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Bundled otherwise: Skills, social mobility, and raciolinguistic ideologies in the Canadian labour market

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ABSTRACT

Showcasing how understandings of social mobility encoded raciolinguistic ideologies of the ideal upwardly mobile speaker, I investigate blue- and white-collar orientation to language, race, and social mobility in the Canadian labor market. I analyze these two subject positionalities and the way bundles of skills are 'bundled otherwise' when ideologies of race and language are invoked as relevant to a class experience. While the acquisition of standard languages remains understood as a gateway to upward mobility, the increased commodification of language made the acquisition of standard registers of French and English a skill amongst others, on par with any other. If this shift challenges an implicit 'linguistic' bias embedded in emic and scientific understandings of class, raciolinguistic ideologies continue to organize worker's orientations to language and work, be it to imagine themselves as cosmopolitan workers or to defend the positions of ethnic, national, and racialized groups in the economy. (Social class, raciolinguistics, work, language ideologies, francophone Canada, bilingualism)*

INTRODUCTION

While doing ethnography in the Acadian Peninsula in Eastern Canada (Heller, Bell, Daveluy, McLaughlin, & Noël 2015), Monica Heller, Hubert Noël, Maurice Beaudin, and I met with a team of local social actors invested in economic and social development. They were grappling with an increase in salaries offered to mobile blue-collar workers. An estimated 30% of the local population had moved or worked part of the year 10,000 kilometers away, in the Albertan oil sands. If, at the time, the median salary for all of New Brunswick was $44,600 dollars a year (Statistics Canada 2017), oil sand workers earned from $90,000 to $120,000 a year (Bouw 2014). This, along with the increasing valuation of local commodities such as crab, oysters, and lobster, enabled a redistribution of resources amongst local workers. As Marc-André, an oil sand worker, proudly stated: "Cette année j'ai payé autant en impôt que mon père a fait en salaire" 'This year, I paid in income tax the same amount of money my father made in total salary' (McLaughlin 2021a).

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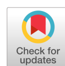

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The shift disrupted the ideological construct linking the acquisition of standard languages through long term exposure in formal education to upward social mobility. Yet, throughout the fieldwork, government policy makers and white-collar workers often adopted prescriptivists ways of conceiving language. Within francophone communities, the acquisition of standard French and near-native competence in English were perceived as both necessary for upward mobility, central to the construction of identity and necessary for the civic relevance of French in Canada (McLaughlin 2018, 2021b). In a region where good school performers already 'learned to leave' (Corbett 2007) for white-collar jobs in urban centers, the remaining workers who used to work for near minimum wage now had access to high paying blue-collar jobs elsewhere in the world.

During our meeting, Patrick, a public servant who helped young entrepreneurs launch local businesses, hesitantly presented as problematic the fact that "big-hearted" people "who could barely sign their own names" were making great salaries as laborers of the global extraction economy.

(1)

Patrick:	Mais ce qui est grave pour moi / grave dans un sens / c'est que notre système qui est voué à dire il faut éduquer plus que jamais / si tu veux réussir / ben il se trouve pris à faux / parce que dans ma région / j'ai un paquet de monde / neuvième année / qui gagne quatre-vingt cent mille piasses par année aujourd'hui 'Well what's a problem for me / well problem in a sense / is that our system is dedicated to saying we have to educate now more than ever / if you want to succeed / well it's being proven as a fallacy / because in my region / I have a bunch of people / grade nine / who make eighty a hundred thousand dollars a year today.'
Maurice:	Ouais 'Yeah'
Patrick:	T'as un paquet de gens qui / peuvent à peine signer leur nom qui gagnent leur vie / t'as des compagnies qui étaient ici qui ont quitté que leur main d'œuvre les bons mécanos les gars de de de de terrain de première ligne qui ont le cœur gros de même [fait un geste de largeur avec les mains] pis qui peuvent te donner quatre-vingt heures semaines sans se lamenter / ben tu viens les chercher tu les amènes là pis ils travaillent 'You have a bunch of people who / can barely sign their names who make a living / you have companies that were here that left because their labour force the good mechanics the guys in the field on the front line who have a heart as big as this [gestures largely with his hands] who can give you eighty hours a week without ever complaining / well you come get them you bring them there [in the oil sands] and they work.'

Patrick's hesitation is indeed telling. How, for whom, and for what institutions is it a problem that workers previously struggling to make ends meet now have access to

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good salaries? Patrick's unease indexed the language ideological terrain that was being undone by the increased economic and symbolic value of certain types of manual labour.

Patrick's concerns, linking economic processes to alphabetization, also raise important questions for scholars of language and inequalities. Where typologies of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled employment often betrayed a racial, educational, and linguistic bias, today, forms of employments previously considered as 'unskilled' or 'semi-skilled' can be understood as having been reconceived as fully skilled. This requires that workers conceive of themselves as bundles of skills marketable in a flexible and precarious economy (Urciuoli 2008). Language is at times centered and at times displaced as a central defining qualification for skilled employment. The taylorization of prescriptivism and authenticity (Heller 2010) means that the acquisition of standard or authenticating languages are no longer as effective on delivering the promise of upward social mobility. This process has contributed to discursively dispossessing, excluding, and exploiting a number of language workers who are now expected to master narratives of 'selling the selves' as members of a flexible, linguistically skilled yet precarious global work force (Duchêne & Flubacher 2015; Lorente 2018; Thurlow 2019; Bae & Park 2020; Flubacher 2020). The second process at work in late capitalism is the 'skilllification' of workers (Urciuoli 2008; Gershon 2017). Ideologically, this process is on the flip side of the first. Where, in the first, language serves to produce working class language workers, here, skills previously underpaid and undervalued are reconceived as economically valuable.

These transformations are characteristic of late capitalism, with its emphasis on individual agency and singularity. They rely on either prescriptivist, authenticating, or anonymizing ideologies (Woolard 2016) of language to assert a link between either 'linguistic competence' (in the case of prescriptivism), localized ethnicity and, implicitly, racialization (in the case of linguistic authenticity), or as a translinguistic 'neutral' practice (in the case linguistic anonymity). This linguistic taylorization means language serves to configure unequal access to resources such as employment, belonging, or citizenship. For instance, in a study of English language proficiency requirements for admission to Australian universities, Piller & Bodis (2022) show that educational background can map onto understandings of proficiency to transform ideologies of English as a white language, all while reproducing racial understandings of language proficiency for most international students. Educational attainment can therefore be a marker of proficiency in a recursive fashion that serves to reproduce both meritocratic understandings of speakers and a neo-colonial imagination of which nation-states produce 'ideal global citizens'. This link between language proficiency, social categorization, and class remains salient to this day and can serve to both reproduce or challenge the nexus of racialization, language, and social mobility.

In conversation with work on language and capitalism and adopting a raciolinguistic perspective (Alim, Reyes, & Kroskrity 2020), this article focuses on

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the Canadian labour market as a site to capture the role of language ideologies in the (re)production of difference in late capitalism (Heller 2010; Park 2011; Duchêne & Heller 2012; Block 2014). I rely on ethnographic data and life course trajectories of French-English bilingual workers in three fields in Canada (entrepreneurs, public servants, and oil sand workers) to interrogate the taken-for-granted racial and class ideologies that structure the imagination of social mobility for minority francophone workers. The intersection between language, class, and racialization became relevant during the data analysis, as the mostly white minority language participants used hierarchichal racial understandings of groups and languages to make sense of the labor market for both themselves and their children. Raciolinguistic ideologies helped them situate themselves and others, at times contesting these hierarchies, at others reproducing them either through zero-sum thinking (McGhee 2021) or by imagining themselves and their communities as languageless in a comparative move that indexed raciolinguistic ideologies (Rosa 2019).

UNPACKING THE RACIOLINGUISTIC IDEOLOGIES OF SOCIAL MOBILITY IN LATE CAPITALISM

Adopting a structuralist approach, scientists classically conceived of upward social mobility as a desirable outcome, signs of an economy where workers 'have a roughly equal chance of success regardless of the economic status of the families to which they were born' (Sawhill & McLanahan 2006:4). I meanwhile adopt a critical constructivist approach to understand social mobility as a concept central to the imagination and management of difference in modernity (Bauman & Briggs 2003). As a concept, social mobility discursively ties together the unequal distribution of resources to the constitution of subjects. As such, language ideologies are central in the colonial, racial, and gendered formation of the ideal upwardly mobile subject.

Historically, in structural approaches to class, analysts would distinguish between manual and intellectual labor, the first considered to be unskilled or semi-skilled labor, while intellectual labor was understood as skilled (Grusky 2008). Language was central in the production of this division of labor: skilled employment required the acquisition of standard languages and the ability to read and write legitimated and unequally distributed by the school system. This classification of labor served to reproduce the idea that upward social mobility could be attained by mastering the linguistic practices valued in education (Bourdieu 1982; Heller & Martin-Jones 2001). This ideal subject conversely produced and legitimated its counterparts: the deficient, inappropriate, or unskilled speaking subject. This converse subject could not speak, at least not in ways audible by the project of modernity (Spivak 1988; Lo 2020; Flores & Rosa 2023). Not surprisingly then, the participant's understandings of

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social mobility rendered visible the implicit classed and racial presuppositions about one's 'rightful place' in the labor market.

Economic and political forces have amplified the embeddedness of language in producing selection in the labor market. These are tied to the unequal distribution of resources through sociohistorical processes of imperialism and colonization and the ways languages become implicit or explicit markers of racialisation. Using Mena & García's (2021) concept of 'converse racialization', Piller & Bodis observe that:

> Racial unmarking happens as the order of the nation state clashes with the order of corporate globalization. While the construct of English as a white language is tied to ethnonational identities, the construct of English as the language of the neoliberal entrepreneur is tied to economic identities. The clash of these identities produces considerable instability in racial formations (Solomos 2020) but the central function of racializing discourse remains the same: 'contrasting those with rightful places in a larger social order to those without'. (Alim, Reyes, & Kroskrity 2020 in Piller & Bodis 2022:6)

Centered on adaptability, flexibility, and entrepreneurial selves, the neoliberal discursive regime at times fragments the prescriptivist language ideologies that were central to modernity, and at times reproduces them.

WHEN ETHNOGRAPHIC DESIGN ENCOUNTERS RACIOLINGUISTIC IDEOLOGIES

Originally, this research aimed to understand the links between social mobility and language ideologies as well as to capture the effects of occupation on linguistic representation and the reproduction of language ideologies. Relying on the literature on language and commodification in Canada (Boudreau & Dubois 2007; Heller 2010; LeBlanc 2010), I chose to work with French-English bilingual entrepreneurs, public and parapublic workers, and resource extraction workers. Each of these sectors were of interest for the changing political economic landscape of Canada. Entrepreneurs are central to ideologies of the added value of French and French-English bilingualism (Da Silva & Heller 2009). Canadians often understand the public and parapublic sectors as driving the valuation of French-English bilingualism in Canada. Meanwhile, policy makers and community leaders often construct resource extraction workers as problematic because of their geographic mobility (Heller et al. 2015; McLaughlin 2021a). These three groups of workers thus allow for a contrast in terms of theories of social class and upward mobility.

My team and I used an ethnographically informed life-course method to follow how white-collar and blue-collar francophone Canadians experience language and work in the language ideological configuration of late capitalism. We carried an institutional ethnography of places of governance where policy makers and business owners discussed language qualifications. For the oil sands, we studied job advertisements (McLaughlin 2021a). We collected, for each field of employment,

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documents that talked about employment and skills. We also carried out thirty-seven life-course interviews focused on language and access to work for French-English bilingual workers originally from New Brunswick. To get a clearer picture of social mobility, we asked participants about their parents' employment, education, and, when possible, proximate income.

The first group was constituted of ten entrepreneurs, tourism, language, and education workers born and based in Northern New Brunswick. These were aged from eighteen to forty-five, with most of them being in their thirties. They were mostly middle class and held university degrees or were in a university program. Six of them identified as women. In all cases, at least one of their parents held a white-collar job.

We also interviewed twelve oil sand workers who lived in New Brunswick but worked 7,000 kms away in the Albertan oil sands. This group is composed of three women and nine men. We purposefully recruited for women, who are still a minority in the sector. They were all in their late twenties to early thirties. Four participants had community college degrees that lasted from six months to ten months in welding or esthetics, one had a university degree in engineering, one had dropped out of school but later went to get a general education degree. Promotions are dependent on certifications on the oil sands. Participants combine two pathways to get these certifications: (i) by getting hours of on-the-job apprenticeship recognized by a union, and (ii) by following two to eight weeks courses (called blocks) in community colleges. Continued education was a practice in this group: all but two participants would regularly return to college for short two to eight weeks programs to get qualifications that helped them get promotions. Most participants combined both pathways, while one relied purely on the apprenticeship system and one worked in cleaning, where it seemed less relevant. For five of them, both parents held blue-collar employment, while the seven others had at least one parent who was either a business owner, a financial analyst, or public servant (including teachers). Three of them had parents who now also worked on the same teams as them in the oil sands.

Finally, we met with fifteen public servants and parapublic workers who had moved from New Brunswick to Ottawa. They were aged twenty-four to fifty-five at the time of the study, the median age being close to thirty. Eight of them were women. They all held or were working on master's degrees. All of their parents held white-collar employment.

While questions of racialization and Indigeneity were not explicit in the research grid, these topics appeared in the data when we asked about colleagues, multilingualism in the workplace, and their own language practices and representations. Of the thirty-seven participants, all were born in Canada; one identified as Black and one as Asian-Canadian. Both worked in the public sector. None identified as First Nation, Inuit, or Metis. The research design focused on the geographic and social mobility of bilingual workers from a region in demographic decline (New Brunswick). This explains the under-representation of

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each category. The region historically attracted few immigrants, and the trend continues today, in spite of municipal, provincial, and federal policies meant to foster the attraction, inclusion, and retention of immigrants (Sall 2021). Meanwhile Indigenous populations have a differentiated access to French-English bilingualism in Canada, for a number of reasons, the efforts to reclaim and revitalize Indigenous languages chief among them (Haque & Patrick 2015; Nasager 2020).

In the analysis, I discuss an excerpt showcasing overt racism. While I was trained in critical ethnography to pay attention to how discourses construct social inequalities and to pay attention to neoracism (Bonilla-Silva 2022) and raciolinguistic ideologies (Rosa & Flores 2021), I had not prepared the research team to respond to racism while interviewing. I am responsible for the fact that the (white) research assistant found herself unprepared to deal with this methodological 'fraught terrain', where the extractive capitalist practices of the oil sands relied on colonial ideologies to erase Indigenous, migrant and black voices and produce the classed subjectivities we were documenting (Liboiron 2021). Here the interactional order of the interview setting colluded with the participant-centred approach we favoured in our qualitative methodologies and the interviewer changed the topic. It is telling of my own flawed and 'contaminated' positionality (Liboiron 2021) that while designing a project on labour, language, and class inequalities, I had not anticipated overtly racist comments. Regardless, as a critical researcher I chose to acknowledge and analyse these instances. Here it led me to follow the intersection between capitalism and raciolinguistic ideologies, and to investigate how those produce participants' understanding of the world (Quraishi & Philburn 2016; Rosa 2019; Tupas 2019) and enable the reproduction of raciolinguistic practices and discourses in late capitalism.

The research design purposefully recruited for differences in three sectors of the labor market (public service, entrepreneurship, and oil sand extraction). In this article, I reconstructed the categories as white- and blue-collar to reflect the two differential subjective relationship to language and work that emerged in the analysis. Most research on language and commodification centers language in ways that make the practices themselves the material in the production of difference (Violette 2023). Centering language was useful in making sense of the white-collar participants: they manifested a lot of linguistic insecurity, presented themselves as linguistically minoritized by English, and experienced anxieties related to language and social mobility. The blue-collar participants, however, expressed little in regards of linguistic anxieties. This brought me to decenter language to make sense of their experiences of the labor market, particularly in contrast with the public servants and the entrepreneurs. Yet, decentering language brought me right back to language, as the linguistic ideologies that organize work served to erase the role language played in producing labor for the late capitalist economy.

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Francophone white-collar participants were generally invested in and affected by the continued reproduction of prescriptivist language ideologies. This group believed the acquisition of standard forms of both French and English ensured upward social mobility in Canada. Specifically, they often thought that French, as a minority language, was harder to learn and practice in Canada, and so held the view that its acquisition required an early and long exposure through both family and education. Mélanie, a parapublic worker, summarizes this view in a government run workshop on early childhood education, through the idea of being "really bilingual".

(2)

Mélanie: Faut que les parents comprennent que s'ils veulent que leurs enfants soient vraiment bilingues, il faut leur apprendre le français le plus tôt possible et les entourer de français. (Représentante d'une association communautaire de francisation)
'Parents must understand that if they want their children to be really bilingual, they have to learn French at the soonest moment possible (Deleguate from a 'francization' community organization)'

For Mélanie, as well as most white-collar participants, the valued type of language acquisition informed sociopolitical orientations that are part of an emancipatory self and community project. Rosa (2019) observes this same imbrication of projects of the selves as projects of community in his field work in Spanish-English bilingual schools, where language and class map onto the bodies of latinx students as potential promising young professionals espousing the valued norms of the community. In Francophone Canada, the iconization of French-English bilingualism became an injunction that in turn informed the overt norms of the group: "Parents must understand". This community norm then either rendered problematic or erased the practices that fell outside of it all while simultaneously positioning as inferior or deficient the practices that differed from the desired ideal.

As a result, the white-collar participants who had children tried their best to enroll their children in francophone schools and to speak French to their children as a way to ensure the acquisition of the type of French valued in Canada. Mai, a parapublic worker, explained that she and her anglophone husband tried to speak French to their child: "Ben on veut principalement qu'il, qu'il parle français, qu'il soit francophone je sais pas c'est c'est la seule raison là (rit)" 'Well we mostly want that he, that he speak French, that he be Francophone, I don't know it's the only reason (laugh)'. This was said

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against the backdrop of Mai being invested in the cultural value of multilingualism in the labor market. She herself spoke French, English, and Vietnamese and worked in an environment where her partner and many of her colleagues had French as a second language. Be it at home with her partner or with colleagues, Mai observed that her white-collar peers who didn't identify as having French as a first language could feel insecure in French, at times make mistakes, and fail to grasp the political stakes of being a minority speaker. She and her partner both spoke in French to their child, and Mai noticed her partner's timidity, effort, and deviation from standard French. Conscious of representing a normative standpoint that went against her allegiance to multilingualism, she hesitated significantly when trying to explain that, in spite of his efforts, her partner could still struggle to speak French competently.

(3)

Mai: C'est quand même sa deuxième, deuxième langue même si c'est la langue de sa mère ben il se débrouille quand même tu sais/ maintenant il est moins gêné parce que là avec le petit tu sais on a décidé qu'on voulait parler au petit en français tu sais en famille alors lui il parle en français avec notre petit mais tu sais il va tu sais il va tu sais il c'est quand même sa seconde langue alors c'est tu sais il essaye très fort-la mais des fois tu sais
'It still is his second, second language even if it is his mother's language well he pulls it off regardless you know / now he's less timid because now we have the little one you know and we decided we wanted to speak to him in French in the home so he [her partner] speaks in French with our kid but you know he will you now he will you know it's still his second language so it's you know he tries really hard but sometimes you know'

Mai valued multilingualism for many reasons: as a political project of diversity, as a way to recognize her own trajectory as a second-generation Vietnamese-Canadian, and as a member of the francophone community. Her relationship to the acquisition of French in Canada showcased the tension many middle-class Acadians now express—feeling a tension between wanting to recognize linguistic variation within a diverse community of speakers, some of whom have it as a second language, and a desire to ensure that their children acquire the standard form of it. The latter leads Mai to evaluate her partner's way of speaking French. Standardizing ideologies are thereby part of Mai's valuation of multilingualism.

The question of linguistic standardization is closely linked to an imagination of upward social mobility. Studying the linguistic prescriptions of French-Canadian grammarians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Bouchard argues that the French spoken in Canada was devalued both by Canadians and Europeans following the French Revolution, an era marked by the French bourgeoisie taking over both political, economic, and linguistic power (Bouchard 2011).

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> To explain the transformations to French norms that we can observe in 1840, one must account for the rise of the [French] bourgeoisie throughout the XVIIIth century, who took power during the Revolution, and perhaps most of all the rapid progression of literacy of the French population after this event.
> Meanwhile, in Canada, French Canadians were experiencing the social downgrading that we know, and a strong regression of their level of instruction. (Bouchard 2011:19, my translation)

Linguistic standardization, be it in the francophone or anglophone world, served to police access to the emerging 'democratic' public space, in ways that rendered some bodies upwardly socially mobile while disqualifying others. Studying the rise of standard American English, Bongfiglio (2002) shows that standardization is more than a question of class warfare. Set against the forced, desired, or impeded geographic mobility of variously positioned colonial subjects, an ideology of race overtly informed the linguistic prescriptions of early twentieth-century grammarians, be it in the US, France, or Canada (Outram 1987; Bongfiglio 2002; Bouchard 2011). Significantly, the increased value of literacy, which was then only readily available to the limited portion of the population who could access formal education, served to produce raciolinguistic understandings linking social mobility to specific ways of performing language.

To this day, the defense of standard French is a common ground of moral panic for francophone Canadian political and intellectual elites (Heller 1999). The white-collar participants also semiotized class to express linguistic anxieties about downward social mobility. An analysis of this process reveals how embedded racio-ontological understandings of language map onto social mobility. Véronique, a parapublic worker and white mother to a two-year-old, showcased a high level of linguistic insecurity in both French and English, all while claiming to be proud of speaking Chiac, an Acadian variety of French. She was happy that her child's black daycare teacher was from a French-speaking African country for two reasons. First, Véronique believed the daycare worker spoke a better variety of French than the one that she and her husband spoke at home. Second, Véronique wanted her daughter to be open to diversity, in a way that I understand both as an exposure to transnational cosmopolitanism and anti-racist awareness. Véronique and her daughter inhabit a world where diversity, and an ability to navigate it, is often constructed as a moral and interactional good, one that can then be marketed as a skill in the bundle individuals offer to the global workplace (Gershon 2017; Urciuoli 2022).

In the excerpts below, the participant uses the word 'ghetto' to describe Chiac, the variety of French that she speaks. The use of 'ghetto' here indexes both the creativity and perceived disadvantages that speaking Chiac entails. This is a source of tension for Veronique, who says she is proud of Chiac, likely as an authenticating language that links her to her southern Acadian upbringing and as a member of a generation who fought for the recognition of linguistic variation (Boudreau 2016; McLaughlin 2021b). She constructs the black daycare worker as the one who will help a white middle-class child acquire the type of French

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and the cosmopolitan and anti-racist cultural soft skills her parents feel are key to ensure their child thrives both socially and economically. Yet, the use of the word 'ghetto' indexes the ways in which racialization and economic marginalization are linked in the linguistic ideologies that constitute linguistic hierarchies in Francophone Canada.

(4)

Véronique:	ben entre moi pis Tony on parle Chiac, trop à son gout … [notre fille] va m'entendre par contre tu sais parce que euh on dit souvent des choses comme le Chiac ça peut être **très ghetto** (Rit) fait que souvent je vais dire 'ah man' des choses comme ça pis elle l'attrape parce que après ça tu sais à moment donné pendant une couple de semaines elle disait man tout le temps, man, man, man, man, man 'Between me and [my spouse] we speak Chiac, too much to his taste … [our daughter] is going to hear me you know because we often say things like / like Chiac it can be **really ghetto** (laughs) so often I will say 'ah man' things like that and she will catch it because after you know at one point for a couple of weeks she would always say 'man, man, man, man, man''
Véronique:	J'en suis très fière [du Chiac] mais je ne pense pas que c'est un avantage, c'est drôle ein, j'en suis très fière mais je pense pas que c'est un avantage, yeah 'I am really proud of it [Chiac] but I don't think it's an advantage. It's funny eh? I am proud of it but I don't think it's an advantage'

Véronique has integrated the weight of standardizing linguistic ideologies and the classed and racial imaginaries that served to constitute them. She feels incompetent in both French and English, even as she holds a job in the public sector where she was evaluated for her abilities in both languages. What's more, by using the word 'ghetto' to express her ambivalence about Chiac, she participates in the reproduction of ideologies of languagelessness (Rosa 2019) that position bodies and linguistic practices along a continuum that simultaneously indexes racial assignation and class. Even as Véronique felt that racial equity was important, the language ideologies she navigated led to the reproduction of a language market that relied on the hierarchization, exploitation, erasure, and disqualification of linguistic practices along classed and racial lines.

Along with all other white-collar participants, Véronique, Mai, and Mélanie actively engaged in discourses touting the value of multilingualism as a gateway to social maintenance or upward social mobility. The reproduction of linguistic prescriptivism and, with it, linguistic insecurity led to challenges for certain participants as they sought to enter the labor market in bilingual regions of Northern New Brunswick. This, however, was not the experience of blue-collar participants, as I document in the next and last analysis section.

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BUNDLED OTHERWISE: MANAGING DIFFERENCE THROUGH LANGUAGE IN THE BLUE-COLLAR LABOR MARKET

The blue-collar participants did not express the same linguistic anxieties. They worked in an industry where language mattered, but it did not matter as a political project of the self, as with the white-collar workers. The participants showcased raciolinguistic beliefs more closely linked to either honouring cultural differences or defending one's position in the labour markets by invoking nationalist ideologies. Many blue-collar participants were proud of identifying as Acadians but tended to view French as a marker of ethnic belonging rather than a skill granting upward mobility or a political act. Blue-collar participants generally considered themselves Acadians by virtue of genealogy or geography. It should be noted that French was, for all blue-collar participants, the first language spoken at home.

Efficient communication is central in the oil sands: workers have to listen to security reports at the beginning of every shift (generally given in English), work in teams throughout the day (here French is regularly spoken as teams are composed of one's network from 'back home'), and fill out written security reports at the end of the day (generally in English). Because of the centrality of communication, participants distinguished between languages and communication. Often, they reported choosing their career path because of deficit views of their skills in English and French (McLaughlin 2021a). While laughing, Pierre, a scaffolder, tells us: "Moi je sais pas beaucoup écrire en français, imagine en anglais" 'I don't know how to write in French very much, imagine in English'. Most of the participants said they struggled with 'languages' in school or in other sectors of the labour market but considered themselves to be efficient and agile communicators in the oil sands. In an economy where blue-collar work was increasingly valued, these participants did not feel the weight of standardizing views of language in the same way the white-collar participants did.

None of the oil sands participants felt that standardizing language practices were central to their work or advancement. Repeating a leitmotiv that was frequent in the oil sand data, Pierre reported that: "Ben tu peux faire des fautes pis c'est pas grave. Ils comprennent là" 'Well you can make mistakes and it's not a big deal. They understand eh'. Collaboration around the linguistic aspect of the work meant that oil sand participants did not ascribe to the view that the acquisition of oral or written standard registers was key in upward social mobility. Linguistically, what was key was the ability to communicate efficiently in a high-risk team environment.

This perception also meant that while they held deficit views of their language skills, none of them felt it might limit their careers and only one of them expressed worry about his French becoming too anglicized. Instead, they all valued English as the linguistic skill to be acquired to access the job market. Alexandre's comment, below, contrasts his linguistic experience of the labor market to that of the school, concluding that once out of school, the linguistic variety spoken was irrelevant.

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(5)

Alexandre: Ben ça dépend de la tête que tu as. Il y a d'autre monde c'est plus facile à apprendre mais il y en a que c'est dur comme le diable. Le français qu'on apprend à l'école c'est du français parfait comme en France ou. Nous autres le français qu'on apprend à l'école là c'est pas le pareil comme qu'on parle
'Well it depends on the head you have on your shoulders. For some people it's easier to learn, for others it's hard as hell. The French we learn in school is perfect French like in France or. For us the French we learn in school is not the same we speak'

Sophie: Fait que c'est tu plus dur pour nous autres tu penses?
'And is that more difficult for us do you think?'

Alexandre: Ben c'est plus dur pour l'éducation des enfants. Pour nous autres astheure ça nous dérange pas ben ben parce que on est sortis de l'école
'Well it's hard for the education of children. For us now it doesn't matter well since we're out of school'

While linguistic prescriptivism was not central in the oil sands, the participants showcased themselves as adept and culturally savvy communicators. The oil sands are a transnational plurilingual global space. Workers from all over the world cohabit within the space, be it as temporary migrant workers or, as with the participants, as Canadian citizens. Most participants reported interacting with workers from other parts of the world, namely Somalia and Mexico. A few of them included this contact in their reconceptualization of themselves as linguistically and culturally agile subjects. Danica, felt, for instance, that she was now more cosmopolitan and loved learning about other cultures and languages. Carl reported learning some Somali from his Somalian friends and using translation technology to communicate with them. He considered this linguistic practice to be both playful and respectful.

(6)

Carl: J'ai une couple de chums qui viennent de / de la Somalie.
'I have a couple of friends who are from / from Somalia'

Sophie: Ah oui?
'ah yeah?'

Carl: Pis j'ai des / je texte avec eux autres dans leur langue là.
'And I have some / I text with them in both languages'

Sophie: Ok.
'Ok.'

Carl: Pour des Somaliens là. C'est comme compliqué, c'est juste pour le fun, c'est juste pour- c'est juste pour leur démontrer un peu de respect là. Eux autres ils se pratiquent en français, moi je leur montre une couple de mots en français, eux autres m'en montrent dans leur langue

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> 'For Somalians. It's a little complicated but it's just for fun, it's just to, it's just to show them a bit of respect. They practice their French, I teach them a couple of words in French and they show me some in their language'

This plurilingual transnational space could, however, be a site of tension for the workers. Oil companies often offered professional translators to international teams, a service rarely offered to francophone Canadians. The expectation seemed to be that Francophones born in Canada were either already bilingual or had the resources (i.e. networks) to adapt to the linguistic demands of the oil sands. Networks of solidarity were in place in the oil sands to ensure the production and acquisition of the necessary linguistic resources. These informal networks guaranteed that the linguistic demands of the work could easily be met. Pierre, for instance, asked an English-speaker for help when writing his security reports. Others often relied on the interpretation or translation to English of other bilingual colleagues, this, until they themselves knew enough English to become informal interpreters and translators. This linguistic organization of work reproduced ethnolinguistic networks amongst the groups of workers.

These groups could therefore experience tensions around language, racialization, and belonging. Danica managed cleaning teams for one of the biggest worker camps. In the following excerpts, she explained that there is competition over which network of workers was employed in the camp's laundry room, a job that many considered easier than the more physically demanding task of cleaning rooms. While she ran the services of that camp, the laundry team tended to be French-English bilingual from Eastern Canada. This camp was unionized and so workers from other networks, namely international workers, could be mandated to the laundry room as an accommodation. Danica reported that some of the francophone Canadian workers complained because this disrupted the ability to work in French.

(7)

Danica:	Les meetings ils [les équipes canadiennes françaises] chialent là 'In the meetings they [the French Canadian teams] complain'
Sophie:	Ok 'Ok'
Danica:	Comme euh 'comment ça se fait que vous prenez eux autres? Ils parlent pas assez français'. Mais il y a des employés qui ont transféré là pour question de santé 'As in 'how come you're taking them in? They don't speak enough French'. But some employees are transferred there for health reasons'
Sophie:	Ok 'Ok'

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Danica: Oui, stress. Parce que c'est un travail à la chaine hein. Tandis que housekeeping c'est plus- c'est physique. C'est physique, housekeeping. Comme faut que tu lèves- faut que tu lèves plus que 50 livres, housekeeping. C'est physique.
'Yes, stress. Because it's chain work. Meanwhile housekeeping is much more – it's physical. It's physical housekeeping. Like you have to be able to lift, lift more than 50 pounds, housekeeping. It's physical.'

Sophie: Ok
'Ok'

Danica: Tandis que à la laundry, quand tu as fini ton quart de travail, même si qu'il y a encore du linen à laver, tu as fini
'Meanwhile at the laundry when you're done your work shift, even if there is still linen to wash, you're done'

Sophie: Ok
'Ok'

Danica: Mais housekeeping, si tu as 30 chambres, faut que tu finis tes 30 chambres.
'But housekeeping if you have 30 rooms, you have to finish your 30 rooms.'

While the oil companies' practice of hiring networks could ensure efficient communication, it also produced tensions around ethnolinguistic, racial, and citizenship categories. Philippe, another participant, used white nationalist understandings of Canada to naturalize the competition between Canadian English and French speakers, Canadian Francophones, and, in this specific case, Somalians. Philippe reported that most of the people he 'chummed' with in the oil sands were "des Anglais",[1] who gave him the nickname "Frenchie". This nickname is frequent enough in Canada to be known as marking difference, often in a derogatory way. Philippe was aware of this and explained that there can be tensions between "Anglais" and "Français". He then used nationalist understandings of belonging to denounce this prejudice, a move that leads him to hierarchical racist statements reproducing understandings of Canadian society as euro-descendant, white, and French-English bilingual, thereby disqualifying migrants and speakers of other languages.

(8)

Philippe: Des fois c'est- c'est- c'est dur euh- des fois il y a des Anglais qui acceptent pas les Français
'Sometimes it's – it's – it's hard ah – sometimes there are English who don't accept the French'

Sophie: Ah non?
'Ah no?'

Philippe: Non. Pis il y en a que ils vont les accepter, tu sais qu'est-ce que je veux dire
'No. And some will accept them, you know what I mean'

Sophie: Ok
'Ok'

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Philippe: Tu es blanc, tu es blanc. Tu es un Canadien, tu es un Canadien. Moins pire qu'un- les autres races les Somaliens pis tout ça qui sont fourrés là partout. Ça parle leur langue pis ah esti
'You're white, you're with. You're Canadian, you're Canadian. It's not as bad as – the other races the Somalians and all that they're crammed everywhere. They speak their language and ah fuck'

Sophie: Pis ça arrive-tu- tu dis qu'il y en a qui acceptent pas les Français. Qu'est-ce qu'ils font, genre?
'And does it – you say that some don't accept the French. What do they do, like?'

Philippe: Ben ils sont plus comme racistes pis il vont piquer pis ils vont envoyer des cracks en anglais sur les Français là
'Well they're more like racists they will pick on they will make cracks in English about the French like'

Sophie: Ah oui!
'Ah yeah!'

Philippe: 'Fucking Frogs' pis
"Fucking Frogs' and'

Sophie: Ah oui!
'Ah yeah!'

Philippe: Oui. Des affaires de même pis oui pis il y en a que c'est- c'est- c'est pareil pour tout le monde tu sais qu'est-ce que je veux dire. Français ou Anglais, il y a pas d'importance. Mais il y en a que les Français- il vont prendre les Anglais en premier ou ils vont prendre leur buddy, leurs chums
'Yes. Things like that and yes for some it's -it's -it's the same for everyone you know what I mean. French or English, it doesn't matter. But for some French – they will take the English first or they will take their buddies, their friends'

Sophie: Ok. Pis comment tu trouves ça?
'Ok and how do you find that?'

Philippe: Ben qu'est-ce que tu veux que je dise. Si les Anglais étaient par ici, on probablement ferait la même chose.
'Well what do you want me to tell you. If the English were not here, we would probably do the same thing'

Sophie: Hum-hum
'Hum hum'

Philippe: C'est ça qu'est ça
'It is what it is'

Philippe linked racial, linguistic, and nationalist discourse to assert a naturalized hierarchy of treatment in the oil sands. He constructed Canadian identity as white and therefore argued that (white) francophones and anglophone Canadians should treat each other equally. "You're white, you're white. You're a Canadian, you're a Canadian". In doing so, he erased Indigenous claims to the territory as well as the centuries of migration to Canada from all parts of the world, most notably from former British and French colonies (Dua 2007). This in turn led

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him to mobilize nationalist raciolinguistic ideologies about the migrant workers hired to work the oil sands. Philippe reported that these groups are "everywhere, speaking their language". The research assistant brought the topic back to linguistic tensions between Anglophones and Francophones. This led the participant to the conclusion that the domination of majority groups over others is natural and inevitable: "If English weren't around here, we would probably do the same thing… It is what it is". In the only overt token of racism in the data, racism was reproduced through the belief that different categories naturally exclude and discriminate against each other, and that euro-settler nationalism should be a basis for solidarity.

As the oil sands are a translinguistic and superdiverse space, language is central to the organization of work teams in ways that enable the acquisition of multilingualism and appreciation of social differences. The organization of work could, however, lead to linguistic, ethnic, and racial tensions and the reproduction of racist ideologies. Oil sands workers are networked and flexible subjects, negotiating themselves as entrepreneurs of themselves as languaged, nationalized, and racialized competitors in a global workforce. Here, ethno-nationalist competition over resources reproduces raciolinguistics ideologies.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I focused on the neoliberalization of the labor market to investigate how ideologies of language intersect with questions of racialization and class. Namely, I show that two types of raciolinguistic ideologies coexist in late capitalist labour markets. The first conceived of language as belonging to linguistically, ethnically, and perhaps racially homogeneous collectivities. In the second, language was a skill amongst others in the bundle of entrepreneurial selves, one that could exacerbate investments into (racist) standardizing ideologies or be irrelevant for upward social mobility.

The parceling of personhood into bundles of skills somewhat disrupted the role the acquisition of standard languages played in regimenting access to work. The commodification of language as a skill among others ensured the value of clever, culturally savvy, and linguistically agile projects of the self. Furthermore, for white-collar workers, the continued investment in standardizing views of language produced anxieties about social mobility that indexed raciolinguistic ideologies.

Neoliberal discourses of entrepreneurial selves and changes in the economy allowed all the participants to this study to construct themselves as skilled, highly capable workers of the global economy. Both the workers who scripted themselves through standardizing language ideologies and those who didn't were embedded in the same processes of taylorization and skillification for the division of labor. Taylorization and skillification of language meant that the blue-collar workers were, in some ways, freed from the classic language market centered on linguistic standardization as described by Bourdieu (1982). The white-collar workers were more likely to be invested in the reproduction of standard forms to

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imagine upward social mobility for themselves and their children, even as they expressed anxieties about how these linguistic markets were organized. All participants' agency, in this sense, is the pinnacle of a neoliberal agency (Gershon 2011), one where the labour market thrives on a differently languaged workforce that serves to reproduce, even as it changes, social hierarchies based on the raciolinguistic ideologies that structure linguistic practices as a skill among others in workers' bundles (Urciuoli 2008; Rosa 2019).

This comparative analysis of the labour market thereby displays the deep roots of raciolinguistic ideologies in reproducing the division of labour at this stage of late capitalism. The participants to this ethnography pointed to many other workers whose mobile livelihoods participated in the constitution of a raciolanguaged labour market: those international workers of the oil sands who became friends or foe; the neo-Canadian workers of the care industry whose bodies and voices became de facto agents of language standardization, multiculturalism, and anti-racism. Our understanding of class, language and capitalism is made richer by accounting for how standardization, taylorization, and skillification intersect or contradict each other to produce interconnected yet conflicting understandings of the links between racialization, language and subjectivity.

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[1]In some varieties of Acadian French, the names *French* and *English* refer to local French-speaking and English-speaking populations, and not to citizens of France or England.

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