

## **Teaching Introductory Linguistics with Justice: Updating an Open Educational Resource**

*Catherine Anderson<sup>1</sup>, Bronwyn Bjorkman<sup>2</sup>, Derek Denis<sup>3</sup>, Julianne Doner<sup>4</sup>, Margaret Grant<sup>5</sup>,  
Martin Kohlberger<sup>6</sup>, Nathan Sanders<sup>4</sup> and Ai Taniguchi<sup>3</sup>*

Introductory courses in linguistics are often students' first and only encounter with the field. While an intro course must present the theories and methods of linguistic analysis to prepare students for future study, it also provides an opportunity to foreground relationships between language and power in society at large. This presentation outlines our process of updating an online open educational resource (OER) in response to recent calls to action on inclusivity in linguistics pedagogy (see Charity Hudley et al. 2020a,b, Sanders et al. 2020). We describe the steps we took to introduce linguistic theory while emphasizing social justice, countering biases, giving prominence to Indigenous language content and perspectives, and calling attention to the relationship between language and socio-political power.

In response to critiques of the first edition and in an effort to offset a long-standing modality bias in linguistics for spoken languages, we included analysis of signed languages throughout, with many new examples signed by a paid deaf signer. The phonetics chapter presents the articulators for sign alongside those for speech, and the chapter on first language acquisition confronts the risks of language deprivation for deaf children without access to signed language. Other chapters incorporate illustrative examples from signed languages without an exceptionalist framing. To help ensure that the overall discussion of signed languages and deaf people was accurate and affirming, we paid a deaf scholar to review the work before publication.

The resource directly addresses the colonial history of the field of linguistics (see e.g., Leonard 2020) and acknowledges the ways that Canada's settler policies caused harm to Indigenous people and their languages. We made efforts to redress these harms by integrating Indigenous languages through most chapters and by including first-person narratives from people working to reclaim and teach Kanien'kéha, Nishnaabemwin, Michif, and Hul'q'umi'num'. We also paid Indigenous scholars to review the work before publication.

Following recent initiatives to make linguistics more relevant to students' lived experiences (e.g. Calhoun et al. 2021), we chose to delay introducing the usual theoretical and structural topics of a typical intro course. The revised OER instead opens with an explicit discussion of the relationships between language and social power. This chapter discusses topics such as linguistic standards and prestige, attitudes about accents, and linguistic discrimination. Throughout the other chapters, justice continues to be highlighted. For example, the chapter on child language acquisition addresses the biases among researchers that led to the well-known, but problematic, finding of the "30 million word gap" (Hart & Risley 1995; cf. Sperry et al. 2018). By having an early and repeated framing of linguistics within the context of justice, we invite readers to consider the social implications of what they are learning.

Finally, the modality of the OER itself furthers justice. While the most widely-used print textbooks cost over \$100, the OER is free. The online, multimodal content is presented in text, audio, and video to suit learners' preferences or accessibility needs, and interactive quizzes allow a quick comprehension check within each unit. We strove to maximize accessibility with subtitled videos and transcripts, alt text for images, and dedicated coding for screen readers, all immediately available in a single place rather than separate supplemental resources.

Our presentation discusses our efforts to provide accessibility, to promote justice, to reduce bias, and to decolonize our teaching. We present examples of these efforts, both at higher levels of organization and at lower levels within individual chapters. We conclude by reflecting on the challenges we encountered and those that remain to be addressed in future work.

## References

- Calhoun, Kendra, Anne H. Charity Hudley, Mary Bucholtz, Jazmine Exford, and Brittney Johnson. 2021. Attracting Black students to linguistics through a Black-centered Introduction to Linguistics course. *Language* 97(1): e12–e38.
- Charity Hudley, Anne H., Christine Mallinson, and Mary Bucholtz. 2020a. From theory to action: Working collectively toward a more antiracist linguistics (Response to commentators). *Language* 96(4): e307–e319.
- Charity Hudley, Anne H., Christine Mallinson, and Mary Bucholtz. 2020b. Toward racial justice in linguistics: Interdisciplinary insights into theorizing race in the discipline and diversifying the profession. *Language* 96(4): e200–e235.
- Hart, Betty, and Todd R. Risley. 1995. *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
- Leonard, Wesley Y. 2020. Insights from Native American Studies for theorizing race and racism in linguistics (Response to Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz). *Language* 96(4): e281–e291.
- Sanders, Nathan, Pocholo Umbal, and Lex Konnelly. 2020. Methods for increasing equity, diversity, and inclusion in linguistics pedagogy. In *Actes du congrès annuel de l'Association canadienne de linguistique/Proceedings of the 2020 annual conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association*, ed. Angelica Hernández and M. Emma Butterworth. <https://cla-acl.artsci.utoronto.ca/actes-2020-proceedings/>
- Sperry, Douglas E., Linda L. Sperry, and Peggy J. Miller. 2019. Language does matter: But there is more to language than vocabulary and directed speech. *Child Development* 90(3): 993–997.

## Affiliations

1. McMaster University, Department of Linguistics and Languages, Gender and Social Justice Program
2. Queen's University, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures
3. University of Toronto Mississauga, Department of Language Studies
4. University of Toronto, Department of Linguistics
5. Simon Fraser University, Department of Linguistics
6. University of Saskatchewan, Department of Linguistics