Language and Educational Justice: A Dialogue between Linguistics and Linguistic Anthropology

Brazos Room
2:00 – 5:00 PM

Organizers: Mary Bucholtz (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Anne H. Charity Hudley (College of William and Mary)

Sponsor: Society for Linguistic Anthropology
Teaching Linguistics Section of Language

Presenters: Anna Bax (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Mary Bucholtz (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Emiliana Cruz (University of Massachusetts)
Michel DeGraff (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)
Kris Gutiérrez (University of California, Berkeley)
Joseph C. Hill (Rochester Institute of Technology)
Anne Charity Hudley (College of William & Mary)
Katie Lateef-Jan (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Wesley Leonard (Southern Oregon University)
Jessi Love-Nichols (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Christine Mallinson (University of Maryland, Baltimore County)
Jonathan Rosa (Stanford University)
Ana Celia Zentella (University of California, San Diego)

Both linguistics and linguistic anthropology have a long tradition of using scholarship on language to expose educational injustice and to advance educational access and equity in a broad range of contexts around the world. Since the early years of modern sociolinguistics, researchers have drawn on analyses of linguistic structure to challenge deficit-based views of linguistically and racially marginalized learners (e.g., Adger et al. 2007; Charity Hudley & Mallinson 2011, 2014; Fought 2003; Labov 1972; McCaskill et al. 2011; Zentella 1997) and to advocate for educational equity in policy and pedagogy (e.g., Labov 1982; Lucas 1995; Smitherman 2000; García & Wei 2013). Meanwhile, linguistic anthropologists have offered detailed ethnographic accounts of culturally based linguistic practices in local communities in order to demonstrate the frequent mismatches between the linguistic expectations of home and school (e.g., Heath 1983; Hymes 1996; Philips 1983) as well as the educational marginalization of minoritized populations in the United States and elsewhere (e.g., García-Sánchez 2014; Rosa forthcoming). While linguists tend to focus on linguistic structure and anthropologists often emphasize the sociocultural and political dimensions of language, both approaches share a concern with the unrecognized or misinterpreted linguistic abilities of members of sociopolitically subordinated groups. Another important counterweight to dominant views of minoritized linguistic groups is found in community members’ own efforts, sometimes in collaboration with scholars (including scholars who are themselves community members), to assert their right to educational and linguistic self-determination (e.g., Cruz & Woodbury 2014; Gutiérrez et al. 1999).

Yet despite these ongoing efforts, educational systems habitually fail to adequately serve students from nondominant linguistic backgrounds. Deficit perspectives circulate in the academy and in public discourse in the face of longstanding and renewed critiques (Avineri et al. 2015), and linguistically damaging educational policies are firmly in place in many parts of the world (e.g., Crawford 2000; Tollefson 2013). This session, jointly sponsored by the Linguistic Society of America and the Society for Linguistic Anthropology, brings together linguists, linguistic anthropologists, and researchers who work at the intersection of both fields to examine the central role of language in achieving educational justice, as part of the larger task of advancing social justice within linguistics and related fields (e.g., Bucholtz et al. 2014; Piller 2016). Such work is neither separate from linguistic scholarship nor a mere application of scholarship. Rather, it is a crucial means of advancing linguistic theory through the grounded examination of how our research affects the lives of real people (DeGraff 2005; Leonard 2011; Zentella 2005, 2014).

This symposium addresses the relationship between language and educational justice in a wide range of linguistic, geographic, and learning contexts both in the United States and in other countries. The papers focus on how an emphasis on linguistic justice advances both linguistic theory and the human condition. The session has three parts. In Part 1: Linguistic Theory and Educational Consequences, Ana Celia Zentella and Wesley Leonard demonstrate how the rethinking of fundamental linguistic
concepts and perspectives is necessary to redress educational and linguistic inequality in schools and communities. In Part 2: Linguistic Collaborations in Educational Settings, Michel DeGraff, Mary Bucholtz and her coauthors, Anne Charity Hudley and Christine Mallinson, and Emiliana Cruz examine how collaborations between linguists and communities yield practical educational linguistic curricula and praxis. In Part 3: Challenging Language Ideologies and Fostering Educational Justice, Jonathan Rosa, Joseph C. Hill, and Kris Gutiérrez show how linguistic-ideological stances have real-world consequences and discuss how to address such issues in both theory and practice.

Abstracts

Ana Celia Zentella (University of California, San Diego)

The Spanglish label debate: linguistic vs. anthro-political linguistic perspectives

Some linguists reject the “Spanglish” label for the way of speaking that incorporates words, phrases, and sentences from English and Spanish, noting parallels in lexical borrowing, semantic bleaching, and syntactic transfers in varied national varieties of Spanish. They prefer “popular Spanish of the United States”, and believe “Spanglish” harms speakers by suggesting they speak a mish-mash. But advocates of an anthro-political linguistics point out that the detractors of “Spanglish” stand outside the speakers, looking in at the system, not at language in its context, and disregarding how the label is valued and used. Interviews with 105 Latin@’s across the US reveal that the majority share a positive assessment of Spanglish and the label, challenging the teachers and texts that misrepresent the grammatical skills of Spanglish speakers as well as the linguists who claim to protect them by disavowing their preferred label.

Wesley Y. Leonard (Southern Oregon University)

When linguistics is prescriptive, not descriptive: implications for language reclamation

Linguistics purports to be descriptive, not prescriptive. Many scholars have employed this principle in attempts to legitimize endangered languages by describing how they follow rules, demonstrate grammatical complexity, undergo change, and exhibit universal traits. While such education has value, problems can arise when descriptive linguists (ironically) dictate how language should be described, or prescribe “truths” about what language is, how it is transmitted, and how and why it changes. For example, structural definitions of “language” may be imposed on communities whose definitions revolve around social concepts such as peoplehood or spirituality. Similarly, dominant ideologies about “natural” language transmission and vitality can serve to mask not only the value, but even the existence of a given community’s language use. Referencing insights on this topic from Native Americans engaged in language reclamation efforts, I offer suggestions on how linguistics education might shift to better promote self-determination and justice for endangered language communities.

Michel DeGraff (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

Linguistics, STEM, educational justice and political and economic equality: MIT-Haiti as case study for retooling linguistics

Linguistic equality is a pre-condition for political and economic equity. Inequality in Haiti is an extreme case of this challenge. The State has failed the vast majority of Haitians. At the root of this failure is a language-of-education issue: French is used to “educate” a population that mostly speaks Haitian Creole (“Kreyòl”) only. Home vernaculars are necessary for universal access to high-quality education, otherwise they will deprive their speakers of intellectual, social, economic and political capital. The MIT-Haiti Initiative alongside Haitian institutions are promoting participative pedagogy in Kreyòl toward improving STEM education across social classes—toward political and economic equity. This project can apply to local languages worldwide. The goal is to improve quality and access of education globally, while strengthening human rights and the foundations of students’ identity. This project doubles as a plea for “retooling” linguistics to better advocate for the speakers of the languages we study.

Mary Bucholtz (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Katie Lateef-Jan (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Jessi Love-Nichols (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Anna Bax (University of California, Santa Barbara)

Orgullosamente indígena: Mexican indigenous immigrant youth in pursuit of educational and sociolinguistic justice

This paper examines how, in a context that blended language documentation with sociocultural linguistic inquiry, linguists and community members worked together to address issues of sociolinguistic and educational justice. Building on scholarship on
collaborative language maintenance and revitalization (Hinton 2002; Chelliah 2011) and Participatory Action Research (Brown & Rodriguez 2009; Cammarota & Fine 2008; Irizarry 2011), this paper focuses on a 2016 collaboration with Mixtec and Zapotec high-school students. As part of a UCSB-sponsored outreach program that aims to foster sociolinguistic justice (Bucholtz et al. 2014), researchers and youth created Orgullosamente indígena, a documentary about young people’s experiences speaking marginalized diasporic varieties. Local screenings of Orgullosamente indígena provide a platform for sociolinguistic justice by amplifying the contributions of indigenous voices to linguistic and cultural knowledge. This project highlights the crucial role of linguists in fostering educational justice with communities beyond traditional classroom spaces (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee 2016).

Anne H. Charity Hudley (College of William & Mary)
Christine Mallinson (University of Maryland, Baltimore County)

_Designing and developing culturally and linguistically supportive materials for educators: technology tools to infuse sociolinguistics into K-12 classroom praxis_

This paper describes two innovative, publicly available technology tools developed for use by K-12 educators to infuse sociolinguistics-based content, strategies, and materials into their teaching: 1) a set of 8 videos on language and culture, focusing on the acquisition of literacy in content areas and challenges related to language variation and assessment in elementary and secondary grades, and 2) an iPhone app that offers sociolinguistics-based teaching exercises and curricular models for use by secondary English educators. Insights from surveys and interviews with 25 K-12 educators in Maryland and Virginia reveal how they have used these tools to develop models for talking and teaching about language variation that help foster an inclusive climate of cultural and linguistic diversity in their classrooms. We suggest that technology-based materials may be an effective and flexible strategy to help K-12 educators more fully integrate sociolinguistic insights about language variation into their pedagogy and praxis.

Emiliana Cruz (University of Massachusetts)

_Teaching native speakers to study their own languages: a collaborative pedagogical strategy_

This presentation discusses collaboration between scholars and speakers of indigenous languages over language documentation and revitalization. I will describe ongoing efforts in Oaxaca, Mexico, to sustain local practices and cultural identities in the face of globalization. Since 2003, I have been training Chatino speakers to document and study their own languages by teaching linguistic methods to youth, and teachers in Chatino communities. This model of instruction has been reproduced in several Chatino communities by my students. In many ways this has been a successful project, but there are many challenges to making a language documentation and revitalization project sustainable. Some of the challenges include limited educational opportunities for native speakers, a paucity of support for indigenous education, economic disparities, and migration to the United States. Finally, I will discuss about how academics can sustain and support the activities of indigenous people who seek to document and revitalize their own languages.

Jonathan Rosa (Stanford University)

_A raciolinguistic approach to educational justice_

Throughout the last several decades, linguists have gone to great lengths to demonstrate the legitimacy, systematicity, and skillfulness of minoritized populations’ language practices. Despite these longstanding efforts, stigmatizing views of these populations and practices not only persist but predominate within educational settings. This paper attempts to reframe the problem by introducing a “raciolinguistic” approach that redirects attention from the communicative practices of minoritized speaking subjects to the hearing practices of hegemonically positioned perceiving subjects. Crucially, perceiving subjects are not simply individuals, but also structurally organized institutions, assessment procedures, and technologies. Rather than continually documenting linguistic dexterity, this approach focuses on the distorted perceptions through which minoritized groups’ practices are perpetually experienced as deviant, deficient, and in need of careful management and remediation. The broader goal is to locate the role of language in advocacy for educational justice at the level of societal structure rather than linguistic structure.

Joseph C. Hill (Rochester Institute of Technology)

_Signing is also human: challenges in changing the language ideology_

The reality for the Deaf communities in the world is that sign languages have been largely ignored, viewed as an impediment to spoken language development in deaf children, questioned as legitimate languages, or viewed as communication support systems instead of languages. The reality is the outcome of attitudes about sign languages has necessarily been driven by ideologies
concerning the fundamental nature of sign language and their basic suitability for human use. These ideologies parallel those concerning the suitability of nonstandard and nonwritten varieties of spoken languages but are unique in that they get at the basic issue of communication modality. The cultural model of deafness reflects Deaf people as a linguistic and cultural minority whose primary languages are sign languages (Lane 2002; Lane et al. 1996). However, the medical model of deafness is much more prevalent and it creates a conditional existence of sign languages of Deaf people.

Kris Gutiérrez (University of California, Berkeley)

*Syncretic literacies: leveraging the linguistic repertoires of youth from nondominant communities*

This paper draws on empirical work conducted over several decades to address how to support and design for the movement of the "everyday" across formal and informal learning ecologies to create connected and robust forms of literacy learning for youth from nondominant communities (Ito, et al., 2013). The metaphor of "learning as movement" (Gutierrez, 2008) focuses attention on movement to better account for what takes hold as people, tools, and practices travel across the activity settings of everyday life, and on how individuals develop, repurpose, and reorganize repertoires. Toward this end, this paper elaborates a syncretic approach literacy in which everyday and school-based literacy practices are reorganized in ways that rupture the gap between in-school and out-of-school literacy learning by leveraging youths' interests and repertoires of across nodes of interests and influence, including community and peer culture and academic domains of inquiry (Gutiérrez, 2014).