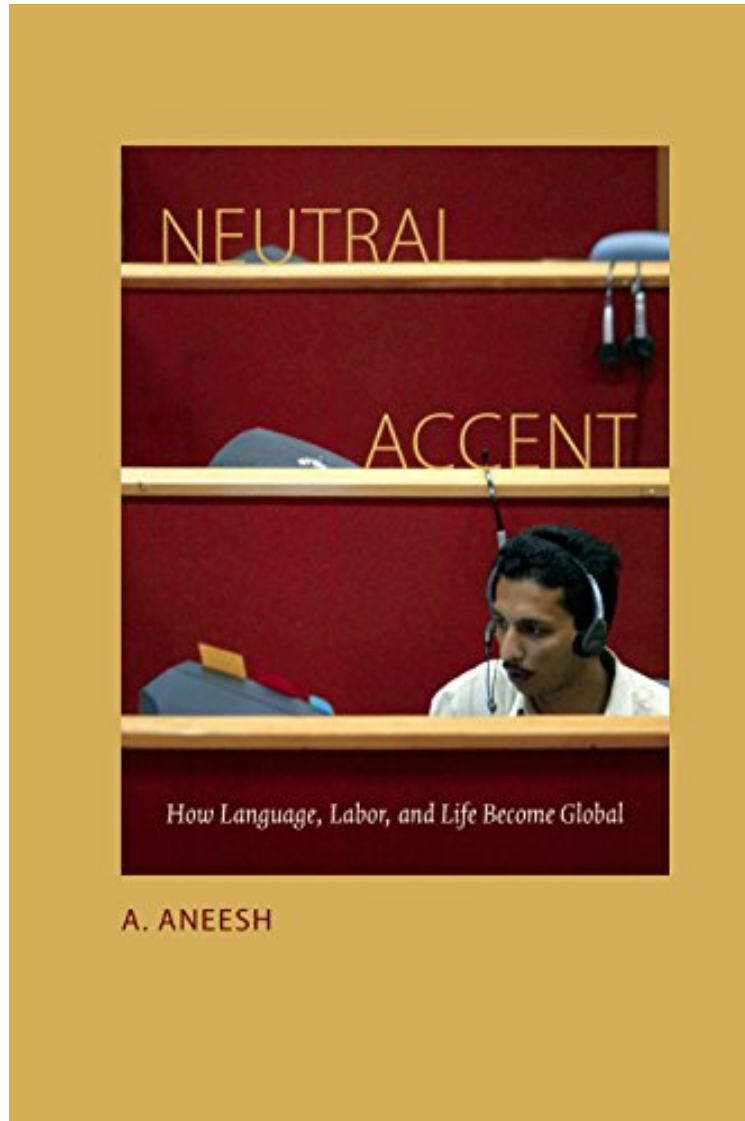


(Mobile pdf) Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor, and Life Become Global

# Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor, and Life Become Global

A. Aneesh

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**A. Aneesh : Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor, and Life Become Global** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor, and Life Become Global:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A New Perspective on Call Centers and Night Work By Emylie Tonnacliff A. Aneesh's book Neutral Accent is a key resource in understanding the processes of globalization within the context of India's call centers. With a clear narrative voice and easily understood language, the book provides necessary information with a touch of humor. Within the prologue, Aneesh points out that there are long lasting disconnections resulting from new global connections. He goes on to explain his use of call centers as the method of

study for this global social formation, detailing the importance of neutrality as the key to understanding both the call center and globalization in general. Aneesh informs the reader that he underwent training as an employee of "GoCom," a call center in India, and that the ethnographic research he conducted there is the basis of the book. There he noted that there is a dual identity that the call center worker needs to obtain to communicate effectively. Chapter one sets the scene by providing background information about the city of Guragaon, explaining how it has become a global city that is defined by its future instead of its past. Gurgaon is essentially many small cities within a city with specialized areas of living and vast networks of shopping complexes - all of which reduce life to interpreted purposes. Transnational enclaves such as EPZs and SEZs give rise to new forms of global urbanization, showing that Gurgaon is simultaneously connected and disconnected. The call centers within Gurgaon are the best means of examining this rapid transformation. Chapter two dives deeper within GoCom, pointing out the unusual hours all the call center workers had to keep. The call center workers are driven by the time zones of the places they are calling (The UK and U.S.) Along with the feeling of disconnection to the time zone of their own country, the agents feel disconnected from their clients - as they seem to be merely constructed identities. Rather than distrust being focused toward the clients, however, workers often focused their suspicions on the company, believing it was cheating them out of benefits and wages. Ironically, the agents were driven by the same kind of deception they assumed GoCom participated in so that they could make sales. While learning the laws and geography of the country they were marketing to sometimes assisted the agents in understanding their customer's culture, there were still many cases of failed understanding between both parties. Chapter three begins with a definition of culture shock and double contingency. Aneesh then states that call centers rely on transmutation to facilitate global communication. Central to transmutation are two processes: neutralization and mimesis. Global communication, however, is hindered by three types of distances: physical, cultural, and organizational. Combined, these distances make global communication nearly impossible. Through the aforementioned processes of neutralization and mimesis, though, this communication continues with fewer glitches. This is not to say that these processes are perfect - accents are ingrained in a person's brain from childhood and cultural differences create many difficulties. Aneesh also makes the point that call center work falls within the scope of emotional labor as the workers need to weave unfamiliar cultural logic into their conversations. The point is then made that the customers are also being neutralized and mimicked by the global system of communication. Chapter four is all about system identities and the algocracy that helps create these new identities. Aneesh begins by writing about identity theft and how credit scores easily become a person's identity. Life has become crystallized into data profiles, allowing a person's identity to become a commodity that can be bought and sold at a distance. These data profiles are made without a person's knowledge and eventually form a system identity which is meant to capture the constant change a person goes through. Unfortunately, due to the differentiation of all the systems, system identities are often in conflict with other types of identities such as those of the social and biological spheres. These conflicts create issues such as alarm clock dissonance and the problems that often arise from human-machine interface. These interfaces, like dialers, are part of algocracy. Aneesh then compares algocratic systems with bureaucratic and market systems and comes to the conclusion that the algocratic method of creating system identities results in the fracturing of a person into different commoditized pieces. Chapter five begins with a history of the labor movement and explains why shorter hours were demanded rather than merely higher pay. In current times, however, the idea of night work has taken over, even though it ends up being highly detrimental to a worker's well being. Within the call centers, protests against night work took the form of complaints against call center cabs and the inability to start a family, rather than the hours themselves. Aneesh explores the idea of choice - mentioning that most call center workers (while told that they had the "choice" to work at night) were driven by various circumstances into having no "choice" but to work at night. While nights at GoCom did promote a certain type of sociality, there was still a distinct lack of social connection with the "outside" world. As mentioned earlier, rather than complaining against the hours one had to work, the agents complained about the cab services which were rarely on time. Cab drivers had to work ridiculous hours in order to achieve economic goods, thus leading them to neglect social and physical goods such as family and sleep (much like the call center agents). Unfortunately, rather than workers organizing to disband night work, the restrictions on such work have been continually lifted. Aneesh states that while giving women the "right" to work at night seems like a benefit, studies have shown that women's bodies react in particularly adverse ways to night work. This is not to say that men are not affected by night work, as all humans have difficulty with such work. Aneesh then explains the creation of neutrality that forces a blaseacute; indifference to circumstances - creating a night neutrality and gender neutrality which inhibit any change to the problem of night work. This creates problems in the biological spheres, which science seeks to solve. Rather than using medicine to prove the problems of night work, science has created new ways for night work to proceed. While the economic sphere benefits from night work, the social and biological spheres suffer. Aneesh concludes with the argument that there is no laboring body left to campaign against night work, as there is not enough knowledge about the detriment of night work. This book concludes with an epilogue entitled "The Logic of Indifference." Here Aneesh explains why he chose to use the language of neutrality and indifference instead of alienation when talking about global work and how it makes his argument susceptible to an intellectual paralysis. From there the author transitions into a discussion about the way

night work has splintered the laboring body into different spheres, showing how functional neutrality to differences in these other spheres produces dysfunctional effects. Aneesh then explains the logic of indifference which, while useful with sorting useful information from useless information, can also be dangerous if it becomes a perpetual feeling. Aneesh explains how indifference can diminish social good if the less fortunate are neutralized by this logic. This brings up the problems inherent in difference blind universal norms which usually conceal non-neutral power relations. Aneesh acknowledges that difference is made in the process of construction and that there is no privileged realm of observation from which to see all constructions in all spheres simultaneously. This connects to night work in the way that the economic sphere benefits from the work while the social and biological spheres suffer. There is then a general summary of the major points from all the previous chapters. Aneesh ends his book stating that in the future it will be just as important to focus on the problems of integration and global networks as it will be to focus on the digital divide.

In *Neutral Accent*, A. Aneesh employs India's call centers as useful sites for studying global change. The horizon of global economic shift, the consequences of global integration, and the ways in which call center work "neutralizes" racial, ethnic, and national identities become visible from the confines of their cubicles. In his interviews with call service workers and in his own work in a call center in the high tech metropolis of Gurgaon, India, Aneesh observed the difficulties these workers face in bridging cultures, laws, and economies: having to speak in an accent that does not betray their ethnicity, location, or social background; learning foreign social norms; and working graveyard shifts to accommodate international customers. Call center work is cast as independent of place, space, and time, and its neutralitymdash;which Aneesh defines as indifference to differencemdash;has become normal business practice in a global economy. The work of call center employees in the globally integrated marketplace comes at a cost, however, as they become disconnected from the local interactions and personal relationships that make their lives anything but neutral.

"In this evocative ethnography A. Aneesh offers us a bold rendering of globalization in which connection and disconnection are in constant, often jarring, relation. The discourse of "neutrality" might claim to foster global communication, but instead serves largely as a mechanism of distinction and hierarchy. The mimetic effects of such communicative dissonance are significant, for they expose global challenges to the logics of culture and emotion, and the meanings of the social and the self. *Neutral Accent* alerts us to processes we are bound to see much more of and suggests a novel analytical toolkit for interpreting their embodied and abstract expressions."