

14. (SOCIO)LINGUISTICS— WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR? A CASE FOR LIBERATORY LINGUISTICS

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As (socio)linguistic¹ research makes more space for the study of linguistic and cultural practices of marginalized communities, more Scholars of Color (SOC) are engaging in social and cultural approaches to the study of language. In turn, many (socio)linguists (both SOC and allies) are rethinking what the labor of (socio)linguistics ought to be and to what ends. These conversations have, over the last 10–15 years, led to the present moment, where calls for principles of language and social activism/liberation have given way to actual theories being proposed. One such theory is what Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2022, 129) call LIBERATORY LINGUISTICS, which “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.” The need for liberatory linguistics is urgent—it always has been. Still, in the era of global pandemics, erosion of fundamental civil rights, and an ongoing assault on Black bodies, we cannot keep pretending that our work exists in a wholly separate space. Of course, not all research needs to be applied (or immediately applicable), but all (socio)linguistic researchers should answer the question, “After you have done your (socio)linguistics, then what?”

In this chapter, we first trace the development of liberatory linguistics over the last 10–15 years as well as current research that is advancing the goals of liberatory linguistics. The bulk of this chapter is devoted to several models for liberatory linguistics through the perspective of each author’s experience:² Anne reviews current research on the experiences of Black faculty who study language (Mallinson and Charity Hudley 2022); Aris describes her model for LINGUISTIC POLITICAL TRANSPARENCY, the argument that scholars should explicitly discuss their positionalities toward research questions and processes (Clemons, forthcoming); and Dan discusses efforts to reframe the “foreign TA problem” in terms of students’ responsibilities as listeners and to disseminate this message to students (Villarreal 2012/13; Villarreal, Loring, and Evans 2014). We also provide an

overview of our 2022 “What Is linguistics?” workshop series, which fostered participation from newcomers and seasoned scholars alike. Along the way, we interweave insights from other chapters in this volume.

WHAT IS LIBERATORY LINGUISTICS?

The concept of LIBERATORY LINGUISTICS is fully laid out in Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2022). But its ideas were first outlined in Charity (2008) and updated in Charity Hudley (2013). They are the evolution of ethical principles first outlined by leading researchers in the first generation of variationists (Labov 1982; Rickford 1997; Wolfram 2007), articulated by Charity Hudley and others into a fully-fledged theoretical framework. In 1982, Labov delineated the Principle of the Debt Incurred and the Principle of Error Correction (Labov 1982, 172–73). This was the linguistics Anne was socialized into.

A proceedings piece drafted by Charity Hudley et al. (2018) led to the first-ever Linguistic Society of America (LSA) Statement on Race (Linguistic Society of America 2019). The lead authors drew on this statement to write a subsequent theoretical paper, “Toward Racial Justice in Linguistics” (Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz 2020), which inspired a set of published responses on racial equity in the field in the discipline’s top journal, *Language*. Brian Joseph, former president of the LSA, referred to the work in his presidential address, published later in *Language* (Joseph 2020, 909). These efforts and others have pushed the discipline to be more fully inclusive and inspired scholars, departments, universities, and professional organizations to put forward their own initiatives: to host webinars on racial equity for professors and students, to form workshops and workgroups for white allies, to design new courses on racial justice, and to craft departmental action statements on racial justice.

This work led to the creation of two forthcoming Oxford University Press collections, *Inclusion in Linguistics* (Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz, forthcoming b) and *Decolonizing Linguistics* (Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz, forthcoming a), and a *Daedalus* special issue, “Language and Social Justice in the USA” (Wolfram, Charity Hudley, and Valdés 2023). The editors have specifically targeted university programs for issues of linguistic discrimination across research areas and approaches. The scholarly conversation has included colleagues in Applied Linguistics as well. The 2022 *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* focused on social justice in applied linguistics. Charity Hudley and Flores (2022, 144–45) noted that the volume was brave across the level of content and disruption

it offered. Taken alongside this American Dialect Society volume, we now have a comprehensive body of work focused on justice and liberation in linguistics, along with organized actions. As such, it is time to move away from simply advancing linguistic scholarship and make the intellectual leap toward research that has articulated and immediate tangible benefits for marginalized communities and communities of color. We have to consistently ask: Why are some versions of linguistics so small (Dockum and Green, forthcoming), and who is your linguistics for? More specifically, who immediately benefits from your research?

In service of those questions, this chapter insists that the active dissemination of (socio)linguistic knowledge beyond our usual academic circles must be the focus of our needed research because, as we write, our people are out here dying in the damn streets, and we're losing our fundamental civil rights (Baker-Bell 2020; Taylor 2020). This means thinking about how to reach all possible constituencies for our work (Wolfram 2016): linguistics majors, non(socio)linguistics undergraduate and graduate students, scholars outside (socio)linguistics, K–12 educators, university policymakers, public policymakers, the general public, and the communities we study. As scholars and communities of color, 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 and vowels. How this change can more formatively happen can take many paths, but it needs to have organization, a schema, and an ethics to it. The time of writing multilingual, multicultural (socio)linguistics for white audiences by white authors, and usually about nonwhite populations, must come to an end. That means changing the publishing model (e.g., Charity Hudley and Flores 2022), increasing public scholarship (Mallinson 2018), prioritizing partnerships with local school districts (Clemons 2021a), and publishing alongside practitioners (Wesely and Thenoux 2021). Crucially, it comes from creating action-based scholarship that impacts the lives and livelihoods of those people and communities whose languages we study.

Since sociolinguists (especially sociolinguists of color) are often housed in nonlinguistics departments (Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz 2020), the ability to transform the broader field of linguistics remains fairly stagnant. Moreover, incentive structures in academic research, publishing, and dissemination are set up to reinforce colonialist hierarchies (Villarreal and Collister, forthcoming). Many are considering our calls to interrogate who benefits from the work, given the tenuous nature of both the state and industry right now (Hutton 2019). Some people are able to see the direct throughline to their work, and that needs to be articulated. For Anne, the

impact our work has had on the educational experiences of Black students is key. Others see their research as a part of their larger mission to educate students and be a part of the academy. From this vantage point, what they study matters less because they see their contribution to be primarily to teaching and learning. Others may not even worry about the financial reward or the benefits of doing extra labor when it comes to teaching and other university service. That line of thinking goes: it is wise to keep your pet/passion projects as your main focus since most work you do for universities doesn't result in significantly increased income. Some are on a scholarly trajectory that was rarefied because (often white male) scholars before them privileged the work, so they entered a scholarly community that encouraged their scholarly questions and privileged their interests. This group particularly needs to be interrogated. Questions that this group must directly confront and answer are:

1. Are you doing the research you are doing because you are just interested in the topics? What impact does your work have?
2. Are you doing the research because you see it contributing to our greater understanding of language and how it functions? What does the rest of (socio)linguistics and the world then do with that knowledge?
3. Are you doing the research for the intellectual contribution, the greater good, the benefit of industry, or some mix thereof?
4. Are you doing the research as just a way for you to remain in the academy? Do you find yourself in a position where you feel like you are just studying some stuff and getting some papers out while you teach, work, and try to live your life?
5. Is the current model of (socio)linguistics that you are engaged in financially and politically sustainable for you as an individual, for your department, and for the study of (socio)linguistics as a whole?

Facets of these questions come up in memoirs from linguists (Rickford 2022; Smitherman 2022; Thomason 2022) and interviews with linguists (Niedzielski 2017; Mengesha 2019), but we need them to be more pointed. As Anne's doctoral student Jamaal Muwwakkil asks, "Are you just doing Sudoku?" As in, are you just playing puzzles with language, ignorant of the impact that linguistic extraction and exploitation directly have on the communities from which the language was extracted—even if that community is your own? To all (socio)linguists, we challenge you to have written answers to these questions that you integrate into your teaching, outreach, and scholarship. Our model relies on direct answers to these questions that lead to explicit planning for active and literal reparations. We contend that reparations is the appropriate model for Linguistics because it recognizes

the material and intellectual profit from the linguistic value of community knowledge. As Coates (2014, 68) explains: “Liberals today mostly view racism not as an active, distinct evil but as a relative of white poverty and inequality. They ignore the long tradition of this country actively punishing [B]lack success.”

So now our challenge is to answer the question, what do reparations in Linguistics look like? And that leads us to liberation as a working practice. For us, it is tangible. Sociolinguistics is a house that Black and Brown language helped build. Or was the house built on top of us, for us, but by someone else? How have other racial and ethnic groups been pushed away from (socio)linguistics into other disciplines? How do we adapt this model for other communities that have been used in this same way or who haven’t come to (socio)linguistics yet? We call for the production of (socio) linguistic research that has innovative broader impacts, and we make the case that a direct focus on linguistic justice should be the express goal of future research as a direct action of reparations. Otherwise, (socio)linguistics will maintain its current model of white supremacy. We focus on needed research and community partnerships in education, speech and hearing, law, and health. We contend that we should do this work by letting SOC lead and do research that promotes and supports their own liberation. Additionally, (socio)linguists should work to partner with scholars in adjacent research areas as a way of bringing justice-focused methods to the forefront. We should build partnerships with SOC to refocus our research and recruitment models on building community. We now share models of projects that have allowed us to engage in such work.

THE TALKING COLLEGE MODEL

The LSA has seen a growth of students and Faculty of Color (FOC) in their publications and their leadership. We have also benefited from the hard work to create SOC collaboratives in Linguistics, The SPARK Society, and the Society of Black Language and Culture in support of scholars across the range of lived experiences who study language from a wide variety of perspectives. This level of professional organization and social action was unimaginable in linguistics even half a generation ago, when most of the organization in the linguistics space was male and white. Nonetheless, the unequal access with which Black students have access to linguistic training is evident in the lack of linguistics degree-granting institutions within HBCU structures. As a response to this need, Charity Hudley and Bucholtz developed the Talking College Scholars in Linguistics Program (Charity

Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz 2022) to respond to the need for the recruitment and development of Black language scholars.

The Talking College Scholars in Linguistics Program is a multiyear program that brings together faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students to research Black language and culture in higher education. Through summer research experiences, the program aims to grow the relationship across universities to increase the number of Black graduate students who study language. It provides networking and mentorship opportunities to students; it aims to increase the diversity of students engaged in the study of language by involving undergraduates from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and students at institutions that do not offer linguistics as a major and from linguistics departments and programs that do not offer (socio)linguistics as a research focus. Research findings from the program benefit students and the institutions they attend by providing information about the nature of the language and culture of Black college students, which has direct implications for teaching and mentoring.

DIRECT MODEL OF REPAIR AND REPARATIONS

Several highly resourced departments and programs in linguistics and related areas have recently hired scholars from backgrounds that have been grossly underrepresented in linguistics. Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2020) spurred people to wrangle with the existing racial demographics of linguistics, and linguists have been calling for more demographic information so we can make strategic and targeted inclusion plans. The LSA Annual Report (2021, 28) highlights the disparities in representation: “The population of ethnic minorities with advanced degrees in linguistics is so low in the U.S. that few federal agencies report data for these groups.”

Despite enduring challenges, scholars from backgrounds that are underrepresented in linguistics are themselves working to organize and create scholarly community cohorts. A group of FOC who studied language have earned tenure or are full professors and are replenishing the scholarly community led by the last generation of (socio)linguists. There is a solid cadre of (socio)linguists in leadership positions at universities as well. Many programs have larger numbers of students from underrepresented backgrounds in their graduate cohorts, and those cohorts have worked with others to organize presentations, such as the LSA Black Becoming Panel in 2020 and others (Ànand et al. 2021; Charity Hudley, Mallinson, Martin, et al., forthcoming; Lanehart and Charity Hudley 2020). As a result, many

of these scholars have joined in on NSF Collaborative Research–funded research on the experiences of Black faculty who study language (Mallinson and Charity Hudley 2022; Mallinson and Charity Hudley 2022).

This 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 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 will yield insight into how language and language discrimination play a role in the systemic underrepresentation of Black scholars in academia. The study also examines professional inequalities for Black scholars in language sciences and related areas to provide precise data that language researchers can use to broaden participation in linguistics departments and programs.

The first work from the project, Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (forthcoming a), presents personal and professional insights into how to begin decolonizing and centering Blackness in a broadly construed linguistics, grounded in the intellectual histories, positionalities, and research experiences of Black Diasporic scholars and their academic allies—especially white allies, given their numeric and structural dominance in the academy. The second work, a book-length collaborative project between four junior and two senior scholars, is a sociolinguistic examination of how Black faculty navigate their language and cultural experiences across their faculty careers.

MODEL FOR LINGUISTIC POLITICAL TRANSPARENCY

Aris's work insists on anti-racism and justice in the study of language. Specifically, she interrogates the intersections of language, race, and identity to question the linguistic mechanisms (e.g., repetitions, stance taking, tropicalizations) responsible for the (re)construction and maintenance of racializing and marginalizing ideologies. As a response to the calls for decolonial, inclusive, and liberatory linguistics (Mufwene 1989, 2020; Charity Hudley and Flores 2022; Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz, forthcoming a, forthcoming b), her recent work draws on several fields of knowledge to develop the notion of LINGUISTIC POLITICAL TRANSPARENCY (Clemons, forthcoming), the insistence that “all language investigators be explicit in defining motivations and orientations toward their research questions, methodological approaches, theoretical frames, and ultimately

their interpretations.” Political transparency is evident across her investigations of the linguistic and social formations of Blackness across the Americas by linking her methodologies and theoretical frames to questions that concern the actual community under investigation. She builds a praxis of political transparency through three steps: (1) explicitly stating the purpose for doing the work in the first place; (2) situating research questions in concerns drawn directly from the community under investigation; and (3) drawing interpretative frames that consider sociohistoric contextualization and social theorization beyond linguistics. Fundamentally, her praxis seeks to expose existing power structures in response to structural harms committed against the varying speaking populations that we traditionally investigate within linguistics.

Much of Aris’s work surrounds the language and culture of Dominican (-American)s, a group that traditionally suffers the consequences of sitting at the margins of several identity categorizations. As colonial power structures have positioned Dominican Spanish as deficient, broken, inappropriate, and something to be remedied through explicit instruction in formal institutional contexts, Clemons (2021b) argues that these discourses are maintained in part through research questions that compare Dominican Spanish to hegemonic Spanishes (e.g., Iberian Spanish). She contests this colonial frame by comparing Dominican Spanish to African American English (AAE), the stigmatized language of another marginalized group in the production of a colonial language. Ultimately, her political praxis recognized that research questions are not ideology-free, and thus the resultant research questions move beyond structural considerations of the language to societal considerations of how we interpret the language and the speakers.

In positioning Dominican Spanish with reference to AAE, Clemons (2021b) was able to make a claim for Dominican Spanish as a Black language practice, even if people of all races (and social stratifications) use it in their daily lives. This repositioning moves understandings of these language practices beyond the deficit frames that have been proposed by comparing it to other dominant Spanishes (Alba 1990, 2004; Harris 2002; Lipski 2011). In the end, Clemons (forthcoming) maintains that if we remove the ideology that culture is created and maintained by hegemonic discourses, which is grounded in white supremacist understandings of the Americas, then we can position these practices in relation to the Afro-historical contexts that shape every facet of American life. Moreover, she notes that in the first majority Black site in the Americas, it is not in the least surprising that Black language practices are the dominant (if not hegemonic) language practices.

Ultimately, Aris's work proposes that linguistic investigations can provide foundations for the construction of new logics that allow us to contend with the complexities of racial hierarchies. Instead of focusing on how we survive colonial systems of power, she seeks to understand how we transform those systems by refusing to engage within the frames that have been laid out for us. In positing Blackness as a central fact, she follows the tradition of many Black feminists drawing the margins of the margins into the center (e.g., hooks 1999). She asks: What systems are built to eradicate Black language practices? In what ways are anti-Black ideologies institutionalized in these efforts? Moreover, how do we continue to push against these systems across a range of activities, institutions, and cross-ethnic solidarities?

Further, she looks to communities to understand how activism, linguistic and otherwise, can disrupt the racial hierarchies that have dominated social institutions across the Americas since colonial times. Additionally, she questions how language allows for the commodification of Blackness while continuing to relegate Black speakers to the margins. Finally, she argues that linguistic research can be primary in our understanding of race and ethnicity, expanding the scope of what has traditionally constituted linguistic research, while simultaneously pushing against the notion that we can deconstruct racial logics within a singular disciplinary field.

MODEL FOR RETHINKING THE COMMUNICATIVE BURDEN

Dan's liberatory praxis has largely focused on a justice-oriented approach to the so-called foreign TA problem (Bailey 1984). Starting with an undergraduate honors thesis under Anne's supervision (Villarreal 2012/13), his approach evolved through trial and error in research, teaching, and service. However, pressures against "applied" work led Dan to pursue other research strands during grad school and postdocs, demonstrating why liberatory linguistics needs to serve as a counterweight. Given Dan's multiple overlapping privileged identities, we offer this narrative in the spirit of our "questions privileged scholars must confront."

U.S. universities overwhelmingly place the burden for solving the "foreign TA problem" onto international teaching assistants (ITAs) and international faculty (e.g., English proficiency testing): "Make the 'accent' go away, and so goes the problem" (Villarreal 2012/13, 9). Contrary to this schema, however, there is ample evidence that the "problem" is not merely a function of ITAs' communication skills (e.g., Rubin 1992; Linde-mann 2002). Villarreal (2012/13) proposed a more coherent model of the

COMMUNICATION GAP consisting of both linguistic misunderstanding (created by ITAs and students) and linguistic bias (created by students). This model implies that one-sided efforts to address the gap are doomed to fail; instead, universities must prepare undergraduates to interact with speakers of diverse Englishes. He modeled this approach through a training module for undergraduates (based on Derwing, Rossiter, and Munro 2002; Lippi-Green 2011; and others), addressing linguistic bias and linguistic misunderstanding. Follow-up focus group sessions uncovered a process by which accent bias is socialized among undergraduate populations. These findings inspired several policy recommendations for universities and TESOL professionals to mitigate the communication gap (Villarreal 2012/13).

Dan continued to iterate this praxis during his graduate work at the University of California, Davis, where beliefs about ITAs' supposed incomprehensibility were alive and well in "progressive, enlightened, diverse" Northern California. In particular, Villarreal's (2012/13) recommendations for closing the communication gap found an ideal test-bed in a new survey-level course, Global English and Communication. Students broke down ideologies and attitudes, participated in structured accent-familiarization listening activities, and discussed their role in communicating in globalized English settings (including in their own classes with ITAs). Villarreal and fellow TAs conducted action research to assess the course's effectiveness, finding that students improved their critical thinking about language and communication (Villarreal, Loring, and Evans 2014).

Advancing the goals of liberatory linguistics means not only identifying who needs to know about (socio)linguistics but also meeting them where they're at rather than expecting them to come to us. For the communication gap, this means reaching U.S. undergraduates, who otherwise escape their share of responsibility for closing the gap. One successful effort was the Global English class itself. As a survey-level course that satisfied several general education requirements and fed into the popular Communication major, the messages of liberatory linguistics could reach a lot of students. However, when Villarreal ran a series of presentations advertised toward undergraduates "having difficulty understanding [their] TA's accent," almost no undergraduates attended. The lesson, in hindsight, is obvious: students didn't show up to do their part against the communication gap because they had been socialized to believe that they were victims of the gap rather than willing participants. As a result, Villarreal later confronted the communication gap as a systemic rather than an individual problem, by integrating insights from this earlier praxis into UC Davis's new TA orientation.

While these experiences still shape Dan's teaching, his research has moved away from the communication gap—though other researchers continue to innovate student-training programs (Lindemann et al. 2016; Subtirelu et al. 2022). He never wrote up his conference paper on the Global English class for publication. His 2016 dissertation and subsequent research were more conventionally (socio)linguistics (i.e., nonapplied). He used his research to advance theory and methods rather than to press against unfair institutional policies and racist attitudes around ITAs. Thankfully, in the wake of Rosa and Flores (2017), researchers are increasingly willing to call out negative raciolinguistic ideologies around ITAs (Deroma 2022; Ramjattan 2022). Among the multiple reasons for his move were job-market realities; a chorus of job ads sent a clear signal: "remaining in the academy" required candidates to market themselves more in the mainstream of linguistics. Since securing a tenure-track job, he has gotten back into the scholarship of dissemination, codeveloping an anticolonial model for sharing research methods (Collister and Villarreal 2022; Villarreal and Collister, forthcoming) and collaborating on research with public health researchers about language attitudes and medication access. Dan "played it safe" and "played nice" with his research profile—a fact that can't be separated from his identities as an L1 English-speaking, hearing, cisgender hetero, white-passing male. But the next generation of scholars in liberatory linguistics will have ample examples of scholars who got jobs without "playing it safe" or "playing nice."

WORKSHOPS TOWARD THE ADVANCEMENT OF (SOCIO)LINGUISTICS

While preparing for the current publication, we felt it important to initiate and expand our ideas into a larger conversation about the future of linguistics, especially in holding with Clemons's (2021b; forthcoming) model of political transparency. As a result, three panels were convened as a means of disseminating knowledge about historical and contemporary linguistic theory, as a survey of scholars we understood to be following liberatory models, and as a generative space for coming to understand where (socio)linguistics could go from here (Charity Hudley, Clemons, and Villarreal 2022). The panels were designed to be inclusive, and ultimately, they resulted in generative conversations where undergrads and senior scholars alike contributed links and reading recommendations, and everyone was sent the whole list. The first panel featured the three authors of this chapter in a discussion about what (exactly) linguistics is, the second discussed the

social in (socio)linguistics, and the third discussed the status of “faculty of mind” as a model for linguistic study.

In the discussion on (socio)linguistics, Norma Mendoza-Denton and Amelia Tseng spoke about the necessity for expanding what has traditionally been understood as linguistic investigation, especially within (socio)linguistics. Upon initiating the conversation, it became clear how many (socio)linguists arrived at their work through deeply personal experiences. For Mendoza-Denton, her transmigrant experience led her to a love of languages (Mendoza-Denton 2021). For Tseng, the uniquely multilingual situation of her family sparked her interest in language and identity. More importantly, though, the conversation highlighted that the immediate and necessary goals of (socio)linguistics should be to address societal issues of import, such as Mendoza-Denton’s recent work on political discourse during the Trump election and presidency (Mendoza-Denton 2017) and Tseng’s work on Latinx identity among historical and ongoing discourses of the Hispanic threat and assumptions about race and language (Tseng 2019, 2020, 2021). Mendoza-Denton noted, “sociolinguistics does not have to be confined to language,” and more importantly, (socio)linguists are uniquely positioned to analyze discourses of power, culture, identity, organizational structures, and more. Therefore, having these unique skills puts us in a position of responsibility, in which we must not only conduct our work within our careers but also in more public-facing venues that provide everyday access to deep understandings of our social worlds, advancing the fourth wave commitment to dissemination beyond the academy.

Nonetheless, much of what is still considered (socio)linguistics in the United States falls within first-wave variationist paradigms that do not allow for levels of interdisciplinarity necessary to tackle the most important social issues (Tseng and Hinrichs 2021). Importantly, the discussion revealed that we aren’t failing at doing linguistic analysis, but rather we are failing at making it legible to ordinary folks in ways that impact overarching linguistic and social ideologies. As such, Tseng suggested that in order for (socio)linguistics to advance, researchers must call on methodological traditions and linguistic questions being posed across language-related fields such as linguistic anthropology, educational linguistics, and critical race studies. Only through these kinds of interdisciplinary expansions will (socio)linguists be able to make sense of the experiences of marginalized and racialized language users in ways that explicate our current social worlds.

(Socio)linguistics has historically been constructed (at least in part) in opposition to so-called mentalist models of language that position language as a window into general cognitive processes—a form of disciplinary gate-keeping that both marginalizes SOC and impoverishes theoretical develop-

ment on both sides of the “divide” (Hutton 2019; Charity Hudley and Flores 2022; Dockum and Green, forthcoming). As a result, we convened our third panel, *What Is “Language as Faculty of Mind”?* with the explicit goal of revisiting whether “language as a faculty of mind” continues to be a viable framework and perspective for linguistics given the social and expressive dimensions. This panel featured two researchers, Rachel Elizabeth Weissler and Meredith Tamminga, whose work engages with the mental by reckoning with the nonmental. For example, Weissler discussed how listeners show different neurophysiological responses to the use of the same grammatical features by speakers of AAL versus mainstream U.S. English, indicating the importance of dialect variation to the language faculty (Weissler and Brennan 2020). Tamminga described how outreach efforts by the Philadelphia Signs Project (Lucas et al. 2023 [this volume]) prioritizes lexical variation, an area of particular interest to the Philadelphia ASL speech community (Occhino et al. 2021)—in contrast to the typical dismissal of lexical variation as not structural enough to be the object of serious linguistic study. Both scholars called for linguistics and related fields to be more inclusive in collecting and disseminating research. Weissler pointed out that until very recently, the literal hardware of electroencephalography (EEG) effectively excluded participants with Afro-centric hair (Etienne et al. 2020); Tamminga highlighted Charlotte Vaughn’s work to set up a research and outreach lab at the new Planet Word Museum (Language Science Station 2022; Vaughn and Huang 2021). Contrary to the typical exclusionary relationship between social and mental linguistics, Weissler and Tamminga modeled a liberatory approach to language as a faculty of the mind.

CONCLUSION

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. These approaches are alluded to across this volume, such as Terry and Green’s (2023, 43–44 [this volume]) statement that “there is no singular way to varietize Black language. Language and culture are both far too complex for a single story to tell all.”

Liberatory linguistics also engages directly with the political and social motivations for the work and situates itself within socio-historical condi-

tions as exemplified in Carter, Callesano, and López Valdez (2023 [this volume]), who call for a move away from the binary and the colonizer categories—even of what constitutes Spanish and what constitutes English—with the explicit goal of dismantling harmful ideologies. In addition, the authors state: “Practitioners should strive to collaborate with students, especially Latinx, Afro-Latinx, and Indigenous-background students, who are underrepresented in our fields, and whose languages and language varieties remain mis- and underrepresented in our overall account of language in the United States” (65).

Liberatory linguistics acknowledges and engages the diversity of Blackness across contexts, leaning in on the diversity of perspectives that can be offered through critical and liberatory approaches to language study. In their chapter, “Needed Research on American Sign Language Variation,” Lucas et al. (2023 [this volume]) state: “some varieties of ASL have been looked at closely, such as Black ASL, but additional aspects of Black ASL and other varieties such as the ASL used in Latinx and Asian communities and the ASL used in Canada and by Black Canadians demand attention. Community members’ beliefs and attitudes about nonprestige or minoritized varieties of ASL also require description” (115). They note that it is important to “pull the broader field of linguistics toward more inclusive practices that situate the actual range of language use at the center of communities and among individual bodies with differing physical and social experiences in the world” (127), advocating for the kind of action based participatory research led by deaf and hard-of-hearing communities.

We should think strategically about what across-discipline and across-academia actions we want to take next. We need sociolinguists to collectively focus on how our linguistic knowledge and technical skill sets can be collaboratively used for the greater good. We need a greater overlap with other people studying language to address pressing issues of linguistic justice in every aspect, from language and literacy acquisition to justice in the legal system to revamping discourses in public health. We need our technology to better understand us and avoid bias in linguistic algorithms that impact our everyday lives (Koencke et al. 2020; Mengesha et al. 2021). We need to be more present in conversations happening across campus in education, psychology, and other fields—where there are plenty of scholars doing linguistics (Charity Hudley, Clemons, and Villarreal 2023)—as areas of study and practice that reach a great number of students. In sum, we need (socio)linguists to consider what their (socio)linguistics is actually good for. Our needed research will be informed by those interactions with scholars of varying backgrounds and lived experiences. We got this!

NOTES

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1. We use the term *(socio)linguistics* throughout the chapter with referential ambiguity intended. While much of the work we read and cite is broadly categorized as sociolinguistics (and/or by scholars who identify themselves or are identified as sociolinguists), we challenge all linguists to think about the justice implications of their work, and we acknowledge that sociolinguists have much to learn from nonsociolinguists in this respect.
2. We use our first names (sparingly) in this chapter to refer to individual authors within the narrative of the piece (e.g., in situations where our positionalities are key), and last names in the context of specific pieces of previous research, teaching, or service. We use first names to invite readers to consider their own professional decisions, in the spirit of themes we discuss.

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