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Research Article

Accumulating Puhunan: Disposable and Superfluous Affective Capacities of Life-Making in the Platform ELT Economy

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This paper attempts to re-conceptualize the role and circulation of affect in English language teaching (ELT) using Neferti X. M. Tadiar's concept of life-times of disposability. I do this by drawing specifically on Tadiar's notions of superfluity and disposability and then expanding these notions by drawing on the Tagalog notion of puhunan, which approximately translates to capital or investment in English. I relate the notion of puhunan to the ways in which the affective capacities and practices of life-making among language-minoritized, racialized, gendered, and sexualized ELT practitioners are not just circulated, but extracted, expropriated, disposed of, and wasted away for capital accumulation in the commercial education sector. My theory and analysis are contextualized at the intersection of the Philippines' rapidly-growing, massive-scale platform economy and the booming transnational commercial online ELT industry in East and Southeast Asia. I explain how, for Filipino platform workers who take on precarious low-paying online ELT jobs, affect is vital for the accumulation of different forms of capital, such as puhunang sosyal (social capital, in Bourdieu's sense of the term) and utang na loob (debt of gratitude or reciprocal obligation), both of which are crucial for accessing resources, work opportunities, and other forms of capital via labor-brokering ELT platforms. As disposable and superfluous human beings, Filipino platform ELT workers must rely ever increasingly on their own affective capacities and practices of life-making, instincts, and sensibilities to ensure not only the longevity and success of their profession, but also their survival.

Keywords: affect; affective labor; English language teaching; life-times of disposability; platform economy

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies of the sociology of language and education have long been interested in the phenomenon of affect and how it relates to the linguistic choices that people make in educational spaces amid ever-increasing pressures to morally align themselves with the logics of market-based freedom, enterprise culture, self-reliance, and sturdy individualism (De Costa et al., 2016, 2021; Evans & Sewell, 2013). Building on this growing literature in the field, this paper sets out to achieve two specific aims. The first one is to illustrate how material and affective precarity 'circulates' (Milani & Richardson, 2021) in the Philippines' commercial English language teaching (ELT) industry, which is experiencing a new wave of neoliberal restructuring thanks to the increasing flexibilization of the ELT labor market and growth and expansion of the country's gig or platform economy (Chen & Soriano, 2022; Ofreneo, 2013; San Juan,

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2016). Drawing on Tadiar's (2012, 2022) concept of *life-times of disposability,* I describe and explain the different conditions that render the affective capacities and practices of life-making among Filipino ELT practitioners superfluous and therefore ultimately disposable. By doing so, this paper hopes to contribute to the growing literature that focuses especially on the entanglements of affect/emotion, labor, capital, and commodity in language teaching and learning (Cinaglia et al., 2024; Gkonou & Miller, 2020; Pavlenko, 2013; Zembylas, 2007).

The second aim of this paper is to respond to recent calls for theoretical diversity in the study of emotional labor in language teaching (De Costa & Nazari, 2024). I do this by presenting an alternative approach to theorizing and analyzing the complex entanglements of affect, capital, commodity, labor, and language in relevant sub-fields within linguistics such as sociolinguistics and applied linguistics where language education is a key area of research focus and source of theory development. As a standalone academic discipline, linguistics does not have its own theory of political economy – a product and function of the field that has treated language, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu (1991), "as an object of contemplation rather than as an instrument of action and power" (p. 37). For several decades applied linguists and sociolinguists have borrowed their ideas of political economy heavily from world-system theorists like Bourdieu (1982, 1986, 1991) and Appadurai (1986, 1996). An important consequence of this has been the popular uptake of Bourdieu's theory of *linguistic capital* and ancillary concepts like *linguistic market* and *language/linguistic commodification* (Blommaert, 2010; Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Heller & Duchêne, 2016; Heller et al., 2014; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Kelly-Holmes, 2016; Park & Wee, 2012) "to explore the interrelations of the political, economic, and the social with regard to language" (Simpson, 2023, p. 19). The use of such theories and concepts, however, has been subject to several criticisms particularly from a small (but increasing number) of linguists who draw ideas on Marx's theory of political economy, pointing to the lack of sophistication of understanding the workings of neoliberal capitalism and foundational notions like commodity and capital (McGill, 2013; Simpson & O'Reagan, 2018). Building on this line of criticism, I seek to develop a different way of thinking about capital and commodity in relation to not only language but also affect and labor. I attempt to do this by drawing specifically on the Tagalog notion of *puhunan* [puˈhunɑn], which translates closely to capital or investment in English, and then relating this notion directly to the affective capacities and practices of life-making among Filipino ELT practitioners, which are shaped by their day-to-day encounters with their capital subjects and their experiences of accentism, racism, sexism, and other forms of social discrimination. It is my hope that by drawing on the notion of puhunan, sociolinguists, applied linguists, and other language scholars may embrace more nuanced understandings of commodity and commodification beyond the domain of language, and of capital beyond its monetary, social, linguistic, and Western-centric ideations.

The paper is organized as follows. First, I provide a critical review of the present state of the labor market in the Philippines in relation to the country's growing platform

economy. Here I posit that the increasing flexibilization of the teaching labor market, driven by the migration of ELT work to gig/platform spaces, is redefining life and labor among ELT practitioners: a 'living labor' (Tadiar, 2022) that is marked not only by material but also emotional or *affective precarity* (Akalin, 2018; Fong, 2022), in particular the dissociation of feelings from self (Hochschild, 1983) and the sense of alienation of sensuousness that reduces the activity of life "to the level of mechanical subservience to crude needs" (Horowitz, n.d.). Then, in the following section, I describe and explain Tadiar's concept of life-times of disposability, after which, I introduce the study context from which my theoretical and analytical frames are built upon, my sources of empirical data – semi-structured interviews with Filipino ELT practitioners, and my method of analyzing them – reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I then move to my findings, where I attempt to link the notion of puhunan to notions of superfluity and disposability, and explain relevant themes in the data that illustrate Filipino ELT practitioners as a consolidated surplus population of workers that function perfectly as 'liquid reserves' or 'soft currency' for the speculative maneuvers of transnational capital subjects (Tadiar, 2022). These themes reflect different processes of commodity fetishism that enable the affective capacities of life-making to take on varying forms of puhunan – to *become* puhunan – only to be extracted, expropriated, circulated, and wasted away for capital accumulation.

2. LABOR FLEXIBILIZATION AND PRECARITY IN THE PLATFORM ELT ECONOMY

This paper is based on my doctoral research project on the Philippines' transnational commercial ELT industry – an industry that has seen immense growth in the last several decades thanks to the insatiable demand for both face-to-face and online, affordable supplementary and adult English tutoring services. As the largest English-speaking country in the Asia-Pacific, the Philippines plays a unique role in the region's education sector, providing low-cost English-speaking labor for private educational and quasi-educational businesses that run English language schools and online tutoring platforms. Like other kinds of gig/platform services run with low-cost business models (e.g., food delivery, digital marketing, and dropshipping services), English language schools and online tutoring platforms tend to promote ELT as an "easy-to-access" job "that usually require(s) little training and/or experience" (Codó, 2018, p. 437).

There is plenty of evidence in the Philippines alone for the increasing 'gigification' and flexibilization of ELT work. In June 2023, for example, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) launched a national *Kalayaan* Job Fair as part of state-led efforts to commemorate the country's 125th Independence Day. Over 70,000 jobs were available (Rico, 2023), including 12,000 overseas jobs (Naval, 2023) and several hundred contract-based ELT jobs offered by private businesses and manpower outsourcing agencies stationed around the country. The inclusion of ELT in a state-

sponsored job fair strongly indicates that the profession is turning into a viable 'HOTS' (hired on the spot) type of job that requires no professional teaching license issued by the Philippine Regulatory Commission, teaching certification from reputable institutions like TESOL or CELTA, or any relevant teaching experience at all. A highly popular Japanese commercial online ELT platform, 'Narra' (pseudonym) embodies this HOTS-type of teacher hiring practice, as seen in the sample tutor hiring advertisement in Figure 1 below. The advertisement is spearheaded by the tagline "Anyone can be a [Narra] tutor." On the left-hand side is an interplay of text ("Create a tutor: Yes/No") and image of appears to be an anthropomorphized cat on the verge of making an important career decision. Meanwhile, on the right-hand side is a laundry list of seemingly unrelated social groups and occupations like marketing managers, artists, engineers, mothers, and fathers, etc. The interplay of text and image here exemplifies what Gal and Irvine (2019) refer to as a rhematizing process that essentializes the role of jobs creation as the societal remit of private entities or individuals. This same rhematizing process also normalizes the lowering of barriers to entry for platform ELT work, blurring the lines between teaching and self-entrepreneurship (Wang & Curran, 2024); between professional licensed teaching work and non-teaching work; and between the professional and non-professional members of the labor force (e.g., teachers and senior high/college students). In Narra's online ELT space, anyone can be an English tutor, as long as they meet nationality and minimum age requirements ("Filipino and at least 18 years old"), demonstrating the increasing flexibilization (Ofreneo, 2013) of ELT jobs in the commercial education sector.

Figure 1. Sample Tutor Hiring Advertisement from "Nara," a Japanese Online Eikaiwa (English conversation) Platform

The aggregation of both professional licensed and non-professional ELT practitioners in commercial teaching platforms is a direct consequence of three important economic developments in the Philippines' transnational education sector: the ever-growing demand for low-cost and affordable English language teaching and training services in East Asia and Southeast Asia (Litman, 2022; Martinez, 2021; Panaligan & Curran, 2022); the growth and increasing popularity of online freelance work and digital labor in the Philippines (Chen & Soriano, 2022), which is supported by state-led pronouncements and small-scale interventions despite a significant legislation gap for instituting labor protection mechanisms (Presto & Tugade, 2023); and the decades-long growth and expansion of the country's business information technology and business process outsourcing (IT-BPO) industries, particularly the call center industry, which has had important spill-over effects on the country's transnational commercial ELT industry.

One might wonder how ELT work and call center work relate to each other. In the Philippines, both rely on not only the same information communication technology and economic infrastructures, but also the same pool of 'English-mediated' transnational labor force for their day-to-day business operations. There is, in other words, "significant mobility of occupation between online English instructors and call center agents" since both groups rely on the same set of language skills required to facilitate intercultural or global communication among L2 English users via online and digital platforms (Lee, 2022, p. 18). In fact, since call center companies specifically train their Filipino agents to target US American cultural and linguistic norms (Hori, 2016), English language schools and online ELT platforms are often happy to hire Filipino workers who have prior call center experience, as this solves the problem of having to train them basic English language skills from the get-go. Call center agents are also shifting to the platform ELT industry due to the harsh nature of the BPO work, which often entails long working hours, mandatory overtime, and 'graveyard' (late-hour) shifts and holiday shifts, not to mention the mental and emotional stress resulting from dealing with irate customers on a day-to-day basis (Chen & Soriano, 2022; Lee, 2022). There is also the general sense of ambivalence or even displeasure that comes along with being branded as a call center agent because amid the job's "white-collar exterior" it remains "part of a larger spectrum of labor that is routine, precarious, low-wage, and feminized" (Padios, 2018, pp. 63–64), and offers no guaranteed upward mobility nor a promise of a stable future, despite it being relatively well-compensated (Uy-Tioco, 2019).

However, like call center work, platform ELT work is also characterized by precarity, uncertainty, and low levels of job security and upward mobility owing to the lack of both career advancement opportunities and pay progression within the profession (Panaligan & Curran, 2022). It also pays much less than call center work (Lee, 2022). Moreover, platform ELT workers who fall under the L2 or non-native English-speaking category of teachers, such as Filipinos, are often paid disproportionately lower wages than their native, white, Anglo-American counterparts (Imperial, 2023; Litman, 2022; Martinez,

2021; Morikawa & Parba, 2024). And because platform ELT workers are typically hired as freelancers or independent contractors, their available work options and choices inevitably tether them "to the whims and exigencies of the market" (Tabiola & Lorente, 2017, p. 136). This 'flexible' hiring practice allows private businesses to implement, often to the detriment of the workers, cost-saving measures such as the nonpayment of sick leave and bonuses (Domingo, 2022) and optionalization of professional development training and career support programs (Imperial, 2023).

The material precarity of ELT jobs, facilitated by the corporatization of individual workers (Flores, 2013), neoliberal logics of self-entrepreneurship and self-development (Shin & Park, 2016), and increasing flexibilization of labor in the platform economy, have pushed many ELT practitioners to place the social and financial responsibility of upskilling and building their careers almost entirely on themselves, for example by taking teaching certification courses, reading for a relevant master's degree or postgraduate teaching diploma, engaging in self-branding discourses to build and grow their online teaching profile, procuring their own equipment for home- or remote-based teaching, working extra-long hours to grow their student clientele, and proactively catering to their clientele's learning needs, wants, and preferences (Curran & Jenks, 2023; Imperial, 2023; Nejadghanbar et al., 2024; Panaligan & Curran, 2022). However, individual efforts by ELT practitioners to corporatize and upskill themselves have led to the emergence of new conditions of precarity that go beyond material hardship and scarcity. The pressure to develop outward-facing online personas and increase online visibility and reach across various teaching and social media platforms, all in the name of self-branding, has heightened the emotional vulnerability of platform ELT workers, resulting in feelings of "being behind, of starting late, of losing the competition, of not being good enough" (Nejadghanbar et al., 2024, p. 1752). Xiong et al.'s (2022) study, for example, highlights how local private supplementary English tutors in Mainland China are placed in a position of "instability and vulnerability" that results in "deprofessionalisation and identity crisis," as they are compelled to discursively construct "a range of hybrid identities, that is, tutors as exam experts, tutors as salespeople, and tutors as underdogs" (p. 73) in order to promote themselves in an extremely competitive shadow education market.

Furthermore, the pervasiveness of standardization in language pedagogy and assessment, strict work surveillance, accountability measures and penalties, not to mention the continuing valorization of native-speaker ideologies in teacher hiring practices, have altogether contributed to increasing feelings of de-professionalization and disempowerment, and loss of reflexivity and creativity among ELT practitioners (Benesch, 2018; Lowe, 2024). What platform ELT workers and other kinds of ELT practitioners are experiencing today is a teaching culture that is becoming more increasingly defined by not only material but also affective precarity (Akalin, 2018; Fong, 2022), in particular the dissociation of feelings from self (Hochschild, 1983): the sense of alienation of sensuousness that reduces the activity of life, as living labor, to the level of mechanical subservience to crude needs" (Horowitz, n.d.).

3. LIFE-TIMES OF DISPOSABILITY IN THE ELT PLATFORM ECONOMY

In the context of the platform economy, the material and affective precarity that undergirds online ELT work can perhaps be more comprehensively understood in terms of Tadiar's concept of *life-times,* which she derives from her post-Marxist analysis and interpretation of migrant domestic work:

> ...the appropriation of "feminized" labor is inextricable from the appropriation of the worker's whole bodily being, that is, conditions in which the distinction between labor time and life time is dissolved—not, however, as in the general case of post-Fordist labor but rather in the specific (gendered, racialized) context of live-in migrant domestic servants at the beck and call, or the unlimited disposal, of their employers (whose disposition over servants is not restricted in time). (2022, p. 96)

In her study of the lives of Filipina migrant domestic workers, Tadiar views the workers in their capacity as not only sources of reproductive and immaterial labor, but also very importantly as "savers and producers of valorized and valorizable 'surplus life-time' for the host employers and their socialities" (p. 96). An important consequence of this new political economy of life, Tadiar argues, is that host employers are able to invest the life-times of their hired domestic servants into their own productive lives as entrepreneurs of themselves (Foucault, 2008). In other words, the domestic workers' life-times, that is their time, their body, their being, and their living are "the medium and source of life-times of use values for consumption in the production of the exchangeable life-times of others" (pp. 96-97).

Tadiar's concept of life-times allows us to emphasize two very important concepts for our understanding of material and affective precarity in the platform ELT economy: the *superfluity* and *disposability* of ELT practice as living labor. These concepts add a deeper and more complex conceptual and analytical dimension to customary understandings of labor precarity based on commonly used frameworks in socio-/applied linguistics like emotion labor (Benesch, 2018) and affective regimes (Wee, 2016); Bourdieusian notions of the linguistic market (Blommaert, 2010) and language/linguistic commodification (Duchêne & Heller, 2012); the Foucauldian notion of linguistic entrepreneurship (De Costa et al., 2016, 2021); unequal Englishes and inequalities of multilingualism (Tupas, 2015a, 2015b); and empowerment narratives and sticky affects (Salonga, 2022), derived from the works of Wetherell (2012) and Ahmed (2014).

Drawing on the concept of superfluity: the growth and popularity of the online ELT services are made possible *only* because there is a consolidated surplus population of Filipino workers that function perfectly as what Tadiar refers to as 'liquid reserves' or 'soft currency' for 'speculative maneuvers' of transnational capital subjects, in this case the business owners and investors of English language schools and online ELT platforms, as well as their customers (e.g., students, their parents, adult learners, corporate professionals, etc.) who reside mostly in Japan, South Korea, and Mainland

China. It is also important to note that this surplus population of Filipino workers is only a small fraction of what Ofreneo (2013) calls the "narrow side of the formal labor market" (p. 435) that is estimated to represent, as per House Bill 347, at least 25 million workers or approximately 27 to 45% of the Philippines' total employment, depending on how contract-based or freelance employment is defined (Purugganan, 2022). This *informalized* formal labor market is shaped and wrought by macro-level policies aimed at keeping workers in casual arrangements with no promise of regularization or social benefits. Material and affective precarity is thus a defining feature of the platform ELT economy because there is a readily available, easily exploitable, and enormous population of English-educated and hardworking surplus workers who are already embedded in precarious conditions owing to their status as informal or unregularized members of the labor force.

As for the second important concept of disposability: not all life-times and labor-times in the education sector are equal under the current machinations of neoliberal capitalism. There are what Tadiar (2022) describes as 'investable' and 'profitable' lives on the one hand, and then 'unvalorizable' lives on the other. An unvalorizable life, such as that of the Filipino platform ELT worker, operates within a diminishing value system whose trajectory is that of "consumption of eventual wastage… toward being used up—spent—its intrinsic value declining irreversibly over time" (p. 91). In other words, Filipino platform ELT workers are not only superfluous but also disposable workers. Panaligan and Curran (2022) emphasize this very point in their discussion of the enormous pool of prospective teachers in the Philippines driving up the hiring competition, rendering the available teaching workforce very easily replaceable despite the very low acceptance rates imposed by ELT platforms. Lee (2022) also describes the tendency among Korean ELT platform owners to "view Filipino instructors as educated knowledge workers who can be consumed and replaced, rather than being professionally and intellectually instructing the development of the abilities of students" (p. 31).

The disposability of platform ELT workers also can be seen in Tajima's (2018) analysis of the discursive construction and consumption of Filipina English teachers as "intimate and romanticized entities" (p. 100) by Japanese men in online *eikaiwa* (English conversation) spaces. Here, Japanese men are able to assert their masculinity and express flirtatious attitudes and personal emotions towards Filipina teachers more easily than towards white women teachers. In my view, this highlights the trajectory of consumption of Filipina teachers whose collective value accrues from having their life-times expended and expropriated by means of controlling their affective and aesthetic labor, e.g., being affectionate and non-threatening, as Tajima has observed. Such extraction and expenditure of surplus value often goes unremunerated, as these teachers are paid to teach English, not to serve as objects of romantic or sexual desire.

4. METHODOLOGY

The empirical data and findings that I present in the latter half of this paper draw on interview data that I co-generated with eleven informants – Filipino ELT practitioners who, at the time of their one-on-one interviews with me, were working as either freelance online tutors or contract-based online tutors for English language schools or ELT platforms. The eleven informants pseudonymously referred in the findings are Chris, Eloisa, Frances, Gwen, Heidi, Maya, Melinda, Patricia, Trisha, Ylona, and Zinnia. Together, they comprise about a fifth of the informants whom I had recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews for my doctoral research project. Maya and Patricia are part of a group of informants whom I had recruited at an earlier stage of my year-long doctoral fieldwork via snowball sampling (social media blasts and word-of-mouth).

At the time of their interviews, Patricia was working for a Korean online Business English platform, 'Lanzones', while Maya split her time between two Japanese ELT platforms, 'Acacia' and 'Katmon'. The rest of the informants were recruited a few months later, when I finally received official approval from 'Almaciga', a private university in Manila, and the Japanese online eikaiwa platform 'Narra' to work with their respective teachers. At the time of the interviews, Trisha was working part-time at Almaciga's English language center, while Chris, Eloisa, Frances, Gwen, Heidi, Melinda, Ylona, and Zinnia were working for Narra on a contractual basis. Trisha was recruited with the help of the director of Almaciga's language center, while the remaining eight tutors were handpicked by two managers from Narra's operations team.

During the interviews, all informants willingly shared their best practices for language teaching, pedagogy, and learning; the struggles and opportunities that come along with gig/platform work; their experiences of working across various platforms and teaching and learning contexts; and their personal views on relevant and timely topics in ELT, focusing especially on social justice issues, including native-speakerism, racism, sexism and other forms of workplace-related discrimination. The ten informants were selected as part of this paper's dataset because their interview excerpts contained exemplar data on the following key themes of the paper: puhunan (capital), affective labor, caring labor, aesthetic labor, material and affective precarity, superfluity, and disposability. Adopting Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis, all interview transcripts went through a rigorous process of coding, which involved the "iterative and contingent tracing" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 39) of both the 'local' and 'fleeting' indexical meanings, as well as the more enduring social identity meanings produced by each informant during their interview. Although the personal testimonies shared by the ten informants do not wholly represent the ideologies, beliefs, and lived experiences of all platform ELT workers (and ELT practitioners in general), these testimonies are nonetheless salient, recognizable, and relatable to all informants who participated in the research project.

Before I continue with my analysis and interpretation of findings, I must express that few ELT practitioners, if any would consciously and explicitly identify their lives as disposable (cf. Wright, 2006). But as Tadiar (2022) argues, critical notions such as superfluity and disposability are useful in thinking about the "overlooked productivity of the social practices of life-making that seem to lie outside contemporary modes of exploitation of life as living labor" (p. 96). Tadiar places the life-times of disposable and remaindered populations at the center of her "analytical and political tale… about our global present" (p. ix), and this is something that my work also aims to accomplish in the context of language-minoritized, gendered, and racialized groups working in the education sector.

5. FINDINGS

The following five sub-sections are my analysis and interpretation of findings. Each sub-section discusses a major theme that relates to the key themes of the paper, particularly to the theme of puhunan, a notion that was brought up specifically by one of the informants, Zinnia, during her interview. I attempt to relate the notion of puhunan to the ways in which certain affective capacities and practices of life-making are not just circulated but extracted, expropriated, disposed of, and wasted away for capital accumulation in the ELT platform economy. The findings illustrate how puhunan in ELT practice takes on various forms:

> Puhunang sosyal (social capital in the Bourdieusian sense), realized through feminized capacities and practices of caring and intimacy, *pakulô* (affective gimmicks) and *tambling* (acrobatic maneuvers), and aesthetic affects
>
> Puhunan as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude or reciprocity of obligation), realized through market logics that legitimize Filipino workers as cheap sources of labor, compliance-gaining strategies, and a culture of subservience, personalism, and patronage politics

The findings will also show how central to the process of extracting and expropriating these various forms of puhunan is the workers' active circulation of affective capacities for their social reproduction across different sites, objects, and bodies in spite of the perennial risk of superfluity, disposal, and wastage that they face. Exemplar testimonies from all eleven informants will be used to develop this line of thinking. In a similar way that Pratt et al. (2016) had analyzed the lives of Filipino migrant workers as surplus entrepreneurs, the aim of this paper is not to formulate a reductive analysis of the lives of platform ELT workers as merely extractible, superfluous, and disposable, but to identify modes of life-making that contemporaneously lie within and outside the platform economy as a hegemonic or totalizing, i.e., colonial, racial, heteropatriarchal capitalist system.

5.1 Puhunan as Feminized Capacities and Practices of Caring and Intimacy

Zinnia's interview excerpt below highlights the importance of embracing the neoliberal logics of self-entrepreneurship and self-development (De Costa et al., 2016, 2021) to develop a successful teaching career in the platform economy:

> Zinnia: Well, I can say yes, that [cultural knowledge] would be necessary in order for a tutor to thrive on teaching… because in English language teaching to Japanese students, our puhunan is the number of students that would book our lessons. So that that will happen if we are good tutors. So how would I be a good tutor? Of course, I would want my students to know that I can understand them, or I can somehow relate to what they are saying… I cannot do that if I do not have a little bit of a background of a Japanese culture, of a Japanese word or not word of a Japanese food cuisine, Japanese province, place, like that. So, I think that's necessary.

Individual efforts by platform ELT workers to embrace neoliberal capitalist logics require the accumulation of what Zinnia refers to as puhunan, which approximately translates to capital or investment in English (Nuncio et al., 2020; Paglinawan & Hussin, 2024; Resurreccion & Demetrio, 2021). In Zinnia's view, to accumulate puhunan is to accumulate a (lucrative) number of students which, she suggests, can be achieved by *being* a "good" tutor. Such view evokes a Bourdieusian notion of capital that aligns with Paglinawan and Hussin's (2024) interpretation of puhunan as "symbolical of capitalism or the bourgeois" (p. 11). Drawing on Zinnia's experience as a platform ELT worker, engaging in socially cooperative behavior for capitalist productivity (Tadiar, 2022) necessitates the development of a class habitus (Bourdieu, 1986) through both the acquisition and accumulation of relevant social capital or *puhunang sosyal,* in Nuncio et al.'s (2020) terms. As a freelance worker and self-entrepreneur, Zinnia must 'invest' in her own life-time by not only learning how to effectively teach English as a second or foreign language but also acquiring cultural knowledge and intercultural communication skills that are relevant and essential to her social reproduction and active participation in the platform economy. This point is also exemplified by another tutor, Patricia: "Not, not to brag, or, like, I would be able to spot the nuances between the things that they're trying to say, the way they say things and the common mistakes that they make. Because I know Korean and I know their culture pretty well."

Acquiring puhunang sosyal, however, requires a specific kind of affective labor, that is caring labor (Himmelweit, 1999), or life-times of caring, following Tadiar's nomenclature. In their interviews, many of my informants often talk of how their students appreciate them for their kindness, openness, and friendliness; for being always polite and respectful and at the same time fun and engaging; and for being able to adjust to their learning needs, wants, or preferences instinctively and flexibly, as in the case of Eloisa, who claims to try her best to meet her students' expectations, even when they do not say them out loud. Several of my informants also talk about the important difference between standing in as a language teacher and as a conversational partner for their students. Melinda for example recounts a student who had told her

straight to her face, “I want to just have a free conversation. I love talking with you.” “So sometimes we do not finish the lesson or sometimes we do not even take the lesson itself… (w)e just have a free conversation… And they would love it if I remember facts about them.”

Melinda’s account of her role as a conversational partner illustrates the importance of not only the affective capacity of caring but also intimacy in platform ELT work. A “carefully constructed performance of intimacy” (Koch, 2016, p. 705) functions to sustain students’ interest in their teachers, which can be quite the challenge especially in online ELT platforms, given the highly transient and transactional nature of teacher-student relationships. Two of my informants, Heidi and Frances, are a testament to the importance of cultivating an intimate language learning space for both teachers and students. Heidi has a loyal group of Japanese students, all of them mothers, who have been signing up for free eikaiwa lessons with her on an almost daily basis for more than a decade now. Having been conversation partners for a long time, Heidi and her students now use the online platform not to learn English, but to have regular conversations about what Heidi describes as “mother-related topics”: “…(B)efore all we’d talk about are the school lives of our kids. Now we talk about our kids getting married because we have kids who are adults now, like those things.”

Frances, another veteran tutor with more than nine years of teaching experience under her belt, had initially struggled to get students to book her lesson slots – until she learned the tricks of the trade from Sarah, a relative of hers who had lived and worked in Japan as a nightlife entertainer. “*Huwag ka maniwala diyan* (Don’t believe it),” Sarah quips, referring to Narra’s rather strict teaching guidelines. “They like it when you smile.” After following Sarah’s advice, Frances claims that the tide had finally turned for her, as she started accumulating more puhunan, in the form of more students and lesson bookings: “*Ayaw nila ng seryoso. Lagi nilang sinasabi, ‘Pagod na nga ako sa trabaho, mag-aaral ako mapapagod na naman’”* (They don’t like it serious. They would always say ‘I’m already so tired from work, the last thing I want from studying is to get even more tired”). It really works. Yeah.”

It is important to note how Heidi and Frances’ life-times of caring and intimacy illustrate how ELT, as living labor, must often take on a feminized character. Heidi specifically draws on shared experiences of womanhood and motherhood, while Frances strategically caters to the male gaze through her use of body language, in particular her smile, to offer exhausted Japanese men *iyashi* (癒やし) or ‘healing’ (Koch, 2016) and a temporary respite from the consumption and expropriation of their own life-times. Together, these two contrasting forms of feminized ELT work underscore the long-standing racialized and gendered representations of Filipinos as “compassionate and loving super-workers” (Guevarra, 2014, p. 131), and ‘laborers of love’ (Simpson & Tajima, 2024) who typically take up low-prestige or low-paying occupations in the services sector.

5.2 Puhunan as utang na loob

Like other providers of caring labor, e.g., nurses, caregivers, social workers, and domestic workers, 'compassionate' and 'loving' teachers are often willing to accept low wages out of genuine compassion, concern, or consideration for their students: In the words of Frances:

> Frances: "I would say na (that) / magagalit ang mga co-teachers ko nito (my co-teachers will be mad at this) / pero (but) I would say na (that) (teaching has to be) customer-oriented… Whatever type of teaching it has to be customer-oriented… It has to be cheap din (too), I would say. Kasi (Because) Narra is also cheap for Japanese people, for Japanese students."

Frances' view of ELT work as "customer-oriented" and "cheap" perfectly illustrates Himmelweit's (1999) explanation for why caring providers with a genuine feeling of love or compassion are often paid so poorly: "caring becomes to some extent its own reward, and to that extent carers' wages can be set lower than those of workers with objectively comparable skills" (p. 33). Drawing on the Tagalog notion of puhunan, we can reasonably address Frances' rather controversial view, that is, that teaching has to be "customer-oriented" and "cheap" for foreign students, as though Filipinos owe it to them for availing themselves of their services. This view makes common sense in the context of the increasing number of low-income or low-resourced families and students in East and Southeast Asia who seek to use the English language as "alternative means of capital building that holds value for them beyond any calculated labor market ascendance" (Choi, 2022, p. 379). Here we see how the global reorganization of social reproduction through English, as a global lingua franca, opens up "new 'peripheries'" for accumulating puhunan which in turn, allows for many English-educated Filipinos to "make and remake" their social lives "under conditions of their own superfluity or disposability" (Tadiar, 2022, p. 34; 114).

Frances' sympathetic and charitable view of what tends to be an exploitative mode of life-making in the global present also evokes a different conceptualization of capital or puhunan: a favor done for someone else. Steinberg (2000) contextualizes this notion of puhunan in his discussion of kinship and other relationships in Philippine society:

> Philippine relationships have depended on the notion of debt of gratitude or reciprocity of obligation (utang na loob), and Filipinos are acutely sensitive to the burden of paying back those favors done for them by others (puhunan)." (p. 79)

In his early conceptualization of the term, Steinberg (1986) traces the relationship between puhunan and utang na loob [ˈut̄aŋ nɑ lɔˈʔɔb] to what he calls a cosmic *compadrazgo* or fictive kinship between each Filipino and the Holy Family that is defined by a sense of utang na loob to Christ for performing a set of favors, i.e., puhunan, "that demanded every good Filipino to acknowledge his reciprocal burden through faith, sympathy, and charity" (p. 31). Later on, in his discussion of *pakikisama* (smooth interpersonal relationships) as "one of the salient characteristics of Philippine life" (2000, p. 4), kinship, and other relationships, Steinberg uses the same concepts of

puhunan and utang na loob to argue that patron-client relationships that link, for instance, tenants to landlords, ward politicians to regional officeholders, or *sari-sari* (local store) owners to Chinese distributors to Manila, help "define the reciprocal obligations of social hierarchies" (p. 6). Indeed it is not difficult to see how in today's neoliberal capitalist society personalism and patronage politics could strongly influence the ways in which Filipino platform ELT workers define their reciprocal obligation towards labor-brokering ELT platforms, who take on the social role of patrons offering them resources and work opportunities. These platforms are not simply sources of puhunan for the life-making capacities of surplus workers – they also function as capital subjects that must take on the reciprocal obligation of availing of surplus workers that would otherwise be wasted away without having their use values extracted and expropriated. This idea of utang na loob among Filipino surplus workers is evident in how Zinnia views Filipino English tutors as "not slaves" but "workers of Narra," and how she uses this to justify Narra's lack of formal training provision for its tutors:

> Zinnia: I think, in our situation here at Narra that we are self-employed. I think the company is not really required to give us formal trainings, because it's up to us, like, we have this skill. So we want to use this skill in order for us to have money. So yeah, it's like very, I think it's not that.. very good to hear or very good to say. But it's like we are allowing ourselves to be to be not slaves, but to be workers of Narra. They are capitalizing on us on our skills like that. So I think it's not their fault, if they will not give us formal trainings, because it's our decisions by ourselves to be self-employed in their company. So it's up on us.

Feelings of utang na loob also intertwine closely with feelings of self-empowerment. Workers like Zinnia and Frances are, borrowing Salonga's (2022) words, "affectively interpellated" by labor-brokering platforms "into ideal workers in the new economy", as they are offered "a way out of a difficult life, a sense of recognition and belongingness and fulfillment, a full embrace of the self, and also a chance at something bigger than the self" (p. 138):

> Frances: Aside from flexibility. I would say na (that) I would get more compared to when I would teach in a public school. Compared to when I work at a call center for example… I was able to buy two farms and nakapag-establish po ako ng trucking business, pero hindi siya okay during this time (I was able to establish a trucking business, but it's not doing well during this time).

It is through these various definitions of puhunan – puhunang sosyal or social capital/investment in the Bourdieusian sense, puhunan as an alternative means of capital building, and puhunan as utang na loob in the context of Philippine personalism and patron-client relations, that we might be able to deepen our understanding of the crucial importance of affective capacities and practices of life-making in the ELT platform economy, in how it enables the exercise of agency and social reproduction of disposable life, while at the same time contributing to the essentialization or normalization of a culture of living labor that puts already unvalorizable workers in a position that then makes them vulnerable targets for other forms of exploitation and abuse.

5.3 Cheche-bureche: Affective labor (mis)management

Like other kinds of interactive service workers, customer service representatives, nurses, and call center agents to name a few, platform ELT workers are often required by their employers or labor-brokering platforms to build good customer relations by honing their intercultural communication knowledge and skills and avoiding, wherever possible, conflict or communication breakdown. Drawing on my interview data, Filipino platform ELT workers actively try to build and maintain customer relationships not just through carefully constructed acts of caring and intimacy, but through 'compliance-gaining strategies' (Makoni, 1998), such as adhering to structured programs, scripted texts, and standardized lesson materials, while at the same time also providing bespoke, customizable, or flexible (as opposed to Taylorized) forms of lesson production (Simpson, 2023), which often require catering directly to the students' learning needs, wants, or preferences. However, managing these dialectical forms of lesson production is not easy especially for Filipinos who, given their position as disposable and superfluous workers, must always carefully manage or control their feelings and emotions. One of my informants, Chris, whose experience of dealing with a rude student illustrated in the excerpted text below, offers us a vivid example of how the production of online English lessons tends to involve the complicated circulation and management of affect between teacher and student:

> Chris: …(T)here was one student there was one, there was one special, one student, hindi ko talaga gets 'yung point nung comment niya (I really didn't get the point of her comment). Umm, tinawanan niya 'yung / ano ba / intonation? Intonation ko? Tumawa siya (Umm, she laughed at my / what this / intonation? My intonation? She laughed). Like, "I'm sorry I can't help it but laugh at your intonation." And then I said "Excuse me? What do you mean by that?" And she said that I have a very strong Filipino English, I don't know intonation or accent or something. So I asked like, "What's what's funny?" It bothered her na daw (already) so she couldn't help but laugh. But for on my side, it was a bit offensive kasi (because) it was a material, and she was even late. So there was no apology… "Are you saying that the Filipino accent is bad?" Tinanong ko siya (I asked her). (..) She said, "No. But yours is bad." "And then you just said that I have a very strong Filipino accent. So you're saying that the Filipino accent is bad!" Hello? Yes. Yeah so medyo nagkaroon ng heated, nagkaroon ng heated argument / kaso may time limit (Yeah so there was a bit of a heated, there was a heated argument / but there was a time limit). So of course, I'd like to end the lesson peacefully or nicely. At least ma-realize man lang niya na making such comments na sobrang extra didn't really help at all with the lesson (At least to make her realize that making such extra comments didn't really help at all with the lesson). Kumbaga (So to speak), she could have just kept it to herself kung feeling niya is katawa-tawa 'yung accent ko (if she felt that my accent was laughable)… "I hope you meet you meet tutors who meet your expectations." Right? So ayun (there). Wala na akong, wala na akong gaanong nasabi after (I didn't know what else to say after that).

Chris is clearly taken aback by the student's rude remarks about his accent, and this contributes to his struggle to adequately manage his feelings and emotions throughout their interaction. And so we witness, through Chris' spoken word, his attempt to 'speak back' (Heller et al., 2014) at his puhunan, his capital subject, the patron doing him a

favor by availing of his service, which inevitably results in the unfolding of a regrettable breakdown in communication, and a tarnishing of social relations – in other words, a discursive *mis*-alignment between self and other (cf. Ahmed, 2014). Offended, distraught, and yet wanting to "end the lesson peacefully or nicely," he signs off with a hint of sarcasm: "I hope you meet tutors who meet your expectations." Here, we see how the performativity of 'speaking back' unfortunately gets "turned against itself" (Borba, 2021, p. 690), only to reinforce the unequal social, economic, and power relations between customer and service provider, through the medium of money, under the guise of professionalization:

> Chris: ...(I)n this kind of setting they are like customers, right? Kasi may ganun, may ganung premise na binabayaran nila 'yung service na nakukuha nila (Because there is like that, like that kind of premise that they are paying for the service that they're getting). So medyo (kind of) comply with that. Kasi kung ire-request nila na ganito na ganyan or gusto nila pag-usapan ito ganyan (Because if they request that they want to talk about this or that), of course, I just really have to be professional...

Also, for being derided for having a "very strong Filipino accent," Chris has become estranged not only from the product of his labor and from the activity of labor, but also from his own linguistic identity – his Filipino accent – that forms an integral part of his life-time: "'*Wag na masyado ma-cheche bureche* (Do not dwell so much on the cheche-bureche). So *trabaho tayo sa lesson ang request nila* (let us work on their lesson requests). Yeah." Chris' use of the Tagalog slang "*cheche-bureche*," which pertains to a quality of frivolousness or uselessness akin to 'yada-yada' in English, speaks to an alienation of sensuousness, wherein the activity of teaching is reduced to mechanical subservience to crude needs. The sense of alienation or estrangement felt by Chris is embodied through the extraction, expropriation, and wasting away of his affective capacities, particularly through the casual indexing of disrespect (Vitorio, 2021) by the student (the capital subject) towards her cheap and disposable worker (Chris). We can also observe a similar instantiation of alienation or estrangement in the case of Maya, who could not stomach working for a Japanese online ELT platform because of the occasional verbal abuse hurled at her by her students: "It was like, 'You Filipinos are not good,' 'They are not good teachers,' 'Are you sure you are a Filipino?' – things like that. And then there's like 'You're very ugly,' things that are not part of the skill set needed for teachers." She also remembers encountering instances of micro-aggression while working for a large-scale online ELT platform based in China: "...So I look back, I see [company name], and then 'I'm surprised Filipinos are good in English,' things like that. So it's something we grew up to and the world doesn't know. And they're always surprised with our skills."

Chris and Maya's unpleasant encounters in the platform ELT space illustrate how accumulating puhunan through a culture of customer compliance, subservience, personalism, and patronage politics always comes at a personal cost, in terms of the wasting away of not only people's affective capacities, but also their sense of self. We see how the discrediting and dismissal of individual and regional identities, like having a

Filipino English accent or Filipino facial features, are made possible via enduring hegemonic ideologies about language, race, and ethnicity that force Filipino workers to observe compliance-gaining strategies and "place the onus" (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 155) on them to adopt a 'neutral' or 'American' accent. ELT practitioners like Chris and Maya must 'perform' this accent or risk losing their puhunan, that is, the customers and labor brokers who they have been socially conditioned to believe to be doing them a favor by availing of their services.

5.4 Pakulô, tambling: Affective Gimmicks and Acrobatic Maneuvers

Trisha works as a part-time teacher at an English language center at 'Almaciga,' a private university in Manila. At the time of our interview, Trisha was just about to finish teaching and facilitating a three-week intensive online ESOL course to a cohort of tertiary students from Japan; she was assigned a group of students of various language proficiencies – between Levels A1 and B2 (CEFR) – which proved quite the challenge for her:

> Trisha: So, I have to do something, I have to be energetic. I have to make some jokes sometimes. Sometimes I have to show them a video kasi nabo-bore na (because they would get bored). Ganun (Like that). Ang dami kong pakulô sa kanila para lang huwag silang mag-leave ng (Zoom meeting) room kasi sometimes nadi-disconnect, tapos ang tagal-tagal bumalik pero mga 15 minutes 'di pa bumabalik 'di ba (I have a lot of pakulô for them just so they wouldn't leave the (Zoom meeting) room because sometimes they'd get disconnected, and then they'd take very long to come back like 15 minutes and they still wouldn't come back, right)… Kaya ayun, I have to tambling talaga (So there, I have to tambling really).

Trisha's use of two Tagalog words, "*pakulô*" and "*tambling,*" perfectly exemplifies the performative and affective capacities of platform ELT as living labor. To a Filipino speaker pakulô, which roughly translates to gimmick in English, affectively evokes a certain metaphorical image: a bag of tricks. This sense derives from the root verb *kulô,* which literally means to boil, simmer, or brew. Pakulô is also very closely related to another Tagalog word, *pakuwela,* whose root nominal form *kuwela* pertains to a human quality of being lively, delightful, and charming; easy to get along with. From a semiotic perspective, the word pakulô evokes a conjecture (Gal & Irvine, 2019) that incites one to think of language teaching as a sly and skillful, almost enticing execution of benign schemes aimed at keeping students engaged, interested, and motivated to participate in their lessons.

Trisha's use of another Tagalog word *tambling*, a lexical borrowing from English (tumbling), emblematizes the physical demands of teaching: "*Medyo hirap na hirap ako last month, no? Given na ganun 'yung klase ko* (The last month was quite difficult for me, right? Given that my class was like that)," she says, with a perceptible heaviness in her voice. Evoking a sense of spatial movement, tambling exemplifies what Isaac

(2021, p. 12) calls the "intensity and direction, that, is vectors" of affective labor. Tambling also parallels Bhattacharya's (2014) notion of acrobatic maneuvers: a "set of acrobatic moves in response to… everyday circumstances" (p. 209). A notion conceived from a silent play production, Bhattacharya describes acrobatic maneuvers as inaudible and yet emotive moves that allows one to display a "range of emotions" with "a paradoxical space of contradictions that transcends any pure understanding of oppression or liberation" (p. 210). Trisha's notion of tambling is quite similar to Bhattacharya's in that it helps us visualize the range and circulation of affective capacities in ELT work – how it "traffics in her human emotions and vital expressions" (Isaac, 2021, p. 15). Her job necessitates her to move across a paradoxical space created by the contradictory pulls of both Taylorized and bespoke forms of lesson production. Tricia is very well aware that this practice of life-making involves tremendous dedication to surface acting or impression management (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983): she has to be "energetic," "make jokes sometimes," and also make all sorts of pakulô just so that her students would not get bored, all while attempting to meet their pre-determined target learning outcomes. Teaching, as living labor, literally exhausts Trisha as she must expend her bodily energy to display various forms of her physical and affective capacities and sensibilities – her puhunang sosyal – to balance the different demands and contradictions of the lesson production.

5.5 Gendered and Sexualized Constitution of ELT Labor

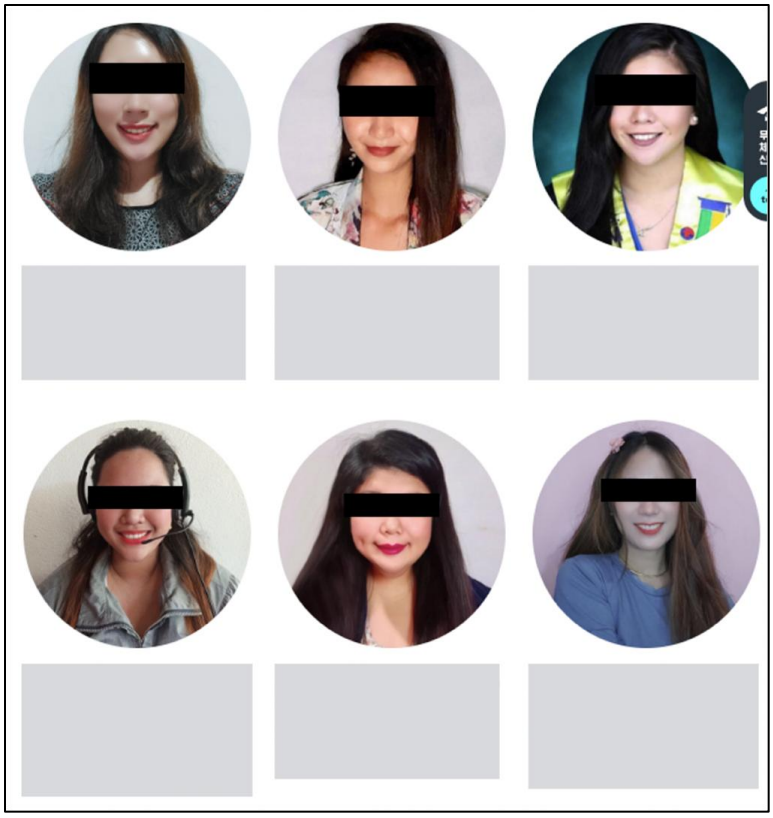
In our interview, Ylona graciously shared one encounter that she had with an old Japanese male student, Hiroshi (not his real name) who, for a time, had been regularly booking her afternoon lessons:

> Ylona: There were those times that I felt uncomfortable like him saying / At first he said, "Okay, oh, Ylona, can you remove your glasses, so that I can see your face?" So okay, I tried to remove it. And then he said, "Well, you you really look beautiful, why not trying to / why not try to not use your glasses? Why not use makeup, so that you will look more beautiful, you would be having more students?" / So that's kind of a bummer. Kasi (Because) of course, it's coming from an old man. And it's not really / it's okay / I took it as a compliment at first. But as we went on with the days, it becomes so uncomfortable, because there are topics like you have a boyfriend, when you come to Japan, can you tell me so that I will, so that we will meet then I can tour you here. So that was kind of traumatic.

The gendered and sexualized constitution of Ylona's life-time – not just her labour-time, but her whole bodily being – could not be more obvious: Hiroshi sees Ylona not as an English teacher but as a sex object – an aesthetically pleasing commodity whom he can fetishize and project his sexual fantasies onto. He compels her to take her glasses off so that he could see her better; suggests that she use makeup so that she "will look more beautiful"; asks her personal and sensitive questions that violate her privacy; and even entices her to visit Japan under the pretense that he would tour her.

Hiroshi's position of social and economic privilege as a paying customer clearly defines and delimits Ylona's reciprocal obligation towards him. Viewing their social relationship from the lens of personalism and patronage politics, one can sympathize with Ylona for taking Hiroshi's unsolicited comments and highly sexist remarks as "compliments at first," not only because the dominant logic of racial heteropatriarchy demands Filipina workers like her to respond positively to such remarks (see, for example, Tajima, 2018), but also because there is always the real risk of losing future social and economic opportunities when one attempts to speak back, as Chris's experience has shown us. Ylona's "traumatic" experience of having to 'teach' a paying customer like Hiroshi reflects the sheer expenditure and wasting away of her life-time, with her knowledge of the English language and her pedagogical labor being made redundant, as her affective capacities and practices of life-making are instead extracted and expropriated for Hiroshi's consumption and satiation of his sexual appetite. If men like Hiroshi must inevitably be the source of puhunan for Filipinos working in the platform ELT economy, then this method of capital accumulation serves to only further essentialize and normalize a system of reciprocal obligation and social reproduction that puts an already unvalorizable, disposable, surplus population in a position that makes them vulnerable to other forms of exploitation and abuse.

Figure 2. A Screenshot Image of a Teacher Profile Page from the Website of 'Caimito,' a Korean-owned Online ELT Platform



Within the platform economy, massive-scale labor-brokering platforms often connect students to teachers like Ylona via an online matchmaking system. Take for example the case of the website run by 'Acacia,' another Japanese online eikaiwa platform, wherein prospective students may choose their 得意レッスン (*tokui ressun*, *lit*. favorite lesson) and then filter teachers by sex and sort them according to popularity, which is often determined by their ratings (5.00 being the highest). Narra has a similar online matchmaking and teacher rating system but is more sophisticated, in that it allows students to filter teachers not just by sex but also by age, educational affiliation, and even their 専攻学科 (*senkō gakka*, or subject/topic of expertise). One important consequence of this conjugal matchmaking and teaching rating system is the immediate emphasis that is placed on physical appearances, which pressures Filipino platform workers like Ylona to aesthetically embellish themselves. It is thus unsurprising to see many Filipino workers in various ELT platforms upload their best-looking pictures on their matchmaking profiles, their faces nicely made-up, sometimes even airbrushed with the help of AI filters designed to give off a glowing, noticeably lighter tone – a distinctive Japanese kawaii or Korean idol aesthetic, as seen in Figure 2 above.

It does pay to have a nice, fair, and flawless-looking skin, as in the case of Gwen who often gets mistaken for being Japanese due to her 'East Asian' looks and her fair complexion: "Are you really Filipino?... You look more like Japanese," Gwen's Japanese students would tell her, seemingly oblivious towards her noticeably distinct Filipino English accent. Now contrast this with Maya, who on the other hand looks perceptibly more brown and less 'East Asian,' and who has experienced being called "very ugly" by Chinese parents and students. The contrast between people's aesthetic dispositions towards teachers like Gwen and Maya illustrates how racial heteropatriarchy is deeply imbricated in a site of ideological work that essentializes the systemic fixation, objectification, and devaluation (Tadiar, 2009) of online ELT work down to aesthetic affects. The enhancement of physical appearances through corporeal embellishments thus functions as a crucial puhunan for accumulating more social, cultural, and economic capital in the ELT profession – and this helps explain why some teachers are able to participate more or less actively than others in their own social reproduction.

6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Patricia, Melinda, Heidi, and Frances's feminized capacities and practices of caring and intimacy; the affective capacity required of Chris to overcome the cheche-bureche or frivolity of ELT work; Trisha's pakulô and tambling – her affective gimmicks and acrobatic maneuvers; Gwen's fair skin complexion and Ylona's whole bodily being... these variegated forms of embodied puhunan or capital exemplify what Tadiar refers to as "forms and practices of social cooperation and imagination... that are subjected to various forms of sexist and racist forms of value extraction and expropriation, "segregated and jettisoned from the capitalizable properties – skills, capacities, styles –

of life worth living" (2022, p. 70). Central to this process of extracting and expropriating value is the workers' active circulation of affective capacities for their social reproduction across different sites, objects, and bodies in spite of the perennial risk of superfluity, disposal, and wastage that they face.

In spite of being treated as disposable, superfluous, liquid, liquefiable, devalued trading currencies in the platform economy, Filipino platform ELT workers are often burdened with rather quite high expectations from their capital subjects. They must successfully deliver Taylorized or scripted lessons to their students, and at the same time provide bespoke services not related to the actual lessons. They often double up as unlicensed therapists, life coaches, academic counsellors, career advisors, friends or acquaintances, confidantes, and even objects of romantic or sexual desire. Both Taylorized and flexible forms of lesson production require tremendous amounts of surface acting and impression management – in other words, affective labour management, which often becomes challenging for many platform ELT workers, especially women, not only because of how potentially exhausting, demoralizing, and alienating it can be, but also because it takes away energy, time, and effort from the actual work of teaching.

To conclude, Tadiar's concept of life-times offers us an alternative way of interrogating the complex entanglements of affect, capital, commodity, labor, and language in the ELT profession, viewing language not "as an object of contemplation" but rather as an "instrument of action and power" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 37). Bearing in mind the large-scale societal, political, and economic changes in the language education sector today, this paper invites us to rethink our notions of commodity and commodification beyond the domain of language, and of capital beyond its monetary, social, linguistic, and Western-centric ideations. By focusing my theory and analysis on a surplus population of ELT practitioners in the Global South, I hope to have shed some light into the material and affective precarity of language-minoritized workers whose linguistic experiences are inevitably shaped by capital subjects and their day-to-day encounters with accentism, racism, sexism, and various other forms of social discrimination.

Examining the phenomenon of capital accumulation through the Tagalog lens of puhunan enables us to view the affective and social relations between platform ELT workers, labor-brokering platforms, and students/paying customers in terms of utang na loob (debt of gratitude or reciprocal obligation). Such relations are often defined and delimited in terms of unjust social contracts, lopsided social relationships, personalism, and patronage politics. Like many other freelance workers in the gig/platform economy, online ELT practitioners are hugely dependent on labor-brokering platforms to access available work opportunities and on the patronage of such platforms and their students to guarantee them a steady flow of business and income. But despite their social and economic advantage as capital subjects, labor-brokering platforms and customers are just as volatile and superfluous as online ELT workers are disposable, as seen in the recent massive crackdown of private supplementary tutoring in Mainland China (Shi & Yung, 2024) and the Global North's increasing stance against mass-importing English-

proficient Asian students as 'skilled migrants' (Choi, 2022). In light of such massive-scale social, political, and economic changes in the contemporary world order, ELT practitioners must rely ever increasingly on their own affective capacities and practices, instincts, and sensibilities to ensure the longevity and success of their profession, and their survival.

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