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The US is not enough: Why the real world of linguistics needs your voice (Response to Charity Hudley et al.)

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PERSPECTIVES

The US is not enough: Why the real world of linguistics needs your voice (Response to Charity Hudley et al.)

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In their target article, Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2020) have raised several issues and suggestions relating to improving racial equality within the scientific field of linguistics. While accepting the general premises of the authors' original article, this response piece offers reasons and suggestions for expanding the scope of the authors' original aims to apply to a broader, global audience. Four main issues are raised as justification and also as measures for expanding the call to action. These are: (i) the fact that the Linguistic Society of America is the flagship linguistics organization not just for US linguists, but for linguists throughout the world; (ii) the global influence and, in association, the responsibility placed on US and North American linguists to serve as trailblazers in our field; (iii) the applicability of the authors' suggestions within different academic settings, and what can be learned from cross-fertilization of ideas across different communities; and (iv) the critical role of English as a vehicle for spreading not only knowledge about linguistics, but also harmful ideologies about race, class, and ethnicity.*

Keywords: linguistic discrimination, institutional racism, racism, English for special purposes, globalization, responsibility, ideology

1. INTRODUCTION. In their target article, 'Toward racial justice in linguistics: Interdisciplinary insights into theorizing race in the discipline and diversifying the profession' (henceforth TRLJ), Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2020) have written a thoroughly researched and thought-provoking piece about the inadequacies of the treatment of race within the scientific discipline of linguistics. As I read and reread the advice proposed by the authors and try to envision how I can operationalize it, I find myself in an all-too-familiar quandary: what do I need to do to make this important message applicable to a setting outside of the United States and North America? Charity Hudley et al. state in a footnote (n. 1, p. e200) that they primarily consider linguistics in the US context in TRLJ, and they envision the article as a starting point for discussion and application to the overall field of linguistics. With that eventual aim in mind, I nonetheless find myself with a few unsatisfied concerns and questions as I contemplate their article. As a linguist who lives and works outside of North America, I am reminded what it is like to be at the margins of a discipline, in this case by virtue of geography. In writing this article, Charity Hudley et al. have taken on the role of leaders who are spearheading efforts toward race-related equality in the field of linguistics. With this response piece, I highlight the importance of making their message accessible to a wider audience, as well as offer suggestions about how to address this goal.

I write this response with the understanding that the authors had to start somewhere, and their undertaking was already enormous in addressing even the US context. They have offered a complex overview and a necessary call to action. Still, I am concerned that by positioning their arguments and suggestions chiefly for a US audience, the authors risk enacting a form of privilege not entirely unlike that which they would aim to

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see dismantled—which is clearly not a desired outcome. All linguists need to support the authors' call to action, not just those from the traditionally most privileged and influential settings. Let us follow up on the authors' suggestion to expand the scope of their discussion to a much wider audience, especially (but not limited to) places where English serves as an additional, rather than as a majority, language.

As I write these words, the federal US holiday known as Martin Luther King Jr. Day is being celebrated in the United States. I am reminded of the fact that King's words became a rallying cry throughout the entire world because, although rooted in his own specific background and experience, they carried with them a universal message. His words apply wherever people are oppressed, especially those who are oppressed because of systematic and endemic racism. Charity Hudley et al. have initiated a grave and critical endeavor, and as a fellow linguist I am grateful to them. Yet is it unfair to expect any less of them, that their words should carry a universal message?

There are four interconnected points I wish to make in reaction to TRLJ, the first being observations about the privilege and, in relation, the responsibility that falls on North American linguists. The final points relate to reasons and suggestions for broadening the scope and aims of TRJL beyond the US context.

2. THE LINGUISTIC SOCIETY OF ... ? It stands to reason that TRLJ was published in *Language*, the flagship journal for the Linguistic Society of America. But the Linguistic Society of America is not just the Linguistic Society of AMERICA. The LSA is the largest linguistics organization in the world, with approximately 5,000 worldwide members. Of these 5,000 members, some 20 percent are from outside of the United States and North America (David Robinson, LSA Membership Director, p.c., January 2020). As a scientific organization, the aims of the LSA are not limited to (North) American scholars. The tagline that features prominently on the LSA homepage reads, 'Advancing the scientific study of language since 1924'. No geographical limitations are mentioned. Global members and readers comprise a not-negligible proportion of those reading TRLJ.

We outside of North America are like a conduit for the critical message shared in the piece, and no doubt many of us are eager to make use of it. But how do we, as global linguists, accomplish this aim? The authors have already succeeded in the most challenging aspect of this work: they have gotten the ball rolling. An article of this stature is clearly the product of hours and hours of meetings (the authors specifically mention the LSA annual conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 2018), feedback from peers, and collaboration on writing and research. The hours spent working on the article itself are a mere shadow of the combined overall expertise of the authors, whose track record demonstrates an unequivocal understanding of the key issues from a global, not just a US, perspective. While their article needed to have a tight focus, there nonetheless could have been even brief mentions as touchstones for their global audience. As just one example, in the final paragraphs of §1, the description of work on related interdisciplinary fields could well apply to indigenous and cultural studies outside of the US. Points from TRJL that could be applied or related to wider contexts are brought up in the remainder of this response piece.

3. THE GLOBAL INFLUENCE OF NORTH AMERICAN LINGUISTS. At the 2019 annual meeting of the American Dialect Society, an organization that holds its own annual meeting concurrent with the LSA's, I presented findings of a small-scale study I conducted about the teaching and research materials used by linguists around the world. I used purposive sampling, targeting discipline-specific email lists and other online plat-

forms to gain feedback from forty-eight linguists around the world, who together teach a combined total of 143 linguistics courses. In the survey, I asked: (1) What is your teaching language? (2) What linguistics courses do you teach? (3) What textbooks or teaching materials do you use? (4) What factors influence your decisions in choosing teaching materials? Respondents filled in open-ended responses over a two-week period in the fall of 2018.

The responses to the survey showed that more than 60 percent of the published textbook materials used by the North American-based linguists are produced by North American scholars in North America. About 20 percent of the materials reported were produced in other English-speaking locations, principally the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. None of the reported publications came from Asia, Africa, or South America. According to the same survey, worldwide respondents, the majority reporting from Europe, were also more likely to use textbook publications from North America (25 percent of the reported total), with the second highest majority coming from the United Kingdom and Ireland (16 percent), followed by other locations in Europe (13 percent). The remainder of the materials came from individual teachers, were article packets, or were locally published.

The evidence of this small study makes it clear that North American linguists have an important voice in shaping what we as linguists in the world teach to our students. Likewise, it stands to reason that the voice of North American linguists is also critical in the research we conduct. Some of the respondents of the survey went to great lengths to describe why they are essentially forced to use English language textbooks and articles, even in cases when their languages of instruction are other so-called ‘big’ languages such as Spanish and Russian. Respondents who teach in so-called ‘small’ languages, such as Swedish and even German, stated a dire need for more advanced-level materials in their language of instruction. In other situations, it is a matter of accessibility, because the only materials available free of charge are in English.

These results are not surprising, at least not to linguistic scholars who live and work outside of North America. It is well established that some of the biggest and most influential academic publishers are based in the United States and the United Kingdom, and predictably their publishing language is English. This fact interacts with the current use of English as the main worldwide language of higher education and science (see Politzer-Ahles et al. 2016).

A diversion into injustices in the world of academic publishing is not the main point, however. The point is that North American linguists, whether they mean to or not, and whether they are aware of it or not, are collectively the most influential figures in our field. With this influence comes responsibility. While North American scholars wield worldwide influence, the reverse does not seem to be true. As such, North American linguists conducting research on issues such as race and equality have a burden to bear: all around the world, linguists are using the materials they have created, and they are using these materials to train their students, global citizens.

4. APPLICABILITY. Charity Hudley et al. begin §2 with a to-the-point complaint: that linguists (in general) have been slow to ‘take up the charge’ issued by linguists of color (p. e202). The section then continues to discuss the underrepresentation of people of color, including indigenous people, in the field of linguistics. This is an extremely important observation that could certainly be opened up and examined from a global perspective, comparing and problematizing what it means to be indigenous, and indeed, what it means to be a person of color and the relation to academic access and privilege. In the context of Europe, for example, the question of access and justice for more recent

immigrant groups, including people of color, is at a critical juncture. At the moment, the issue of human mobility—and its relationship to race and privilege—is a central element within the overall framework of linguistic justice. The treatment of this issue would be a welcome addition to the authors' perspective as their work expands and is taken up by others. Mobility, human rights, and relative access to privilege are promising lacunae for partnership and exploration between linguists around the world, not only with the current era of migration, but also with the promise of impending further mobility issues related to the climate crisis.

While it was interesting to read about the statements of race from various US-based scholarly organizations in TRJL §2, the crux of the article as it applies to the working life of linguists outside of the United States is probably most apparent in §3, with statements such as 'whether acknowledged or not, race is central, not peripheral or irrelevant, to every aspect of academic knowledge production' (p. e211). This succinctly stated fact stands out, as well as the subsequent crucial observation that 'notions of race are constantly changing and in dispute. In addition, models of race are different over time, across contexts, and around the world' (p. e211), along with some references to work on race that has been conducted on populations outside of the United States (for example, Makoni et al. 2003, Alim, Rickford, & Ball 2016). While each location in the world has its own history and social makeup, there tend to be overarching similarities with regard to race, socioeconomic status, and access to privilege, notably as these factors interact with language (see Baugh 2007, 2018).

As work on racial equality in the field of linguistics continues, it would be helpful to highlight the similarities across different global settings. With regard to newer immigrant populations in Europe, for example, linguists have much to learn from the work of US linguists who are experienced in researching the relationship of race to education (Charity Hudley & Mallinson 2011, Reaser et al. 2017) and the justice system (Jones et al. 2019, Rickford & King 2016). At the same time, there is much to be learned from cross-fertilization of ideas where social settings differ. Research from places like London (e.g. Sharma & Sankaran 2011, Gates 2018), Berlin (Wiese 2015), and Copenhagen (e.g. Spindler Møller 2015) offers US linguists perspectives on aspects of ethnicity, belonging, and language contact in contemporary constellations they might not be familiar with. These are just a few suggestions, and clearly the list could go on.

The multiple perspectives used in TRJL §5 to explain the perpetuation of a deficiency model of race within different academic fields—for example, education, psychology, anthropology, and sociology—was on point. This section was in my view the most broadly applicable and useful of all the contributions of the article. These carefully crafted descriptions will surely inspire many in our profession to critically examine how we carry out our work.

Charity Hudley et al. moved away from the more theoretical perspective to offer practical advice about how to open up linguistics as a field of inquiry for a less white and privileged population in their conclusions in §6. As much as I would like to enact their suggestions in my own research and teaching, the precise applicability is difficult to grapple with. I happen to work and live in an overwhelmingly white environment. For example, I would not know where to begin in attempting to open up my field of study to a more diverse set of students in my professional setting, as suggested in TRJL. There are so few colleagues of color as to cause discomfort about enacting tokenism in taking up the article's advice.

For linguistics colleagues in, say, Ghana or South Africa, the suggestions offered by the TRJL authors are probably equally evasive: how to dismantle institutional elitism in a location that is predominantly populated by people of color?

These observations again bring to the forefront that models of race and access differ across settings, and each location faces its own challenges in enacting practical measures to address racial issues in linguistics. At the University of Helsinki, for example, a Somali language program was recently introduced in the Faculty of Arts (= School of Humanities) in response to the fact that the largest nonwhite population in Finland are citizens with historical background in Somalia (see Bjork 2017). A major challenge in creating the Somali language program was, first of all, recruiting a faculty member who had the academic credentials to fill the post. A second challenge has been to attract students to the program. As pointed out by Friederike Lüpke, University of Helsinki Professor of African Studies, the slow uptake of the Somali language program serves as a testimony to the time and effort needed to build up such programs, and the impossibility to achieve such aims through the activities of the university alone (p.c., January 2020). The university's Somali language program, Lüpke continued, involves support from language teachers for immigrants and other community members, who work together to incorporate ways of combating stereotypes and raising awareness (p.c., January 2020). As mentioned by Charity Hudley et al., the processes we enact may seem long and onerous, and the payoff will not be immediate, but we have to try.

5. COLONIAL LEGACIES OF ENGLISH. In their article, Charity Hudley et al. listed several organizations similar to the LSA and described those organizations' policies relating to race and ethnicity. One of the organizations described was the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL). The AAAL's 'Resolution for confirming commitment to promoting diversity' (American Association for Applied Linguistics 2013) has not, Charity Hudley et al. note, 'resulted in a more representative and inclusive organization' (p. e207). This observation connects to global issues relating to applied linguistics, which is the final suggested area of collaboration in this reaction piece.

Within the context of the United States, a major component of the field of applied linguistics is, naturally, second language acquisition and teaching and studying English as a second language. Within the global context, a major component of the field of applied linguistics is foreign language acquisition, and, more specifically, teaching and studying English as a foreign language. In the world today, English is the most taught foreign language. Within many global contexts, such as certain locations in Asia, the packaging of linguistics as an integral part of foreign language learning constitutes the full extent of exposure to the science of language. This phenomenon is captured, for example, in work on global Englishes and English worldwide (e.g. Jenkins 2015, Seargeant 2012).

Charity Hudley et al. note that 'the white supremacy of linguistics emerges from its origins as a tool of colonialism and conquest, a repugnant history that continues to haunt the discipline' (p. e213). This supremacy is rooted in the past, but it very much lives on in the current era not only in linguistics as an academic subject, but also in the ideologies that are appropriated through the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. Colonial white supremacy is an omnipresent component of the global use of English, being reproduced with little or no acknowledgment of this history throughout the world. For the most part, English language teachers and students appear to have an unquestioning acceptance of what is considered 'good' and 'bad' English, with little realization of how those views align with the historical privilege of elite, white speakers (see Forsberg et al. 2020, Peterson 2019). With an estimated 1.5 billion foreign/second language speakers of English in the world today (Peterson 2019), there is a clear and immediate need for practical and meaningful tools for English teachers in the world to move beyond the colonial vestiges of English, enabling learners and new speakers to embrace and accept the variation and richness inherent to a language spo-

ken by so many different people in so many different places. Linguists working on variation in English are uniquely qualified to take on the task of dismantling the white supremacy inherent in the teaching of English around the world (see e.g. Schreier, Hundt, & Schneider 2020).

Yet in our discipline we have an old and troublesome division between what we consider ‘applied’ and ‘theoretical’ linguistics. This division hinders progress in addressing the colonial inheritance in the teaching of English. Using terminology introduced by Kachru (1982; notwithstanding some of its conceptual limitations), I observe a foundational disconnect between English language linguists in the inner, outer, and expanding circles. For example, in inner-circle settings, it is common to find treatments of ‘world Englishes’ within the context of applied linguistics programs, this designation implying that variation and properties of world Englishes have to do primarily with language learning. This is an extremely reductionist viewpoint of the multiple complexities and social realities of English varieties throughout the world. At the same time, it is not uncommon for global English linguistics courses to not make use of the crucial work on race and justice that has been conducted in inner-circle settings. More explicit cooperation between, for example, English language sociolinguistics and applied linguists working on the teaching of English could lead to significant progress in enabling English users around the world to see and also address the racist and elitist ideologies perpetuated in the global use of English, especially notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ English.

6. CONCLUSION. I end this response by thanking Charity Hudley et al. for taking on the enormous task of explaining important and critical concepts so vividly for their colleagues in the field of linguistics. With this response piece, I wish to remind the authors, as well as other North American linguists who conduct work on equality and access within our field: you have a crucial voice, and your voice extends globally. Your global influence cannot be overstated. Please consider how your research and experience can be utilized in other contexts. For all of us, it is important to acknowledge the learning and insights that can be gained from engaging with researchers from other geographical areas and language situations. There is much to gain from working together to address inequity and the advancement of linguistic justice in our field, and much to be lost if we fail to do so.

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