Translingual Entanglements of English

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Abstract

Arguing that the social semiotic trajectory of translingual approaches – transcending what is generally seen as language – is equally, if not more, important than translingual approaches that seek to transcend divisions between named languages, this paper takes up the idea of *entanglements of English* as a way to understand the multiple ways English is connected to, and part of, the material world. Global Englishes can usefully focus not just on the translingual relations among English and other languages but also among English and other entanglements. A backstreet sign for an English school in the Philippines suggests an assemblage of cheap English, sexual desire, neoliberal goals, domestic workers, multilingual repertoires, Korean English frenzy, American colonialism, brownouts, call centres, racial hierarchies, global inequality, unequal resources, researcher subjectivity and tangled wires. Developing the ideas of *assemblages* and *entanglements*, this paper argues that new approaches to materiality and the interconnectedness of things can take us forward in a search for alternative ways of thinking about the distribution of unequal linguistic resources.

Introduction: English and the Global North

English arguably remains a language of the Global North, not so much because its origins lie in geographically northern regions, but rather because it is so embedded in the institutions and injustices that the Global North created and still endeavours to maintain that its prevalence and use cannot be separated from the political and economic forces that dominate the world. The world Englishes (WE) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) movements have both, in their own ways, sought to turn English into a language of the Global South. By insisting that English is the property of all, that ownership of English no longer rests in the hands of its so-called native speakers, that English can be understood as global, variable and multilingual, proponents of these two related programs have aimed to *delink* English from its origins and ownership and to shift the centre of English from the Global North. While both have arguably achieved some success In this endeavour – enabling

many to see English as locally inflected, as no longer encumbered by conventional decrees, as no longer tied to particular speakers and places – such gains have only been partial.

Neither framework provides the tools to appreciate the extent of the political and theoretical *delinking* that is necessary to decolonize English (Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Mignolo, 2018). Both WE and ELF approaches have been widely critiqued for lacking a sufficient politics to engage with the global implications of English (Bruthiaux, 2003; O'Regan, 2014). More politically engaged approaches such as linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992, 2009), meanwhile, have presented only a dystopian narrative of English domination, failing thereby to attend to the complex relations between English and its uses and users. And none of these approaches has engaged seriously enough with the epistemological and ontological challenges raised long ago by Parakrama (1995): These Other Englishes present a far greater set of concerns for our ways of thinking about language than just a decentring of our linguistic framework. Southern or decolonial approaches to applied linguistics require far more profound questions about global inequalities, language ideologies and language ontologies (Pennycook, 2020; Pennycook and Makoni, 2020)

A focus on *unequal Englishes* – "the unequal ways and situations in which Englishes are arranged, configured, and contested" (Tupas and Rubdy, 2015, p. 3; Tupas and Salonga, 2016) – partly addresses these concerns by asking whether "all English users regardless of their racial, gender, socioeconomic, and other background" can "equally transgress linguistic boundaries and engage in hybrid and fluid linguistic practices" (Kubota, 2015, p. 33). By keeping *Englishes* in place (while acknowledging their inequality), however, this approach fails to unravel the linguistic ideologies that maintain the language myth in the first place. Likewise, while the introduction of the idea of English as a multilingua franca (EMF) (Jenkins, 2015) usefully draws attention to the multilingualism of which English is only a part, it maintains the idea of *English* as a lingua franca, rather than starting with multilingua francas as the departure point (Makoni and Pennycook, 2012). We need to think in terms of the unequal distribution of linguistic resources in relation to other resources (Dovchin et al, 2016) rather than the unequal status of a diversity of languages or of a form of multilingualism that can nonetheless be called English.

While acknowledging the importance of these attempts to relocate English in the Global South (English as an Asian language), I want to suggest some alternative ways

forward for thinking about this. The trajectory I propose to follow is one that has expanded the scope of language studies from a narrower conception of language as system to a broader vision of social semiotics, while also providing scope for an alternative materialist politics. Canagarajah (2013) suggests that the idea of *translinguistic practices* implies an understanding not only that "communication transcends individual languages," (we use repertoires of linguistic resources without necessary recourse to the notions of languages) but also that "communication transcends words and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances" (Canagarajah, 2013, p.6) (we draw on a wide set of possible resources to achieve communication). Just as linguistic landscape research has shifted from a focus on languages on signs in public spaces – "the presence, representation, meanings and interpretation of languages displayed in public places" (Shohamy and Ben-Rafael, 2015, p.1) – towards a much broader consideration of semiotic complexity (Blommaert, 2013) – "images, photos, sounds (soundscapes), movements, music, smells (smellscapes), graffiti, clothes, food, buildings, history, as well as people who are immersed and absorbed in spaces by interacting with LL in different ways" (Shohamy, 2015, pp. 153-154) – so a focus on the translingual entanglements of English can benefit from questioning not only the boundaries between languages (which, as Lee, 2019, notes, may be overstated as a resistant praxis), but also the boundaries between different modes of semiosis.

This focus on *semiotic landscapes* (Eckert, 2018)[1] may arguably be interpreted as the *4th wave* of sociolinguistics, a focus that is bringing a range of new political, epistemological and ontological questions to the table. This can help us get beyond a focus on pluralised languages: Talking of 'Englishes' (even if unequal) does not take us far enough and cannot capture the "multilingual repertoire of speakers" or the "complex semiotic webs within and across which speakers move, comprising not just languages as we know them, but bits of language such as registers, accents, words, and *assemblages of form-meaning elements*, such as rap rhythms and embodied performances" (Williams, 2017, p.4, emphasis added). This brings together an understanding of language, space and place, linking current views on translanguaging with an understanding of the semiotic landscape (Pennycook, 2019). Looking at this broader approach to translinguistic studies (Pennycook, 2017), this paper

[1] Eckert's (2018) final chapter on semiotic landscapes does not propose this as a 4th wave (for Eckert, this is the endpoint of the 3rd wave and its focus on style) but I suggest this as an alternative reading of where her argument leads.

asks how we can come to a better understanding of global Englishes, if we focus not just on the translingual relations among English and other languages but also among English and other entanglements. Developing the ideas of *assemblages* and *entanglements*, this paper suggests that new approaches to materiality and the interconnectedness of things can provide useful ways forward here.

Achieve Goal English: Tangled wires and brownouts

Let us ground this discussion in a backstreet in Cebu[2] in the Philippines, and a sign (Fig 1: Achieve Goal English) [about here], announcing "AGESL: Achieve Goal English as a Second Language". For those of us attuned to linguistic landscapes and world Englishes, our attention may be drawn to the English of the sign, both in terms of its relation to other languages (the absence of Cebuano or Filipino, for example) and in terms of its slight divergence from central expectations: At least for some users of English, there seems something slightly odd about this "Achieve Goal English" name, though we should immediately be cautious about ascribing too much to this in a world where commercial slogans follow their own grammatical logics (Heinz/ Nutella's "Spread the Happy" or Thai Tourism's "Find your Fabulous" amongst many others). We should be cautious too of trying to categorise this as some sort of Philippine English. Of more interest is the interpellative force of the sign (calling whoever the sign is intended for, to see English as a goal) and its material position in the landscape.

The location of this sign matters: It is on a backstreet in Banilad, Cebu City, in the central Philippines, surrounded by the bustle of cars, bikes and Cebu *jeepnees*. And above the sign is a tangled expanse of electricity wires. The state and precarity of municipal wiring are often a good indicator of economic development (United Nations, 2006): the material relations between this sign and the wiring above it matter. Much has been made of the supposedly Philippine English "brownout" (a partial blackout or dimming of the lights) (Bautista, 1997). Like a number of such terms claimed as specifically local, and exoticized as part of a regional English, its status is unclear: the term itself seems to date to the USA in the early 1940s and it is commonly used in textbooks on power systems (Blume, 2016, p.

[2] Questions about why I have focused on Cebu and how to understand my own positionality in relation to the discussion here are tied to the work I do for the Coastal Conservation and Education Foundation in Cebu as a conservation scuba diver. A larger argument that I cannot expand on here links reef conservation and fish identification with the entanglements discussed in this paper.

183). It is of course possible that its provenance is nonetheless in the Philippines or that it originated in different places at the same time. It may also be that speakers of other varieties of English, unfamiliar with the term, assumed it to be specifically Philippine English when they encountered it there[3]. Such terms may have multiple origins, and further operate variously across different speaker repertoires. Of more importance, however, is that it is indeed a fairly common term in the Philippines (particularly "summer brownouts") because of the insecurity of the power supply. It may therefore be more useful to focus on the relations between English in the Philippines and the tangled wires behind the AGESL sign, and all they imply for electricity supplies, health, environment and power.

For Bennett (2010, p. 24), the "electrical power grid offers a good example of an assemblage. It is a material cluster of charged parts that have indeed affiliated, remaining in sufficient proximity and coordination to produce distinctive effects." Analysing a blackout in the United States, Bennett asks how we can understand such events in terms of assemblages and agencies, or put another way, how we make sense of something like a power failure or a brownout. If human agency does not seem to play much of a role (it may not be attributable to human error), do we simply fall back on a position that "stuff happens" or might it be more productive to explore how it is that events occur (or to unravel what 'stuff happens' may mean)? For a "vital materialist" the electrical grid "is better understood as a volatile mix of coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electron streams, profit motives, heat, lifestyles, nuclear fuel, plastic, fantasies of mastery, static, legislation, water, economic theory, wire and wood" (Bennett, 2010, p. 25). These tangled wires are more than just carriers of current, or lines indexical of economic development. Rather they are variously connected to forms of power. It is this way of looking at assemblages, and in this context the complex relations between a sign for an English school and its emplacement, that is important for this paper: tangled wires are entangled wires.

Assemblages and entanglements

The idea of entanglements of English aims to shift the sociolinguistic focus towards a more profound sense of interconnectedness. This is very different from the sociolinguistic trope

[3] The term additionally has a number of popular uses in different parts of the world, such as not remembering something from the night before until mentioned (not quite a total blackout) (Urban Dictionary, 2019).

of context, with its static relations between pregiven backgrounds and assumed languages; nor is it limited to a critical sociolinguistic or discourse analytic insistence that we have to focus on language in relation to power, class, capital, gender, race and other social categories (though all these matter). Rather, by bringing together both old and new materialisms (Bennett, 2010), by questioning assumed divisions between humans and non-humans (Pennycook, 2018), between living and non-living existents (Povinelli, 2016), a notion of assemblages insists that we think again about how language relates to the world. A variety of recent approaches have sought ways to deal with the "total linguistic/ semiotic fact" in relation to "cultural ideology" and "sociolinguistic stratification" (Blommaert, 2017, p.58), to understand the multiplicity of factors that come together around people and place: "These dense and complex objects are the 'stuff' of the study of language in society" (2017, p.59).

If, as Blommaert urges, we do not seek so much to reduce this complexity as to account for it, then we need ways of articulating how multiple things come together at a given moment. For Blommaert this is a question of bringing chronotopes, scales and complexity together. One way of approaching this has been through *conjunctural analysis* focusing on "spatial and temporal composition of moments, or periods, within larger historical processes and their uneven and intersectional materialisations" (Varis 2017, p. 38). The idea of a conjuncture – with its particular focus on a combination of events or circumstances – can be understood as a "description of a social formation as fractured and conflictual, along multiple axes, planes and scales, constantly in search of struggle and negotiation" (Grossberg, 2006, p4). The idea of a conjuncture seeks to get beyond "mere context" in terms of "an articulation, accumulation, or condensation of contradictions" (p.5).

In line with other recent attempts to grasp complexity, conjunctural analysis moves away from abstraction and regularity towards "temporary settlement" or "temporary stabilities" (Grossberg, 2006, p5). Other attempts to grasp this "coming together" of things, this "thrown**together**ness" of both the "human and nonhuman" (Massey 2005, p.140) also emphasize this move from the abstract to the temporary. Scollon and Scollon's (2004) *nexus of practice* is where "historical trajectories of people, places, discourse, ideas, and objects come together" (p.159), focusing on "moments of action rather than on abstractable structures such as cultures and languages" (Scollon and Scollon, 2007, p.620).

Moment Analysis similarly draws attention to the need to move away from "frequency and regularity oriented, pattern-seeking approaches to a focus on spontaneous, impromptu, and momentary actions and performances of the individual" (Li Wei 2011: 1224). Rather than the predominant linguistic and sociolinguistic approach to seek regularities, underlying principles, genres, registers and concatenations of identifiable structures, this is a call to see the complexity of the moment. Similarly, a focus on *semiotic assemblages* has aimed to combine the complexity of "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts" (Bennett, 2010, p. 23) with a focus on how semiotic resources, artefacts and places are assembled in particular moments (Pennycook, 2017; Pennycook and Otsuji, 2017).

Toohey et al's (2015) study of *sociomaterial assemblages* brings a related focus on the complexity of sociolinguistic events to contexts of school literacy and the collaborative production of digital video texts, asking "how human bodies, the physical setup of classrooms, classroom materials (furniture, books, paper, computers, and so on), discourses about teaching and learning, what is considered to be knowledge, school district policies, the curriculum, and so on are entangled with one another, and how they may be moving and changing together" (p. 466). From their point of view, it is by understanding these *entanglements* (de Freitas and Sinclair, 2014), the ways in which all these things come together at one moment that we can help minority language students to engage with literacy. Like Kerfoot and Hyltenstam's (2017, p. 5) exploration of the entanglements of North/South politics, epistemologies and histories in order to "illuminate the shifting structures of power and asymmetrical relations between North and South that render some types of knowledges, practices, repertoires, and bodies more legitimate, and therefore more visible, and thus construct different orders of visibility," these approaches insist on both a politics of intersectionality and a politics of the material, assembling humans and non-humans, linguistic resources and material existents.

Achieve Goal English: Governmentality, gender and scripts of servitude

The location of this backstreet English school matters. Common in many parts of the world – selling English to local buyers – backstreet English schools offer to the relatively disadvantaged – those who may have missed out through school and other forms of capital accrual on the advantages that English may bring, but who can also envisage, and afford to invest in, its purported benefits – one potential means of getting ahead. This sign announces

of course a private enterprise. This private-public tension around English echoes across the world. English is already widely available in the public school system in the Philippines; indeed, it has often been too much so. The problem with an education system that has long favoured English is the highly negative impact for many children (Azurin, 2010), who receive minimal support in their first language, and an inadequate education through the medium of English. More recently education in the Philippines has moved away from an over-emphasis on English and Filipino in the direction of a greater inclusion of mother-tongue based multilingualism particularly at elementary levels, a move that has been met with some approval among teachers (Amarles, 2016) and presents a range of possibilities for better educational outcomes (Cruz and Mahboob, 2018). Lorente (2013) welcomes this move from being in the "grip of English" to a better acknowledgement of the role of education in the first language. Many issues nonetheless remain, in terms both of whether education in the Philippines can really escape the grip of English and its associated emphasis on Standard American English and English-Only instruction (Canilao, 2019), and whether the 'multilingualism' taken up by the school system reflects the multilingualism experienced in daily life (Makalela, 2018; Pennycook and Makoni, 2020).

At one level to note that this is a commercial enterprise selling English is merely to reiterate the oft-made point that English has become a global commodity (Tan and Rubdy, 2008; Duchêne and Heller, 2011), an observation that may be neither very accurate from the point of view of political economy (Block, 2018), nor very remarkable when we consider that languages have long been intertwined with trade and viewed in material terms. Languages have long been subject to economic and material forces, be they capitalist, communist, neoliberal, feudal, or otherwise. Indeed these schools are quite explicit about the material conditions of language production. Cebu City is full of English schools, with AGESL sitting alongside other players such as English Factory: "your one-stop English language services that makes studying English fun and accessible for all ages". Not only can this school/ factory provide "a gateway to broader opportunities and wider horizons," but following a "strict protocol like a real factory," the teachers, "also known as manufacturers," provide the "students with the best quality learning experience." (English Factory, 2019). The value of English here may be as much through the certification of English (symbolic capital in Bourdieu's terms) as any real English-using need or capacity. Another school around the corner [Figure 2: Success Academy [about here]] – Success Academy – advertises

its wares more explicitly: “ESL, TOEFL, TOIEC, Tutorial, English Camp”. As Kubota (2011) points out, ostensibly designed to discriminate between linguistic abilities, such tests now serve to reinforce neoliberal regimes through their modes of distinction.

For whom is this English being manufactured? A clue can be found in a shop around the corner: “Jook Hair Salon/ Royal Family/ Korean Total Beauty/ Any Lenght [sic] Rebond and Cut/ For Only P 1000.00” (Figure 3: Jook Hair Salon [about here]]. This sign itself is worth some further analysis, from its lack of *hangul* script (unlike the Korean Kimchi store next door), to its use of varied fonts and terms (Royal Family, Korean Total Beauty) and spelling slippage (Lenght). Also of interest, however, is the relation between the hair salon and the English school. The presence of Koreans in Cebu (and the Philippines more generally), where they make up a significant diasporic population, is connected to a number of factors, including its affordability, its desirability as a tourist destination, the presence of English, and the possibility of setting up small businesses[4], including English schools for Korean visitors (Garcia-Yap, 2009). When we ask to whom this sign – with its call to “achieve goal English” – is addressed, therefore, the answer is as likely to be Koreans as anyone else. It is no coincidence that it is the two principal regional client states of the USA that are buying and selling English. South Korea’s “frenzy” for English has driven people to remarkable extremes (from prenatal classes, to tongue surgery and sending young children overseas to study). It is produced by a range of forces, from South Korea’s “close dependent relationship with the United States in trade, security, culture, and politics” (Park, 2013, p. 287) to its insertion into a neoliberal order and desire to compete in global economic terms. Local conditions of culture and class and “local ideologies and contingencies” (Park, 2013, p. 300) matter too, as do the close collaboration between government, business and education sectors.

English has become naturalized “as the language of global competitiveness,” so that English as the language of the Global North is regarded as a “natural and neutral medium of academic excellence” (Piller and Cho, 2013, p. 24). As Tabiola and Lorente (2017, p. 123) note, ELT projects are “particularly potent instruments for transforming citizens into

[4] Some large companies too. Korea Electric Power Company (KEPCO: “Energizing lives, powering communities”) has also become a major player in the provision of electricity in the Philippines, particularly through its large plant at Naga, just down the coast in Cebu. This will have implications for the eradication of Philippine brownouts.

neoliberal subjects." The 'Achieve Goal English' sign invites students to invest in "the elusive promise of English" as a form of "speculative capital" (Tabiola and Lorente, 2017, p. 133). The sign interpellates potential learners into discourses of the entrepreneurial self, and the person seeking such English accreditation is "reimagined" as "*an assemblage of commodifiable elements*…a bundle of skills" (Urciuoli and La Dousa, 2013, p. 176, italics added). This helps us to see how such a sign is not just a product of neoliberal economies but rather is part of an assemblage of governmental practices. Once we understand neoliberalism as a form of governance, we can see that there is much more at stake here than just a contemporary form of political economy; this is about subjectivities, practices and ways of being (Martín Rojo and del Percio, 2019).

The important question is what kind of profit (rather than its juxtaposition with non-profit-making ideals), what kind of inequitable economic forces, English is tied up with. The Philippines has become a cheap destination to learn English, and, like all processes of impoverishment, these are not mere accidents of history but a very clear result of political and economic policies in the 20th century that saw the Philippines change from a colony of the USA, to a part of the Japanese empire, and a cornerstone (basecamp) of US counter-communist operations. As a new destination for such English language learners, the Philippines markets itself as a place where "authentic English" is spoken, yet its real drawcard is that its English is "cheap and affordable" (Lorente and Tupas, 2014, p. 79). For countries where English has long been institutionally embedded – the so-called outer-circle – the possibility of marketing English as both a cheap and a second – even an authentic – language has opened up new commercial possibilities.

This focus on English is further perpetuated by the development of call centres, the export of domestic workers, and other aspects of becoming a service economy to an inequitable global order, so that the pressure to export English-speaking workers has implications across the school system (Lorente, 2017). Call centres, English classes, online English, and domestic workers all trade on this. For the Philippines, like other countries such as Pakistan (Rahman, 2009) with relatively low economic development but relatively strong access to English, the language becomes one of commercial opportunity, so that businesses such as call centres on the one hand open up jobs for local college-educated employees, but on the other hand distort the local economy and education system and perpetuate forms of global inequality (Friginal, 2009). As Tajima (2018) makes clear, this "cheap English" also

extends to the online *Eikaiwa* (English conversation) industry, where Japanese and Korean companies are able to offer cheap Skype conversation classes using Philippine workers. These women – often college students or graduates – are paid around 50 pesos (US$1) for a 25-minute lesson. As Tajima also observes, this is a highly sexualised domain, with predominantly male students learning from younger Filipinas. This in turn replicates a long history of Japanese male exploitation of Filipina women, from sex tours to bar 'hostesses' and marriages between mainly rural Japanese men and Filipinas. We also therefore need to understand this "cheap English" not only within the neoliberal economics that breed call centres and language schools, but also within a history of sexual exploitation of Filipina women.

English is often marketed in relation to a particular set of images of sexual desire – along with images that tie English to travel, a White consumer lifestyle, and aspirational goals for learning English (Gray, 2010; 2012). English, as advertised for language schools and presented in textbooks, "emerges as a powerful tool to construct a gendered identity and to gain access to the romanticized West" (Piller and Takahashi, 2006, p. 69). As Motha and Lin (2014, p. 332) contend "at the center of every English language learning moment lies desire: desire for the language; for the identities represented by particular accents and varieties of English; for capital, power, and images that are associated with English; for what is believed to lie beyond the doors that English unlocks." Takahashi (2013, p. 144) explains Japanese women's desire for English, as "constructed at the intersection between the macro-discourses of the West and foreign men and ideologies of Japanese women's life-courses in terms of education, occupation, and heterosexuality". Focusing on the ways in which these discourses of desire implicate White Western men, Appleby (2013, p. 144) shows how "an embodied hegemonic masculinity" is constructed in the Japanese ELT industry, producing as a commodity "an extroverted and eroticised White Western ideal for male teachers". Any understanding of the motivations to learn English, therefore, has to deal with relations of power not only in economic and educational terms but also as they are tied to questions of desire, gender, sexuality, and the marketing of English and English language teachers as products. The political economy of English and the possibility of cheap but authentic English are also therefore tied to very real material conditions of sexuality.

The Philippine education system, as Ordoñez, (1999 pp. 19-20) remarked some years ago, appears to be aimed at "supplying the world market economy with a docile and cheap

labor force who are trained in English and the vocational and technical skills required by that economy." English is bound up with the export of labour, and particularly domestic workers (Lorente, 2017). Filipino workers can be found on boats and construction sites among many other workplaces, but it is in domestic and health care that many women work. Here we have to understand the entangled relations of language, gender, domestic work and migration. The export of domestic and other workers affects language and education policy back in the Philippines. These domestic workers now market themselves to prospective employers, while also having to deal with the local language politics of places such as Singapore. This is about Filipina women being inscribed into a neoliberal order of *supermaids* and *scripts of servitude* (Lorente, 2017).

Entangled with the class formations produced by neoliberal economies are the gendered nature of work and the ways this fits into patterns of domestic labour and transnational migration (Parreñas, 2001). Language, gender and labour are already connected in complex ways (Gonçalvez and Schluter, 2017). The position of the Philippines in the global economy requires a "cheap, female labour force that has a working knowledge of English" (Tinio, 2013, p. 221). These women – domestic workers, aged care workers, bargirls, singers, English skype teachers – "serve as the very foundations of the global economic order that oppresses them. The English that they speak, idiosyncratic as it is, serves as a not so silent witness of the tenderness, care, libido, pretense at/desire for an ease with Western culture that is imbricated into this oppression" (Tinio, 2013, p. 221). For Lorente (2017) *scripts of servitude* turn these women into particular kinds of languagized domestic workers that are also stratified by country of origin.

Achieve Goal English: Language stratifications and the global colour line

All varieties of English are intertwined with questions of access and discrimination along lines of class, gender and race. If the notion of concentric circles of English is to carry any weight, it needs, as Martin (2014, p. 53) observes in the context of the Philippines, to encompass circles within circles. We have to distinguish between an inner circle "of educated, elite Filipinos who have embraced the English language," an outer circle who may be aware of Philippine English as a variety but are "either powerless to support it and/or ambivalent about its promotion" and an expanding circle for whom the language is "largely inaccessible". The issue, therefore, is not centrally about how Philippine English differs from

American English but how English resources are spread, used, and become available or inaccessible to people of different classes and ethnicities across these islands, how English operates amid questions of access, education, style, disparity and difference. The focus needs to be not so much on linguistic variation as on "linguistic discrimination and prejudice experienced by translingual speakers" (Dovchin, 2019, p. 85).

Claims to a variety of English do not therefore stand outside ethnic and racial divisions either within Philippine society or in relation to the "global colour line" (Lake and Reynolds 2008, p.5), the technologies of distinction and surveillance that divide speakers along racial lines. The Philippines, as Reyes (2017, p. 211) shows, replays its racial colonial history in which "mestizo elites, not colonial officials, uphold the bifurcated racial state: lighter races on top; darker races on bottom." Arguing that "semiotic processes that form and circulate ideologies about race, language, and the elite are central to questions of coloniality," Reyes (2017, p. 211, emphasis added) shows how "colonial hierarchies are reconfigured through *reassemblages* of social figures and linguistic registers across discursively connected events over time and space." For Reyes, the central focus is not so much on the mixed Taglish register supposedly used by the *conyo* elite (and which would be of interest to studies of World or translingual Englishes) but rather the *enregisterment* (Agha, 2007) of this way of talking by the *listening subjects* - private-school-educated middle class students. This is not, then, the linguistically describable register against which we can map a sociolinguistic elite, but rather a construction of an elite in order to normalize the non-excessive postcolonial subject who uses languages appropriately.

Such language stratifications, whether a construction of a Taglish-speaking *conyo* elite, or a set of registers used by call-centre workers, online English conversation teachers, bar hostesses, or domestic workers, Tinio (2013, p. 209) explains, are "symptomatic of the harsh and polarized social stratification in the Philippines." They are also entangled with the wider "English divide" that permeates social relations across the globe. For Block (2018, p. 12) English "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." Elsewhere, the divide between English and local ("vernacular") education has been shown to be deeply divisive, with English education in India connected on the one hand with the denigration of vernacular languages, cultures, and ways of learning and teaching, and, on the other,

dovetailing “with the values and aspirations of the elite Indian middle class” (Ramanathan, 2005, p. 112).

Laying claim to a variety of English (such as Philippine English) is a claim on multiple levels: Philippine English over other (inauthentic or expensive) varieties, Philippine English as a variety like any other, one kind of Philippine English at the expense of others (regional and class varieties). The claim that is hardest to make, however, is to native speaker-hood, since such claims run up against the racial classification of English speakers, the global colour line that bifurcates speakerhood: “Both race and nativeness are elements of ‘the idealized native speaker’”(Romney 2010, p.19). Because of the “tendency to equate the native speaker with white and the non-native speaker with non-white” (Kubota and Lin, 2009, p.8) people of colour face discrimination as non-native speakers, and non-native speakers are stigmatised within a racial order (Rosa and Flores, 2017). “White normativity,” Jenks (2017, p. 149) points out, is deeply embedded in practices and ideologies of English language teaching, part of a “system of racial discrimination that is founded on White privilege, saviorism and neoliberalism.” These *raciolinguistic* ideologies link “the white speaking and listening subject to *monoglossic language ideologies”* (Flores and Rosa 2015, p. 151). Like Reyes’ (2017) focus on the listening subject, this turns the focus away from the language practices of the racialized non-native speaker (the non-White varieties of English in the Outer Circle) towards the “interpretive practices” of “White perceiving subjects” (Rosa 2019, p. 6).

This English divide is entangled with “racialized discourses that position the bilingualism of white students” – or of a *conyo* elite or an elite Indian middle class – “as more valuable than the bilingualism of language-minoritized communities” (Flores, 2017, p. 79). The co-optation of elite bilingualism is what Flores (2017) calls the *Coke-ification* of language education, which brings us back to the sign in the backstreets of Cebu City, and the realisation that the entanglements of English combine at multiple levels across multiple material and semiotic domains. Just behind the AGESL sign is another for Coca Cola. Across the road *Angel’s Hamburger* – “24 hours” “Hamburger 23 pesos” (about US$ 0.45, so an online Eikaiwa teacher could afford two of these hamburgers from the payments she gets from her 25minute class; and with the two-for-one deal on offer could take two home and still have 27 pesos to spend) – carries the rival Pepsi sign (see Figure 4: Angel’s Hamburger [about here]).

The entanglements of this sign link it to the ways that English, like Pepsi, Coke and hamburgers, have become part of local economies and tastes, again with implications for health, cultural affiliations, hopes and desires. All of this is going on at the same time around this sign as an assemblage of matters of concern, an assemblage that must also of course include the researcher, as perceiving subject, participating actor and knowing interpreter. Just as Bennett (2010) sees the power grid as an assemblage of multiple elements, so this sign and its emplacement is an assemblage of cheap English, sexual desire, neoliberal goals, domestic workers, multilingual repertoires, Korean English frenzy, American colonialism, brownouts, call centres, racial hierarchies, global inequality, unequal resources, researcher subjectivity and tangled wires.

Conclusion: Imagining new subjectivities

The idea of *entanglements of English* draws our attention to the multiple levels and ways in which English is part of social and political relations, from the inequalities of North/South political economies to the ways it is connected to discourses and ideologies of change, modernization, access, and desire. "Any discussion of English as a global language and its socioeducational implications" Rubdy (2015, p. 43) reminds us, "cannot ignore the fact that far from being a solution to the dismantling of 'unequal power' relations in the world, English is in fact often part of the problem" (p. 43). At the same time, a framework of entanglements and assemblages allows us to avoid levels or scales that place the global at the top and work their way down through nations to the local. A scalar approach implies levels of importance that do not match with people's lives and contingencies (an English-only classroom language policy may be far more important than a regional policy on minority languages). An assemblage approach avoids necessarily favouring one set of social and political relations over another whereby, for example, political economy is seen as more fundamental than, or as determining, classroom materiality. Such a move may appear to problematically equalize inequality – suggesting that all inequalities are the same in a flattened hierarchy – but this is neither the intention nor the outcome of this way of thinking.

By opening up "a broader perspective on the contingency of language and its entanglements" (Beck, 2018, p. 1) – showing how English is entangled with social, cultural, political and economic relations – I have tried not to favour one over the other, not to

suggest that class matters *a priori* more than race or gender, economy more than health, materiality more than discourse. In these local assemblages, certain things do of course matter more than others – modes of inequality are not equal – but the point is not to operate with a predefined hierarchy of inequality. Inequalities have to be understood in relation to each other. Although at times a focus on assemblages may appear to lead to flattened hierarchies and ontologies, it is, by contrast, intended as a way of understanding and engaging with contemporary political relations: "The logic of assemblage" Hardt and Negri (2017, p. 295) assert, "integrates material and immaterial machines, as well as nature and other nonhuman entities, into cooperative subjectivities. An enriched freedom of assembly generates the subjective assemblages that can animate a new world of cooperative networks and social production."

This approach allows for an alternative in terms of the politics of assembly and a more intertwined set of policies, practices and discourses that occur across multiple spatiotemporal domains. English is enmeshed within local modes of distribution, and all the inclusions, exclusions, and inequalities this may entail. It is bound up with changing modes of communication and forms of popular culture. It is entrenched in educational systems, bringing to the fore many concerns about knowledge, pedagogy, and the curriculum. Drawing on insights from Southern Applied Linguistics (Pennycook and Makoni, 2020) and posthumanist theory (Pennycook, 2018) this paper has sought to give an account of how English can be understood in relation to these local and global entanglements, and to suggest that a redistributive project (Block, 2018) need not be limited to, or to be dependent on, the redistribution of traditionally material goods, but can also include the redistribution of linguistic resources, agentive actions, cognitive processes and forms of identity.

A focus on entanglements and assemblages, therefore, does not eschew old materialism for either new materialism or discourse, but rather seeks an understanding of their interrelationship. In order to engage with the entanglements of English, neither the utopian logics of world Englishes and English as a lingua franca, nor the dystopian logics of linguistic imperialism, will get us very far. A focus on English entanglements sheds light on how being "part of the problem" is about the interconnectedness between language, place, power, objects, class, race, gender, and more. To create a new post-neoliberal society, and a new post-*homo economicus* subjectivity, therefore, we need to be able imagine "new

subjectivities that operate increasingly according to *a logic of assemblage*, defined no longer by their possessions but by their connections." (Hardt and Negri, 2017, p. 295; emphasis added). This is to see how English is entangled in everyday, simultaneous activities and material encounters, and how a project of radical redistribution may concern not only political economy but also assemblages of linguistic resources, identifications, artefacts and places.

Figures

Figure 1: Achieve Goal English

Figure 2: Success Academy

Figure 3: Jook Hair Salon

Figure 4: Angel's Hamburger

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