Our Linguistics Community
Addressing Bias, Power Dynamics, Harassment

Hosts: Penny Eckert and Sharon Inkelas

Linguistic Society of America
Annual Meeting
2018
Outline

• Opening remarks
• Panelist presentations
• Audience discussion of sample scenarios
The importance of civility

• Harassment and incivility aren’t just annoying
  – They erode confidence and inhibit creativity
  – They can derail careers
  – They are at odds with the mission of any academic department, institute, or conference
This is the moment

• Harassment and incivility are ubiquitous
  – Well-known cases in the news
  – “Open secrets” and “known offenders” in our communities
  – Over 1700 entries so far in the sexual harassment survey on “The Professor is In” blog
Infrastructure on campuses (focused on Title IX issues)

– Clear policies re sexual harassment and violence
– Clear mechanisms for investigation and adjudicating incidents
– Confidential resources for survivors
– Resources for remediation/healing after an incident
Civility is a broader community issue

• Know what behaviors are problematic
  – Understand the effects power imbalances can have
  – Talk about these issues with your colleagues
  – Strive for community understanding

• The LSA cannot enforce good behavior
  – It can only encourage community reflection and action
Our roles

• Be an active bystander; be an ally
• This requires understanding and empathy
  – Targets of harassment may be traumatized and not behave as others might expect
  – Don’t force a survivor to confront a harasser
• The most effective conversations are local: take this back to your workplace
Our Panel

• Gregory Ward       Northwestern University
• Kristen Syrett     Rutgers University
• Itamar Francez     University of Chicago
• Anne Charity-Hudley UC Santa Barbara
• Katherine Campbell-Kibler The Ohio State University
Implicit Bias, Slurs, and the Use-Mention Distinction

GREGORY WARD
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Special Session
Our Linguistics Community: Addressing Bias, Power Dynamics, Harassment
LSA Annual Meeting
January 6, 2018
Introduction

- Slurs, as a type of hate speech, have been shown to be hurtful, especially - but not exclusively - when directed towards individuals who are members of the targeted group.
- But what about slurs when used as objects of linguistic inquiry? That is, when being mentioned rather than used? (I already told you, ‘I’ is a deictic!)
- First, a working definition of “slur” is in order...

What are slurs?

Slurs:
- identify members of a social group, typically on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex/gender, sexuality, gender identity, religion, appearance, or disability;
- essentialize that group by picking out a characteristic (or set of characteristics) taken to be representative of group members;
- typically dehumanize, disparage, or derogate the targeted group;
- are socially embedded in that they draw upon and render salient a history of oppression of the targeted group;
- help to establish norms for the treatment of group members.
Some features of slurs

- **Offensive Autonomy**: slurs may be deemed/perceived as offensive regardless of a particular speaker’s intention;

- **Embedding Failure**: the offensiveness of slurs projects out of various forms of embedding, including indirect reports, negations, and mentions;
  - “Pat is not a [slur]” vs. “Pat is not a linguist”.

- **Perspective Dependence**: the use of a slur is taken to indicate that the speaker holds a negative/derogatory attitude towards the targeted group;

- **Offensive Variation**: not all slurs, even if used co-referentially, are judged to be equally offensive/hurtful;

- **Insulation**: despite all of the above, there are contextually-determined occasions when slurs—even the most pernicious—can be mentioned inoffensively, e.g. reclamationally.

How do slurs hurt, even when (only) mentioned?

- Slurs can prime implicit/pernicious bias, even in mention contexts, as evidenced by Implicit Association Tests (IAT);
  - Low-level cognition simply doesn’t track how a slur is discursively embedded; the priming effects occur regardless of whether the slur is being used or merely mentioned.

- The hateful perspective that slurs “call forth and license” is present even when the use of a slur is denied (in, e.g., a mention context); [Camp, Elisabeth. 2013. “Slurring perspectives”.

- Thus, while a speaker who mentions a slur may not be (intending to be) inflicting all of the harm that a speaker who uses the slur inflicts, they may nonetheless be inflicting some harm.
So, as linguists, what can we do?

- Given that even the mention of a slur may prime pernicious bias, how can we as linguists talk about slurs without inflicting harm?
Factors to consider in talking about slurs in a linguistic context

- Who are you?
  - What are your (multiple, intersectional) identity categories?
  - Do you have linguistic ‘license’ with respect to the slur(s) in question?

- Are you linguistically ‘woke’?
  - Do you have an informed and critical view on how language interacts with race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality?
  - Have you established your linguistic credentials, by displaying:
    - linguistic awareness of the issues involved?
    - sensitivity in how you broach the subject?
    - empathy for the group(s) affected/impacted by a given slur?

- What is your purpose/goal in mentioning a slur?
  - To educate? To increase linguistic awareness?
  - To establish rapport?
  - To reclaim the slur and reduce its power to hurt through repeated iteration?
Factors to consider in talking about slurs in a linguistic context, cont.

- What is the setting/context for your mention of a slur?
  - Who is your audience? Do you have power over them?
    - Class lecture? Public talk/interview? Group of intimates?
  - How familiar are you with your interlocuters?
    - Do you (believe that you) share their values?

- Can mentioning the slur be avoided?
  - Need a specific slur be mentioned to make your point?
  - Could a symbol ($\rho$) be substituted?
  - Could a historical (bosch) or fictional (Mudblood) slur be used instead (without trivializing the issue)?
Concluding remarks

- We must take seriously the notion that engaging with slurs may involve perpetuating harm – even if that’s what we are trying to work against.

- We ought to take care to limit that harm and to engage with slurs reflectively, both in terms of reflecting on what slurs do and how they are used and in terms of navigating the contours of talking about them.

- Perhaps the best way to counteract the pernicious bias associated with a slur is to interact with a variety of people from the targeted group so as to dismantle monolithic stereotypic associations with that group.
Thank you!
Gendered Language Across Contexts:
How to foster participation, level the playing field, and minimize gatekeeping

Workshop on ‘Our Linguistics Community: Addressing Bias, Power Dynamics, Harassment’

Kristen Syrett
Rutgers University – New Brunswick
What is your role?

• Do any of these apply to you?
  • I’m an instructor.
  • I write reference letters.
  • I’m on a job search committee.
  • I serve on a colloquium committee or organizing committee for a conference or workshop.
  • I have a role in chairing a talk session.
  • I’m an author, editor, or reviewer.
  • I interact with people on a daily basis.

• Then YOU have an IMPORTANT role to play!
What Can I do?
In the classroom

• Have positive, realistic, high expectations based on individuals.

• Consider how fear and anxiety connected to stereotypes and judgment by peers can affect learning and performance. (“I’m confirming the stereotype!” “I have to prove people wrong/right!”)

• Show an investment in and respect for students and their unique learning experiences.
In reference letters

• Watch the length.
• Pay attention to ‘doubt raisers’: hedges (it appears…), negative language (while/although…), faint praise (hard worker), and irrelevant personal info.
• Watch the use of ‘grindstone adjectives’
• See Madera, Hebl, & Martin (2009).

2003 study examining 312 letters of recommendation for 103 medical faculty positions at a large American medical school in the mid-1990; Authors had been asked by a member of the Executive Committee for Hiring and Promotion of the medical school to see if the letters of recommendation written for female applicants were different than those written for male applicants.
In reference letters

• Keep it balanced!
• Watch the length.
• Use formal titles.
• Refer to the research.
• Leave out personal deets.
• Don’t mention emotional qualities.
• Mind your evaluative adjectives and predicates of personal taste!
In reference letters

Exploring the color of glass: letters of recommendation for female and male medical faculty

FRANCES TRIX AND CAROLYN PSENKA
WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
In job ads

• Consider how language can contribute to a sense of belongingness, appeal of job, and decisions to apply for jobs.

• Consider the use of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ words when crafting job descriptions.
## In job ads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company description</strong></td>
<td><strong>Company description</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We are a corporate team dedicated to supporting our financial clients.</td>
<td>• Our organization works to offer every possible advantage to our banking customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Our company is devoted to providing a great work/life balance and compensation package.</td>
<td>• The company boasts impressive salaries allowing our employees with financial independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifications</strong></td>
<td><strong>Qualifications</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience in providing administrative support services to a team of senior management and understand office organization.</td>
<td>• Ability to deal with multiple senior staff in a demanding environment and navigate office hierarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Polite: sensitive to needs of other employees and clients.</td>
<td>• Civil personality aware of other workers’ and customers’ requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dependable and responsible.</td>
<td>• Independent and self-reliant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Capable computer skills.</td>
<td>• Strong computer skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Responsibilities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support office team and assist with departmental procedures so that work progresses more efficiently.</td>
<td>• Organize and monitor office tasks and processes so that work progresses more efficiently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connect and develop relationships with a variety of clients (e.g., other businesses).</td>
<td>• Able to interface with external parties (e.g., other businesses).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coordinate incoming and outgoing shipments.</td>
<td>• Control incoming and outgoing shipments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In job ads

How To Take Gender Bias Out Of Your Job Ads

By Carmen Nobel

• Remove (implicit) gender bias.
• Limit the number of mandatory qualifications.
• Consider using a ‘gender decoder’ for job ads
• http://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com
When inviting speakers

Gender disparities in colloquium speakers at top universities

Christine L. Nittroer\textsuperscript{a,1}, Michelle R. Hebl\textsuperscript{a}, Leslie Ashburn-Nardo\textsuperscript{b}, Rachel C. E. Trump-Steele\textsuperscript{a}, David M. Lane\textsuperscript{a,c}, and Virginia Valian\textsuperscript{d}

Author Affiliations

Edited by Susan T. Fiske, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, and approved November 29, 2017 (received 2017)

Analysis of 3,652 talks in six academic disciplines

Finding: a man is more likely to give a colloquium talk at a top 50 college or university than is a woman

“those who invite and schedule speakers serve as gender gatekeepers with the power to create or reduce gender differences in academic reputations”
When inviting speakers

• Pay attention to characteristics of prospective speakers such as gender, ethnicity, areas of research, and seniority.

Congrats!
You have an all-male panel!
When chairing a talk

• Be inclusive when calling upon people to ask questions.

• Keep track of ‘question asker’ characteristics (location in audience, gender, seniority, etc.) when calling upon people during the Q&A.

• (Before the event itself) Appoint women! The presence of women as colloquium chairs (and committee members) increases the likelihood of having female colloquium speakers.
In your reviews of papers/proposals:

- Distinguish between evaluating the science and evaluating the principal investigator.

Female grant applicants are equally successful when peer reviewers assess the science, but not when they assess the scientist.

Holly O Witteman, Michael Hendricks, Sharon Straus, Cara Tannenbaum

doi: https://doi.org/10.1101/232868

This article is a preprint and has not been peer-reviewed [what does this mean?].
In our writing about linguistics

Guidelines for Inclusive Language

“Linguists can both lead the way in proactively writing inclusively and avoid past pitfalls or habits that may unintentionally lead to marginalization, offense, misrepresentation, or the perpetuation of stereotypes.”

- Focus on findings, not labels of people and generics
- Use cultural sensitivity and respect when constructing examples
- Avoid institutional bias in labeling ‘standard’ practices/dialects
- Avoid unnecessary gendered NPs, pronouns, names
Thank you!
These slides present questions that arose for me when trying to reflect on situations in which I felt implicated in, or inadvertently responsible for, the production of harm (harm caused inadvertently is nevertheless just as harmful). They should be read as interpretative reflections, not as claims to knowledge.

I’d like to especially thank Jessica Rett, Judith Tonhauser, and Ashwini Deo for their wisdom.
1. Harassment: What can we do at what level?
Institutional protections are crucial, but have proven problematic:

- Institutional interests (liability, attracting capital/prestige) do not always align with our interests as a community (protection for students, staff and faculty).
- Institutional-level handling leads to silencing on the one hand, and to collateral damage on the other.

So:

Institutional tools should be strengthened and improved rather than dismantled and DeVosed, but in the meantime, we need more communal solutions.
What can be done at a departmental level?

• We need effective ways of *proactively creating and maintaining* a good climate, and of monitoring climate
  
  • Periodic internal anonymized climate surveys?
  
  • Periodic direct communication of departmental investment in climate issues?
  
• Promote a conception of *graduate school as a work environment*
2. Changes to disciplinary culture that can foster inclusion
Problematic discursive ideologies

High regard for rigorous debate turns into legitimization of verbal bullying and abuse

- Ethos of myth-breaking and preaching to the ignorant masses, both about language and about linguistics.
- A-historicism (nothing exists pre-1957, nobody outside generative linguistics and Anglo-American philosophy has said anything relevant about language or grammar)
- Ideological myth of a truth-guided, impersonal research culture based solely on pitting theories against each other.
Formalocentrism⁠¹ (and the formalpha-male)

**Slippery slope** from valuing formalism as a tool for analysis, to using formalism as a show of power and a tool for exclusion.

- Fetishization of formalism
- Dismissal of anything not formally stated as nonsense
- Identification of formal agility with quality/intelligence/”brilliance”
- Failure to recognize variable backgrounds

These things contribute to creating unwelcoming, and potentially hostile environments in which participation is not equally accessible

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¹ When these slides were presented, I used a term here which was called out (by a person who may not want to be named here) as hostile to Latinos. I decided to refrain from using the term, especially at a time at which the Latino community is persecuted by a racist and xenophobic administration.
We can use a little more self-irony, perspective, humility, and self-reflection about our discipline.
LSA Civility Panel: Power Dynamics in Linguistics

We can’t eat prestige and won’t eat crumbs.

Anne H. Charity Hudley
University of California, Santa Barbara
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@acharityhudley

https://www.linguisticsociety.org/news/2017/10/30/special-annual-meeting-session
Power Dynamics in Linguistics & Higher Education

• Particularly at the schools where linguistics is most readily taught, reflects a historical privileging of White male ideas and then the narration that we should all accept those values and norms to also be accepted.

• If not, the rhetoric goes, there will be direct consequences.

@acharityhudley
Examples of the Power Dynamic

• There are a host of topics, in particular, that aren’t seen as linguistics.
• Scope of discipline, with the common exclusionary phrase “that’s not linguistics”
• A popular rhetorical device among linguists to the tune of mocking those who assume linguists “speak many languages”

@acharityhudley
Power is Predicated on Fear and Exclusion

• White male supremacy, in all contexts is predicated on fear and exclusion.

• Accordingly, there is a fear quality in linguistics that belies empowerment
  • fear of doing the work you actually care about,
  • fear of saying the wrong thing,
  • fear about what job you take or who you reach out to

• These fears prevents some of the squelching of the power dynamic because people fall back on pragmatic notions of “I have to because there just aren’t that many jobs.”

@acharityhudley
Need for Transparent Discussions about the linguistic marketplace (ours)

• How jobs in higher education are financed, generated and brought to market

• Structural bias throughout the process down to the last negotiation

@acharityhudley
We can’t eat prestige and won’t eat crumbs

• There is still a lot of discourse about whether the LSA is for everyone—whether it is relevant. Whether *Language* would publish certain work. I wondered all of these things myself.

• Here at this very LSA annual meeting, I’m working with three teams of people to take these issue head on:
  • Proposed LSA statement on race
  • Collaboration in linguistics
  • Discrimination in linguistics

• All three groups are important because to disrupt this power dynamic, we need to shift and share decision making about who is privileged and how in linguistics in formative ways that will take research and effort.

@acharityhudley
A Special Note about Students & Staff

• Abuse of students and disrespect of staff should be called out for what they are: ignorance.

• Many of us are unintentionally ignorant, so we have to consciously work to mitigate that ignorance.

• Study policies of student and worker’s rights—they pertain to you and your work and to the LSA.

• These matters are not tangential to us as a discipline or a society; they are the very foundation on which the study of language, communication, and humanity are laid.

@acharityhudley
Ready, Set, Go: Addressing bias in the moment

Kathryn Campbell-Kibler

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS
READY
• Work through your stuff

SET
• What happened?
• Are there targets involved?
• What is your role?

GO
• Call them in
• Shut it down
• Distract and disrupt
GET READY
Work through your stuff

“That doesn’t seem racist.”
“That wouldn’t bother me.”
“I can’t believe someone would say that.”
“Maybe they meant it in a nice way.”
“They asked you about your genitals at work?”
“Why didn’t anyone tell me about this before?”
GET SET
What happened?
  Who said what and why?
  Who was impacted?
Are there targets present?
  What do they need?
  Are they still vulnerable?
What is your role?
  What are the short term needs?
  What are the long term goals?
GO

Call them in

Shut it down

Distract and disrupt
Call them in

Ask questions: “I don’t understand what you mean by “ghetto" in that context. Can you explain?”

Name your feelings: “When you used that example sentence, it made me uncomfortable.”

Emphasize shared values: “I know we both want to make this a supportive environment for students.”

Acknowledge the relationship: “I really value working with you.”

Share your own struggles: “I have a hard time with changing pronouns, too. But it's getting easier.”
Shut it down

Label the behavior: “Wow, that was pretty racist.”
“You just interrupted Kim.”
State the social norm: “We don't comment on people's breasts in this department.”
Tell them not to: “Please don't use that word.”
Use non-verbal cues: gasp, stare, raised eyebrows
Distract and disrupt

Engage the target: “How is your semester going?”
Engage the speaker: “Hey, can I ask you a question about the teaching plans for next year?”

Be present: Stay nearby.
Check in after: “Are you ok?” “You didn’t do anything wrong.”
Let’s get ready

Resources:
http://go.osu.edu/AddressingBias

Practice!
Meet me in the lobby tomorrow at 1pm.
Resources: Books

- Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia. (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Flores Niemann, González, & Harris, Eds.)
- The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure--Without Losing Your Soul. (Rockquemore & Laszloffy)
- It's Not Because You're Black: Addressing Issues of Racism and Underrepresentation of African Americans in Academia. (Smith)
- Trans* in College: Transgender Students' Strategies for Navigating Campus Life and the Institutional Politics of Inclusion (Nicolazzo)
- Disability in Higher Education: A Social Justice Approach (Evans, Broido, Brown, & Wilke)
- Disability as Diversity in Higher Education: Policies and Practices to Enhance Student Success (Kim & Aquino Eds.)
- Supporting College and University Students with Invisible Disabilities (Oslund)
- The Working-Class Student in Higher Education: Addressing a Class-Based Understanding (Lathe)
- Working in Class: Recognizing How Social Class Shapes Our Academic Work (Hurst & Nenga)
- Surviving Sexism in Academia: Strategies for Feminist Leadership (Cole & Hassel Eds.)
- Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation (Sue)
Resources: Articles


• **Men ask more questions than women at a scientific conference.** Hinsley A, Sutherland WJ, Johnston A (2017) PLOS ONE 12(10): e0185534. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0185534
Resources: Websites/Organizations

- Julie Libarkin’s Blog
- Microaggressions project
- Chronically academic
- Conditionally Accepted

- hollaback on bystander intervention
- AFSC on bystander intervention
- A practical guide to calling in