Race and Social Justice in Linguistics

Laura Bailey (Kent), Karen Corrigan (Newcastle), Hannah Gibson (Essex) and Itamar Kastner (Edinburgh)

Language and Linguistics Seminar Series, Newcastle University

25 October 2023
G.05, Percy Building
https://newcastleuniversity.zoom.us/j/85488433882
Meeting ID: 854 8843 3882

Roadmap

(I) Background and the local context

(II) The call to decolonise

(III) Curriculum reform

(IV) Unassessment

(V) In focus: 'Sociolinguistics'/'Language in Society' modules

(VI) A call to action
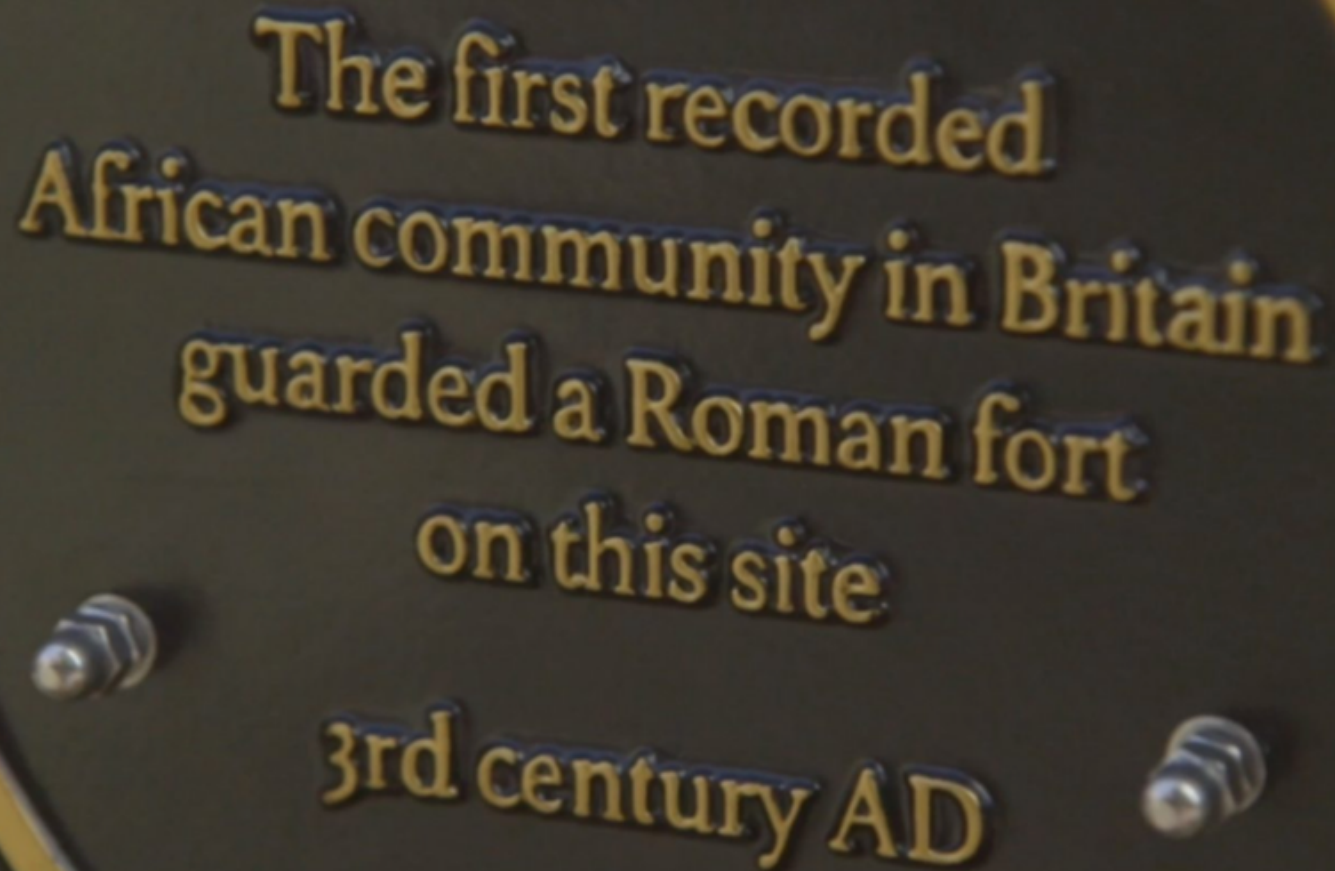
I. Background and the local context

Race and Social Justice in Linguistics

The first recorded African community in Britain guarded a Roman fort on this site

3rd century AD

These were direct journeys carrying coal and iron goods and returning with timbers and pitch, but there was a more complex operation too. It involved stop-overs and transfers of commodities at London, Rotterdam, Bristol and the Cumbrian port of Whitehaven where family and business connections of Crowleys, Cooksons, Lowthers, Blacketts and others helped to create a web of transaction.

The north east was wholly integrated into the British Empire's political and commercial networks where the enslavement of Africans produced super profits. Combined with enclosure and agrarian capitalism at home, a launch pad was provided for the first industrial revolution. It is likely that wealth generated in the Caribbean and in North America funnelled into the north east of England. John Graham Clarke, for example was the owner of plantations in Jamaica, the exporter and importer of sugar and rum to the Tyne, and a major shareholder in the Newcastle bank of Burdon and Surtees. The new district banks of the 18th century were an important part of setting into motion the industrial economy. Yet more obviously, gentry families indulged in building, extending or renovating their great houses. Caribbean money was a vital ingredient in luxury consumption just as sugar was to become an object of mass consumption.

Shackles like these were made at a local ironworks and were used to restrain captured Africans.
© Tyne and Wear Museums.

5 Summerhill Grove

FREDERICK DOUGLASS
c. 1818 - 1895

I would unite with anybody to do right and with nobody to do wrong.

African American abolitionist, author and social reformer.
One of many fugitive slaves who stayed here
with the Richardson family. Henry Richardson,
his wife Anna and sister Ellen were Quakers
and anti-slavery activists who helped
raise funds for Douglass to
formally buy his freedom
in 1846.

City of Newcastle upon Tyne

THE MIGHTY STREAM
POEMS IN CELEBRATION OF
MARTIN LUTHER KING
EDITED BY CAROLYN FORCHÉ & JACKIE KAY

THE MIGHTY STREAM
POEMS IN CELEBRATION OF
MARTIN LUTHER KING
EDITED BY CAROLYN FORCHÉ & JACKIE KAY

Freedom City 2017

"The three urgent and indeed great problems that we face not only in the United States of America but all over the world today... the problem of racism, the problem of poverty and the problem of war."

II. The call to decolonise

Motivation

- 2020 saw the movement for racial equality gain yet further momentum.
- Subject areas and discipline associations were challenged on their roles in perpetuating racial inequalities.
- Linguistics lags behind a number of other disciplines in its engagement with race and racism (Charity Hudley, Mallinson and Bucholtz 2020).
- Some of our sub-disciplines are yet further behind – e.g. syntax (Gibson et al. forthcoming).
- We must engage with decoloniality and the inherent colonial and racial bias in the study of language - both past and present.

The call to decolonise

- In the UK, discourses in HE tend to focus on the curriculum and teaching, although there is a varied response to the topic (Bhambra et al. 2018, Gebrial 2028, Andrews 2018).
- The call to decolonise seeks to highlight the link between present-day (racial) inequalities and broader historical processes of colonialism.
- Global histories of Western domination have impacted on – and limited – what is considered knowledge and whose knowledge is recognised.
- This has affected both what we teach and how we teach.
- Universities play(ed) a central role in structures of empire.
- Knowledge production is central to transformation.

The call to decolonise

- Decolonising efforts are united by two key referents (Bhambra et al. 2018: 2):
  1) A way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study; it re-situates these phenomena as key shaping forces in the contemporary world in which their role has been systematically effaced from view;
  2) Offers an alternative way of thinking about the world and alternative forms of political praxis.

- Although note, 'decolonising' remains a contested term (cf. Tuck & Yang 2012)

The call to decolonise

#LeopoldMustFallQM
NUS: Why is my curriculum white?
Absent from the Academy

#RhodesMustFall
#FeesMustFall
Reclaim Harvard Law School

What we're not talking about

- A central part of the call to decolonise the curriculum is linked to addressing racialised disadvantage in Higher Education.

- The 'awarding gap'
- Decolonising the university more broadly
- Decolonising research (although see Chetty, Gibson and Reilly *in press*)

Some Further Reflections

- Not easy, not quick
- This can (and should?) be a conversation
- This is not a destination
- We can't do this alone
- There are some fantastic resources out there
- We have a chance to make a huge difference!

No quick wins but…

- Acknowledge gaps

- Talk/learn about the history, origins and (mis)uses of our field

- Talk about who is (not) on your reading list (UKent 'Diversity mark')

- Think beyond reading

- Encourage students to make suggestions and additions

- Situate yourself and the knowledge your teach

- Encourage students (and colleagues) to talk about themselves

III. Curriculum reform

Context

Student-led calls for change, protests

Diversifying reading lists as one component of wider decolonisation efforts

(Schucan Bird & Pitman 2020)

Universities' goals:

- Access and Participation Plans
- Closing awarding gaps

Reading lists are not representative

Empirical findings in reading list studies (Schucan Bird & Pitman 2020, Adewumi et al. 2023):

- dominated by white, male authors from the Global North
- do not represent the student body (though they may represent staff demographics)

This matters:

- Students see the reading list as providing the key texts in an area
- Lack of BAME role models, curriculum delivery, curriculum design, and lack of diversity among senior staff most significant factors in lack of belonging for BAME students (UUK/NUS 2019 survey)

However, student intake (of home students) at Russell Group universities is not very diverse…

- If reading lists represented the student body, institutional disparities would emerge
- Intentional 'representational artefact' rather than strict representation

Real Kent students' voices

'That's why I won't classify myself as a feminist … most of the theories and perspectives are from White feminists, and you can't really say that a Black female has the same experiences as a White female.'

'I do feel like [certain fields] are really gendered or racialised. I think it wouldn't put me off doing [the subject], but it might make me think, would they listen to me?'

'If we see a lot more Black scholars…more ethnic minority scholars, it might give off the impression that we can actually make it'

'[This project] has enabled me to see that scholars and academics from around the globe are contributing to research, and this reinforced in me that academic status is attainable for people of colour.'

'I don't want to learn about oppression in a framework that is still oppressing. I want to learn about it in a framework that liberates my brain… that raises me above it.'

Diversity Mark

Institution-wide award for individual modules

- Focus on process of review and reflection, working with students and student Diversity Mark Officers (paid)
- Can choose to investigate reading lists, seminars, assessments, etc.
- Supported by Liaison Librarians

Does it work?

- TASO: ongoing – marginally higher results in reformed modules, but not enough evidence to say for sure that the intervention had a positive impact on marks
- Positive comments from students and staff who found it transformative
- May have an effect on belonging, beyond simply achieving a 2:1 (so we also need to look at continuation gaps, etc.)

Student involvement

Diversity Mark

- Initiated by students (Diversify My Curriculum, Decolonise UKC)
- Paid student researchers and Diversity Mark Officers
- Co-authorship on conference talks and journal articles

In modules

- Talk to students about construction of readings lists on day 1
- Assessment centred on addressing reading list gaps
- Open discussions about student agency and validity of their own experiences/cultural knowledge

Student-created resources

- Alternative Reading List Project: https://thealternativereadinglistproject.wordpress.com/english-literature/ (though… v little linguistics and somewhat problematic choices…)

Potential pitfalls and points to bear in mind

Simple counting masks a lot

- How the texts are analysed
- Which are used more or 'core'
- Content of the text

Racialising authors or making assumptions (also gender, etc.)

- Concealing heterogeneity and multiracialness under broad labels like 'white' or 'BAME'

No access to other protected characteristics (or e.g. class)

- And gender and ethnicity are not explicitly public information (ethical implications)

IV. Unassessement

What's our mission?

Rank students against each other?

OR

Provide structures for them to grow as scholars and people?

Assessment should reflect our values.

(Freire 1968, Purpel 1988, hooks 1994, Sackstein 2015, Gannon 2020, Stommel 2023, etc.)

29

What is assessment (claimed to be) for?

1. Motivate learning.
2. Evaluate learning.
3. Provide feedback (improve learning).

The form of assessment should speak to these goals.

Let's look at a few examples:

- Unessays
- Self assessment
- Discussion and back to decolonisation

LEARNING IS ABOUT FEEDBACK, NOT ASSESSMENT

SO UNI BOFFINS DECIDED TO OVERASSESS

Un

Verb structure of Takale Kham

Template: $A;S.1;2$ — T_1 — $O_{1}.3$ — $O_{2}.3$ — STEM — $O.1;2$ — T_2 — $A;S.3$ — T_3

Persons:

A;S.1;2	$O_{1,2}.3$	O.1;2	A.S;3
S;A.1SG ŋa-		O.1SG -na	A.3SG -o
S;A.1DU gin-	O_1.3DU;3PL ra- A.3DU;3PL	O.1DU {-sin A.SG;3 / -si A.$\overline{SG}$;3}	A.3DU {-ni A.SG;3 / -rə A.$\overline{SG}$;3}
S;A.1PL ge-	O_2.3SG ø	O.1PL -si	A.3PL -rə
S;A.2SG na-	O_2 3DU ʃni- A.SG	O.2SG -ni	A.3SG ø
			S.3DU -ni
DU		{-cin A.$\overline{1PL}$ / -ci A.1PL}	S.3PL -rə
PL	-ci		

mutual understanding. I agree, it mig[ht]

10 tree for the forest, the features for th[e]

understanding might not be the way t[...]

I think, (again, n[...]

that sometimes [...]

for our own goo[d]

15 blows from ever[y]

it all applies. Eve[...]

a certain seed, it[...]

YOU'RE GOING TO END UP WITH AN ASYMMETRIC LANGUAGE WHERE LATIN SUFFIXES AREN'T AS PRODUCTIVE AS NATIVE GERMANIC SUFFIXES! YOU'LL SEE! YOU'LL BE SORRY THEN!
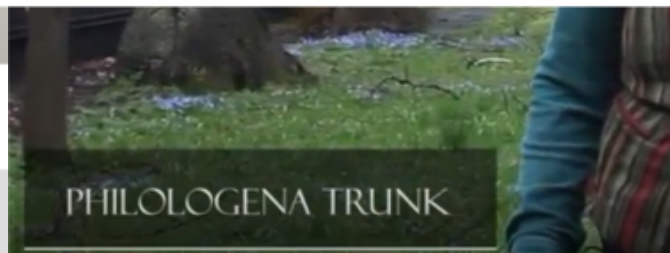
... weirdly enough, he was right.
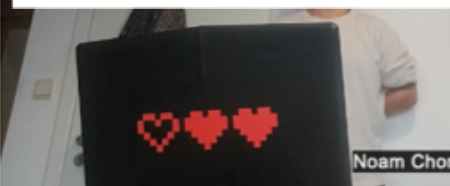
Noam Chomsky!?

Syntactic Soliloquies: A Short Play with Few Arguments and Many Adjuncts

PHILOLOGENA TRUNK

Folk Etymology

Derivational Morphology

Reduplication

bear

bears

beyon[...]

beytw[...]

Self-assessment

Assessment structure
What we want to evaluate:
- What we've learned and how we've grown (portfolio: reflections)
- How well we've learned the skills (portfolio: exercises)
- How we can apply the new knowledge (project)

Accordingly, self-assessment will rely on the following:
- Portfolio (Learn Journal) with self-reflection and answers to exercises
- Self-evaluations at midterm and end of semester
- Group project (any medium, can be creative) - devote time to this in class some Thursdays

- Shift the focus towards learning and growth.
- Shift the focus away from grading.
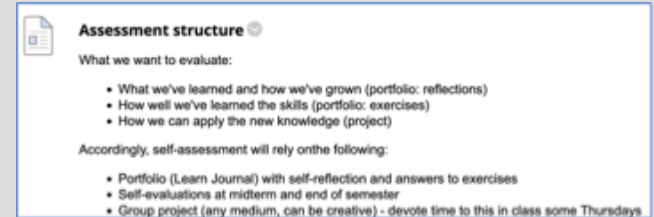
1. Evaluate what we've learned and how we've grown: private online journal ("portfolio")
   a. Students were asked to post a reflection after each class.
   b. Students filled out self-evaluation questionnaires at the midterm and end of semester.
2. Check how well we learned it: exercises
   a. Rather than being assessed, formed the starting point for discussion in the following class.
   b. Answered in the portfolio.
3. How can we apply the new knowledge: group projects (Unessays).

- Scaffolding and communication throughout the semester, plus a final "exit interview".
- Levelled the playing field.

More ungrading

IMPLEMENTING SKILLS-BASED GRADING
IN A LINGUISTICS COURSE

MAURA O'LEARY, *University of California, Los Angeles*
RICHARD STOCKWELL, *Christ Church, University of Oxford*

Pass/fail:

- Why do we need to put numbers on people?
- What does "65" mean (65 of what)?

TEACHING LINGUISTICS

Gotta catch 'em all:
Skills grading in undergraduate linguistics

KIE ZURAW	ANN M. ALY
University of California, Los Angeles	*Agile Six*
ISABELLE LIN	ADAM J. ROYER
University of California, Los Angeles	*University of California, Los Angeles*

Skills-based grading:

- Break down "doing linguistics" into components.
- Contract grading gives students control.

33

Structural issues

- The scholarship is out there...
  - ... but our institutions don't give staff time and freedom to learn from it, or to experiment.
  - Learning isn't *really* a priority for our institutions.
  - It is for us though, so we should think about our responsibility as individuals and collectively.

- Trust yourself and trust our students!
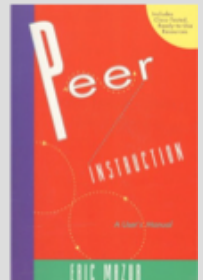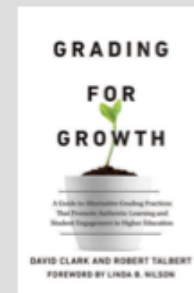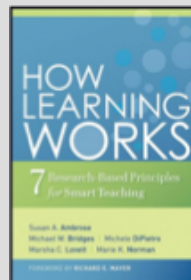
Assessment and decolonisation

Chemistry module at Kingston University London:

- 2017/18: White > BAME 12.2%
- 2018/19: Curriculum revised, assessment redone as Project-Based Learning.

Table 4. Comparison of Average Mark for Module Assessments

Academic Year	Students, N	Avg Marks Earned, %	
		Lab Reports	Examination
2016–2017	34	59.2	48.8
2017–2018	30	60.2	51.6
2018–2019	30	67.8	48.2
2019–2020	34	64.0	59.0

- 2019/20: BAME > White 10%

(Williams 2022)

Assessment and decolonisation

- Traditional forms of assessment reproduce traditional forms of inequality.

- Marks and grade bands produce categories and hierarchies.
  - That needs to be argued for, not assumed.
  - Especially if we're adopting a decolonial mindset (see limki).

- One way of decolonising assessment:
  - Instead of ranking people as to who is better than whom, find the best way to give folk tools and knowledge.

V. In focus: The 'Sociolinguistics' / 'Language in Society' modules

Makoni et al. (2023: 12)

"Central to sociolinguistics is the notion that language is 'socially constituted' (Hymes, 1974: 195) but also needs to develop a metalanguage apparatus that is consistent with the requirements and expectations of Western social sciences."

Labov (1982: 165)

"Though many linguists have shown a strong concern for social issues, there is an apparent contradiction between the principles of objectivity needed for scientific work and commitment to social action. The Black English trial in Ann Arbor showed one way in which this contradiction could be resolved."

- **Resist an Anglo-Centric and Western Focus**

Race and Social Justice in *Socio*linguistics

SEL2091: Sociolinguistics
SEL8163: Language and Society

Key Questions (Schilling-Estes 2007: 165)

• How do I get people to talk to me and let me record them? Can I get them to talk in a fairly relaxed way?

The Vernacular (Holmes 1992:146)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kK9UU3dTo8

- Resist an Anglo-Centric and Western Focus
- **Consider Issues of Diversity and Discrimination**

LANGUAGE IN THE REAL WORLD: The Problems

at the start when I come it was really bad about racism ... I have a neighbour beside me, she's really nice, like she is just like a family to us but the other side our neighbour is like terrible to us

('JOVITA TORRES', 2014)

LANGUAGE IN THE REAL WORLD: The Problems

ES: ....when his mum would ring and he wouldn't answer 'cause he didn't want us to hear him speaking Lithuanian.

KPC: So he's almost ashamed of it then, huh?

ES: Yeah, which is a shame that someone would be ashamed of you know where they come from and but I suppose people do get a lot of grief over here. Like, I tend to find that majority of *them [immigrant teenagers]* don't like being identified as not from here, specifically the boys. That's what my feeling is. Any of the boys that I know that aren't from here they don't like people knowing they're not from here like they're not proud of the fact that they're not from here. *('Elizabeth Siocháin', Northern Irish)*

- Resist an Anglo-Centric and Western Focus
- Consider Issues of Diversity and Discrimination
- **Adopt a Comparative Approach**

LANGUAGE POLICY

• Institutional Support: Government Services

Reactions to Irish Language Act
[See also: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jjB1B6501c]

CONRADH NA GAEILGE

Irish is seen as important to the wider nationalist community as a symbol of identity

SOURCE: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56258672

LANGUAGE POLICY

• Status Planning or 'Language Determination': "Hindi Never, English Ever"

Student rally in Madras against Hindi imposition

Cartoon by R K Laxman depicting the anti-Hindi agitation in Madras

THE BOY CAN'T READ ENGLISH EITHER!

STUDENT AGITATION

ASSURANCES
NO HINDI!
ENGLISH TO CONTINUE!
NO COMPULSION TO LEARN HINDI.
NO HINDI! ENGLISH FOR EVER! ETC. ETC.

SOURCE: http://subversions.tiss.edu/vol2-issue1/sriram/

- Resist an Anglo-Centric and Western Focus
- Consider Issues of Diversity and Discrimination
- Adopt a Comparative Approach
- **Include Research on Heritage, Understudied and Minority Languages and Dialects**

Figure 2. *Lexemes* for Covid-19 among the less educated and uneducated.

Figure 3. Lexemes for Covid-19 among the highly educated.

- Resist an Anglo-Centric and Western Focus
- Consider Issues of Diversity and Discrimination
- Adopt a Comparative Approach
- Include Heritage, Understudied and Minority Languages and Dialects
- **Evidence Co-Creation of Research and Impact with Local Communities**

(i)   Multilingual individuals no longer being viewed as necessarily having a disability and being made more aware of their rights to free interpreting services;

(ii) Children not now required to interpret in confidential contexts for their bilingual or deaf parents;

(iii) Plans for translating M-UDC websites map directly to the unique language ecology of the region.

(i) "significant in terms of its strategic importance";
(ii) "major positive impact on equality of opportunity regarding Racial Group, Age and Disability";
(iii) "invaluable in raising awareness within our organisation of best practices with respect to interpreting and translating in our area in which all languages are valued and steps taken to ensure that everyone has access to any service they might need".

VI. A call to action

A call to action

- A strategic, sector-wide response would be great

- There are structural challenges (time, resources, workload, precarity)

- But in the meantime, the right thing to do is to look at our own practices as individuals (and if you can influence your department, do so)

- Resources and support exist!

Thoughts? Questions? Suggestions?

Resources

- The LAGB race and social justice committee - website, FAQs and resources: https://lagb.org.uk/

- University of Kent Diversity Mark

- Kingston Inclusive curriculum framework

- SOAS Decolonising the curriculum Toolkit

Resources

Abel, S., Tyson, G.F., & Palsson, G. 2019. 'From Enslavement to Emancipation: Naming Practices in the Danish West Indies.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61(2): 332–365.

Adewumi, Barbara, Laura R. Bailey, Emma Mires-Richards, Kathleen M. Quinlan, Evangeline Agyeman, Aisha Alabi, Miriam Jeyasingh, et al. 2022. Cross-disciplinary, collaborative and student-led: developing a change process for diversifying reading lists. *London Review of Education*. UCL Press. doi:10.14324/LRE.20.1.01. https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.14324/LRE.20.1.01 (13 January, 2022).

Ahmed, A.K. 2019. *The rise of fallism: #RhodesMustFall and the movement to decolonize the university.* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Columbia

Charity Hudley, A.H., Mallinson, C., Bucholtz, M., Nelson Flores, N., Holliday, E.C. & Spears, A. 2018. 'Linguistics and Race: An Interdisciplinary Approach towards an LSA Statement on Race.' *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America* 3: 1-14.

Chetty, Rajendra, Hannah Gibson and Colin Reilly (forthcoming) 'Decolonising methodologies through collaboration: reflections on partnerships and funding flows from working between the 'South' and the 'North'. In: *Decolonizing Linguistics.* Editors: Charity Hudley, A., Mallinson, C. and Bucholtz, M., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Corrigan, K.P. 2022. 'Language, Migration and Identity on the Island of Ireland Through Time and Space', Plenary at *Methods in Dialectology XVII*, University of Mainz, August 1-5 2022.

Deumart, Ana and Sinfree Makoni (eds.) 2023. *From Southern Theory to Decolonizing Sociolinguistics: Voices, Questions and Alternatives.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Denis, D. & D'Arcy, A. 2018. 'Settler Colonial Englishes are Distinct from Postcolonial English.' *American Speech* 93(1): 3-31.

Freire, P. 1968. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York, NY: Seabury Press.

Gannon, K. 2020. *Radical Hope: A teaching manifesto.* Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press.

Gibson, H., Jerro, K., Namboodiripad, S. and Reidel, K. (forthcoming) 'Towards a decolonial syntax: Research, Teaching, Publishing'. In: *Decolonizing Linguistics.* Editors: Charity Hudley, A., Mallinson, C. and Bucholtz, M. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Resources

Gibson, H., Jerro, K., Namboodiripad, S. and Reidel, K. (forthcoming) 'Towards a decolonial syntax: Research, Teaching, Publishing'. In: *Decolonizing Linguistics.* Editors: Charity Hudley, A., Mallinson, C. and Bucholtz, M. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hooks, B. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress.* London: Routledge.

Hutchinson, I. (ed.). *The Fire Thus Kindled May be Kindled Again: On Frederick Douglass.* Newcastle: NCLA, Newcastle University.

Kastner, I. 2023. "A collaborative, ungraded course in morphology." Talk at the Annual Meeting of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Kupolati, O., Adebileje, A. & Adeleke, A. 2021. ' "Someone has been coronated" Nigerian English lexical innovations in the COVID-19 Pandemic' *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 8:1 https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.1947559, accessed 20.9.23.

Labov, W. 1982. 'Objectivity and Commitment in Linguistic Science: The Case of the Black English Trial in Ann Arbor.' *Language in Society* 11(2): 165-201. doi:10.1017/S0047404500009192.

Lebron, C.J. 2017. *The Making of Black Lives Matter. A Brief History of an Idea.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

O'Leary, M., & Stockwell, R. 2023. 'Implementing Skills-Based Grading in a Linguistics Course'. *American Speech* 97(2):247-262.

Makoni, S., Severo, C., Abdelhay, A., Kaiper-Marquez, A. and Milojičić, V. 2023. 'Why 'shades of decolonial linguistics'?' In Makoni, S., Severo, C., Abdelhay, A., Kaiper-Marquez, A. & Milojičić, V. (eds.) *Shades of Decolonial Voices in Linguistics*, 1-12. Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800418547.

Ndhlovu, Finex. 2021. 'Decolonising sociolinguistics research: Methodological turn-around next?' *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, vol. (267-268): 193-201. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2020-0063

Purpel, D. E. 1989. *The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education: A Curriculum for Justice and Compassion in Education*. Grandby, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Sackstein, S. 2015. Hacking Assessment: 10 ways to go gradeless in a traditional grades school. Times 10 Publications.

Resources

Saraceni, M. & Jacob, C. 2021. 'Decolonizing (World) Englishes.' In Onysko, A. (ed.) _Research Developments in World Englishes,_ 11-28. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Schucan Bird, K. & Lesley Pitman. 2020. How diverse is your reading list? Exploring issues of representation and decolonisation in the UK. _Higher Education_ 79(5), 903–920. doi:10.1007/s10734-019-00446-9.

Stommel, J. 2023. _Undoing the grade: Why we grade, and how to stop._ Hybrid Pedagogy.

Veracini, L. 2014. 'Understanding Colonialism and Settler Colonialism as Distinct Formations.' _Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies_ 16(5): 615–33.

Williams, N. 2022. 'Using an Inclusive Curriculum Framework to Address an Awarding Gap in a First-Year Chemistry Module.' _Journal of Chemical Education_ 99(1):171-176.

Zuraw, K., A. M. Aly, I. Lin & Royer, A.J. 2019. 'Gotta catch 'em all: Skills grading in undergraduate linguistics.' _Language_ 95(4):e406-e427.

Get in touch and please join us!

https://lagb.org.uk/