) is a far cry from what is found in most applied linguistics literature with political economy leanings, where the primary concern has been with the deployment of multi-semiotic repertoires in a wide range of social contexts. Indeed, most researchers focusing on the latter do not engage with the work of Grin and his associates, preferring to link ideas gleaned from the kind of political economy described above with their ongoing interest in critical ethnography, pragmatics, Bourdieu's (1991) notions of symbolic capital and linguistic markets, and critical discourse analysis (CDA).

CDA is perhaps the one corner of applied linguistics where one would expect to find the strongest roots in political economy. After all, Fairclough's (1992) early work on the creeping marketisation of institutional discourses was clearly linked to economic globalisation, and CDA, on the whole, has always sought not only to analyse discourse, but to challenge dominant ideologies and propose changes in power relations in societies (Zotzmann & O'Regan 2016). However, with notable exceptions (e.g. Machin & Richardson 2008), over the years many CDA researchers seem to have abandoned explicit links to Marxism as more Foucauldian notions of power and ideology have taken over. This can be seen in much of the current work focusing on nationalism, racism, xenophobia, gender bias, homophobia and environmentalism being published in monographs and journals such as *Critical Discourses Studies* and *Language and Politics*.

Indeed, Fairclough (2014) has recently felt compelled to re-state the case for a 'radical view of CDA', in a sense reminding CDA researchers of the links to Marxism upon which CDA was originally based. Critics of CDA, most notably Holborow (2015a), have made this very point about CDA, and she has based her particular form of discourse analysis very directly on Marxist scholarship.

Despite criticisms of CDA, it is in early CDA that one finds the first references to the rise of the enterprise culture and the marketisation of institutional discourses in applied linguistics (Fairclough 1992, 1995), as since the late 1970s more and more domains of activity have come to be discursively constructed in terms of the market metaphor (Kelly-Holmes & Mautner 2010; Mautner 2010). For example, Holborow (2012b, 2013, 2015a) has examined the rise to prominence in education and society at large of 'neoliberal keywords' such as 'the market', 'human capital', 'the entrepreneur' and 'austerity'. She shows how these and other constructs become agents of ideology as they help form and shape our ways of understanding the world around us and events in it. In effect, they 'are so much a part of the dominant ideology that they pass unnoticed [even if] their meanings are in flux and disputed' (Holborow 2015a: 72). Elsewhere, Park (2013) describes how 'diversity management' in Singaporean workplaces has been co-opted by neoliberal management discourses in such a way that it not only benefits the company by enhancing its public image but also allows . . . corporations to maximally utilize their employees' potential by harnessing the wide-ranging skills, knowledge, and experience represented by their varying cultural and social backgrounds' (Park 2013: 559). Gunnarson (2010) makes a similar point examining how, via their webpages, Swedish companies celebrate difference and diversity in the workplace. And further to this kind of discursive colonisation, at the more concrete level of actual practices, there is the encroachment of business and jobs on areas of individuals' personal lives, which were previously considered separate from the world of work. These areas are increasingly incorporated into extensions of the work day beyond the physical and psychological borders which existed previously, an example being organised drinking fests and the glorification of the worker who is available 24/7 (Fleming 2015).

Elsewhere, O'Regan has developed a Marxist-based 'immanent critique', whereby a 'theoretical position is . . . critiqued . . . on the basis of the grounds and assumptions which have already been established and set in train by the position which is your object of scrutiny' (O'Regan 2014: 534). O'Regan has applied this technique in his detailed analysis of academic discussions of issues in World Englishes such as English as lingua franca (O'Regan 2014, 2017). Meanwhile, Chun (2017) examines the ways that academics, politicians, the media and lay people represent the economy in the wake of the 2008 depression. Chun adopts a clearly Marxist-based discourse-analytic framework as he focuses on the kinds of common sense understandings of the economy that lay people construct; media representations of the economy and how it works; how hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses interrelate and stand in open conflict with each other; and how despite the recurrence of economic crises, so endemic to capitalism, members of the general public never seem to lose their faith in capitalism as the only viable economic system.

Yet another real-world phenomenon in which political economy and language figures centrally is tourism studies, as an increasing number of applied linguists turn their attention to how aspects of local and global economies are linked to language policies and practices in the tourist industry (e.g. Jaworski & Pritchard 2005; Jaworski et al. 2009; Thurlow & Jaworski 2010, 2011, 2012; Jaworski, Thurlow & Heller 2014). These researchers find inspiration in ongoing work in anthropology on the 'commodification of culture' as a more general construct (e.g. Comaroff & Comaroff 2009; Lury 2011).Foundational to this line of research is the idea that in 'the context of the new globalized economy, and with the new types of job opportunities it brings (for example in tourism) and the market value it creates for locality, the value, function and experiences of multilingualism and particular languages ... are also renegotiated and reinvented' (Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes 2011: 327). In more general terms, Heller (e.g. 2011) has argued for a shift in thinking about bi/multilingualism worldwide, embedding her discussions of evolving policies and practices in the political economic sphere within what she calls 'postnationalism'. Heller's take on postnationalism does not include an argument that nation-states no longer matter, but it is about a point in history when the nation-state ceases to be the origin and focal point of all forms of polity, as this role is taken over by supranational and/or global entities. Thus, there is now a growing literature on language policies and practices in minority language settings in Europe such as Catalonia, where the traditional dual Catalan-Spanish bilingualism is now inflected by the languages of immigration as well as the growing presence of English, particularly in the tourist trade (Pujolar 2006; Pujolar & Jones 2012). In essence, language policy makers have shifted their orientation, and linguistic practices on the ground have taken a new and different direction, such that there has been a very tangible move from what has been termed 'pride' – languages as identity markers – to 'profit' – languages as a means through which money can be made (Duchêne 2009; Heller 2011; Duchêne & Heller 2012;). As regards these and other developments, there is a need for language policy as a field of enquiry to situate political economy front and centre as opposed to only having a minor presence, as has been the case in the past (Block 2017c). In this sense, Ricento's (2015) recent edited collection, *Language policy and political economy*, and two recent special issues of the journal *Language Policy* (Ricento, Peled & Ives 2014; Pérez-Milans 2015) are positive steps forward.

6.2 Examinations of social class in applied linguistics

Another area of applied linguistics where political economy has made inroads is in the revival of interest in social class (Block 2014, 2015a, 2016a). In some of the foundational work in sociolinguistics, social class was in evidence as a key construct. Three important examples are Labov (1966) on how individuals' relative positions in the social class stratification of 1960s New York led to the production of particular speech features and patterns in English; Trudgill's (1974) charting of the English spoken by the working-class residents of Norwich in the UK; and Bernstein's (1971) work on the interrelationship between social class and language in terms of social structures in society and language socialisation in home and school settings in the UK. However, as we moved through the 1980s and 1990s, social class fell into a fairly long period of relative erasure.[8] On the one hand, the rise of poststructuralist

[8] This, notwithstanding, prominent examples of research in which social class did figure as a construct (e.g. Eckert 1989; Foley 1990), to say nothing of Williams's (1992) *Sociolinguistics: A sociological critique*, which can be read as a critical lambasting of sociolinguistics for not taking political economy seriously.

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approaches across different areas of applied linguistics (see McNamara 2012 for a discussion) led many people to question what they saw as a kind of social class determinism in the work of Labov, Trudgill and (to a lesser extent perhaps) Bernstein, namely the basic idea that class was embodied in individuals and that in a somewhat mechanical and predicable fashion, it determined the ways that they spoke English. On the other hand, there was a wholesale embrace of mainstream globalisation literature from 2000 onwards (Block & Cameron 2002), in which there was a great deal written about how societies were being reconfigured in ways which made analytical frameworks developed for a previous stage in history obsolete, if not wrong. Social class thus came to be seen as a relic of the past and an ill-suited construct for emerging events and phenomena in late twentieth-century- and early twenty-first-century societies.

However, in the past decade, this trend towards erasure has been reversed as first Rampton (2006, 2010) and Collins (2006, 2009), and then other researchers have focused on class as part of their general turn to repertoire (Snell 2013) as the way to capture how individuals possess and deploy a range of semiotic resources in communication, 'tailoring linguistic styles in ongoing and lifelong projects of self-construction and differentiation' (Eckert 2012: 97–98). For example, Snell (2010) and Moore (2012) have combined their interest in linguistic variation, multimodal repertoires and style with an interest in social class, focusing, respectively, on adolescent speech patterns and forms in Teesside, in the north-east of England, and Bolton, in the north-west of England. Meanwhile, away from the Anglophone world, Theodoropoulou (2014) examines how the different uses and styling of Greek index social class positions in contemporary Athens. Finally, in a series of recent publications, I have explored how social class intersects with issues in second language acquisition (Block 2012b), language and migration (Block 2016b forthcoming), language education (Block 2015b, 2016c forthcoming) and political discourses (Block 2017d forthcoming, 2017e forthcoming), while the contributions to Kanno (2014) situate class as the central construct in ethnographically-oriented studies of languages in education and society at large.

Closely related to an interest in class is an interest in inequality. Pennycook has highlighted how English as an international language 'colludes with many of the pernicious processes of globalisation, deludes many learners through the false promises it holds out for social and material gain, and excludes many people by operating as an exclusionary class dialect, favouring particular people, countries, cultures and forms of knowledge' (Pennycook 2007: 101). This notion that English mediates inequality and class differences can be seen clearly in collections such as Harbert et al. (2009) and the literature on East Asian contexts cited above (see in particular Park & Wee 2012). However, it is also evident wherever English medium instruction has been integrated into mainstream education, a process engendering situations in which it is children and young adults from middle- and upper-class positions in society who have the most and best quality access to English. This is as much the case with bilingual English-Spanish schools in Madrid (Martín Rojo 2010, 2013; Relaño 2015) as it is in bilingual English-Spanish schools in South America (de Mejia 2005) or with English language instruction in mainstream schools in Mexico (López-Gopar & Sughrua 2014). In countries with a post-colonial relationship with English, social class is likewise embedded in issues around access to and acquisition of English, as noted by LaDousa (2014) and Ramanathan (2005), with reference to India, and Blommaert (2010), Blommaert & Makoe (2011) and

Mufwene (2008), with reference to a range of African contexts such as Tanzania and South Africa.

But, of course, English is not the only language in the world to be drawn into the complexities inherent in the intersection of class and education. Heller (1999, 2006) documents the class conflict which arose when the French immersion school that she studied in Ontario was founded: Anglophone middle-class parents saw French as extra cultural capital for their children, while Francophone working-class parents wanted to conserve French but also wanted their children to become competent users of English. Meanwhile, in the United States, two-way English-Spanish immersion programmes have also come to be class battlegrounds, as they are 'viewed as enrichment education by many middle- to upper-class English monolingual parents' (Kleyn & Adelman Reyes 2011: 215). Examining activities in such a school in California, Palmer (2009) notes how middle-class children are able to monopolise their teachers' attention because of their more developed knowledge of how to use emerging learning opportunities in the classroom to their advantage.

In addition, in bi/multilingual societies, in which two or more languages or two or more varieties of the same language are in regular use, class issues also arise around language choice and language use. For example, in Catalonia, there is a constant tension around Catalan and Spanish and the social class positions of preferent speakers of both: Spanish is more generally identified as the language of the working class (and in recent years, of immigrants), while Catalan is the middle-class language (Woolard 1989; Pujolar 2001; Frekko 2013; Codó & Patiño-Santos 2014). Elsewhere, in Singapore, *Singlish*, as the local Singaporean variety of English, is now positioned as the language of the economically less well-off in society (Tupas 2011; Kang 2012), while in the US, middle-class African Americans are often caught between speaking middle-class English (identified as 'white') and strong historically rooted affiliations to varieties of African American vernacular English (Fought 2006).

A related emergent area of research examines the intersection of mobility and language practices, both of which are impacted by political economic developments emanating from the policies and practices at the societal and nation-state levels. Darvin & Norton (2014) discuss how against the backdrop of neoliberal policies and practices and changes in job markets, migration policy and the arrival of migrants with varying qualifications are the chief means through which government can police workforces and satisfy the needs of capitalists. Focusing specifically on two adolescent Filipino migrants in Canada, they show how 'social class is inscribed in the different social and learning trajectories of these migrant students' (Darvin & Norton 2014: 115. They also note how 'from the linguistic resources they acquire in their country of origin to the social networks they become part of in their country of settlement, their opportunities for the future are largely shaped by the affordances and constraints of their class positions (Darvin & Norton 2014: 115). Elsewhere, Sabaté (2013, 2015) has focused on the sociocultural and linguistic practices taking place in *locutorios* (shops in Spain offering working-class and poor immigrants' phone and computer services which they would not ordinarily be able to afford). Embedding her discussion in the liberalisation of the Spanish telecommunications industry from the 1990s onwards, she shows how immigrant-owned, operated and customed *locutorios* come to be alternatives and sites of resistance to Spanish telecommunications firms and their attempts to monopolise and extract as much profit as possible from their immigrant customers. Elsewhere, at the other end of the international pecking order are Vandrick's (1995, 2011, 2014) 'privileged international students' (Vandrick 1995), or 'students of the new global elite' (Vandrick 2011), that is, the privileged, multilingual, cosmopolitan students from around the world who study at North American universities on their way to taking their places on the world stage as fully-fledged members of the international elite which transcend nation-state borders (Block 2012c).

6.3 Language teaching and learning

One area of applied linguistics in which political economy issues in general have been absent is language teaching and learning. However, there are indications that this situation is beginning to change. For example, Flores (2013) argues that TESOL practitioners need to be wary of how 'the shift occurring in the field of TESOL that has produced plurilingualism as a policy ideal parallels the production of a neoliberal subject that fits the political and economic context of our current sociohistorical period– in particular, the desire for flexible workers and lifelong learners to perform service-oriented and technological jobs as part of a post-Fordist political economy' (Flores 2013: 501). Elsewhere Kubota (2014) makes a similar point regarding unanticipated and unwanted alliances. She argues that the 'multi/pluri turn in applied linguistics' has distracted critical-minded researchers away from the bigger issues of our times (e.g. neoliberalism and its effects), as they often focus on the minutia of multi/plurilingual practices in increasingly more complex societies in a celebratory but uncritical way. For both Flores and Kubota, there is a danger that many researchers may ignore how the uncritical promotion of multi/pluriculturalism and multi/plurilingualism makes them complicit with neoliberal policies and practices and rising inequality (see Blommaert 2016 for a response to Kubota on this point).

Kubota has also noted how Japanese nationals learning English to communicate with people from other countries no longer do so for high-minded cosmopolitan ideals, but for instrumental, business-related proposes (Kubota 2011, 2013, 2015). In Kubota (2015) we see how Japanese workers learning English display nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes towards their Chinese and Korean interlocutors. In this and other similar cases, language learning related to diversity management and broadening horizons has become part of the neoliberal agenda, but of greater importance is how the intersection of business, intercultural contacts and enduring localised thinking (the recalcitrant nationalism and xenophobia cited above) make for an explosive real-world problem in which language figures prominently. It is for this reason that both Flores and Kubota argue for a critical approach to language education as a way of calling attention to, and raising consciousness about, the kind of neoliberal/intercultural intersectionalities that they have encountered. Relevant here is Chun's (2015) critical approach to literacies, which means moving below the surface meaning of texts to uncover the deeper generative ideologies. In his analysis of conversations with teachers and classroom discussions in English for academic purposes (EAP) education in Canada, Chun explores how neoliberal discourses permeate classroom practices on the way to examining how the critical literacy strategies and practices which he employs might work in such classrooms, an exploration which resonates with Flores's and Kubota's respective discussions.

Shifting away from issues related exclusively to English language teaching and learning, Block (2012b) is a call for second language acquisition and learning (SLA/L) researchers to take on board social class in their work. One important factor in SLA/L is access to the target language. However, access is not just a localised phenomenon having to do with the immediacies of isolated interactions (the nature of input provided to interlocutors positioned as language learners and the latter's output); rather, it is a bigger phenomenon, involving the amount and nature of the opportunities that second language learners have to read, write, hear and speak the target language. And as I have argued elsewhere (Block 2012c), access to second languages is shaped by positions in class hierarchies. Among other things, as was observed in sections 6.1 and 6.2, middle-class and wealthy parents can afford to pay for additional second language tuition for their children, or they can hire a caregiver who speaks a second language; working-class and poor parents cannot provide such support for their children. SLA/L researchers may choose to ignore such factors, but they do so at the risk of missing a key causal element in the processes that they research. Thus, while they can document what learners do in cognitive and linguistic terms and they can attribute cause to effect as regards a particular task design and the production of particular linguistic features, there are other causes and shaping factors to consider in the process of second language learning, and class is arguably a very important one.

Moving to language teaching materials, Gray (2010, 2012) has been in the forefront of bringing political economic issues to bear on the global English language textbook, highlighting in particular how these books are imbued with a neoliberal ethos of aspiration and individualism. In more recent work Gray & Block (2014) have noted how English language textbooks have evolved in such a way that whereas previously (e.g. the 1970s and 80s) it was possible to find texts and references to working-class speakers of English, today this is well-nigh impossible. The erasure of class in such textbooks has coincided with the rise of neoliberalism as dominant rationality (Dardot & Laval 2013) as the ideal English language user portrayed in them is a socially disembedded individual who travels and shops a great deal, is technologically savvy and works in the services sector, often (though not always) at the top end of the job scale. Interestingly, the move away from native-speaker-based textbooks, in which many of the activities revolved around texts about 'life in X' (where X = Britain, the US, Australia and so on), has meant that nation-state-bound issues such as the class divide, have been replaced by a complete surrender to neoliberal orthodoxy (the aforementioned consumerist culture which permeates most activities) and the embracing of acceptable liberal politics in their most superficial forms (environmentalism without the commendation of big capital; gender equality with no underlying analysis of how gender politics are constructed and work). In work in progress (e.g. Block & Gray 2017 forthcoming), the authors extend this kind of textbook analysis to French language textbooks. Meanwhile, Bori (forthcoming) is an interesting analysis of Catalan language textbooks, in which the author finds many of the same neoliberal thematic strands in books designed for the teaching and learning of a language which is highly localised with practically no international pretensions.

Finally, in the realm of language teacher education, there is an emergent line of research on how pre- and post-service programmes insert student teachers into Taylorised behavioural regimes. (Gray & Block 2012; Block 2015b; Block & Gray 2016). For example, Block & Gray (2016) note how the marketisation of education in countries like the UK has had a great

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impact on initial teacher preparation programmes such as the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) and the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA). Drawing on accounts of ongoing activity provided by student teachers on a PGCE course and recordings of post-observation sessions on a CELTA course, they argue that student teachers on these programmes are socialised into teaching regimes that are far more routinised, instrumental and socially disembedded than they appear at first glance. Focusing on little more than the technical minutiae of teaching, the PGCE and the CELTA are emblematic of the deskilling and discrediting of professionals which has occurred in a range of domains in recent decades.

For the moment, this line of research is somewhat tentative and speculative, based as it is on relatively limited databases. Nevertheless, it is an attempt to subject language teacher education, a field which has tended to focus on issues such as the nature of language teacher knowledge and the pros and cons and ins and outs of reflective practice (Gray & Block 2012), to a much needed political economic gaze, one which moves below the surface to examine the deeper socioeconomic forces shaping language teacher education policy and practice.

7. The future of political economy in applied linguistics

In this paper, I have cited a large number of applied linguistics publications which contain some element of political economy. I have attempted to be comprehensive, while realising that no survey can ever include every single relevant publication ever produced. In this sense, what has been discussed in the previous sections amounts to a sample of what is out there and one that is partial in both senses of the word (i.e. incomplete and reflecting the view of the author). In this, the final section, I shift from past and present survey mode to future-oriented critique, as I outline issues arising, or things to bear in mind, in research which attempts to link political economy with real-world issues in which language is a key element.

First, it is worth noting how in much of the literature cited thus far, there is passing mention of political economy but very little in-depth discussion of what kind of political economy researchers are actually doing. To my mind, this is a problem for this budding area of research in applied linguistics, not least because, bereft of a good understanding of the past and present of political economy, and above all what a political economy inspired analysis entails, researchers can only deal in generalities and/or oversimplify the interrelationship between political economy and language related issues. Elsewhere, I have written the following with reference to the interdisciplinarity implicit in any attempt to bring political economy into discussions in sociolinguistics:

> working in an interdisciplinary way, and specifically drawing on political economy for inspiration, is not a simple affair. It requires reading beyond the seemingly obligatory source, David Harvey's (2005) *A brief history of neoliberalism*, and a handful of sociolinguistics publications which are positioned as 'political economy' ... It requires immersion in the multitude of publications coming out every day analysing the current economic crisis. And, I would add, it requires some reading of older sources, from Smith to Ricardo to Mill to Marx, and onwards to the foundational theoretical work sustaining dominant economic developments and trends, such as neoliberalism: Hayek, Rand, Friedman, Becker and others.
>
> (Block 2017b forthcoming)

Of course, as I am often reminded when I say or write such things, not everyone has time to go back into history and read Smith and Marx, or even to keep abreast of the numerous political economy based publications coming out every day. Nevertheless, surely applied linguists can do more than they often do at present, which is to cite one or two political economy based publications (as I say in the quote, Harvey 2005 being the most popular source) on their way to a rather thin portrayal of political economy issues in their work. I insist that here I am writing about publications which contain explicit claims to being based in political economy and therefore I am not arguing for a political economy takeover of applied linguistics writ large.

A second matter worth highlighting has to do with how we understand the times in which we live. Many of the lines of research discussed above are framed within the notion of the so-called 'new economy', deemed to be part and parcel of the broader forces and flows of neoliberalism. The term aims to capture several key political economic developments which have emerged in recent years: 'the emergence of new regimes of regulation of work (flexibility, individual responsibility); modes of production that are increasing mediated, whether technologically, linguistically, or culturally; . . . the growth of the tertiary sector; and increased emphasis on symbolic added value, as well as . . . openings for niche markets articulated in complex ways with global ones' (Heller 2011: 20). However, it is worth noting, as Grin et al. (2010: 195) suggest, that services 'have been a major and growing part of economies around the world for decades' (and, it could be added, for centuries). But more importantly, talk of the 'new economy' and the shift in balance, whereby economies become far more service-oriented than production-oriented, is more about the wealthier nations of the world than the world as a whole. In this sense, applied linguists taking a political economic stance regarding the objects of their enquiries seldom if ever note how the shift to services in one part of the planet means that countries in other parts must take up the production slack (although Heller, for example, actually does do this in her work). Thus while there is often a celebratory tone employed when discussing how countries in Europe, North America and the Pacific rim have become more service oriented, little is said about the hundreds of millions of workers worldwide currently toiling in factory settings which are more reminiscent of nineteenth-century England (Engels 2009 [1845]) than the idealised work environments in the technology sector (think Silicon Valley, even if as Fuchs 2015 notes, work conditions in the California idyll are not always as ideal as they are purported to be). This particular aspect of global economics needs to be borne in mind before we get too carried away with how we are working in environments in which language and communication skills are so important.

A third point I would like to make about future applied linguistics research based on political economy has to do with how we position ourselves with regard to ontology and epistemology: 'ontology refers to what we consider to be the nature of being and existence, our "actual reality" and what it is we are studying, researching and writing about, while epistemology refers to what we consider to be the origin, nature and limits of human knowledge, and how we come to "know it"' (Block 2016b forthcoming). Most scholarship in political economy is realist as regards ontology and epistemology, which puts it in conflict with the generally dominant poststructuralist approach that permeates most current research in applied linguistics. This poststructuralist approach 'questions fixed categories or structures, oppositional binaries, closed systems, and stable truths and embraces seeming contradictions' (Duff 2012: 412). One important element here is a strong affinity to the so-called 'discursive turn' in the

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social sciences and humanities, whereby the subjective and objective are conflated, as are epistemology and ontology: the only ontology is that which can be grasped by the researcher, that which is 'discursively constructed'. In marked contrast to this approach, Bhaskar (1989) proposes a critical realist approach. This approach acknowledges that epistemology is variable and ever-changing, and that theorising is a discursively and socially constructed activity (what Bhaskar calls the 'transitive' dimension). It also posits the existence of social structures which govern social activity even if they lie beyond our ability to grasp them (what Bhaskar calls the 'intransisitive' dimension).

Most work in political economy (and certainly the work cited in this paper) adopts a view of the world consistent with critical realism, and in this sense the authors may be considered (either explicitly or by default) critical realists. My reason for introducing critical realism into this discussion is my belief that a key implication of developing research in an interdisciplinary manner (in this case bringing political economy into applied linguistics research) is the need to be cognisant of the epistemological and ontological frames within which source authors are working. Applied linguists interested in political economy need to engage more deeply with this discipline, even if doing so leads them to epistemological and ontological dissonances, or indeed, to changes in the ways in which they understand the world and how it works.

Beyond more abstract notions of ontology and epistemology, there is also research methodology to consider. One consideration is how researchers operationalise key constructs taken from political economy, such as inequality, class and exploitation: in effect, how do we know these phenomena when we encounter them? In my ongoing research on social class (e.g. Block 2014), I have insisted that we need to adopt models with multiple dimensions (see my discussion of class above) if we are ever to say anything significant about the interrelationship between class and language and communication practices. Of course, such models only make sense once they are confronted with data collection of one kind or another and hence are operationalised. In the review above, we see how those examining the worlds of work and tourism often rely on document analysis as much as the analysis of interactions recorded and transcribed, lining these up with theories about new developments in job markets and tourism activity around the world.

Regarding the recording of interactions, there is by now a well-established tradition of linguistic ethnography, which 'holds that language and social life are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity' (Rampton et al. 2004: 2). And this tradition has been central to varying degrees in the many studies of how social class is constructed in ongoing interactions (e.g. Rampton 2006; Snell 2010; Moore 2012; Theodoropoulou 2014).

However, at the same time, there are researchers who have been more concerned with relating the stories that people tell about their lives to key phenomena in political economy, that is, how people construct their lives when they are asked to do so by researchers. For some time now, researchers in the social sciences and humanities have been talking about the 'narrative turn' (Clandinin 2007), whereby there is progressively more and more interest in how individuals present their life stories when communicating with others and how these stories might be analysed and interpreted, and this development is present in applied linguistics (e.g. De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012; Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik 2014). An interesting combination of narrative research with a political economy angle is Block & Gallego-Balsà's (2017) study of the life stories told by the children of immigrants in Catalonia who have managed to overcome class and ethnic barriers on their way to university studies.

8. Conclusion

As I noted at the beginning of this survey article, political economy is a broad church. There is, on the one hand, a more traditional, quantitative tendency, one which is closely linked to the field of economics (without the political prefix). On the other hand, there is a more interdisciplinary tendency which has arisen in recent years, which has seen a number of Marxist geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, cultural theorists and, of course, economists, writing about issues which fall under the general purview of political economy. Publications produced within this latter tendency are perhaps not to the liking of researchers aligned with the former more traditional, quantitative tendency, but there is little doubt that much of what is understood as political economy today comes from within this interdisciplinary Marxist tendency. Meanwhile, applied linguistics is also a board church, especially if one accepts the all-encompassing version of the field that I have adopted here. This version includes sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology work on a range of social domains (see sections 6.1 and 6.2) as well as language teaching and learning research (see section 6.3). Marrying a diverse amalgam of interests and approaches in political economy with an equally diverse array of interests and approaches in applied linguistics might seem to some like a recipe for – if not disaster – then certainly academic disorder. However, my point throughout this article has been that the times in which we live compel us at least to try to establish and work within such new configurations, while being careful not to trivialise any of the constituent research traditions that we are bringing together. For here we have a basic truth about interdisciplinary research which merits the qualification of 'well done', namely that it must be done on the back of an extensive as possible command of all of the disciplines being drawn on. A tall order to be sure, but one which, if followed, may give applied linguistics a broader appeal, just as the ground-breaking work of David Harvey has opened up, for the field of geography, new avenues of enquiry and exposure to the general public for the field of geography which previously did not exist.

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