



We somehow survive: English language learning, social cohesion and questions of identity

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ARTICLE INFO

Issue: 2016(2).

This article was published on: 16 Jan, 2017.

Keywords: Gujarati women, Social Class, Identity, ESOL, Second Language Learning, SLA.

ABSTRACT

Second language learning involves affective factors such as interactions with the dominant linguistic and cultural group, and related problems of self-concept, identity, and self-esteem. Substantial attention has not been paid to these categories in the field of earlier studies of second language acquisition. In recent years however, there has been increasing research on the relationship between second language learning and the question of identity. The lives of immigrant women, particularly of ethnic minority, may be complicated not only by gendered and systematic inequalities but also cultural conflicts which makes them struggle to define and redefine their identity. It is important to raise awareness of perceptions of immigrant women learning and speaking the language of the host community as their experiences intersect with race, gender and class, and contribute to their identity formations. Drawing on the poststructuralist notion of identity as “multiple, changing, and a site of struggle” (Norton and Toohey 2011, p. 412 Butler 1990; Weedon 1997, p.21) and Norton’s (1997) work on identity and investment, this paper examines the relationship between the process of learning English as a second language and social class, and analyses the construction gender identity of Gujarati women upon migration to the UK. It further underlines how the inability to speak English for migrant women is further complicated by inequities brought about by classed structures, private/public patriarchy and processes of ‘othering’. External life experiences and personal relationships are integrally linked to linguistic confidence and identity formation/subjectivities. This study aims to understand from a sociolinguistic perspective the dynamics of Gujarati women’s identities across different migrations and patterns of settlements in the UK.

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INTRODUCTION

There have been very many changes in the policy for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in the UK over the past few years. It is known that historically, policy towards ESOL provision has been rather stringent and isolated from other provision for adult education (Hamilton and Merrifield 2000). Current and further proposed cuts in funding for ESOL are likely to disproportionately impact on women. This paper argues that it is important to understand the impact of social class and gender on the lives of marginalised immigrant women where they intersect with the process of language learning, while planning for their futures with a view of social cohesion.

This research topic is the outcome of my personal experiences of teaching English as a second language in London over the period of last ten years. In the Indian subcontinent, it is generally believed that diasporic populations have a better status, are economically and socially better off, and undoubtedly possess fluency in English language. As an economic migrant to the UK, I myself held somewhat similar view of the South Asian community settled abroad. It was only after arriving in the UK that I realised the gendered experiences of South Asian women in Britain, as Brah (1996), Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) and Wilson (2006) have noted, are bound up with differentiation as to, for example, race, class, and region of origin. Being an Indian woman myself, I was aware of the source of social and cultural constraints these migrant women might have had to deal with; yet, I found it ironic that many of these women had to spend their entire life living in a developed country like Britain without actually being able to learn English. On the other hand, I was also familiar with the collective and individual struggle of South Asian women to resist the power exerted by racialized and patriarchal relations within the context of British society through the academic work of Brah (1996), Yuval-Davis (1992), Shain (2013), Thakar (2003) and Mirza (1997). I particularly found the new discourses challenging earlier invisibilities and representations of South Asian women interesting and decided to focus on their language learning experiences and shifting identities, keeping in mind the limited availability of research in this field.

It is a general view that language learning is beneficial for society and the individual; however, according to Leathwood (2006, p.44), although this is presented as the logical choice for individuals, there is no acknowledgment of the ways in which the choice-making individual of neo-liberal economic policy is a gendered, classed and racialized one. Leathwood (2006) explains how the policy discourse surrounding language learning is constructed in a way that the learner has to take full responsibility for their own learning. The ESOL provision in the UK originally started as a service by volunteers and was influenced over the years by various government legislation (Hamilton and Merrifield, 2000). This provision was not included in the 1975 Right to Read literacy campaign, which shows how bilingual speakers of ethnic minority were totally invisible in the eyes of the policy makers. Shain (2013) argues that the social mobility has been declining in the UK over the past few decades which has led to further structural inequalities. The current funding cuts in ESOL provision, reflect the neo-liberal shift away from state responsibility to that of the individual in a market economy. They imply that individuals, i.e. ESOL learners in this case, are expected to adapt to these 'new times'. This research shows how ESOL provision is critically important to the UK as a tool to secure social inclusion.

This paper is structured as follows: Firstly, I will briefly review research in feminist poststructuralist approaches to identity and second language learning followed by methodology before concluding with the findings of the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

It is vital to understand the relevance of psycholinguistic theories of Second Language Acquisition before discussing the literature this research is drawing on. According to traditional Second Language Acquisition theorists, the inability to speak a second language results from lack of motivation, affective filtering, or socialisation (Krashen 1985)¹. However, Norton (2000) through

¹ Some linguists, in particular Stephen Krashen, distinguish between acquisition and learning. Acquisition is supposed to be a subconscious process which leads to fluency. Learning, on the other hand, is a conscious process which shows itself in terms of learning rules and

her research on immigrant Canadian women, established 'identity' as another variable operative in the language learning process. She establishes that where social distance between the second language group and target language group is wide, the second language group struggles to become proficient speakers of the target language.

Bourdieu (1991) discussed social position in relation to language use. The use or production of language is directly related to the speaker's position in society. Speakers lacking the legitimate competence are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence (Bourdieu 1991). This "linguistic capital" demonstrates a clear affinity between linguistic capital and material wealth, both of which are distributed unequally and depend on the location and the position of the individuals in society.

Similarly, according to Weedon (1987, p.21) language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. Thus subjectivity consists of "an individual's conscious and unconscious sense of self, emotions and desires" (Weedon 2004, p.18). However, individuals are not the authors of their subjectivity, as this is imposed on them by their social context, and the relationship between an individual's subjectivity and her 'self' is therefore imaginary. Ideological state apparatuses, "such as religion, education, the family, the law, politics, culture and the media produce the ideologies within which we assume identities and become subjects" (Weedon 2004, p.6).

It is the notion of agency that holds the key to know how an individual constantly renegotiates positions while moving through wide ranges of available discourses (Davies 1990, Weedon 1987). Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) further define agency as "a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual

and with the society at large" (p. 148) and infer that agency is connected to the power relations in discourse and is related to society's system of stratification. Higgins (2011) has also demonstrated that much scholarship on language learning often references a target community, a term that refers to the idea of a mostly cohesive group of people who speak a (standard) language in relatively homogeneous ways, and whose cultural practices are likely to differ significantly from those who study the target language of that community. However, these assumptions underlying the visions of language learners and the communities in which they use their additional languages do not relate well to the contexts of actual usage of second language, at times referred to as L2. Adult immigrants, such as the participants in the present research often experience social exclusion as well (Norton 2000), and, in spite of living in the 'target community' many immigrants often struggle to find opportunities to use their second language in interactionally rich environments (Warriner 2007). In order to problematize the language learning in the 'target community' another important strand of identity research, i.e. a post-structuralist approach, is taken into consideration to theorize how second language users develop a sense of self through finding their voice in their second language (Norton & Toohey 2004).

Rather than creating fixed identities for learners, including the identification of a specific 'target community' poststructuralist researchers typically view learners as negotiating their identities in 'sites of struggle' (Norton 2000; Osgood 2010). Pavlenko theorizes second language learning and use as 'discursive assimilation', 'self-translation' and the 'repositioning' of the self in a new language environment. She further explains that different languages and cultures provide different subject positions for individuals to take up, and because subjectivities are not entirely shared across cultures, learners often must undergo discursive assimilation in order to find 'ways to mean' in the new environment (2001, p.133). She has defined feminist post structuralism as approaches to language study that strive to understand relationships between power and knowledge; to theorize the role of language in production and reproduction of power, difference, and symbolic domination; and to deconstruct

structures. Furthermore, Krashen claims that there are three internal processors that operate when students learn or acquire a second language: the subconscious 'filter' and the 'organizer' as well as the conscious 'monitor' (Krashen, 1982: 11-45).

master narratives that oppress certain groups - be it immigrants, women, or minority members- and devalue their linguistic practices (2004, p. 53) This approach is pivotal to my study, as it recognises the choices made by participants with regard to learning English and shaping their particular understanding of their worlds, and the subject positions they take up within different discourses will tell us more about themselves as women of a particular race, class and culture. These lessons in turn affect how they see themselves as learners and shape their future learning experience and resultant identity.

While studies of South Asian migration, colonisation and class have formed an important context for understanding ethnicity (Ballard 1994; Brah 1996), the intersection of gender within migration and class structure remains unexplored. In terms of such research, Gujarati women have also been a neglected group, with some of the early histories in this area (Ballard 1994; Modood 1994) focusing exclusively on men. Yet Gujarati women migrants play a distinctive role within transnational communities. Ramji (2003); Mukadam (2007) highlight their economic role in strengthening kinship ties, often to the detriment of their own needs. Each of these areas of research literature provided useful concepts for my theoretical framework for this inquiry. By exploring how participants' family and community relationships and interactions affect Gujarati women as English speakers, this enquiry has developed a critical feminist approach foregrounding participants' voices and giving rise to a set of distinctly feminist concerns. Through an intersectional lens of gender, race and class, observing overt and invisible structural discrimination, I have connected the discourses surrounding immigration and settlement and learning English. As my research arises from experience in the provision of English language support programmes, it also aims to increase the awareness available to such programs in the provision of settlement education that will more adequately address these deeper and broader issues.

1. METHODOLOGY

A. Theoretical approach

The original impetus for this research was an outcome of my observations of structural obstacles facing women with caring responsibilities, especially young children, and women working in shift-patterned low paid jobs and struggling to attend English lessons. From my own experiences of learning English as a second language, transnational migration, I was interested in recording and relating how these women view their experiences of crossing borders, learning languages, adapting socially and culturally. An examination of the everyday experiences of adult non-native speakers of English may seem mundane and trivial, but it is these experiences that lead to understanding the phenomenon of second language learning and usage from the perspectives of those who have been involved.

The research has taken three distinct approaches to collect data from the participants; namely, a short written personal information questionnaire done either by the participants or by me (depending on their literacy skills); semi-structured personal interviews; and focus group discussions.

The study involved total 33 Gujarati women participants from various social backgrounds and places of origin. Data was collected by conducting two focus groups and 20 semi-structured interviews with Gujarati women. The first focus group was conducted at a Further Education college and involved three participants. The second focus group was attended by 10 participants consisting mainly long term settled twice migrant elderly women. A number of candidates were recruited by the snowballing method. As a racial insider I was able to recruit a number of participants by visiting the local temples. As Bhopal (2001) argues, our gender and racial identity *can* and *does* affect the research process and in some cases women who have some shared experience with researchers are more willing to speak to researchers who reflect this. My ability to communicate in Gujarati, Hindi and English allowed the participants a choice of the flexibility of communication but at the same time

my non-Gujarati ethnicity made me a partial outsider.

In adopting the qualitative methodology, I accept that reality and meaning are co-constructed by participants and contextualized, rather than having intrinsic meaning (Gray 2003). Gujarati women, the participants in this research, as immigrants in the UK, experience marginalisation because of their inability to speak English which intersects with other aspects such as their gender, race and class. The significance of post-structuralist theory lies in its recognition of the constitutive force of language in identity formation as well as its conception of the notion of identity that is fluid, complex, contradictory and multifaceted (Norton, 1997). Thus the language learning experiences of Gujarat women can be understood in the light of the discussion about their marginality and exclusion. In order to understand the conditions under which these marginalised women as language learners learn the language, it is essential to question the complex relationship between language and identity, as well as the inseparable relationship between speech, speakers and their social relationships. The contexts of second language learning are imbued with issues of power, identities and access, all of which are capable of changing the language learning endeavour. In short, the feminist poststructuralist view of the relationship between language and gender highlights at the inadequacies of the existing psycholinguistic theories and allows us to view the processes in a new light. By employing this framework for this research I have attempted to engage with individuals who are positioned not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of age, race, class, ethnicity, national origins, immigrant status and sexuality.

A. Analysis:

Reflecting on the questions about identity, subject positioning and agency and the ability to access and develop and maintain social networks essential to learn a language, I analysed the data to expose the power relationships that operate in the negotiation of identity. Following the feminist post-structural theoretical framework, I focused prominently on the power imbalance caused by the process of othering; discrimination resulting from

gender, race, ethnicity or class; as well as language socialisation resulting from social turn in second language learning; recording these through the lens of poststructuralist approach to identity throughout the process of analysis.

The data highlighted some specific examples of structural barriers to access such as exclusion of women who are classified as dependants, lack of recognition of previous skills, lack of support (e.g. child care), lack of funding sources for further vocational training, and lack of awareness of such support programmes. The study also revealed a number of examples of how some women struggled to overcome these obstacles and make successful journeys from the margins to the centre despite limited and infrequent support. The data highlights how these women are triply oppressed; firstly, they are workers or workers' wives (class), secondly, they share the fate of women in all class societies (gender) and thirdly, they are migrants, i.e., subjected to discrimination (race). The narratives clearly underline the interrelation of gender, race and class in the context of language learning. Although gender and race remain important intersections in the process of language learning, social class emerges as a key factor prohibiting women from participating fully in the process. It is clear that class differences in the country of origin make a difference to the language learning experience, job opportunities and also impacts on class positioning within this country. I will discuss some of the findings in the following section and demonstrate how social class emerges as a major issue in the process of language learning.

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS:

A. Information and access:

A number of participants interviewed in this study have accessed the English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL) training programmes funded by the government at some point of time upon arrival in the UK. The research gathered their views about the accessibility and usefulness of these training programmes. It examined ESOL provision in the UK against the backdrop of gendered access to linguistic resources, as well as gendered agency and probed whether the policies understand and

address linguistic socialization and identity. Rosenberg (2007), in her comprehensive and detailed account of contexts and policies of ESOL, has categorically emphasised that the role of Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) and Basic Skills Agency has been less effective when it comes to ESOL. Most participants in this research, however, talking about their lack of fluency and difficulties in English, used the expression; “We somehow survive ” without adding any tinge of disappointment to the word ‘somehow’. I analyse the word ‘somehow’ as a critical comment on the subtle form of discrimination in the political discourse and policy texts, detrimental to these women’s lives and learning.

One of the main issues arising from the research data is the issue of access, which is especially crucial given the relationship between participation in language training programs and immigrants' enhanced social and economic wellbeing. The data reveal some specific examples of access barriers such as eligibility requirements that exclude many women who are classified as dependants, lack of programme supports (e.g. child care), funding sources for training, lack of awareness of such programmes and personal barriers such as low self-confidence and/or lack of study skills. These issues affected the learning process, especially to the women who lacked resources to continue learning English without the availability of support to help participate the language training programmes. The participants in my research voiced concerns about their lack of knowledge of the availability of such courses, in the early stages, or knowledge of free care provision through local providers to attend courses. Madhu narrates her experience:

“I know I want to learn. But I don’t know how.. now I have information everything about class..but when I come new..no information giving somebody to me.. kaise pata chalega? (How will I know?)”

This demonstrates the significant disconnection between the women’s lives and the government’s policies. The lack of information has put many immigrant women in similar disadvantaged positions. For women with children, language training becomes an unaffordable luxury. When

they have young children, they are at home either looking after them, due to lack of affordable child care, or working in menial jobs unrelated to their level of expertise.

Extending Sunderland’s observations (2004), it can be said that although none of the government policies are explicitly racist or sexist, they create gendered and raced boundaries. In relation to the strategies of connecting discourses of the national economic interest and community or social cohesion, the provision of ESOL should discover ways to explore these policies through gender lenses.

Another issue arising from the research data is the issue of childcare, which is especially crucial given the relationship between participation in language training programs and immigrants' enhanced social and economic wellbeing. This neglect in issues related to culturally different child care needs, has resulted in a number of the elderly cohort not having significant opportunities to learn English, at the start of their settlement in the UK. As Anshu describes:

“How to know.. nobody tell us.. you go here .. learn English like that.. then with small children .. I confused..at that time.. not knowing ..you know crèche ... may be there and (laughs) I learn the word first time...I am thinking... crash means some danger...”

It is however, astonishing to observe how these women in spite of their isolation and lack of information, family obligations, cultural barriers, including patriarchal practices, have worked, cared for extended families, brought up their children, and lived a very content life with their ‘we somehow survive ’ level of English. Participants in my research extend helping hands in looking after each other’s children, celebrating a number of activities together and supporting each other. A number of participants learnt about ESOL courses from a female member of her community or neighbourhood. They not only share the information with each other but encourage actively engaging in full participation by introducing them to people/locations/organisations or offering to take care of the responsibilities that might hinder the participation in such activities.

It was evident from these narratives that, despite the keenness of immigrant women to learn English, access and information surrounding language training programmes remains problematic. Women receive the information about language courses mainly through word of mouth publicity, owing to the lack of coordination among various service provisions.

B. Issues of eligibility:

Apart from this situation in accessing the language service provision, eligibility for the existing courses also appears to be problematic. Women who come to the UK to join their fiancés/husbands, who are present and settled in the UK, are subject to a two-year probationary period of residency, also known as the 'two-year rule'. If their relationship breaks down during this period, they no longer have the right to remain in the UK, and are barred from accessing public funds—the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) requirement. (Home Office 2007).

One of the respondents, Madhu, came to the UK in 2008 after being married to a British Gujarati businessman in India. Her husband who has a white girlfriend and had no interest in Madhu, only agreed to marry to keep his parents happy. Soon after her arrival, she realised that she had been brought over to serve his extended family as a maid, rather than act as a spouse to her husband. She had to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and serve the family members tirelessly. She was often humiliated because of her inability to join the family conversations that took place in English. After suffering for a year and half, Madhu gathered the courage to walk out of that home with the help of a friend and a local organisation. She has rented a bedsit, works in a local factory and is studying ESOL. Women like her are hardly in a position to negotiate better terms of services and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse because their lack of basic tool such as the language of the community.

Madhu: I cannot tell ..how it feels, when everyone else was speaking, laughing in English and I just sit . They think I am their servant, stupid...why? I can't speak English like them? It make me so angry all the time.

it was like bird in cage. I thought, nothing doing...I must get out of this. I must learn English... very important for me.

It is clear from this how complex and acute the process of language learning is which has an immediate impact on identity development and investment in language learning. Madhu, who came to England to live a traditionally assigned married life as someone's wife, needs English as a surviving tool. She is now an independent woman working towards changing the course of her life. This reconstructed aspect of her identities seems to correspond to her shifting desires, efforts and access to learning English. By understanding these identity changes as an evolving construction we can understand the complex processes of identity formation as fluid, shifting and contingent.

If we look at one of the four principles of social policy for lifelong learning, it states: "People should have access to learning at the time which suits them best. For most people, this is at the earliest possible point, when their motivation to learn and integrate is highest, and before they learn to survive without integrating. Access to learning is a particular issue for the most vulnerable asylum seekers, who are currently barred from learning on arrival. For some migrants, other pressing needs may make it necessary to delay learning until later." (NIACE 2009) This is reflected in a number of participants' views. One research participant, Meena, is exasperated by her own inability to speak English and wishes to have had opportunities of learning English earlier.

"If someone told me, when I came here, to do these classes, may be ..by this time, I would be speaking better English... (laughs) .. even this interview...you don't have to repeat your question or speak Gujarati with me."

The data ascertains that the eligibility criteria, to learn the language, should be reviewed and made accessible. Previous education and skills of the migrants need to be taken into consideration to help them pursue their interests and prepare them to transfer their knowledge and skills once they are fluent in English.

C. The context of learning

The poststructuralist view of language socialization allows for languages to be conceptualised as a site of struggle in which meanings and the identities of the speaker are negotiated and renegotiated with each utterance and experience in a speaker's life, and which may or may not involve development of second language competence. There is an acknowledgement that language learning can involve, for example, power and gender struggles while learners, are in the process of being socialized into the host communities and cultures. The research investigates how novices use language to become socialized into other cultures and their norms, i.e. to become a participant in various communities of practice. In this case subject positioning contributes to public identity. As Pavlenko argues, the process of language learning is not simply a cognitive process, but a process of "socialization into specific communities of practice" (2002, p.286).

As discussed earlier in the methodology, SLA theories do not always problematize the social context of learning. My data affirms the argument that, in the context of transnational migration, SLA theorists have not adequately explored how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities the speakers have to practice the target language outside the classroom. SLA research (Norton 1997; Pavlenko 2004) reveals that even students who have intensive classroom instruction will have difficulties progressing and developing if they do not have a chance to interact with fluent native speakers. Access to more experienced speakers of the second language is mediated by the learner's class, race, gender, age and linguistic background, among other things. Respondents in my research frequently voiced this question: 'Who do I practise my English with?'

The participants are disadvantaged by their gender, race and social status and become invisible and excluded. Their language learning is inseparable from their identity performance and negotiation. Socialization and the context of identity performance are seen to shape one another. This is relevant in the participants' responses about their access to 'sympathetic' native language speakers. Marginalised Gujarati

women, are surrounded by people like themselves who are not fluent in English. At workplaces if they are employed in low paid menial jobs, the possibilities of communicating with native speakers are bound by imbalance of power structures where the listeners are not interested in the speakers. Whereas, someone like Rupa, who belongs to the upper class, however, finds it easier to practice English with sympathetic fluent speakers of English within her extended family circle. On the other hand, People like Rani have difficulties in getting someone to practise their English with.

Rani: I just go out in the community, go out to burger shop, pizza shop, I order in English. If they don't understand once, I tell them again, again and again. I learn like this English. I watch TV programmes lot, I watch English programmes, so I learn the accent.

Language learners as agents, actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning" (Lantolf and Pavlenko 2001, p.145), which implies 'you have to work your way into the spaces where that socialization can happen, and second you have you to let yourself be resocialized in ways that allow for demonstrations of profound mastery' (Heller 2011, p.37). The participants in this research try to employ various methods to improve their linguistic repertoire by watching programmes such as the BBC news programmes, or entertainment programmes such as *Eastenders*,² *Deal or No Deal*, *Cookery shows*. They repeat the words that they have to use frequently, they take help from their children to understand the pronunciation or meanings, they make lists of words that are useful for them, they sit and do the homework with their children so that they can learn along with them. Rekha, who works as a nursery assistant, and others who are in parental roles, have to show that they are gradually acquiring the status of 'legitimate speaker' who wishes to be not only understood, but also 'believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished' (Bourdieu 1977, p.648), a position which can be particularly difficult for immigrant women who can

² *Eastenders* is a very popular programme amongst ESOL learners who can relate it to their lives and try to learn English by watching it.

find it difficult to achieve the 'right to impose reception' (Norton 2000, p.113) on their listeners.

D. Locations to practise

The places where these women can practise English with a sympathetic listener are limited. They devise strategies to improve their listening input mainly by watching television, speaking with their children or forging a bond with another person from a different community. Hira who works at a fast food restaurant and has to travel to Central London by public transport utilises her time to listen to English wherever she can:

Hira : I try..like in the morning.. you see school children.. teenagers .. their English .. difficult to understand..I try to listen to them...or on the underground..I find a seat where I see if people are speaking English...

Hira's is an example of a language learner who seeks opportunities, is highly motivated, and pays attention to detail. (Norton 2000) However, relationship between the language learner and the social world is problematic. This example further strengthens the arguments of feminist poststructuralists like Norton (2000), Pavlenko (2004) who argue that the inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities second language learner have to practise the target language outside the classroom. Learners like Hira are deprived of the self-confidence arising from positive experiences in the social context of the second language because of processes of 'othering'. These examples show how language intersects with race as a mechanism for invisibility and social exclusion, and influences gender constructions in the post-migration society. Some participants expressed their anguish of being treated as second class citizens because of their lack of fluency in English in addition to the colour of their skin.

E. Difficulties with English

I have identified numerous factors influencing the participants' post-migration constructions of self in social interactions pertaining to specific difficulties with English language. These include the experience of using English in various situations

such as schools, workplaces and social gatherings, accent and cultural gaps. Respondents explain the practical difficulties they have to endure because of the lack of substantial vocabulary in English be that at a pharmacy, surgery or parent teacher meetings.

Rani: One time I have constipation, you know? I don't know how to explain them. It is so hard to explain them.

Mothers like Rupa, Rekha and Anshu express their anxiety when they are unable to contribute their valuable input in PTA meetings. As Norton (2000) reveals, migrant English language learners experience social exclusion in naturalistic language settings, so their ability to assert selfhood is negatively affected. This process of othering and silencing has an impact on the self-confidence of language learners.

Rekha says: It happens, when other children's parents, moms,... they speak English very well... and they say something.. and I want to say something... but I can't because I am embarrassed that I might speak wrong...

By this Rekha implies that other parents' (native white speakers) voices are not only heard, but also accepted whereas parents who are not fluent in English often feel that their opinions are not counted as valid owing to their linguistic competence. On the importance of narrative discourse, Weedon notes that, if the voices are predominantly white, then this serves to "marginalize non-white readers, whose experiences are likely to be very different from this assumed norm" (2004, p.62).

Another example is of working women like Hira and Devi who were frustrated at the beginning of their career, for not being able to communicate with others and thought that their work was devalued because of their lack of fluency in English, in spite of displaying high standards and strong work ethic. In governmental discourses (Skills for Life: Access for All, 2005) on building integrated communities and preventing social breakdown, gender as a factor is highlighted as an issue in, for example, reaching isolated and vulnerable learners, but is rarely debated from the starting point of meeting the needs of women as the mainstream

learner population who have specific issues arising from inequitable power relations. Women learners come to an educational programme with specific personal histories, learning styles and expectations that are shaped to varying degrees by their experiences as girls and women in a society characterised by male power and privilege. It is essential to capitalize on this knowledge and experiences of women learners to provide appropriate educational programmes to their needs. The discourses connected to ESOL policies, need to understand and work through gendered lenses to acknowledge and improve the lacuna in current practices.

3. The role of social class in second language learning:

The findings discussed above highlight that how class structures play a role in constructing linguistic identities in different aspects of migrant women's lives. Social class identities are expressed and negotiated through Gujarati women's English language learning journeys in Britain. Drawing on the data, this section analyses Gujarati women's socioeconomic status and their class structured interaction opportunities, and the display and reconstruction of their social class identities in various social contexts to relate it to their journey of learning English as a second language.

As mentioned earlier, much of the early work in the fields of SLA regarded learners as "bundles of variables" (Kinginger 2004, pp.199-220) such as, "motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited" (Norton 2000, p.5). This implies that immigrants settling in the host society should find it easier to learn the target language if they are motivated, extroverted and uninhibited. Contrary to earlier SLA theories, the study establishes that class, race and gender must be seen as important facets of migrant women's lives but interlinking in different ways for different groups of people. It observed that access to the host community's social practices were not always readily available to learners. In the matters such as attending courses, childcare or even finding someone to practise speaking, participants were disadvantaged because of their marginalised social status.

As a result, despite being highly motivated there were particular social conditions under which the women in the study were acutely uncomfortable and therefore unlikely to speak. The data observes that a language learner's motivation to speak is mediated by investments that may conflict with the desire to speak. "An understanding of motivation should therefore be mediated by an understanding of learners' investments in the target language- investments that are closely connected to the ongoing production of a language learner's social identity" (Peirce 1995, p.19).

The data suggests that social class has a huge impact on how second language is learnt. My research confirms that working-class black women have been marginalised and subjected to 'simultaneous oppression of patriarchy, class and 'race' (Carby 1982, p.213). Collins (2006) suggests that social class as a feature of identity is a sense of self in relation to other, and thus should be explored as a process which takes place within different ethnicities as well as wider social groups.

The study shows that the participants whose marital partners and family are well-settled in the UK, had the option to stay at home, look after the family and devote time to learning English. Others, who were not educated or literate, needed to support the family financially by working in low-paid factory jobs, as well as had responsibilities of domestic caring and housework. For some women, due to their socioeconomic class, it may be necessary for them to work outside of the house even though they may not be accustomed to it, thus adding to psychological stress on various levels. Devi arrived in London in the late 1970s, started to work on the next day upon arrival and continued to do work until being made redundant last year. She says:

"How can you survive without work here? Big family.. mouths to feed.. educate the children...give them good life .. we don't have it.. but they can".

In Devi's case shows issues related to survival and supporting the family took precedence over the issue learning the language. She further narrates how due to her inability to communicate fluently in

English she was constantly bullied at work and became the first to be made redundant in spite of her excellent work ethic. Devi's family is now well-settled and do not require her income but Devi has decided to gain literacy skills and find a new job. This example confirms that social interactions are constructed by power relations, making participants stressed, feeling devalued. It further shows that 'agency' "is never a property of a particular individual; rather, it is a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large" (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001,p.148).

Another example, in the present study, Rani whose husband moved back to India with their children, has to support herself financially and she is uncomfortable with the idea of financial support from the state. In her situation, her employment has made it difficult for her to benefit from English classes. Anshu who does some packing work at home to support her husband financially and look after her young children at the same time is stuck at home with no access to much linguistic interaction. According to Ehrenreich & Hoshchild (2003) without migrant women's labour in many affluent global cities, an array of products and services that are widely available today at an affordable price would simply disappear. The lifestyle many citizens of the First World enjoy today relies on the low wage and physically- and emotionally-intensive labour provided by migrant women from the Third World. Therefore, it is possible that because of their economic status, they are essentially trapped; wanting to learn English, but being unable to because of inconsistent employment, while relying on employment to provide for their needs. Although living in the 'ghetto' community had its drawback, such as not being able to communicate in English, the issue of childcare was solved by the support available in the local community. Thus these narratives make it clear that gender inequalities are profoundly embedded in the hierarchy of other aspects of identity, particularly race, ethnicity and class.

Some participants in my research, mainly direct migrants from rural parts of Gujarat, find themselves marginalised even in India when it comes to learning English, where the material and

social conditions are not conducive for women to get basic education. Upon arrival to the UK, they are further marginalised on the basis of larger patriarchal, material and racist social structures. Their investment in English must be understood with reference to their desire to resist the structural norms in the public and private spheres. Participants in my research, nevertheless, express shame and guilt at not being able to communicate English. Rupa uses the word 'sharam' ³ that she feels when she is unable to express herself.

Rupa: Do you know how it feels? You have something important to say and you have no words to say? You feel worthless. .. such 'sharam' I feel about myself.

Rupa's narration affirms what Gumprez (1964) observes about locating linguistic repertoire in a linguistic community. He says that "stylistic choice becomes a problem when we are away from our accustomed social surroundings". (p.138) A lot of participants used the word 'izzat'⁴ (status/respect) being at stake because of their inability to communicate in good English.

According to Busch (2013) a feeling often mentioned in biographies in connection with multilingualism is that of shame, arising because one has used a 'wrong' word, a 'wrong' tone, or is speaking with a 'wrong', out-of-place accent. This is often described as feeling as though everyone is looking at you, or wishing the earth would swallow you up. It results in a kind of paralysis, an abrupt suspension of the capacity to act. Interestingly, my research shows similar kind of angst by participants who are marginalised and subjected to discrimination on the basis of their gender and class. Hira who works at a fast food chain feels:

Hira: I used to feel so bad... I used to come home and cry... that I don't know anything here.. and these people look at us like as if we are nothing in front of them...

She is an Anglophone, but initially she neither had access to the social networks within the workplace

³ "sharam" (shame) which influence individual and familial reputations in Asian communities

⁴ "Izzat" is a phenomenon which confers status and respect, is fluid enough to shift from the individual to the collective domain

and no encouragement from her family. She experienced 'othering' because of her status as a 'foreign' worker and had her confidence shaken as a result. However, she was eventually able to practise her English when she changed her job and progress in her career.

Transgressing or disregarding a norm, standard, or ideal can make a person feel ashamed. Such situations of intense shame affect self-image. An accumulation of situations of shame can become concentrated into particular dispositions or attitudes, such as feelings of inferiority or shyness. In terms of linguistic experience, this may mean that people stop speaking a low-prestige minority language in public, that they avoid speaking in public at all. A number of participants expressed their concerns and the impact of such situations on their confidence levels.

However, participants who have financially stronger background have different views on their initial incompetency in speaking English. For them their first language and cultural identity is more important than being able to speak English fluently. They also found it easier to access the network and resources to practise English. This also concurs with Norton's (1997) research which shows that younger women with fewer domestic responsibilities and more time and energy devoted more time to learning English and found work that would give them access to English speakers. (p.42).

Conclusion:

To sum up, there are structural constraints working against many women of South Asian origin within which their language learning process should be assessed and understood. It is evident from the discussion above that social class plays a major role in gaining access to English classes, affording childcare and access to social networks for practice of English. It is obvious that stereotypical accounts of "disadvantaged" South Asian women as oppressed within families fails to address the questions surrounding their approaches to learning English. In contrast to the stereotype, South Asian women should be seen as women as constantly reworking their identities dependent upon time, space and place. Rather than a simple acceptance or rejection of new values, these participants

variously (re-)interpreted and performed their subjectivities - within communities, in work contexts, at college, within families. It is clear that class differences in the country of origin makes a difference to the language learning experience, job opportunities and also impacts on class positioning within this country. The narratives underline the interrelation of gender and class in the context of language learning. The research highlights a need for a deeper cultural understanding by policy makers and education providers, to encourage the attendance of working-class students, and providing differentiated approaches with new methods (place/times/enrolment methods/fees) and improved outreach.

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We somehow survive: English language learning, social cohesion and questions of identity

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