

# Teaching for a just and inclusive linguistics

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## Acknowledgment of the Chumash people and land

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which UC Santa Barbara stands: the Chumash people. The UCSB community recognizes and honors their past and present stewardship, as well as the significance of Native American peoples' place in the learning and research activities of this university.

# Thank you to my UCSB colleagues and students, past and present!

- Many thanks to those who have helped me to understand these issues better, especially:

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- Lal Zimman
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# Where I'm coming from and why I'm here

- I'm a white cis female sociocultural linguist from Indiana and Oklahoma
- I do research on language, race, and racism (and other topics)
- I mostly teach 250- to 350-person general education classes such as Language, Race, and Ethnicity; Language, Power, and Learning
- Why I do linguistics: Because I love languages (and yes, I know it's a disciplinary taboo to admit this)
- What I do when I'm not doing linguistics: Watch international TV and (when there's no pandemic) whales
- Why I'm here today: I'm passionate about dismantling racism and white supremacy in linguistics

# What I hope you'll do today

- Use the **chat** throughout to interact with me, Souidi, and each other
- **Learn and share ideas** about how to make linguistics more inclusive, not just as a set of “tips” but as a large-scale intellectual/political commitment
- Notice **what I'm doing (and failing to do)** to foster inclusivity
  - Providing the pronunciation of my name; giving my pronouns
  - Acknowledging Native land and people
  - Telling you who I am
  - Crediting originators of ideas by name and providing a photo of them
  - Encouraging everyone to be active participants and providing ways to do so

# Injustice and exclusion in the classroom

- Students from dominant groups have the privilege of knowing that **people like them will be the focus** of their learning experience in linguistics
  - Instructors are more likely to share their background
  - Researchers are more likely to share their background
  - Their language is more likely to be taken as normative
  - Their lived experience is more likely to be taken as normative
  - Their learning needs are more likely to be accommodated in the classroom
  - Their presence in the discipline is more likely to go unquestioned

# Injustice and exclusion in the classroom

- In almost all linguistics classes, students from marginalized and minoritized groups **must do extra work**:
  - to find the relevance of linguistics for their own language and lived experience
  - to ensure that their language and lived experience are (accurately) represented in the field
  - To position themselves as legitimate members of the discipline

# What does “structural exclusion” mean?

- People from marginalized social groups **aren't given equal access** due to systemic barriers to their presence and participation
  - And when they manage to gain access, they may not participate as much or they may seem detached because the curriculum wasn't created with them in mind
- People from these groups and their languages, cultures, and lived experiences **often aren't represented** in the curriculum and the discipline
  - Or they're represented through the work of researchers from the dominant group, which is inherently limited

## What *doesn't* “structural exclusion” mean?

- Structural exclusion does NOT mean:
  - Being a numeric minority but a member of a structurally dominant group
  - Feeling uncomfortable when a space becomes more inclusive of traditionally marginalized groups
- The reality of inclusion means that **dominant group members will need to give up some of our comfort** in order to make others more comfortable

# Inclusive teaching is student-centered

- Teaching **the students we have right now**, not last year's students, and definitely not the students that we were (or imagine that we were)
- Finding out **who our students are and what they want**
  - Just ask them!: Why are they taking the class? What are their career goals? What's their background in linguistics? What languages and language varieties are part of their lives?)
  - Recognizing that students are individuals but also that shared lived experiences matter and deserve validation
- **Being a person first**, not just a linguist: Letting students know who we are

# Inclusive teaching is flexible

- Positioning **ourselves as learners**, not as experts
- Positioning **students as partners/collaborators** in the teaching and learning process
- Revising our teaching content, style, and strategies continuously to **keep our teaching fresh and relevant**
- Creating content and teaching strategies that **support our students' needs**
  - Checking with students often to find out what's working and what's not
- Constantly **expanding the boundaries** of our discipline, our classes, our knowledge

# What does “inclusion” include?: The course

- **Accessibility:** The sine qua non: If students can't access the course materials, information, and discussions, they can't learn
- **Graduate and undergraduate curriculum:** Which courses are taught? Which are required or optional? Why are some degrees unmarked (“Linguistics”) and others marked?
- **Course content:** What do students read? What is in the lectures? Conversely, what don't students read and what's missing from lectures regarding their own linguistic background and experiences?
- **Course delivery:** Why do you use the specific activities, assignments, assessments, and modalities that you use? How might these exclude, marginalize, or discourage some students?

# What does “inclusion” include?: The people

- **Teaching style:** How would you describe your teaching? Does this match how your students describe it? Do you prioritize your own comfort level or convenience over what would be most effective for your students?
- **Teaching team:** Are the instructors members of the language communities discussed in class? Do instructors from structurally dominant groups address their own subjectivity and its potential limits to the class?
- **Students:** Who is taking the class? Who isn't? Who participates and doesn't? Why?
- **Normalizing inclusion across the curriculum:** Are these issues considered relevant only to some classes and not others? How can every class be made more inclusive?

# Whom does “inclusion” include?

- Members of groups that are **structurally marginalized and/or underrepresented** in linguistics and higher education/the academy
- People often have **intersectional experiences** in more than one of these groups simultaneously
  - Race and ethnicity
  - Gender identity (including trans, nonbinary, and cis-female)
  - Disability
  - Sexual identity
  - Nationality, citizenship, and immigrant generation status
  - Religion
  - Socioeconomic status and background
  - First-generation college/graduate student status
  - Military/veteran status
  - Age, and more...

# Inclusive teaching pitfalls to watch out for

- **Basic accessibility issues:** Lack of awareness/understanding of, e.g., disabled, low-income, or international students' needs
- **Conflicting needs:** Different students need different things
- **Instructor discomfort** with talking about racism and other forms of oppression or fear of making mistakes
- **Superficial or inappropriate incorporation** of students' languages and cultures
- **Treating minoritized students as representatives** or spokespeople of their group
- **Exploiting minoritized colleagues/students** to fill gaps in your knowledge; not providing compensation for their expertise
- **Pushback** from colleagues and others who devalue inclusive teaching

# What can institutions do to make linguistics and the academy more just and inclusive?

- **Departments and programs:** Provide ongoing discussions, workshops, talks, and trainings in equitable and just teaching practices
- **Colleges and universities:** Require evidence of inclusive teaching practices in hiring, tenure, promotion, and merit review processes and treat these efforts not as an optional bonus but as expected as part of basic teaching competence
- **The Linguistic Society of America and other organizations:** Highlight inclusive teaching as essential to the discipline and provide public recognition via awards, plenary talks, and Institute Professorships
- **Everywhere:** Recruit and reward leaders who care about these issues
- **Everyone:** Lobby, protest, and pressure the institution; take on leadership roles

# One example: UCSB's Inclusive Curriculum Initiative

- Began in Summer 2020 with funding from UCSB's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Goal: To collaboratively and collectively revise at least 75% of undergraduate and graduate linguistics courses to be more inclusive
- Forms teams of faculty and graduate student experts and apprentices in inclusive teaching to work on each class
- Also funds a year-long speaker series on inclusive linguistics teaching
- Spring 2021: Planned virtual symposium to share the results of the project

# For further resources, scan QR code below

1. Charity Hudley, Anne H., & Christine Mallinson, 2018, “Dismantling ‘the master’s tools’: Moving students’ rights to their own language from theory to practice,” *American Speech* 93(3–4):513–537
  - See especially the discussion questions at the end
2. Charity Hudley et al., forthcoming, “Toward Racial Justice in Linguistics,” *Language*
3. Bucholtz, “How white linguists can support Black linguists”
4. Crowd-sourced version of above document



## For further reflection

- In what ways can you reimagine the teaching of linguistics and your subfield(s) as more just and inclusive?
- What aspects of inclusive teaching seem relatively “easy” for you to incorporate right now, or soon? Which aspects seem harder? Which do you feel resistant or skeptical about, and why? Who can you talk to to think this through further?
- What is the next individual, collective, and/or institutional action you’ll take to make linguistics more just and inclusive?

# Thank you for thinking about these issues!

Please share these slides, the webinar recording, the resource folder,  
and these ideas with others

To continue the conversation after today's session  
(but not next week, when I'll be on staycation):

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