

Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Summer 2023

Language & Social Justice in the United States

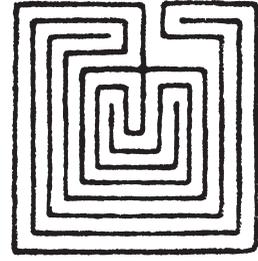


Walt Wolfram, Anne H. Charity Hudley &
Guadalupe Valdés, guest editors

with Anne Curzan · Robin M. Queen
Kristin VanEyck · Rachel Elizabeth Weissler
Wesley Y. Leonard · Julia C. Fine
Jessica Love-Nichols · Bernard C. Perley
Jonathan Rosa · Nelson Flores
Aris Moreno Clemons · Jessica A. Grieser
Joyhanna Yoo · Cheryl Lee · Andrew Cheng
Anusha Ànand · H. Samy Alim · John Baugh
Sharese King · John R. Rickford
Norma Mendoza-Denton



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“Language & Social Justice in the United States”

Volume 152, Number 3; Summer 2023

Walt Wolfram, Anne H. Charity Hudley & Guadalupe Valdés, Guest Editors

Phyllis S. Bendell, Editor in Chief

Peter Walton, Associate Editor

Key Bird, Assistant Editor

Inside front cover: The photos on the inside front and back covers, provided by the authors of this volume of *Dædalus*, represent the rich and varied ways that, in the words of Toni Morrison, “we do language.”

(top row) Basket weavers in Village Tindomsolibgo (Upper East Region, Ghana) do call and response work songs, 2021. Photo courtesy of Walt Wolfram.

(middle row, left) Wesley Y. Leonard in Miami Tribe of Oklahoma headquarters, standing next to a display of myaamia ribbonwork that also has the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma seal, June 2023. Photo courtesy of Wesley Y. Leonard. *(right, upper)* Black deaf signers demonstrate some of the characteristics of Black ASL (American Sign Language) at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Walt Wolfram. *(right, lower)* The Eastern Band of Cherokee immersion school, New Kituwah Academy, Cherokee, North Carolina, 2014, as featured in the Emmy award-winning film *First Language: The Race to Save Cherokee*. Photo courtesy of Walt Wolfram.

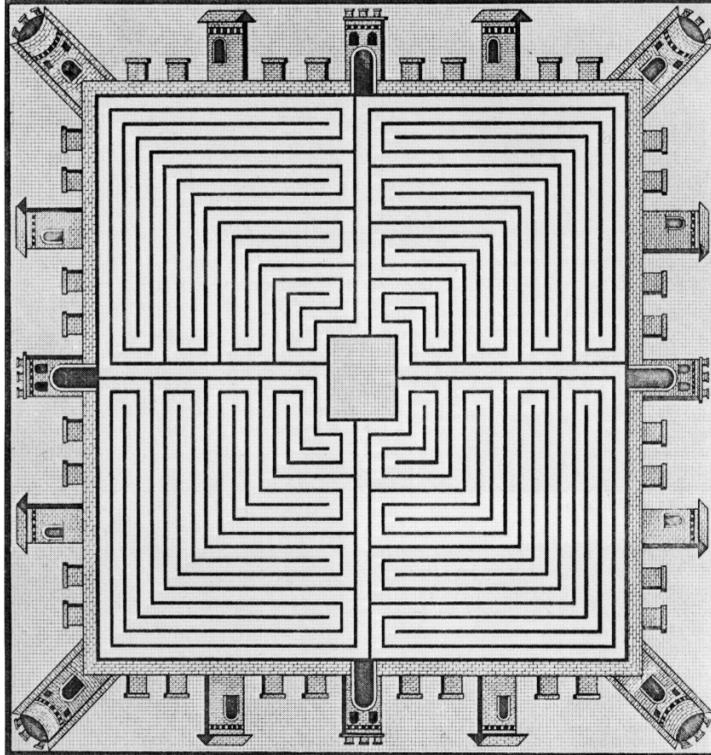
(bottom row) Sophomores at Sequoia High School in Redwood City, California, work with Jonathan Rosa in Stephanie Weden’s class, February 2019. Photo by Elisa Niño-Sears, courtesy of Jonathan Rosa.

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Nineteenth-century depiction of a Roman mosaic labyrinth, now lost, found in Villa di Diomede, Pompeii

Dædalus was founded in 1955 and established as a quarterly in 1958. Its namesake was renowned in ancient Greece as an inventor, scientist, and unriddler of riddles. The journal's emblem, a maze seen from above, symbolizes the aspiration of its founders to “lift each of us above his cell in the labyrinth of learning in order that he may see the entire structure as if from above, where each separate part loses its comfortable separateness.”

The American Academy of Arts & Sciences, like its journal, brings together distinguished individuals from every field of human endeavor. It was chartered in 1780 as a forum “to cultivate every art and science which may tend to advance the interest, honour, dignity, and happiness of a free, independent, and virtuous people.” Now in its third century, the Academy, with its more than five thousand members, continues to provide intellectual leadership to meet the critical challenges facing our world.

Dædalus Summer 2023

Issued as Volume 152, Number 3

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Editorial offices: *Dædalus*, American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 136 Irving Street, Cambridge MA 02138. Phone: 617 576 5085. Fax: 617 576 5088. Email: daedalus@amacad.org.

Library of Congress Catalog No. 12-30299.

Dædalus publishes by invitation only and assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. The views expressed are those of the author(s) of each essay, and not necessarily of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

Dædalus (ISSN 0011-5266; E-ISSN 1548-6192) is published quarterly (winter, spring, summer, fall) by The MIT Press, One Broadway, Floor 12, Cambridge MA 02142-1189, for the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. An electronic full-text version of *Dædalus* is available from amacad.org/daedalus and from The MIT Press.

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Printed in the United States by The Sheridan Press, 450 Fame Avenue, Hanover PA 17331.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Dædalus*, One Broadway, Floor 12, Cambridge MA 02142-1189. Periodicals postage paid at Boston MA and at additional mailing offices.

The typeface is Cycles, designed by Sumner Stone at the Stone Type Foundry of Guinda CA. Each size of Cycles has been separately designed in the tradition of metal types.

Language & Social Justice in the United States: An Introduction

Walt Wolfram, Anne H. Charity Hudley & Guadalupe Valdés

In recent decades, the United States has witnessed a noteworthy escalation of academic responses to long-standing social and racial inequities in its society. In this process, research, advocacy, and programs supporting diversity and inclusion initiatives have grown. A set of themes and their relevant discourses have now developed in most programs related to diversity and inclusion; for example, current models are typically designed to include a range of groups, particularly reaching people by their race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, gender, and other demographic categories. Unfortunately, one of the themes typically overlooked, dismissed, or even refuted as necessary is language. Furthermore, the role of language subordination in antiracist activities tends to be treated as a secondary factor under the rubric of culture. Many linguists, however, see language inequality as a central or even leading component related to all of the traditional themes included in diversity and inclusion strategies.¹ In fact, writer and researcher Rosina Lippi-Green observes that “Discrimination based on language variation is so commonly accepted, so widely perceived as appropriate, that it must be seen as the last back door to discrimination. And the door stands wide open.”²

Even academics, one of the groups that should be exposed to issues of comprehensive inclusion, have seemingly decided that language is a low-priority issue. As noted in a 2015 article in *The Economist*:

The collision of academic prejudice and accent is particularly ironic. Academics tend to the centre-left nearly everywhere, and talk endlessly about class and multiculturalism. . . . And yet accent and dialect are still barely on many people’s minds as deserving respect.³

As such, as the editors of this collection, we have commissioned thirteen essays that address specific issues of language inequality and discrimination, both in their own right and directly related to traditional themes of diversity and inclusion.

Recent issues of *Dædalus* have addressed immigration, climate change, access to justice, inequality, and teaching in higher education, all of which relate to language in some way.⁴ The theme of the Summer 2022 issue is “The Humanities in American Life: Transforming the Relationship with the Public.” As an extension of that work, the essays in this volume focus on a humanistic social science approach to transforming our relationship with language both in the academy and at large.

There is a growing inventory of research projects and written collections that consider issues of language and social justice, including dimensions such as raciolinguistics, linguistic profiling, multilingual education, gendered linguistics, and court cases that are linguistically informed. Those materials cover a comprehensive range of language issues related to social justice. The collection of essays in this *Dædalus* volume is unique in its breadth of coverage and extends from issues including linguistic profiling, raciolinguistics, and institutional linguicism to multilingualism, language teaching, migration, and climate change. The authors are experts in their respective areas of scholarship, who combine strong research records with extensive engagement in their topics of inquiry.

The initial goal of this *Dædalus* issue is to demonstrate the vast array of social and political disparity manifested in language inequality, ranging from ecological conditions such as climate change, social conditions of inter- and intralanguage variation, and institutional policies that promulgate the notion and the stated practice of official languages and homogenized, monolithic norms of standardized language based on socially dominant speakers. These norms are socialized overtly and covertly into all sectors of society and often are adopted as consensus norms, even by those who are marginalized or stigmatized by these distinctions. As linguist Norman Fairclough notes in *Language and Power*, the exercise of power is most efficiently achieved through ideology-manufacturing consent instead of coercion.⁵ Practices that appear universal or common sense often originate in the dominant class, and these practices work to sustain an unequal power dynamic. Furthermore, there is power *behind* discourse because the social order of discourses is held together as a hidden effect of power, such as standardization and national/official languages, and power *in* discourse as strategies of discourse reflect asymmetrical power relations between interlocutors in sets of routines, such as address forms, interruptions, and a host of other conversational routines. In this context, the first step in addressing these linguistic inequalities is to raise awareness of their existence, since many operate as implicit bias rather than overt, explicit bias recognized by the public.

Unfortunately, and somewhat ironically, higher education has been slow in this process; in fact, several essays in this collection show that higher education has been an active agent in the reproduction of linguistic inequality at the same time that it advocates for equality in many other realms of social structure.⁶ Two

essays in particular explore underlying notions of standardization and the use of language in social presentation and argumentation. The essays also address language rights as a fundamental human right. In “Language Standardization & Linguistic Subordination,” Anne Curzan, Robin M. Queen, Kristin VanEyck, and Rachel Elizabeth Weissler discuss how ideologies about standardized language circulate in higher education, to the detriment of many students, and they include a range of suggestions and examples for how to center linguistic justice and equity within higher education.

Curzan and coauthors give us an important overview of language standardization:

We have suggested some solutions to many of the issues we’ve highlighted in this essay; however, implementing solutions in a meaningful way first requires recognition of how important language variation is for our everyday interactions with others. Second, implementing solutions depends on recognizing how our ideas about language (standardized or not) can pose a true barrier to meaningful change. Such recognition includes the understanding that much of what we think about language often stands as a proxy for what we think about people, who we are willing to listen to and hear, and who we want to be with or distance ourselves from.⁷

In “Addressing Linguistic Inequality in Higher Education: A Proactive Model,” Walt Wolfram describes a proactive “campus-infusion” program that includes activities and resources for student affairs, academic affairs, human resources, faculty affairs, and offices of institutional equity and diversity. Wolfram’s essay shows directly and specifically how academics aren’t always the solution but, as a whole, are complicit in linguistic exclusion. He writes:

A casual survey of university diversity statements and programs indicates that a) there is an implicitly recognized set of diversity themes within higher education and b) it traditionally excludes language issues.⁸ Topics related to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual preference, and age are commonly included in these programs, but language is noticeably absent, either by explicit exclusion or by implicit disregard. Ironically, issues of language intersect with all of the themes in the canonical catalog of diversity issues.⁹

The absence of systemic language considerations from most diversity and inclusion programs and their limited role in antiracist initiatives is a major concern for these programs, since language is a critical component for discrimination among the central themes in the extant canon of diversity. Language is an active agent in discrimination and cannot be overlooked or minimized in the process.

Some of the essays in this volume of *Daedalus* address the sociopolitical dominance of a restricted set of languages and its impact on the lives of speakers of devalued languages. The authors of these essays consider the effects of climate,

social, educational, legal, and political dissonance confronted by speakers of non-dominant languages. They also show how the metaphors of “disappearance” and “loss” obscure the colonial processes responsible for the suppression of Indigenous languages. People who speak an estimated 90 percent of the world’s languages have now been linguistically and culturally harmed due to the increasing dominance of a selected number of “world languages” and changes in the physical and topographical ecology. The authors describe the implications of this extensive language subjugation and endangerment and the consequences for the speakers of these languages. Both physical and social ecology are implicated in this threat to multitudes of languages in the world.

Linguistics in general, and sociolinguistics in particular, has a significant history of engagement in issues of social inequality. From the educational controversies over the language adequacy of marginalized, racialized groups of speakers in the 1960s, as in linguist William Labov’s *A Study of Non-Standard English*, to ideological challenges to multilingualism and the social and cultural impact of the devaluing of the world’s languages, as described in the essays by Wesley Y. Leonard, Guadalupe Valdés, and Julia C. Fine, Jessica Love-Nichols, and Bernard C. Perley, the role of language is a prominent consideration in the actualization and dispensation of social justice.¹⁰

In addition, this collection addresses areas of research that are complementary to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences’ 2017 report by the Commission on Language Learning, *America’s Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century*.¹¹ In spite of the long-term presence of the teaching of languages other than English in the American educational system, concern over “world language capacity” has surfaced periodically over a period of many years because of the perceived limitations in developing functional additional language proficiencies. The consensus view (as in Congressman Paul Simon’s 1980 report *The Tongue-Tied American*) has been that foreign/world language study in U.S. schools is generally unsuccessful, that Americans are poor language learners, and that focused attention must be given to the national defense implications of these language limitations.¹² In the 2017 Language Commission report, foreign/world language study is presented as 1) critical to success in business, research, and international relations in the twenty-first century and 2) a contributing factor to “improved learning outcomes in other subjects, enhanced cognitive ability, and the development of empathy and effective interpretive skills.”¹³

The Academy’s report presents information about languages spoken at home by U.S. residents (76.7 percent English, 12.6 percent Spanish). It also includes a graphic illustrating the prevalence of thirteen other languages (including Chinese, Hindi, Filipino and Tagalog, and Vietnamese) commonly spoken by 0.13 percent to 0.2 percent of the population, as well as a category identified as *all other languages* (a small category comprising 2.2 percent of residents of the Unit-

ed States).¹⁴ The report focuses on languages – rather than speakers – and recommends: 1) new activities that will increase the number of language teachers, 2) expanded efforts that can supplement language instruction across the education system, and 3) more opportunities for students to experience and immerse themselves in “languages as they are used in everyday interactions and across all segments of society.” It also specifically mentions needed support for *heritage languages* so these languages can “persist from one generation to the next,” and for targeted programming for Native American languages.¹⁵

While it effectively interrupted the monolingual, English-only ideologies that permeate ideas on language in the United States, the conceptualization of language undergirding the report needs to be greatly expanded. The report focuses on developing expertise in additional language acquisition as the product of deliberative study. For example, in the case of heritage languages (defined as those non-English languages spoken by residents of the United States), the report highlights efforts such as the Seal of Biliteracy. Through this effort (now endorsed by many states around the country), high school students who complete a sequence of established language classes and pass a state-approved language assessment can obtain an official Seal of Biliteracy endorsement. Unfortunately, the series of courses and the assessments required to obtain the Seal are only available in a limited number of languages. The report mentions other efforts, including dual language immersion programs, yet it does not recognize family- and community-gained bilingualism and biliteracy. Notably, the report specifically laments what are viewed as *limited literacy abilities* of heritage language speakers and recommends making available curricula specially designed for heritage language learners and Native American languages.

The view of language that the report is based on is a narrow one and does not represent the linguistic realities of the majority of bilingual and multilingual students. In her contribution to this volume, “Social Justice Challenges of ‘Teaching’ Languages,” Guadalupe Valdés “specifically problematize[s] language instruction as it takes place in classroom settings and the impact of what I term the *curricularization* of language as it is experienced by Latinx students who ‘study’ language *qua* language in instructed situations.”¹⁶ Valdés shows us how these specific issues play out in what is typically viewed as the neutral “teaching” of languages. She writes that challenges to

linguistic justice [result] from widely held negative perspectives on bi/multilingualism and from common and continuing misunderstandings of individuals who use resources from two communicative systems in their everyday lives. My goal is to highlight the effect of these misunderstandings on the direct teaching of English.¹⁷

In “Refusing ‘Endangered Languages’ Narratives,” Wesley Y. Leonard draws from his experiences as a member of a Native American community whose language was wrongly labeled “extinct”:

Within this narrative, I begin with an overview of how language endangerment is described to general audiences in the United States and critique the way it is framed and shared. From there, I shift to an alternative that draws from Indigenous ways of knowing to promote social justice through language reclamation.¹⁸

Leonard encourages us to directly refute “dominant endangered languages narratives” and replace the focus on the actors of harm in Indigenous communities with a focus on the creativity and resolve of native scholars working to revitalize native language and culture. As he states, the “ultimate goal of this essay is to promote a praxis of social justice by showing how language shift occurs largely as a result of injustices, and by offering possible interventions.”¹⁹

In “Climate & Language: An Entangled Crisis,” Julia C. Fine, Jessica Love-Nichols, and Bernard C. Perley

note that these academic discourses – as well as similar discourses in nonprofit and policy-making spheres – rightly acknowledge the importance of Indigenous thought to environmental and climate action. Sadly, they often fall short of acknowledging both the colonial drivers of Indigenous language “loss” and Indigenous ownership of Indigenous language and environmental knowledge. We propose alternative framings that emphasize colonial responsibility and Indigenous sovereignty.²⁰

Fine, Love-Nichols, and Perley present models of how language and climate are intertwined. They write, “Scholars and activists have documented the intersections of climate change and language endangerment, with special focus paid to their compounding consequences.” The authors “consider the relationship between language and environmental ideologies, synthesizing previous research on how metaphors and communicative norms in Indigenous and colonial languages influence environmental beliefs and actions.”²¹

The essays in this volume profile a wide range of language issues related to social justice, from everyday hegemonic comments to legislative policies and courtroom testimony that depend on language reliability and the linguistic credibility of witnesses who do not communicate in a mainstream American English variety. In 1972, the president of the Linguistic Society of America, Dwight Bolinger, gave his presidential address titled “Truth is a Linguistic Question” as a forewarning of the linguistic accountability of public reporting of national events. In his other work, he describes language as “a loaded weapon.” Through these essays, we find both concepts to be true.²²

Over recent decades, the field of linguistics has developed a robust specialization in areas that pay primary attention to the application of a full range of legal and nonlegal verbal, digital, and document communication that is at the heart of equitable communication strategies. Language variation is also a highly politi-

cized behavior, extending from the construct of a “standardized language” considered essential for writing and speaking to the use of language in negotiating the administration of social and political justice. The essays on linguistic variation and sociopolitical ideology, by Curzan and coauthors, Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores, and H. Samy Alim, examine both the ideological underpinnings of consensual constructs such as “standard” versus “nonmainstream” and their use in the political process of persuasion and sociopolitical implementation.²³ The authors in this section address key issues of language variation and language discrimination that demonstrate the vitality of language in issues of social justice, both independent of and related to other attributes of social justice. This model includes standardization in media platforms, as described in Rosa and Flores’s essay, demonstrating the systemic othering of those who do not speak this variety as their default dialect.

In “Rethinking Language Barriers & Social Justice from a Raciolinguistic Perspective,” Rosa and Flores show how “the trope of language barriers and the toppling thereof is widely resonant as a reference point for societal progress.”

We argue that by interrogating the colonial and imperial underpinnings of widespread ideas about linguistic diversity, we can connect linguistic advocacy to broader political struggles. We suggest that language and social justice efforts must link affirmations of linguistic diversity to demands for the creation of societal structures that sustain collective well-being.²⁴

Rosa and Flores present and update their raciolinguistics model in current spaces where race meets technology. With this emerging technology as a reference point, they demonstrate why “it is crucial to reconsider the logics that inform contemporary digital accent-modification platforms and the broader ways that purportedly benevolent efforts to help marked subjects modify their language practices become institutionalized as assimilationist projects masquerading as assistance.” They also note that disability has always been part of the story – and needs to be brought back to light – sharing that Mabel Hubbard and Ma Bell, who were both influential on modern linguistic technology, were deaf women.²⁵

In “Black Womanhood: Raciolinguistic Intersections of Gender, Sexuality & Social Status in the Aftermaths of Colonization,” Aris Moreno Clemons and Jessica A. Grieser “call for an exploration of social life that considers the raciolinguistic intersections of gender, sexuality, and social class as part and parcel of overarching social formations.” They center the Black woman as the prototypical Other, her condition being interpreted neither by conventions of race nor gender. As such, we take “Black womanhood as the point of departure for a description of the necessary intersecting and variable analyses of social life.” Clemons and Greiser “interrogate the intersections of gender, sexuality, and social status, focusing on the experiences of Black women who fit into and lie at the margins of these categories.”

They highlight the work of semiotician Krystal A. Smalls, who “reveals a model for how interdisciplinary reading across fields such as Black feminist studies, Black anthropology, Black geographies, and Black linguistics can result in expansive and inclusive worldmaking.”²⁶

In “Asian American Racialization & Model Minority Logics in Linguistics,” Joyhanna Yoo, Cheryl Lee, Andrew Cheng, and Anusha Anand “consider historical and contemporary racializing tactics with respect to Asians and Asian Americans.” Such racializing tactics, which they call model minority logics,

weaponize an abstract version of one group to further racialize all minoritized groups and regiment ethnoracial hierarchies. We identify three functions of model minority logics that perpetuate white supremacy in the academy, using linguistics as a case study and underscoring the ways in which the discipline is already mired in racializing logics that differentiate scholars of color based on reified hierarchies.²⁷

The authors consider the often-overlooked linguistic experiences of Asian Americans in linguistics and show how “ideological positioning of Asian Americans as “honorary whites” is based on selective and heavily skewed images of Asian American economic and educational achievements that circulate across institutional and dominant media channels.”²⁸

In “Inventing ‘the White Voice’: Racial Capitalism, Raciolinguistics & Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies,” H. Samy Alim explores

how paradigms like raciolinguistics and culturally sustaining pedagogies, among others, can offer substantive breaks from mainstream thought and provide us with new, just, and equitable ways of living together in the world. I begin with a deep engagement with Boots Riley and his critically acclaimed, anticapitalist, absurdist comedy *Sorry to Bother You* in hopes of demonstrating how artists, activists, creatives, and scholars might: 1) cotheorize the complex relationships between language and racial capitalism and 2) think through the political, economic, and pedagogical implications of this new theorizing for Communities of Color.²⁹

Alim digs deep into models of aspirational whiteness in *Sorry to Bother You* and shows how it goes past the mark. In the script, Boots states, “It’s not really a white voice. It’s what they *wish* they sounded like. So, it’s like, what they think they’re *supposed* to sound like.” All of the authors in this section examine varied kinds of intervention strategies and programs in institutional education and social action that can raise awareness of and help to ameliorate linguistic subordination and sociolinguistic inequality in American society.

From our perspective, it is not sufficient to raise awareness and describe linguistic inequality without attempting to confront and ameliorate that inequality. Thus, our third and final set of papers by John Baugh, Sharese King and John R. Rickford, and Norma Mendoza-Denton offer legal and policy alternatives that

implement activities and programs that directly confront issues of institutional inequality. As linguist Jan Blommaert puts it, “we need an activist attitude, one in which the battle for power-through-knowledge is engaged, in which knowledge is activated as a key instrument for the liberation of people, and as a central tool underpinning any effort to arrive at a more just and equitable society.”³⁰ Our authors illustrate the communicative processes involved when we use our human capacity for language to work toward justice.

In “Linguistic Profiling across International Geopolitical Landscapes,” Baugh “explore[s] various forms of linguistic profiling throughout the world, culminating with observations intended to promote linguistic human rights and the aspirational goal of equality among people who do not share common sociolinguistic backgrounds.”³¹ Baugh extends his previous work on linguistic profiling into the international geopolitical landscape and notes, in countries that have them, the role that language academies play in reinforcing narrow norms, showing how those practices relate to practices in countries where these processes are more organic and situated in the educational systems.

In “Language on Trial,” King and Rickford draw on their case study of the testimony of Rachel Jeantel, a close friend of Trayvon Martin, in the 2013 trial of *George Zimmerman v. The State of Florida*.³² They show that despite being an ear-witness (by cell phone) to all but the final minutes of Zimmerman’s interaction with Trayvon, and despite testifying for nearly six hours about it, her testimony was dismissed in jury deliberations. “Through a linguistic analysis of Jeantel’s speech, comments from a juror, and a broader contextualization of stigmatized speech forms and linguistic styles,” they show that “lack of acknowledgment of dialectal variation has harmful social and legal consequences for speakers of stigmatized dialects.”³³ Their work complements legal scholar D. James Greiner’s essay on empiricism in law, from a previous volume of *Dædalus*, to show how empirical linguistic analysis should be included in such models.³⁴ As King and Rickford state:

Alongside the vitriol from the general public, evidence from jury members suggested that not only was Jeantel’s speech misunderstood, but it was ultimately disregarded in more than sixteen hours of deliberation. With no access to the court transcript, unless when requesting a specific playback, jurors did not have the materials to reread speech that might have been unfamiliar to most if they were not exposed to or did not speak the dialect.³⁵

In “Currents of Innuendo Converge on an American Path to Political Hate,” Norma Mendoza-Denton shows that politicians’ “innuendo such as enthymemes, sarcasm, and dog whistles” gave us “an early warning about the type of relationship that has now obtained between Christianity and politics, and specifically the rise of Christian Nationalism as facilitated by President Donald Trump.” She demonstrates that “two currents of indirectness in American politics, one reli-

gious and the other racial, have converged like tributaries leading to a larger body of water.”³⁶

Anne H. Charity Hudley concludes the collection with “Liberatory Linguistics,” offering the model as “a productive, unifying framework for the scholarship that will advance strategies for attaining linguistic justice [...] [e]merging from the synthesis of various lived experiences, academic traditions, and methodological approaches.” She highlights promising strategies from her work with Black undergraduates, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and faculty members as they endeavor to embed a justice framework throughout the study of language broadly conceived that can “improve current approaches to engaging with structural realities that impede linguistic justice.”³⁷ Charity Hudley ends by noting how this set of essays is in conversation with the 2022 *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* on social justice in applied linguistics, and the forthcoming Oxford volumes *Decolonizing Linguistics* and *Inclusion in Linguistics*, which “set frameworks for the professional growth of those who study language and create direct roadmaps for scholars to establish innovative agendas for integrating their teaching and research and outreach in ways that will transform linguistic theory and practice for years to come.”³⁸

As our summaries suggest, this collection of essays is diverse and comprehensive, representing a range of situations and conditions calling for justice in language. We hope these essays, along with other publications on this topic, broaden the conversations across higher education on language and justice. We are extremely grateful to the authors who have shared their knowledge, research, advocacy, and perspectives in such lucid, accessible presentations.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Language Standardization & Linguistic Subordination

Anne Curzan, Robin M. Queen, Kristin VanEyck & Rachel Elizabeth Weissler

Language standardization involves minimizing variation, especially in written forms of language. That process includes judgments about people who don't or can't use the standard forms. These kinds of judgments can unfairly limit people's access to opportunities, including in educational and professional realms. In this essay, we discuss standardized language varieties and the specific ways beliefs and ideologies about them allow judgments about language to become judgments about people, especially groups of people who share, or are presumed to share, gender, race, ethnicity, social status, education status, and numerous other socially salient identities. After describing how the process of standardization occurs, we illustrate how the expression of language peeves becomes embodied. Finally, we discuss how ideologies about standardized language circulate in higher education to the detriment of many students, and include a range of suggestions and examples for how to center linguistic justice and equity within higher education.

Language peeves seem harmless, which only enhances their power. How serious could it be to complain about people's use of apostrophes or double negatives or the contraction *ain't*? The features under fire are relatively trivial when it comes to mutual comprehension. At the same time, many articulations of language peeves, intentionally or unintentionally, belittle or humiliate those who have "transgressed," which is not trivial. Such peeves can become a referendum on the people themselves rather than "just" their language. For example, someone who uses *ain't* may be understood as uneducated; or an expression like *we don't want none of that* is presumed to be illogical and thus a sign of a speaker's inability to think precisely. And these kinds of judgments can unfairly limit people's access to opportunities, including in educational and professional realms.

To understand the unfairness of these judgments and their real-world implications, it helps to return to our use of scare quotes around "just" in the previous paragraph. The languages we speak are essential parts of our identities; they are not just how we talk about the world but are part of who we are and part of our

cultures and communities. Further, the languages we speak are part of how we understand the world we live in. For example, one of the authors of this essay, who is from the Southern United States, can use multiple modal verbs to indicate finer distinctions in grammatical mood than are available with a single modal verb. In the sentence “We might should go to the beach today,” the speaker indicates both that it is an action that probably needs to be done and an action that may or may not be feasible. This construction, acquired by speakers in toddlerhood, creates a different flavor for modal verbs and is tied to how a speaker shows politeness. Multiple modals are nuanced and helpful. They are also often framed, both by those who don’t use them and by some who do, as highly “incorrect” and as signaling a lack of education and intelligence.

Given the connection of language to identity, culture, and community, judgments about individuals’ language use are frequently linked to groups of people (rather than specific individuals), particularly those connected by race, ethnicity, gender identity, social status, geographic location, and education. At their most troubling, overt judgments about language and imagined “correct” ways of speaking reinforce social hierarchies and deny the richness of linguistic diversity. The language gatekeeping that happens routinely in institutions of higher education and elsewhere ultimately promotes the ideologies of the powerful and disempowers those who are disenfranchised based on the various social groups of which they are a part.

Language gatekeeping happens in both formal and informal ways in higher education. For example, all four authors of this essay know colleagues who have policies in their courses that penalize students if their written work contains, say, more than three “errors” per page. Other colleagues give their students a list of their language peeves (for example, using *different than* rather than *different from*, or ending a sentence with a preposition, or using *anyways* rather than *anyway*, or using multiple modals such as *might could*) that students should not use in their written work if they want to please their instructor and receive a better grade. At a less formal level, students themselves may “correct” their peers for saying something like “aks” in “aks a question.” While not a formal correction tied to a grade, this judgment and gatekeeping take multiple forms, from an explicit correction to derisive laughter or eye-rolling. Similarly, we have all heard other instructors complaining to a colleague that their students “can’t write” because they confused the homophones *their* and *there* or sent in their “collage application essay.” We’ll return to the different kinds of language that are being corrected in these examples – and the harmful language ideologies that justify this powerful gatekeeping.

These instructors and students are participating in a gatekeeping discourse that circulates broadly in institutions beyond education, including popular media. Consider, for example, a 2021 feature in *Reader’s Digest* titled “11 Grammar Mistakes Editors Hate the Most,” which offers a collection of grammatical peeves

sourced from language experts like editors and college instructors.¹ The “mistakes” by “offenders” range from confusion of homophones (*their/they’re/there*) to nonstandard apostrophes to the use of *I* for *me*. One editor-in-chief, irritated by the abundance of grammatical errors on public signs, used her own pen to correct them. She explains, “I’ve only done it once or twice, but when a mistake makes my skin crawl, I have no shame.”

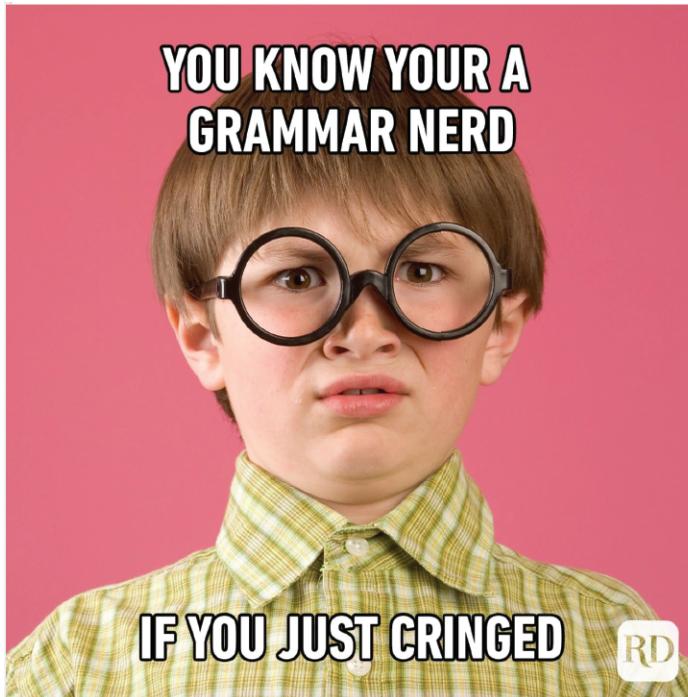
The use of phrases like “makes my skin crawl” is an example of language embodiment, which in this case describes a physical response to a visual grammatical “error.” It reflects how beliefs about language correctness are deeply held and how they are both cognitively and physically naturalized – to the point where people articulate that perceived mistakes cause physical pain (for example, ears or eyes hurting, feeling ill). Figure 1 illustrates such embodiment.

Throughout this essay, we provide further examples of embodiment/embodyed responses that occur in the name of language standardization to illustrate how deeply ingrained beliefs about what is and isn’t “correct” are.

Discussing language standardization is critical, given how deeply ideologies about language use and correctness are embedded in our social interactions with one another and in our cognitive capacities to both produce and interpret language. Standardization often hides the fact that all varieties of all human languages are equally capable of being “grammatical” in the sense that users have strong understandings of the rules that govern the variety. For this reason, we don’t use the term *dialect* or *accent* to refer to less standardized varieties. Instead, we use *variety*.² In doing so, we are committing to the position that standardized varieties are not better or worse than less standardized varieties. Yet the discourses that position standardized varieties as better, correct, or the “real” language naturalize the assumed superiority of the standardized variety. We must take seriously the power of this naturalized discourse about language “correctness” because it facilitates and often overtly promotes discrimination, both deliberate and unintentional.

We urge readers to consider the implications of language standardization within their own fields. Language standardization supports one of the most consistent forms of gatekeeping, and one in which every field represented in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences participates. The ideological power of language standardization holds true for English and for other languages, including many found in the United States. For instance, there is a general prestige associated with the standardized form of Spanish used in Spain that relegates other forms of Spanish, such as Cuban or Mexican Spanish, to a significantly lower status.³ This version of an ideology about standardized language facilitates discrimination against those who use varieties of Spanish other than those found in Spain – and, of course, the same discrimination against minoritized varieties happens in Spain itself. When we unquestioningly reinforce the belief that the standardized variety is inherently “correct,” we almost always marginalize those who

Figure 1
Standard Grammatical Use of the Contraction “You’re”



Source: RD.com, Getty Images, <https://www.rdasia.com/true-stories-lifestyle/humour/23-grammar-memes-thatll-crack-you-up?pages=2> (accessed May 30, 2022).

are minoritized in ways that appear neutral but are in fact classist, racist, sexist, and in other ways discriminatory.⁴

Higher education in the United States (and many places with a long history of standardization) presupposes a standardized, edited written form of English as the model for what is “correct” linguistically. We often talk about this variety, “Standard English” (or even just “English”), as a stable, neutral, locatable entity. Let us be clear: It is none of those things. In fact, the very act of trying to define Standard English reveals how slippery this notion is. For this reason, it can be useful to start a discussion of Standard English with the process of standardization, rather than the variety itself.

Standard languages do not magically or neutrally appear; they result from the process of language standardization. The central goal of standardizing a language

is to minimize variation in the selected variety, which can then be used to facilitate communication across regional and social dialects of a language. A common by-product is shoring up social hierarchies based on who has access to the standardized variety, which comes to represent not only a shared standard but also the one “correct” or “proper” way to use the language. Variation is natural to any living language, so the process of standardization must always work against the natural tendency for a language to morph over time, space, and social identities.

The process of language standardization is often described in four stages, first outlined by sociolinguist Einar Haugen, which we’ve summarized below:

- **Selection:** A dialect of the language is chosen as the variety that will be shared more broadly. Typically, this variety carries social, political, and/or economic prestige based on the status of its speakers.
- **Elaboration:** As a more local variety is asked to take on a wider array of functions (for example, legal documents and scientific writing), its available resources – such as vocabulary and written style – must expand to meet the varied needs of speakers and writers.
- **Codification:** As the variety comes to be more broadly shared, it starts to become more regulated in an attempt to minimize variation across speakers and writers.
- **Acceptance:** The variety is institutionalized as a standard in education, media, administrative functions, and elsewhere, and mastery of it becomes a qualification for higher education and many professional careers.⁵

Sociolinguists James Milroy and Lesley Milroy, who describe standardization as an ideology in addition to a process, expand this model to include more stages: selection, acceptance, diffusion, elaboration, maintenance, codification, and prescription.⁶ In these late stages (which are not necessarily linear), the standardized variety often acquires prestige.

There is nothing formalized about these stages; no one “decides” to select a variety and elaborate on it. Rather, selection often follows from the institutionalized social power of particular users, and the stages follow the idea, promoted within powerful social, cultural, and legal institutions, that standardized varieties are inherently better than varieties that are less standardized. The standardized variety is then available to confer social prestige on those who use it while the less standardized varieties are seen as evidence of lower social prestige. For example, in the United States, a roughly Midwestern variety of spoken English was “selected” by broadcasters in the early to mid-twentieth century because it was neither a Southern nor a Northeastern variety of American English.⁷ One of the important aspects of this selection can be seen in films from the early through the late 1950s, in which varieties associated with the Northeast become less and less prestigious.

In the film *Philadelphia Story* (1940), Katherine Hepburn's character Tracy Lord uses language associated with the Northeast to mark her upper-class status. By 1954, however, Marlon Brando's Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront* uses language associated with the Northeast (specifically New York) to mark lower-class status.

The selection of the "standard" variety is not neutral, nor are the parties responsible for its codification, maintenance, and prescription. In some countries, there is an identifiable institution that promotes standardization, such as the Académie Française in France. In the United States, by contrast, standardization is enforced by a loose network of language authorities, including editors, teachers, dictionary and usage guide writers, language pundits, and the like. In English, codification and prescription took hold in Britain and the United States and beyond in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the proliferation of dictionaries and then style guides that would become standard reference tools in the educational system.

Standardization works to limit change and variability within a language variety. Change still happens in standardized varieties (for example, the introduction of the passive progressive – *the house is being built* – in the nineteenth century), but it is often resisted and only slowly accepted (for example, the use of "they" as a singular pronoun, which occurs as early as the fourteenth century).⁸ Therefore, we use the phrase *Standardized American English* to capture the dynamic processes at work in this variety. Standardized American English (henceforth referred to in this essay as SAE) is easier to distinguish in writing than in speech. While we can identify some features that are prototypically standard (for example, single negation, use of third-person singular -s in the present tense as in *she thinks, he dreams*), SAE is often identified by what it isn't (for example, *fixin to, ain't*, multiple modals, merger of the vowel in *pen* and *pin* [but the merger of the vowel in *cot* and *caught* is not stigmatized as nonstandard], *aks* rather than *ask*).⁹ As these few examples capture, these distinctions between standardized and nonstandardized language features are often raced and classed.

While SAE is often described as neutral or unmarked, it is neither. It may not have distinctive markers of geographical location, but SAE indexes whiteness and higher socioeconomic class.¹⁰ It is enforced and reinforced through discourses of "correctness" in our educational system, editorial practices, a proliferation of usage guides and style manuals, and technologies such as grammar checkers built into word processors.

It is important to note here that language gatekeeping and the discourse of correctness are not entirely consistent and apply to variety and register (or stylistic) differences as well as spelling and punctuation. Let's return to the examples in the introductory section of common language gatekeeping practices in higher education. Some of the examples involve nonstandard pronunciations or grammatical features associated with social groups, such as *aks, anyways*, and multiple modals.

Some of the examples are stylistic distinctions, in which arguably both variants fall within standardized usage (for example, *different from* versus *different than* or ending a sentence with a preposition). And especially with these kinds of prescriptive rules, not all language authorities will agree on what counts as an error.¹¹ For example, not all readers of this essay will care equally, or at all, about *different than*, or *hopefully* used to mean “it is hoped,” or the use of *impact* as a verb. The list goes on. Then there are typos and “grammos” or homophonous grammar errors (for example, *their/they’re, its/it’s*), which are entirely written phenomena – and in some cases created by autocorrect functions found on mobile devices that, for instance, often revert the possessive *its* to the contracted *it’s*, despite attempts by the typers to change it.¹² At some fundamental level, when we think about language as a communicative system, these grammos are trivial (we cannot even hear them in speech) and most writers have made them when writing quickly or in less proofed genres. Yet the stakes for making them can be socially and professionally high: they can be seen as markers not just that a writer may not have proofed carefully but also that a writer is lazy, unintelligent, unqualified.

The consequences of language standardization are significant because of the beliefs the process creates and sustains. While, in theory, the standardized variety could coexist with nonstandard varieties in a way that legitimizes and celebrates the richness and systematicity of linguistic diversity, the commonsense belief that the standardized variety is inherently better results in the degradation of other varieties, including both regional and social varieties of the language that are core cultural markers of communities. This ideological system, typically referred to as Standard Language Ideology (SLI), can be summarized as “a bias toward an abstract, idealized language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant institutions and which has as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class.”¹³ As a result, SLI allows those in power to exclude and restrict access to power for speakers of minoritized varieties in many sectors of the public domain.

SLI generally works invisibly, by nature of its “commonsense” approach to right and wrong (or better and worse) language patterns. It allows, if not encourages, the dissemination of misinformation about language variation, and speakers of all varieties tend to accept SLI without question. This ideology captures the power of convincing speakers that their own language varieties, which they use for diverse communicative purposes, are “wrong” if they do not correspond with what is seen as standard. This bias applies not only to SAE but also to many languages in the United States such as Spanish, which is spoken variably by people in the United States depending on their background and origin. Because the standard variety of a language functions as the uninterrogated norm, other varieties are relegated to the margins as linguistically inferior, even if they may carry social capital. Those who speak nonstandardized or semistandardized dialects are

labeled ungrammatical, which translates to illogical and untrustworthy. Such disinformation consolidates power, reifies it, and naturalizes its reification.

The embodiment of negative reactions to linguistic (primarily orthographic) “errors” presents a fascinating aspect of the language standardization process, which can link bodily sensation to beliefs about standardized and nonstandardized forms of language. Eyerolls, for instance, are a form of embodied annoyance, as is saying someone’s grammar makes you sick (or [*sic*]), as seen in Figure 2.

Though theories of embodiment have made their way across fields, from cognitive neuroscience to robotics to anthropology to some areas of linguistics, they have not been widely incorporated into theories of language standardization.¹⁴ Nonetheless, embodiment offers fertile ground for understanding linguistic judgment and prejudice. When a person expresses that grammatical errors “make their skin crawl,” or when certain speech modalities such as creaky voice or uptalk are described as an “embodied contagion” or metaphorical viral infection, we see a direct link to specific ideologies about language that set up the standardized form as correct, beautiful, healthy, and pure.¹⁵ Further, these embodied physiological responses to language variation suggest how deeply naturalized standard language ideologies are, including among the most highly educated.

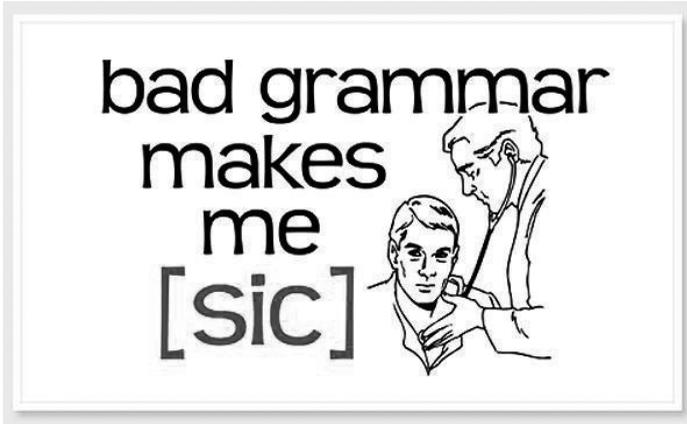
Language production and perception – spoken, written, or signed – always engage the body directly: the hands, the mouth, the larynx, the lungs, the ears, the eyes, the motor system, and the processing systems in the brain.¹⁶ This material physicality is simultaneously involved in both producing and perceiving language, including linguistic forms understood as being correct because they are standardized. Most important, these responses embody the power of standardization and the challenges involved in dislodging that power. Therefore, engaging with and changing SLI, especially those that subordinate other people’s linguistic production, requires confronting their embodiment.¹⁷

One area of embodiment that occurs with some frequency when grammar “errors” are under consideration is laughter. Laughter is a physical characteristic of and reaction to a range of affective states, including playfulness, amusement, joy, but also discomfort, dismissal, *schadenfreude*, or tease.¹⁸ In the context of language standardization, attempts to evoke laughter most typically involve teasing, *schadenfreude*, and superiority, all of which are negatively valenced toward the user of grammar “errors.”

The connection between public humor about grammar and a taunting or superior affect can be seen in the frequency with which the “humor” of many grammar memes derives from metaphors of sickness and death, as seen in Figures 3 and 4. In examples like Figures 3 and 4, in which the memes discuss pain and death as being brought on specifically by grammatical “errors,” it becomes clear how ideolo-

Figure 2

Bad Grammar Makes Me [Sic]



Source: Logo of the public Facebook group “Bad Grammar Makes Me [Sic].”

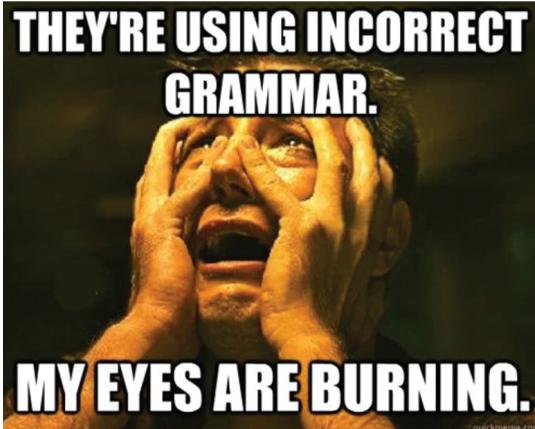
Figure 3

“When You Use Bad Grammer [sic] It Kills Me Again”



Source: Taken from Lenia Crouch, “Grammar Memes to Make Your Day,” *The EMS Sound*, February 6, 2018, <https://emssound.net/1560/fun-and-games>. Made using <https://imgflip.com>.

Figure 4
“My Eyes Are Burning”



Source: Taken from Rose Ledgard, “Grammar Memes,” Rose Ledgard: MA Major Project, October 10, 2012, <https://roseledgarddesigns.wordpress.com/2012/10/10/grammar-memes>. Made using <https://quickmeme.com>.

gies about the inherent correctness and superiority of the standard are reinforced through the representation of embodied illness.

In surfacing these ideologies about a standardized language, memes and other “humorous” displays of grammar errors are immediately available to denigrate socially and linguistically marginalized groups of people. For instance, articles such as *Business Insider*’s “The 13 Celebrities with the Worst Grammar on Twitter” are meant to elicit a visceral and critical response.¹⁹ Despite the availability of many celebrities with “poor grammar” who embody a range of identities on Twitter, eleven of the thirteen celebrities in this article are People of Color, including Queen Latifah who is criticized for using “U” in place of “you” in a tweet, and Snoop Dogg for using numbers “2” and “4” in lieu of “to” and “for” (see Figure 5).

These forms are clear (and at this point, largely standardized) ways to reduce the number of characters in a tweet since Twitter limits how many characters a single tweet may have. These celebrities are using the orthographic norms of the medium; nonetheless, they are criticized for using especially poor grammar.

Many news organizations have features about poor grammar that are framed in terms of the embodiment of grammar scorn, for instance, BuzzFeed’s article “19 Grammar Fails That Will Make You Shake Your Head Then Laugh Out Loud,” CNBC’s article “The 11 Extremely Common Grammar Mistakes That Make People

Figure 5

Snoop Dogg Tweet Using Numbers “2” and “4” in Lieu of “To” and “For”

INSIDER

1. Snoop Dogg (30.9 mistakes)

Alberto E. Rodriguez/Getty Images, @SnoopDogg/Twitter

Snoop Dogg @SnoopDogg · Follow

salute 2 my guy @iamdiddy 4 his @RevoltTV partnership wit time warner cable @TWC !! every1 congratulate puff 4 bringn music bacc 2 tv !!

2:05 PM · Jun 21, 2013

29 Likes Reply Share

Read 15 replies

Source: Kirsten Acuna, “The 13 Celebrities with the Worst Grammar on Twitter,” *Business Insider*, June 25, 2013, <https://www.businessinsider.com/worst-celebrity-grammar-2013-6>.

Cringe – And Make You Look Less Smart,” and the BBC’s article “Have We Murdered the Apostrophe?”²⁰ These types of articles present negatively embodied responses to other people’s intelligence, social class, racial or ethnic background, and presumed lack of education. Such responses incorrectly reduce language to the (formal) written language. More insidiously, they mobilize ideas about language to make strongly negative assessments of people who are marginalized or otherwise oppressed for reasons beyond language.

Deep-seated beliefs about language correctness circulate so broadly in U.S. culture that they metaphorically become part of the air we breathe. That said, we must pay particular attention to their pervasiveness in K–12

spaces and in higher education. Early in their literacy careers, children are taught to write adhering to specific forms and conventions: capitalize the first word of a sentence, write homophones correctly, and end each sentence with appropriate punctuation. They also learn that some linguistic features are not appropriate for school, be that *ain't* or the pronunciation “aks” or constructions such as *me and my mom went*. As students progress through their literacy and writing curriculums, the forms and conventions become increasingly specific to the preferences of SAE. While there are many varieties of English spoken around the world, and indeed many varieties spoken in the United States, rarely are “nonstandard” varieties permitted for high-stakes – or even low-stakes – uses in schools. Especially for academic writing and standardized testing, the use of SAE is normalized as the only appropriate linguistic variety.

The consequences in schools can be devastating. Students get silenced because they are told they talk “incorrectly.” As students experience the dissonance between home and school ways of speaking, they must navigate complex emotional terrain as they decide how to present themselves. This cascade of events and circumstances can undermine students’ confidence as well as their identity and can result in attrition: students drop out of school because they don’t see themselves as belonging there or are told, with or without words, they don’t belong there. All of this runs counter to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives that are making their way across the United States. Yet not nearly enough attention has been given to countering SLI as part of DEI initiatives.

In spaces of higher education, whether it be composition classes or writing centers, language is typically taught as one specific, idealized, standardized form. While teaching SAE to the exclusion of other varieties in schools is the normalized practice, there have been movements recently to permit students to use their home language varieties in schools, sometimes as a learning tool for translation or code-switching to help students acquire SAE, and occasionally, but increasingly, for academic purposes.²¹ Historically, code-switching approaches, which taught students to switch between their home language codes and school codes, took a language awareness approach that taught students to use their knowledge of their own language to acquire SAE. Problematically, students sometimes interpret this practice to mean their home language is inferior in school and professional settings, reinforcing deficit ideologies about their home languages and identities. Given the interconnections of language, dialect, race, and identity, some explain the practice of code-switching as “race-switching,” meaning non-white people are expected to put on linguistic patterns of whiteness to be taken seriously in schools and professional settings.²²

Recognizing the challenges of switching on the formation of students’ linguistic identities, there has been an increasing call in education to allow students to use their home language varieties for school and professional purposes.²³ Allow-

ing students to speak and write in their home varieties in schools moves toward greater linguistic justice, but it is predicated upon an essential ideological shift in the infrastructure of schooling. Before students can bring their full linguistic identities into the classrooms, the systems of schooling must create inclusive spaces in which all language varieties are treated as equally valid for academic purposes. Given the associations of particular language varieties with various social, economic, ethnic, and racial groups, just treatment of all varieties is a radical approach for education, one that relies on those with power and influence to deliberately redistribute power to those whose language varieties have historically been discriminated against in schools.

For the redistribution of linguistic power to take place in schools, the academy has to make a fundamental ideological shift away from language standardization toward a preference for language diversity. In the K–12 setting, students learn from teachers who are trained, explicitly and implicitly, in SLI through the academy. Beyond K–12 teacher education curricula, the academy trains its students to practice and prefer the standard, through the use of SAE in course materials, classroom discourse, and unstated expectations for formal and informal writing, even in low-stakes academic assignments. The practice of SAE for academic purposes is so naturalized within the academy, it is often omitted from the syllabus or assignment expectations, despite being expected from students. On formal writing assignments, the conventions of SAE often appear on grading rubrics, absent any discussion of the politics of language and standardization.

There are several tangible actions those of us in the academy can pursue to further diversity, equity, and inclusion when it comes to the treatment of SAE. The first action is to teach students about the politics of language standardization.²⁴ This approach, sometimes now called Critical Language Awareness, aims to make students aware of standardized language forms while also being explicit about the socially constructed nature of standardization. The goal is to empower students as speakers and writers to make informed choices about what language varieties and styles they want to use in a given context, with a specific audience, and to empower them to challenge systems of power that promote standard language ideologies. This conversation should also extend to colleagues across a university's campus. DEI work that does not include attention to linguistic justice cannot achieve its goals because of the mutually sustaining relationship between language and identity.

A second action is to challenge the preference for standardization within the discourse of the academy. In addition to naming linguistic justice and inclusion as a pillar of classroom discourse, academics can issue explicit calls for invited speakers, papers, dissertation formats, journal abstracts, and more that are presented within a framework of linguistic justice.

If this feels impossible, it is because the system has made SAE unchallengeable. Teachers and academics struggle to see linguistically diverse writing and speaking

styles as part of cultural and intellectual diversity. Even when permitted to use diverse language varieties, researchers and writers may be hesitant because hyper-standard academic norms are difficult to subvert. Rather than erasing the richness of linguistic diversity, we could teach the standardized version of the language as content rather than the only correct way to speak and engage.

The discriminatory consequences of language standardization go far beyond schools. For example, language standardization is problematic in legal spaces where standardized languages are privileged and others are ignored.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, many court reporters are trained only in standardized English, focusing on accuracy and typing speed, and these reporters may be ill-equipped to transcribe diverse English dialects. Fortunately, there are linguists who are teaching linguistics in prisons, such as Nicole Holliday, training court transcribers in African American English (AAE), such as Sharese King, and writing articles about court transcriber accuracy to bring awareness to these issues.²⁶

Many scholars across the disciplines consider how interactions with institutions affect people who are in relatively minoritized groups. However, little research pays careful attention to the ways in which minoritized language forms are part and parcel of those interactions. In our conversations with education specialists, psychologists, political scientists, sociologists, and others in both the social sciences and the humanities, we regularly encounter surprise at the suggestion that language, especially language attitudes, form another materialization of many of the topics they investigate. Indeed, this materialization is frequently embodied, metaphorically and literally, in feelings of disgust, illness, and discomfort. We ask of them, as we ask of you, to rethink the assumptions about language that inform scholarship, as this is one concrete way to dismantle some of the consequences of beliefs about standardized forms of language.

We have suggested some solutions to many of the issues we've highlighted in this essay; however, implementing solutions in a meaningful way first requires recognition of how important language variation is for our everyday interactions with others. Second, implementing solutions depends on recognizing how our ideas about language (standardized or not) can pose a true barrier to meaningful change. Such recognition includes the understanding that much of what we think about language often stands as a proxy for what we think about people, who we are willing to listen to and hear, and who we want to be with or distance ourselves from.

Acts of language oppression are generally directly tied to ideas about the "proper" or "correct" way to use language, and ideas about what is correct generally follow from very specific beliefs regarding standardized language forms and, often much more specifically, forms that are expected in formal, written prose. While there are also plenty of contexts in which standardized, written prose is not

welcome (for instance, on many social media platforms), the majority of us participate in the reification of standardized language expectations. These ideas circulate in virtually all of our institutions – in employment, banking, medical practice, housing, education, and business. In our own practices within higher education, we have a responsibility to regularly rethink how we teach and then come to expect standardized forms in at least some contexts. We can also learn to have a heightened awareness of how those expectations can easily slip into language discrimination and general oppression of people who use linguistic systems that are minoritized in many contexts.

Within higher education, one solution is to consider standardized forms, particularly formal written prose, as a type of content rather than simply a content delivery system. For instance, discuss the variation linked to genres of speaking and writing as a form of information. Other practical solutions include: 1) working with others to develop an ongoing meta-awareness of how attitudes about language surface – for instance, asking students to survey their friends and peers about responses to the use of forms found on social media; 2) asking ourselves and others how much of our assessment of a person is tied to something about their language – for instance, by first writing a reflection about a particular person’s language use and what it seems to indicate and then sharing those reflections for further discussion; and 3) considering how our assessments of individuals lead to broader assumptions about groups of people who share an identity or identities. We can all talk together, with curiosity and generosity, about what we think about language and why we may react to particular linguistic forms in the ways we do. Finally, we can all embrace the richness, creativity, and wonder that comes when we recognize what linguistic diversity brings to the experience of being human together in the world.

AUTHORS’ NOTE

The four authors worked together at the University of Michigan on the Language Matters initiative, an interdisciplinary initiative to increase recognition of the role of language diversity, to create linguistically inclusive classrooms, and to contribute to an inclusive campus climate. The authors are listed in alphabetical order.

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Addressing Linguistic Inequality in Higher Education: A Proactive Model

Walt Wolfram

Although most institutions of higher education in the United States have now developed diversity, equity, and inclusion centers, programs, and initiatives, language equality tends to be excluded from the typical “canon of diversity.” Language remains an overlooked or dismissed issue in higher education while it insidiously serves as an active agent for promoting inequality in campus life. Based on two empirical studies, one of students from Southern Appalachia attending a large urban university in the South, and one of tenured faculty at the same university, I establish the need for the awareness of language inequality in higher education. I then describe a proactive “campus-infusion” program that includes activities and resources for student affairs, academic affairs, human resources, faculty affairs, and offices of institutional equity and diversity. As an interdisciplinary team from different administrative and disciplinary programs within the university, we used a variety of venues, resources, and techniques to educate the faculty, students, and staff about the significance of language inequality on campus that has had an ongoing effect on higher education.

In a career spanning more than a half-century of teaching in higher education, I have served in institutions that range from elite private universities with large linguistics departments to small, open-enrollment HBCUs, and large land-grant, research-extensive universities where linguistics was incorporated into larger departments such as communication sciences and English. In these higher education contexts, the linguistics programs have always considered it a foundational premise that all language varieties were based on systematic, complex patterns, and that there were no linguistically superior or deficient languages or dialects.¹ I regrettably admit that, at the same time, I was aware that this axiom was not shared throughout the university, even within linguistics programs. In fact, in many aligned disciplines, it was commonly assumed that nonstandardized versions of English were simply a “collection of errors” or “ungrammatical” patterns to be stamped out in the process of higher education. While these universities might have been progressive in their stances on other social issues, language equality was exempted from inclusion. In fact, in the historical predecessor of the

HBCU where I served, students were required to pass an exam in standardized English to qualify for graduation, in addition to other requirements.

Over the past couple of decades, diversity has become a growing topic in universities, and practically every university in the United States now has a version of an “office of diversity, equity, and inclusion.” The themes covered in such offices have developed into a canon of diversity, including topics related to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual preference, and so forth. What is typically missing from such canons, however, is language. As noted in an article in *The Economist*, language is typically excluded, and it has rarely been addressed explicitly in diversity, equity, and inclusion offices.

The collision of academic prejudice and accent is particularly ironic. Academics tend to the centre-left nearly everywhere, and talk endlessly about class and multiculturalism. . . . And yet accent and dialect are still barely on many people’s minds as deserving respect.²

A casual survey of university diversity statements and programs indicates that a) there is an implicitly recognized set of diversity themes within higher education and b) it traditionally excludes language issues.³ Topics related to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual preference, and age are commonly included in these programs, but language is noticeably absent, either by explicit exclusion or by implicit disregard. Ironically, issues of language intersect with all of the themes in the canonical catalog of diversity issues. How can we address discriminatory issues of race, sex, gender, and class without including the conversational interactions and language labels that index each identity marker (see Aris Moreno Clemons and Jessica A. Grieser in this volume)?⁴ And how can we contend with inequalities of race and ethnicity without tackling offensive, explicit, and implicit racist language use at an institutional level (see Sharese King and John R. Rickford in this volume)?⁵ Institutional offices of diversity, like academic disciplinary fields and scholars, are indeed vulnerable to the construction of a canon of issues restricted to customary and traditionally recognized topics while ignoring or dismissing topics that are outside of the traditional foci.⁶ Unfortunately, language is one of those issues that remains unrecognized in the higher education diversity canon while it insidiously serves as an active agent for promoting inequality in campus life.

I recount my personal experience here because, like many other linguists, I have often followed the practice of compartmentalizing linguistics in higher education. For the majority of my career in higher education, the linguistics programs in which I served operated as isolated enclaves of linguists in a university setting where our foundational axioms about language were disregarded and dismissed by aligned disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and education. A pair of empirical studies, one on university students speaking a nonstandardized variety of English and one on faculty backgrounds and perceptions of language, finally

caused me to realize that I had been ignoring a sociolinguistic conundrum in my own experiences of higher education.⁷

One of the pivotal studies of student behavior related to dialect differences comes from Stephany Brett Dunstan's examination of students from the mountains of Appalachia who attended a large state university in an urban region of the South. In this university context, their speech was quite different from the majority of the students who were Southern but not from the Southern mountains. Dunstan conducted extensive interviews with the selected students and analyzed their use of a couple of iconic vowel productions found in that region of western North Carolina (for example, the pronunciation of the vowel in *time* and the vowel in *bought*), as well as the use of some socially stigmatized grammatical features (for example, multiple negation in *He ain't do nothing* or subject-verb agreement in *We was down there*).⁸ In addition to the sample of their speech, the students discussed questions about their sense of belonging, their comfort level in class, and their interactional experiences related to language differences at the university.

Dunstan found that dialect played a significant role in student experiences on campus, including their academic and social life, as participants from the region expressed hesitance to speak out in class for fear of drawing unwanted negative attention.⁹ These students also indicated that their dialect could influence how comfortable they felt in certain courses and in interactions with other students and instructors. For example, one student indicated that he felt more comfortable in his economics courses where there was considerable linguistic diversity than in his sociology course where his peers and instructor used his dialect (sometimes negatively) to make him the representative of all rural white males. Quotes from a few students typify these comments:

I don't really speak up too much in class and stuff like that unless I feel really comfortable... 'cause I can hear, you know, people snickering or stuff like that when I talk...¹⁰

Sometimes I think that people might think that I'm not educated... just because I have this accent and you hear a country accent and you think hillbilly, and then hillbilly, no education. So I think it's just the social norm to think that way.¹¹

One of the outcomes of Dunstan's study indicated that student experiences related to language differed by departments and colleges within the university, but not in a way that aligned with traditional sociopolitical ideologies found in most universities. In most universities, the humanities and social sciences tend to embrace more progressive, liberal political and social stances, as opposed to those in the physical sciences or economics.¹² But students in Dunstan's study reported that their treatment by instructors and students in the social sciences and human-

ities courses was more negative than those in the physical sciences with respect to dialect differences.¹³ In part, this may be because of the language-gatekeeping and guardianship role assumed by faculty in the humanities and social sciences disciplines. At the same time, it attests to the acceptance of an ideology by some professors in these universities in which language differences do not cluster with attitudes about other kinds of social and cultural differences. Therefore, it is open to implicit bias.¹⁴ As pointed out by sociolinguist Rosina Lippi-Green, language diversity is often “the last acceptable prejudice,” and may persist in situations where other progressive sociopolitical stances are embraced and promoted.¹⁵

Students with nonstandardized dialect features said they had to work harder than students with more normalized dialects to prove their intelligence to both faculty and peers. Participants also indicated that language influenced their sense of belonging; some students indicated feeling a need to code-switch to fit in or be accepted academically or socially. Although significant outreach has been conducted in terms of language diversity in the communities in North Carolina and in the K–12 system, we began to realize that we had not specifically addressed this issue in the community of higher education, where students from diverse backgrounds might be facing issues academically, socially, and personally because of language differences.¹⁶ The results of Dunstan’s study revealed discomfiting exceptionalism and marginalization within and outside of the classrooms of higher education related to their native “mountain dialect,” a Southern Highland variety of English often referred to as Appalachian English.¹⁷

Following up on Dunstan’s study of a specific dialect community’s experiences in higher education, we decided to interview a sample of faculty at the same university about their dialect background and current experiences with language variation in their interactions in the classroom. I sent out a randomized request to one-third of the faculty to see if they would be willing to be interviewed. More than seventy faculty members volunteered to be interviewed, and my colleagues at North Carolina State University and I conducted the interviews. Questions included a discussion of their home dialect from their community of origin to their progressive and current use of language in the academic community of practice, resulting in several different research studies based on these interviews.¹⁸

Some faculty exhibited explicitly positive perspectives, but others offered insight into underlying prejudicial attitudes and perceptions relating to language. Some of the statements reflected issues of standard language ideology in academia: in particular, the idea that student and faculty scholars should aspire to certain hegemonic styles of speech, notably those associated with the white middle class. In addition to faculty members’ perceptions of students’ language in the classroom, participants also shared thoughts on how they believed others on campus perceive their language. Several faculty members suggested a belief that the way they are perceived by students and colleagues is shaped by their language and the factors

that have influenced their speech, such as race/ethnicity, geographic origin, and gender. For example, one instructor believes that his social class dialect and geographic origin influenced his credibility as a scholar in the eyes of his peers:

I've always been insecure about [my speech] and I'm still insecure about it to this day. In fact, earlier this week I got invited to do an interview on NPR radio. I'm like, I would love to talk about the research I'm doing and to share that, but to be interviewed on a national radio program where it's just my voice and nothing else, I'm scared to death....I hate going to professional conferences for that very reason. I love reconnecting with colleagues and meeting new people. I'm an editor of a journal in my field and you know I get treated very, very well and everybody's respectful to me, but I know that the moment I get up to the podium and I open my mouth, you know for half the audience at least it's going to just – my credibility's just going to sink and I have to spend the rest of the time like building it back up, you know.¹⁹

Faculty who shared this perspective also observed that they make or have made a conscious effort to change their speech. This finding is interesting since linguistic representation matters for students who want to feel that they belong in the academic community. If faculty feel the need to code-switch to accommodate perceived norms of valued language in the academy, students from diverse backgrounds may not hear faculty who sound like them.

In examining the disciplinary backgrounds of faculty in the study, however, sociolinguist Aston Patrick did find a benefit to speaking a local dialect.²⁰ Her analysis based on the set of interviews indicates that faculty regard Southern, rural dialects as devalued in many parts of the university, but that “these dialects confer *benefits* to faculty in the colleges of agricultural sciences, natural resources, and veterinary sciences because of these colleges’ significant connections to rural areas and communities.”²¹ Her analysis demonstrates that professors may benefit when they speak Southern or rural dialects of English within university colleges that have a high proportion of students from rural backgrounds and when conducting fieldwork with rural, Southern communities. The benefit of speaking a Southern or rural dialect, however, did not extend to other colleges whose faculty have greater bias against nonstandardized varieties of English. Patrick’s study demonstrates that acceptance or nonacceptance of varieties of English among professors may vary depending on context and constituencies, highlighting the need for greater nuance in understanding how conventional in-group and out-group dynamics of social identity formation can shift in local contexts, even within the university.

The analysis of these faculty data by sociolinguist Caroline Marie Myrick examines the role of language and gender ideologies.²² Myrick’s mixed-methods analysis uncovers linguistic expectations and pressures that female faculty perceive as normative in academia, including how and why they conform to or re-

sist these expectations.²³ Many female professors report being advised in graduate school and beyond to alter their speech to sound “more competent” in a university setting, including their resistance to so-called vocal fry (the lowest register [tone] of a person’s voice characterized by its deep, creaky, breathy sound) or “uptalk” (using a rising terminal intonation at the end of a declarative statement to make it sound like a question), two indexes of women’s speech that are considered “nonprofessional.” Men have considerably more classroom flexibility in language usage, since male language is unmarked and normative in the classroom. Women, on the other hand, are sanctioned for indexing femininity such as uptalk and vocal fry at the same time they may be sanctioned for violating gender-norm expectations. This places them in a double bind, in which their multiple identities as women and scholars intersect to produce a unique form of social oppression.

Sociolinguist Peter Andrews conducted a chronotropic analysis of the data in terms of ethnicity, describing the “comfortably white classroom” where normative, standardized speech prevails.²⁴ In this context, the use of regionalized Southern English may enhance solidarity between Southern instructors and Southern white students – but African American Language is marginalized. For example, one white Southern male professor made the following observations about the speech of an African American male graduate student in his seminar:

And his speech patterns are very Black. He’s not altered his speech patterns like I see most of them trying to do when they come here. In fact, it’s so much so, that he comes across very unprofessional. . . . I would say I have a hard time treating him professional because he’s so jive-y in his talk. It’s just “street talk” almost, the way he talks . . . and I’m like, “How can you look and talk like this?” . . . because you’re really making it hard for me.²⁵

The same professor offered the following contrast for a white female Midwestern student in the class:

So I think, yes, that if I had that [Midwestern] voice that I would use it. I think I definitely would. Because I always notice it when someone has one. And I point it out to them . . . so I’m teaching people how to speak, right? And we had this Midwestern-voice girl, and her diction was just perfect. And after she gave her seminar, I said, “You know, you sound like a radio announcer. You could go into radio,” I said. “You’ve got that nice Midwestern,” I said. “Perfect. It’s just beautiful, you know. Use it.”²⁶

We have also found that African American faculty face the burden of being exceptionalized as a token representative of ethnicity and gender in their use of language.

I’ve been told by a couple of students over the years that I’m the very first African American person that they’ve ever spoken to in their life . . . and I ask them, “What has

that experience been like?" . . . And so, you know, how I speak is really important to make sure that those students see, you know, that African American people can talk just like you.²⁷

Results from empirical studies such as these reveal how language use and attitudes by professors in the academy operate to reproduce and instantiate language inequality in our institutions of higher learning. It is not just the student body that needs vital information about dialect diversity; faculty and administrators are equally in need of such substantive information. This knowledge influences how faculty interact with and assess students, how they interact as colleagues, and how they view themselves as members of the academic community. Indeed, studies such as these challenge us to "educate the educated," who are the gatekeepers of language in our academic communities, along with the students who are discriminated upon based on erroneous linguistic assumptions.²⁸ The empirical results of student and faculty interactions and attitudes reported above cannot be ignored or dismissed if sociolinguistic equality is to become a practiced reality in higher education.

Although our program in linguistics has been engaged in proactive language awareness activities outside of our campus for several decades now, the landmark study by Dunstan and the follow-up study of faculty language experiences have inspired our program to address issues of language inequality that exist in our own backyard.²⁹ After meeting with the diversity officer of the university to explain our findings, we obtained a modest grant from the office of diversity to implement a program on linguistic diversity throughout the campus.

The conceptual framework underlying the program is based on psychologist Paul Pedersen's Multicultural Development Model, which includes the stages of awareness, knowledge, and skill.³⁰ Because language is rarely addressed as a type of diversity in college and because standard language ideology and linguistic hegemony are so pervasive in American society, members of the campus community are largely unaware of the attitudes and assumptions they hold about language. We devised a program that seeks to raise awareness through an inductive process in which participants initially think critically about beliefs they hold. The second stage of the model, knowledge – the cognitive domain – addresses factual linguistic evidence to dispel common myths and fallacies associated with language variation. Finally, the third stage, skill, addresses the behavioral domain by offering strategies for inclusion and for considering language and dialect when interacting with others from different linguistic backgrounds.

The initial goals of the program were: 1) to raise awareness about language as a form of diversity on college campuses and on our campus in particular, 2) to educate a full range of members of the campus community about language variation and diversity, and 3) to provide multifaceted resources and strategies for

the campus community to facilitate the inclusion of language diversity in diversity programming. The initial target was undergraduate students, for whom we designed positively framed interactive workshops in a variety of undergraduate courses that addressed language myths and facts regarding the dialects that students might hear on campus. Upon completion of the workshops, participants should recognize that: 1) the scientific study of language does not acknowledge a single correct variety or “standard” of any spoken language and that “standards” are social constructs, 2) speakers of any language necessarily speak a dialect of that language, and 3) all dialects are systematic, patterned, and rule-governed. Participants in the workshops included first years through seniors with a range of majors, and several hundred students completed both pre- and postworkshop surveys aimed at measuring language attitudes and beliefs and assessing learning outcomes. The postworkshop survey also asked questions related to how interesting and beneficial students found the workshop. The response from students was overwhelmingly positive, and the assessment data collected indicated that they were interested in the material covered and met the learning outcomes of the workshop.³¹ Given the initial success, and the shift in students’ previously held attitudes and beliefs about dialects, we decided to scale up the program to reach a broader audience across campus.

The program is an interdisciplinary, collaborative endeavor, rather than a group of linguists who set themselves apart as the exclusive experts on issues related to language variation. The program coordinators represented different colleges, as well as faculty and administrative roles at the university, thus offering different perspectives, disciplinary affiliations, and administrative networks for the program, leading to a “campus-infusion model” for implementation. The primary team involved an educator, a linguist, and an administrator. Using university organizational charts, we identified key units and divisions to approach, which would reach broad and diverse audiences across campus. We then identified key personnel from each of these units and divisions and began discussions with leaders and gatekeepers regarding our program, its objectives, and potential collaboration with their units. Given the commitment of our campus to creating diverse environments and because the ideas the program presented are “a fresh take on diversity” to most academics outside of the field of linguistics, it was relatively easy to obtain a pledge from members of the campus to participate in our program.

With the development of the campus-infusion model depicted in Figure 1, the leadership team pursued connections across campus in various divisions and began sharing language diversity awareness materials in several forms. As Figure 1 notes, the campus-infusion model includes student affairs, academic affairs, faculty affairs, and campus diversity programs. We were strategic in selecting units and programs in each of these areas in an effort to fully address the entire campus community. Over the next couple of years, we conducted more than fifty work-

Figure 1
The Campus-Infusion Model in Implementation

Student Affairs	Academic Affairs	Human Resources	Faculty Affairs	Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity
New student orientation	New graduate-level course taught spring 2014	New employee orientation (vignette)	New faculty orientation (vignette; speakers)	Diversity education week
Partnership with Global Training Initiative	Development of undergrad-level language diversity course	Resource personnel and online resources	Resource personnel and online resources	Resource personnel and online resources
Welcome festival	Workshops/lectures in undergrad/graduate courses			
Housing				
Student leadership training	Peer education: diversity ambassadors			
Resource personnel and online resources	Resource personnel and online resources			

Source: Stephany Brett Dunstan, Walt Wolfram, Audrey J. Jaeger, and Rebecca E. Crandall, "Educating the Educated: Language Diversity in the University Backyard," *American Speech* 90 (2) (2015): 274, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-3130368>.

shops with faculty, staff, and administrators, ranging from new faculty employees to the service workers throughout the university.

For the diversity initiative, we produced specific video vignettes of three to six minutes that we posted online for the campus population and used regularly in our workshops and presentations, including new student orientation for first years. One vignette was filmed on the university commons and included spontaneous responses from passing students, staff, faculty, and key administrators, including the chancellor of the university, to questions about their speech and

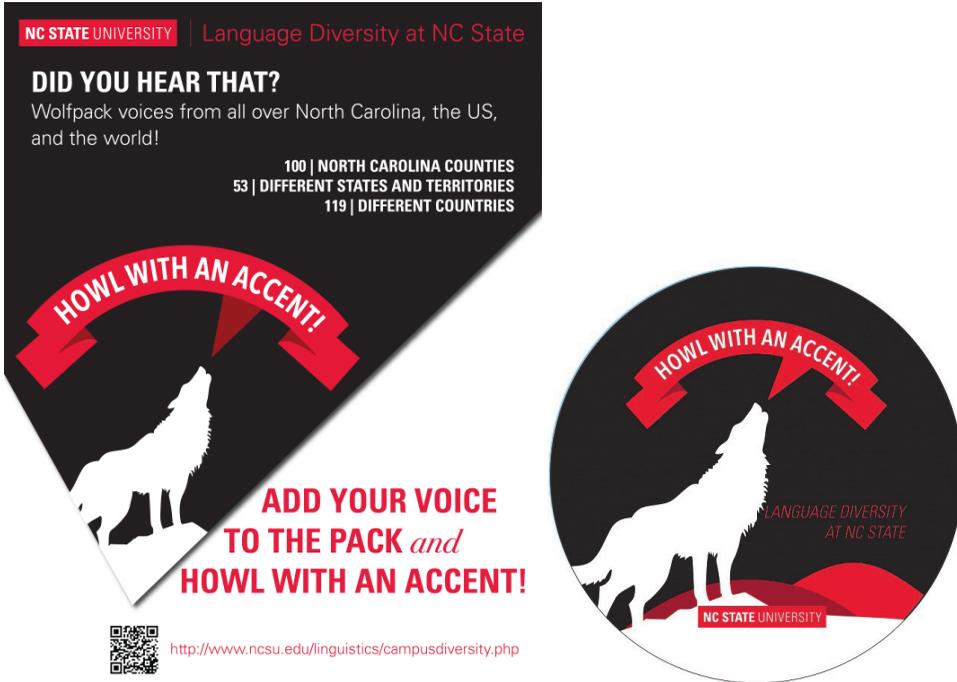
about language diversity on campus.³² Another vignette, “I Sound like a Scholar,” features students from different regions, ethnic backgrounds, and language backgrounds saying the phrase “I sound like a scholar” to underscore the fact that language variation is not connected with intelligence or scholarly achievement.³³ These vignettes continue to be key components in presentations and serve as a resource for others on campus in diversity training/programming. We also created a brand of language diversity related to the North Carolina State University’s mascot, the Wolfpack. More than a half-dozen years after the initial launch, campus residents and personnel can still see digital versions of the poster on video boards throughout campus, and the brand button on diversity remains popular with students who receive them at different events on campus (see Figure 2).

The workshop format has been fairly standardized, although we adapt certain elements of the workshops (primarily the implications for practice, and examples given during the workshop) for specific audiences. The workshops are centered on the learning outcomes previously described in this essay and follow the following format: 1) defining a dialect; 2) addressing common myths/truths about dialects; 3) addressing issues of linguistic discrimination; 4) addressing how language variation might impact you, your discipline, work environment, interactions with others, and so on; and 5) implications for practice (how audience members can use dialect diversity to create inclusive and respectful environments). The workshops are interactive in nature, calling upon audience members to reflect on experiences, explore their attitudes and beliefs about language, work through examples of dialect patterning, and collectively discuss strategies for using this knowledge.

The engagement of students plays a critical role in the implementation of the campus linguistic diversity programs. From its inception, students were involved in workshops, the production of videos, and the staffing of exhibit booths on and off campus. The programs also targeted different student groups, like those in university housing. Many undergraduate students live on campus, and residence halls are a critical environment for the psychosocial development of college students and informal learning.³⁴ Students in residence halls engage in diversity programming, thus offering an opportunity for inclusion of language diversity as part of this education. Accordingly, we provided language diversity training for all new residence hall directors and resident advisors for the university.

Linguistics students also established a student organization officially recognized by the Student Involvement Office in the Division of Academic and Student Affairs named the “Linguistic Diversity Ambassadors” (LDA). As we discuss in our report on the study, the LDA program offers students an opportunity to become involved and to develop leadership roles in multiple dimensions of advocacy and activities on campus.³⁵ Graduate students, in particular, often have limited engagement experiences compared to undergraduates, in part due to their myo-

Figure 2
“Howl with an Accent” Campus Poster and Button



Source: Language Diversity Ambassadors, North Carolina State University, <https://howl.wordpress.ncsu.edu> (accessed May 17, 2023).

pic focus on their academic subject.³⁶ Since 2013, the Educating the Educated Program has involved the LDA for meetings, events, promotional ventures, and other activities related to language variation supported structurally and financially by the Division of Academic and Student Affairs. It has a profile on the NC State “Get-Involved” website that informs students of events and assists in event logistics. The team also hosts booths at various functions for students and the campus community.

A substantive function of the LDA is a monthly meeting for students and others that highlights a language issue of relevance to the campus community. For example, in the last couple of years, meetings have included:

- A presentation and discussion of language issues in the University’s Book of Common Reading for 2019–2020, *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah. This ac-

tivity is a recognized campus seminar event in connection with the Book of Common Reading.

- A screening and discussion of the documentary *Talking Black in America* as an event celebrating Black History Month on campus.³⁷ This event was cohosted by the NC State Union Activities Black Student Board.
- A student presentation on “Queer Language” that presented the state of current ideology and research about the notion of speech in queer communities.
- A presentation and discussion of American Sign Language, including diversity in ASL that is featured in a Language and Life Project documentary, *Signing Black in America*. This event was cohosted with a university sorority that requested that LDA give a presentation on the topic.³⁸
- A demonstration and discussion of language misogyny in classic Disney films over time.

LDA’s programs focus on current language events relevant to campus life, and presentations and discussions have included themes such as language and politics, language and the LBGTQIA+ community, and gendered language in Disney films, among current topics. In many cases, these events are cosponsored with other student organizations to facilitate a collaborative and interdisciplinary perspective in considering language variation. LDA staff also engage in class presentations and guest lectures, and write op-ed pieces for the school newspaper and other venues as issues about language arise in higher education and on campus. In fact, during the 2021–2022 academic year, the LDA did more than twenty presentations for first-year writing instructors who requested a lecture on language diversity as a part of their course. Language Diversity Ambassadors have also worked to create an online digital repository of resource materials (such as PowerPoint presentations, audiovisual materials, and assessment materials) that all team members can access for their use.³⁹ They also participate actively in social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Through their regular promotion venues, they have raised the awareness of language diversity on campus, leading to an increase in student enrollment in linguistics courses and a general awareness of language variation under the rubric of the Educating the Educated campaign.

As I have demonstrated, linguistic subordination is a pervasive ideology in higher education that is manifested in faculty, students, and staff. Accordingly, it calls for the campus-infusion model described here if we expect to make a significant difference in campus life. While it may seem obvious to sociolinguists that linguistic prejudice and discrimination are pervasive on college campuses, it is not nearly as transparent to the campus community. In fact, a proposal to implement a language component in a diversity initiative at a neighboring university similar to the one described here was met with the response that

“there is no evidence that language diversity is a problem on campus.” There are many dimensions of linguistic intolerance in higher education in addition to those researched here, which are limited to the relatively narrow issue of dialect differences on a Southern metropolitan campus. For example, prejudices exist with respect to second-language acquisition accents just as readily, though these issues were not a part of the empirical study included in our examination. Linguists also need to form alliances outside the narrow confines of their linguistic department that include proactive collaboration with the campus office of diversity program and aligned disciplines.

Linguists and sociolinguists can play a prominent role in confronting linguistic inequality in higher education, but they cannot do it simply by espousing their position in the limited linguistic courses they teach or in conversations that they have with other professionals. While we have had a highly successful initial campaign in the Educating the Educated program, it needs to become integrated into the regular programs offered by the office of diversity at the university. When I give presentations about linguistic inequality at various universities around the country, one of my first requests is, “Would you please invite representatives of the office of diversity to the talk?” And when they attend, they commonly remark that this program is unique, and they want to incorporate a similar one at their university. In fact, a number of universities around the United States are now beginning to include dimensions of language variation in their diversity programs. Educators, specialists in aligned fields, and administrators familiar with effective methods for program implementation need to be a part of the program. Happily, some have started to include language in their diversity initiatives, but many more institutions of higher learning need to ensure that language bias, one of the most significant and overlooked dimensions of inequality, is substantively confronted, and interdisciplinary solutions must be programmatically incorporated into programs of diversity in our institutions of higher learning.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Walt Wolfram, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2019, is one of the pioneers of sociolinguistics. He is the William C. Friday Distinguished University Professor at North Carolina State University, where he also directs the Language and Life Project. He has published more than twenty books and three hundred articles on language variation, and has served as executive producer of fifteen television documentaries, winning several Emmys. His recent publications include *Fine in the World: Lumbee Language in Time and Place* (with Clare Dannenberg, Stanley Knick, and Linda Oxendine, 2021) and *African American Language: Language Development from Infancy to Adulthood* (with Mary Kohn, Charlie Farrington, Jennifer Renn, and Janneke Van Hofwegen, 2021).

ENDNOTES

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- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 340.
- ¹² Daniel B. Klein and Charlotta Stern, “Professors and Their Politics: The Policy Views of Social Scientists,” *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society* 17 (3–4) (2005): 257–303, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913810508443640>.
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Social Justice Challenges of “Teaching” Languages

Guadalupe Valdés

This essay explores the challenges to linguistic justice resulting from widely held negative perspectives on the English of young Latinx bi/multilinguals and from common misunderstandings of individuals who use resources from two communicative systems in their everyday lives. I highlight the effects of these misunderstandings on Long-Term English Learners as they engage with the formal teaching of English. I specifically problematize language instruction as it takes place in classrooms and the impact of the curricularization of language as it is experienced by minoritized students who “study” language qua language in instructed settings.

Long-Term English Learner (LTEL) is a legal category for students in the State of California. It is used to describe immigrant-origin students who were initially categorized as English Language Learners (ELLs) upon entering school and whose test scores, after six years, suggest that they are not making sufficient progress in learning English. The legal LTEL category is the product of a well-meaning political campaign launched by sympathetic supporters of Mexican-origin students in California (for example, Californians Together) who claim that more attention needed to be given to the teaching of English in schools and to reclassifying ELLs as Fluent English Proficient (FEP).¹ Advocates of the legislation argued that, because of lack of attention by schools to the teaching of English, many Latinx ELLs in California were not passing the state English Language Proficiency examination required to reclassify them. As a result, they were denied access to challenging subject matter instruction, to college-preparation courses, and to other important educational opportunities. The new legislation requiring schools to identify and monitor students was envisioned as a way of bringing attention to the unintended consequences of existing policies and of forcing schools to implement quality English language development programs designed to meet the needs of young ELLs.

A Google search for “LTEL” yields 594,000 results to education-related sites that include school district policy documents relating to the challenges of educating such students, guides for administrators and educators, ads for curricular aids and materials, and lists of characteristics of LTEL students. A Google Schol-

ar search produces over seven hundred fifty articles, some of which prescribe approaches for remediating the assumed language limitations of LTEL-designated students and others that question the validity and usefulness of the category itself.

The LTEL label has created a category widely used around the country that positions students “new to English” as out of step, as failing to move at the “right” pace in their additional-language acquisition trajectories. In using the term and establishing the category of LTEL, the educational community is formally making the case that a specific group of students is not making academic progress. The category, moreover, is based on widely shared expectations underlying established educational policies that make the assumption that students initially labeled ELLs can be 1) accurately identified in early childhood and 2) supported with adequate educational “services” leading to successful performance on state mandated English language proficiency examinations. Unfortunately for Latinx students, the path to reclassification as FEP is much more challenging than originally expected. Policies and procedures established to “teach” English, to support subject matter learning, and to assess students’ levels of English proficiency leading to their timely reclassification have, over time, led to unforeseen consequences. Sadly, as determined by varying state and district classification criteria in different parts of the United States, many students who have been bureaucratically categorized as ELLs since kindergarten are now currently identified by state assessment systems as “failing to acquire English.”

For Latinx youngsters, the extensive use of the LTEL label along with frequent criticisms of their spoken Spanish on social media suggest that these young people are being seen (and perhaps are also seeing themselves) as *languageless*.² Taken together, both labels imply that these young individuals speak neither English nor Spanish well or possibly at all. In the case of LTELEs, the description of languagelessness is clearly impacting Latinx students’ educational lives and futures more directly. In the ongoing analysis and prescription of remedies for perceived linguistic limitations, formal language study is invariably identified as the principal solution. LTELs need more ESL (English as a second language) classes.

In this essay, I explore the challenges to linguistic justice resulting from widely held negative perspectives on bi/multilingualism and from common and continuing misunderstandings of individuals who use resources from two communicative systems in their everyday lives. My goal is to highlight the effect of these misunderstandings on the direct teaching of English. I specifically problematize language instruction as it takes place in classroom settings and the impact of what I term the *curricularization* of language as it is experienced by Latinx students who “study” language *qua* language in instructed situations. I analyze the activity of language teaching itself and argue that, while existing work in critical applied linguistics (for example, Alastair Pennycook’s study on the teaching of English as an additional language across the world) is an important first step, it has not yet pen-

etrated the various levels of the powerful language industry teaching English to immigrant-origin students.³

In the American educational system, Latinx children and particularly Mexican-origin children are considered “disadvantaged.” They are part of a class of students whose family, social, or economic circumstances have been found to impact negatively on their ability to learn at school. These young people are both minoritized and racialized, and their educational experiences are impacted strongly by well-meaning educational policies – focusing on language – that directly contribute to both exclusion and inequality.

The category of English Language Learner was established in federal policy as part of the Civil Rights initiatives of the 1960s, the passage of Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1967, and the *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court decision of 1974.⁴ Following the *Lau* decision (which established that students could not be educated in a language that they did not understand), the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 required states to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers and provide equal opportunities for children. This legislation led to extensive debates and court challenges during the 1970s and 1980s that focused on the types of remedies (for example, ESL pullout programs and bilingual education programs) that would be required in order to provide opportunities for children who were in the process of acquiring English. Over time, there has been strong opposition to bilingual education, numerous lawsuits seeking to compel school districts to serve the needs of Latinx students, and shifting federal and state regulations and guidelines.

In 2001, the shift to standards-based educational reform in the country (deregulation at the federal level in exchange for demonstrated educational outcomes) led to the No Child Left Behind Act, to strong accountability provisions, to the establishment of detailed English Language Learner classifications, and to increasing opposition to bilingual education.⁵ In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized the fifty-year-old ESEA, the national education law seen as a long-standing commitment to equal opportunity for all students. ESSA established reporting requirements for all states and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) on ELLs’ progress in attainment of English language proficiency, on academic achievement, and on high school graduation rates.

Currently, the use of any non-English language at home has direct consequences for all children who enter the American educational system. Upon enrolling children in school, parents are required to complete a home-language survey and specifically to identify the language spoken at home. The assumption is that children raised in homes where a non-English language is spoken may themselves be non-English-speaking or ELLs. In theory, screening for home language allows schools to appropriately serve the needs of all children entering schools by clas-

sifying them as English Only (EO), Initially English Proficient (IEP), or ELLs. In the case of Latinx families, even when children may already speak and understand English, reporting the use of Spanish in the home almost always results in their being categorized as ELLs, an identification that directly affects their educational trajectories and opportunities to learn. Importantly, schools receive additional funds for ELL-classified students.

English is currently taught as an additional language to students who are categorized as English Language Learners. By law, all students so categorized must be provided with “language assistance” and assessed every year until they are reclassified as Fluent English Proficient. Language assistance, however, has been variously defined. Over the last fifty years, different states have recognized a variety of approaches for delivery of this assistance to children ranging from 1) providing subject matter instruction in students’ home language and gradually transitioning to instruction in English; 2) requiring periods of designated English language development (that is, direct teaching of ESL using pedagogies adapted from the teaching of ESL to adults); and 3) implementing instruction described as integrating both English and subject-matter content.

Each of these approaches involves the direct teaching of an additional language to young children. In the case of the first approach (known as bilingual education), English is used gradually as a medium of instruction complementing the use of children’s home language to teach academic content. In many programs, however, explicit teaching of English vocabulary and/or forms is also included.

The second approach, referred to as Structured English Immersion (SEI), involves the adaptation of explicit language-teaching methodologies used traditionally for the teaching of English as an international language to adults. Such instruction often takes place in pullout ESL programs that group children by language levels (beginning, intermediate, advanced) for segments held separately from monolingual English coursework. Known as “leveled” English Language Development (ELD), this approach limits ELLs’ access to fluent English speakers and opportunities for imitating or interacting with such speakers.

The third approach directs the teacher to structure subject matter teaching (for example, math, science, initial reading) to include mini lessons on grammatical structures and forms, such as phrasal verbs. Popular in many parts of the country, this approach, often marketed to school districts as SIOP (Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol), requires that teachers develop both content and language teaching objectives for each lesson. Unfortunately, even if teaching structures and forms to children were effective – a point numerous experts have questioned (for example, Michael Long and H. D. Adamson) – very few elementary or secondary content teachers have the background to do so without sacrificing either the teaching of English or the teaching of subject matter content.⁶

In many districts, there are specialized newcomer programs – particularly at the secondary level – in which students new to the country and to English are provided intensive, traditional language instruction for a period of time in lieu of enrollment in regular subject matter classes. In Arizona, this same segregationist approach was implemented with elementary school children. ELLs were assigned to a prescriptive English language development program and grouped only with other English learners at the same level for four hours a day. They were separated from English-speaking peers and, more important, from subject matter instruction (math, science, social studies). The goal was to accelerate the “learning” of English so that children could pass the required state English Language Proficiency examination after *a single year* of leveled ESL instruction. According to educational psychologist Patricia Gándara and political scientist Gary Orfield, Arizona was following a model designed by an “obscure educational consultant” whose program focused on “five ELD components within the four hour daily time block: phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, and semantics.”⁷

The extensive analyses that have been conducted on the Arizona program reveal that the three-part test established by the Fifth Circuit Court in 1981 by *Castañeda v. Pickard* for determining whether a school district program is “appropriate” led to the establishment of the SEI program that deprived ELLs of access to subject matter instruction and resulted in their linguistic isolation.⁸ These analyses clearly uncover the challenges of providing children English language assistance while at the same time giving them access to the curriculum. They make evident, moreover, the impact of political contexts at particular points in time when, as in this case, opposition to bilingual education led to Propositions 203 in Arizona and 227 in California, measures that required Latinx ELLs to be taught exclusively in English.⁹

The establishment of language classifications in K–12 schools in the United States and the accompanying practices and mechanisms are relatively recent examples of the ways in which such categories operate and the challenges encountered in their implementation. As useful as classifications are in doing the work of schooling, it is also the case that such classifications can serve as rigid demarcations that exclude particular groups of students, denying them entry and access to educational opportunities and to challenging instruction.

As described above, the category of LTEL is the result of the implementation of such policies and of the well-intended concern expressed by educators, researchers, and other members of the public. However, recent and ongoing research on the impact of this new classification on the lives of already marginalized students (for example, by Maneka Deanna Brooks) provides strong evidence of the negative consequences of academic “sentencing” and “carcerality” of the largest group of ELLs in the country: speakers of Spanish.¹⁰ This research points specifically to

the “ineffective” teaching of English, the exclusion from opportunities to learn, and the consequences of language assessment practices that determine progress toward students’ reclassification as Fluent English Proficient.¹¹

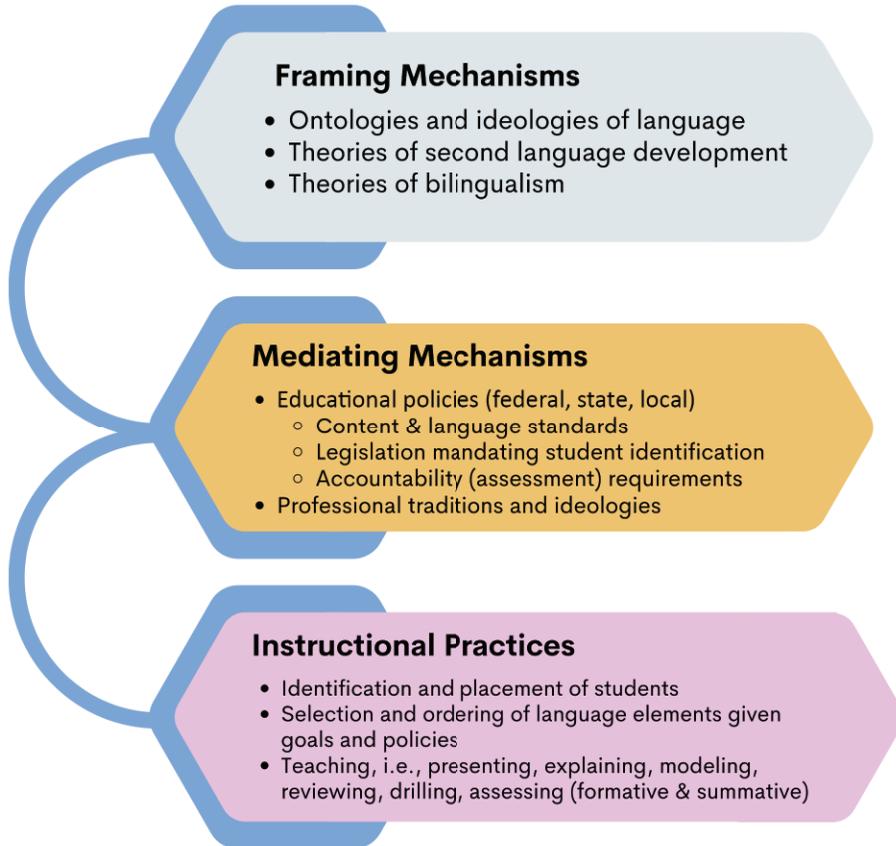
The “teaching” of languages in instructed settings involves bringing together in a classroom setting a group of learners to “study” and “learn” a language that is new to them. The learners, moreover, outnumber the teacher, the single competent user/speaker of the “target” language. Whether the target language is seen as a social practice or primarily as structure and form, if the goal of instruction is viewed as the development of interactive competence in the language being studied (for example, for immigrant-origin students, the ability to understand teacher explanations, to respond to questions, and to interact with fellow students), the fluent-speaker-to-learner ratio is a particularly serious problem and, to date, an underexamined challenge, resulting in what some have described as adverse and detrimental conditions for the acquisition/development of additional languages.¹²

The activity of language teaching in classroom settings, moreover, takes place as part of a complex system that is, for the most part, invisible to its participants. All instructional arrangements that have additional language acquisition as their goal – for example, English as a second language, English as a foreign language, foreign/world language instruction, bilingual education, and content and language integrated learning – are engaged in an activity that has been described as *curricularizing language*.¹³ When language is curricularized, it is treated not as a communicative system acquired naturally in the process of primary socialization, but as a subject or sets of skills, the elements of which can be developed through specific types of curricula and controlled experiences. While the activity of “language teaching” itself varies depending on the specific goals and purposes of instructional programs (for example, foreign/world language, heritage language instruction, content-based language instruction), the process of curricularizing language involves a series of levels of interacting mechanisms and elements as illustrated in Figure 1.

The specific activities that count as language instruction take place at the classroom level. Drawing from twenty-five centuries of pedagogical practice in combination with notions of “proficiency” as established by national, state, and local “standards” and listings of learning progressions, the teaching of language in classroom settings inevitably requires a curriculum, that is, an instructional plan that guides the presentation, learning, and assessment of the elements to be “learned.”¹⁴ These elements are often presented in a time-honored, accepted order, following either an obvious or more disguised grammatical syllabus usually packaged in published materials, including workbooks and possibly multimedia activities. Whatever the “essentials” are thought to be,

Figure 1

The Curricularization of a Language: Mechanisms and Practices in Education and Beyond



Source: Author’s data; infographic created by Dozandri Mendoza.

instructors “teach” specific elements (such as vocabulary, sentence frames, language forms) that students are expected to “learn” using approaches, materials, and activities that are sanctioned by the schools in which they teach, by the districts in which the schools are located, and by broader state mandates within the larger national system of which they are a part. Instructors carry out the activity of teaching as it is understood by state and national policies and established traditions, bringing to it their own strengths and limitations as well as their own understanding of what teaching language entails. To facilitate their work, teachers

generally categorize students as beginners, intermediate, or advanced learners, but, as many practitioners have found, all categories lead to exceptions.

Finally, assessment practices, which are an essential part of classroom instruction, include grades based on the completion of tasks and assignments, as well as student performance on both classroom and officially prescribed student evaluation instruments. Both types of student evaluations are informed by the program's design as well as by understandings of language development progressions and theoretical perspectives on *what needs to be acquired* by students when "learning" an additional language.

Macropolicies at the national and state levels, mesopolicies at the school district level, and micropolicies at the school level constrain what teachers do and how they view student progress. For example, currently, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 requires all states to develop or adopt "English language proficiency standards": that is, state-consensus documents that put forward the expected language-learning progressions for beginning, intermediate, and advanced English language learners of immigrant background.¹⁵ Even though they are the products of consensus activities and not empirically based, these standards documents specify the content of language assessments and directly influence the language teaching enterprise.¹⁶

The mechanisms that frame language instruction (that is, the often unexamined ideas that shape the practice of teaching additional languages) include:

- conceptualizations of language;
- ideologies of language, race, class, and identity;
- theories of second-language acquisition/development; and
- theories of bilingualism/multilingualism.

Conceptualizations of language are views and ideas about language as well as definitions of language that are informed by the study of or exposure to established bodies of knowledge. There are many ways that ordinary people as well as linguists define language. Different perspectives on language, moreover, give rise to dramatically different expectations about teaching, learning, and assessing languages. As sociolinguist Paul Seedhouse contends, researchers and practitioners involved in the area of language teaching may not be aware they are starting with vastly different conceptualizations of language and that these differences in conceptualization have led to existing debates in the field.¹⁷ The conceptualizations that have informed and continue to inform institutionalized language teaching include notions that various researchers have commented on, including linguists Vivian Cook; Leo van Lier; and Hannele Dufva, Minna Suni, Mari Aro, and Olli-Pekka Salo.¹⁸ Many

of these notions can be seen as “common sense” (for example, language is a medium of communication), while others are more closely informed by specific theoretical positions (for example, language is a rule-governed system).

Ideologies of language, race, class, and identity inform the entire process of language curricularization and directly influence language education. They inform constructions and conceptualizations of language itself and established and emerging theories of what it means to “acquire” both a first and a second language. Language ideologies intersect in important ways with perspectives on bilingualism and multilingualism, as well as with theories of bi/multilingual acquisition and use. These ideologies – often multiple and conflicting – help compose the institutional and social fabric of a culture, and include “notions of what is ‘true,’ ‘morally good,’ or ‘aesthetically pleasing’ about language, including who speaks and does not speak ‘correctly.’”¹⁹ Defined variously as feelings, ideas, conceptions, and cultural models of language, language ideologies may appear to be common sense, but are in fact constructed from specific political economic perspectives and frequently result in evaluative views about speakers and their language use.²⁰

Theories of second-language acquisition/development (SLA) are also important in framing the teaching of additional languages. What is now referred to as mainstream SLA (as contrasted with alternative approaches to SLA) is informed primarily by componential and formalist conceptualizations of language as well as by the disciplines of linguistics and psychology. Until the last two decades, mainstream second-language acquisition has viewed the end-state of additional language learning to be the acquisition of the full monolingual norm said to be characteristic of educated “native speakers.” It has also regarded the process of second-language acquisition as a cognitive phenomenon that takes place in the mind of individual learners. The primary focus of language study has been considered to involve the internalization of the linguistic system (that is, the forms and structures) of the additional language. These theories and perspectives have played an important role in framing the practice of institutionalized language teaching.

Finally, theories of bilingualism/multilingualism are central to both the teaching of additional languages and the assessment systems developed to measure learning/development. Until recently, the field of applied linguistics, and within it the subdiscipline of SLA, had given little attention to bilingualism or multilingualism. The end-state of the acquisition process was seen as the development of the language characteristics of the educated native speaker of the additional language. This native speaker, moreover, was constructed as a monolingual, perhaps the ideal speaker-listener of Chomskyan theory.²¹ When bilinguals entered the discussion, they were viewed from a monolingualist perspective that overwhelmed the second and foreign-language teaching field, and that constructed “ideal” or “full” bilinguals as two monolinguals in one who are capable of keeping their two internalized language systems (or their two sets of social practices or lin-

guistic resources) completely apart.²² As Dufva, Suni, Aro, and Salo point out, until quite recently, monological thinking dominated the field of applied linguistics and the practice of language teaching.²³ Controlled by both established theoretical linguistic perspectives as well as by a written language bias, languages were seen as singular, enclosed systems.²⁴ As a result, involuntary, momentary transfers in language learners that drew from the “other” national language(s) were frowned upon, corrected, and labeled linguistic interference. The use of borrowings and other elements categorized as belonging to another language system were labeled language mixtures (such as Spanglish, Chinglish, and Franglais), and language learners were urged to keep their new language “pure.” They were expected to refrain from “mixing” languages and from engaging in practices typical of competent multilinguals that involve the alternation of (what have been considered to be) two separate and distinct systems.

Much has changed. Monolingualist perspectives have been problematized. The expansion of and increasing epistemological diversity in the field of SLA have led to what some refer to as the “multilingual turn” in applied linguistics and describe as a direct consequence of a growing dissatisfaction with and concern about the tendency to view individuals acquiring a second language as failed native speakers.²⁵ Beginning in the early 1990s, numerous scholars criticized monolingual assumptions and the narrow views of language experience that these perspectives implied.²⁶ Nevertheless, writing many years later, applied linguist Lourdes Ortega contends that mainstream SLA has not yet fully turned away from the comparative fallacy: that is, the concern about deviations from the idealized norm of the additional language produced by language learners.²⁷ She argues, moreover, that in spite of the extensive work carried out on this topic,²⁸ many applied linguists and language educators do not fully understand the ideological or empirical consequences of the native-speaker norms and assumptions they rely upon in their work.

Others are more optimistic. For example, the Douglas Fir Group, a group of distinguished applied linguists and second-language acquisition theorists of various persuasions, contends that a wider range of intellectual traditions and disciplines are now contributing to the field of SLA, leading to a greater focus on the social-local worlds of additional language learners.²⁹ They argue that SLA must be “particularly responsive to the pressing needs of people who learn to live – and in fact do live – with more than one language at various points in their lives, with regard to their education, their multilingual and multiliterate development, social integration, and performance across diverse contexts.”³⁰

While not yet widely represented systematically in the actual practice of language instruction, there has been an extensive expansion and problematization, at the theoretical level, of positions that were previously unquestioned. For example, that language programs teach and students learn specific “national” (named) languages, and that national languages are unitary, autonomous, abstract systems

formally represented by rules and items. There is also increasing rejection of the position that, although national languages have different social and regional varieties, the goal of language teaching is to help learners to acquire the norms of the “standard” language as codified by pedagogical grammars and dictionaries. Importantly, the field of applied linguistics itself is being closely examined and in the current context in which there is increasing awareness of the impact of systems of oppression on minoritized peoples, the question is whether there can be a race-neutral applied linguistics: that is, “impervious to the effects of racism, xenophobia, and concerns about language rights.”³¹

In both current and past discussions about educational policies and practices focusing on the education of students who do not speak a societal language, very little attention has been given to conceptualizations of language itself. In the United States, it has been taken for granted that there is a common, agreed-upon understanding of what languages are, how they work, and why English, as the societal language, needs to be “learned” by students in order to succeed in American schools. Underlying existing classification and assessment policies for students who are categorized as English Language Learners, moreover, are folk perspectives about “good” language or more recently “academic” language that emphasize vocabulary, correct grammar, near-native pronunciation, standardness, and other markers of complexity, accuracy, and fluency understood as “good” usage. Additionally, it has been generally assumed by both educators and policy-makers that for English Language Learners, second-language acquisition follows predictable trajectories that can be accurately measured by standardized tests.

At the same time, for almost five decades, there has been a fundamental paradigm shift in the ways that scholarship in a number of disciplines (such as applied linguistics, psychology, sociolinguistics, anthropology, sociology, communication, cognitive science, usage-based linguistics) now problematize “what is casually called a language.”³² In the second decade of the twenty-first century, cutting-edge scholarship on language in disciplines that directly inform education has undergone a paradigm shift from the tenets of behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics to a more contextualized, meaning-based, social view of language. This shift takes for granted a rethinking of language as object.³³ Perspectives on bi/multilingualism, moreover, have shifted from views of “real” or “true” bi/multilinguals as speakers of two named languages (always kept separate) to views of communicative and interactional multicompetence in which individuals deploy resources from their entire repertoire.³⁴

High school students labeled LTELs, who entered the American educational system as young children, have been found to be multicompetent, skilled users of English capable of expressing themselves effectively for a variety of purposes in both spoken and written English.³⁵ Recent research, moreover, has determined

that these young people see themselves as fluent and capable speakers of English. They dismiss attempts to “assess” their English on yearly English Language Proficiency examinations and thus rarely make an effort to obtain high scores.

For the field of applied linguistics and for the practice of language education/ language teaching, the identification of students as LTELs, however, presents challenges. In theory, applied linguists can provide a race- and class-neutral theoretical framework that can inform the practice of teaching English to LTELs. And yet, as pointed out above, researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners are part of a complex system that constrains their perceptions of both groups of students. Teachers, moreover, are embedded in the same system and deeply influenced by their commitment to doing the “best” for their students. ESL teachers want their students to pass the required state English Language Proficiency examination and to be reclassified as early as possible. Moreover, they want to help LTELs develop the variously described “academic language” that many educators and researchers claim that they do not have and that they believe is essential to their educational futures, social justice, and life success.

For minoritized students and especially for LTELs, every aspect of the educational system that involves them implicates language. Content and language standards, curriculum, pedagogies, and assessments in particular can potentially contribute to or undermine these students’ opportunities to develop their subject matter knowledge and their talents and to maximize their futures. For that reason, when linguistic justice is a goal, it is of vital importance that researchers and practitioners scrutinize the sets of standards (learning progressions) and expectations underlying the language assessment systems currently in use to measure the development and/or the quality of both English and Spanish. Minimally, these standards need to be examined to determine whether they are informed by current scholarship and research about both ontologies and ideologies of language as well as about bi/multilingualism. Standards are important because they establish:

- the ways ELL students are assumed to grow in their use of English over time;
- the language abilities expected at different levels of development;
- the aspects of language that need to be measured in determining progress; and
- the types of support that will be required in order to provide these learners with access to instruction in key subject-matter areas (available exclusively in English).

For such standards to serve the purpose of appropriately supporting and monitoring the growth of English or Spanish language proficiency in minoritized youth, they must be constructed to describe the trajectories that linguistically multicompetent K–12 learners follow in the development of English/Spanish

in school settings. Additionally, they must be informed by a clear theoretical position on the ways that instruction can impact (or not) the complex, nonlinear process of language development/acquisition, and they must take into account the fact that there are currently few longitudinal studies of the second-language acquisition process.³⁶ Researchers working from the tradition of corpus linguistics, moreover, argue for authentic collections of learner language as the primary data and the most reliable information about learner’s evolving systems. Drawing from the study of learner corpora, applied linguist Victoria Hasko summarizes the state of the field on the “pace and patterns of changes in global and individual developmental trajectories” as follows:

The amassed body of SLA investigations reveals one fact with absolute clarity: A “typical” L2 developmental profile is an elusive target to portray, as L2 development is not linear or evenly paced and is characterized by complex dynamics of inter- and intra-learner variability, fluctuation, plateaus, and breakthroughs.³⁷

In sum, the state of knowledge about stages of acquisition in second-language (L2) learning does not support precise expectations about the sequence of development of additional languages by a group of students whose proficiency must be assessed and determined by mandated language assessments. Thus, constructing developmental sequences and progressions is very much a minefield.

Assessing language proficiency, moreover, is a complicated endeavor. As applied linguists Glenn Fulcher and Fred Davidson contend, the practice of language testing “makes an assumption that knowledge, skills, and abilities are stable and can be ‘measured’ or ‘assessed.’ It does it in full knowledge that there is error and uncertainty, and wishes to make the extent of the error and uncertainty transparent.”³⁸ And there has been increasing concern within the language testing profession about the degree to which that uncertainty is actually made transparent to test users at all levels as well as the general public. Linguist Elana Shohamy, for example, has raised a number of important issues about the ethics and fairness of language testing with reference to language policy.³⁹ Attention has been given, in particular, to the impact of high-stakes tests, to the uses of language tests for the management of language-related issues in many national settings, and to the special challenges of standards-based testing.⁴⁰ Applied linguist Alister Cumming makes the following powerful statement about the conceptual foundations of language assessments:

A major dilemma for comprehensive assessments of oracy and literacy are the conceptual foundations on which to base such assessments. On the one hand, each language assessment asserts, at least implicitly, a certain conceptualization of language and of language acquisition by stipulating a normative sequence in which people are expected to gain language proficiency with respect to the content and methods of the test.

*On the other hand, there is no universally agreed upon theory of language or of language acquisition nor any systematic means of accounting for the great variation in which people need, use, and acquire oral and literate language abilities.*⁴¹

Accepting the results of current assessments as accurate measures of the language proficiencies of bi/multicompetent students is simply unjust and unacceptable. Tests are not thermometers; they are instruments that allocate educational opportunities and that, as sociolinguists Matthew Knoester and Assaf Meshulam contend, impair the cultural, educational, and personal development of the country's most vulnerable students.⁴²

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Refusing “Endangered Languages” Narratives

Wesley Y. Leonard

Indigenous language endangerment is a global crisis, and in response, a normative “endangered languages” narrative about the crisis has developed. Though seemingly beneficent and accurate in many of its points, this narrative can also cause harm to language communities by furthering colonial logics that repurpose Indigenous languages as objects for wider society’s consumption, while deemphasizing or even outright omitting the extreme injustices that beget language endangerment. The objective of this essay is to promote social justice praxis first by detailing how language shift results from major injustices, and then by offering possible interventions that are accountable to the communities whose languages are endangered. Drawing from my experiences as a member of a Native American community whose language was wrongly labeled “extinct” within this narrative, I begin with an overview of how language endangerment is described to general audiences in the United States and critique the way it is framed and shared. From there, I shift to an alternative that draws from Indigenous ways of knowing to promote social justice through language reclamation.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared 2022–2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL), noting that “[o]ptimistic estimates suggest that at least 50 percent of today’s spoken languages will be extinct or seriously endangered by 2100. More pessimistic, but also realistic estimates claim that 90–95 percent will become extinct or seriously endangered. . . . Most of these languages are Indigenous languages.”¹ In this summary, UNESCO correctly identifies a major crisis: the world’s language diversity has drastically diminished in the last several decades, many languages are not being transmitted to new generations, and the majority of these languages are Indigenous.² This phenomenon, referred to technically in language sciences as *community language shift* or just *language shift* but more commonly framed with metaphors for the endangerment of biological species, is particularly serious in North America, the focus of this essay.

Native American and other Indigenous language shift has increasingly become a focus of scientific and social concern, and the collective response has had many effects, several of which are positive. These include increased awareness, research,

community language programs, and new networks of scholar-practitioners and activists. Language policy has shifted accordingly, both at the level of individual Indigenous communities and by non-Indigenous governments and organizations, with many calls to support language maintenance and revitalization. The IDIL, for example, “aims at ensuring [I]ndigenous peoples’ right to preserve, revitalize and promote their languages, and mainstreaming linguistic diversity and multilingualism aspects into the sustainable development efforts.”³ Organizations geared toward this work, along with several language documentation initiatives, have been created. Even the U.S. government, long an agent of violence toward Native American nations and languages, passed in 1990 the Native American Languages Act, which established as policy that the United States will “preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages.”⁴ Most important, many Native American communities are working hard for language maintenance and recovery.

I come from a Native American nation that is engaged in such work. I am a citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, and our language, *myaamiaataweenki*, fell into almost complete dormancy during the 1960s, having been replaced by English until community efforts began in the 1990s to bring our language back by learning it from historical documentation. I am proud to report that *myaamiaataweenki* is used by many Miami people today. In this essay, I draw from my experiences in Miami language work, as well as my training and research as a linguist who specializes in *language reclamation*, a decolonial approach to language revitalization that centers community needs and goals and focuses on addressing the underlying causes of language shift.⁵ The way language reclamation brought my community together corroborates, alongside similar examples from other communities, the assertion in the aforementioned Native American Languages Act that “the traditional languages of Native Americans are an integral part of their cultures and identities and form the basic medium for the transmission, and thus survival, of Native American cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values.”

What happened among Miami people – a story of extreme language shift but also, and crucially, of language recovery – is shared by other Native American communities. Indeed, as summarized by Indigenous education scholars Onowa McIvor (*maskiko-nehinaw*) and Teresa L. McCarty, “the sociolinguistic landscape in Native North America is defined by the dual realities of language loss and reclamation.”⁶ However, accounts of reclamation are not widely reflected in academic and popular descriptions of language shift, which instead emphasize only the loss. I collectively refer to these as *dominant endangered languages narratives*, the core parts of which I refer to in the singular as *the narrative*. As I detail below by drawing upon tools and principles from Linguistics and Native American Studies,⁷ the narrative contains several truths and is framed as beneficent, but draws attention away from the injustices that underlie language endangerment.

Linguistics, the discipline described as “the scientific study of language” though better characterized as a set of particular approaches to studying language, is predicated on the inherent value of language. Linguists recognize that all humans use language, and that languages meet the communicative needs of their users and evolve as needed. For this reason, claims about intrinsic deficiencies in a given language variety – for example, that it “doesn’t have grammar” or “is primitive” – are linguistically baseless. Instead, they are manifestations of a sociopolitical principle exemplified throughout this volume: that beliefs about people get transferred to the language(s) with which those people are associated. Beliefs about a given language variety’s alleged superiority or inferiority relative to others, along with other language myths, strongly affect language practices and policies. In contexts where Indigenous peoples are rendered as “savage” or even less than human, related ideologies about Indigenous languages follow.

Related to the point above is the notion that accounts of languages and language use are contextually embedded in historical and contemporary social relations and power structures. As a corollary, public narratives about oppressed language communities are likely to 1) privilege the needs, wants, and perspectives of dominant groups and 2) discount the roles of dominant groups and institutions in this oppression. Following this logic, dominant narratives warrant careful scrutiny, both in terms of their content and who is relating them for whom. Even “descriptions” can become speech acts – statements that perform an action – especially when they come from people with power. As discussed throughout this essay, it is common for non-Indigenous agents who have considerable power due to their social positions to describe Native American languages in ways that are not accountable to Native American communities.

Conversely, the field of Native American Studies frames issues, linguistic and otherwise, through Native American experiences and points of view, and strongly emphasizes accountability to Native American nations. Though a principle of Native American Studies is that respect for tribal sovereignty entails identifying differences among tribal nations, the field also recognizes common experiences across multiple nations, especially those with shared relationships to a particular colonial government. For this reason, alongside attention to particular tribal histories and circumstances, it is common for structures of oppression, and strategies to end them, to be theorized in general ways as I do in this essay. Native American Studies responds to a variety of oppressions such as racism and sexism, recognizing the need for an intersectional analytic as elaborated by Aris Moreno Clemons and Jessica A. Grieser in this volume, but stresses the major role of colonization in contemporary Native American experiences.⁸ To this end, Tribal Critical Race Theory, a framework that draws upon general principles of Critical Race Theory but adds and highlights the political status (nationhood) and experiences of Native Americans, asserts as a foundational principle that colonization is endemic in

wider society.⁹ Particularly important for this essay is *settler colonialism*, the project and supporting logics whereby governments such as those of the United States and Canada try to replace Indigenous peoples – and by extension our languages, lifeways, intellectual traditions, and futures – through resettling Indigenous lands with new polities and linguistic landscapes.

Given the violence of settler colonialism, scholarship in Native American Studies frequently references oppression and trauma. As these accounts are crucial for understanding realities such as the current status of Native American languages, I include them. At the same time, I share Unanga scholar Eve Tuck’s observation that “damage-centered” accounts can promote problematic views of contemporary Indigenous peoples and mask our resilience and successes.¹⁰ My response is to refuse the assumptions of inferiority that often accompany such accounts and instead to promote reclamation, with emphasis on how Indigenous cultural and intellectual traditions provide tools to support this work. For example, the focus on relationships that is core to Miami and other Native American communities’ ways of knowing is hugely important for language reclamation. A relational approach to understanding the world illuminates how language shift occurs when something ruptures the relationships people have to languages; language recovery thus requires rebuilding these relationships.

Though linguists certainly consider relationships such as how multiple languages may derive from a common source, it is not a disciplinary norm of Linguistics to follow the relational model described above. Instead, aligning with dominant academic practices of conceptualizing knowledge as universal and disembodied, it is common for linguists to focus on discrete elements, such as sounds, words, and clauses. Moreover, it is common practice for researchers to present linguistic analyses without mentioning their relationships to the communities whose languages are under discussion or engaging the question of who is licensed to make or share a given analysis. According to this logic, the quality of research conclusions lies in their reasoning, evidence, and impact. In Native American Studies, conversely, these metrics apply, but there is also emphasis on how knowledge is produced in particular places and contexts, with significant attention paid not only to what knowledge should be produced but also if, how, and by whom it should be shared.

As a Miami person whose lived experiences with language shift and recovery primarily involve my own and other North American Indigenous communities, and whose professional training occurred at U.S. institutions, my analysis draws on global trends but focuses on North American (particularly U.S.) dynamics. For this reason, the points I offer in this essay should not be taken as universal, though I draw attention to two themes that I believe are true for most Indigenous communities. First, members of Indigenous communities (as with minoritized communities in general) share the experience of being the characters, rather than the

narrators, of stories and theories about language shift. Second, although many language scholars and activists center social justice when responding to language endangerment, this is not true for dominant endangered languages narratives. While the sharing of these narratives has supported some important interventions in research, education, and policy, their framing can harm Indigenous communities and the language reclamation work we do.

Widely referenced by linguists as a call to action is the 1992 “Endangered Languages” collection of papers published in *Language*, a flagship journal in Linguistics. This series includes linguist Michael Krauss’s essay “The World’s Languages in Crisis,” which claims that “[I]anguages no longer being learned as mother-tongue by children are beyond mere endangerment, for, unless the course is somehow dramatically reversed, they are already doomed to extinction, like species lacking reproductive capacity.”¹¹ While such a break in intergenerational transmission actually applies to an array of languages and dialects, several of which are not Indigenous, Indigenous languages have become the prototype in discussions of language shift. This theme of doom and gloom, with Indigenous language “extinction” as the presumed endpoint, anchors many popular as well as scientific discussions of language endangerment, and is central to dominant endangered languages narratives.

For instance, the teleological trajectory toward complete nonuse of a given language, described in the narrative as “extinction,” is almost always anchored in predictions with specific numbers. In general, this is operationalized through a statement that some percentage of the world’s roughly seven thousand languages will disappear within a specified time frame, often one hundred years, as with the IDIL statement quoted earlier. Sometimes the narrative mentions that “languages have always died,” but with an accompanying explanation that this phenomenon has greatly accelerated in recent times. Especially frequent in reference to current trends is the specific claim that “a language dies every two weeks.” Though empirical research reported on in the *Catalogue of Endangered Languages* finds instead that this rate is actually about every twelve weeks, the crux of the idea holds.¹²

Even though the narrative often ignores major types of linguistic diversity – for example, the glaring omission of endangered sign languages – it normally includes a statement about the value of linguistic diversity, or of human diversity more broadly. If framed within human rights, the narrative could offer compelling support for social justice. However, the narrative instead too easily evokes neoliberal discourses of diversity, in which examples that are lesser known by dominant groups – the assumed baseline – are rendered “diverse” and become repurposed as resources. This is exemplified by the narrative’s lamentation of cultural and scientific losses when languages “disappear,” emphasizing how “we” (who is the pronoun referring to?) are losing this knowledge or “our” heritage.

Particularly when shared with academic audiences, these claims of imminent loss frequently reference how language diversity is crucial to science. For instance, a major research framework in Linguistics aims to uncover universals of human languages, a task that requires data from many languages, including, of course, those that are endangered. Especially when related by linguists, the narrative may include details about how concepts are encoded in grammar, or how ecological knowledge may be gleaned from words. Longer versions might include examples of concepts known only because “we discovered them before it was too late.”

Although the basic idea is true – that different groups, and by extension different languages, encode different types of information and showcase human linguistic potential in different ways – the problems in this section of the narrative are numerous. As elaborated throughout this essay, the framing of Indigenous languages as resources to extract, whose value lies in what they can provide for “us” (non-Indigenous publics), and whose embedded information becomes true “knowledge” only after it has been described and curated within scientific circles, is Colonialism 101.

Most important, and also a reflection of colonialism, is that the narrative de-emphasizes why language endangerment is occurring on the unprecedented scale that it is. Indeed, a common statement is that Native American languages are “quickly disappearing,” and that “a language dies when people stop speaking it.” Such tautologies are not helpful. Borrowing conceptually from Newton’s principle that objects in motion stay in motion unless an external force acts upon them, Chikasaw linguist Jenny L. Davis observes that intergenerational transmission of languages continues over time unless an external force disrupts this process.¹³ By extension, the external forces should be the focus, yet the dominant narrative largely does not reflect this.

The narrative often does provide some explanation for current trends in language “loss” by referencing broad factors such as globalization, education, or language shame. Some narrators identify unequal power relations explicitly. However, the narrative rarely engages the deeper forces that facilitate these unequal power relations and related inequities. Missing, for instance, is critical engagement with how globalization is not merely a story of the world’s populations getting closer due to travel and technologies, but crucially also a story of colonialism and imperialism. Missing are critical examinations of how policies, such as what languages are used and taught in schools, are indexed to nation-building and nation-eradicating practices that are themselves linked to colonialism and imperialism. Language attitudes, particularly shame toward one’s language(s) of heritage, can have large effects and are worth studying. The problem occurs when the narrative presents language shame as the source of language shift, rather than an outcome of oppression.

Sometimes the narrative includes explanations that superficially may come across as reasonable or self-evident. Referencing “economic pressures,” for ex-

ample, some versions explain that members of minoritized language communities adopt languages of wider use to get jobs. However, beyond failing to query the economic injustices that often characterize these situations, the narrative frequently omits key linguistic principles that bring such explanations into question. Multilingualism is the historical and contemporary norm in most parts of the world, and people can and do learn additional languages while maintaining those they already have. Nevertheless, the narrative naturalizes Native American communities' wholesale *replacement* of their original languages. Along with "wouldn't it be better if we all spoke one language?"-type arguments that dismiss the harms of language shift, the narrative misses how language maintenance and reclamation occur in contexts of multilingualism, which has long been the norm across Native North America.¹⁴

And sometimes the implied reason for communities such as my own shifting entirely to English is that it just happened. *Native American language loss is a natural result of progress – unfortunate, yet inevitable, and in Native Americans' best interest, helping them to be part of modern American society.* This colonial rationale evokes logics of Social Darwinism that have long been debunked in anthropological sciences but remain robust in wider society, as a quick perusal of reader comments for popular articles about "dying" languages shows.

The truth is that contemporary Native American language shift is primarily an outcome of oppression, a point that many members of Native American communities can explain easily because we experience the effects of settler colonialism, racism, and other *-isms* daily. Major examples include land dispossession through forced relocations and environmental degradation, policies aimed toward language eradication, violent disruptions to cultural practices (with some even made illegal), and assimilatory education through missions and boarding schools. Added to these are wider issues that adversely affect language maintenance in general, such as the hegemony of English and other pressures discussed by other authors in this volume.

In critical scholarship, language endangerment is theorized and responded to in complex ways, engaging issues such as those summarized above. Recent Native American language shift reflects what critical language scholars such as Tove Skutnabb-Kangas refer to as *linguicide*, which is anchored in *linguicism*: "ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, regulate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language."¹⁵ But linguicism is not the frame that the narrative espouses. Instead, it focuses on the "disappearance" of Native American languages, with little attention to the oppressions that created and reinforce this outcome.

In response, I next explore these stories of oppression and linguicide – those that are *not* prominent in the narrative but that regularly come up in my discus-

sions with other Native Americans. These are the stories that must be shared, honestly acknowledged, and responded to. Again, owing to my experiences and relations as a Miami person, I draw heavily on examples from my own community.

I begin with literal displacement via land theft. Despite a series of treaties by Miami leaders with the U.S. government stating that the original Miami homelands in Indiana and surrounding areas would remain Miami forever, our community was split in 1846 when many families – including my direct ancestors – were forcibly removed from these lands to a reservation in Kansas by U.S. agents. Traditional Miami cultural practices, which reflect relationships to particular homelands, were, of course, disrupted. And then in a second removal in the late 1860s, several Miamis, though not all – again, splitting the community beyond what had already occurred in 1846 – were sent to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), further disrupting community lifeways. This second removal was followed by individual land allotments through legislation similar to the broader U.S. policy (Dawes Act) to socialize Native Americans into Euro-Western relationships with land as individual property and capital.¹⁶ As with this allotment policy, which applied to members of many Native American nations, the Miami removals themselves also reflected a broader policy: the U.S. government’s Indian Removal Act of 1830.¹⁷ For this reason, though the details vary, the examples from my community parallel those of many Native American nations, particularly those whose homelands are in what is now the eastern part of the United States.

Shortly after the bulk of removals and displacements, the U.S. government adopted a policy of assimilatory education of tribal youth via federally operated Indian boarding schools, which several of my Miami ancestors attended. When these institutions are (sometimes) mentioned in the dominant narrative, the illustrative detail is that they forbade the use of Indian languages and physically punished children who broke this rule. This is true and clearly important, but there is much more to consider. The fundamental assumption underlying these institutions was that Indian cultures and knowledge systems were “savage” and needed to be eradicated. In addition to their practices of blatant cultural genocide along with additional abuses, these schools ruptured tribal relationships; children were literally removed from their homes and kinship networks.

Although there are many stories of resistance, Indian boarding schools’ objectives were largely realized. Not only did the use and transmission of many children’s tribal languages end, these children were also inculcated with ideologies to justify this linguicide. I have long been haunted by an interview with a Miami Elder who had gone to boarding school in the early 1900s and stated that “it done the Indian children just a lot of good.” She explained that visitors came from the eastern part of the United States to make sure the children were speaking English, and that she worked in the sewing room at the school five days a week but

on weekends went to church and Sunday school. She emphasized how on Sundays, they didn't get supper but instead got a piece of apple pie and gingerbread, and that she would never forget that apple pie!¹⁸ But she did forget – perhaps was forced to “forget” – our tribal language.

Other boarding school survivors share their experiences of language oppression more directly, as with the following story from a Warm Springs Elder:

Before I went to the boarding school, I was speaking [a Native American language], and all my sisters and brothers were speaking it. That's all we spoke, and then we got into boarding school and we were not allowed to speak. And I grew up believing that it was something very bad, because we got punished, or switched, and so they just kind of beat it out of me.... That boarding school did bad stuff to us, and they took the most important thing, which was our language.¹⁹

As Diné scholar James McKenzie explains in an essay directed to applied linguists, trauma experienced directly by boarding school survivors, which in many cases extends far beyond language oppression to include physical and sexual violence, does not end with the survivors themselves.²⁰ Instead, the trauma can be passed on to subsequent generations, continuing to harm individual and community well-being until something intervenes. Language reclamation can address this trauma by helping people to (re)establish healthy relationships with their languages and what those languages represent in their respective community contexts and cosmologies.

Around the same time as the development and spread of Indian boarding schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the U.S. government increasingly adopted policies and promoted nationalist narratives that furthered an ideal of English monolingualism. Even though the earlier historical record of settler life in the United States documents a landscape of many languages and more acceptance of language diversity, the notion that English was *the* language of the United States became increasingly promoted as an imagined original American trait.²¹ This belief, which remains strong today, impedes the maintenance of Native American (and other) languages.

Linguistic justice calls for sharing stories such as those above, which though highly abridged can at least point to recurring themes of oppression, thereby facilitating the detailed discussions that need to occur. But sharing stories of colonial violence or the hegemony of English disrupts contemporary power structures, so stories such as those of boarding school survivors tend to be pushed to the margins. Whether by misattributing fault onto language communities or by just ignoring the agents of language oppression entirely, the narrative often works against justice by engaging a strategy that Davis calls *erasure of colonial agency*. Complementing this is a strategy of removing languages from their relational contexts. Davis describes the latter as *linguistic extraction*, the process of documenting, describing,

preserving, or otherwise engaging with languages separately from the social and political contexts of their historical and contemporary use and users.²²

Both strategies occur in dominant endangered languages narratives, which adopt and naturalize “endangered languages” as the unit of focus as opposed to the broader process of endangerment. This frame of “endangered languages” reinforces a theory of languages as objects: named, bounded sets of grammatical patterns and vocabulary that can be counted, analyzed, or lost. Indeed, research by language scientists, which as shown throughout the essays in this volume has great potential to promote social justice, can also foster harm by rendering languages into disembodied data or objects whose primary value lies in what they contribute to science. I emphasize that it is common in Native American communities for languages and peoplehood to be heavily intertwined.²³ In such contexts, objectifying the language by emphasizing, for example, what its grammar reveals for science easily objectifies the people who claim the language.

Unfortunately, as extractive models of Indigenous language research remain sanctioned in normative research practices, associated framing is common in the dominant narrative. For instance, it regularly includes queries about how Native American languages contribute to “our knowledge,” where “our” is contextually referring to members of dominant groups, such as language scientists. Asking “What do we lose when a language dies?” has a similar overtone, especially when relayed in a context with few or no Indigenous people. This noted, it is not my opinion that wider society cannot or should not appreciate and learn from Indigenous languages. The problem is rather that these queries too often lack important counterparts, such as “What does colonialism have to do with it?”

It is common in Linguistics to categorize and theorize “endangered languages” through biological metaphors such as *living* and *dying*. This practice, which also occurs in Indigenous communities, is not surprising, given that using language is so intertwined with human life experience. Moreover, language endangerment, like biological species endangerment, occurs when environments have been seriously disrupted. If employed to express these links, the use of biological metaphors could facilitate social justice by calling attention to the issues that must be addressed to reverse language shift. In general, however, use of biological metaphors warrants great caution. In the narrative, Native American language shift is normally framed unidirectionally (only away from the original languages) using categories that represent increasingly severe stages of endangerment and end at *extinction*. This is highly problematic.²⁴

Actual extinction of a biological species is normally understood as a lost cause, an irreversible eventuality. By extension, if a language is “extinct,” interventions that could promote its future use, such as funding language programs, are illogical, hopeless, and unlikely to be supported. But here the species extinction meta-

phor fails. Using language is an action, not an object. A community may stop using its original language, but they can also start using it again so long as there are records of the language to learn from and people who are able and empowered to do this work.

In masking these and related possibilities, extinction narratives are a form of oppression. They are also entrenched. I have on many occasions related the story of how my tribal language had been declared “extinct” by linguists before the Miami people reclaimed it as a language of everyday use. Although Miami people assert our linguistic sovereignty by explaining that our language was just “sleeping” for about thirty years, some scholars continue to describe myaamiaataweenki as “extinct.” This is just one of the many contradictions supported by the dominant endangered languages narrative, whose strength in guiding theory likely at least partly explains why public sources such as Wikipedia have continued to describe my community’s language as “extinct,” despite ample evidence otherwise.²⁵

Even more serious than masking possibilities for language reclamation, the logic of language extinction intersects with the dominant narrative’s focus on “endangered languages” in a way that goes beyond erasing the underlying oppressions of language endangerment to also erase their continued presence. That language shift is “complete” does not mean these oppressions have even been identified, let alone corrected. The intergenerational trauma from boarding school experiences, for example, does not stop when a community’s language has gone out of use. Rather, it stops when communities can engage in and are supported in healing, and in rebuilding the relationships that boarding schools violently severed. Similarly, ruptures between communities and their lands do not stop when language shift is complete. Rather, they stop through interventions that restore those relationships, a process that requires decolonization and supporting activism such as the LandBack movement.²⁶

The dominant endangered languages narrative fails to support language recovery because it puts the focus on results of oppressions, rather than on identifying and dismantling the oppressions. But it does not have to be this way. I conclude with possible changes and actions.

First, rather than lamenting how languages “disappear” or “vanish,” I propose highlighting the agents of language shift through queries such as, “Who or what is oppressing these language communities?” From this vantage, the central question is no longer about what an undefined “we” lose when languages go out of use, but instead about changing social dynamics, a process that requires identifying structures of oppression and stopping them. This is a social justice approach, situated in an honest account of the historical and contemporary factors that underlie language shift in places like North America. Anthropologist Gerald Roche gets to the heart of what a social justice-oriented narrative could emphasize:

Speakers and signers of Indigenous and minoritized languages have repeatedly explained that their languages are endangered due to failures of social justice – the oppression, marginalization, stigmatization, exclusion, deprivation, and so on – that take place in the context of imperial, colonial, and nationalist domination.²⁷

Beyond working to reverse the injustices created by this domination, the second key to an alternative narrative is a focus on reclamation, and what non-Indigenous agents and institutions can do to support it. Shifting the unit of analysis away from “endangered languages,” which focuses on languages rather than the peoples who claim them, is crucial to this narrative. “Language endangerment” is an improvement, as it references a process rather than objects, but better yet would be to position community language ecologies as the anchor for the story. Language ecologies are the ways in which languages exist in their environments, and an ecological approach thus inherently emphasizes place (which is especially fundamental to Indigenous communities) along with sociopolitical, economic, and other factors in language shift and recovery. An ecological approach emphasizes relationships, which as noted earlier must in some way have been severely changed or damaged in order for language shift to have occurred. Unlike the dominant narrative’s focus, this approach firmly engages the multiple oppressions those communities have experienced and continue to experience, while also drawing attention to their rights, needs, goals, and futures.

Finally, following from the last point is the importance of prioritizing the lived experiences of members of Native American language communities when planning and executing language work. Roche notes that dominant approaches to theorizing language endangerment largely miss the political factors and lead to “a refusal to sincerely hear the voices of the linguistically oppressed.”²⁸ I follow Roche’s observation that many members of oppressed language communities are already explaining the causes of language endangerment and sharing stories of language reclamation, and yet we are not fully being heard or seen.²⁹ In Native North America, where settler colonial logics teach that Native Americans for the most part no longer really exist, this is to be expected; and by extension, the stories we relate and the needs we articulate are easily dismissed by dominant discourses and the actions they promote. As shown throughout the essays in this volume, however, many tools to address these injustices already exist. The question is whether people with power are willing to engage them.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A Dean's Professorship at the University of California, Riverside Center for Ideas and Society funded through a Mellon Foundation Investments in Humanities Faculty Grant supported work on this essay.

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ENDNOTES

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- ⁴ An Act to Reauthorize the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978 and the Navajo Community College Act, 101st Congress, 04 Stat. 1152, Public Law 101-477, October 30, 1990, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-bill/2167/text>.
- ⁵ For an overview of the language reclamation framework, see Wesley Y. Leonard, "Contesting Extinction through a Praxis of Language Reclamation," in *Contesting Extinctions: Decolonial and Regenerative Futures*, ed. Suzanne M. McCullagh, Luis I. Prádanos, Ilaria Tabusso Marcyan, and Catherine Wagner (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2021), 143–159.
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- ⁸ Aris Moreno Clemons and Jessica A. Grieser, "Black Womanhood: Raciolinguistic Intersections of Gender, Sexuality & Social Status in the Aftermaths of Colonization,"

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- ¹¹ Michael Krauss, “The World’s Languages in Crisis,” *Language* 68 (1) (1992): 4.
- ¹² Lyle Campbell and Eve Okura, “New Knowledge Produced by the *Catalogue of Endangered Languages*,” in *Cataloguing the World’s Endangered Languages*, ed. Lyle Campbell and Anna Belew (New York: Routledge, 2018), 79.
- ¹³ Jenny L. Davis, “Resisting Rhetorics of Language Endangerment: Reclamation through Indigenous Language Survivance,” *Language Documentation and Description* 14 (2017): 41, <http://doi.org/10.25894/ldd147>.
- ¹⁴ McIvor and McCarty, “Indigenous Bilingual and Revitalization-Immersion Education,” 3.
- ¹⁵ Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, “Linguicism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal1460>.
- ¹⁶ An Act to Provide for the Allotment of Lands in Severalty to Indians on the Various Reservations (General Allotment Act or Dawes Act), 49th Congress, 2nd Session, Stat. 24, 388–391, December 6, 1886 (codified as 25 U.S.C. ch. 9 §331 et seq.).
- ¹⁷ An Act to Provide for an Exchange of Lands with the Indians Residing in Any of the States or Territories, and For Their Removal West of the River Mississippi (Indian Removal Act), 21st Congress, 4 Stat. 411, signed into law May 28, 1830.
- ¹⁸ This example comes from a series of Miami Elder interviews in the late 1960s that I accessed through Miami tribal archives. For reasons of privacy, I omit identifying details.
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- ²⁶ Also written as two words (“Land Back”), this movement calls for and develops strategies to return lands to the control of their original caretakers. See LandBack, <https://landback.org>.
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- ²⁹ For example, a 2021 issue of *WINHEC: International Journal of Indigenous Education Scholarship* focuses on “Indigenous Language Revitalization: Innovation, Reflection and Future Directions.” See *WINHEC: International Journal of Indigenous Education Scholarship* 16 (1) (2021), <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/winhec/issue/view/1486>. For an example from a previous issue of *Dædalus*, see Teresa L. McCarty, Sheilah E. Nicholas, Kari A. B. Chew, Natalie G. Diaz, Wesley Y. Leonard, and Louellyn White, “Hear Our Languages, Hear Our Voices: Storywork as Theory and Praxis in Indigenous-Language Reclamation,” *Dædalus* 147 (2) (2018): 160–172, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/hear-our-languages-hear-our-voices-storywork-theory-praxis-indigenous-language>.

Climate & Language: An Entangled Crisis

*Julia C. Fine, Jessica Love-Nichols &
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Rising ocean levels threaten entire communities with relocation. The continued erosion of Arctic coastlines due to melting ice sheets and thawing permafrost has forced Inuit communities to move to more secure locations. Each move dislodges Indigenous peoples and their languages from ancestral landscapes and ways of knowing, obligating communities to adopt colonial or majority languages. Scholars and activists have documented the intersections of climate change and language endangerment, with special focus paid to their compounding consequences. We consider the relationship between language and environmental ideologies, synthesizing previous research on how metaphors and communicative norms in Indigenous and colonial languages and cultures influence environmental beliefs and actions. We note that these academic discourses – as well as similar discourses in nonprofit and policy-making spheres – rightly acknowledge the importance of Indigenous thought to environmental and climate action. Sadly, they often fall short of acknowledging both the colonial drivers of Indigenous language “loss” and Indigenous ownership of Indigenous language and environmental knowledge. We propose alternative framings that emphasize colonial responsibility and Indigenous sovereignty. Finally, we reflect on emergent vitalities and radical hope in Indigenous language movements and climate justice movements.

Peoples and entire communities are experiencing anguish and displacement due to climate-related disasters. The proliferation of media images makes palpable a growing crisis that may engulf all of us. The shock on people’s faces expresses the paralysis of trauma and the disbelief that “it could happen to them.” Even in communities where there is no risk of “language endangerment” – a problematic term, as Wesley Y. Leonard notes in his essay in this volume – there is still a loss for words to describe the horror of displacement and uncertainty.¹ The entanglement between “climate” and “language” creates a difficult challenge to tease apart as ideologies of language, climate change, and social justice are intertwined in unequal and unforgiving knots. One critical knot to disentangle is the difference between our expectations of climate and our expe-

riences of weather. Another is between our expectations of a just society and our uneven experiences as citizens in a global system that favors some over others (as recently laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic). The concurrent global crises of the late twentieth century – global language endangerment and global warming – did sound the alarm for many researchers and activists. These crises are intertwined, with climate change driving language endangerment.² However, well into the third decade of the twenty-first century, we find little comfort in “awareness” of these crises and greater discomfort in the slow violence of colonialism and the endangerment of Indigenous languages, landscapes, cultures, and peoples.³ This “imperial discomfort” is the disquieting perception that past injustice is buried under current threats to social, political, and economic privilege and security.⁴ Therefore, we contend that the knot that most needs to be disentangled is the centuries of the slow violence of colonial systems that created the climate in which we must bear the convulsions of everyday violence and upheaval, which continue unabated. The harm that capitalists and colonists have wrought upon Indigenous communities, along with their languages, cultures, and ways of knowing, is now breaking colonial containment and starting to imperil all.

This essay identifies language, not as an artifact of human communication, but as a source of social action against this slow violence. We assert a positionality that recognizes the inequities of the past as the fulcrum for actions in the present such that the entanglements of language and climate will weave a framework for imagining possible futures. This framework will lay the foundation for social justice as a process of transformation to remediate the systemic violence of the world system.

Linguists and historians have noted that an early stage of imperialism often creates an imagined new land as empty, or *terra nullius* (“virgin land”). Once “discovered” lands are given colonial names, this further creates an imagined geography.⁵ Historian Tina Loo has noted several examples of this phenomenon in the Canadian context, where colonial names like the Strait of Georgia, Victoria, New Westminster, and Halifax recreated local places in the image of the colonial homeland and connected them to an imperial whole.⁶

Place names are just one instance of this process of colonial displacement and reimagining, which permeates every aspect of language use. For instance, in English, we refer to living organisms such as trees through the pronoun “it.” In Potawatomi, as author and botanist Robin Kimmerer explains, members of the living world are categorized as animate, a similar effect to speaking about trees, bays, and fruit as “he” or “she” in English, instead of “it.”⁷ Across languages, animacy can be understood as a scale between humans at one end and inanimate objects or abstract ideas at the other.⁸ The English categorization of many living things as inanimate alienates them from humans, while the Potawatomi categorization places them closer to us. In addition to this difference in animacy, English

uses more grammatically agentive forms for humans – portraying them as actors rather than experiencers – and in so doing, represents them as primary.⁹

Metaphor reveals similar differences across Indigenous and colonial languages. Scholars Matthew Rout and John Reid, for instance, contrast two main metaphors for the more-than-human world: natural systems as “machines,” and more animistic ways of understanding these systems, often used in Māori discourse.¹⁰ They, among others, argue that the metaphor of nature as a “machine” is deeply embedded in English and European philosophy. Philosophers Silvi Funtowicz and Ângela Guimarães Pereira, for instance, present an interpretation of Descartes’s *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One’s Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences* as holding that a complete understanding of the “machinery” of the biological world would allow humanity to become “the masters and possessors of nature.”¹¹

Additionally, scholars have pointed out that metaphors can often mediate scientific concepts in a way that makes them more understandable to nonexpert audiences, while also affecting how those concepts are perceived.¹² Ecolinguistics scholar Arran Stibbe, for instance, has critiqued the metaphor of biodiversity as a “library.”¹³ Apart from similar reasons to the ones critiqued below (that is, that such biodiversity exists for the benefit and extraction of humans), such metaphors also imply that a few members of each species would be enough to achieve the purpose of the species. Furthermore, in addition to the use of maladaptive metaphors to describe the environment, metaphors of the environment have been harmfully applied to Indigenous languages. Leonard notes that the metaphor of biological extinction can result in a macabre self-fulfilling prophecy of language “death.”¹⁴ Relatedly, Bernard C. Perley observes that this same biological metaphor of “saving” endangered languages ascribes life to lifeless tape-recorded reproductions of Indigenous language users’ voices, leading to a disjointed “zombie linguistics.”¹⁵

How we count things also plays a role in shaping environmental ideologies. Linguist Michael Halliday points to potentially contributing grammatical features like the use of mass nouns for finite resources, arguing that terms such as “soil” and “water,” which are grammatically unbounded – unlike count nouns such as “horse(s)” – convey an air of limitlessness that is counter to reality.¹⁶ Linguist Saroj Chalwa goes even further, arguing that the linguistic fragmentation of the mass, the quantification of intangibles, and the splitting of the perception of time into past, present, and future all impact humans’ ability to perceive the natural environment as holistic and interconnected.¹⁷

In addition to these subtleties of meaning, the overall form and context of language use influences our environmental perceptions and actions. Some scholars propose that the removal of a language from its environmental context can result in more harmful environmental practices by divorcing it from the ecological knowledge in which it arose.¹⁸ Similarly, in an extension of that argument not accepted by all linguists, David Abram maintains that the development of writing,

which allowed the decontextualization of language, also led to harmful environmental practices.¹⁹ Other scholars have observed that modern scientific writing, in particular, uses forms that obscure agentive and affected participants; this feature makes this style of scientific writing ill-suited to recognizing the agents and sufferers of environmental and climate injustice.²⁰

The pitfalls of colonial language are evident, not only in how we conceptualize the environment in general, but also in how we talk about climate change. For instance, mass media portrays climate change as uncertain through epistemic markers even as the effects of the climate crisis become more and more apparent; this hedging undermines the clarity of the scientific consensus around the climate crisis.²¹ “Global warming” is inadequate to describe the complex repercussions of climate change, while “climate change” evokes no specific consequences whatsoever, and can even suggest that the climate is changing of its own accord.²² Terms like “climate crisis” and “climate emergency” yield a greater sense of immediacy and alarm, yet these terms, precisely because of their sense of immediacy, risk erasing the connections between the climate crisis and the crisis of colonial violence that Indigenous communities have endured for centuries.²³ Humanist April Anson analyzes these framings as “settler apocalypticism.”²⁴ And the infamous metaphor of the “carbon footprint” – the product of a marketing campaign by British Petroleum (BP) – sets up a neoliberal framing of the climate crisis as a failure of individuals to be more environmentally conscious, thus distracting from the evildoings of corporations like BP itself.²⁵

In light of these and similar findings, linguist Peter Mühlhäusler and anthropologist Adrian Peace argue that the “lexicon and grammar of individual languages are the root causes of our environmental crisis.”²⁶ Halliday calls on linguists to “draw attention to it; to show how the grammar promotes the ideology of growth, or ‘growthism.’”²⁷ Of course, language does not completely determine thought: climate movements have found ways to articulate their visions even through the unwieldy medium of colonial language. This suggests the possibility and necessity of changing, as well as critically examining, our conceptualizations of climate and the environment in colonial languages. We further suggest that, as part of this overarching strategy of regenerative language use, settler scholars and activists lend support to Indigenous communities who are reclaiming their languages – without viewing those communities and languages through the same extractive lens that got us into this mess in the first place.

Recognizing the merits of Indigenous environmental ideologies (as encoded in language) and the flaws of colonial ones, settler climate advocates often propose to adopt Indigenous environmental knowledge and values into predominantly settler-led climate movements. For instance, many prominent mainstream environmental nonprofits, colloquially known as “big greens,” such

as Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Foundation, and the Nature Conservancy, espouse the value of Indigenous knowledge for ecosystem conservation and climate action, and the White House Council on Environmental Quality issued a memorandum detailing the importance of Indigenous knowledge to policy-making.²⁸ However, settlers' acknowledgment of the usefulness of Indigenous climate knowledge, while potentially decolonial, is not automatically so. Settlers who take up the themes of Indigenous language, environmental knowledge, and climate action often do so in ways that 1) overlook the root causes of climate change and Indigenous language loss (such as colonialism and extractive capitalism) and 2) treat Indigenous languages and knowledges as universally owned property. When we (settlers) speak only of Indigenous language "loss," we erase the history of calculated colonial violence and ignore its clear relationship with both Indigenous language endangerment and the climate crisis. When we classify Indigenous environmental knowledge as universal human heritage to be used against the climate crisis, we frame this knowledge as a climate change lifeline to which we, as settlers, are entitled to cling. As with *terra nullius* discourses, we render Indigenous people invisible and inaudible in order to misappropriate their ideas, as well as their lands.

These convenient erasures of colonial and Indigenous agency recall anthropologist Jane H. Hill's seminal work on "expert rhetorics" in endangered language advocacy.²⁹ Hill observes similar trends in how settler linguists and linguistic anthropologists communicate about Indigenous language endangerment, naming the strategies of *universal ownership*, or "the assertion that endangered languages in some sense 'belong' to everyone in the world," and *hyperbolic valorization*, such as the comparison of Indigenous languages to "priceless treasures." Building on Hill's critique, linguist Jenny L. Davis examines the strategies of *linguistic extraction*, through which Indigenous languages and language movements are detached from Indigenous people's lives and experiences, and *erasure of colonial agency*, through which the historical and present causes of Indigenous language shift are minimized.³⁰ Such strategies abound in endangered language advocacy; for instance, in a 2009 National Geographic video entitled *Dying Languages*, photographer and filmmaker Chris Rainier comments, "Every two weeks, around the planet, a language disappears. Completely disappears, forever and ever."³¹

Metaphors of "disappearance" and "loss" obscure settler-colonizers' deliberate destruction of Indigenous languages, lands, and livelihoods. For instance, NDN Collective program officer PennElys Droz details George Washington's burning of Haudenosaunee seed houses, the United States' slaughter of the buffalo on which the Plains Nations relied for subsistence, and California settlers' destruction of oak trees, noting that each of these examples constitutes "a cunning way to suppress and control [Indigenous peoples]."³² Many scholars have documented how settler-colonizers analogously disrupted Indigenous languages, cultures, and families by sending Indigenous children to abusive boarding schools

in the United States and Canada.³³ Often, colonial disruptions of Indigenous language and land work in concert. For instance, forced migration displaces Indigenous people from their lands, interrupts environmental stewardship, and often leads to language shift.³⁴ Moreover, climate change itself can be understood as both a result and accelerant of Indigenous environmental and linguistic dispossession: as colonizers have seized Indigenous land, they have displaced people with long-standing knowledge of how to live sustainably on that land, bringing with them a host of worldviews – the division of humans from nature, the myth of consequence-less eternal growth, the totalizing view of lands and peoples as resources to be extracted – that have driven the climate crisis.

The strategies of erasure of colonial agency and universal ownership are evident, not only in academic discourses of Indigenous environmental knowledge and climate change, but also in the rhetoric of nonprofit organizing and policy-making. The 1987 United Nations report on sustainable development (*Our Common Future*), for instance, employs both strategies in its discussion of the role of Indigenous knowledge in the management of ecological systems.³⁵

Tribal and indigenous peoples will need special attention as the forces of economic development disrupt their traditional life-styles – life-styles that can offer modern societies many lessons in the management of resources in complex forest, mountain, and dryland ecosystems.³⁶

These communities are the *repositories* of vast accumulations of traditional knowledge and experience that links *humanity* with its ancient origins. Their *disappearance* is a loss for the larger society, which could learn a great deal from their traditional skills in sustainably managing very complex ecological systems.³⁷

By referring to Indigenous communities as “repositories” of knowledge that can “offer” modern societies (that is, in the committee’s view, non-Indigenous societies) lessons in resource management, and from which the larger society “could learn” a great deal, the committee paints Indigenous communities in a passive light. This framing sidesteps conversations about Indigenous ownership of knowledge, such as that developed in the Indigenous Data Sovereignty Movement.³⁸ The term “humanity” further suggests that Indigenous knowledge belongs to everyone. Additionally, the phrases “disappearance” and “loss” erase colonial agency for the disruption of traditional Indigenous knowledge transmission. These insinuations of universal ownership and natural obsolescence mirror the myth that Indigenous people did not own land before colonization – a falsehood that many settlers were taught in school.³⁹

Discourses of universal ownership and erasure of colonial agency are also present in more recent discussions of Indigenous knowledge in relation to climate change. For instance, UNESCO’s statement on Indigenous knowledge and

climate change states that “Indigenous knowledge thus *makes an important contribution* to climate change policy.”⁴⁰ Similarly, a policy brief from the Water Governance Facility states that Indigenous knowledge “should be *integrated* in dominant climate policies” and “*offer* solutions to both mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.”⁴¹ The relationship between Indigenous knowledge and dominant science and policy is the subject of much dispute, and not all Indigenous people feel that their knowledge should be “integrated” into the dominant paradigms. For example, Eriel Tchekwie Deranger of Indigenous Climate Action has written instead of “a world where Indigenous-led climate solutions are the standard and where colonial structures are doing the work to figure out where their resources and knowledge can offer support to existing Indigenous systems, not the other way around.”⁴² Environmental justice scholar Kyle Whyte warns that, given the breakdown of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies and governments, it may be too late to achieve Indigenous climate justice through coordination with settler-led initiatives.⁴³

In her discussion of the rhetoric of endangered language advocacy, Hill frames her critique not as an attack on the character or motives of those engaged in said advocacy, but as a self-critical suggestion intended to hone existing rhetorical strategies and not undermine their advocacy goals.⁴⁴

Likewise, we do not argue that the texts cited above – particularly the more recent ones – are intentionally bolstering colonial worldviews in their discussions of Indigenous knowledge and climate change, in which they make many compelling points about the impacts of climate change on Indigenous people and the specificity and rigor of Indigenous environmental knowledge. This is an unintended consequence of the rhetoric that has become commonplace for describing the relationship between climate and Indigenous language. Avoiding the language of universal ownership and passive “loss” of Indigenous knowledge can strengthen appeals for the consideration of Indigenous environmental knowledge in climate change policy. More agentive terms, such as *ecocide*, *epistemicide*, and *linguicide*, may be helpful in acknowledging the intentionality and violence of colonial incursions into Indigenous land and knowledge, though we note that some Indigenous linguists see such death-laden metaphors as ways of precluding Indigenous linguistic and cultural survivance, preferring metaphors of language dormancy.⁴⁵ The variety of perspectives on how to discuss Indigenous language vitality highlights the need to understand the preferences of individual Indigenous communities and community members.

Let us return to the heart-wrenching images of people displaced from their homes by severe flooding, extreme wildfires, and unprecedented winter storms. These images document the worsening environmental and climate crises. The despair etched onto anguished faces in the moment of catastrophe is

often followed in the media by graphic images and videos of victims as they survey the ruins of devastated landscapes and the debris that were once homes. These tragic upheavals have become part of our everyday experience and have amplified anxieties about our collective future. The immediacy of climate crises circulating in the media calls attention to the severity of the events and provokes consideration of causes and mitigation strategies for future events. Lost in the public display of devastation is the slow violence against Indigenous and at-risk populations over decades and centuries. The impulse to find some relief for recent victims of climate-related extreme weather events is laudable, but the inattention to antecedent and ongoing threats to Indigenous and at-risk communities is unconscionable. Equally unconscionable is the failure to recognize the collateral injustice of language loss in the face of these climate disasters for Indigenous communities that have been grappling with these entangled catastrophes for centuries.

Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and UN special envoy on climate change, writes: “But with the advance of climate change, common Yupik words such as *tagneghneq* – used to describe dark, dense ice – are becoming obsolete as Alaska’s melting permafrost turns the once solid landscape into a mushy, sodden waste.”⁴⁶ Robinson cautions, “Some experts warn that many coastal Alaskan villages will be completely uninhabitable by 2050, the year my eldest grandson, Rory, and his burdened generation may be forced to reckon with the challenge of housing tens of millions of climate refugees.”⁴⁷ The looming humanitarian crisis Robinson outlines is a projection of costs associated with anticipated outcomes of upheaval resulting from climate change. Though Robinson uses Yupik as an example of collateral loss due to climate change, she does not link language vitality as a social and climate justice focus.⁴⁸ Instead, she anticipates that Rory and his generation will be “burdened” with challenges in the form of climate refugees. She does, however, offer a personal reflection that may seem like hope: survival through resilience.

Robinson ends her account of the long-term global warming disaster in the Arctic with a note of optimism by quoting her interlocutor, Patricia: “We have always been resilient, adaptive, creative, amazing people – which has helped see us through the darkest times in the past. That resilience, that spirit, will help us in the times yet to come.”⁴⁹ Is this an evocation of hope? Patricia expresses an embodied experience of resilience, and Robinson suggests her grandson’s generation may take solace in finding hope against the threat of ontological vulnerability. Philosopher Jonathan Lear’s argument for *radical hope* is that “it is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is. Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it.”⁵⁰ Perhaps Robinson quotes Patricia to suggest that we must be “resilient, adaptive, creative, amazing people” if we are to imagine surviving the existential crises that climate

change can initiate. Absent from current media coverage of upheaval is the slow violence of colonial processes that continue to undermine Indigenous worlds. If there is a lesson from Indigenous pasts, it is that resilience and radical hope are stances that take time to adapt to ontological vulnerability. Many at-risk communities grapple with displacement and erasure of intimate knowledge of their heritage landscapes.⁵¹ The slow violence of colonialism has disrupted the continuity of cultural knowledge, linguistic heritage, and social relations; the growing silence is a reminder of the social injustice community members continue to endure while trying to maintain community cohesion.⁵² The disintegration of languages from the richness of social interconnectedness (such as religion, ecological knowledge, oral histories, and ceremonies) is paralleled by the disintegration of interconnected forms of justice. Social justice must consider linguistic justice as well as climate justice. These are not separate domains.

Climate disasters today share media space with the COVID-19 pandemic. The term “doom scrolling” reflects the preoccupation many experience in regard to our collective ontological vulnerability. Social justice movements also compete for our attention; the images and videos of protests, demonstrations, and police violence outrage many citizens. Social justice has become the overarching call to action, alongside calls to mitigate the devastation related to climate change. Resilience may be our only option. Creative thinking offers some hope, but hope is aspirational and implies delayed results. The vitality of many languages continues to be undermined by processes that have contributed to the state of our collective world. Returning to a “normal” that we imagine was in place in pre-pandemic times will be a return to the same system failures we have observed following the pandemic. We need to conceptualize the present as the catalyst for possible futures. In contrast to “doom scrolling,” we must actuate “emergent vitalities.” Such a stance allows us to “promote vitalities in the present as they unfold in the intersubjective unfolding of being in the world.”⁵³ Not only does this stance promote language vitality, it also applies to imagining forms of climate justice as a transformative process that emphasizes equity over equality as a system of fairness.

Wave after wave of pathogens (smallpox) spread along the Massachusetts coast between 1617 and 1619 and killed nine-tenths of the Indigenous populations.⁵⁴ Those losses of human life also contributed to the silencing of the Massachusetts language and undermining of many others. Today, wave after wave of COVID-19 has contributed to the entangled loss of Native American lives and associated heritage languages. Some commentators characterize this moment as the “new normal,” but for Indigenous peoples, this moment is the structural continuation of “the colonial normal.” The uneven costs of the pandemic are reflected in the statistics suggesting that Native Americans between the ages of 40 and 64 suf-

ferred a mortality rate of 1 in 240, whereas the mortality rate for Hispanic people is 1 in 390, 1 in 480 for Black people, and 1 in 1,300 for white people and for Asian people. COVID has threatened not only Native American lives, but Native American languages as well.⁵⁵ These losses are threaded into the weave of climate change and the injustice of inaction by neoliberal regimes of extraction and exploitation.

A recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that the uneven consequences of climate change expose the criminal injustice of failed leadership.⁵⁶ Writing about the report for *The Washington Post*, Sarah Kaplan and Brady Dennis state, “The report makes clear, however, that averting the worst-case scenarios will require nothing less than transformational change on a global scale.”⁵⁷ The prospect of transformational change must be entangled with transformational justice. Language and climate justice is not an endpoint proposition. Rather, it is a necessary realignment of discourses, commitments, and social movements. Promising in-progress climate and social justice actions include the LandBack movement, the Red Deal, and the Red Black and Green New Deal.⁵⁸ Are these actions enough? Do they represent transformative justice or are they isolated convulsions of conscience-cleansing before “returning to normal”? We offer this provocation: Returning to normal is a dead end for all of us. Perhaps it is time to think about climate and justice in Indigenous terms. Philosopher and environmental law scholar Laura Westra writes, “It is obvious, and largely undisputed in international and domestic law, that justice for aboriginal communities *starts* with environmental justice: not only their right to the historical territories and lands they have occupied, but, equally, if not more important, with the ecological health of those lands.”⁵⁹ Now is not the time to return to normal. Now is the time to evoke the common Yupik words such as *tagneghneq*, not as a lamentation of lost words and environments, but as a reminder it will take our collective wisdom to imagine justice that transforms our world as entangled modes of being.

Instead of concluding this essay with a full stop, we propose that settler climate advocates do not shy away from calling for more recognition of Indigenous climate wisdom, and keep the following principles in mind as they do so:

1. Name colonialism, and the historic and present actors thereof, as a driver of both the climate crisis and Indigenous language shift;
2. Support Indigenous-led climate actions and policies, not just ones that draw on Indigenous knowledge;
3. Acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty over Indigenous language and environmental knowledge; and
4. Cite Indigenous thinkers’ perspectives on Indigenous language, environmental knowledge, and the climate crisis in general.

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Rethinking Language Barriers & Social Justice from a Raciolinguistic Perspective

Jonathan Rosa & Nelson Flores

The trope of language barriers and the toppling thereof is widely resonant as a reference point for societal progress. Central to this trope is a misleading debate between advocates of linguistic assimilation and pluralism, both sides of which deceptively normalize dominant power structures by approaching language as an isolated site of remediation. In this essay, we invite a reconsideration of how particular populations and language practices are persistently marked, surveilled, and managed. We show how perceptions of linguistic diversity become sites for the reproduction of marginalization and exclusion, as well as how advocacy for language and social justice must move beyond celebrating linguistic diversity or remediating it. We argue that by interrogating the colonial and imperial underpinnings of widespread ideas about linguistic diversity, we can connect linguistic advocacy to broader political struggles. We suggest that language and social justice efforts must link affirmations of linguistic diversity to demands for the creation of societal structures that sustain collective well-being.

In December 2021, CNN reported on the creation of a digital platform – an app – to “eliminate miscommunication by changing people’s accents in real time.”¹ The app is specifically designed to modify the English language practices of call center employees in the Global South such that they would become more intelligible to presumed Global North customers. The report suggests that “a call center worker in the Philippines, for example, could speak normally into the microphone and end up sounding more like someone from Kansas to a customer on the other end.” While the platform’s “algorithm can convert English to and from American, Australian, British, Filipino, Indian and Spanish accents . . . the team is planning to add more.” The broader vision is for this app to be used in any context in which there are communication barriers, including language learning, health care provision, film dubbing, and digital voice assistants.

Depending on one’s outlook, this technology might be interpreted as utopian or dystopian. From a utopian perspective, this app could be perceived as a prelude to a *Star Trek* style universal translator that facilitates communication across what might otherwise be experienced as fundamental linguistic divides. From a dys-

topian perspective, by continually positioning dominant languages and varieties thereof as target reference points, such apps could contribute to the production of global homogeneity through the elimination of linguistic diversity. Yet these seemingly opposing perspectives are united in their orientation to language varieties as discrete and disembodied sets of forms and structures.

This understanding of language varieties as separable from the people who use them and as objectively classifiable into bounded categories (such as “American English”) is a reflection of modern language ideologies that serve particular political and economic interests.² In the case of accent-modification technologies designed to facilitate global commerce, as well as local classifications of language difference and its management, the recognition and mediation of linguistic diversity is often framed as progress toward social justice. Language ideologies scholarship, however, has taught us that purported recognitions of linguistic diversity can, in fact, function as deceptive forms of regimentation, stigmatization, and commodification in service of particular populations’ accumulation through others’ dispossession.³ For example, sociolinguists Nelson Flores and Mark Lewis show how stigmatizing stereotypes about low-income Latinx students’ perceived linguistic diversity function as rationalizations for their racial and socioeconomic marginalization.⁴ Thus, linguistic recognition is always about more than language, requiring careful analysis of deeply intertwined relations among languages and political economies.⁵ In the discussion that follows, we invite a reconsideration of how particular populations and language practices are persistently marked, surveilled, and managed. We show how perceptions of linguistic diversity become sites for the reproduction of marginalization and exclusion, as well as how advocacy for language and social justice must move beyond celebrating linguistic diversity or (re)mediating it through an app. Thus, language and social justice efforts must link affirmations of linguistic diversity to demands for the creation of societal structures that sustain collective well-being.

Digital platforms, such as the app described above, are a continuation of long-standing accent-modification efforts in educational, professional, legal, medical, and broader societal contexts. Such efforts have been famously dramatized in widely beloved popular representations such as George Bernard Shaw’s 1913 play *Pygmalion*, later adapted into a 1938 film with the same title, as well as its 1956 Broadway musical adaptation, *My Fair Lady*, starring Julie Andrews, a 1964 film musical by the same title starring Audrey Hepburn, and many subsequent revivals and remakes. These various representations center on the figures of Henry Higgins, a phonetician and professor, and Eliza Doolittle, a working-class woman who sells flowers in the public commons of London. Higgins offers Doolittle elocution and etiquette lessons, with the goal of modifying Doolittle’s stereotypical working-class Cockney accent such that her language use would

become less marked and stigmatized. The implication is that Higgins's accent-modification support would improve Doolittle's ability to find employment in and effectively navigate "higher" societal settings. For Doolittle, the aspiration is to sound like someone who sells flowers in a proper shop rather than on the street.

In Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins initially encounter one another serendipitously, with Doolittle attempting to sell flowers to one of Higgins's associates. When Doolittle is informed that the linguist Higgins has taken an interest in her language practices and is documenting everything she says, she initially presumes he is a police officer. While a language analyst and police officer might seem to have little in common, research on accent modification, language policing, and various forms of linguistic profiling demonstrate powerful links between language and population management.⁶ Moreover, linguists' systematic participation in domestic and imperial state projects of population surveillance and management, including long-standing colonial language-brokering practices and their contemporary recontextualization as part of development and democratization efforts, suggests that the perception of a linguistics professor as a state agent was not simply by chance.⁷

Professor Higgins explains to his associate that by modifying Doolittle's speech, he could make her sound like a duchess instead of a flower girl. Higgins's coached modifications of Doolittle's phonological patterns seem to effectively, if not completely, eliminate the sonic dimensions of her Cockney accent by assimilating it to received pronunciation. However, the referential content of Doolittle's speech, her affective and gestural stances, and her infamous use of the term "bloody" – which in the context of the play and its reception was regarded as an obscenity and thus highly provocative – signaled that the markedness and stigmatization of her class status through her accent had not, in fact, been eradicated but rather shifted to other semiotic targets. Eventually, Doolittle is left feeling fundamentally transformed and alienated from her previous life. Meanwhile, when Doolittle stops working with Higgins, he experiences ambivalence about his desire for what Doolittle was and what she has become. In fact, the Greek mythological figure of Pygmalion, perhaps most widely recognized in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which served as inspiration for Shaw, is a sculptor who falls in love with his own creation. While interpersonal accent modification might function as a form of narcissistic projection, commodified and institutionalized accent-modification efforts require structural analysis to understand the interplay between perceptions of linguistic diversity and population management strategies.

With this context as a reference point, it is crucial to reconsider the logics that inform contemporary digital accent-modification platforms and the broader ways that purportedly benevolent efforts to help marked subjects modify their language practices become institutionalized as assimilationist projects masquerading as assistance. These dynamics are reflected in the tropes that informed the creation and

uptake of Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins as characters. Note that the characters of Doolittle and Higgins were inspired by the family of Alexander Graham Bell, who is credited with creating electronic speech technology that led to the invention of the telephone. Bell's work was shaped not only by his grandfather who instructed speech etiquette classes for young women, but also by his father's and his efforts to hone language-teaching methods for deaf individuals, including their respective wives, Mabel Hubbard and Ma Bell.⁸ These efforts centered on oral methods that discouraged sign language based on theories that "deaf persons speak by reading the lips of others . . . in other words, they speak by becoming *operators*."⁹ This ableist logic ignores the complexity and robustness of deaf linguistic and broader cultural practices by approaching deafness as a functional challenge of linguistic transduction. Ableist objectifications of deaf persons combined with misogynistic objectifications of women in the invention of the telephone, which came to be reflected in a gendered division of labor such that "women claimed 87 percent of the public service positions in telephone offices as early as 1907."¹⁰ Thus, stigmatizing ideas about the need to manage linguistic diversity associated with gender and disability shaped the invention of the characters of Doolittle and Higgins, as well as the invention of the telephonic technology that subsequently inspired accent-modification platforms for telephone operators.

Relatedly, one of the earliest digital language processing platforms and a key precursor to contemporary accent-modification apps was created at MIT in 1966 and called ELIZA in reference to *My Fair Lady*.¹¹ Such technologies are often framed as advances toward using artificial intelligence to overcome language barriers. Allegedly benevolent projects of helping people accommodate and adapt to dominant communicative norms could be framed as social justice commitments that attempt to challenge systematic experiences of linguistic marginalization. In practice, however, these initiatives often misunderstand the nature of the problem by orienting to it pragmatically as a matter of linguistic mismatch necessitating individualized remediation, rather than systemically as a matter of endemic structures of discrimination necessitating societal transformation. By continually identifying and modifying language practices positioned as deviating from standardized norms, accent-modification projects never address the fundamental causes of linguistic marginalization and discrimination. Insofar as the focus is on modifying marked forms, whether through individual practice or digital mediation, the structures that position particular forms and the populations with which they are associated as dominant or subordinate – idealized or deficient – remain unquestioned. While many contemporary linguists might object to Higgins's work to eradicate Doolittle's stigmatized accent and to aspects of the accent-modification platform described in the CNN story, we suggest that these various efforts resonate with liberal humanist linguistic logics that shape the foundation of the discipline of linguistics, as well as applied linguistics and sociolinguistics as

its engaged offshoots. These liberal humanist logics are characterized by the overrepresentation of particular populations' interests as universal norms and rights, producing intersecting marginalizations in relation to axes of difference including race, class, gender, ability, and language.¹²

Liberal humanism is the foundation of the Chomskyian framing of linguistic competence as a context-free, underlying universal cognitive capacity.¹³ While Chomsky's universalist conceptualization of competence might seem to be radically egalitarian, it is crucial to note his framing of "an ideal speaker-listener, in a homogeneous speech community who knows its language perfectly" as the proper object of linguistic science.¹⁴ Although Chomsky frames linguistic competence as a universal human cognitive phenomenon, societal assumptions about and assessments of linguistic competence have perpetually positioned particular populations and practices as more or less competent, or even as fundamentally in/competent. These dynamics are reflected in accent-modification efforts aspiring to produce linguistic ideals, perfection, and homogeneity to remediate purported linguistic problems, deficiency, and diversity, which Chomsky positions as outside of the scope of a science of language.

This liberal humanist project is also the foundation of the Hymesian framing of communicative competence that has sought to account for the social dimensions of language through a focus on the interactional norms that shape linguistic practices within specific speech communities.¹⁵ The reframing of linguistic competence as communicative competence might seem to present a more affirming orientation to linguistic and cultural diversity. The shift from linguistic competence to communicative competence, however, perpetuates the structural positioning of particular populations and practices as fundamentally problematic, deficient, and nonstandard. This is demonstrated by the uptake of the concept of communicative competence in language-teaching in ways that reify the idealized native speaker from a homogeneous speech community that communicative competence was ostensibly developed to challenge.¹⁶ As with the case of linguistic competence and its particularism framed as universalism, communicative competence reifies language ideals under the auspices of recognizing and affirming diversity. The institutionalization of communicative competence often takes the form of efforts that identify distinctive language norms but exclusively target marginalized populations' language practices for remediation. The implication is that while all populations might possess different forms of communicative competence, only particular populations' communicative competencies are appropriate for success within schools and other mainstream institutions.¹⁷ Therefore, while communicative competence has often been offered as an alternative to the theoretical abstraction of linguistic competence, its logics contribute to the reproduction of social hierarchies and dominant language ideologies under the guise

of appropriateness. This is because communicative competence, like most mainstream approaches to (socio)linguistics, frames language discrimination primarily as a matter of affirming the legitimacy of stigmatized language varieties on the grounds that all languages are legitimate, rule-governed, and share universal underlying structures. Thus, we are left with the assumption that linguistic justice is primarily a matter of establishing and promoting knowledge of the systematicity of stigmatized language varieties and the skillfulness of their users, which leaves unaddressed the structural barriers that ultimately anchor the stigmatization of populations and communities associated with these practices.¹⁸

A raciolinguistic perspective offers an alternative approach to these conceptualizations of language. As opposed to efforts to create universalizing typologies of language structures and proficiencies, such as linguistic or communicative competence, a raciolinguistic perspective seeks to denaturalize contemporary conceptualizations of language by pointing to their roots in the globalization of the modern European colonial project.¹⁹ A raciolinguistic perspective emphasizes 1) the colonial anchoring of racial and linguistic classifications and hierarchies, 2) the modes of perception through which race and language are jointly apprehended across contexts, 3) the production of naturalized typologies of racial and linguistic features, forms, and categories imagined to emanate from and correspond to one another, 4) the intersectional matrices of marginalization that dynamically (re)structure racial and linguistic hierarchies, and 5) the need for radically reimagined theories of change that move beyond modifying the linguistic practices of racialized populations to challenging colonial, imperial, and capitalist power formations that continually reproduce disparity, dispossession, and disability.

A raciolinguistic perspective further rejects essentialist notions of race. It frames race as a dynamic process of sorting populations into those deemed more or less fully human, a process that is shaped by histories and contemporary realities of settler colonialism, enslavement, and imperialism, but plays out differently in distinctive local contexts. A rejection of essentializing static understandings of race provides us with conceptual tools for analyzing racialization beyond the logics that inform its stereotypical construction in any given context. For example, anti-Black U.S. racial logics of hypodescent have historically relied on the “one-drop rule,” a biological ideology presuming racially distinctive blood in which one drop of “Black blood” constituted Black legal status regardless of physical stereotypes like skin color.²⁰ Thus, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Homer Plessy was white-identified based on physical stereotypes such that the Court suggested his “one-eighth African blood” was “not discernable in him,” yet the Court ultimately reaffirmed his Black legal status, which in turn reestablished legal segregation targeting all Black legal subjects.²¹ In contrast, Mexican American racialization was developed via the “reverse one-drop rule,” a logic in which one drop of “Spanish blood” constituted white legal status regardless of one’s skin color.²² While this

provided certain legal rights, it was also used to justify the continued oppression of Mexican Americans by denying them the right to make claims under the equal protection clause in the face of systemic discrimination across societal contexts, including labor, education, and housing.²³ In this way, the legal status of whiteness was simultaneously a privilege in certain ways while also part of the continued racialization of Mexican Americans in the context of an ongoing colonial relationship. Here, the Spanish language, which in other geopolitical contexts was colonially imposed on Indigenous populations, became a mechanism for racializing Mexican Americans based on the assumption that the presence of Spanish in their communities justified their segregation in schools and other facilities.²⁴ Meanwhile, the imposition of the English language and the rigid maintenance of linguistic borders in these communities was linked to the broader regulation of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, socioeconomic, and religious borders, and the violent colonial and imperial population management projects of which they are a part.²⁵ The goal of a raciolinguistic perspective, therefore, is not to decide which people and language practices coincide with which ethnoracial categories, as if this were an objective process. Instead, a raciolinguistic perspective seeks to understand how racial and linguistic discourses are conaturalized in ways that position particular populations as less than fully human and in need of perpetual containment and (re)mediation.

A raciolinguistic perspective also rejects the essentializing linguistic assumption that each named language possesses ontologically discrete boundaries corresponding to a particular territory and belonging to a specific group of people. It traces the emergence of these ideologies linking named languages, territories, and populations alongside the rise of European nation-states and the globalization of the European colonial project.²⁶ It also locates the creation of the modern science of language within this broader colonial history, calling into question its empiricist impulse to separate language from bodies as part of the scientific study of language. Rather than approaching languages as disembodied sets of forms and structures, a raciolinguistic perspective examines how hegemonic modes of perception (trans)form interpretations of what are ostensibly the same linguistic practices based on the racial status of the producer.²⁷ For example, in the U.S. context, the same linguistic tokens that are framed as nonstandard, incorrect, or inferior English when produced by Black language users can be interpreted as cool, youthful, and desirable when produced by white language users.²⁸ Similarly, Princess Charlotte's Spanish language use is positioned as worthy of laudatory newspaper headlines, whereas U.S. Latinx Spanish language use is presented as a problem in need of careful management and remediation.²⁹ Therefore, the goal of a raciolinguistic perspective is not to decide which racial categories correspond to which linguistic forms and varieties, but rather to interrogate and contest the power structures that organize the conaturalization of race and language.

Taking this nonessentialist view of race and language as its point of entry, at the core of a raciolinguistic perspective is critical examination of ideologies that frame the language practices of racialized communities as inherently deficient and in need of remediation.³⁰ Raciolinguistic ideologies differ from the standard language ideologies that shape the marginalization of Eliza Doolittle. Understanding this difference requires careful conceptualization of race and racialization. As ideological justifications for the globalization of modern European colonialism, race and racialization center on the imposition and contestation of “what is to be the descriptive statement of the human”: that is, the epistemological battle over sorting populations into those deemed fully and less than fully human.³¹ Decolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo traces the origins of contemporary race and racialization to religious distinctions that characterized the European premodern world, which were remapped onto enslaved and colonized Black and Indigenous populations.³² European whiteness emerged in part through Christian ideologies that positioned Jews and Muslims as possessing the wrong religion and, by extension, as inferior humans. European settlers in the Americas presumed that Black and Indigenous populations had no legitimate religion and were, therefore, not fully human. Ideologies distinguishing between populations framed as possessing the wrong religion and those framed as possessing no religion are linked to the distinction between standard language ideologies and raciolinguistic ideologies. While standard language ideologies frame working-class white individuals like Eliza Doolittle as producing the wrong form of a legitimate language, making them inferior humans on a case-by-case basis, raciolinguistic ideologies frame racialized populations as having no legitimate language or being altogether languageless, collectively rendering them as less than fully human.³³ Whereas standard language ideologies draw individualized distinctions in terms of perceived degrees of correctness, raciolinguistic ideologies draw collective distinctions in terms of perceived ontological kinds.

Raciolinguistic ideologies were instrumental to the rise of European nation-states and the European colonial project.³⁴ For example, raciolinguistic ideologies were integral in producing justifications for white settler colonialism, with white settlers often depicting Indigenous languages in the Americas as animal-like forms of simple communication incapable of expressing Christian doctrine.³⁵ In addition, raciolinguistic ideologies were integral to the dehumanization of Black populations as part of the justification for the transatlantic slave trade and the forced segregation of African Americans within the context of the Jim Crow South.³⁶ In a reconfiguration of early anti-Semitism framed in religious terms, raciolinguistic ideologies were also central to the racialization of Jewishness in the context of the Holocaust. Specifically, Jews were represented as having no loyalty to a mother-tongue, thereby posing an existential threat to the integrity of the German language, paralleling their framing as an existential threat to German

society.³⁷ In short, raciolinguistic ideologies that called into question the inherent legitimacy of racialized populations' language practices were part of the framing of these populations as a threat to the national polity in need of containment and perhaps even elimination.³⁸

Studies of raciolinguistic ideologies are also anchored in a distinctive ontological and epistemological perspective from dominant sociolinguistic approaches to the studies of standard language ideologies. Sociolinguistic approaches to the study of standard language ideologies often begin from an empirical perspective presupposing standard languages as sets of disembodied linguistic features associated with higher social status groups in a particular society that can be used by anyone regardless of their social status.³⁹ In contrast, raciolinguistic ideologies build on conceptualizations of race as a fundamentally colonial-ontological problem of being made to exist as an object in advance of one's presence through processes of conaturalization.⁴⁰ From this perspective, language varieties are not sets of disembodied linguistic features. Instead, hegemonic modes of perception can frame what are ostensibly the same language practices as standard when produced by someone inhabiting a dominant racial status but nonstandard when produced by someone inhabiting a subordinate racial status. From this perspective, racialization can render particular populations' language practices as inherently deficient and fundamentally illegitimate.⁴¹ Thus, raciolinguistic ideologies' systematic attributions of un/intelligibility disrupt ontological distinctions between languages and varieties thereof. These conceptualizations can help us better understand distinctive articulations of linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic marginalization. For example, while Eliza Doolittle experienced socioeconomic and linguistic marginalization, her whiteness provided provisional access to elite spaces that are systematically denied to racially minoritized communities. This by no means negates the marginalization that Eliza Doolittle experienced or the alienation that it produced, but rather illustrates the importance of attending to the ways that linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic stigmatization coarticulate and disarticulate.

Adult-education scholar Vijay A. Ramjattan characterizes various contemporary "accent reduction" industries as "raciolinguistic pedagogy" that attribute deficiency and value to different populations' language practices in deeply contradictory ways that obscure the reproduction of racial and class stratification.⁴² This focus on race can sharpen understandings of contemporary linguistic marginalization. One example that we have written about previously is "Long-Term English Learners," a label for students institutionally classified as English Learners for seven or more years and subjected to perpetual remediation due to their supposed lack of English language proficiency.⁴³ Based on its association with systematically racialized attributions of linguistic illegitimacy, Long-Term English Learner has become institutionalized as a deeply stigmatizing raciolinguistic classification in U.S. schools. We have examined how racialized experiences of students designat-

ed as Long-Term English Learners are linked to the experiences of students designated as “Heritage Language Learners” and “Standard English Learners,” which also function as raciolinguistic classifications. These linguistic designations are produced through hegemonic modes of perception associated with *white listening subjects* that frame racialized students’ language practices as inherently deficient and in need of remediation, even when these practices ostensibly correspond to standardized norms that are institutionally affirmed or even prized for white language users. Indeed, even researchers who accept these raciolinguistic categories as objective descriptions of students’ purportedly limited linguistic capacities acknowledge this overlap, with one prominent report focused on Long-Term English Learners describing them as sharing “much in common with other Standard English learners – the mix of English vocabulary superimposed on the structure of the heritage language and the use of a dialect of English that differs from academic English.”⁴⁴ Default assumptions about the linguistic deficiency of students designated as Long-Term English Learners systematically obscure their demonstration of profound multilingual skills that in many ways meet or exceed stipulated educational standards.⁴⁵

Raciolinguistic ideologies associated with the U.S.-based Long-Term English Learner label are rooted in the nation’s white settler colonial and anti-Black logics, which also undergird the Standard English Learner category. This underlying logic is demonstrated by Standard English Learner linguistic screeners used in the Los Angeles Unified School District that seek to identify students who “would particularly benefit from mainstream English language development.”⁴⁶ The screeners provide separate lists of “African American linguistic features,” “Hawaiian American linguistic features,” and “Mexican American linguistic features.” Each list includes approximately twenty sentences that are represented in Standard English and the respective nonstandard racialized variety, highlighting the particular linguistic features that distinguish between the two. The screeners are designed to identify students whose attributed lack of Standard English abilities make them eligible for a remedial program focused on correcting their purported linguistic deficiencies. Here, we once again encounter the distinction between standard language ideologies and raciolinguistic ideologies in that, based on the screeners available, the working-class white U.S. equivalent to Eliza Doolittle would not be targeted for formally institutionalized linguistic screening, and would, therefore, not be threatened with remediation and marginalization regardless of their perceived linguistic deviation from Standard English.

Despite African American and Native Hawaiian students’ display of tremendous communicative dexterity, dialect variation is framed as an endemic educational problem for them, which reflects how anti-Blackness and white settler colonialism are deceptively reproduced through raciolinguistic ideologies.⁴⁷ Mexican American students’ targeting as part of these screeners underscores the impor-

tance of understanding the racialization of Latinxs in relation to the foundational anti-Blackness and white settler colonialism of U.S. society.⁴⁸ As a result of such English language screeners and assessments, millions of students are designated as English Learners annually, a significant percentage of whom are relegated to a perpetual classification as Long-Term English Learners and assigned to remedial classrooms for the entirety of their elementary and secondary schooling experiences. These experiences of perpetual linguistic remediation constrain the opportunities available to racialized students, often reproducing intergenerational socioeconomic vulnerability and societal marginalization. Sociologist Brian Cabral conceptualizes this as a racialized process of “linguistic confinement,” and argues that state-based educational language assessments come to be institutionalized in conjunction with broader carceral dynamics of surveillance and containment.⁴⁹ In this way, raciolinguistic ideologies that produced contemporary categories such as Long-Term English Learner are rooted in the nation’s white settler colonial and anti-Black foundations. These educational language learning assessments, designations, and curricula are presented as helpful interventions that serve to (re)mediate linguistic barriers. A raciolinguistic perspective on linguistic (re)mediation attends to the historical colonial underpinnings of contemporary language classifications to examine how deeply stratified political and economic structures are rationalized through ideologies of linguistic deficiency. The broader goal is to refuse behavioral linguistic explanations for challenges requiring broad institutional and societal transformation to sustain collective well-being.

Whether in terms of the contemporary emergence of digital language technologies such as accent-modification apps, or past popular representations of upward socioeconomic mobility through elocution lessons, the trope of language barriers and the toppling thereof is widely resonant as a reference point for societal progress. Central to this trope is a misleading debate between advocates of linguistic assimilation and pluralism, both sides of which deceptively normalize dominant power structures by approaching language narrowly as an isolated site of (re)mediation. This dynamic can be recognized in assimilationist efforts toward Standard English remediation in U.S. schools that systematically target racialized students regardless of the extent to which their English language practices might seem to correspond to standardized norms.⁵⁰ It is also at work in dual-language programs that systematically support the achievement of economically dominant white students, many of whom enter these programs identifying as monolingual English users, over their racialized and economically marginalized peers, many of whom use multiple languages and varieties thereof throughout their everyday lives.⁵¹ Thus, it is insufficient to challenge assimilation through advocacy for linguistic diversity as an end in itself. Reconnecting contemporary advocacy for multilingual education in the United States to its history as part of broader civil rights demands for institutional and societal transformation is one strategy for refusing

generic affirmation of linguistic diversity as the solution to hierarchies rationalized in relation to linguistic differences.⁵²

These rationalizations and narrow, instrumentalist framings of language dovetail with prevailing approaches in U.S. linguistics that separate the study of languages from the populations and communities among which they are used. In contrast, a raciolinguistic perspective interrogates the fundamental relationship between linguistic and racial classifications, thereby refusing to separate the study of languages from the experiences, positionalities, perspectives, and political projects of their users. By recognizing the colonial underpinnings of widespread ideas about linguistic diversity, we can connect linguistic advocacy to broader political struggles. This is what the digital app as the newest attempt at bridging linguistic diversity misses. Its design presupposes that the marginalization of those positioned as having a marked accent is primarily linguistic, leaving uninterrogated the colonial and imperial structures that shape contemporary racial and economic inequities. While such an app may benefit the primarily Global North customers who will no longer have to navigate linguistic diversity, it does little to improve the social outcomes of the call center workers, primarily of the Global South, whom the app was reportedly developed to help. Through their primary commitment to maximizing efficiency in service encounters, such technologies contribute to the reproduction of dominant political and economic power structures under the auspices of brokering linguistic diversity. Yet mainstream approaches to sociolinguistics, which often celebrate linguistic diversity without situating it in relation to broader colonial and imperial histories and their effects on contemporary political and economic realities, also do little to challenge prevailing power structures. Thus, language must be understood as a central medium and object in *all* justice struggles, including those focused on issues such as climate change, education, health, reproductive rights, migration, labor, housing, race, gender, sexuality, disability, anticapitalism, prison abolition, and decolonization.⁵³ We look forward to continued dialogues about the role of language in these various political struggles, as well as the role of different scholarly approaches in supporting or constraining them.

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Black Womanhood: Raciolinguistic Intersections of Gender, Sexuality & Social Status in the Aftermaths of Colonization

Aris Moreno Clemons & Jessica A. Grieser

In this essay, we highlight the colonial invention of oppositional and binary categories as a dominant form of social sorting and meaning-making in our society. We understand language as a tool for the construction, maintenance, and analysis of these categories. Through language, these categorizations often render those who sit at the margins illegible. We center the Black woman as the prototypical “other,” her condition being interpreted neither by conventions of race nor gender, and take Black womanhood as the point of departure for a description of the necessary intersecting and variable analyses of social life. We call for an exploration of social life that considers the raciolinguistic intersections of gender, sexuality, and social class as part and parcel of overarching social formations. In this way, we can advocate for a shift in linguistics and in all social sciences that accounts for the mutability of category. We argue that a raciolinguistic perspective allows for a more nuanced investigation of the compounding intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and social status that often function to erase Black womanhood.

In 1981, the late bell hooks asked the question: “Ain’t I a woman?”¹ During this decade, Black women were reckoning with the fact that the Black liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s had left them in a precarious place. Just one year after hooks asked the question, Akasha (Gloria T.) Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith exemplified this precariousness in their volume *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*.² In calling out that conceptions of gender and race are inextricably linked in the minds of many scholars, Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith were chastising the tendency of even the most justice-oriented scholarship to treat issues of race in ways that overlook and even erase the complexities of gender and to treat issues of gender in ways that erase the complexities of race.³ A decade later, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined and introduced the term *intersectionality* as a lens for interrogat-

ing these multiple intersecting categories of identity and unearthing how they interact to create compounding oppression for individuals, namely Black women. Gender-based oppression, Crenshaw demonstrated, takes as its normative victim white women, while race-based oppression takes as its normative victim Black men. Thus, a Black woman may find herself at a unique intersection of oppressions, with her employer able to point to similar treatment of a Black man as evidence of lack of gender discrimination, and similar treatment of a white woman as evidence of a lack of racial discrimination. The Black woman is then denied restitution because of the two intersecting marginalized identities to which she belongs: both Black and woman.⁴

Nowhere have the limits of essentialist categorizations been clearer than in the progression of the study of the language of marginalized and multiply-marginalized groups. Sociolinguistics, the subdiscipline of linguistics that considers the relationship between language and social practice, has long understood language as central to identity. Yet the earliest sociolinguistic studies were dialectological surveys, which attempted to draw lines around the language practices of distinct physical regions – north and south, inland and coastal, urban and rural – in ways that reified the distinctions between these regions as distinct, homogenous groups.⁵ As the field matured throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, sociolinguists began to pay more attention to language variation that was not rooted in regional difference, spurred especially by early work on the grammatical system and sound system of African American English, a variety recognized as early as the 1930s to be systematically different from white varieties in the same regions.⁶ Nevertheless, the history of the analytical focus in trying to circumscribe boundaries, first physical and then raciosocial, as well as to analyze language that was maximally divergent from white varieties, led to a scholarly understanding of Black language that often categorized all Black language as being that of Black working-class men.

Despite the circumscription of “Black language” as being exclusively made up of Black male language, Black women concerned with Black dialect, vernacular, and identity have positioned themselves as both scholars and activists since the earliest days of the discipline. Initiatives such as the Nairobi Day School in East Palo Alto, California, and the teaching of Black language vernacular in college courses exemplified Black women’s commitment to affirming and legitimizing Black language and identity.⁷ Yet despite the work of Black women scholars to disentangle and problematize these erasures, this situation has only compounded. In the 2010s and early 2020s, hashtags such as #SayHerName, #CiteBlackWomen, and #GirlsLikeUs have brought attention to the complexity of and precarity for Black women who sit at varying intersections of power and oppression. What we learn from these projects and movements is that Black women, both transgender and cisgender, who must navigate colonial formations of power, simply do not have the luxury of existing without constant attention to their race, their gender,

their sexuality, and their social status within the postcolonial societies that constantly render them illegible and thus expendable.

It is therefore not an overstatement to say that Black (mostly queer) women have been at the center of liberatory efforts for all marginalized social classes in the United States.⁸ Grounded in histories of abolitionist thought and liberatory praxis, Black women have interrogated labor, self-determination, language, the body, and indeed humanity itself. Crucially, these theories and demands for a recognition of Black humanity have been responses to the misogynoir that we have been forced to endure.⁹ The complexity of Black womanhood cannot be understood without attending to the raciolinguistic intersections of language, gender, sexuality, and social status. As such, we take Black womanhood as the point of departure for a description of the necessary intersecting and variable analyses of social life. Further, we understand language as the place where identity is mediated; thus, we explore the ways that language (and its theorization) impacts our social understandings of the world around us.¹⁰

The authors of this essay are not new to the condition of having to navigate the complexities of their race, gender, and sexuality in nearly every facet of their lives. Clemons identifies as a Black cisgender and heterosexual woman. At an early age, it became clear that these categories were not so clear cut, often having her ethnoracial declarations questioned and re-ascribed as she moved through differing geographic contexts. Additionally, her inability to accept heteropatriarchal structures has forced her to redefine her heterosexuality through a queer lens, one that seeks a problematization of the structure and category itself. Grieser grew up navigating the complexity of life in a transracial adoptive family. Choosing to move among Black peers as a young adult, she learned that rejecting certain performance norms of heterosexual femininity meant being variably perceived as either not particularly Black or not particularly straight, but rarely both or neither at the same time, which similarly forced the necessity of interrogating the interconnectedness of race, gender, and sexuality.

With these backgrounds, we join the growing wave of Black language scholars who challenge the essentialism of early work by centering current explorations of Black language on the ways that it, and attitudes toward it, are embedded in the processes of discrimination and power relations. As a result, the current scholarly turn has seen a great deal of linguistic work that has had tangible, real-world liberatory effects on Black speakers through the areas of education, housing, and criminal justice. These works rely on understanding the role that racism and racist ideologies play in the material marginalization of racialized speakers. Racism is often circumscribed as being individual acts of violence and discrimination against racialized people; these works and we as authors instead define racism as the systemic, structural, and institutional policies that are enacted against racialized people, which promotes racialized ideologies that stratify power.

The “enlightened” move of many twenty-first-century scholars is to acknowledge that the definition of racism focused on individual-level violence and discrimination is incomplete. Yet understandings of the machinations of systemic racism also serve to reinforce boundedness between different groups by treating groups as homogenous, reifying the boundaries upon which systemic racism thrives. The creation of postcolonial society relies on forced categorizations and binaries, despite known Indigenous formations that counter many of these structures.¹¹ Through the enactment of the binary, each term gains meaning only in relation to its counterpart and “because oppositional binaries rarely represent different but equal relationships, they are inherently unstable.”¹² Since modern power formations rest on the ability to impose and maintain oppositional boundaries of difference, which often manifest in binaries, racism itself is insufficient as a guiding construct for understanding power formation. Instead, we focus on the oppositional boundary of anti-Blackness as the root of hierarchical power formations across the Americas. We define anti-Blackness as “the ideological manifestation of white supremacy, whiteness, and white apathy.”¹³ Anti-Blackness thus requires *whiteness* as a logic, which stands in its opposition. Importantly, whiteness allows those who identify and exist within its categorizations – as indicated by proximity to Europeanness and its aftermaths – to elude racial categorization and maintain individuality in their humanity.¹⁴ In positing anti-Blackness as an organizing principle of life for all Black peoples in the Americas, we highlight an oppositional category that has been dominant in our formation of society due to these nations’ colonial histories. Race is not only a category; it is also a technology for iterative and discursive categorization, exerting itself onto all other social categories.¹⁵ Language, something so fundamentally human, is and has been a tool for the construction, maintenance, and analysis of these binaries, often itself falling victim to oppositional boundedness.

However, language also provides us the necessary tools to interrogate the intersections between these identities. Thus, the tradition of linguistics that deals with the interface of language, race, and identity is particularly well suited to intersectional analyses in the pursuit of linguistic justice.¹⁶ Intersectionality, in this instance, can be understood as not only the overlapping of multiple bounded categories of oppression, but a refusal to draw boundaries around named social categories in the first place, privileging complexity over the simplified, multiplicity over the essentialized, and mutability over static definitions of the human condition.¹⁷ Raciolinguistics – a branch of sociolinguistic inquiry that theorizes the conaturalization of language and race in ways that are inextricable, coinfluent, and embedded in society – provides a way into this more nuanced exploration of the genesis and instability of the categorical formations of power that have defined postcolonial societies.¹⁸

In their influential essay “Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective,” Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores lay out five key compo-

nents of a raciolinguistic perspective: 1) that the conaturalization of language and race are rooted in colonial formations of society; 2) that people perceive, enact, and act on perceptions of racial and linguistic difference; 3) that those differences between race and language are seen to be naturally connected in ways that render invisible the human agency and racist processes creating them; 4) that past explorations have underemphasized the colonialist roots of race and overlooked the degree to which racialization is still a major organizing identity-framework; and 5) that the power formations that have resulted from the unacknowledged linkage of race and language practice must be contested.¹⁹ Consequently, a raciolinguistic perspective is generative in that it functions as a lens through which, centering the inextricable interconnectedness of language and race, one can iteratively examine hegemonically situated power hierarchies.

In this essay, we interrogate the intersections of gender, sexuality, and social status, focusing on the experiences of Black women who fit into and lie at the margins of these categories. We again acknowledge that social categories in and of themselves are multiple and mutable, and thus any model used to interrogate these categories must be able to engage multiple strategies toward sustainable social justice.²⁰ Additionally, we reject the standard assumption of white cisgender heteropatriarchal capitalism as being the center of social formation. As such, we highlight the work of scholars who have consistently dismantled raciolinguistic ideologies as inextricably tied to the body. We do this with a primary goal of exploring the theoretical advantage of applying a raciolinguistic and intersectional lens to our explorations of social worlds through the study of language. As a secondary goal, we reveal the imperative that justice-oriented scholarship be deeply informed by minoritized epistemologies and by minoritized scholars. We argue that to investigate the very structure of society, one must pay attention to the most vulnerable. In other words, none of us are free until we all are.²¹ With this in mind, we review the implications of applying a raciolinguistic perspective to social science scholarship. We follow with a brief overview of the ways that Black women have consistently challenged the idea of category, and thus complicated notions of language, race, and identity through a Black feminist praxis that insists on reclaiming humanity for Black women. Lastly, we profile an exemplary Black language scholar, noting the development of a Black feminist raciolinguistics. Ultimately, our goal is to offer a way forward in expanding already established moves toward more justice-oriented and equitable language-centered research.

Many of the most significant developments in the field of linguistics have been built on the exploration – and some might say exploitation – of minority languages and minoritized speakers. The dominant North American paradigm of variationist sociolinguistics owes many of its early findings about systemic social variation of English to the studies of African American En-

English conducted in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.²² As the field had, until that time, been heavily rooted in atlas studies of regional dialectal difference, the discovery of a variety that was relatively uniform across regions, and predicated instead on membership in an ethnoracial category, offered an exciting counterbalance to regional variation studies and, as such, provided opportunities for intriguing new findings about the full scope of possibilities for English language variation.²³

At the same time, these early studies revealed the importance of centering Black lived experience. While these studies encompassed work by both white and Black linguists, it is in the work of the Black linguists that we find explanatory models rooted in the Black experience. One of the most compelling examples of Black linguist agency in Black language from this era comes from John Rickford's work in his home of Guyana, where he shows that language choices along the creole continuum correspond to speakers' overall situatedness with respect to models of conflict between social classes, offering a new example of motivations for language choice as well as new models for considering differences of class.²⁴ While all of this work furthered the understanding of Black language use in the Americas, it was these studies by Black linguists that took the social conditions of Blackness as being integral to the interpretation of the data that provide many of the richest explanations of Black language use.²⁵

As with studies of racialized language differences, the intersection of gender and sexuality and language has similarly been a preoccupation of the field.²⁶ These foundational literatures make clear that linguists and linguistics have often been preoccupied with the work of understanding "category," both in terms of defining linguistic varieties as systems, as well as describing language communities. In linguistics, it is the form (that is, language practices and productions) that traditionally dictate boundaries, resulting in borders between languages, dialect, register, and variety. These borders, however, erase the role that sociocultural factors play in deciding which linguistic structures belong to which varieties.

As an example, one could look to structures that are considered part of African American language such as negative concord (*didn't nobody want none*). Many of these structures are also part of other varieties of English, and they are generally understood even by speakers who do not use them. The decision to categorize them as being part of African American language then, despite being understood by and used by speakers from other social groups, is one made on social not structural grounds. But speakers both produce and are produced by the language choices they make. Thus, making the social choice to ascribe certain linguistic structures to African American language reifies the category of "African American." Further, these sorts of choices are not produced in a vacuum – they reflect the power relations of a society that is itself unable to extricate itself from the racism and patriarchy that creates it. As we erase the social constructedness of social categories and treat groups as more homogeneous than they are, category itself

becomes a mechanism for contributing to power structures that hurt people. Ultimately, representation through essentialization erases the heterogeneous nature of members of larger social categorizations (in this case, Black women).

Like social categorization, many of our underlying assumptions about language are best understood as being more indicative of ideology than of objective linguistic structure, process, or practice. Research across varying linguistic disciplines has integrated investigations of raciolinguistic ideologies and their impact on the human experience. A salient example appears in linguist and disability scholar María Cioè-Peña's exploration of the orthoepic exam, a linguistic-evaluation test used in the 1930s in the Dominican Republic to determine whether speakers were of Haitian or Dominican descent, and ultimately whether they deserved to live or die based on the pronunciation of the shibboleth *perejil* (*parsley* in Spanish), leading to the Parsley Massacre where thousands of Black-presenting Dominicans and Haitians were slaughtered.²⁷ A testament to the dangers of raciolinguistic ideologies, the study shows how the pathologization of accent is part and parcel of projects of structuring genocidal power.

Taking a raciolinguistic perspective requires us to grapple with historical formations of power that rested on the ability to make ideological and structural connections between language and ethnicity, gender, class, level of education, and sexuality. Much of this can be captured by a process called linguistic enregisterment, the means by which listeners come to form ideologically mediated connections between certain forms of speech, and the speaker types to which the listener considers those speakers to belong: for example, thinking of *y'all* as "Southern" or *he be runnin'* as "African American."²⁸ Grounded in their assertion of raciolinguistic ideologies as the naturalized conflation of certain racialized bodies with stigmatized linguistic practices, Rosa and Flores propose the existence of a process of "raciolinguistic enregisterment" by which language and racial categories are jointly constructed and drawn into processes of oppositional difference.²⁹ In doing so, they offer a means for exploring ties between language and the racialized bodies that produce it. Assuming raciolinguistic enregisterment as the starting point presses researchers to move beyond the description of language practices as production of distinct linguistic features by distinct ethnoracial groups. Instead, researchers are pushed to an exploration of how speakers have been positioned in relation to named racial categories and linguistic varieties. In turn, they are able to deconstruct the idea of language varieties and racial categories as discrete "things" that can be demarcated by particular characteristics, whether they be linguistic forms or biological features.

These frameworks have gifted a new generation of scholars (of color) with the ability to locate and expand notions of the body, category, social semiotics, and indeed the very nature of how our societies are structured. So, while the lineage of sociocultural linguistics, by virtue of its focus on minoritized languages

and speakers, has been instrumental in challenging hegemonic understanding modes of the nature of language exploration, as we demand more equitable and just societal formations, we sociolinguistic researchers too must engage in more nuanced examinations of society. Scholarship that takes from and deeply impacts the perceptions of minoritized and racialized populations must be informed by those populations. In the most recent turn in sociocultural linguistics, we can see a shift toward scholarship informed by both minoritized epistemologies – looking to Black studies and activism to inform theory and methodological innovations – and minoritized bodies. Black feminist scholars have theorized oppositional categories of difference over the years, providing a foundation for the integration of intersectionality into language scholarship as a way to resist the deracialization of theories that often results in the reification of marginalizing power structures. Linguistics needs Black feminism, Black feminism needs linguistics, and any scholar seeking to subvert the inequitable power structures that stem from an overreliance on categorization needs them both.

The condition of being Black, woman, queer, and of meager social status can reveal the inability of category to fully or accurately capture social experience because the nature of these categories is in of itself multiplicative rather than additive: it is not that a Black queer woman has the same experience as other queer women but for being Black, or the same experience as other Black women but for being queer. The intersecting identity is a unique identity that defies the other categories. A focus on these intersectional conditions offers the possibility for subverting colonial logics. And Black feminist studies can orient us toward an understanding of the negative impacts of binary thinking. Black feminist theorists from Saidiya Hartman to Patricia Hill Collins to Sylvia Wynter to Katherine McKittrick have invested significant amounts of their intellectual labor explicating and then disrupting boundaries of oppositional difference.³⁰

Collins alerts us to the ways “interdependent concepts of binary thinking, oppositional difference, objectification, and social hierarchy” underpin oppression through a constant subordination of that positioned as “other.”³¹ Drawing on the work of other Black feminist scholars, Collins situates this theorization in an understanding of the African enslaved woman as the quintessential representation of oppositional “other” in U.S. society. Collins notes the ways that ideologies surrounding femininity are upheld through a comparison of the natural and correct, exemplified by white women, to that of the unnatural and masculine, exemplified by Black women. In doing so, we come to understand the Black woman only in relation to that of the white woman, thus creating a binary. Nonetheless, the logic of this binary is contested, in both the work of Collins and that of other Black feminist theorists. In particular, Wynter, in her conception of bios-mythoi, disrupts the bifurcation of humans as biological on the one hand and cultural on the other.

She suggests instead that because humans are simultaneously biological *and* cultural, then all natural processes are, in fact, conditioned by social coding that impacts the working of mind, body, and soul.³² Fundamentally, Wynter disrupts the notions of binaries, ones that would require us to understand the physical body in absence of culture and/or the cultural modes of someone in absence of their physical body. In doing so, she disrupts category itself.

Steeped in a rigorous engagement with the scholarship of Wynter, McKittrick draws on her background as a geographer to provide a transformational heuristic for understanding boundaries of difference, which move beyond the binary. McKittrick suggests that understanding Black being requires an acknowledgment that the spaces where Black diasporic beings perform their identities are and have been continually shaped by white European practices of domination over Black bodies and psyches, as exemplified in the case of Black Canadian womanhood.³³ For Black women then, the condition of Blackness requires an evolving reimagining of self and space beyond the binary of Canadian versus “other” to make oneself legible within structures meant to erase Black humanness. Finally, Hartman challenges the notion of Black womanhood as “outside the gendered universe” by arguing that the juxtaposition of the enslaved woman’s condition to that of white femininity “becomes a descriptive for the social and sexual arrangements of the dominant order rather than an analytic category.”³⁴ In each of these accounts, it is through Black womanhood that we can come to know the shape of the world around us.

In language research, Black women have been especially dedicated to exploring the intersections of race, gender, class, and whatever other categories of opposition are used to create boundaries of difference. Take, for example, June Jordan’s “Report from the Bahamas,” in which she describes a “consciousness of race, class, and gender as [she] notice[s] the fixed relations between these other Black women and [herself].”³⁵ Jordan describes the connection between herself and a white Jewish student who find common ground in a shared love and dedication to the “forceful” survival of their own marginalized language varieties, Yiddish and Black English.³⁶ Jordan notes both the moment she and her white student become symbolically aligned in regard to their relationships with these languages and when they were symbolically torn apart due to a class positionality, which placed the Jewish student and Jordan’s own Black son in direct opposition on the issue of federal aid programs for minority students. Thus, a linguistic minority status alone could not account for experience, which ultimately drew Jordan back to a consciousness of race and class. Jordan’s “report” is just one of several examples revealing an impossibility of language exploration without an account of intersecting social modes of being.

Though not always explicitly stated as rooted in Black feminist thought, much of the work of Black women linguists has similarly broken down categorizations

that have been undertheorized by dominant disciplinary paradigms that have privileged the speech of men. Sociolinguist Tracey L. Weldon has made important arguments about how the speech of the African American middle class has been undertheorized and, as a result, left a gap in our understandings of Black language.³⁷ Sociolinguists Shelome Gooden and Jennifer Bloomquist's work on the lower Susquehanna Valley and nearby Pittsburgh complicates our understandings of Black language as an urban phenomenon, showing how speakers construct Black identity in an area that is considered rural and white.³⁸ In her work on African American women's literacy and language, sociolinguist Sonja Lanehart has demonstrated that African American womanhood is constructed differently and results in more complex relationships to language than does African American manhood.³⁹ In our own work, we have shown how class pressures caused by gentrification complicate the traditional narrative of the urban Black speaker and the complications of one-to-one mapping of language and race for diasporic Black subjectivities.⁴⁰ And Anne H. Charity Hudley's work applies understandings of African American language to the inherently feminist liberatory work of making room for Black voices in educational settings where they have historically been marginalized.⁴¹

An exemplary scholar taking up the work of Black feminist raciolinguistics is semiotician Krystal A. Smalls. Through close investigations of how language creates meaning, Smalls reveals a model for how interdisciplinary reading across fields such as Black feminist studies, Black anthropology, Black geographies, and Black linguistics can result in expansive and inclusive worldmaking. Smalls's work is useful in showing how raciolinguistics expands and advances Black feminist thought that has been instrumental in critiquing colonial power structures. In particular, Smalls positions semiotics as a methodological heuristic for meaning-making about race, gender, and ultimately the structure of society. Her theorization of raciosemiotics at its core aims to understand the ways that signs (that is, the combination of referent, psychological indexes of that referent, and symbols that represent that referent) and the body coconstruct with race, ultimately revealing processes of semiosis, racialization, and racism.⁴² In her own estimation, the semiotics of race explored by Black scholars such as Geneva Smitherman, John Baugh, and Arthur K. Spears has allowed the field of semiotics to advance beyond the traditional call for a grounding in historical contexts to interrogate and interpret the processes for meaning-making by different people.

Much like earlier scholarship of language and gender, semiotics has long considered structures of power. Nonetheless, by juxtaposing theorization of the body by Black feminist scholar Hortense Spiller against that of Black sociologist Frantz Fanon, Smalls expertly demonstrates the ways a racial frame without an intersectional lens results in the further erasure of Black women. Scholars in allied

fields such as H. Samy Alim, Angela Reyes, and Paul Kroskrity describe Smalls's contribution to linguistic theorizations, noting that she "contributes to a more in-depth understanding of the role of racial subjectivity in semiotic mediation by introducing a historico-racial schema to semiotic theory, effectively denaturalizing the white body/subject as the default 'human' in semiotic models."⁴³ In other words, Smalls's use of Black feminist praxis and sociohistoric contexts calls explicit attention to the ways binary categories themselves come to be. Alim, Reyes, and Kroskrity's description points to Smalls's dedication to incorporating Black feminist musings on the concept of "human" as explored by scholars such as Wynter and Hartman, whose work we have described above, as well as scholars such as Hortense Spillers and Judith Butler, who she engages throughout her work.⁴⁴ Smalls relies on Black feminist theory to move beyond white hegemonically positioned theorizations, but also beyond Black theorizations that may fail to consider Black womanhood. So, raciosemiotics is not the adaptation of critical theorizations by top semiotics scholars, but rather the layering of theories through the introduction of Black studies and then Black feminist studies, which again allows for the dismantling of oppositional binaries that are often at the center of power formations.

In the last component of a raciolinguistic perspective, as explained by Rosa and Flores, the struggle for social change must move away from investigations of the behaviors of racialized subjects to an investigation of the dominant ideologies that permeate institutions in which these subjects perform themselves.⁴⁵ The contestation of racial and linguistic power formations rests in the ability to incorporate analyses of broader political and economic processes with those of racial and linguistic mappings onto specific populations. It is here where a Black feminist praxis is useful and necessary; and it is in this space where scholars have the potential to achieve the social justice goals of their research. While scholarship on African American language offers insight into Black womanhood at the intersection of language and social category, linguists have recently begun to engage critically with Black feminist theory and intersectionality explicitly.⁴⁶ Early- and mid-career Black scholars such as Tasha Austin, Uju Anya, and the authors of this essay have exemplified how Black feminist praxis and raciolinguistics can revolutionize the ways we engage social science research.⁴⁷ Ultimately, it is through the engagement of these intersections of language, race, and the body that understandings of social structures become clear.

While this review of Black feminist raciolinguistics is not exhaustive, it provides insight into how the understanding of language can and should be implicated in analyses of the social realities of our interactive contexts. Drawing on the work of scholars who take up what we have defined as Black feminist raciolinguistics, we argue that one must engage interdisciplin-

arity in ways that allow us to account for sociohistorical contexts, systemic power structures, and processes of marginalization. Language and race, inextricably linked and mediated, are both central to understanding the ways that power structures have been defined globally. Attempts to ignore race undoubtedly reify race, and attempts to ignore language fail to recognize the mutability and contextual nature of power structures and the ways they are often invisibly mediated. We must continue to contest the oppositional categorizations that exist as a result of colonial formations of power.

Truly liberatory scholarship can and must recognize the ways that language is implicated in the intersecting and overlapping consequences of social categorization. Investigations of language, race, gender, sexuality, and social status can and must be complicated beyond human as object, product, or category. Critical studies help us to interrupt the thingification of human performance of self. We thus urge scholars to integrate Black feminist raciolinguistics into their critical analyses of social constructs. In this way, we will be able to complicate and dismantle essentialized notions of the human.

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ENDNOTES

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Asian American Racialization & Model Minority Logics in Linguistics

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With increased discussions of racial justice in academia, linguistics has had to contend with long-standing issues of inequality. We contribute to these conversations by considering historical and contemporary racializing tactics with respect to Asians and Asian Americans. Such racializing tactics, which we call model minority logics, weaponize an abstract version of one group to further racialize all minoritized groups and regiment ethnoracial hierarchies. We identify three functions of model minority logics that perpetuate white supremacy in the academy, using linguistics as a case study and underscoring the ways in which the discipline is already mired in racializing logics that differentiate scholars of color based on reified hierarchies. We urge language scholars to reject a superficial multiculturalism that appropriates embodied difference while perpetuating injustices under an inherently white supremacist framework. For those dedicated to greater racial justice in the discipline, we offer actions to critically reflect on and help dismantle existing racializing logics.

Despite popular understandings of the so-called model minority as a simple set of stereotypes, scholarship in Asian American studies has shown that the invocation of Asians as a model minority functions as a relationally racializing tactic that reinforces white supremacy on multiple scales.¹ Asian Americans have historically been racialized relative to the imagined Black-white racial dichotomy in the United States; thus, their treatment as a model minority reifies ideologized racial hierarchies and obfuscates the ways that racialization processes are mutually constitutive of one another.² Following scholars who conceptualize the model minority as an inherently relational concept, we use the term *model minority logics*, a decision that both rejects the flattening of racialization to a series of stereotypes and refuses the strategic positioning of Asians for the furthering of white supremacy. By model minority logics, we mean the racializing tactics whereby the model minority – an abstraction of minoritized groups whose relationship with the nation-state becomes historically resignified – is weaponized to further racialize all minoritized groups and regiment ethnoracial hierarchies.

Model minority logics are laid bare when institutions of higher education leave the work of racial equity to minoritized individuals under a framework of “inclusion,” uncritically defined. In the study of language, this tactic obscures the material and psychological ways that racialization pervades our places of work and training by reinforcing the quotidian mechanisms of white supremacy. For the purposes of our discussion, we focus on three functions of model minority logics as they relate to the racialization of Asian Americans in linguistics. First, model minority logics position Asian Americans as socially proximal to whites.³ Second, they strategically weaponize the racial visibility of Asian Americans and other minoritized groups by contrasting these groups’ respective historical and contemporary struggles for social equality as discrete and disconnected. Finally, they define inclusion in extremely narrow terms: namely, through numerical counting and neoliberal academic success.⁴ In defining these functions, we underscore not only the implications for how Asian American linguistic practices are studied (or not), but also the sociopolitical stakes of eschewing a superficial multiculturalism whereby “justice” is always conditional and relegated to a distant future.

In linguistics, minoritized language varieties and the people who use them are frequently argued to be “included” if they merely appear in a syllabus, a course catalog, or a research project.⁵ Sociolinguistic research, in particular, has tended to rely on distinctiveness-centered models whereby language varieties are ascribed to specific and discrete groups of people.⁶ Yet this process is itself driven by a specific linguistic ideology, one that often conflates nonhegemonic language varieties with racial visibility. The result is that the linguistic practices of groups perceived to lack a distinct “ethnolect,” including Asian Americans, remain undertheorized. Indeed, Asian American language use has received little attention from linguists; furthermore, the theorization of racial and ethnic varieties of English in the United States – specifically, what counts as legitimate language – is in need of radical reconsideration.⁷ After all, the assumption that a particular group must use a corresponding variety effectively homogenizes racialized groups and often obscures the way people actually use language. An examination of the historical and contemporary racialization of Asian Americans thus reveals how their perceived language use – and the study thereof – continues to be animated by hegemonic ideologies that reify a white listening subject and hence reinforce white supremacist frameworks that racialize groups unevenly.⁸

We begin by offering some contextualization for our collective musings that inspired and informed this essay. In January 2021, the Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), the largest and perhaps most important academic conference for linguists, featured the most programming by Asian and Asian American linguists in its history, including some of the first panels on interdisciplinary approaches to studying Asian and Asian American linguistic practices. Although the meeting was virtual, it had originally been scheduled to take place

in San Francisco, a city of historical significance to Asian migration to the United States and the birthplace of the nation's first school of ethnic studies.⁹ Among our various panels, we organized a special session entitled "Room at the Table: Locating Asian Identity in Linguistics and the LSA," featuring crossdisciplinary and intergenerational scholarship.

This session was long overdue, like other perpetually late discussions of racial justice in linguistics.¹⁰ Our collaboration was motivated by the need to continue critical conversations surrounding race as a social reality that affects our lives within and beyond academia. Prior to the session, there were few, if any, spaces for us to openly discuss our racializing experiences as Asian American linguists. Especially given the exigencies of global events unfolding in 2020 and 2021, events that led to increased threats and violence against Asian Americans, we craved community and solidarity, not only to share the latest research, but to have sustained conversations about Asian American linguists' racial positioning within our field. We wanted Room at the Table to lay the groundwork for a scholarly coalition of Asian American linguists within and beyond the LSA.

Ultimately, the session unearthed more questions than answers, as well as disagreements among participants. Who, exactly, is included in "Asian America"? Within linguistics, why is racial inclusion seen as primarily an issue for sociolinguists, and doubly so for sociolinguists of color, and why do some linguists push back against issues of social justice as "not linguistics"? In the months that followed, we held introspective critiques and discussions about our event. Crucially, we asked, what forms of belonging were we invoking when calling for "room at the table"? Did the session take a step toward dismantling dominant tropes that racialize, and thus harm, Asian Americans, or did it merely perpetuate them by creating another siloed space for marginalized scholars? Notably, the metrics for racial diversity used by the LSA in 2021 collapse important differences among Asian groups: Asian and Pacific Islander members are considered one large demographic category, with no accounting for the axes of difference of nationality and ethnicity, let alone disability, gender, sexuality, and class. Besides the shortcomings of this kind of ethnoracial classification, the Linguistic Society of America neglected to amplify our numerous programs, including those entities within the organization explicitly dedicated to uplifting minoritized scholars and their work. For us, the unresolved questions on Asian racialized experiences in linguistics that emerged from our Room at the Table session revealed how we are racialized as "the model minority" and at times erased altogether in the discipline.

Amid our conversations, we witnessed and grieved tremendous violence and loss, including assaults on Asian people in the United States and globally in the wake of COVID-19 and the racialized and gendered violence of the March 2021 shooting in Atlanta, Georgia.¹¹ These episodes of violence reverberated in our communities, and we incurred additional violence through institutional and in-

terpersonal silences regarding them, which forced us to reckon with the (de)valuation of our work and our very selves within our own discipline. Thus, we write with deep skepticism toward the dominant models of inclusion in the neoliberal academy, which have repeatedly failed us, and we assert the urgency of theorizing Asian American racialization in the midst of both spectacular and everyday violences.

We also write as Asian Americans, a label we acknowledge as fraught and in need of constant problematizing. Our decision to use this term here is both an insistence on its historical signification of political unity and a refusal to foreground our ethnic or other affiliations, lest we reproduce ahistorical understandings of racialized groups and unduly personalize our critiques of the discipline.¹² Furthermore, while our ethnic identities and the histories they represent are importantly diverse, these cannot be known *a priori* by readers. Given the long-standing disregard for the histories of minoritized peoples in the United States, coupled with the pervasiveness of hegemonic ideologies about Asians in the academy, we cannot assume readers will take stock of each author's multiple positionalities, the histories they index, and these histories' varied, fraught, and ongoing relationships to U.S. empire. Scholars of Asian American studies have critiqued not only the shifting historical terms of inclusion but also the obfuscation of violence by way of that very same inclusion. Put differently, inclusion of some Asian Americans becomes a proxy for other forms of exclusion, both of Asian Americans and of other minoritized subjects.¹³

We thus present this essay as a holistic product of conversations, not of individually produced parts. In the sections that follow, we detail the historical formation of the model minority trope, discuss its pervasiveness in the study of language, and provide some productive paths toward disentangling our discipline from dominant frameworks that continue to racialize and marginalize us.

Asian Americans' marginal and conditional existence in the United States has been shaped by the cyclical and interdependent reinventions of yellow peril and model minority discourses. With historical origins tracing back to centuries-old Orientalist imaginaries, yellow peril discourse emerges from a violent nineteenth-century white populist backlash against Asian migrant laborers throughout the Americas and projects a racialized Asian figure that is diseased, treacherous, and perpetually foreign.¹⁴ The creation of this threatening yellow body laid the foundations for modern U.S. citizenship and immigration laws and this figure was further repurposed for the circulation of American military propaganda, which helped justify the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.¹⁵ Having emerged from the world wars as a definitive global superpower, the United States emboldened its imperial campaign throughout Asia and the Pacific while declaring a cold war against communist states. Along

with this new American self-image as a global savior and perpetuator of free and liberal capitalist democracy emerged the figure of the good and passive Asian subject: the model minority.

To bolster the image of its imperial project as benevolent, the United States resignified its historical relationship to Asian subjects both domestic and abroad through a series of key legislative acts. The 1965 Hart-Celler Act abolished national origins quotas, and the Refugee Act of 1980 institutionalized refugee resettlement in the United States, leading to a mass increase in migration from across Asia.¹⁶ Importantly, the 1965 legislation systemically privileged family reunification and professional and skill-based labor, and thus previously dominant racial formations of Asians in the United States – as marginal workers, suspicious foreigners, and the like – were quickly eclipsed by new ones. The demographics of Asian America shifted in dramatic ways that appeared to validate their image in the media as self-reliant, highly educated, and apolitical. Previously antagonized as political enemies or expendable laborers, select Asian groups became the face of the ethnic minority who had “made it” within American society despite historical injustices. This discourse additionally came to be employed to dismiss and disparage civil rights protests spearheaded by Black Americans alongside their Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian allies. Yet even as these newer model minority discourses gained public traction, the specter of the yellow peril and other Orientalist tropes persisted in casting Asian Americans as perpetually foreign threats of dubious loyalty. Exclusion and vilification of entire groups have occurred repeatedly in the decades since, including acts of violence and accusations of terrorism against people racialized as being of Middle Eastern, North African, and South Asian descent following the 9/11 attacks, anti-Asian hate crimes in the wake of COVID-19, and the U.S. Department of Justice’s China Initiative, which falsely accused Chinese researchers of espionage.¹⁷

The ideological positioning of Asian Americans as “honorary whites” is based on selective and heavily skewed images of Asian American economic and educational achievements that circulate across institutional and dominant media channels. Sociologist Mia Tuan’s foundational study showed how different Asian American communities strategically articulate their identities with respect to institutional whiteness.¹⁸ Two early examples of Asians arguing for white status in U.S. legal cases – *Ozawa v. United States* and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* – point to the historical connections of whiteness to legal personhood, citizenship, and material advancement.¹⁹ Both *Ozawa* and *Thind* were ultimately determined to be legally nonwhite on the basis that they did not conform to whiteness as it was “popularly understood,” decisions that reveal the institutionalized discursive processes through which whiteness is made unavailable to certain bodies in order to maintain white supremacy.²⁰

In the context of contemporary higher education, model minority logics invisibilize Asian-raced bodies by approximating them with whiteness while exaggerating their racial visibility as evidence of campus diversity.²¹ The notion that students of Asian descent are sufficiently represented on college campuses often relies on the practice of problematically lumping together different ethnic groups, economic backgrounds, and national statuses when gathering demographic statistics.²² Even more egregiously, the “Asian” category in many campus climate surveys includes groups with different racialized histories and relationships to institutions of higher education, such as “Middle Eastern” (when not categorized as white), “Pacific Islander,” and “international.”²³ This aggregation results in a picture of satisfied Asian American students – alongside white students, who are consistently the most satisfied in campus climate surveys – while downplaying race-based marginalization and the need for any specialized resources. Numbers are used to account for campus climate as well as to establish eligibility for the federal designation of “Minority Serving Institution” and, hence, increased federal funding. Following the logic that numbers equate diversity, universities frequently use promotional material featuring racialized bodies.²⁴ Thus, while numbers are used to erase diversity across Asian students’ experiences by collapsing ethnic difference, a visual emphasis on embodied difference fortifies an illusion of institutional diversity and inclusion.

The racial positioning of Asians as honorary whites fuels linguistic ideologies whereby second- and later-generation Asian Americans are seen as linguistically and culturally assimilated to middle-class white norms. Moreover, racial ideologies that construct Asian Americans as model minorities who approximate whiteness are linked to language ideologies that imagine Asian Americans as necessarily speaking “Standard English” – itself an ideological construct – and lacking a racially distinct variety of English.²⁵ By the same token, Asians who speak other ethnolectal varieties are frequently seen as engaging in linguistic and cultural appropriation, if not linguistic minstrelsy.²⁶ Such linguistic processes cannot be divorced from broader processes of Asian racialization in the United States.

We frequently find evidence of such racial positioning in linguistics departments and professional organizations when Asian students are not considered “underrepresented” in professionalization activities, at departmental events, and even by granting agencies geared explicitly toward students of color. For example, a diversity workshop at an elite research university, billed as supporting underrepresented and marginalized students, identified its groups of interest as “Black, Brown, and international.” Besides the wholesale omission of Indigeneity, this language performs various types of erasure simultaneously: the disparate needs of different kinds of international students, the needs of Asian students who are not international, and the overlapping identities of some Asian students, who may also identify as Black and/or Brown. The explicit omission of Asian Amer-

ican students reproduces the erroneous notion that this group is sufficiently represented and resourced, like their white peers. Such language in antiracist efforts in our field only fuels the systemic exclusion of Asian bodies through which white supremacy maintains its hegemony.

Moreover, the treatment of Asians as honorary whites necessarily collapses the difference between Asian international and Asian American students. Despite these groups' differences and similarities (not to mention individuals who do not fit neatly into either category), national status does not prevent the racialization of Asians. Additionally, Asian Americans are frequently recruited to take part in xenophobic practices against Asian immigrants through differentiating and distancing tactics such as the creation of "fresh off the boat" stereotypes and the policing of "nonstandard" language practices, even as the racialization of Asian nationals continues to affect Asian Americans.²⁷ In higher education, Asian students are frequently characterized as bookish and overly competitive, and Asian international students in particular are represented as culturally disfluent hordes, a framing that renews yellow peril discourses of old.²⁸ Such pervasive xenophobic comments about, open suspicion of, and discomfort with Asian international students – especially, in recent years, Chinese students – shifts the blame onto students, rather than onto the decades-long project of accelerated privatization and commercialization of institutions of higher education.²⁹

From its earliest beginnings, the figure of the model minority has made and remade Asian bodies into perpetually imminent threats. As we have noted, Asian students are strategically and often intentionally rendered either hypervisible or invisible within academic institutions in order to fulfill particular white hegemonic narratives. The construction of white public spaces (such as in schools) is contingent on the processes through which non-white bodies are made invisible, yet made hypervisible when they transgress normative white expectations of belonging.³⁰ Thus, the (in)visibility of racialized Asian bodies depends on the situated context in which they are evoked. Within racializing discourses, everyday activities such as studying for a test or playing a musical instrument are constituted and denaturalized as alien or strange when carried out by Asian subjects.³¹ In performing such denaturalized activities, Asian students are then fundamentally made hypervisible as a model minority. In sum, the racialization of Asians in the United States relies on the discursive construction of exceptional figures like the model minority, whose visibility shifts based on the needs of white supremacy.

On one hand, the model minority is frequently invoked to signify a rosy portrait of American multiculturalism and class mobility, thus denying U.S. institutional culpability in systemic anti-Black racism. On the other hand, the model minority readily shifts into a threat to whiteness when Asian bodies are perceived as

too exceptional and too numerous, as exemplified in cases of suburban whites positioning their new Asian American neighbors as toxic and unwelcome, or complaints of the over-encroachment of Asian bodies on college campuses.³² Tenuous yet evocative, the figure of the model minority exemplifies how perceived racial visibility in academic spaces becomes a powerful and quantifiable device for institutional actors to reaffirm a white supremacist hierarchy, in particular through the essentialist logics of affirmative action and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. One of the ways racial visibility is weaponized is through the tokenization of Asian faculty, who, like other faculty of color, are often given a heavier burden to serve, mentor, educate, and succeed compared with their white colleagues. Faculty of color who experience tokenism tend to respond to their situations using various strategies of (in)visibility, including socially withdrawing from their colleagues in order to cope with negative environments, working harder to counter their experiences of exclusion, and disengaging completely from their research.³³ Moreover, tokenized professors, especially women of color, may feel a disproportionate amount of responsibility and substantial social pressure to serve as *de facto* role models for students of color, an unspoken labor that is rarely included in job descriptions and seldom contributes to one's tenure and promotion portfolio.³⁴

Meanwhile, Asian and Asian American graduate students in linguistics are frequently rendered hypervisible when recruited to participate in extractive research that continues a long history of colonial linguistic projects: this is the double-edged sword of belonging to a minoritized community.³⁵ For example, it is not uncommon for non-Asian mentors and faculty to advise their Asian and Asian American graduate students to study a particular language or linguistic phenomenon based on their perceived ethnolinguistic connection to the language community. In these cases, the junior scholar's actual field of study, research interests, and ethnic background are neglected in the face of their advisor's agenda. Crucially, instances in which Asian Americans are invisibilized, hypervisibilized, or tokenized due to their racial background are never simply isolated interpersonal conflicts, but a fundamental part of the construction of broader racial hierarchies in the United States. More than just regrettable incidents of individual stereotyping, these microaggressions contribute to a framework of systemic and strategic structural exclusion that began centuries ago and continues today.

The weaponized positioning of Asian students' bodies in the mainstream media additionally attests to the model minority logics already at play in higher education. That is to say, the ideological perception of Asian Americans as the model minority precedes any one discursive event in which it is reproduced and made communicable. These discourses are then institutionally privileged and amplified by school boards, educational authorities, and media outlets, as notably demonstrated by the ongoing national controversy over affirmative action.³⁶ Within mainstream discourses, Asian Americans are essentialized and predeter-

mined as model students while their own voices and perspectives are simultaneously silenced and erased.³⁷ Hence, the media portrayal of a highly selective group of Asian Americans becomes a proxy for all Asians' positionality in the academy. This ideological work flattens inter- and intragroup differences among Asians, and also pits Asian Americans against other minoritized subjects.³⁸ If whiteness is the standard for inclusion in the academy, and its ideological counterpart, Blackness, a signifier of exclusion in the academy, Asian American experiences of racialization demonstrate that inclusion is often fraught and conditional.

Moreover, racialized perceptions about Asian Americans refract onto ideologies about Asian American language use and linguistic practice in general. Fundamentally, contemporary conceptualizations of race and language in the United States come from a dynamic process of conaturalization that regiments social formations and maintains white supremacy.³⁹ The overdetermination of racial visibility in and through language accordingly relies on entrenched racial formations, recognizable and typified in figures such as the perpetual foreigner or the model minority. These seemingly conflicting forms of racialization of Asian Americans underscore an unsettling raciolinguistic tension: that Asian Americans are treated in some instances as non-English-speaking foreigners and in others as "linguistically white," inauthentic, or deficient speakers of Asian languages, especially when measured against "real" native speakers.⁴⁰ In essence, raciolinguistic ideologies about Asian Americans as speakers of accented or "broken" English, Yellow English, or of only Asian languages draw substantially from the social positioning of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners.⁴¹ At the same time, perceptions about Asian Americans as assimilated speakers of "standard" American English depend on the racialized image of Asian Americans as honorary whites. The linguistic practices of Asian Americans are simultaneously perceived as sufficient yet deficient, authentic yet inauthentic.

These paradoxes not only reveal the discrepancies within essentialist logics of language and race, but also point to the partiality and subjectivity through which raciolinguistic ideologies emerge and are strategically employed across social contexts. Within the discipline, such tensions shape the way Asian American language is studied while the weaponization of (in)visible language behavior in the project of racialization has ramifications in the broader context of academia as well. The linguistics of Asian America is consequently a necessary locus for a critical examination of race and racialization, including interrogating the overdetermination of already racialized embodied markers and other ostensibly visible cues.

Finally, model minority logics depend on, and in turn reify, a narrow version of inclusion that relies on numerical representation and neoliberal valuation. As argued above, Asians are linked to whiteness through their relatively large numbers on some campuses, a form of representation that is legible to uni-

versities through the terms of institutional diversity and inclusion.⁴² However, as we have also discussed, the accounting and aggregating of bodies is a mechanism by which Asian bodies are invisibilized. As scholars of critical race studies, ethnic studies, and cultural studies have noted, pushing for numerical diversity reflects the liberal multiculturalism of higher education, not the radical forms of diversity and challenges to hegemonic epistemologies championed by student movements of the 1960s and 1970s.⁴³ By treating greater numbers as the ultimate goal of inclusion, institutions flatten the differences between historically marginalized groups and mask intragroup needs.⁴⁴ When the term *minority* loses its valence as a signifier of ethnoracial political coalitions and becomes solely about enumeration, inclusion can be wielded to increase diversity for diversity's sake, but not to address systems of racial injury. Under this definition of *minority*, institutions and individuals alike celebrate Asians as part of a shallow neoliberal multiculturalism while denying the need to support them institutionally.⁴⁵ Some examples include decontextualized exhibitions of Asian scholars' research or highlighting the presence of Asian bodies in universities' advertising materials. Such practices have been found to position the minoritized group outside of the national collectivity and to hail multiculturalism as a consumable good while ignoring the racism that undergirds it.⁴⁶

Another related and equally narrow understanding of inclusion enabled by model minority logics involves neoliberal advancement in the form of (some) Asian American economic and academic successes, which are not the same as social equality.⁴⁷ In the context of higher education, high Asian American student enrollment numbers do not amount to greater feelings of belonging or fewer instances of racial injustice on college campuses.⁴⁸ In fact, the very trope of the model minority and its insistence on economically informed academic success has been shown to take a psychological toll on Asian American students and scholars by setting up racialized behavioral expectations while minimizing the everyday traumas inflicted upon them.⁴⁹ This reality affects how Asian Americans are treated in the classroom, as well as the kinds of teaching, research, and leadership opportunities for which they are considered. When we, the authors, have advocated for more resources and greater institutional support as Asian Americans, for instance, we have been told to be more humble and accommodating in the face of authority and hierarchy. We have also frequently been pressured to align ourselves along a single aspect of our identities (such as being a woman or being queer) at the cost of erasing our Asian identification.

In sum, linguistics maintains a façade of inclusion through the presence and labor of Asian American students and faculty, and through research practices that tokenize and essentialize them, as discussed earlier. However, the discipline has neither addressed the roots of ethnoracial exclusivity nor provided sufficient avenues of recourse for ongoing experiences of racism or institutional disenfranchisement. Displays of our talents and of the products of our labor do not solve

racism or dismantle white supremacy, but perpetuate a logic that claims that we are and will continue to be satisfied with simply being mentioned and in the room rather than by a genuine and sustained pursuit of justice and equality.

We have discussed how Asians in the United States have been rendered malleable within historical and contemporary racial formations, giving rise to model minority logics, which position Asian Americans strategically for the furthering of white supremacy and the oppression of people of color. Furthermore, we identified model minority logics as an essential racializing project for the maintenance of institutional norms. Within linguistics and the academy writ large, model minority logics ideologically position Asians in proximity to whiteness, weaponize the racial visibility of Asian-raced peoples for institutional gain, and advance narrow, uncritical definitions of inclusion. Having highlighted the ways that model minority logics have detrimental effects on Asian American linguists, we now offer some pathways to begin to disrupt these processes of racialization at the departmental and institutional levels.

First, the undertheorization of race in linguistics has left a theoretical void for understanding how language shapes and racializes Asians and Asian Americans and their communicative practices. Given its intimate links to Western colonial histories of studying the “other,” linguistics must be in meaningful conversation with scholarship on race and racism in critical race and ethnic studies and adjacent disciplines. However, we caution against simplistic appropriations of insights from studies of race into contemporary linguistics, which remains conspicuously white, U.S.-centric, and colonial. Despite sustained moves within the social sciences toward reflexive and decolonizing practices, linguistics has been slow to equip itself with the necessary tools to engage with its own complicity in histories of racism and colonialism. This failure is particularly egregious given that linguistics departments across the United States may recruit minoritized students, who are then confronted with largely inequitable conditions in academic and intellectual spaces.⁵⁰ Thus, we urge faculty to work actively and collaboratively with minoritized scholars – especially prospective and currently enrolled students – to reshape the very infrastructure of academic programs that continue to exclude and marginalize them. This work should always be done with equitable compensation. We call for continued reflexivity in the field and for a foregrounding of the whole scholar, which includes a sociopolitical interrogation of the purpose of linguistics research. Despite such steps, the inclusion of Asian American subjectivities and epistemologies must always contend with academic institutions’ propensity to subsume radical scholarship into a colonial structure of knowledge-making that ultimately reifies white hegemony.⁵¹

As linguists invested in racial justice, we must drastically improve the recruitment and retention of Asian American linguists in a way that reflects a deep under-

standing of the diversity of Asian America. As we have noted, Asians' numerical representation is often used to promote an illusion of institutional diversity. However, since numerical diversity is not synonymous with racial equity, we advocate for an approach that interrogates this version of inclusion and seeks to use alternative frameworks. Such efforts also require a thoughtful consideration of resources and their allocation in a way that does not compete with or draw false equivalencies with other minoritized groups. Departments and professional organizations should evaluate their current metrics for racial inclusion and subsequently develop or improve outreach programs for Asian Americans with active and appropriately compensated input from past and current students. Departments may also find that their undergraduate and graduate students of color are already laboring in grassroots initiatives to improve diversity and inclusion at the departmental or university level, efforts that should also be meaningfully compensated.

In the realm of mentorship, faculty would do well to consider the ways they actively invisibilize their students of Asian descent, ignore differences among groups, and lack general understanding of Asian diasporic experiences. As we have discussed, seemingly benign actions (and inactions) from institutional agents are reinstantiations of model minority logics that continue to racialize and thus harm minoritized students. We urge individuals with institutional power to consider the direct ways they might work to make Asians legible as people of color in their realms of influence and to ensure that they receive the institutional support they need. Mentorship also entails familiarity with existing campus resources for Asian students and faculty, as well as creative measures to partner with departments and campus centers to make these available to linguists. For students in particular, the dearth of Asian mentors in linguistics may be rectified in part by acknowledging that many Asian scholars study language outside the purview of what is traditionally considered linguistics; when we expand our field's horizons and strengthen interdisciplinary and collaborative scholarship, the entire discipline benefits by creating new research possibilities and opportunities for mentorship.⁵²

Even as we continue to grapple with and critique dominant frameworks of inclusion in linguistics, we ardently reject the liberal multiculturalist model in which our very embodied presence and the knowledge we produce are co-opted under the guise of diversity: a framework of inclusion that also, in and of itself, inherently excludes. We are especially wary of the ways that institutional inclusion blandly masquerades as racial justice. Instead, we look to the political project of Asian America: at once insurgent, anticolonial, and global. We thus urge the discipline to embrace a deeply relational politics rooted in historical and comparative understandings of race that refuses the interchangeability of minoritized groups. This work will require the learning and unlearning of histories that inform how we approach the study of language. We take these enmeshed histories seriously as we continue to envision a different linguistics in the pursuit of racial justice.

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Inventing “the White Voice”: Racial Capitalism, Raciolinguistics & Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

H. Samy Alim

*In this essay, I explore how paradigms like raciolinguistics and culturally sustaining pedagogies can offer substantive breaks from mainstream thought and provide us with new, just, and equitable ways of living together in the world. I begin with a deep engagement with Boots Riley and his critically acclaimed, anticapitalist, absurdist comedy *Sorry to Bother You*, in hopes of demonstrating how artists, activists, creatives, and scholars might: 1) cotheorize the complex relationships between language and racial capitalism and 2) think through the political, economic, and pedagogical implications of this new theorizing for Communities of Color. In our current sociopolitical situation, we need to continue making pedagogical moves toward freedom that center and sustain Communities of Color in the face of the myriad ways that white settler capitalist terror manifests. As we continue to theorize the relationships between language and racial capitalism, frameworks like raciolinguistics and culturally sustaining pedagogies provide fundamentally critical, antiracist, anticolonial approaches that reject the capitalist white settler gaze and its kindred cisheteropatriarchal, English-monolingual, ableist, classist, xenophobic, and other hegemonic gazes. What they offer us, instead, is a break from the assimilationist politics of the past and a move toward abolitionist frameworks of the future.*

UCLA’s Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Language and the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies’ Hip Hop Initiative invited Boots Riley to campus. Riley, the director of the critically acclaimed, anticapitalist, absurdist comedy *Sorry to Bother You*, and winner of the Sundance Institute’s highly coveted Vanguard Award, had produced a provocative work of art with far-reaching implications related to the theme of this volume: language, race, and social justice. Every scholar of race on campus was discussing the film. As a result, I invited Robin D. G. Kelley, Gaye Theresa Johnson, and Kelly Lytle Hernández, all historians and scholars of the Black radical tradition, to join me in conversation with Riley so that we might: 1) cotheorize the complex relationships between lan-

guage and racial capitalism and 2) think through the political, economic, and pedagogical implications of this new theorizing for Communities of Color.¹

Boots spent the entire day with us. Sporting a tan corduroy jacket and rocking the classic afro and sideburns he has come to be known for, he lectured masterfully, without notes, for over an hour to over three hundred undergraduate students in my course on “Culture and Communication” and fielded their questions long after the class session had ended. Then he engaged in a lively discussion with C-BLAAC, a Black graduate student group in the department of anthropology, as well as Bunche Center faculty. Later that evening, we hosted a screening of *Sorry to Bother You* to a standing-room-only crowd in the Fowler Museum, which was followed by a rich, extended dialogue with Riley. It was, quite simply, a beautiful thing to witness.²

Throughout his career, Riley has created immensely powerful works of art – from music to film – all while being in the movement struggle as an activist and organizer, taking incredible risks to both his person and his career. *Sorry to Bother You* was an instant classic, but I first became acquainted with Boots Riley through his innovative music with Oakland-based Hip Hop group The Coup back when I was a graduate student at Stanford University immersing myself in Bay-Area Hip Hop to survive the racial absurdity of life for People of Color at that elite, overwhelmingly white institution. I would meet Boots again in 2002 at Harvard University’s Hiphop Archive at the invitation of Dr. Marcyliena Morgan. Years later, after seeing how deeply involved Boots was in the Occupy Movement as a constant and vocal presence in #OccupyOakland in 2011, I invited him to speak to our students about how artists were engaging in anticapitalist resistance and helping us to imagine new futures.

I’ve learned so much from each of our engagements. When I picked him up from the hotel, I thanked him, and he said, “For what?” I told him, “For communicating better in *just two hours* what it has taken linguists decades to try to say – and we still haven’t said it nearly as well. That’s what you’ve done in *Sorry to Bother You*.” As we wound our way west on LA’s storied Sunset Boulevard, we talked about how art can be a much more powerful medium “to communicate revolutionary ideas to the people” than the academy. And yet scholars owe it to themselves and others to reach far beyond the walls of their hallowed institutions and dusty journals. Reflecting on that conversation, I think Riley was trying to make sure that, even as he acknowledged the important role of the academy, I was also acknowledging its limits, particularly with respect to its often exclusionary discourses, unimaginative means of communicating with the public, and frequent lip-service given to social impact, all of which belie a questionable theory of, and suspect commitment to, change.

Within the academy, we talked about the emerging area of raciolinguistics, our establishment of the Oxford University Press book series Oxford Studies in Language and Race, and the field of language and race

writ large, in particular how scholars of color are increasingly rejecting analyses of language that ignore race, racism, and racialization. We were shocked that, even among our more progressive white allies, many linguists who watched *Sorry to Bother You* reported being caught off guard, even disappointed, because they expected a film about “language” and instead “got a film about race and capitalism,” as if these things were mutually exclusive. When I shared this with Boots, he responded, “I guess it depends on what your definition of language is,” highlighting how most academic training in linguistics has historically preferred to deal with language as an abstract system severed from its social context, and even when that context is considered, it is a raceless one or one aligned with white normativity.³ However, as I wrote in the introduction to *Raciolinguistics*, one of our goals is to “better understand the role of language in maintaining and challenging racism as a global system of capitalist oppression.”⁴ And we can do this by “taking intersectional approaches that understand race as always produced jointly with class, gender, sexuality, religion, (trans)national, and other axes of social differentiation” used in complex vectors of oppression.⁵

This is why *Sorry to Bother You* is such an important film: It not only uses a linguistic device (“the white voice”) as its central metaphor, but it also throws into sharp relief the links between language, patriarchy, racial capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Further, the film helps viewers take a critical, social constructionist view of language and race, showing both to be social processes invented for particular purposes. In Boots’s own words, as he explained to my linguistic anthropology students, the white voice represents a “performance of whiteness that is at once in juxtaposition to what white people are told Blackness is,” as well as “racist tropes of People of Color, which... have a utility” in that they serve the interests of the capitalist elite. Last, and perhaps most important, the film highlights that anticapitalist, antipatriarchal, and anticolonial resistance necessitates the deconstruction of these social categories in order to imagine new ways of existing together in the world.

The protagonist of the film, Cassius Green (sound it out, “cash is green;” played by Lakeith Stanfield), is a Black telemarketer living in a rapidly gentrifying Oakland. Cassius is not only struggling to make ends meet, but he is also struggling to live a life that has meaning above and beyond the crushing weight of capitalism and its daily, routinized grind. In perhaps the most iconic scene of the film, Cassius’s more senior coworker Langston (played by Danny Glover) observes his poor performance and offers him some advice. It’s at this moment that Langston introduces “the white voice”:

001 | **Langston:** [*laughing at Cassius’s failure to secure a sale as a customer hangs up on him*]
002 | Hey, youngblood.

003 | Cassius: What up?
004 | Langston: Let me give you a tip. Use your white voice.
005 | Cassius: My white voice?
006 | Langston: Yeah.
007 | Cassius: Maaan, I ain't got no white voice.
008 | Langston: Oh, come on. You know what I mean, youngblood. You have a
009 | white voice in there. You can use it. It's like being pulled over by the police.
010 | Cassius: [*sarcastically*] Ohhh, nooo. I just use my regular voice when that hap-
011 | pens. I just say, "Back the fuck up off the car, and don't nobody get hurt."
012 | Langston: Alright, man, I'm just tryna give you some game. You wanna
013 | make some money here? Then read your script with a white voice.
014 | Cassius: People say I talk with a white voice anyway, so why ain't it helpin
015 | me out?
016 | Langston: Well, you don't talk white enough. I'm not talkin about Will
017 | Smith white. That ain't white, that's just proper.
018 | Cassius: Mm-hmm.
019 | Langston: I'm talkin about the real deal.
020 | Cassius: So, like [*plugging his nose with his fingers to give his voice an exaggerated*
021 | *nasal quality*], "Hello, Mr. Everett, Cassius Green here. Soooorry to boooother
022 | you." [*mocking white speech through ritualized performance*]
023 | Langston: Now, look, look, you got that wrong. I'm not talkin about soundin
024 | all *nasal*. It's like sounding like you don't have a care. You got your bills paid.
025 | You're happy about your future. You're about ready to jump into *your* Ferrari
026 | out there after you get off this call. Put some real [*voice gets breathy*] breath in
027 | there, breezy like, "I don't really need this money." You've never been fired,
028 | only laid off. It's not really a white voice. It's what they *wish* they sounded
029 | like. So, it's like, what they think they're *supposed* to sound like. Like this,
030 | youngblood, [*Langston performs the magical white voice*] "Heyyy, Mr. Kramer,
031 | this is Langston from Regal View. I didn't catch you at the wrong time,
032 | did I?"
033 | Cassius: [*looking back at Langston, stunned into silence as the scene fades*]⁶

The dialogue between Cassius and Langston makes it clear that the white voice is not merely what some folks refer to as "sounding white." In lines 016–017, Langston states that he is not referring to Black people who speak "standard English," or even those that speak in ways that are palatable to white folks ("I'm not talkin about Will Smith white. That ain't white, that's just proper"). Later, we also see that the white voice that Langston is referring to is not to be mistaken with ritualized, comedic mockeries of white speech, which have been performed by Black comedians and others for decades.⁷ So the white voice, then, is not what Cassius performs in lines 020–022 when he plugs his nose and speaks with an exaggerated nasal quality.

If the white voice doesn't refer to these common speech events, then what does it refer to? As Langston explained to Cassius in line 009, it's the voice that many

People of Color use when being “pulled over by the police,” that everyday (yet soul-murdering) transformation of bodily comportment, facial expressions, and language that some of us perform to “help” white police officers see us as human. We draw on every ounce of our accumulated cultural capital and perform a version of whiteness that most white officers themselves do not even possess. We develop additional routines as well. For me, it was “accidentally” pulling out my Stanford University ID card instead of my driver’s license, which helped me on some occasions (I did it every single time I was pulled over – sometimes they got mad, sometimes they softened a bit, but I know enough to know that it was never a guarantee of safety or equitable treatment under the law). I wasn’t mocking whiteness, nor was I performing “whiteness” as verbal artistic realism. Instead, I was creating abstract verbal art, giving them what they themselves *thought* they sounded like, or perhaps *aspired* to sound like. Langston explains this brilliantly, and quite humorously, in the key passage of the excerpt (lines 023–029):

Now, look, look, you got that wrong. I’m not talkin about soundin all *nasal*. It’s like sounding like you don’t have a care. You got your bills paid. You’re happy about your future. You’re about ready to jump into *your* Ferrari out there after you get off this call. Put some real [voice gets breathy] breath in there, breezy like, “I don’t really need this money.” You’ve never been fired, only laid off. It’s not really a white voice. It’s what they *wish* they sounded like. So, it’s like, what they think they’re *supposed* to sound like.

I’ll return to this aspirational whiteness below. Later, we see that Cassius begins using the white voice and experiencing some serious success. In fact, his employers at Regal View are ecstatic with his improved job performance. However, Cassius goes above and beyond simply using the white voice. He references stereotypically white cultural touchstones and uses intonation associated with white Americans, while using slang associated with Black Americans or at least having originated with Black speakers [“holla, holla, holla, hollaaaaaa!”]. Humorously, he sometimes juxtaposes this slang while describing himself engaging in stereotypically white activities (“Tim, I wanna *chop it up* more, but I gotta get to my *squash game*. [Then rapidly follows with] Was that Visa or MasterCard?”), increasing his sales numbers.

In the film, we see that his white customers also use slang associated with Black folks, even if outdated, like, “Booyah!” In one scene, Cassius Green and his white customer jointly construct hypermasculinity through use of Black slang in discussing how the customer’s acquisition of the merchandise that Cassius is selling will lead to sexual intercourse with a desirable woman. But, importantly, it’s not only his white voice that’s helping him achieve success. Cassius is also employing slang associated with Black folks in ways that might confirm stereotypical ideas about Blackness in the white imagination: that is, Black men and Black sexual prowess. Ultimately, the use of the white voice has such success because it simul-

taneously alleviates white fears about Blackness (Cassius is later introduced to the CEO, “It’s OK, he’s friendly”) and confirms white stereotypes about Black people – in this case, providing a patriarchal “bonding moment” for these two men.

Cassius’s “success” earns him a promotion to “power caller,” but he’s no longer selling magazine subscriptions. He’s now selling arms and human beings into slavery through a company named WorryFree. When Cassius meets WorryFree CEO Steve Lift, he “praises” Cassius as a “cunning racoon.” Inside Lift’s mansion, Lift is surrounded by his party guests (mostly his “groupies,” women hanging all over him), telling a story about how he killed a rhinoceros during one of his hunting trips and turned it into a trophy. He then turns to Cassius and asks, “What about you, Cash? Have you ever had to bust a cap in anybody’s ass?” As he invites Cassius to come sit down in front of him on the floor, he adds, “I wanna hear about some of that Oakland gangster shit, man. Oak Town!”⁸

As the CEO continues the litany of racist stereotypes, Cassius apologizes because he doesn’t have any “cool stories,” but the CEO insists aggressively:

034 CEO: Alright, well, I mean, give us *something*, right? These boring cunts are at
035 every single one of my parties. You’re different, man. Make an impression. At
036 least take off the white voice. And I know you can bust a rap, right?
037 Cassius: [*in his regular voice*] No, actually, I can’t, umm....
038 CEO: Bullshit! Come on, bullshit.
039 Cassius: I *can’t*, man. I mean, I can listen to rap well, but I just can’t rap. It’s
040 actually embarrassing.
041 CEO: I don’t know, I think he’s lying. I think you can rap. I think you should
042 rap. Rap! Rap! Rap! [*The CEO’s chant is now echoed by everyone in the room.*] Rap!
043 Rap! Rap! Rap! Rap! Rap! Rap! Rap! [*repeated approximately 25 times, creating an*
044 *overwhelming sense of discomfort for Cassius and even the least racially literate members*
045 *of the movie audience*].⁹

In response to the deafening chant, Cassius attempts to rap on what is now a makeshift concert stage. It turns out that he was telling the truth – he has *zero* rap skills. As he flounders in front of the guests, he tries to rhyme a lame line about drugs, which fails miserably. He looks around anxiously at his now bored white audience and comes up with a strategy. He starts chanting: “N*gga shit, n*gga shit, n*gga n*gga n*gga shit!” The crowd loves it, chants along enthusiastically, throwing their hands up in the air as if they just don’t care (the scene is now an absurd Hip Hop club concert). And so there it is. Cassius has given the CEO and his party guests *exactly* what they wanted, some real life “n*gga shit”: that is, something profoundly and stereotypically Black that would confirm all of their essentialist, racist ideas about Black people, including the profoundly reductive (and fetishizing) notion that every Black person has a “real n*gga” inside of them who

only comes out when white people aren't looking ("Bullshit. I think he's lying"). He has also given them the much-desired access to Black cultural space for their enjoyment.

Cassius has both exploited and been exploited by white desires to come into contact with the exotic masculine Black man, the gangsta Black man, the violent ("bust a cap"), Black talking ("at least drop the white voice"), Hip Hopping ("bust a rap") Black man. As the scene fades with surreal white cheers of "n*gga shit," Cassius seems to know that he has both saved his career and sold his soul to the devil. He has allowed himself to fall prey to the ultimate form of racial reductionism. Cassius is caught between performing "the white voice" and performing "n*gga shit" for white folks, both figures of the white raciolinguistic imagination. He must display his "true" Blackness, but only when it is appropriate, only when asked, and only when given permission by whites. They don't want the complexity of his Blackness, his humanity. They want what they *think* Blackness is, and they want Cassius to cosign it for them. In the end, Cassius is left with a choice that's not really a choice at all. What kinds of decisions do we make when our art is commodified, when *we* are commodified, and when our ability to supply basic necessities, such as food and housing, hangs in the balance?

As Robin Kelley would later point out in our discussion with Boots, the use of the white voice in the film carries deep, if not absurd, historical significance as well, particularly if we recall Langston's advice to Cassius:

Langston's deconstruction of the white voice slyly breaks down the principles of minstrelsy: white men in blackface adopted a black voice not as it was but as white folks imagined it to be. I do not mean the plantation dialect or the corruption of words but the intonations that come from imagining that slaves don't have a care in the world. As we have learned from the historians Eric Lott and David Roediger, minstrelsy was a product not only of hatred and fear, but also of envy. It wasn't just black bodies white men envied, but the association of blackness with sexual abandon and the rhythms of preindustrial life – with the performing rather than the laboring body, as it danced and sang. Ironically, the enslaved African – who often worked in gangs from sun up to sun down under the supervision of a driver – came to represent freedom from industrial time and discipline.¹⁰

By engaging in Black linguistic practice – that is, language use associated with Black people, such as rap or the use of certain slang – white customers and partygoers are elevated from "corny" to "cool." Meanwhile, Black users of the white voice remain in a form of suspended animation, winning limited material success but suffering severe cultural and linguistic deprecation, while staying excluded from the elite class, always in performance, forever in service to them. Their success, as demonstrated by Mr. _____ (the Black guardian of Lift's golden elevator), depends on their ability to suppress the absurdity of this state of affairs

and to ignore how their individual success depends upon the oppression of the collective.¹¹ Throughout, women remain sexual objects to be purchased by men, nothing more than adornment, degraded, humiliated, and happy about it. No resistance is shown to the CEO's misogynist comment, "These boring cunts are at every single one of my parties."

As Riley lays out his raciolinguistic vision, we come to see that all of this degradation is central to white supremacist, patriarchal, racial capitalism.¹² As Boots himself reminded me that day, "Culture comes from how we survive, and how we survive is determined by the economic system that we're in, and so you need to have a class analysis. Having a class analysis means also to understand that race and class are tied together inextricably" (and of course gender and sexuality as well). If we revisit Langston's advice to Cassius – about the white voice being aspirational – we can see more clearly that the white voice isn't merely about some performance to convince customers that he's white. For Boots, that performance highlights the links between whiteness, racism, capitalism, and (settler) colonialism. In fact, he described the function of the white voice as a voice

that maybe white people don't even have but they wish they had, think they're supposed to have. And so, it's just talking about the idea of whiteness as this idea that actually is juxtaposed with and against racist tropes of People of Color... [There's] a utility there. They say, "Look, look how savage Black folks are!" "Look how their family structure's broken!" You know, "They just don't have the drive. They don't have the tools they need to win in society. And that is something to do with *them*." And so, it's a way of explaining poverty as the bad mistakes of the impoverished.

He continued:

But the truth is this. It's that under capitalism you must have a certain amount of unemployed people... Because if you did have full employment, then every worker could demand whatever wage they wanted, because there's nobody to replace them... They need an army of unemployed people, to threaten people with jobs, with losing their jobs, to say, "We can replace you." So poverty is built into capitalism, and capitalism must have poverty. But how do you explain that to the largest section of the working class in the United States, which are white people? ... You don't... You create an Other, and you point at them, and you say, "You don't want to be like them." And so you end up having this performance of whiteness, that is, at once in juxtaposition to what white people are told Blackness is. And at the same time, this allows some white guy making \$22,000 a year in the Midwest to think that they are the middle class and identify more with the ruling class than with other people who are suffering. And so, all these racist ideas have a utility. And that's the reason they exist... They're useful.

For *Boots*, the idea of race was created and manipulated to serve European capitalist and colonial interests: “The whole reason that there is capitalism, as we have it today, was a big part of stealing labor and stealing land, and the idea of race was created to assuage the white working class in Europe, with the idea that you’re not going to be enslaved. ‘Don’t worry . . .’ Because at the time race meant species. . . . There wasn’t this idea that people in France were the same as the people in Ireland because they were white.” As Kelley pointed out in his brilliant *Boston Review* piece about the film, Riley uses the white voice to:

interrogate the privileges and poverty of whiteness. . . . Like whiteness itself, the white voice is a chimera, masking a specific class position and conveying a sense of being genuinely worry free, with no bills to pay, money in the bank, not a care in the world. This is the expectation of whiteness – an expectation many white people never, in fact, realize.¹³

Riley’s use of the white voice points to whiteness – and race – as an invention. As we see in the film, particularly when characters debate the status of Italians as white, understanding whiteness as an invention points to its inherent instability. The white voice as it’s used in the film also underscores Blackness as a figment of the white imagination. The white voice is not only what white people *think* they sound like, or think they are *supposed* to sound like, but the whole abstraction, as with whiteness itself, is set in opposition to white ideas about what they *think* Blackness is and what Black people are *supposed* to sound like.

But the real brilliance of the white voice is that it is *disembodied*. It should be clear by now that the white voice is not an actual representation of “white speech.” *Boots*’ white voice is not just a linguistic performance but a device that draws attention to the crushing system of racial capitalism. This is why the actors themselves don’t perform the white voice. To *Boots*, when Cassius speaks in the white voice, it’s “supposed to sound like an overdub to the other people around him. . . a magical voice that is coming from somewhere else.” As he explains, the reason for that is twofold:

One, often when writers have someone like a superhero have magic powers. . . it’s usually their way of saying what they think the problem is in the world, right? So we have all these superheroes whose power is that they’re strong enough to beat people up, right? And usually, that’s because apparently, the problem is poor people who are doing crimes. And that’s the big picture, that this person develops this superpower and they can stop crime. Stop people physically. And . . . if they thought that the problem was more systemic, then – and I don’t know how you just show this in a superpower – but they’d be trying to change the economic system that we’re in, right. But so, that power’s often a comment on what the problem is. And so, I wanted him to have a power that dealt with the problems . . . that you have to deal with when you have the identi-

fiers of race and being Black. So, I wanted that to not just be something that he figured out, but to have it be a magic power to say that that is a problem that people have to deal with. But I also wanted it to not be his voice. I needed it to be something that was separate from his body, something that was an idea on its own. Because as Langston, Danny Glover's character explains, it's not something connected genetically, even to white people.

In these remarks, Boots appeals to audiences to complicate the oft-heard inadequate readings of the white voice that don't explain the political-economic theory of race behind its use. As Kelley and others have pointed out, WorryFree is not only the name of the corporation selling human beings into slavery. Under this surreal scenario, human beings willingly give up life in the capitalist "rat race" to live in what are essentially prison cells with multiple bunks to a room, eating slop for sustenance, and achieving "worry-free" status with no more bills to pay or outside responsibilities. But the company's name also points to the worry-free quality of the white voice (how whites think they sound, or should sound), as well as the imagined worry-free existence of enslaved Africans. Further, if we recall Boots's comments about the invention of race to serve capitalist ends, WorryFree also points to the suggestion by imperial powers for the white European poor to remain worry-free because they wouldn't be enslaved like the "darker peoples of the earth."

The links between language, race, capitalism, and colonialism are brought sharply into focus by the character of Cassius's girlfriend, Detroit (played by Tessa Thompson), an activist and visual and performance artist and one of only two other characters in the film that uses a "white voice." The difference here is that Detroit's overdubbed white voice represents a prestigious, albeit exaggerated, British variety, as well as the "ideal" of white femininity. In the film, we notice immediately that she's talking to prospective art buyers in a voice that sounds radically different from her usual voice, including using gasps to display interest among other affectations. Later during her stunning stage performance, she appears virtually nude and encourages audience members to throw "broken cell phones, used bullet casings, and water balloons filled with sheep's blood" at her body while she continues to perform – and the movie audience either looks away or watches the grotesque scene as Detroit's patrons begin to violently hurl the items at her body.¹⁴

As Boots explained, Detroit's white voice was meant to sound more prestigious than the American white voice in order to convey the so-called sophistication of "the art world." To me, the British white voice might also function as a raciolinguistic symbol of the economic exploitation of Africa by European, capitalist, imperialist powers. It's not lost on the audience that the brutality of the European exploitation – the theft of humans and natural resources, the destruction

of lands and ways of life, the ongoing neocolonial, extractive practices by the tech industry and others – is visited upon the bodies of Black women, as represented by the physical pain endured by Detroit during her performance. Detroit’s performance conveys the idea that the destruction of Black women – from the unspeakable horrors of enslavement and genocide to the precarity of contemporary life – is the ultimate price of the white supremacist, patriarchal, racial capitalist, imperial ticket. The white voice, as a cinematic device, provokes these and other serious ideas and questions.

However, not only do oft-heard descriptions of the white voice not adequately represent the theory of race that informs Riley’s film, they also fall short in communicating the complexity of his theory of language – and, of course, that language and race are being theorized *together* throughout.¹⁵ As I shared in “Hearing What’s Not Said and Missing What Is,” white folks can and often do *invent* the linguistic practices of People of Color in ways that track neatly with the stereotypes they hold about them.¹⁶ White racial and linguistic hegemony shapes how speech is heard and interpreted through what Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa have termed *raciolinguistic ideologies*. As they point out, the “raciolinguistic ideologies of the white listening subject can stigmatize language use regardless of one’s empirical linguistic practices.”¹⁷ Just as Riley urges us to focus on the system that the abstract, disembodied white voice is meant to critique, these scholars have similarly urged us to look beyond “empirical linguistic practices” of People of Color and to the perceiving practices of whites.

Building upon research on language ideologies, and leaning on linguistic anthropologist Miyako Inoue’s powerful theorizing of what she refers to as “the listening subject,” this recent work can be seen as an effort to critique language scholarship’s focus on speaker agency and to push the theoretical pendulum back toward hearers, particularly when “the listening subject” is used to refer to hegemonic systems of power.¹⁸ Inoue’s work on gender has been taken up to consider not just how language can transform race but also how “racialized signs come to transform linguistic ones.”¹⁹ Riley’s separation of the white voice from any physical body highlights hegemonic perceiving practices as crucial to theorizing language and race. How whites hear *themselves* – and in relation to how they hear Black folks – creates both language and race in the white raciolinguistic imagination in ways that have material consequences for People of Color and, as Boots points out, poor whites.

The process of racialization – whereby race is an enduring yet evolving social process steeped in centuries of colonialism and capitalism – is central to recent linguistic anthropological approaches to language and race.²⁰ But Boots’s analysis of the white voice also echoes studies of race that have long shown race to be inextricable from histories of genocide, enslavement, apartheid,

occupation, dispossession, nationalism, capitalism, and various forms of colonialism, as well as their contemporary manifestations. Anthropologist Arthur Spears, for example, argues for studies of race and language that amplify “the macro contexts” in which they are produced, what he refers to as the “political-economic pentad”:

(1) the global system; (2) the state; (3) ideology-coercion (in practice, two sides of the same coin), for the purposes of social and resource control via regime maintenance; (4) social stratification, not simply as regards socioeconomic class but also other hierarchies of oppression [I stress the hierarchical and also the authoritarian and patriarchal nature of oppressive systems]; and (5) oppression-exploitation (also two sides of the same coin).²¹

If we read Spears together with Riley’s *Sorry to Bother You*, what becomes evident is that the terror, violence, and brutality of these systems are not only the macro contexts in which race and language are produced, but white supremacy comes to *depend* on the idea of race and, therefore, processes of racialization for its continued propagation. As anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli summarizes, racialization processes not only measure everyone else against a hegemonic norm, but analysis of racialization is “productively approached by examining not merely the emergence but the active construction of that norm as whiteness in relation to labor and economic structures and reinforced by social policies, as shown by [W. E. B.] DuBois (1947), [David] Roediger (1991), [Theodore W.] Allen (1994), [Matthew Frye] Jacobson (1998), and [George] Lipsitz (1998) among others.”²²

Thus, another point of brilliance in Riley’s use of the white voice is that language – in addition to race – is also an invention. Language is a category that continues to be taken for granted by race theorists and even some linguists and anthropologists. As with race, linguists Cristine Severo and Sinfrey Makoni urge us to take a critical perspective that shows how “languages are historically and politically invented by a complex colonial apparatus that [overlays] language, race, power, and religion in specific ways,” and that our “concepts of language should be submitted to continuous revision so that we avoid using colonial frameworks to describe and problematize historical power relations.”²³

This call for continued revision is also, in part, the power of *Sorry to Bother You*. It helps explain why I couldn’t find the words to thank Boots Riley when I picked him up at the hotel. With his artistic vision, he has not only helped us theorize the political economy of language and race more clearly, but he has given us a mandate to think more creatively about how to express those ideas. Like the path-breaking work of Geneva Smitherman in *Talkin and Testifyin’: The Language of Black America*, Riley has also urged us to think about language and race more broadly, as processes that are interconnected with political-economic systems and histories of colonial relations, yet remain unstable, and thus worth fighting against.²⁴

To illustrate the above ideas, I share this one interaction between Boots Riley and my undergraduate students that highlights the ways *Sorry to Bother You* can help us rethink the more traditional concerns of linguistics. After Boots explained that performance is inherent in how we live – “we can’t get away from performing” – one of my students asked him: “Do you believe that code-switching is inherently necessary for Black people to survive in this society?” Boots quickly replied by entirely reframing the question:

I don’t. I think that what’s inherently necessary is for us to have a movement that gets rid of the capitalist system.... For me, that’s not the question, like, “How do we survive in a terrible system?” You know, I’m like, “Well, how do we get rid of the system?” What if somebody came up with a book for how slaves can endorse slavery each day without getting killed? We’d be like, “Why are you writing that book? You need to be writing a whole different book or not writing a book, period, actually.”

Boots brilliantly shifted the object of critique away from Black people, and their linguistic practices, and toward the oppressive systems that, in one way or another, enslave or incarcerate them (the link to the abolition of the prison industrial complex is obvious). He further reframed the question in ways that point out the absurdity of assimilationist approaches, and nudged students toward the abolitionist leanings of more radical approaches. As I wrote with Geneva Smitherman, not only are conventional approaches assimilationist, they are also insidious because they require the *impossible*.²⁵ White hegemonic power doesn’t just demand that Black people learn some grammatical rules; rather, it requires that Black Americans act, talk, and sound like whites if they are to experience “success,” which is framed as readily available to them if they would just make some morphosyntactic changes (John Baugh’s 2003 research on “linguistic profiling” provides ample evidence of that fallacy).²⁶

The impossibility of the demand comes into clearer focus when we flip the question on its racist head: how many white people could pass the test of sounding “authentically” Black in order to ensure their upward mobility? Chances are that most would sound like straight-up posers unless they grew up in Black communities and/or have intimate Black friendship networks. There is little, if any, chance that a white person can “let go” of the markers of their whiteness, and even less chance of successfully securing employment, for example, if landing the job depended on one’s mastery of code-switching into Black linguistic norms. But whether or not whites can perform “Black linguistic norms” is beside the point, isn’t it? Hegemonic whiteness bolsters itself by requiring ideologies that “produce racialized speaking subjects who are constructed as linguistically deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative or innovative when produced by privileged white subjects.”²⁷ Given the above discussion of the linkages between language, race, capitalism, and colonialism, we would never, or more accu-

rately *could* never, ask this of whites. Given the machinations of power, it would appear nonsensical.

As Smitherman's work has reminded us for decades, with respect to "the oppressive ways of white folks," the problem has never been that Black people "sound" Black (a result of Black people's inventing a new language for themselves through linguistic creolization in the context of the terror of the African Slave Trade); it's that they *were* Black (that white people needed to perceive all signs of Blackness as inferior in order to justify their slavocracy).²⁸ "Suddenly, after more than three centuries on this continent, the educational and societal consensus is that Blacks have a 'language problem,'" Smitherman writes. "But wasn't nobody complainin bout Black speech in 1619 when the first cargo of Africans was brought here on the Good Ship Jesus. Yeah, that's right. Not in 1719, 1819, wasn't till bout the 1950s when it became evident that Afros was really beginning to make some economic headway in America that everybody and they Momma started talkin bout we didn talk right."²⁹

Similarly, James Baldwin wrote over forty years ago that debates about Black Language had "absolutely nothing to do with the question the argument supposes itself to be posing. The argument has nothing to do with the language itself but with the role of language. Language, incontestably, reveals the speaker." He then dropped the hammer: "The brutal truth is that the bulk of white people in America never had any interest in educating black people, except as this could serve white purposes. It is not the black child's language that is in question, it is not his language that is despised: It is his experience."³⁰ To Baldwin, the sounds that came to reference the Black linguistic history of creolization were audible reminders of a fact that most white Americans refused (and still refuse) to face: it is not the presence of the sounds, but rather, the presence of the speakers – the Black descendants of people who would have otherwise been born on the African continent were it not for the terror of enslavement – that reveals their complicity with the imperialist, white settler colonial-capitalist system that they continue to benefit from. In other words, the question was never one about Black people but about a culture and system of white greed.

Rooted in a broader political-economic analysis, Boots's raciolinguistic pedagogy is based on a linguistics of refusal that bucks the notion of "bidialectalism" (what white linguist James Sledd referred to as "the linguistics of white supremacy" as far back as the 1960s), in which white people insist on Black children's "code-switching" as a precondition for their success while white kids get to remain blissfully, if not woefully, monolingual.³¹ Boots's raciolinguistic pedagogy is not the linguistics of reform, but rather an abolitionist linguistics that might finally throw a wrench in the "push-pull" dynamics that have haunted Black folks for too long.³²

Rather than viewing questions about code-switching as an end point, Riley takes them as the *starting* point for new raciolinguistic futures. As Geneva Smith-

erman and I wrote, “By asking different kinds of questions, we can stop silently legitimizing ‘standardized English’ and tacitly standardizing ‘whiteness.’”³³ *Sorry to Bother You* pushes us in a different direction. Rather than promoting uncritical, conformist, and assimilationist models of schooling and survival, we should invest our intellectual energies in imagining and creating more egalitarian societies. As Boots explained to my students, “the best way to be engaged with the world is to change the world.” We simply cannot continue to produce future generations who believe that the only pathway to success, or even just survival, is to S.T.T.S. (“stick to the script,” the omnipresent motto of the telemarketing call center where Cassius Green was employed).

In our current sociopolitical situation, we need to continue making pedagogical moves toward freedom that center and sustain Communities of Color in the face of the myriad ways that white settler capitalist terror manifests: culturally, racially, linguistically, politically, geographically, economically, epistemically, and otherwise. As we continue to theorize the relationships between language and racial capitalism, frameworks like culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) provide fundamentally critical, antiracist, anticolonial approaches that reject the capitalist white settler gaze and its kindred cisheteropatriarchal, English-monolingual, ableist, classist, xenophobic, and other hegemonic gazes.³⁴ Like Riley, these frameworks are not interested in relegating learners’ cultural and linguistic resources as tools for advancing the learning of an “acceptable” curricular canon, a “standard” variety of language, or other so-called academic skills.

Rather, extending my approach of critical language awareness, we are interested in producing young people who can interrogate what counts as “acceptable” or “canonical,” what language varieties are heard as “standard,” and what ways of knowing are viewed as “academic.”³⁵ As I’ve been arguing for twenty years, our pedagogies must do much more than simply take students’ language into account; they must also “account for the interconnectedness of language with the larger sociopolitical and sociohistorical systems that help to maintain unequal power relations in a still-segregated society.”³⁶ Our students should be able to ask questions like: How did these perspectives come to be the dominant ones? Whose purposes do they serve? And how do they uphold white supremacist systems of racial capitalism and its efforts to produce *not* critically thinking human beings, but cheap sources of labor?³⁷

Our critical approaches are not concerned with the study of decontextualized language (recall my opening car ride conversation with Boots), but rather with the analysis of “opaque and transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language.”³⁸ Norman Fairclough argues that the job of sociolinguists should be to do more than ask, “What language varieties are stigmatized?”³⁹ Rather, we should be asking, “How –

in terms of the development of social relationships to power – was the existing sociolinguistic order brought into being? How is it sustained? And how might it be changed to the advantage of those who are dominated by it?” If educational institutions are designed to teach citizens about the current sociolinguistic order of things, without challenging that order, then our pedagogies must continue to pull away from the generally noncritical American sociolinguistic tradition. Even in our more critical traditions, we often stop at asking how language is used to maintain, reinforce, and perpetuate existing power relations. In the interest of freedom, we need pedagogies that *also* ask how language – in conjunction with all available other means – can be used to resist, redefine, and possibly reverse these relations. This approach engages in the process of consciousness-raising: that is, the process of actively becoming aware of one’s own position in the world and, importantly, what to do about it.

This process begins with mining history. Returning to my opening conversation with Boots about the academy, a critical CSP framework requires us to theorize from the “ground-up” and from the “past-forward” by recovering and reworking the suppressed pedagogies that enabled Communities of Color to survive even the most brutal of contexts. As literacy scholar Carol Lee has argued, in the contexts of genocide and enslavement – the foundational, settler colonial experiences of Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans – acts of historic and cultural resistance and “survivance” have allowed Indigenous and African-descended communities to sustain practices and belief systems (and their very lives) in the face of racialized white terror.⁴⁰ Sustaining those practices is one way we can go beyond reformist pedagogies that ask, to quote Boots, “how slaves can endorse slavery each day without being killed,” and move toward abolitionist ones that seek to change the conditions under which we live and create new, emancipatory futures. Our goal is to reimagine education not only within the context of centuries of oppression and domination, but critically, also to draw strength and wisdom from centuries of intergenerational revitalization, resistance, and the revolutionary spirit of our communities in the face of such brutality.

As I hope to have shown, following Boots’s lead, scholars should work with artists, activists, community organizations, teachers, and various “folks on the ground” (particularly those doing revolutionary work who risk both their person and their livelihoods) in order to understand the more nuanced perspectives that arise directly from the histories and experiences of marginalized and oppressed groups. Our theorizing should be led by our interactions at the grassroots level. Artists, activists, community organizers, and other social actors have much to offer academic theorists of racial capitalism, raciolinguistics, and culturally sustaining pedagogies moving forward. Like Riley’s film, our collective work is meant to disrupt, to provoke, to bother you, and like the best art, to inspire all of us to imagine – *and fight for* – new, just, and equitable ways of living together in the world.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Historian Robin D. G. Kelley writes that Cedric Robinson, the scholar most associated with the term “racial capitalism”—see Robinson’s *Black Marxism: The Making of a Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Books, 1983)—first encountered the term as it was used by European intellectuals to describe South Africa’s apartheid economics. Robinson not only critiqued Marx for his inability to account for the nature of radical movements outside of Europe, but he argued that Marx also “failed to account for the racial character of capitalism.” Kelley further explains that “Robinson challenged the Marxist idea that capitalism was a revolutionary negation of feudalism. Instead, capitalism emerged within the feudal order and flowered in the cultural soil of a Western civilization already thoroughly infused with racialism.” Capitalism and racism according to Robinson, as Kelley makes clear, “did not break from the old order, but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of ‘racial capitalism’ dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide.” Robin D. G. Kelley, “What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?” *Boston Review*, January 12, 2017, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/robin-d-g-kelley-introduction-race-capitalism-justice>. See also Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin’s 2017 edited collection *Futures of Black Radicalism*, which takes Robinson’s work as a point of entry to “consider the history and ongoing struggle against racial capitalism, from the roots of Black radical thought to a shared epistemology of the present political moment.” Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, eds., *Futures of Black Radicalism* (New York and London: Verso Books, 2017), 3.
- ² I am eternally grateful to Boots Riley and everyone, especially Stephanie Keeney Parks and Casey Philip Wong, who helped make these events happen. All quotes from Boots Riley come from our engagement with him on November 6, 2018.
- ³ Anne H. Charity Hudley, Christine Mallinson, Mary Bucholtz, et al., “Linguistics and Race: An Interdisciplinary Approach towards an LSA Statement on Race,” *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America* 3 (2018): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.3765/plsa.v3i1.4303>.
- ⁴ H. Samy Alim, “Introducing Raciolinguistics: Racing Language and Linguaging Race in Hyperracial Times,” in *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas About Race*, ed. H. Samy Alim, John R. Rickford, and Arnetta F. Ball (London: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6.

- ⁵ Arthur K. Spears, “Racism, Colorism, and Language within Their Macro Contexts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, ed. H. Samy Alim, Angela Reyes, and Paul V. Kroskrity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 47–67; and Imani Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2018).
- ⁶ Boots Riley, writer and director, *Sorry to Bother You*, Annapurna Pictures, 2018.
- ⁷ See Jacqueline Rahman, *It’s a Serious Business: The Linguistic Construction of Middle-Class White Characters by African American Narrative Comedians* (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2004).
- ⁸ Riley, *Sorry to Bother You*.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley, “Sorry, Not Sorry,” *Boston Review*, September 13, 2018, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/robin-d-g-kelley-sorry-not-sorry>. For Eric Lott and David Roediger on white envy of Blackness and how it relates to minstrelsy, see Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York and London: Verso Books, 1991).
- ¹¹ Mr. _____ is one of two other characters who use a “white voice” in the film. According to Kelley, he is a modern-day slave, who is given authority but no real power. When Mr. _____ informs Cassius that the CEO wants to meet with him, he advises Cassius: “Don’t fuck it up.” As Kelley notes, “The implication is that Black people about to ride to the top always do fuck it up—because they are unwilling to sell their souls, to shut their left eyes to the world, to accept absurdity as an inevitable consequence of the way things are.” Kelley, “Sorry, Not Sorry.”
- ¹² Robinson, *Black Marxism*.
- ¹³ Kelley, “Sorry, Not Sorry.”
- ¹⁴ Riley, *Sorry to Bother You*.
- ¹⁵ Awad El Karim M. Ibrahim, “‘Whassup, homeboy?’ Joining the African Diaspora: Black English as a Symbolic Site of Identification and Language Learning,” in *Black Linguistics: Language, Society, and Politics in Africa and the Americas*, ed. Sinfree Makoni, Geneva Smitherman, Arnetha F. Ball, and Arthur K. Spears (Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2003), 169–185.
- ¹⁶ H. Samy Alim, “Hearing What’s Not Said and Missing What Is: Black Language in White Public Space,” in *Intercultural Discourse and Intercultural Communication: The Essential Readings*, ed. Scott F. Kiesling and Christina Bratt Paulston (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), 180–197.
- ¹⁷ Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa, “Undoing Appropriateness: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Language Diversity in Education,” *Harvard Educational Review* 85 (2) (2015): 166, <https://doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149>.
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- ¹⁹ Jonathan Rosa and Adrienne Lo, “Towards a Semiotics of Racialization: Ontologies of the Sign,” paper presented at the 114th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association,” Denver, Colorado, November 2015; Jonathan Rosa, *Looking Like*

- a *Language, Sounding Like a Race: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and the Learning of Latinidad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Angela Reyes, "Inventing Postcolonial Elites: Race, Language, Mix, Excess," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 27 (2) (2017): 210–231, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12156>; and Krystal Smalls, "Race, Language, and the Body: Towards a Theory of Racial Semiotics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, ed. Alim, Reyes, and Kroskrity, 233–260.
- ²⁰ *Black Linguistics*, ed. Makoni, Smitherman, Ball, and Spears; Monica Heller and Bonnie McElhinny, *Language, Capitalism, Colonialism: Toward a Critical History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); and H. Samy Alim, Django Paris, and Casey Philip Wong, "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: A Critical Framework for Centering Communities," in *Handbook of the Cultural Foundations of Learning*, ed. Na'ilah Suad Nasir, Carol D. Lee, Roy Pea, and Maxine McKinney de Royston (Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2020), 261–276.
- ²¹ Spears, "Racism, Colorism, and Language within Their Macro Contexts," in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, ed. Alim, Reyes, and Kroskrity.
- ²² Bonnie Urciuoli, "Racializing, Ethnicizing, and Diversity Discourses: The Forms May Change But the Pragmatics Stay Remarkably the Same," in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, ed. Alim, Reyes, and Kroskrity, 110–111. See also W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part which Africa Has Played in World History* (New York: Viking Press, 1947); Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Vol. 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York and London: Verso Books, 1994); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); and George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).
- ²³ Cristine Gorski Severo and Sinfree B. Makoni, "African Languages, Race, and Colonialism: The Case of Brazil and Angola," in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, ed. Alim, Reyes, and Kroskrity, 153–154.
- ²⁴ Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986 [1977]).
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- ²⁶ John Baugh, "Linguistic Profiling," in *Black Linguistics*, ed. Makoni, Smitherman, Ball, and Spears, 155–168.
- ²⁷ Flores and Rosa, "Undoing Appropriateness," 150, emphasis mine.
- ²⁸ "The oppressive ways of white folks," in Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin*, 10. See also Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin That Talk: Language, Culture, and Education in African America* (Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2006).
- ²⁹ Smitherman, *Talkin That Talk*, 346.
- ³⁰ James Baldwin, "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?" *The New York Times*, July 29, 1979, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-english.html>.
- ³¹ James Sledd, "Bi-Dialectalism: The Linguistics of White Supremacy," *The English Journal* 58 (9) (1969): 1307–1329, <https://doi.org/10.2307/811913>.
- ³² Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin*.

- ³³ Alim and Smitherman, *Articulate While Black*, 191.
- ³⁴ Django Paris, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice,” *Educational Researcher* 41 (3) (2012): 93–97, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12441244>; Django Paris and H. Samy Alim, “What Are We Seeking to Sustain through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy? A Loving Critique Forward,” *Harvard Educational Review* 84 (1) (2014): 85–100, <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.9821873k2ht16m77>; Django Paris and H. Samy Alim, eds., *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 2017); and Alim, Paris, and Wong, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies.”
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- ³⁶ Alim, “Critical Language Awareness in the United States,” 24.
- ³⁷ Gloria Ladson-Billings, Django Paris, and H. Samy Alim, “‘Where the Beat Drops’: Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Hip Hop Pedagogies,” in *Freedom Moves: Hip Hop Knowledges, Pedagogies, and Futures*, ed. H. Samy Alim, Jeff Chang, and Casey Philip Wong (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023), 245–268.
- ³⁸ Ruth Wodak, “Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse,” in *Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. Jef Verschueren, Jan-Ola Östman, and Jan Blommaert (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995), 204.
- ³⁹ Norman Fairclough, “The Appropriacy of Appropriateness,” in *Critical Discourse Awareness*, ed. Norman Fairclough (London: Longman, 1992), 233–252.
- ⁴⁰ Carol D. Lee, “An Ecological Framework for Enacting Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy,” in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*, ed. Paris and Alim, 261–273. See also Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

Linguistic Profiling across International Geopolitical Landscapes

John Baugh

Voice recognition lies at the heart of linguistic profiling, a discriminatory practice whereby goods, services, or opportunities that might otherwise be available are denied to someone, typically sight unseen, based on the sound of their voice. The technology that faithfully recreates one's voice during phone conversations provides the basis on which nefarious, if not illegal, voice-derived discrimination occurs. These denials often go undetected because callers typically believe that the decline of their request for an apartment or a job or a loan is valid; that is, they do not necessarily assume that they were turned down because of negative stereotypes about their speech. I debunk a long-standing myth that exists among well-educated native speakers of the dominant language(s) in the countries where they live: namely, that such individuals speak without an accent. After dispelling this prevalent falsehood, I explore various forms of linguistic profiling throughout the world, culminating with observations intended to promote linguistic human rights and the aspirational goal of equality among people who do not share common sociolinguistic backgrounds.

The miracle of human speech is a double-edged sword that can be weaponized in situations when a person's speech reveals demographic information that evokes negative prejudicial reactions.¹ Alternatively, some positive benefits of linguistic profiling accrue on those occasions when people recognize speech belonging to someone who is well-known to them, or from a favored sociolinguistic background. These familiar voices tend to be viewed more positively when heard by listeners who share similar language traits. Family members who live together recognize each other's voices, seldom needing any further identification, with rare exceptions, such as an adult child who sounds nearly identical to one of their parents. A combination of biological and sociological circumstances gives rise to these familial linguistic similarities; parents typically serve as the linguistic models for their children, whose vocal tracts often match that of their mother or father.

Every child who learns to speak has no memory of doing so. One of the most difficult of all human accomplishments – becoming a fluent speaker of a language – takes place so early in life that our long-term memory is not yet fully en-

gaged.² Thus, depending on the social circumstances under which a child learns their first language, they are unlikely to comprehend the relative status (or lack of it) when viewed within the sociolinguistic totality of the speech community in which they live. Those among us who experience pathological speech disorders know well that insensitive people often mock their manner of speaking, a painful personal experience known to anyone who has ever been told, “You talk funny.” As with perceptions of beauty, the belief that someone *talks funny* is relative to the ear of the beholder.³ What may *sound funny* to one person could easily be the source of discomfort and potential discrimination to another.

Children raised in circumstances in which their parents or caregivers are well-educated, fluent speakers of the dominant language(s), wherever they may be living, frequently come to believe that they speak without an accent.⁴ These self-perceptions of accent-free speech are always wrong, but are persistent and prevalent because the dominant groups hold the reins of political power and therefore set the linguistic standard(s) by which others are judged. Some nations, like France and Spain, have official languages that are protected by scholarly academies responsible for maintaining the linguistic purity of their beloved language. In other cases, as with English, there are no established academies but rather a set of socially dominant groups who unofficially establish norms of “correctness” or “standards.”

Language academies reinforce perceptions that some people may speak a language properly, without an accent, while others who are perceived to speak with an accent are often viewed as speaking that same language improperly.⁵ From a scientific linguistic point of view, notions of proper speech and correct grammar are misnomers, perpetuated by those who seek to control the inevitable tides of linguistic change that impact all languages worldwide. Much like the imperceptible movement of the earth’s plates, language change is also constant, and dimensions of that change are frequently undetectable, while others (for example, the creation of slang or new pronoun usage) stand out as might earthquake tremors that splinter the ground under our feet.

Before one can fully appreciate the consequences of linguistic profiling, it is vital to understand that language prejudice is relative and most impactful when standing on the shoulders of ill-founded fallacies of linguistic (and racial) superiority.⁶ Thus, the weaponization of language is most formidable when wielded by members of the well-educated elite who may not fully comprehend their prejudicial reactions to others whose language backgrounds are substantially different from their own or, worse, they may indeed be aware of their linguistic privilege and use it to their personal advantage.⁷

The first discoveries related to linguistic profiling were unearthed quite by accident through calls to inquire about prospective rental properties. The National Fair Housing Alliance regularly sent housing testers to view

properties in person, frequently noting that minority housing testers routinely fared less well. These tests were expanded to include telephone calls, in which European Americans and members of American minority groups would call prospective landlords asking for appointments to visit rental properties, revealing a similar pattern of racial bias. Minority callers were denied access with far greater frequency than was the case for white callers. A group of social scientists became interested in evaluating these trends, and performed a series of experiments that confirmed the existence of linguistic profiling. The results proved that callers from different racial and linguistic backgrounds received (or didn't receive) an appointment to view a property based exclusively on the sound of their voice.⁸

Ensuing experiments went further, demonstrating that some prospective landlords used answering machines to help screen calls. In those instances, the property managers never answered their phones; all calls initially went to voice mail. Upon listening to their messages, the property managers only returned calls to white callers. In a striking contrast, Black callers – who never had the opportunity to speak with anyone – did not receive a return call.⁹ The tactic of using an answering machine to help screen calls was presumably employed to offer the perpetrators of these crimes with a defense of never having met nor even spoken to the caller. How, then, might a plaintiff prove that a defendant landlord was guilty of racial discrimination when no direct personal contact had taken place? This deniability allowed landlords to use the tactic regularly throughout the United States.¹⁰

Evidence of linguistic profiling in housing markets is not confined to the United States, but it is always based on linguistic discrimination wherever it exists. In four German cities, callers who had Turkish names were less likely to be granted an appointment to view properties than were callers with Anglo-American names. Further, the group with American names, while treated somewhat better than callers with Turkish names, had less success than callers whose names were recognizably German and who were far more likely to be given an opportunity to view rental properties.¹¹

Somewhat related to these examples of linguistic profiling, sociologists also explored differential access to homeowner's insurance. Using quite similar methods to those used by fair-housing testers, the sociologists questioned whether minority homeowners might have equal access to insurance policies; alas, they do not. A nontrivial difference between renting a property and purchasing home insurance as a homeowner stems from the fact that the majority of home-insurance policies are discussed between an agent and client by phone prior to a policy being written and sent to the homeowner. This fact intersects with other historical evidence of linguistic profiling in this arena:

If race is not a factor or insurers cannot detect race over the phone, then in the initial telephone conversation there should be no association between the race of the caller

and when the applicant is asked about the location of the home. But if the insurer can detect the race of the applicant and race (or racial composition of neighborhood) matters, a question about where the home is located would likely be posed earlier in the conversation with Black applicants than with Whites.¹²

Racially biased discrimination resulting from phone calls, while extremely problematic, represents only one form of linguistic profiling. Other manifestations of discrimination based on language affect different groups in various social circumstances. Language discrimination in the workplace, for example, can result in hostile work environments for speakers of nondominant languages in different parts of the world. In one well-documented case in the United States, an employer imposed harsh restrictions on any employees' use of Spanish, or any language other than English, while at work, even when on break with fellow employees who shared fluency in another language.¹³

The employer argued that his efforts to confine all employee communication to English was beneficial because it would promote inclusivity among all employees since a significant number of workers were monolingual English speakers. Ensuing conversations that explored this rationale more thoroughly exposed substantial linguistic chauvinism on the part of the employer, who admitted that some monolingual English-speaking employees feared that their colleagues who did speak Spanish could employ it as a means of exclusionary, if not derisive, conversation. However, this fear was based entirely on speculation, and largely concerned conversations, such as in the lunchroom, that were entirely unconnected to their work.

Since private employers have tremendous latitude to dictate policies associated with their workplaces, Spanish speakers had no alternative but to comply with this demand, even when their private conversations had nothing whatsoever to do with the job. The employer seemed to be impervious to the fact that bilingual employees should be free to use whatever language they prefer during conversations with others who share their linguistic competence if that conversation is unrelated to their job or taking place at a time or location within the workplace when the conversation is completely dislocated from anything having to do with their assignments.¹⁴

All the examples of linguistic profiling that I have considered thus far reveal interlocking connections among people from diverse language backgrounds who share different roles and responsibilities. And in an institutional context, these dynamics often provide opportunity for a language or dialect to become weaponized in ways that may either break the law or deny a person of their civil rights, linguistic human rights, or both.

Some of the research on perceptual dialectology is highly informative in this regard.¹⁵ Every language variety evokes different reactions among speakers who do not share the same dialectal background for that language.¹⁶ The larger the linguistic footprint associated with any given language, the more likely

it will be that differences of opinion prevail that expose a patchwork of perceptions that vary along numerous sociological and demographic dimensions, such as region, class, education, race, and religion, among other traits including sexual orientation or speech impediments. These traits may not only differentiate speakers of a given language, but do so in ways that provide alternative sociolinguistic perceptions of speech. Perceptions regarding those who employ local speech patterns are inevitably relative psychological constructs determined by the myriad of factors that individuals maintain from one region to another within every speech community. Moreover, the concept of a speech community, which is a basic construct of linguistic science, has evolved throughout human history as technological advances promoted increasingly rapid and distant travel, resulting in massive linguistic contact among people who were historically dislocated from one another slightly more than a century ago.

Advances in technology did more than promote language contact among people who spoke different languages, or different dialects within a single language. The invention of writing followed by its companion invention the printing press gave rise to increasing numbers of people who could read and write. The growing need for educated citizens throughout the world produced new mechanisms that served to offer the hope of greater social equality at the very same time that differential access to unequal educational opportunities continued to perpetuate the established social class order worldwide, regardless of the political orientation of the language in question, or the nation-states that used it.

Educational opportunities in England illustrate this point wonderfully, due in no small measure to the long-standing reign of its royal family and the array of educational and religious institutions that have evolved there. At the height of the British Empire – that is, when the sun never set on lands that had been colonized by Britain through a combination of military might and increasing global trade – access to educational opportunities was determined in large measure by virtue of a person's social status at birth. Oxford University and Cambridge University were not available to the majority of English citizens who lived in different locations, with an eclectic mixture of languages and dialects that still linger on the tongues of regional descendants of their bygone ancestors.

Clearly, the English were not alone as far as matters of colonial and linguistic expansion were concerned. Holland, Spain, France, and Portugal, among other European nations, have left their indelible linguistic imprint on distant lands that echo aspects of the linguistic expansionism that became an inevitable artifact of the subjugation of non-Europeans, either through enslavement or other forms of social dislocation that dislodged Indigenous peoples and their languages in deference to political domination imposed from afar. These historical facts are common precursors to newer educational ventures in countries once inhabited by European colonizers. Fluency in the language of one's oppressor became an

ironic means to personal betterment throughout the world, often resulting in the suppression and diminishment of Indigenous languages or, worse, their eventual demise. It is against this neocolonial backdrop that history has witnessed another form of linguistic profiling that has been perpetuated, either indirectly or by design, in schools throughout the world. In England, where uneducated masses living in poverty were unable to avail themselves of educational opportunities, elite academies eventually gave way to a burgeoning educational system that exposed new forms of differential access to educational opportunities whose quality was fundamentally determined by one's wealth or lack of it. Again, the English are not unique when it comes to allocations of educational opportunities based on wealth, which is pervasive worldwide. However, the longevity of unequal educational opportunities in England stands out because of the expansiveness of their former empire, procured at a time when England's naval might was the primary determinant of its global power.

The United States, along with many other former British colonies, created schools that replicated models of economically driven, differential access to education. In fact, educational and linguistic disparities in the United States have been exacerbated by long-standing decentralized policies. Each state has the authority to regulate public education within its jurisdiction, while school funding within states is differentiated largely by local property values, resulting in a disjointed national education system that varies widely in content, resources, and quality. While it may be understandable that each state devotes a portion of its curriculum to historical state-centric studies, there are also different approaches to the teaching of various subjects, including language-related subjects, be they related to English, other languages, or how best to educate children who are profoundly deaf or who experience pathological speech disorders. Therein, I find fertile ground for sowing the seeds of uninformed linguistic profiling, based variously on misguided perceptions of linguistic elitism, authority, and superiority as means through which less influential speakers are castigated or treated in other discriminatory ways.¹⁷

Language attitudes alone do not account for many of these educational disparities. Some states maintain an ethos of equal educational opportunity by assigning identical textbooks for all students throughout the state, regardless of their linguistic background. The underlying assumption is that if students are required to adopt the same textbook, then they share equal access to the same pedagogical content. However, informed educational linguistic scholarship has shown that students from different language or dialect backgrounds may benefit from pedagogy that is modified to account for their unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds.¹⁸

Keeping in mind that most educational systems throughout the world are designed to maintain the political status quo, cultural and linguistic modifications

to education were once employed during apartheid in South Africa under the guise that children can learn best when doing so in their native language. While the principle of supporting mother-tongue education has clear benefits, it is also important to fully understand the sociopolitical circumstances under which such policies operate, as well as their far-reaching consequences for the students who attend schools that do not share a common language. In 1953, South Africa's apartheid government acted upon the Eiselen Commission Report, produced in 1951, which encouraged the government to take charge of the education of Black South Africans as a way to control the socioeconomic development and, by extension, the political future of the country.¹⁹

The Bantu Education Act was designed to ensure that Black South Africans would not have direct or sustained access to the same educational opportunities that were offered to the minority-ruling white South Africans, who were either native speakers of Afrikaans or English, the two South African languages that received official governmental recognition prior to the fall of apartheid.²⁰ As was the case for nearly every institution within South Africa, the Bantu Education Act was designed to help maintain racial segregation while simultaneously making sure only white South Africans had access to the languages of power and political influence. Those policies were dramatically transformed after apartheid ended. Under President Nelson Mandela's leadership, South Africa adopted a new national language policy with eleven official languages, taking care to still include Afrikaans and English in the hope that doing so might increase the likelihood of racial healing, bolstered by the new, more inclusive recognition of nine additional Indigenous languages that were native to South Africa long before Afrikaans or English was spoken there.²¹

These educational exemplars from nations where overt racial segregation was once the law of the land serve as a stark reminder that government policies underwrite many of the cultural and linguistic discrepancies that create and maintain racial segregation, perpetuating distinctive Black language usage, as well as widespread discrimination against Black people for the way they speak. Although instances of linguistic profiling against Black people differ from country to country based on the specific historical sociolinguistic circumstances of the nation in question, Black linguistic equality remains elusive at best anywhere in the world. The combination of policies and prejudices that can be traced to colonization and the denial of human rights that resulted from the African slave trade have only exacerbated these trends while also creating a climate in which perceptions of well-spoken Black people are considered to be those who have mastered the languages and/or dialects of their (former?) oppressors.²²

The various forms of linguistic profiling I have described thus far can be evaluated and examined in a variety of ways, including descriptive techniques, survey research, and experimental studies. The latter method was employed quite recently

regarding potential bias against Uyghur speakers of Mandarin, or Putonghua, as a second language.²³ Carefully designed experiments that used name-based priming examined how listeners thought they were hearing either a Korean, Uyghur, or a nondescript person with a Chinese surname, all of whom were portrayed as second-language (L2) Mandarin speakers. By employing the classical matched-guise task design, in which participants listen to multiple speakers and assess them based on various characteristics, the researchers explored alternative reactions to the same speech, albeit associated with different ethnic surnames. The study in question contemplated the relative employability of an L2 Mandarin speaker and did so by comparing three experimental conditions: the first condition had no social priming; the second condition contrasted speakers with Chinese or Korean surnames (written in Chinese characters); and the third and final condition introduced these voices as belonging to either a Chinese or Uyghur surname (also written in Chinese characters).²⁴

The results were significant, showing that the speech being primed as belonging to a Uyghur surname was perceived to be that of someone who was hardworking, but who was also deemed as less likely to be hired compared with the nondescript L2 Mandarin speaker depicted with a Chinese surname. Of considerable importance here, this matched-guise test revealed linguistic profiling based on surnames. The bias was not the product of differences in speech styles, which were controlled and held constant. As such, we now have learned that some forms of linguistic profiling exceed actual differences in linguistic behavior and can merely be triggered by the belief that a person is a speaker from a devalued group.²⁵

Nearly two decades ago, when studies of linguistic profiling first began, building on the experimental foundations of matched-guise tests and perceptual dialectology, every effort was made to ponder how best to help speakers belonging to marginalized groups gain more fair and equitable access to housing, employment, education, justice, and medical care in speech communities where bias against nondominant linguistic groups had been documented.²⁶ With the passage of time, we have come to recognize that the relief needed to advance linguistic human rights and increase access to equal opportunities throughout the world may also rely on the goodwill of those who are in positions of political influence and power within their respective societies. Faced with global evidence of linguistic prejudice that varies from one country to another, it is imperative that greater linguistic benevolence be bestowed on those who are often powerless to detect or challenge when their voice – or profound deafness and the use of sign language – triggers unwelcome, if not illegal, reactions that restrict their access to opportunities routinely afforded to anyone perceived as speaking without an accent.

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Language on Trial

Sharese King & John R. Rickford

This essay draws on the case study we conducted of Rachel Jeantel’s testimony in the 2013 trial of George Zimmerman v. The State of Florida.¹ Although Jeantel, a close friend of Trayvon Martin, was an ear-witness (by cell phone) to all but the final minutes of Zimmerman’s interaction with Trayvon, and testified for nearly six hours about it, her testimony was disregarded in jury deliberations. Through a linguistic analysis of Jeantel’s speech, comments from a juror, and a broader contextualization of stigmatized speech forms and linguistic styles, we argue that the lack of acknowledgment of dialectal variation has harmful social and legal consequences for speakers of stigmatized dialects. Such consequences include limits on criminal justice, employment, and fair access to housing, as well as accessible and culturally sensitive education. We propose new calls to action, which include the ongoing work the coauthors are doing to address such harms, while also moving to inspire concerned citizens to act.

On February 26, 2012, while returning from a casual walk to the corner store, a Black teenager named Trayvon Martin was murdered by a neighborhood watchman, George Zimmerman, in Sanford, Florida. While Zimmerman was the admitted suspect, he was not formally charged for the crime, second-degree murder, until April 11, 2012. Like the fatal police shooting of eighteen-year-old Michael Brown, Jr. in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014, after which protestors and activists demanded that the offending officer, Darren Wilson, be held accountable, this incident sparked a wave of resistance.² Zimmerman, tried in 2013, was ultimately found not guilty. The acquittal was a key moment in the formation of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, a response to the history of excessive force and extrajudicial killings by the state and vigilantes.³

There were many injustices leading up to the ultimate “not guilty” verdict for Zimmerman, with the first and foremost being the pursuit and killing of Trayvon Martin. It is difficult to point to any single factor that influenced the jury’s decision. Perhaps the official charge should have been manslaughter rather than second-degree murder. It might have been that the jury, composed of six women, represented Zimmerman’s peers but not Martin’s, and as a result, the jurors were unable to sympathize with Martin. Some have also emphasized that Martin, the victim, was on trial, rather than Zimmerman, and that his character assassination contributed to the verdict.⁴ Acknowledging all of these and other possible con-

tributions to Zimmerman's acquittal, we, as linguists, examine the prosecution's training of their star witness, Rachel Jeantel, and the criticism of her linguistic performance in the courtroom.⁵

Rachel Jeantel, then nineteen years old, was a friend of Martin. Her testimony lasted almost six hours across two days of questioning. As the last person to speak with Martin before he passed away, she heard much of the encounter between him and Zimmerman up until their tussle on the ground. Despite her knowledge of the encounter, her testimony was dismissed as difficult to understand and not credible, and played no part in jury deliberations.⁶ Through a linguistic analysis of Jeantel's speech, comments from a juror, and a broader contextualization of stigmatized speech forms and linguistic styles, we have argued elsewhere that Jeantel's dialect was found guilty before a verdict had even been reached in the case.⁷ In this essay, we use our case study of Jeantel to launch a broader discussion of linguistic prejudice, contending that the lack of acknowledgment of dialectal variation has harmful social and legal consequences for speakers of stigmatized dialects.⁸ We begin with an examination of the critiques leveled against Jeantel's speech and examine how the unintelligibility of such vernaculars extends to more legal contexts. We expand this discussion to account for how such stigma also has legal consequences in employment, housing, and schooling. Finally, we end with an updated call to action, which includes the ongoing work the coauthors are doing to address such harms, while also moving to inspire concerned citizens to act.

Jeantel, a trilingual speaker born and raised in Miami, received much backlash for the way she spoke during the trial. Specifically, her use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) contrasted with the socially unmarked varieties of English demonstrated by the lawyers, the judges, and other witnesses, and attracted the attention of many who subscribe to standard language ideologies.⁹ Such ideologies are what linguists describe as *prescriptivist*, emphasizing the "incorrectness" or "ungrammaticality" of her speech, which departed from the rules we learned as early as grade school.¹⁰ Contrary to popular belief, linguists have shown that AAVE is a systematic, rule-governed dialect with regular phonological (system of sounds), morphological (system of structure of words and relationship among words), syntactic (system of sentence structure), semantic (system of meaning), and lexical (structural organization of vocabulary items and other information of English) patterns.¹¹ Negative language attitudes about AAVE are based on ideology, or ingrained beliefs about how one *should* speak and how language *should* be used, rather than linguistic science, which has substantiated the structure of the dialect across decades of research.¹²

We can observe Jeantel's use of AAVE in an excerpt of her testimony, recounting Martin's realization that he was being followed by Zimmerman:

Excerpt from Courtroom Testimony of Rachel Jeantel (RJ), Day 1, Prosecutor Bernie de la Rionda (BR) questioning, as recorded by the court reporter (CR) and annotated by the authors [\emptyset = zero is/are copula, or zero plural, possessive, or third singular present tense -s]

RJ: He said he \emptyset from – he – I asked him where he \emptyset at. An he told me he \emptyset at the back of his daddy \emptyset fiancée \emptyset house, like in the area where his daddy fiancée – BY his daddy \emptyset fiancée \emptyset house. Like – I said, ‘Oh, you better keep running.’ He said, naw, he lost him.

BR: Okay. Let me stop you a second. This – this lady [the Court Reporter] has got to take everything down, so you make sure you’re – Okay. So after he said he lost him, what happened then?

RJ: And he say he – he \emptyset by – um – the area that his daddy \emptyset house is, his daddy \emptyset fiancée \emptyset house is, and I told him ‘Keep running.’ He – and he said, ‘Naw,’ he’ll just walk faster. I’m like, ‘Oh oh.’ And I – I ain’t complain, ‘cause he was breathing hard, so I understand why. Soo

BR: What – what happened after that?

RJ: And then, second \emptyset later – ah – Trayvon come and say, ‘Oh, shit!’

CR: [Unintelligible – requesting clarification] ‘Second later?’

RJ: A couple second \emptyset later, Trayvon come and say, ‘Oh, shit!’

BR: Okay. Let me interrupt you a second. When you say, the words, ‘Oh, shit,’ pardon my language, who said that?

RJ: Trayvon.

BR: He said it to YOU?

RJ: Yes.

BR: Okay. And after he used, pardon my language, he said, ‘Oh, shit,’ what happened then?

RJ: The nigga \emptyset behind me.

CR: I’m sorry, what? (22:7 – 23:7)

RJ: [Slowly, deliberately] The nigga’s behind – the nigga \emptyset behind me.

BR: Okay. He used the N word again and said the nigger is behind me?¹³

This excerpt demonstrates several documented AAVE features including the *absence of -s* in possessive and plural tense contexts, *copula absence*, and the use of the controversial lexical item, the *n-word*.¹⁴ With respect to *-s* absence in possessive contexts, we observe such a feature in a phrase like “daddy fiancée house” where there is no *-s* after *daddy* or *fiancée* to mark possession. Absence of *-s* in plural contexts can be seen in phrases like “and then second later” or “couple second later” where the noun *second* does not have an overt *-s* to mark plurality. Alongside these examples, there is a “hallmark” feature of AAVE known as *copula absence* where inflected “be” forms like *is* and *are* are absent. The AAVE copula follows im-

portant constraints such as rarely being deleted in the context of first person *am* or in clauses where the copula occurs finally (for example, “the area that his daddyØ house is”). Jeantel deletes where expected in this dialect, as we can observe in sentences such as, “I asked him where he Ø at,” in which *is* is absent. We discuss these examples to emphasize how these rule-governed AAVE patterns are employed in naturally occurring speech and to display their regularity in Jeantel’s speech.¹⁵

Without the awareness of AAVE’s systematicity or its legitimate status as a rule-governed dialect, one might assume that the occurrence of such patterns in someone’s speech marks both a lack of grammaticality and intelligence. However, as shown above, Jeantel displays a deep understanding of the dialect’s grammar and its associated patterns. Unfair judgment of Jeantel’s language skills is demonstrated in public comments on news articles published covering the trial:

She is a dullard, an idiot, an individual who can barely speak in coherent sentences.
– Jim Heron, Appalachian State¹⁶

This lady is a perfect example of uneducated urban ignorance. . . . When she spoke everyone hear, “mumble mumble duhhhh im a miami girl, duhhhhh.” – Sheena Scott¹⁷

Everyone, regardless of race, should learn to speak correct English, or at least understandable English. . . . I couldn’t understand 75% of what she was saying . . . that is just ridiculous [*sic*]!’ – Emma, comment on MEDIAite¹⁸

These comments expose the overwhelmingly negative response from the public to Jeantel’s speech. The first exhibits the lack of understanding of such dialectal variation, implying her speech was incoherent. The second demonstrates the same, but also reveals the tropes that co-occur with discussions of racialized vernacular speakers as being from the inner city, working class, and uneducated. This coarticulation of discourses about the speaker and their assumed position in society reinforces how stigma against vernacular speech is as much about *how* things are said as it is about *the speaker* who says them.

Alongside the vitriol from the general public, evidence from jury members suggested that not only was Jeantel’s speech misunderstood, but it was ultimately disregarded in the more than sixteen hours of deliberation. With no access to the court transcript, unless when requesting a specific playback, jurors did not have the materials to reread speech that might have been unfamiliar to most if they were not exposed to or did not speak the dialect. Specifically, juror B37 stated in an interview with Anderson Cooper that “A lot of times [Jeantel] was using phrases I had never heard before,” indicating some degree of miscomprehension of Jeantel’s speech. Further, when asked by Cooper if she found Jeantel credible, juror B37 hastily responded, “No.”¹⁹ Further support for miscomprehension across jurors came from the court transcript itself. Specifically, the court transcriber notes moments where jurors speak out of turn, such as:

RJ: Yeah, now following him.

BR: Now following him. Okay. What I want you to do, Rachel Jeantel –

THE COURT [to a juror]: Just one second, please. Yes, ma'am?

A JUROR: He is now following me or – I'm sorry. I just didn't hear.

THE COURT: Okay. Can we one more time, please, give that answer again.

RJ: He said, he told me now that a man is starting following him, is following him.

A JUROR: Again or is still?

THE COURT: Okay. You can't ask questions.

A JUROR: Okay.

THE COURT: If you can't understand, just raise your hand.

Here we observe further evidence that jurors needed moments of clarification for Jeantel's speech. Such confusion from the jurors, alongside the public commentary on Jeantel's use of AAVE, highlight the common lack of understanding in public discourses of and about AAVE. They also raise questions about the potential consequences of producing stigmatized speech in legal settings and the role that dialect plays in attributions of credibility or trustworthiness. Specifically, this case opened up the following inquiries, which have taken a concerted effort from linguists and members of contiguous fields to answer:

- 1) Are accented speakers like Rachel Jeantel more likely to be misheard and viewed as less credible?
- 2) How intelligible is AAVE, or "accented" speech, in general?
- 3) What can we do to reduce these inequities among speakers of stigmatized varieties?

While we do not provide complete answers to these questions, this essay surveys the research that addresses them, examining the perception of accented speech more broadly construed, while also expanding our consideration of the sociopolitical consequences in legal contexts beyond criminal cases. Ultimately, this specific case study showed us how the treatment of Jeantel as the defendant on trial operates in a history of linguistic prejudice, discrimination, and misperception of vernacular speech in legal contexts.

Listening to accented speech that is not your own can have processing costs or the potential to be judged as less comprehensible.²⁰ However, the extent to which the lack of comprehensibility is the result of genuine misunderstandings of accented speech, implicit biases about speakers with certain accents,

or some combination of the two is unclear. Research in linguistics has established that listeners have negative or positive ideologies about certain accents or dialects, which can reinforce stereotypes about certain groups of speakers.²¹ The question of how much these ideologies can influence perception has been explored in work by linguist Donald Rubin in his investigation of race and the perception of accentedness.²² Specifically, his work suggests that the same voice can be evaluated differently in terms of comprehension, whether presented with a picture of a white or Asian face. Different perceptions of accentedness and comprehension for the same speech signal, but different races, calls into question the objectivity of *listening* and its role in interpreting racialized speakers' voices as nonnormative, and therefore deficient.²³

How might such biases interact with perceptions of credibility or presumptions of guilt? In low-stake situations, such as reading random trivia facts, research has indicated that listeners were less likely to believe statements when produced by a nonnative speaker.²⁴ However, when the stakes are higher and in the context of legal settings, biases against specific dialects can affect presumptions of guilt for suspects *and* witnesses. In particular, linguists John A. Dixon, Berenice Mahoney, and Roger Cocks found that those who spoke in the less-prestigious and more stigmatized regional accent tended to be negatively evaluated and rated as guilty.²⁵ Linguists Courtney Kurinec and Charles Weaver make similar observations in their 2019 article showing that jurors found AAVE-speaking defense witnesses and defendants less credible and less educated than their General American English-speaking peers, ultimately yielding more guilty verdicts.²⁶ Finally, evidence from linguists Lara Frumkin and Anna Stone shows that even eyewitness testimonies are evaluated differently with respect to credibility, accuracy, and trustworthiness based on factors like the prestige of an accent, race, and age.²⁷

The unintelligibility or lack of understanding between dialects can also lead to mistranscriptions, which not only result in the misrepresentation of speech in legal documents, but also the misinterpretation of the facts in a case. To demonstrate such injustices, we introduce three examples from English contexts. The first example comes from vernacular Aboriginal English (AE) and displays how unawareness of a particular word in this dialect affected the meaning of the sentence. In a Central Australian case, the phrase “Charcoal Jack, *properly* his father,” uttered by an AE-speaking witness, was transcribed by a court reporter unaware of the dialectal differences as “Charcoal Jack, *probably* his father.”²⁸ On the surface, such a mistake looks benign, but an understanding of the phrase reveals that the speaker’s intended usage reflects the specific meaning in AE where *properly* means *real*. Thus, the mistranscription introduces doubt via the use of the word *probably* where the actual usage of the term *properly* is meant to distinguish the biological father.

Building on this example, we turn to a mistranscription of a Jamaican Creole speaker testifying in a police interview in the United Kingdom:

- wen mi ier di bap bap, mi drap a groun an den mi staat ron.
- a. When I heard the shots (bap, bap), I drop the gun, and then I run.
- b. when I heard the bap bap [the shots], I fell to the ground and then I started to run.²⁹

In this example, the verb *drop* is initially transcribed such that it has the direct object *gun*. The introduction of the word *gun* for *ground* potentially attributes responsibility to the speaker of having a weapon. Fortunately, the transcript was checked against the recording by a Jamaican Creole interpreter who corrected the potentially dangerous error.

A final example of such transcription errors comes from a 2015 police transcript of a recorded jail call from a speaker in East Palo Alto. The speaker, recorded as saying “I’m fitna be admitted” was mistranscribed as “I’m fit to be admitted.” The word *fitna* is a variation of *finna*, “fixing to,” and marks the immediate future in AAVE. While this statement originally referred to the timing of admittance, the transcription now changes meaning to consent to being admitted. Such examples illustrate that across these three dialects (Aboriginal English, Jamaican Creole, and African American Vernacular English), lack of awareness of the structure of the variety, be it in vocabulary or sentence structure, affects one’s ability to accurately transcribe the speech. Taylor Jones and colleagues recently showed that court transcribers from Philadelphia, who were certified at accuracy rates of 95 percent and above, often mistranscribed and misparaphrased AAVE.³⁰ Although they self-reported at least some degree of comprehension with the dialect, their transcription and paraphrase accuracy was 59.5 percent and 33 percent, respectively, at the level of the full utterance, far below the threshold for acceptable accuracy. Such work suggests that even for these experts, understanding and representing the variety can be difficult; thus, we must recognize the potential legal repercussions when we do not account for vernacular intelligibility.

Prejudice against and stigma for such speech extends beyond the legal consequences of speaking and hearing speech in criminal cases. Speakers of these stigmatized dialects also suffer consequences that can infringe on their civil liberties and access to services and resources.

Accent discrimination in the workplace can affect current and future employment opportunities.³¹ James Kahakua, a “university-trained meteorologist with 20 years of experience” and a speaker of Hawaiian Creole and English, was denied a promotion to read weather reports on air in Hawai‘i because his employer believed that his colleague, a thirty-year-old Caucasian man, had the better broadcasting voice.³² And in *Mandhare v. W.S. LaFargue Elementary School*, Sulochana Mandhare, an Indian immigrant who had been studying English for almost twenty years, sued the school board for not renewing her contract as a school librarian

because of her “heavy accent.”³³ These are just two examples of many that show what is on the line for speakers when they encounter the stigma of having accented speech.

Title VII of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission disallows employers from taking action on the basis of one’s accent, but protects their ability to do so if the employee’s accent affects job performance.³⁴ The perception of which accents interfere with job performance is often influenced by bias. That is, what one might interpret as a linguistic impediment to the job might interact with their beliefs, not facts, about what is considered unprofessional language and who is considered “professional.” Thus, in deciding what is or is not an interference, “even the most open-minded of courts may be subject to the unwritten laws of the standard language ideology.”³⁵ Further, the ambiguity around “accent” and “language” does not make clear where the law stands in relation to *dialects* of one language (such as English), rather than the differences between multiple languages.

In addition to employment discrimination, discrimination with respect to housing rental has often involved linguistic prejudice. Through “linguistic profiling,” the auditory equivalent to racial profiling, whereby listeners use auditory cues to identify the race of a speaker, speakers have been denied opportunities to see homes on the basis of their voices.³⁶ In extensive work on housing discrimination, linguists Thomas Purnell, William Idsardi, and John Baugh have demonstrated that not only do listeners try to identify a speaker’s dialect based on the word “Hello,” but landlords also discriminated against prospective tenants on the basis of their voice.³⁷ That is, landlords were less likely to make appointments with Black and Latinx callers in neighborhoods with higher populations of white residents.³⁸ The Fair Housing Act “prohibits housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and sexual harassment), familial status, and disability.”³⁹ However, people are not always aware that cues in a voice can be used to map a person to such demographic categories.

Finally, having shown how linguistic injustices can generate both employment and housing discrimination, we turn to examine a pivotal case in the history of Black language in education. In *King v. Ann Arbor*, the plaintiffs were Black pre-school and elementary students asserting that they spoke a Black vernacular or dialect and were denied equal participation in their instructional programs as the school had not taken appropriate measures to account for such a language barrier.⁴⁰ This case was the first to argue successfully on behalf of speakers of Black English, and resulted in the judge ordering the district to identify Black English speakers in the schools, teach them how to read Standard English, and improve teachers’ negative attitudes toward their speech.⁴¹ Intuitively, we can imagine that the lack of recognition of Black English in schooling impedes the learning experience, but without explicit instruction on these vernaculars and the reach

of their stigma, the broader society remains unaware of the vulnerability speaking such a dialect can pose in a range of areas including education, housing, and employment.

We have considered how often speakers of stigmatized dialects are misheard and perceived as less credible, that accented speech can affect processing, and that such effects can be tied to negative language ideologies or negative attitudes about certain groups of speakers. Let us now address the question of what can be done to reduce these inequities among speakers of stigmatized varieties. In our previous work, we have suggested how linguists and citizens could play a more active role in combating linguistic prejudice in legal systems.⁴² While our work has focused on the dialect AAVE, our suggestions can be extended to other vernaculars. We revisit this list through a new lens of the practical challenges to reducing these inequities, as well as examples of how we have tried to implement such solutions since the publication of our study:

- i. Oppose efforts to preemptively keep African Americans and members of other marginalized groups that are overrepresented in the carceral system from serving on juries, especially when their knowledge of linguistic differences could be beneficial to the task. After all, a jury should be reflective of one's peers. But as we have made clear, discrimination through jury selection is not uncommon: "In *Foster v. Chatman* (2016), the U.S. Supreme Court held that prosecutors purposefully discriminated against a Georgia man facing the death penalty when they dismissed two Black jurors during jury selection." On the other hand, "The Court's narrow decision was largely based on the egregious nature of the *Batson* violations and, therefore, may do little to deter the discriminatory use of race in jury selection."⁴³ We can also consider the criminal case of *Box v. Superior Court* where a potential Black juror was dismissed on the basis of pronouncing *police* as PO-lice, rather than po-LICE, with stress on the first syllable rather than the last.⁴⁴ This pronunciation is a feature of AAVE. However, due to bias against AAVE, the prosecutor claimed the pronunciation was evidence the juror had an "unfriendly feeling" toward law enforcement.
- ii. Advocate for and produce more research on the perception and processing of stigmatized voices in institutions like schools, courtrooms, and hospitals. Research in this vein is burgeoning, with researchers assessing court reporters' understanding and transcription of vernacular speech, as well as researchers evaluating bidialectal Black speakers' use of MAE (Mainstream American English) or AAVE when providing a narrative as one would in an alibi.⁴⁵ Expanding research on the study of stigmatized dialects allows us to investigate which aspects of the dialect are difficult for nonfluent listeners to

interpret, while also uncovering more about the relationship between perception and linguistic biases.

- iii. Agree to help with cases or projects in the legal system that involve speakers of stigmatized varieties. Native speakers of AAVE and linguists familiar with AAVE should offer to serve as an expert witness or participate in building cases for speakers whose speech in question is AAVE. For instance, Sharese King has accepted invitations to speak with law firms or specific courts, such as the Fourth District in the Minnesota Judicial Branch and the Habeas Corpus Resource Center in California, about linguistic prejudice in legal contexts. This direct engagement has allowed us to educate lawyers, judges, and court reporters on the legitimacy of the variety, while also informing them of the social and legal consequences of producing such speech in legal contexts and beyond.
- iv. Similarly, advocate for speakers of stigmatized varieties like AAVE to be heard in the courts and beyond, while acknowledging how raciolinguistic ideologies affect one's ability to listen and accept information from accented speakers.⁴⁶
- v. Offer help to acquire "standardized" varieties of English for speakers interested in commanding both their vernacular and MAE. Such multilingualism can help them be more upwardly mobile. We acknowledge the controversy of such an offer, since one should be wary of solutions that put the burden on the victims to conform to the linguistic norms of those in power. We also recognize that speaking the standardized dialect will not fix *all* the injustices such speakers face, nor shield them from the injustice of racial prejudice. But it may alleviate such injustices to some extent, and we should prioritize individual speakers' agency to decide what is the best option for themselves.
- vi. Advocate for more vernacular speakers to have the option to use interpreting services in court settings to reduce the risk of misunderstandings. We emphasize the word *option* as we understand that some speakers may reject the notion given that they may not be aware of how their language varieties are subject to misunderstandings in comparison to other English speakers in the courtroom. Further, we acknowledge that the position of the translator would need to be filled by someone who is informed about the structure of the language, including regional variation. As above, we prioritize speaker autonomy to choose which solution they feel most comfortable with.
- vii. We have advocated for jurors receiving transcripts, while also having linguists check these transcripts for accuracy. King's ongoing work teaching Minnesota court reporters about AAVE and the social political consequences for speaking such a variety has raised a new awareness of this need and the challenges to implementation. Specifically, court transcribers noted the

difficulty of converting their work into legible transcripts for jury members in a short period of time. Such work could prolong the time between lawyers' closing statements and jury deliberation. Moreover, court transcribers not only expressed their lack of knowledge about the grammar, but a lack of understanding of how to represent the variety. These conversations made us aware that court transcribers may need linguists' help in developing a universal coding system for transcribing AAVE in these contexts.

- viii. "Stay woke" or informed about the racial disparities experienced by the most marginalized in society, be it from linguistic prejudice to health inequities to unfair policing of such communities. Consider when and how such injustices interact. In addition to increasing awareness, we must be vigilant in spreading such knowledge and not keeping these conversations in the halls of the ivory towers. Such work includes engaging in different forms of communication with family and friends, or with the public via social media platforms, linguistic podcasts such as *The Vocal Fries* and *Spectacular Vernacular*, or newspaper editorials.⁴⁷
- ix. Lastly, we must evaluate our own linguistic prejudice and how it materializes in both personal and professional settings. Further, we must assess how specific norms in the workplace might devalue some voices versus others and work to address them.

While the broader public is just becoming aware of the notion, linguistic prejudice and its impacts are being felt widely by communities of speakers whose linguistic practices have been stigmatized. Recognizing the consequences of prejudice in criminal justice, employment, housing, and education can help us to address the unnecessary harms speakers of AAVE and other vernacular speakers face in society. We believe that the multifaceted solution to reducing such inequities will require acceptance and compassion for an increasingly multilingual society, but also the courage to enact such empathy through research, policy, and sustained education on the issue.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sharese King is Neubauer Family Assistant Professor in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Chicago. Her research explores how African Americans use language to construct multidimensional identities and how these constructions are perceived and evaluated across different listener populations. She has published in journals such as *Annual Review of Linguistics* and *Journal of Sociolinguistics*.

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Currents of Innuendo Converge on an American Path to Political Hate

Norma Mendoza-Denton

Uses of innuendo such as enthymemes, sarcasm, and dog whistles by politicians and the resulting interlineal readings available to some listeners gave us an early warning about the type of relationship that has now obtained between Christianity and politics, and specifically the rise of Christian Nationalism as facilitated by President Donald Trump. I argue that two currents of indirectness in American politics, one religious and the other racial, have converged like tributaries leading to a larger body of water.

The ellipsis is the punctuation of innuendo par excellence [...] The ellipsis points toward the moment “just after,” inviting the reader to dwell in this blank, white, critical space so he or she may reflect on the possibility of irony within the text.

– Srikanth Reddy¹

When George W. Bush delivered the 2003 State of the Union address, Vice President Dick Cheney and Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert presided over the proceedings on the podium behind him. On that cold January evening, barely fifteen months after the World Trade Center attacks of 2001 and eight weeks before the bombing of Iraq, this speech was only Bush’s second State of the Union address and his third to both houses of Congress. Seated in the presidential box, two seats from the first lady, were some special guests: a former prostitute and drug user who now ran a heavily evangelizing church-based program to get addicts off the streets in Louisiana, representing compassionate conservatism; a former marine who repeatedly entered the Pentagon wreckage on 9/11, representing heroism and American grit; and two disgruntled physicians who had been hit by rising malpractice insurance costs, representing their own less profitable selves. Each one of these guests’ physical presence indexed an initiative that was addressed in the speech.² But there were other things, a lot less overt and neither personified nor directly stated, which were in the water, *a escondidas* – covertly – in the president’s speech:

For so many in our country – the homeless . . . the fatherless, the addicted – the need is great. Yet there is power, *wonder-working power*, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people. . . I urge you to pass both my faith-based initiative and the Citizen Service Act to encourage acts of compassion that can transform America, one heart and one soul at a time.³

Political scientist Bethany Albertson probed the interpretation of the phrase “wonder-working power” with an experimental setup.⁴ She found what was effectively an interpretive bifurcation (a dog whistle) varying in audibility according to the listener’s religious background: 89 percent of Pentecostals recognized the reference as coming from a well-known church hymn, while this effect held for only 9 percent of a more general subject population.⁵ Albertson additionally found that, for those who did recover the reference, a preference was exhibited for inexplicit rather than overt religious appeals, leading her to the conclusion that coded religious communication is particularly persuasive in politics.

We can corroborate these experimental results by tracing commentators’ reactions following Bush’s speech. The president’s supporters warmly welcomed the reference, praising the speech’s compassionate leanings, as well as an overt transfer of some of the roles of government (like dealing with unmet need among citizens) to the conditional charity of faith-based organizations. Gregory Rummo, a Christian Exchange contributor, wrote on the Writer’s Exchange Blog:

Those words will become hollow echoes as long as the obstructionists – the people who become apoplectic at the thought of God and government working in tandem – manage to block what is the only hope for the down-and-outs of society: Changed lives through the power of the Cross.⁶

Still others interpreted (admittedly verbally awkward) Bush 43’s role not so much as author but as animator; the words as spoken by the president were written by Michael Gerson, a fundamentalist Christian hired as a speechwriter prior to the announcement of Bush’s candidacy.⁷ Gerson, an opinion columnist at *The Washington Post* until his death in 2022, thought this was no big deal, since many presidents up until that point had hinted that they were religious, deployed mentions of God, and spoke of their faith before it became de rigeur to state one’s religious affiliation early on in the campaign.⁸ Additionally, when specifically asked in 2007 by journalist Kim Lawton about the idea that Bush was speaking in code to religious believers (recall some of his other [impromptu!] speeches on good versus evil, and crusades), Gerson had the following to say: “These aren’t code words. They are our culture. You know, millions of people understand them, and just because some people don’t get them doesn’t mean that there’s some kind of plot.”⁹

Having established that the Bush/Gerson message was on the surface about love and compassion, what motivates me to identify it as part of a downstream

branch meandering toward political hate?¹⁰ And what can linguistic and discourse analysis elucidate about it? It is already well known that politicians worldwide use dog whistles in communicating with and often manipulating their constituencies.¹¹ Rhetorical indirectness has been described – in the West at least – since the enthymeme (in brief, a syllogism missing one of its premises), as explored by Aristotle and Theophrastus, applied to war history by Thucydides, among the Islamic philosophers by Ibn Sina/Avicenna and Ibn Rushd/Averroes, and in the East as part of Abhinavagupta’s contribution to Classical Sanskrit *Rasa* poetics, making meaning through *Dhvani*, the process of suggestion or revelation.¹²

American politicians’ interpellation of religious audiences, by indirectly indexing specific Christian beliefs on one hand and Donald Trump’s later increasingly overt invocation of eugenicist logics on the other hand, has contributed to a kind of alluvial discourse sedimentation, intensified by processes of circulation and repetition.¹³ The sedimentation of the detritus swirled about by these religious and racist currents provides precedent and license for even more extreme views, and has made it increasingly acceptable to “say the quiet part aloud,” leading to our current political moment of red flags and alarm bells, constantly ping-pong-ing us with instances of political hate toward non-Christians and non-whites. At the same time, an inchoate Christian Nationalist movement gains shape and momentum, churning back and forth through indexical uncertainty (our disbelieving minds have to process: *Did they really just say that?*), and follow-up denials of hatred and racism. Every disavowal primes the core concept. This can be seen in the exponential growth of innuendo like the ludic “Let’s Go Brandon!” phenomenon described by linguist Janet McIntosh.¹⁴ It’s hard not to constantly think about an issue when everyone denies it is there, and all the denials paradoxically establish the issue as discursive common ground.¹⁵

Recent Western work in philosophy of language and the discourse/pragmatics of political hate speech has focused on “dog whistles,” “fig leaves,” and “stupefying,” terms that all point to the real-world effects of indirectness in the carrying out of political aims.¹⁶ Various accounts for these effects by processes of implicature, deniability, in-group identitarian appeals, indexical field effects, and the at-issue/not-at-issue distinction, these types of strategic conversational manipulation fall into a broader category that I will here call innuendo.¹⁷ Not only do multiple linguistic strategies involving speaker, target, audience, and interpretant support innuendo; it also happens through other semiotic channels: for instance, consider that the Trump administration’s frequent photo-ops eating KFC, while ostensibly innocuous, were a veiled sexist dig at Hillary Clinton.¹⁸ Another example is the “tableau vivant” that was Ronald Reagan announcing his presidential candidacy in the city of Philadelphia, Mississippi, the heart of the movement for “states’ rights” that opposed the federal enforcement of antisegregation legislation.¹⁹

Effects such as the religious, sexist, and racist ones described above are crucially dependent on background social context: coded religious innuendo prevails in the United States because it is a normatively (though variably) secular society with an established-but-contested practice of the separation of church and state, coexisting with pervasive religiosity now bubbling forth that has until recently remained relatively excluded from official government actions.²⁰ Along with other frowned-upon but pervasive behaviors (such as sexism, racism, and classism), this creates the conditions for religious, sexist, racist, classist, and other types of innuendo.

Consider the following now-familiar example of enthymematic innuendo as uttered by Trump, cloaked in plausible deniability, and capped off with what I have previously discussed as reactive reversal.²¹

Statement 8.7.2015

Then-candidate Trump, speaking to CNN's Don Lemon, complains about Fox News correspondent Megyn Kelly's performance at a recent presidential debate: "She gets out and she starts asking me all sorts of ridiculous questions. You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever."²²

Enthymematic Innuendo

Premise 1: She had blood coming out of her eyes and blood coming out of her [place called X].

Unstated Premise 2: Women menstruate out of a place called vagina. This place is unmentionable in polite society. I am being polite by not mentioning it.

Unstated Premise 2a: Because of menstruation, women are irrational.

Conclusion, to be drawn by the listener: Megyn Kelly was probably menstruating, and this made her irrational.

Possible secondarily primed conclusion: She was aggressive, like a bull seeing red (the use of "gets out" and "blood coming out of her eyes").

The next day, Trump and his campaign issued two more statements, the first a tweet, the other a campaign statement attempting to rewrite his words.

Plausible Deniability 8.8a.2015

Re Megyn Kelly quote: "you could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever" (NOSE). Just got on w/thought²³

Reactive Reversal 8.8b.2015

Mr. Trump made Megyn Kelly look really bad – she was a mess with her anger and totally caught off guard. Mr. Trump said "blood was coming out of her eyes and whatever" meaning nose, but wanted to move on to more important topics. Only a deviant would think anything else.²⁴

Though (8.7.2015) is arguably one of the top ten most famous of Trump's sexist statements, I want to draw attention to two aspects from (8.8b.2015). The statement was issued through a campaign press release/Twitter blast, but note the meaning-changing recasting of the prepositional phrase "out of her wherever," to the discourse-marking general extender "and whatever."²⁵ Also, the last phrase, "Only a deviant would think anything else," is the critical piece of evidence we need to see the inner workings of how enthymemes function. The interpretation can be claimed to be dependent on the listener, and the speaker's responsibility is thus disowned. In this case, it is not "the corrupt media" or "fake news" that promoted this interpretation. If you got that reading of "wherever," *you* are the deviant.

But how do we determine whether the inference was in fact invited by the statement? In conversation analysis, we apply what is called the next-turn proof procedure, looking for the interactional meaning to emerge based on how the contribution was responded to in the next speaker's turn.²⁶ In this case, the next turn was taken by Erick Erickson, who had invited Trump to the RedState Gathering, and who promptly rescinded the invitation, saying "I wanted to have him here as a legitimate candidate, but no legitimate candidate suggests a female asking questions does so because she's hormonal."²⁷ Erickson's response is the next-proof we as analysts need to support an assertion that the original statement, in fact, carried the inference.

In 1955, sociologist Erving Goffman wrote what almost appears like a user's manual for the kind of enthymematic innuendo President Trump was employing. It is worth quoting at length:

Tact in regard to face-work often relies for its operation on a tacit agreement to do business through the language of hint – the language of innuendo, ambiguities, well-placed pauses, carefully worded jokes, and so on. The rule regarding this unofficial kind of communication is that the sender ought not to act as if he had officially conveyed the message he has hinted at, while the recipients have the right and the obligation to act as if they have not officially received the message contained in the hint. Hinted communication, then, is deniable communication; it need not be faced up to.²⁸

I have analyzed this type of underspecification of meaning at length elsewhere, as obtaining in pronominal forms such as *something*, *anything*, and *thing*, general extenders that are used in discourse precisely because they can instantiate a value that depends on the listener.²⁹ While articulating the exact relationship between microdiscursive moves such as general extenders and broader discursive patterns of sustained political innuendo is beyond the scope of this essay, I would nevertheless like to flag this for future investigation.

Now we can turn to the remaining data for this essay, examining racist dog-whistle innuendo alluding to genetic purity (the so-called racehorse theory) from the Trump administration and its attendant troglobionts.

What do we want Haitians here for? Why do we want all these people from Africa here? Why do we want all these people from shithole countries? We should have people from countries like Norway.

– Donald J. Trump at a White House meeting on immigration, January 11, 2018

If you vote for me, I'm the difference, and I'm the wall. You know the wall that we're building on the southern border? I'm your wall between the American Dream and chaos.

– Donald J. Trump at a campaign rally in Bemidji, Minnesota, September 18, 2020

One of the tributaries in my argument, racial innuendo, is illustrated by the first Trump epigraph above.³⁰ While Trump started his presidential run by railing against Mexicans and implementing a near-total ban on travel from Muslim-majority countries, by the middle of his administration, it became clear that his “big, beautiful wall” was largely metaphorical. The tiny, half-finished wall to the south was invoked as the means to keep out immigrants and refugees of all kinds and from all directions, but especially those who came from non-European, non-Christian backgrounds. In his own mind, as seen in the second epigraph, Trump himself was the wall.

In 2020, Trump held a rally for his reelection campaign in Bemidji, Minnesota, speaking to a largely white audience, where he began by stoking nativist fears of racialized groups, especially Muslims, and by attacking Minnesota's Democratic Congresswoman Ilhan Omar. Remarkably, if one were reading the transcript of the speech, the first parts do not read like he is attacking Omar. However, on listening to the broadcast, we can hear the innuendo, this time in the form of verbal irony and sarcasm. This exemplifies how political innuendo includes not only veiled references to perceived flaws in an opponent's character, or alleged groups who pose a threat to the speaker's constituency, but also the inversion of meaning of one's utterance through pragmatic means such as intonation. Here I provide excerpts from the rally speech for analysis. Readers can follow the link in the endnotes for the full content:³¹

Excerpt 1

Trump on Refugees at a Campaign Rally in Bemidji, Minnesota,
September 18, 2020

Trump: (13:48) One of the most vital issues in this election is the subject of refugees. You know it. You know it perhaps better than almost anybody. Lots of luck. *You're having a good time . . . with your refugees? That's good.* We want to have . . . [turns to someone screaming in the audience]

Audience: Ilhan Omar!

Trump: Omar! He said Omar.

Aud: Boooo! Boooo!

Trump: *That's a beauty.*

Aud: Boooo . . .

Trump: How the hell did SHE win the election? How did she WIN?

Aud: Boooo . . .

Trump: It's unbelievable. Every family in Minnesota needs to know about sleepy Joe Biden's extreme plan to flood your state with an influx of refugees from Somalia, from places all over the planet.

Aud: Boooo!

Trump: Well, that's what's happened, and *you like Omar a lot, don't you, huh?*

Aud: Noooo . . .

Trump: Biden has promised a 700-percent increase [. . .] in the importation of refugees from the most dangerous places in the world, including Yemen, Syria, and Somalia. *Congratulations, Minnesota.* A 700-percent increase. *Good luck, Minnesota.* Enjoy yourselves, because if I'm not here, if I don't win [. . .] Your state will be overrun and destroyed [. . .]

In Excerpt 1, I have inserted italics to highlight Trump's uses of verbal irony, another type of innuendo. As devices for meaning inversion, many have described both irony and the more specific sarcasm as features of Trump's rally delivery.³² Their commonality in part stems from a high degree of deniability. But how can we tell the utterances in question are ironic? Trump uses many rhetorical devices to signal that he means the opposite of what he is saying. He uses sarcasm ("Good luck, Minnesota") and rhetorical questions ("You're having a good time with your refugees?"). Another way of generating implicatures is through the use of unexpected intonational focus.³³ In Figure 1, I use the Tones and Breaks Indices (ToBI) system of intonational phonology transcription to describe the intonational patterns used by Trump to render a "sarcastic tone" in his Minnesota speech.³⁴ I've extracted two examples below.³⁵

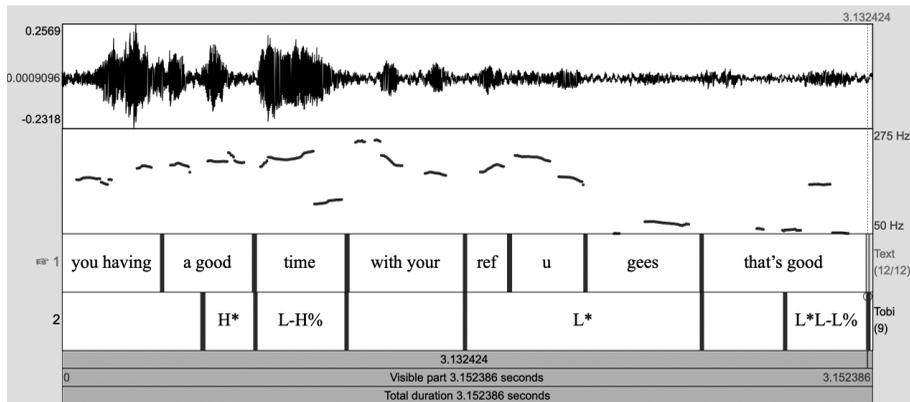
1a. *You're having a good time*

1b. *with your refugees? . . . That's good.*

Example 1a has a high pitch accent H* on "good" and a low intonational phrase and high boundary tone L-H% on "time" at the end of the phrase. This type of intonational contour is used to signal a continuation rise, and can be heard as a type of ellipsis. Although a transcription hardly captures it (which is why I have included the formant frequency track), this type of level high tone (see the flat visible

Figure 1

Trump’s Waveform and Visible Pitch Contour with Text Transcription and Annotation for Tones and Breaks Indices for Examples 1a and 1b



Source : Track generated from examples 1a and 1b using Praat pitch software (developed by linguists Paul Boersma and David J. M. Weenink, 1992).

pitch above the word “time”) invites the listener to respond, and indeed some in the audience say, “No!”

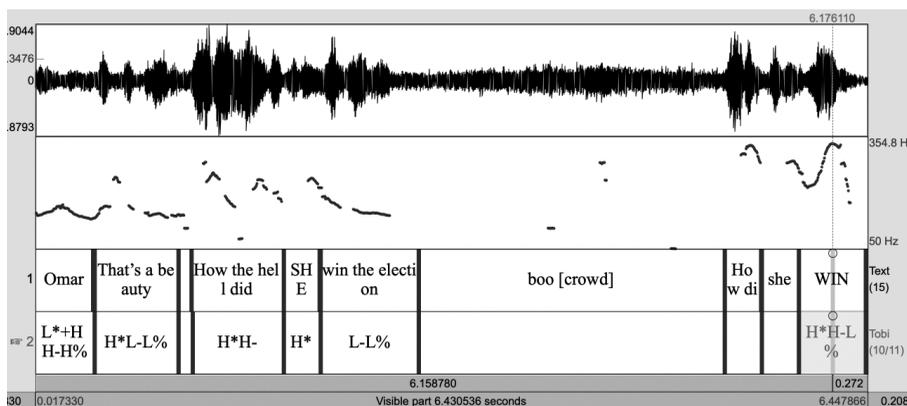
In contrast, Example 1b, which features a yes/no question, would normally be expected to have a high intermediate tone and high boundary tone, H-H%, signaling a question. Instead, Trump has delivered this line with audible pauses between “ref-u-gees,” and an unexpected low pitch accent (L*) at the end of “that’s good.” Linguists Joseph Tepperman, David Traum, and Shrikanth Narayanan have identified the narrow range and low pitch (approximately 75hz) seen in “that’s good” as reliably signaling sarcasm in speech recognition.³⁶ The multiple violations of listeners’ intonational expectations here are a strong clue that the message mustn’t be taken at face value, and that the listener must look to other, hidden dimensions of meaning.

- 1c. *That’s a beauty.*
- 1d. *How the hell did SHE win the election?*
- 1e. *How did she WIN?*

As seen in Figure 2, example 1c (*That’s a beauty.* H* L-L%) differs from what one would expect from a nonironic example. By putting the intonational focus on the word “that,” and lowering the pitch for the rest of the utterance, Trump lets his listeners know that he is communicating the opposite of what he is saying. His audience responds in alignment with him by loudly booing the mention of Omar.

Figure 2

Trump’s Waveform and Visible Pitch Contour with Text Transcription and Annotation for Tones and Breaks Indices for Examples 1c, 1d, and 1e



Source: Track generated from examples 1c, 1d, and 1e using Praat pitch software (developed by linguists Paul Boersma and David J. M. Weenink, 1992).

Contrast these unexpected occurrences (1a, 1b, 1c) with the focus given to high pitch peak accents in Examples 1d and 1e, where Trump expresses doubt about Omar having won her election.

Examples 1d and 1e occur immediately after 1c, and before each utterance, Trump resets his pitch, as is normal in English.³⁷ He starts each intonational phrase and then produces a contrastive high pitch accent, first on “she” and then on “win.” Both of these utterances are instances of the rise-fall-rise (RFR) intonation contour: H* is the rise at sentence stress, and the low part of the utterance is the phrase tone (L-), followed by another rise at the boundary tone (H%).

The RFR contour’s meaning has been much discussed in the literature.³⁸ Linguists Daniel Goodhue, Lyana Harrison, Yuen Tung Clémentine Siu, and Michael Wagner posit its meaning as “tak[ing] a proposition *p* as input, and return[ing] *p* as output while insinuating alternatives to *p*.”³⁹ Thus, examples 1d and 1e, within the standard interpretations of American English intonation, yield alternative possibilities: in 1d, for other candidates to win the election; and in 1e, for Omar to lose the election. In the case of 1e, we get an incredulity reading which could be paraphrased as: *She couldn’t have possibly won the election.*

Trump’s alternations between observing and violating the expectations of our shared intonational grammar is part of what makes his innuendo interesting to hear for the audience, and part of what makes him a dynamic speaker. His speech is full of twists and turns, of sarcasm, innuendo, ellipsis, incredulity, and insinua-

tions, of what sounds like in-jokes and invitations to continue his line of thought, and surely would motivate some in the audience to regard the messages as part of what sociolinguist Janet McIntosh calls alt-signaling.⁴⁰

The last excerpt I will analyze reveals another device used by Trump: the dog whistle, which I define by expanding Ian Haney-López’s foundational work from “coded racial appeals that carefully manipulate hostility toward nonwhites” to also include antagonism and violence against other marginalized groups (such as discourse that encourages sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia).

Excerpt 2

Trump on “Pioneers” and “Genes” at a Campaign Rally in Bemidji, Minnesota, September 18, 2020

Trump: (01:55:16) From St. Paul to St. Cloud, from Rochester to Duluth, and from Minneapolis, thank God we still have Minneapolis, to right here, right here with all of you great people, this state was *pioneered* by men and women who *braved* the wilderness and the winters to build a better life for themselves and for their families. They were *tough* and they were *strong*. You *have good genes*. You know that, right? *You have good genes. A lot of it’s about the genes, isn’t it? Don’t you believe? The racehorse theory, you think we are so different? You have good genes in Minnesota.* They didn’t have a lot of money. They didn’t have a lot of luxury, but they had grit, they had faith, and they had each other. [. . .] They were miners and lumberjacks, fishermen and farmers, shipbuilders and shopkeepers. But *they all had one thing in common*. They loved their families, they loved their countries, and they loved their God.⁴¹

Contrasting my analysis of “refugees” in Example 1b with “pioneers” in this excerpt, Trump details what he thinks must have been the qualities of the ancestors of Minnesotans assembled there, qualities stemming from the genes of their presumed European pioneer forebears. I have italicized the parts of the speech I will focus on with my discussion. In the beginning of the excerpt, Trump erases the precolonization history of the state of Minnesota and of the Native peoples who live there and focuses only on the “pioneers who braved the wilderness.” While praising pioneers’ toughness and strength, he juxtaposes the claim that the current audience has good genes, creating a causal link between the two through parataxis (they braved the wilderness; you have good genes). Next, he introduces the “racehorse theory” in what sounds like a parenthetical aside. Finally, he returns to his ongoing thought and asserts that despite all their diversity of occupation, the pioneers had one thing in common (and this part he leaves unsaid): their genes.

After this rally footage aired, outlets all across the country wrote articles and religious organizations sent protests and gave interviews alerting the public to the

dangers of the overt eugenics espoused by Trump.⁴² *The Huffington Post* even compiled footage of Trump bragging about his great genes on camera. Trump biographer Michael D'Antonio shared the following observation with PBS *Frontline*: "The [Trump] family subscribes to a racehorse theory of human development [...] they believe that if you put together the genes of a superior woman and a superior man, you get superior offspring."⁴³ And while the mention of racehorse theory is an easily decipherable dog whistle, more sinister is the pervasiveness of Trump's lifelong obsession with both family bloodlines and supposedly high IQ. This obsession results in his constant name-checking of his uncle who was an MIT professor, and results in absurdly challenging others to IQ tests, in boasting about his vocabulary, in bragging about his progeny's schools, and so on. Trump's racialized and ableist view of intelligence is in line with the reasoning for his ongoing attacks on everyone from Maxine Waters to Black athletes, and his insistence that Black people live in hell/war zones.⁴⁴ Many of Trump's callous actions against immigrants (like family separation), Muslims, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asians (like calling COVID-19 the "China virus") all follow a pattern of fomenting hate toward non-whites and other targets of eugenicist movements.⁴⁵

It is important to understand Trump as participating in the history of these deep-rooted racial logics. Many of the terms Trump uses descend from the legacy of John Tanton's "Latin Onslaught" papers in the 1980s (Tanton was the founder of the Federation of American Immigration Reform), and at least "anchor baby" was at one point considered hate speech.⁴⁶ Now it is commonplace in Trump's speech and has even been normalized in the media.

Innuendo, whether through dog whistles, sarcasm, irony, or enthymemes, not only avoids accountability but manages to bring epistemic information into the common ground in discourse (this is why a term like "anchor baby" can become normalized). By couching divisive statements in innuendo, politicians like Trump can dodge scrutiny while still delivering sexist, racist, and xenophobic messages.

The different long-running discourse tributaries I have discussed gather speed and force to meet up at a metaphorical watershed. In just the past few months, far-right religious political figures such as Republican Congresswomen Lauren Boebert (Colorado) and Marjorie Taylor Greene (Georgia) have proudly declared themselves to be Christian Nationalists, again to the dismay of many leaders at civil rights organizations.⁴⁷ These bald declarations of religious affiliation and pro-white evangelical bias would not be possible without the discourse precedent, much of it in innuendo, set forth in comments from President Trump. Christian Nationalism not only threatens the separation of church and state but has resonance with the actual Nazi-sympathizer history of the American Christian Nationalist Party, which nominated Gerald L. K. Smith in 1948, an anti-Semitic, anti-Black, pro-deportation presidential candidate with an "America First" platform.⁴⁸

Ironically, even as they protest Christianity's ascendancy in politics, it seems difficult for American observers and media to disentangle their own Islamophobic leanings from their effort to repel racist, sexist, and anti-Semitic statements. Lauren Boebert and Marjorie Taylor Greene have both been accused of being American Taliban by then-fellow GOP Representative Adam Kinzinger (Illinois), and the members of the Supreme Court who recently overturned *Roe v. Wade* were roundly mocked as "American Taliban" by media commentators, while high-profile social media accounts circulated memes of a picture altered to have most of the male judges appear to be wearing turbans and long beards, two signifiers commonly associated with devout Islamic faith, and Judge Amy Coney Barrett wearing a burka, a garment that some Muslim women wear because it covers their face and body.⁴⁹ It seems even after the Trump presidency, Americans process home-grown extremism through a projection of the Other, and dog whistling once more against Muslims in the process.⁵⁰

While most of the semantic and pragmatic literature I have cited aims to examine dog whistles and other types of innuendo at the level of single utterances, I argue that studying them as a historically unfolding system uncovers greater regularities and coordinated acts in messaging, as well as elucidating their support among followers and connecting individual speech acts to normalization trends and what becomes acceptable to say. I see the study of innuendo, including dog whistles, enthymemes, and sarcastic intonation, as an investigation into the pragmatics of what remains unsaid, and the recoverability of innuendo as of utmost importance for the understanding of political hate. We are all implicated, and implicated in complicity, in the making of innuendo.

Working hand in hand with other semiotic indices, understanding innuendo gives us a chance to describe the broader aesthetics of our current political moment. I hope this essay provides some tools to recognize and subvert the authority emerging from these powerful strategies while attenuating their stranglehold on discursive practices.⁵¹

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Thanks to Jill Anderson, Aomar Boum, Sandro Duranti, Janet McIntosh, David Myers, Nomi Stoltzenberg, Edna Andrews, Aaron Colston, Laurie Hart, and Maggie Boum-Mendoza for inspiration and fruitful discussions. Parts of this material were presented at a colloquium jointly sponsored by the University of Chicago and University of Colorado Boulder, where I presented along with Janet McIntosh in 2021. A different version entitled "Hate and Innuendo" was presented at Duke University in 2022. Flaws in this work are all my own.

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- ¹ Srikanth Reddy, "'As He Starts the Human Tale': Strategies of Closure in Wallace Stevens," *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 24 (1) (2000): 13.
- ² David Firestone, "State of the Union: The Audience; Guests Put A Human Face On The President's Ideas," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/29/us/state-of-the-union-the-audience-guests-put-a-human-face-on-the-president-s-ideas.html>.
- ³ George W. Bush, "President Delivers 'State of the Union,'" January 28, 2003, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html>.
- ⁴ Bethany L. Albertson, "Dog-Whistle Politics: Multivocal Communication and Religious Appeals," *Political Behavior* 37 (1) (2015): 3–26, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-013-9265-x>.
- ⁵ Ian Haney López's classic work defines dog whistles as "coded racial appeals that carefully manipulate hostility toward nonwhites." I have chosen to focus on the broader concept of innuendo partly because I want to broaden the scope beyond racism to encompass sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitic, and anti-Islamic discourse. See Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21. See also Lewis E. Jones's hymn "Power in the Blood," 1899: "Would you be free from the burden of sin? // There is pow'r, pow'r, wonder-working pow'r // In the precious blood of the Lamb."
- ⁶ Gregory J. Rummo, "Power, Wonder Working Power," *Writer's Exchange Blog*, http://writers-voice.com/FGHIJ/G/Gregory_J_Rummo_power_wonder_working_power.htm (accessed August 5, 2022).
- ⁷ Erving Goffman, "Footing," *Semiotica* 25 (1–2) (1979): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.1979.25.1-2.1>.
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- ⁹ Reaction to the mention of crusades is documented in Peter Waldman and Hugh Pope, "'Crusade' Reference Reinforces Fears War on Terrorism Is Against Muslims," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 21, 2001, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1001020294332922160>. Here is part of the text of the speech in question: "[W]e need to be alert to the fact that these *evil-doers* still exist. We haven't seen this kind of barbarism in a long period of time. No one could have conceivably imagined suicide bombers burrowing into our society and then emerging all in the same day to fly their aircraft—fly U.S. aircraft into buildings full of innocent people—and show no remorse. This is a new kind of—a *new kind of evil*. And we understand. And the American peo-

ple are beginning to understand. This *crusade*, this war on terrorism is going to take a while. And the American people must be patient.” Emphasis added. George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President upon Arrival on the South Lawn,” September 16, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>. Gerson’s quote is from an episode of *Religion & Ethics*: “Michael Gerson,” *Religion & Ethics*, November 2, 2007, Public Broadcasting Service, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2007/11/02/november-2-2007-michael-gerson/3101>.

- ¹⁰ I will resist jumping into the topic of *hate speech*, for which legal status and definition vary by jurisdiction. Hate speech is neither illegal nor exhaustively defined in laws across the United States, although harassment and hate crimes are both illegal. Alexander Brown and Adriana Sinclair, *The Politics of Hate Speech Laws* (Abington-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2019), 67.
- ¹¹ Marco Duranti, *The Conservative Human Rights Revolution: European Identity, Transnational Politics, and the Origins of the European Convention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Samuel Gyasi Obeng, “Language and Politics: Indirectness in Political Discourse,” *Discourse & Society* 8 (1) (1997): 49–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926597008001004>; Joyojeet Pal, Priyank Chandra, Padma Chirumamilla, et al., “Mediatized Populisms Innuendo as Outreach: @narendramodi and the Use of Political Irony on Twitter,” *International Journal of Communication* 11 (22) (2017): 4197–4218, <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/6705>; Alex Massie, “Another Day, Another UKIP Dog Whistle. Fancy That!” *The Spectator*, February 3, 2015, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/another-day-another-ukip-dog-whistle-fancy-that-;> and Mathilda Åkerlund, “Dog Whistling Far-Right Code Words: The Case of ‘Culture Enricher’ on the Swedish Web,” *Information, Communication & Society* 25 (12) (2021): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1889639>.
- ¹² Aristotle’s somewhat vague definition of enthymeme: “but when, certain things being the case, something different results beside them by virtue of their being the case, *either universally or for the most part*, it is called deduction here (in dialectic) and enthymeme there (in rhetoric).” Aristotle, *Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), lines 1356ba15–1356ba17. Although Aristotle referred to the enthymeme as “the substance of rhetorical persuasion,” his underspecification as to the definition of it has left much room for scholarly argument; see Lloyd F. Bitzer, “Aristotle’s Enthymeme Revisited,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 45 (4) (1959): 399–408, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335635909382374>. Other scholars such as James H. McBurney have defined the enthymeme “as a syllogism, drawn from probable causes, signs (certain and fallible) and examples. As a syllogism drawn from these materials . . . the enthymeme starts from probable premises (probable in a *material sense*) and lacks *formal validity* in certain of the types explained”; “It is not essential to speak at length and with precision on everything, but some things should be left also for the listener—to be understood and sorted out by himself—so that, in coming to understand that which has been left by you for him, he will become not just your listener but also your witness, and a witness quite well disposed as well. For he will think himself a man of understanding because you have afforded him an occasion for showing his capacity for understanding. By the same token, whoever tells his listener everything accuses him of being mindless.” See James H. McBurney, “The Place of the Enthymeme in Rhetorical Theory,” *Speech Monographs* 3 (1) (1936): 67–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637753609374841>. See also *Theophrastus of Eresus: Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought and Influence*, ed. and trans. William W. Fortenbaugh, Pamela M. Huby, Robert W. Sharples, and Dimitri Gutas (Leiden: Brill, 1992);

- Paul A. Rahe, "Thucydides' Critique of Realpolitik," *Security Studies* 5 (2) (1995): 105–141, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636419508429264>; Allan Bäck, "Avicenna's Hermeneutics," *Vivarium* 49 (1–3) (2011): 9–25, <https://doi.org/10.1163%2F156853411X590417>; V. K. Chari, "The Indian Theory of Suggestion (Dhvani)," *Philosophy East and West* 27 (4) (1977): 391–399, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1397981>; and Lalita Pandit "Dhvani and the 'Full Word': Suggestion and Signification from Abhinavagupta to Jacques Lacan," *College Literature* 23 (1) (1996): 142–163.
- ¹³ Elinor Ochs, "Narrative," in *Discourse as Structure and Process: Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction Volume 1*, ed. Teun A. van Dijk (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc, 1997), 185–207.
- ¹⁴ Janet McIntosh, "'Let's Go Brandon': On the Mutable Power of Semiotic Peekaboo," *Anthropology News* 63 (4) (2022), <https://www.anthropology-news.org/articles/lets-go-brandon>.
- ¹⁵ Craig Roberts, "Speech Acts in Discourse Context," in *New Work on Speech Acts*, ed. Daniel Fogal, Daniel W. Harris, and Matt Moss (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 317–359.
- ¹⁶ Quentin Dénigot and Heather Burnett, "Dogwhistles as Identity-Based Interpretative Variation," in *Proceedings of the Probability and Meaning Conference (PaM 2020)* (Gothenburg, Sweden: Association for Computational Linguistics, 2020), 17–25; Robert Henderson and Elin McCready, "Dogwhistles, Trust and Ideology," in *Proceedings of the 22nd Amsterdam Colloquium*, ed. Julian J. Schlöder, Dean McHugh, and Floris Roelofsen (Amsterdam: Institute for Logic, Language and Computation, 2019), 152–160; Jennifer Saul, "Racist and Sexist Figleaves," in *The Routledge Handbook of Social and Political Philosophy of Language*, ed. Justin Khoo and Rachel Katharine Sterken (Abington-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2021), 161–178; and Mike Deigan, "Stupefying," *Philosophers' Imprint* 22 (5) (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3998/phimp.2117>.
- ¹⁷ My own definition of innuendo is closest to Elisabeth Camp's: "the communication of beliefs, requests, and other attitudes 'off-record', so that the speaker's main communicative point remains unstated." Elisabeth Camp, "Insinuation, Common Ground, and the Conversational Record," in *New Work on Speech Acts*, ed. Fogal, Harris, and Moss, 42. For the purposes of this essay, I consider innuendo to be the superordinate category that includes dog whistles, sarcasm, and other kinds of strategic indirectness.
- ¹⁸ Sarah Muller, "Sexist 'KFC' Hillary Clinton Buttons at GOP Event," October 7, 2013, MSNBC, <https://www.msnbc.com/the-last-word/sexist-anti-clinton-buttons-gop-event-msna178021>.
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- ²⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists: The Final Letter, as Sent*, January 1, 1802, The Library of Congress Archives, <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html> (accessed August 5, 2022); Justice Samuel Alito, "U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito Delivers Keynote Address at 2022 Notre Dame Religious Liberty Summit in Rome," Notre Dame Law School, July 28, 2022, <https://law.nd.edu/news-events/news/2022-religious-liberty-summit-rome-justice-samuel-alito-keynote>.
- ²¹ Goffman, "Footing"; Adam Hodges, "Plausible Deniability," in *Language in the Trump Era: Scandals and Emergencies*, ed. Janet McIntosh and Norma Mendoza-Denton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); and Norma Mendoza-Denton, "The Show Must

- Go On: Hyperbole and Falsehood in Trump's Performance," in *Language in the Trump Era*, ed. McIntosh and Mendoza-Denton.
- ²² "Trump on Kelly: Blood Was Coming Out of Her Eyes," *Don Lemon Tonight*, CNN, August 8, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2015/08/08/donald-trump-megyn-kelly-blood-lemon-intv-ctn.cnn>.
- ²³ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Tweet, August 8, 2015, 08:46 a.m., <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/629997060830425088>.
- ²⁴ Zeke A. Miller, "Donald Trump Fires Back after Outrage over Megyn Kelly Remarks," *Time*, August 8, 2015, <https://time.com/3989656/donald-trump-redstate-gathering>.
- ²⁵ Maryann Overstreet, *Whales, Candlelight, and Stuff Like That: General Extenders in English Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- ²⁶ Emanuel A. Schegloff, "Repair after Next Turn: The Last Structurally Provided Defense of Intersubjectivity in Conversation," *American Journal of Sociology* 97 (5) (1992): 1295–1345, <https://doi.org/10.1086/229903>.
- ²⁷ Miller, "Donald Trump Fires Back after Outrage over Megyn Kelly Remarks."
- ²⁸ Erving Goffman, "On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction," *Psychiatry* 18 (3) (1955): 224, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1955.11023008>.
- ²⁹ Norma Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice among Latina Youth Gangs* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).
- ³⁰ Quentin Williams, "Rejoinders from the Shithole," in *Language in the Trump Era*, ed. McIntosh and Mendoza-Denton.
- ³¹ For a video and transcription of the speech, see "President Donald Trump in Bemidji, MN," Rev.com, September 18, 2020, https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/OuUlxo6wA_07MUtpY8up9pqqvx-PPTW4O6MTUCh1FsyY9t9Ka2cii5UIv1eQPGqzbPHyP8eoTOBT2rExr1H2rvTKTZWm?loadFrom=PastedDeeplink&ts=828.38.
- ³² Stéphanie Bonnefille, "Confrontational Rhetoric: President Trump Goes Off-Script on the Green New Deal," *Études de Stylistique Anglaise* 15 (1) (2019), <https://doi.org/10.4000/esa.3890>; Abbas Degan Darweesh and Nesaem Mehdi Abdullah, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Donald Trump's Sexist Ideology," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7 (30) (2016): 87–95, <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/33622/34566>; and Noor Falah Hassan Akbar and Nawal Fadhil Abbas, "Negative Other-Representation in American Political Speeches," *International Journal of English Linguistics* 9 (2) (2019): 113–127, <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n2p113>.
- ³³ For focus, see David I. Beaver and Brady Z. Clark, *Sense and Sensitivity: How Focus Determines Meaning* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2009). For implicature, see H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," *Speech Acts*, ed. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (Leiden, Amsterdam: Brill, 1975), 41–58.
- ³⁴ The ToBI (Tones and Breaks Indices) system is an interpolation-based phonological system of annotation for intonation. ToBI was developed in recognition of the role that intonation plays in both phonological meaning and speech recognition, and taking into account that, on their own, absolute pitch values yield neither consistent percepts nor cross-speaker meaning units. The ToBI system allows for the transcription of an intonational sequence given a recording of speech and an associated spectrogram or formant record. The interpolation occurs between perceptually prominent events that can be categorized as high (and annotated H* "high-star") or low (L*) and are known as

pitch accents. Additionally, ToBI allows for compositionally derived intonational contours, such as L+H* (“low plus high-star,” a low-leading tone followed by a high pitch accent) or H*+L (a high pitch accent followed by a low trailing tone). The most widely used conventions cover four tiers, arranged and stacked like a musical score, and labeled from top to bottom: 1. Orthographic: for orthographic words, with segmented boundaries lining up temporally with word intervals; 2. Tone: for the edges of high and low phrase tones (H-, L-) and boundary tones (H%, L%), and time values of points indicating the pitch accents, the points over which we interpolate; 3. Break-index: for perceived juncture/pauses; and 4. Miscellaneous: used to note disfluencies. By generating a ToBI transcription, we can abstract away from the specific details of absolute pitch value (as might result from speaker size) and temporal characteristics of talk (spoken quickly or slowly) to arrive at something more like an intonational “signature” for a specific pitch contour, yielding a stable of pragmatic meanings within a specific variety. The ToBI system has been used to transcribe the intonation of numerous languages, including varieties of English, Spanish, French, Chinese, and Japanese, among others. Here I describe it only briefly: please consult annotation guides for fuller accounts; see Mary E. Beckman and Gayle Ayers Elam, “Guidelines for ToBI Labelling, Version 3” (Columbus: The Ohio State University Research Foundation, 1997); and Mary E. Beckman, Julia Hirschberg, and Stefanie Shattuck-Hufnagel, “The Original ToBI System and the Evolution of the ToBI Framework,” in *Prosodic Typology: The Phonology of Intonation and Phrasing*, ed. Sun-Ah Jun (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9–54.

- ³⁵ Although examples 1a and 1b split a grammatical sentence into two parts, they are divided into two examples because each one takes place across a “break,” that is, a perceptual juncture. We consider them as separate utterances and analyze them as such in this essay.
- ³⁶ Joseph Tepperman, David Traum, and Shrikanth Narayanan, “‘Yeah Right’: Sarcasm Recognition for Spoken Dialogue Systems,” *Proceedings of Interspeech ICSLP* (Pittsburgh: International Conference on Spoken Language, 2006), 1838–1841.
- ³⁷ Hubert Truckenbrodt, “The Interface of Semantics with Phonology and Morphology: Semantics of Intonation,” in *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning: Volume 3*, ed. Claudia Maienborn, Klaus von Stechow, and Paul Portner (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011), 2039–2069.
- ³⁸ Gregory Ward and Julia Hirschberg, “Implicating Uncertainty: The Pragmatics of Fall-rise Intonation,” *Language* 61 (4) (1995): 747–776, <https://doi.org/10.2307/414489>; and Noah Constant, “English Rise-Fall-Rise: A Study in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Intonation,” *Linguistics and Philosophy* 35 (2012): 407–442, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10988-012-9121-1>.
- ³⁹ Daniel Goodhue, Lyana Harrison, Yuen Tung Clémentine Siu, and Michael Wagner, “Toward a Bestiary of English Intonational Contours,” *The Proceedings of the 46th Conference of the North Eastern Linguistics Society (NELS)*, ed. Christopher Hammerly and Brandon Prickett (Montreal: The North East Linguistic Society, 2016), 314.
- ⁴⁰ Janet McIntosh, “Alt-Signaling: White Violence, Military Fantasies, and Racial Stock in Trump’s America” (lecture jointly delivered with Norma Mendoza-Denton as part of “Talking Politics,” a colloquium delivered to and organized by University of Chicago’s Center for the Study of Communication and Society, and University of Colorado Boulder’s Culture, Language, and Social Practice, October–November, 2021).
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- ⁴⁹ Josephine Harvey, “GOP Rep. Adam Kinzinger Suggests Lauren Boebert’s Views Akin To ‘Christian Taliban,’” *Huffington Post*, June 29, 2022, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/adam-kinzinger-lauren-boebert-christian-taliban_n_62bd03dce4b00a9334e3a102; Jason Lemon, “Adam Kinzinger Blasts Marjorie Taylor Greene as the ‘American Taliban,’” *Newsweek*, July 29, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/adam-kinzinger-blasts-marjorie-taylor-greene-american-taliban-1729116>; Ruth Cutler, “The American Taliban Rules on Roe,” *Connecticut Mirror*, June 27, 2022, <https://ctmirror.org/2022/06/27/roe-v-wade-and-the-american-taliban>; and Bette Midler, Tweet, July 5, 2022, <https://twitter.com/BetteMidler/status/1544409932883181569>.
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Liberatory Linguistics

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While the college population in the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, few studies focus on the goal of linguistic justice in higher education teaching and learning – a critical factor in achieving all forms of social equity. I offer liberatory linguistics as a productive, unifying framework for the scholarship that will advance strategies for attaining linguistic justice. Emerging from the synthesis of various lived experiences, academic traditions, and methodological approaches, I illustrate how a structural ignorance of language justice affects the lived experiences of people across the world. I present findings from my work with Black undergraduates, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and faculty members as they endeavor to embed a justice framework throughout the study of language broadly conceived. I conclude by highlighting promising strategies that can improve current approaches to engaging with structural realities that impede linguistic justice.

The authors in this volume have presented a comprehensive overview of the study of language and social justice. The authors' varied lived experiences and disciplinary lenses have richly added to our own knowledge of language and justice. They also leave us squarely and directly with marching orders on what we need to do next.¹

As authors and linguists, our own appearance in this volume is a double-edged sword. The writing we covet as scholars can, at the same time, be used as a racialized weapon to keep students and other people out. For example, I have worked for several years on a Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) research initiative grant with Hannah Franz of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. To support Black students' linguistic agency, she launched the website entitled Students' Right to Their Own Writing, which offers guides for writing instructors and for their students. The project stages included creating content for the website based on our prior work, gathering feedback from student and faculty focus groups, updating the content based on this feedback, designing the web format, and disseminating the website through targeted outlets. Students who offered feedback suggested that the information on African American English and grading can help them view previously confusing instructor feedback in the light of language variation. Our recommendations for "questions to ask your instructor" give students a way to turn instructor feedback into a conversation and, in the

process, advocate for the right to their own writing. These findings show a need to use specific examples and guidance to educate faculty and empower students to advocate for grading that enacts students' right to their own languages.

In this volume, we have veered into that taboo territory of explaining how we – the people who would write or read *Dædalus* – are complicit in both the creation and maintenance of linguistic ignorance and, through these essays, have attempted to lay bare how that work benefits us, even as we critique it and seek institutional change. Through these tensions, our conversations have given us new ways to disrupt these patterns and dominant narratives. Our ways of interacting aren't limited to the grammatical and rhetorical conventions favored in the academy. We have to delve even deeper into our notions of who is a "good speaker" and even whom you want to be around and communicate with. Our language ideologies help us get through the day and have helped us to be successful academics, but they also betray us.

For my part, I have tried to be a disruptor, but I am keenly aware of my own complicities. I am deeply committed to change, but I also have worked tirelessly to keep my sparkling academic record. I was born to two Black physicians who were part of two large, privileged Black families in the Upper U.S. South. My family members have been multigenerational graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Ivy Plus universities. I work every day to use that privilege to bring about educational justice in the world in service of Black lives and Black students. I identify as Black/African American in the one-drop rule style of the Upper South, growing up in an area with three-way segregation between Black, Indigenous, and white people. I walked a fine but proud Black line between all three. I'm lighter-skinned with straightish yet curly hair, but my looks are deceiving. My mother was a brown-skinned Black woman, and that's the energy that I bring into most rooms and even to the writing of this essay. And years of chemotherapy and immunotherapy have straightened my previously very-telling-that-I-am-Black hair.

All of this begs the question, "How did I come to be writing here?" I first found the American Academy of Arts and Sciences on one of my long walks as an undergraduate at Harvard. I thought it was a Harvard building, so I went in to ask what it was. When the person at the front desk told me it was the Academy, I asked how I could become a member. The person took their time to explain it all to me. Attaining membership was at the same time all so close and tangible, yet so many life experiences and pathways away. That experience stands as a metaphor for what it means to pass through elite higher education spaces as a Black Southern Woman.

Black women like me spend a lot of time trying to figure out our place and our truth and where we belong. A lot of that sorting and figuring is linguistic; it is spoken, written, and signed. It is what we produce, and it is how what we produce is read, heard, and seen. Yet we have roadmaps and warnings to support us in this

process. In his 1979 essay, “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?” James Baldwin contended:

The brutal truth is that the bulk of white people in America never had any interest in educating black people, except as this could serve white purposes. It is not the black child’s language that is in question, it is not his language that is despised: It is his experience. A child cannot be taught by anyone who despises him, and a child cannot afford to be fooled. A child cannot be taught by anyone whose demand, essentially, is that the child repudiate his experience, and all that gives him sustenance, and enter a limbo in which he will no longer be black, and in which he knows that he can never become white. Black people have lost too many black children that way.²

This statement shapes my creation and spread of liberatory linguistics as a key theoretical framework and active methodology for linguistic justice. We need liberation in linguistics to repair the exclusionary and colonizing harms done in pursuit of linguistic knowledge as well as to recenter the study of language on liberation and the personal and institutional ways that language is cocreated and used. As we continue to work on institutional and structural changes in pursuit of linguistic justice, we are also in a constant process of linguistically liberating our individual selves and our collective communities.

In our book *Talking College: Making Space for Black Language Practices in Higher Education*, Christine Mallinson, Mary Bucholtz, and I define *liberatory linguistics* as linguistics designed by people from marginalized and racialized communities focused on liberating their forms of communication and expression while humanizing their connections.³ Liberatory linguistics stems from the fourth wave of sociolinguistics, the scholarship of dissemination, which I first started to lay out in 2016.⁴ It is truly linguistics done by Black people rather than (presumably and sometimes even questionably) for Black people. It takes as literal both the creation of linguistics and the intended audience. We work with allies and stand in solidarity with other groups in linguistics who are focused on liberation but refuse to be intellectually or practically lumped together. Liberatory linguistics recognizes the material and intellectual profit from the linguistic value of community knowledge.

In our book, which speaks directly to Black undergraduate students and their teachers, we ask: How can we change the system to center Black students’ knowledge in the study of Black language practices? How can we ensure that Black students are fully supported educationally and holistically in ways that challenge linguistic and cultural anti-Blackness? To achieve these goals, over my fifteen-year working relationship with Christine Mallinson, we have intentionally engaged in collaborative partnerships with thousands of students and teachers to cocreate educational equity and linguistic justice in classrooms across the United States.

Our work, grounded in our backgrounds as Black and white women scholars who were born and raised in the South, centers language and culture by centering people and communities. Our most recent student-focused work tackles linguistic justice in higher education, offering a model of linguistics that puts the comprehensive educational, social, emotional, and cultural needs of Black college students first. Our Black student-centered model prepares students to be the leaders of the linguistic *new school*. Their insights and interests are at the heart of socially relevant, community-centered, participatory teaching and learning about language, culture, and education.

Thus, liberatory linguistics is more fully linguistics intentionally designed by Black people (as well as people from other communities in solidarity) and expressly focused on Black languages, language varieties, linguistic expression, and communicative practices within the ongoing struggle for Black liberation. The components of linguistic liberation include 1) self-determination, in how Black language is used and how it is studied; 2) action and resistance, as both practical and aspirational strategies; and 3) humanization, fully recognizing Black people's humanity in the ways they connect to each other linguistically, culturally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. We focus our model on linguistics, but it is relevant to all of higher education.

Liberatory linguistics also manifests for us in a current and ongoing Build and Broaden 2.0 Collaborative Research project entitled Linguistic Production, Perception, and Identity in the Career Mobility of Black Faculty in Linguistics and the Language Sciences.⁵ Our mixed-methodological study examines how Black faculty in the language sciences and related areas linguistically navigate their professional experiences. Black faculty are skilled at navigating between varieties of English, with strong perceptual and linguistic abilities and linguistic flexibility. At the same time, linguistic inequalities may cause Black faculty to experience the structural realities of racism through the continuous evaluation of their language. These findings give us very detailed and nuanced insights into how language discrimination plays a role in the systemic underrepresentation of Black scholars in academia and how language plays a role in those processes. The study also examines professional inequalities for Black scholars in the language sciences and related areas to provide precise data that language researchers can use to broaden participation in linguistics departments and programs. The following narratives, taken from my forthcoming article with Aris Moreno Clemons and Dan Villarreal, humanize the researchers themselves and put our Blackness front and center.⁶

Several of the Black diasporic scholar interviewees emphasized that their personal understanding of and lived experiences surrounding Black language, identity, and culture led them to linguistics and language study as places where they could embrace their positionality as Black scholars in their academic pursuits. In her interview, Shelome Gooden described her upbringing as a Jamaican Creole

speaker. Both Creole and English were used in her school, and Gooden recalled how her first exposure to language differences was in elementary school: “[My teacher] was doing what I now know is contrastive analysis, where he would ask a question, he would receive responses from his mostly Creole-speaking students in Creole. And then he would ask us, ‘How would you say this in English?’ And then he would . . . show us these differences.” Gooden noted that these insights were foundational to her career, which proceeded from the inherent validity of Creole languages: “[My] pursuit became about not validating the language in a linguistic sense, per se, but looking for theories that can tell me something about my language.”

Similarly, Marlyse Baptista recalled: “I became a linguist because, later in life, I realized that Cape Verdean Creole, the language that I speak, was actually stigmatized.” Although she was raised in France and attended French-speaking schools, Baptista recalled that “the language that I really could connect with, for me as a marker of identity, was Creole. And to me, when I first realized in my early twenties, that actually the language was stigmatized, it made no sense to me.” Baptista explained, “That’s what brought me to linguistics because I identified the field as providing me with some scientific tools that I could use to demonstrate to myself primarily, and to others, to a community, that the language that my parents spoke is a language like any other natural language.” Linguistics provided Baptista with the tools to refute linguistic racism and marginalization and honor her and her family’s linguistic experiences.

Shenika Hankerson also recalls moments when her language, African American Language (AAL), was stigmatized in educational settings. Hankerson was raised in Romulus, Michigan, and remembers the years around 1985 to 1996 as being particularly traumatic. During this time, she was taught by several teachers who used “eradicationist” language pedagogies in the classroom. These pedagogies prevented Hankerson from using AAL in speech and writing, and when she attempted to do so, she was penalized (for instance, received lower grades). She encountered similar harmful and unjust experiences after 1996, during her college years. These experiences led Hankerson to her career in linguistics, with her research and scholarship focusing on topics such as dismantling anti-Black linguistic discrimination in language and writing pedagogy.⁷

Similarly, Aris Moreno Clemons discussed how her family ties to linguistics for Black liberatory struggles made the field and its potential for social justice meaningful, and were a key motivation to keep studying language. Growing up in Oakland, California, Clemons’ grandmother

was very involved in Stanford and politics, and she worked with Stanford. Now I’ve come to find out my Stanford aunties were also linguists. I remember very clearly them fighting for the rights of African American Language, in what would lead up to

the Oakland Ebonics debate of the 1990s. . . . They helped to start a school called the Nairobi School in East Palo Alto in California, which is, and was, the Black region. Everything was done in English, Swahili, and French. . . . [It was an] educational space for kids to learn using their own languages and using other kinds of historically Black *lingua francas*.

Years later, in graduate school, Clemons realized that her Stanford aunties were linguists Faye McNair-Knox and Mary Hoover:

I was like, wait a minute, is this Auntie Faye? Is this Auntie Mary being cited in these books? . . . Having familial ties to linguistics is what keeps me doing it because I do see the liberatory values of linguistics . . . that linguistics can be used in order to argue for liberatory frames and for pedagogical frames that support Black students and their development and rail against the machine that is academic and “appropriate” language.

The diasporic multilingualism of the Nairobi school was also a feature in the up-bringing of other Black scholars of language, like Kahdeidra Monét Martin.

Martin credits her love of language to two things: Brooklyn and Pan-Africanism. Reflecting on the quizzical look that hearers often assume when wondering where she is from, she notes, “My accent skirts the edges.” Born in Savannah, Georgia, and raised biregionally in Brooklyn, New York, and the cities of Atlanta and Savannah, Martin developed a range of multicultural and multilingual competencies at an early age. She states, “My step-father was Jamaican, and I spoke Gullah Geechee, African American Language, and Jamaican Patwa in my home. In neighborhood schools, I learned that ‘kaka,’ ‘dookey,’ and ‘doodoo’ were all names for what you definitely did not want to get caught stepping in during field trips, or you would never live it down.” In the Crown Heights and Flatbush neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Martin bolstered her linguistic repertoire with words from Puerto Rican and Dominican Spanishes and Haitian Creole, the latter of which she currently uses in prayers and conversations on a daily basis as a priestess in Vodou. These lived experiences have spurred her current theorization on Afro-phobia and convergent discourses of deviance and disability applied to African diasporic languaging and spiritual practices. “In the wake of the latest diasporic wars on social media and the newest cycle of attacks on antiracist teaching,” she says, “I think back on the Pan-African liberatory project that fortified me during my childhood and kindled my love of literature, literacy, and linguistics.”

These histories show the direct engagement that Black linguists have with research on Black language and culture for the benefit of Black people and Black communities. It contrasts with the often disembodied and detached linguistic approach that a predominantly white-oriented linguistics has set as the traditional frame of study. Through our stories, we are also creating a place for us – in the academy in general and in this Academy.

Why do we need a Black-centered model of linguistics? Because current disciplinary models, as well as academic frameworks focused on “diversity” and “inclusion,” are woefully inadequate to the task of Black liberation: Black scholars and students aren’t just “underrepresented” and “under-served” (in the parlance of academic diversity discourse) but “misrepresented” and “disserved” (to quote a graduate student interviewed by Kendra Calhoun, Mary Bucholtz, and me), both in linguistics and in the academy generally.⁸ Our model of liberatory linguistics aligns with the Demand for Black Linguistic Justice, written by a team of Black language scholars who wrote the CCCC position statement on anti-Black racism and Black linguistic justice, April Baker-Bell, Bonnie J. Williams-Farrier, Davena Jackson, Lamar Johnson, Carmen Kynard, and Teaira McMurtry.⁹ We are inviting ourselves in as we resist.

When it’s all said and done, liberatory linguistics aligns with multicultural education, culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies, and critical theories. It emphasizes needed pedagogical innovations that facilitate the spread of information about Black language and culture to Black people in service of the liberation of users of Black languages, varieties, and language practices. It takes a broad, transdisciplinary, Black-centered sociocultural linguistic approach to humanistic inquiry.

Liberatory linguistics advances self-determination in Black language and communication through “applied” and “translational” – that is, immediately useful and socially beneficial – research, as well as community-based participatory methodologies. It involves collaborative efforts that center Black students and faculty in all aspects of the research, particularly faculty at HBCUs. It privileges modes of scholarly communication and public dissemination that are directly accessible to Black scholars, students, and the Black community and use culturally relevant language and ideas. Mallinson’s and my first coauthored texts – *Understanding English Language Variation in U.S. Schools* in 2010 and *We Do Language: English Language Variation in the Secondary English Classroom* in 2014 – were directly addressed to in-classroom educators to help support them in the challenging task of supporting students home languages and varieties while helping students be successful in contemporary educational systems, which are often ignorant of and even aggressively negative toward the use of language varieties in educational contexts.¹⁰ Each text engaged directly with educators and students as they dealt with the linguistic tensions they faced in schools and communities.

Liberatory linguistics also imagines a liberated expressive future for Black people in the academy in general, in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in particular, and in the world. It stands with work on liberatory education – and abolition, fugitivity, and emancipation – to say, “In liberating you, I also liberate myself.”¹¹ This is a tangible call as academic leaders grapple with the reality that historical looting has left people from unrepresented backgrounds lower on their

strategic academic priority lists because they aren't the most prominent donors; their rhetoric walks that delicate balance. And now, we must balance with the race-ignorant rulings by the majority of the Supreme Court. What is diversity and inclusion work without a comprehensive budget and the support of the law? And because of that balance, we are witnessing institutions and organizations craft statements condemning police brutality and anti-Black racism while ignoring the anti-Black skeletons in their own classrooms. In this collection and in our work, we are calling the question, which forces us to face the imbalance. These guiding challenges help frame how students, instructors, and other readers can use this entire volume – including white allies in high-resource spaces, who must also take up this charge – to advance racial, linguistic, and educational justice.

Older, predominately white people constructed and dominated models of academic success that relied on the values of competition, individual work, and narrow notions of excellence and merit. New models, such as the *Imagining America* consortium, rely on the values of intellectual community, collaboration, and an emphasis on socially beneficial research.¹² Not surprisingly, white supremacy preserves old values within the academy, including in the discipline of linguistics. These values privilege the research interests of the over-represented, overserved majority of influential white scholars, framing them as the most pressing theoretical questions. Everyone else, and particularly misrepresented Black scholars and disserved Black students – whose home, community, and heritage languages and varieties are often the focus of colonizing research – are then expected to orient their work to these questions, rather than setting their own research agendas. “Academic freedom” is often touted as a scholarly right, but in our Black-centered model, academic freedom does not exist without Black liberation. In the old model, research on pedagogy that involves direct community engagement is devalued, cast as unintellectual and “applied,” and therefore unworthy, unscientific, and outside the bounds of “real,” “theoretical” scholarship. These values, in turn, directly support structural barriers that maintain white supremacy and demand assimilation in the academy, erase the intellectual contributions of generations of Black scholars, and prevent social change.

Our model of linguistics is a liberatory effort in response to this history and ongoing reality – a direct intervention and a value shift. Black education is a key tenet of our liberation model. As John Baugh has compellingly argued, language has been central to the “educational malpractice” facing African American students from the slavery era to the present day.¹³ Fortunately, old academic hierarchies are now crumbling as the next generation of Black students works collectively and courageously, in solidarity with faculty and other allies, demanding greater change from institutions of higher education. It's a wonderful time to be bold and active, and, in the words of the late Congressman John Lewis, to make “good trouble.”

This volume represents the open, direct conversations about liberation that linguists have been having. Liberatory linguistics frees our research from old values and enables students and scholars to do work that is valued, endorsed, and needed by their own communities. And our conversation is broad. So how do we disrupt all of this and create linguistic space in the academy and in linguistics?

In my engagement with linguistics faculty and students across the world, I have been promoting a three-stage model of addressing inclusion challenges in the language sciences. The model recognizes the current pressure between existing inclusion models and the nature of academic relationships.

- The STEM model: The STEM model follows National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health inclusion model directives. From a critical race theory perspective, the STEM model follows an interest convergence model that relies on adherence to current government mandates and narratives of “broadening participation,” in which diversity and inclusion are good for the individual and good for the state.
- The racial value model: This stage in the model emphasizes social justice and the intellectual values of scholars presently in linguistics from groups that are underrepresented, particularly in highly resourced linguistics departments and programs. This intellectual valuing is at the heart of intellectual liberation, and requires more inclusion in publication and hiring in particular. A focus on racial valuing doesn’t just call the question; it reframes and reauthors it. It asks, what questions do Black scholars who study language have and how can scholars comprehensively center their questions?
- The partnership model: The third aspect of the model states that to create genuinely interdisciplinary models of linguistic justice and liberation, it is essential to work with neighboring disciplines and research areas and with racial/ethnic and gender studies programs. In this volume, the essays by Aris Moreno Clemons and Jessica A. Grieser and by Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores give thorough examples of the work that happens when the study of language overlaps with Black feminism and Latinx studies.¹⁴ To make this succeed, we need all of you to engage with us and our work to make it stronger.

The key to the model is active work. Our theories will only take us so far. An article I and my colleagues wrote for *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America* in 2018 led to the first-ever statement on race for the Linguistic Society of America, which was adopted by the association.¹⁵ We drew on this statement to write a subsequent theoretical paper, “Toward Racial Justice in Linguistics,” which inspired a set of published responses on racial equity in the field.¹⁶ That work then led to

the forthcoming Oxford University Press edited collections *Inclusion in Linguistics* and *Decolonizing Linguistics*.¹⁷

Conceptualized as a two-volume set, *Decolonizing Linguistics* and *Inclusion in Linguistics* establish frameworks for the discipline's professional growth and create direct roadmaps for scholars to establish innovative agendas for integrating their teaching, research, and outreach in ways that will transform linguistic theory and practice for years to come. *Decolonizing Linguistics* focuses on how to decolonize linguists' theories, methodologies, and practices. *Inclusion in Linguistics* presents theories, resources, and models for achieving inclusion and broader participation in linguistics. Both volumes center social justice as an urgent priority for linguistics as a discipline. Forty contributions were received across both volumes, all of which have gone through an intentionally inclusive process of development, workshopping, and revision that we adopted in deliberate contrast to the traditional paradigm of scholarly writing, editing, revision, and anonymous critique, which is often isolated and isolating, as well as susceptible to processes of injustice and exclusion.

This intentionally inclusive scholarly conversation has included colleagues in applied linguistics as well. The 2022 *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* focused on social justice in applied linguistics. Nelson Flores and I noted that the volume was brave in the level of content and disruption it offered:

When thinking about the role of linguists in promoting social justice, it is tempting to focus our attention solely on what we can contribute to the world "out there." Indeed, in light of the many struggles for justice and liberation throughout the world, it is easy to see the urgency in wanting linguistics to contribute to social transformation. Equally important, however, is to recognize that the study of language has been shaped by the world and that oppression doesn't simply exist "out there" but also in research and practice in higher education.¹⁸

We also note that our next task is to think about how we help each other both in our scholarly development and in our local context across experiences. If we don't, we risk reinventing and rewriting the wheel in our scholarship, even with the nuances of local realities and nuanced solutions that undergird this new work. At the end of the day, this work is meant to sustain and support learners worldwide. Being explicit about that mission and who we need to reach to make it happen should be our guiding principle as we continue the work of this tremendous volume.

The education and inclusion of new and emergent scholars are central to the model. For too long, introductory courses in linguistics have been white-centered by default. By centering Black language and culture throughout the course and tailoring content to the knowledge, interests, and educational experiences of the students in the class, my colleagues and I designed an introductory linguistics course that was more accessible to and equitable for Black students as part of a larger effort

to create a more liberatory linguistics. The course was grounded in our experiential knowledge as Black people living in the United States as much as peer-reviewed research on Black students' experiences and barriers to equitable education. In our description of the course and explanation of our pedagogical choices, we highlight how moving away from teaching to an imagined (white) linguistics student and directly to Black students forces instructors to confront the anti-Blackness – and white supremacy more broadly – that shapes their teaching choices.¹⁹

It is time to move away from simply advancing linguistic scholarship and make the intellectual leap toward research that has articulated immediate tangible benefits for marginalized communities and communities of color. That model is needed now more than ever – people are dying in the damn streets. And we need to be the audience for our own work, examining our own campuses to discover answers to the following questions:

1. What is taught to linguistics students about education, culture, and diversity?
2. What is taught to education students about language, culture, and diversity?
3. What is taught to everyone else?

In 2009, Christine Mallinson and I described the dissemination of linguistic knowledge in the professional development of teachers, where contrastive analysis (of African American English versus Standardized English) plays a major role.²⁰ In 2010, we presented a linguistic awareness model that is designed to facilitate the sharing of knowledge about language variation between researchers and community members.²¹ The goals of the model are to:

1. Partner with community members, particularly in underserved areas where universities may not already have such partnerships, including K–12 schools and others who provide for the educational, social, and health welfare of the community;
2. Communicate sociolinguistic information about language variation to community members in ways that are effectively tailored to their skills and their needs;
3. Disseminate accurate linguistic knowledge to community members, both to train them in the science of linguistics and to help them better serve dialectically diverse students;
4. Assess the results of providing linguistic information to community members; and
5. Apply these findings to public policy and social justice models.

We contend that more effort and energy should be spent on disseminating relevant information that has already been gathered about language variation, par-

ticularly when integrated with existing literature from education, sociology, psychology, and other related fields. Researchers must share knowledge while also adding to this body of information by continuing to document and analyze how language variation interacts in real-world educational settings within the contexts of local communities. This volume contributes to that work.

Linguists and related scholars should also be more involved in creating easy-to-implement and realistic language-based strategies to help educators and students facing larger social and educational issues. These strategies must be both linguistically and educationally informed; that is, they must be oriented toward helping students understand sociolinguistic concepts and be practical enough to implement in everyday settings.

Future research centered on liberation should have a focus on the study of language across disciplines and the academy rather than just within linguistics and related areas. We see such rich strands of research across scholarly traditions come together in the essays in this volume. We've had enough basic research extensions in the study of language at this point, such that to try to stay within a small technical band now, people are wading into the dangers of re-researching and rewriting previous work in an attempt to stay intellectually and technically relevant, as they try to stay apolitical enough to appease tech giants they don't even know. Our model, as exemplified by the essays in this volume, is to decolonize this work, and our approach is one of direct refusal and of recreation of our language ideologies and practices. All linguistics needs to be applied with an articulated and transparent purpose for the work.²² As Aris Moreno Clemons, Dan Villarreal, and I write in a forthcoming article:

The 4th wave of sociolinguistics, as Charity Hudley first outlined in 2013, notes that scholarly communication must be the focus of our needed research because our people are out here dying in the streets, and we're losing our fundamental civil rights; as we write. As scholars & communities of color, in particular, we must be the audience for and arbiters of our own work. The stakes are too high at this moment, after everything we have been through, to revert to some delicate dance that relies on the niceties of the technicalities of consonants & vowels.

Liberatory linguistics is alive at this moment. Liberatory linguistics is scientific, but it is also lyrical. It is our community and our soul.

Liberatory linguistics pays homage to a long lineage of scholars who have persistently asked: who is all this linguistic work for? And it gives the center intellectual stage to those who have been punished and ignored even for the asking.

I'm writing fire fueled by the heat of climate change in California and my mother's spirit, magic, and memory. I'm writing for the American Academy right now under Paula Giddings, who is making history as the current chair of the or-

ganization's council. Her monumental work *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (1984) established a frame to which this work is responding.

I'm riding the fourth wave of sociolinguistics and laying it all the way down for my people.

Liberatory linguistics extricates, but it also remembers. It says that you have a place here because I am here.

I'm the first Black woman to edit *Dædalus*. Who got next?

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am grateful to the Bonnie Katz Tenenbaum Endowment at Stanford University, the North Hall Endowment at UCSB, the National Science Foundation, and the National Council of Teachers of English Conference on College Composition and Communication for support of this work. I would like particularly to thank Dr. Kahdeidra Martin for her editorial assistance.

Parts of this essay are adapted from my book *Talking College*, especially chapter 5, "The Next Generation of Linguistic Dreamkeepers." See Anne H. Charity Hudley, Christine Mallinson, and Mary Bucholtz, *Talking College: Making Space for Black Language Practices in Higher Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2022).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne H. Charity Hudley is Associate Dean of Educational Affairs and the Bonnie Katz Tenenbaum Professor of Education and African and African-American Studies and Linguistics, by courtesy, at the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University. She is the author of four books: *The Indispensable Guide to Undergraduate Research* (with Cheryl L. Dickter and Hannah A. Franz, 2017), *We Do Language: English Language Variation in the Secondary English Classroom* (with Christine Mallinson, 2013), *Understanding English Language Variation in U.S. Schools* (with Christine Mallinson, James A. Banks, Walt Wolfram, and William Labov, 2010), and *Talking College: Making Space for Black Linguistic Practices in Higher Education* (with Christine Mallinson and Mary Bucholtz, 2022). She is a Fellow of the Linguistic Society of America and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

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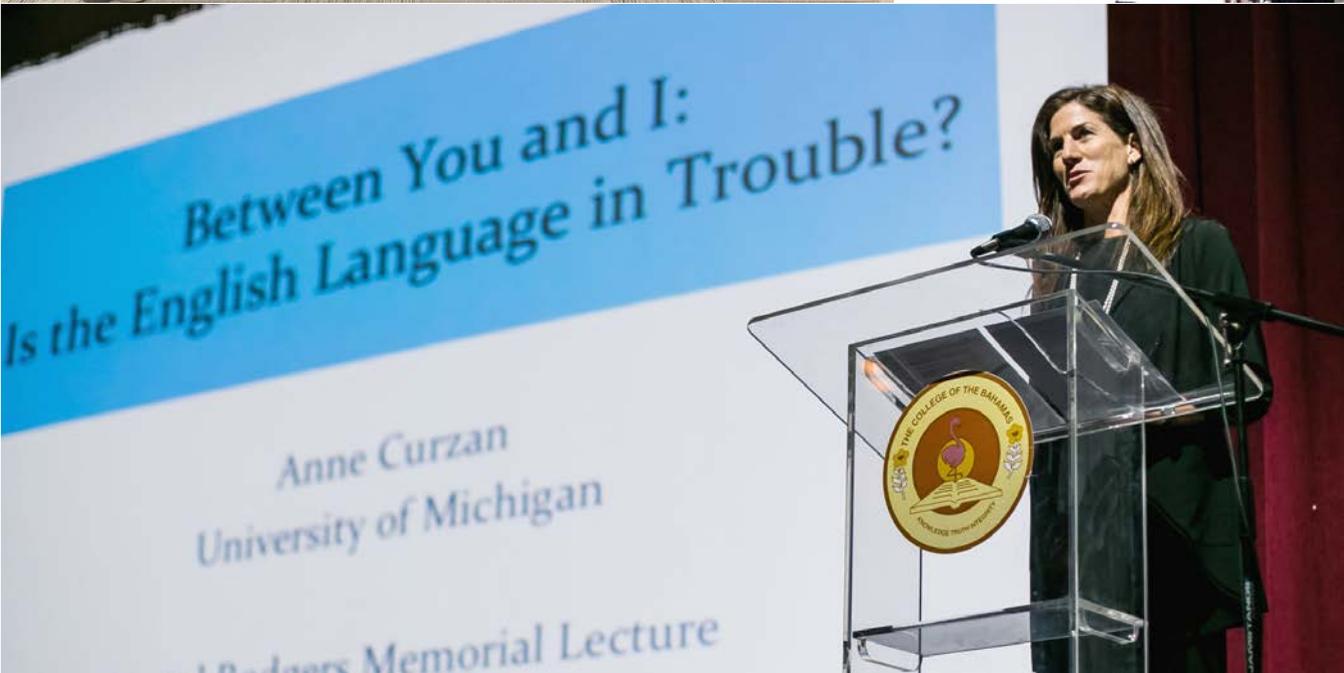
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Inside back cover: The photos on the inside front and back covers, provided by the authors of this volume of *Dædalus*, represent the rich and varied ways that, in the words of Toni Morrison, “we do language.”

(top row, left) Kristin VanEyck at Hope College, Holland, Michigan, October 2022. Photo courtesy of Kristin VanEyck. *(right)* John R. Rickford doing community service while conducting fieldwork, recording Gullah speakers on Daufuskie Island, South Carolina, next to Hilton Head Island, spring 1970. Photo courtesy of John R. Rickford.

(middle row, left) Anne H. Charity Hudley and students at the student poster session of the 2019 Race, Inequality and Language in Education Research Conference at Stanford University. The photo exemplifies Charity Hudley’s approach to doing language with her students as coresearchers and coauthors, as described in the conclusion to this volume. Photo courtesy of Anne H. Charity Hudley. *(right)* Street banner on Main Street in Miami, Oklahoma, displaying the greetings in the languages of local tribes in Ottawa County, Oklahoma, June 2023. Photo by Wesley Y. Leonard.

(bottom row) Anne Curzan delivers the annual Anatol Rodgers Memorial Lecture at the College of the Bahamas, February 2015. Photo by Kovah Duncombe, courtesy of Anne Curzan.



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