



Social justice in the linguistics classroom

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Abstract. In the current political and social climate, diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice initiatives in higher education face pushback and at times abolition. Educators within the field of linguistics face a paradox: vulnerability of the classroom versus the fundamental duty to promote linguistic and social justice. This organized session aimed to support community and coalition building, helping linguists build capacity to engage in the work of linguistic and social justice through their teaching. The session was structured into four areas: diversity and inclusion, justice and equity, resistance and response, and lifelong learning and engagement. The first session introduced strategies for decentering English and Euro-Western narratives through a scaffolded indigenous languages project. The second session discussed how to shift classroom practices towards indigenous data sovereignty and collaborative praxis, as illustrated by an urban fieldwork model that empowers community experts and students as co-investigators. The third session detailed practical interventions for navigating both student and institutional pushback, offering a roadmap for maintaining momentum. The last session offered methods for applying linguistic analysis of linguistic landscapes, encouraging students to recognize and challenge marginalization within their own communities. Throughout these sessions a theme emerged of centering the humanity of language and the core values underlying the field of linguistics, all of which create opportunities to further social justice through linguistics education.

Keywords. social justice; diversity; inclusion; pedagogy; data sovereignty; scholarship of teaching and learning

1. Introduction. The opening plenary panel of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) 2026 Annual Meeting introduced a theme of coalition-building to address topics of linguistic and social justice. LSA members, special interest groups, and committees represent a diverse array of racialized, minoritized, marginalized communities and their allies. Each has unique history, needs, and goals related to linguistic and social justice, but nevertheless “we are invested in each other’s success” (Zimman 2026). But, to echo recurring comments at the LSA, how do we build coalitions and keep momentum when the conference is over?

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As linguists, we have opportunities to promote justice in all aspects of our work, but teaching responsibilities unite many of us where our research and social interests may not. Language is the substance and source of identity, community affiliation, and social position, and education in the science of language has the potential to advance understanding of critical issues in society and lived experience. The LSA highlights this potential in its Statement on Race, which says that “linguists are well positioned to contribute to social justice and equality in ways that benefit the discipline, speakers, communities, and academia” (LSA Executive Committee 2019). Educators in linguistics are particularly well positioned to make these contributions by centering issues of justice and equity in our teaching practice; by doing so we not only enhance belonging and inclusion for diverse student populations (Calhoun et al. 2021), we also invite our students into the work of advancing social justice within their own communities and networks of practice. If we do this well, and often, we can hope for cascading effects on a larger scale.

But as we heard in questions and comments throughout the annual meeting, people are concerned about teaching this way. Teaching makes us vulnerable. With movement against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in education, teachers face unprecedented challenges when it comes to what and how they teach. States are passing legislation that directly targets the content of university classrooms (Smith 2026). Teaching does not afford us the protections of anonymity made possible through statements issued by the LSA, or of obfuscation when standing up against injustice en masse. Teaching does not offer the slow refinement of our words through peer review nor the scholarly prestige that accompanies book chapters or journal articles. Supportive departments and administrators cannot guarantee protection, and even tenured professors now feel unsafe asking controversial questions — or simply presenting facts. Doing good and denouncing hatred in the classroom carries heightened risk to ourselves and our livelihoods; but to say nothing is to abdicate our fundamental duty as educators to prepare our students to leave the world better than they found it.

In the “Social Justice in the Linguistics Classroom” organized session, sponsored by the LSA’s Scholarly Teaching Special Interest Group, we aimed to support community and coalition building by helping each other navigate these critical issues in our classrooms. We provided space for participants to discuss their unique situations and find solidarity around, if not solutions to, these issues. We focused on ways to respond to student and institutional resistance and to create an inclusive environment in the classroom. And we proposed ways in which linguists can build our own capacity to engage in social justice work.

The session was divided into four modules: Diversity and Inclusion, Justice and Equity, Resistance and Response, and Lifelong Learning and Engagement. Each module was structured to include a brief introduction on the topic, the demonstration of a lesson plan or activity that addresses the issue, and then a round table discussion by participants.

2. Diversity & inclusion. One fundamental concept in linguistics is that all languages and varieties are equal and valid. Our field and classrooms then are a rich space to naturally further diversity and inclusion in academia. When thinking of diversity and inclusion in the classroom, there are many areas where we can begin to dismantle linguistic biases and promote a diverse and inclusive classroom and pedagogical practice. These biases include our own linguistic biases as educators. This can be addressed through the content that we include and in our interactions in the classroom in the form of linguistic microaggressions and unconscious biases (Sanders et al. 2020). For this portion, we will be focusing on the content. We have all seen the bias in our textbooks and workbooks that privileges linguistic data from English and excludes, exoticizes, or decontextualizes minority and/or indigenous languages. The solution is not to simply add more

languages as examples, but to add more linguistic variety in a meaningful and culturally appropriate (not appropriative) way. By situating contextualized language examples, we increase student exposure to diverse worldviews. Doing so will, in the long run, help combat racism (see Pauker et al. 2017 on how racial diversity leads to reduction in racial essentialism).

2.1 DE-CENTERING ENGLISH. The undergraduate introductory linguistics course is intended to address a number of goals. Often, those goals are achieved by centering the language of instruction that all students are expected to know and use — English, in the U.S. where several of the authors teach. Other languages are generally reduced to exoticized problem sets in textbooks. This exoticism is not accidental, as “[c]oloniality... is deeply embedded in linguistic disciplinary practice” (Deumert & Storch 2020: 20). Because most colonialism has originated from Europe, there is a power dynamic between colonial languages and indigenous languages, particularly those from the Western Hemisphere and the Global South. In a workshop on social justice in the classroom, Brock (2022) emphasized the need to teach *counternarratives* as a response to the powerful master narratives in our classrooms. The centering of English is, by far, the most powerful master narrative in the U.S. linguistics classroom. The question raised by this situation is how instructors can de-center English and increase awareness of (and concern for) threatened indigenous languages. One possible way to accomplish this is through a semester-long Indigenous Language Project based on individual research and supported by scaffolded assignments, which becomes the primary assignment structure for the course. This intervention follows Felten’s (2013: 122) principles of good practice in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL): (1) inquiry into student learning, (2) grounded in context, (3) methodologically sound, (4) conducted in partnership with students, and (5) appropriately public.

2.2 THE INTERVENTION. All teaching is contextual, and the context for this teaching intervention is the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, a rural state comprehensive university of approximately 8,500 students. The instructor, Dr. James Berry, is a white Anglo-American cisgender man; however, he is careful to acknowledge his positionality with students, particularly when introducing this assignment. One goal in all of his classes is to increase sociolinguistic awareness about the act of teaching linguistics itself. The project was developed to connect to UNESCO’s International Decade of Indigenous Languages as well as a local acknowledgment on the campus of UW–Stevens Point that the university was partially constructed on a burial ground for local indigenous people following an 1860s scarlet fever epidemic.

The Indigenous Language Project is an assignment set that arose from a SoTL project. This intervention is a series of five low-stakes homework assignments that complement the more traditional textbook and in-class work. They include:

1. Choosing an indigenous language (based on a definition reached in class) and doing some initial research (including considerations of endangerment and revitalization efforts); finding a reference grammar;
2. Exploring the sound system of the language;
3. Discussing the morphosyntax of the language;
4. Considering the lexicon, semantics, pragmatics, and culture of the language; and
5. Reflecting on the language project.

The project has several goals for student learning associated with it:

- Studying an unfamiliar language from a linguistic viewpoint;

- Taking agency in choosing their subject;
- Learning about language users of non-European languages and de-exoticizing their linguistic knowledge by moving beyond marked examples;
- Incorporating basic linguistic typology into an introductory class;
- Gaining understanding and empathy about language dormancy/loss as a result of the (ongoing) colonial enterprise; and
- Recognizing that indigenous language knowledge is often difficult to access and is nearly always filtered through a colonial/postcolonial lens (and that linguistics itself as a discipline provides that lens).

This intervention has been very successful at achieving these goals. Student reflections and course evaluations indicate a deeper understanding of threats to language diversity and local efforts to revitalize languages. Students also respond favorably to the typological aspects of comparing different languages using the parameters found in different linguistic subfields.

2.3 CONCLUSION. This activity raises questions as to how individual educators can create classroom spaces and assessments that further diversity and inclusion when including data from indigenous and minoritized languages. In the name of diversity and inclusion, educators must not use data in a way that decontextualizes and exoticizes the data and community. One important step to implementing projects that center and contextualize linguistic data is to engage in reflective teaching practices, which enables educators to engage in more inclusive classroom practices (Beverly 2025). To this end, participants reflected upon a set of discussion questions listed at the end of the article.

3. Justice & equity. Another fundamental concept in linguistics is that language is a uniquely *human* phenomenon. This means that regardless of our specific research questions or theoretical orientations, we are largely concerned with data that are produced and perceived by individual humans as a result of embodied and enculturated experience. In this second module, we considered ways to center justice and equity in our classrooms by making explicit the relationships between linguists and the persons who have contributed language data. This built on many of the issues that were raised in the module on diversity and inclusion — that is, while recognizing the importance of including data from diverse languages in introducing key linguistics concepts to students, attention to justice and equity requires addressing unequal power dynamics and the potential exoticization of language communities when their data is decontextualized.

3.1 KEYNOTE SPEAKER. Dr. Wesley Y. Leonard began our module by introducing key considerations in Indigenous data sovereignty, an issue that concretely engages with these critical questions. Building on his critiques of how linguist researchers have traditionally ‘collected’ data from Indigenous community sources (Leonard 2018; Holton et al. 2022), in this organized session Leonard challenged linguist educators to carefully consider how we (re)use data in our teaching activities without attending to the original contributors or the original sociopolitical context in which that data was first recorded for study by linguists. Making space for social justice in our educational space requires responsible stewardship of data which originated from Indigenous sources (see Dupris 2025 for further discussion).

In their chapter introducing Indigenous data sovereignty and ethical practice in linguistics, Holton and colleagues (2022: 57) write: “linguistic data cannot be divorced from their sources. While ethical practices may differ across different research contexts, this principle remains and

lies at the heart of ethics in linguistic data.” The principle of maintaining the connection between linguistic data and their human sources underlies the teaching activity that Jill introduced.

3.2 FIELD METHODS COURSE FRAMEWORK. The activity presented here features a new course in which Chicago serves as the field site for linguistic, cultural, and methodological inquiry. Urban Linguistic Field Methods (ULFM) was designed to offer undergraduate students the opportunity to practice authentic application of their linguistics coursework by fostering organic, human-centered interactions with local language users experiencing linguistic contact, discrimination, and generational shift. As Marcia Farr and Rachel Reynolds (2003: 5) explain, “The eloquent and complex ways in which people of varying class, ethnic, and racial groups (including ‘mainstream’ groups) express their multiple identities here in Chicago is a testament to how much more we need to study class and ethnic formation on the ground.” The vision for ULFM involved students working in partnership with community users of languages in diaspora, applying a collective understanding of the perpetuation and erasure of languages, structures, meanings, and lenses that scaffold social norms of language contact and use (Farr & Reynolds 2003; Hallett 2012; Perlin 2024).

Before such work could be endeavored, I established and centered some non-negotiables, principles that required a bit of extra time and funding that crucially guided my course planning:

- Community language experts get paid for their time
- Community language experts choose deliverables
- Community language experts hold and control the sharing of linguistic and cultural knowledge

Additionally, I saw my main responsibility as facilitating meaningful experiences for students and language experts so all of us would be empowered to better advocate for language access in our city. While designing the syllabus, I began with a set of essential questions to which none of us had complete answers, which we would authentically uncover in our communal work.

- What are the roles of linguists and community members in fieldwork settings?
- How can outsider linguists contribute to language reclamation?
- How can linguists ensure they are doing fieldwork ethically?
- What can we learn from collaboration with community members?

The rest of the non-negotiables emerged organically from the essential questions as I fleshed out the course design and outcomes.

- Instructor offers context, methodology, and ethics training
- Students learn inductively
- Students contribute their assets to produce meaningful deliverables
- Community language experts retain ownership and control of deliverables

Instruction toward these outcomes necessitated offering students intensive ethical training to recognize and avoid extractive and reductive linguistic fieldwork that perpetuates narratives of deficit and erasure (Bower 2008; Cala et al. 2024). Our subversion of these historically pervasive practices relied on us — the instructor, community language users, and undergraduate students — to co-construct a collaborative praxis in which minoritized languages are celebrated and promoted, consultants are compensated, and language data remains with the community. It is this data sovereignty on which the activity presented here is predicated.

3.3 FIELDWORK PROCESS. We began our "fieldwork" in earnest with course and consultant end goals in mind. Our first community language expert is a speaker of Amharic who had been exposed to other Semitic languages as a child in Ethiopia and to Spanish as a teen in Chicago. Her goal for this partnership was to increase Amharic literacy among Ethiopian kids in diaspora; thus, she requested we build a website with our findings that she could tend and share. The second community language expert is a Rom user from a Romani family. She also wanted a website, as she was motivated to use her knowledge of Romani music and culture toward reclamation of the Rom language and a Romani identity, providing a counternarrative to damaging portrayals of Romani in popular culture. We decided to use Google Sites to build the websites so we could easily turn over the login and password information to each of the language experts at the end of the semester.

Having established the course and consultant goals toward data sovereignty, I aimed to build in student investment throughout the semester. One of the first occasions for this buy-in was the pre-elicitation activity of co-constructing a word list. While wordlists of varying lengths and compositions exist (e.g., Swadesh 1950; Comrie & Smith 1977), students did not know about them; furthermore, choosing a wordlist is an inherently subjective endeavor.

I saw this moment as an opportunity for students to exert sovereignty over their own data collection by charging them with the task of co-constructing word lists for elicitation that honored their backgrounds, assets, and curiosities. Students worked in four teams to generate lists of the 50–100 words they deemed most crucial for understanding Amharic and Rom. Groups posted their lists to a Google Doc that was shared with the whole class. Given the vast range of terms students submitted as among the 100 most important words, it became increasingly evident — in real time — that linguistic methodological design and data collection embeds human experiences and interactions. The ensuing large group discussion offered a glimpse into how the students approached data collection based on what lexical items and categories they found critical to their understanding of the languages. Below are the first 10-ish terms or categories from each group's list.

1. Property, mine, yours, mother, father, sibling, heart, brain, finger, hand
2. Kinship terms & honorifics, terms of endearment, formal & informal language such as basic greetings, physical & metaphorical body parts/ traits, numbers, past/ present/ future (tense), adverbs of motion, transitive vs intransitive verbs, temperature, colors, animals
3. Sing, song, sky, rooster, hen, cousin, you (informal vs. formal), jacket, cancer, fermentation
4. Grammatical gender, negation, transitivity, plurality, basic verbs, tense, onomatopoeia, honorifics, possession

We took a few minutes to read through all of the groups' lists in preparation for selecting the final 100 to elicit with our language experts. Where there was overlapping inclusion of terms between and among the groups, those terms were automatically included in the final list. For most of the terms, however, each group needed to make the case for inclusion on the final class list. Group 1 argued for possession and body parts. Group 2 was interested in interrogating the universality of certain concepts. Group 3 was curious about gendered/ non-gendered animals and kinship terms, numbers, life stages, and medical issues. Group 4 set their list up to understand grammatical relations. After two class sessions and some extra time on my end, we finalized our list of 100 words and each student signed up to elicit around seven terms.

The elicitation itself was a collaborative effort in which the students exercised methodological sovereignty. It was implemented with flexibility in allowing students and experts

to ask follow-up questions that arose organically. All parties were encouraged to honor each other's goals and assets, including complex language inventories and ways of processing new linguistic information. At one poignant moment during elicitation, a student asked how to say 'toes' in Amharic, which the language expert explained is a combination of words meaning 'foot' and 'fingers'. At this moment, the student — whose language background included Gujarati, English, Hindi, and Spanish in addition to her coursework in Linguistics — lit up and said "So then is the word for 'sock' like, 'foot glove' or something?" Here, the student recruits both her language assets and her processes of quick analogy and pattern-seeking to create a meaningful interaction with the community expert. The data sovereignty produced in this exchange was the result of a team effort that does not purport to be objective or neutral. Rather, the data is capacious enough to hold the values of multiple human sources, human investigators, and human interpreters.

3.4 CONCLUSION. Where dominant social values are adopted and codified in the academy, mythical standards for language use thrive. The Urban Linguistic Field Methods course challenges oppressive academic norms by recognizing and conferring expertise on diasporic language users and undergraduate linguistics students, whose collective insights have often been overlooked as “unworthy” or “messy.” We recognize these insights as complex and nuanced in ways the academy is only beginning to learn as we shake the constraints of "the way we've always done it" (Charity Hudley et al. 2022: 136; Sedlacek et al. 2024: 243).

Following from the demonstration activity, and returning to themes raised in Leonard’s overview of Indigenous data sovereignty, we concluded our module on Justice and Equity with the questions for attendees to consider and discuss, listed at the end of the article.

4. Resistance & response. Efforts to incorporate social justice into linguistics classes are sometimes met with student and/or institutional resistance. In this third module, we discussed several types of resistance as well as some suggestions for constructive responses.0

4.1 STUDENT RESISTANCE. According to Curzan (2013), students may resist content that challenges their deeply held, often prescriptive conceptions of how language works in favor of what she calls “linguistic security.” Similarly, Hercula (2020) found that some students prefer not to experience the feelings of shame or guilt that can arise in response to learning about, for example, linguistic prejudice and discrimination.

There are several common themes of student resistance to social justice content in our classes. First, students may believe that linguistics should be apolitical or purely objective and may resist content if they feel it doesn’t belong in a certain course or if they perceive that the instructor is pushing a certain agenda. Second, students sometimes struggle to understand that the facts we present in our classes — such as the linguistic equity of all dialects/languages — are research-based. Instead, they insist that these are issues with multiple sides; this is especially true when the evidence presented conflicts with their belief systems. Third, many students have been fully ingrained in the prescriptive perspective toward language throughout their K–12 education, which may lead them to resist content that conflicts with the “rights” and “wrongs” about language they’ve learned — especially facts that threaten linguistic hierarchies or their own linguistic privilege.

4.2 RESPONSE STRATEGIES. Hercula (2020) suggests a few strategies in the classroom that can promote an environment in which students feel supported as their viewpoints are challenged. First, it can be helpful to use your own background and experiences as a model. It’s important to recognize and share our own subjectivities and positionalities and even our own past failures and

growth points with which students can relate. Second, we can help students understand that it's not their fault if they have held misinformed or even harmful beliefs about language in the past — they need to understand that we are all socialized into the prescriptive perspective on social media, in school, TV, and movies. It's there everywhere we turn. So we can't be expected to do better until we know better. Third, it's important to give students time and multiple opportunities to process the new information they are learning. And it's important to allow students to make mistakes as they progress. Immediately correcting a student who, for example, uses an incorrect term or makes too broad a generalization (but who's not being malicious and is actually trying) might ultimately shut down their progress or give them the impression that they have to get it perfect before they can say anything. Lastly, some students believe that changing their minds or reversing their position on something is a sign of weakness or failure, so it's important to teach students that shifts in thinking are a normal, positive outcome of learning and to promote the value of lifelong learning.

We then shifted our conversation to the different levels at which we might encounter resistance — individual interactions, full-class instruction, and/or institutional or administrative. We encouraged participants to consider what they could do beforehand to prepare for resistance, what they can do in-the-moment when resistance occurs, and what they can do to follow up after experiencing resistance. Table 1 suggests strategies for response at these different stages and levels.

We then highlighted a few of these specific strategies. For example, when preparing courses, instructors can think about how to frame social justice content in a way that's likely to resonate with their specific student population (e.g., panelists discussed how their approaches to presenting content differs, as Sarah teaches at a STEM-focused institution, while Lisa teaches at a religious institution. On the other hand, M. A. Sakender's context is different from both Sarah's and Lisa's; he teaches at neither a STEM-focused nor a religious institution; his institution is a government-funded, autonomous public university.). At the class level, one in-the-moment strategy is to invite other students in the class to respond when a student expresses resistance. Hearing a response from a peer might be more impactful than only hearing from the instructor.

4.3 INSTITUTIONAL RESISTANCE. At the institutional level, instructors can spend time learning about policies and guidelines at their respective institutions and can share disciplinary knowledge and best practices with administrators and others who may be critical of social justice work. Where possible, linguists can also help shape policies that would allow for the inclusion of more social justice content in linguistics courses and beyond. Finally, we acknowledge that not all of us have equal opportunities or capacity for this kind of involvement. So, ultimately, it's important to support our colleagues doing this work and to care for ourselves as we pursue these opportunities.

4.4 CONCLUSION. Following this general introduction, we presented specific scenarios related to student and institutional resistance and asked groups to discuss possible responses. We also asked them to share their own experiences in order to receive or offer advice. Questions for reader consideration and/or discussion are included in Section 6.

	Individual Level	Class Level	Institutional Level
In advance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about students’ backgrounds and interests • Acknowledge positionality of students and instructor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set expectations for the learning environment • Frame social justice content appropriately for your context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document institutional guidelines, policies, and resources
In-the-moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimize harm to others • Seek to understand student perspective • Reinforce learning objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for peer-led responses • Acknowledge structural, social, and historical norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight disciplinary knowledge and conventions that may be unknown outside the field
As follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand firm without arguing • Encourage self-reflection and re-engagement with content • Offer ongoing conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge harms • Reinforce course policies • Model academic rigor and openness to learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to institutional resources/ procedures • Pursue opportunities to shape policies

Table 1. Preparing for responses to resistance

5. Lifelong learning & engagement. The previous modules focused on the actions that we can take to engage students in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion while they are active participants in the classroom. Yet, as educators we are also concerned with how our students can take their learning from the classroom and use those skills to have a meaningful impact in their own lives and broader communities. As Bentley (2000: 354) points out, “the true test of understanding becomes what you are able to do with the knowledge you possess, especially in contexts outside the bounds of formal educational experience.” Therefore, the final module of our workshop, Lifelong Learning and Engagement, explored how we can teach students the relevant knowledge and skills needed for engaging in the community and promoting justice and equity beyond the classroom. The goal of this module, then, was to focus on classroom projects that give students practical experience with assessing linguistics in their surrounding community with the goal of instilling lifetime values of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion scholarship that persist even after students have completed their university courses. Specifically, this module centers on teaching students awareness of their linguistic landscape, which has shown to give

students the opportunity “to analyze and critically reflect upon the socially-situated and constructed public spaces in [linguistic landscapes] and the communities who are represented, silenced, or excluded” (Lozano et al. 2021: 18).

5.1 **FRAMEWORK.** In this module, Dr. Kahdeidra Monét Martin presented a semester-long project in which students investigate the linguistic profile of a school or community by analyzing aspects such as the syntax, phonology, and codeswitching present in these areas. She highlighted two examples of student projects: one focused on the linguistic diversity of the Muslim Student Association at Vassar College and the other focused on the minoritization of non-standard linguistic varieties in the Scituate, MA public school system. This project is an example of how we can make students aware of how linguistics, including issues surrounding linguistic justice, impacts our daily lives.

5.2 **STUDENT PROJECT EXAMPLES.** Students’ research illustrated how language cannot be decontextualized from culture and that studying linguistic diversity offered insights into the broader ecology of cultural diversity in spaces. For example, in a project researching the Muslim Student Association, the student reflected on how the group fostered his development of religious literacies, writing, “Although we have different languages that we speak depending on our background, our shared religion allows us to bond and communicate with words outside of just our own languages...I have realized that celebrating these differences enriches both the social and academic experiences for students in college.” As this statement reflects, projects such as these foster critical thinking beyond the classroom curriculum and help students to better understand how diversity and inclusion are beneficial for all. For his project on the Scituate, Massachusetts public school system, a student observed that linguistic marginalization in schools was indicative of wider racial and cultural marginalization in the community. He noted, “With townie and bubble culture come negative attitudes toward change,” referencing a comment left on a public video of a town hall meeting that read, “‘Don’t shove this [diversity] stuff down our throats, this town is 95% white. We don’t need this.’...A truly inclusive [Scituate Public Schools] cannot be created unless an inclusive community is created around it.”

5.3 **CONCLUSION.** While this semester-long project requires that students analyze linguistic properties, it heavily centers on the humanity of language. Both of the student project examples investigated how language was affecting real people in their community as well as the consequences of little linguistic diversity. By integrating these types of lifelong learning projects in the classroom, we can better engage our students in their surrounding areas, help them identify linguistic needs of the community, and be prepared to respond to these subsequent needs with their linguistic education.

6. Toward teaching justice. The anonymous participant feedback after the session was quite positive. Participants expressed more interest and confidence addressing topics related to social justice in the classroom, particularly data sovereignty. But one comment highlighted a concern that may resonate with some readers and that we feel merits attention:

I don't feel that I have the expertise to speak on social justice in the classroom. I want to be the teacher that does, but I doubt I will start doing it, if I'm being honest. How can I say something small without overtly giving a reason why my whole course design should be different? Once I start teaching about social justice, shouldn't I redesign everything to be oriented towards it?

This comment reflects two assumptions: first, that one must have expertise on matters of social justice in order to talk about them, with perhaps a related assumption that talking about issues of justice must be done perfectly; second, that we must totally change everything we are doing to make social justice the focus.

With respect to the first assumption, we confess that many of us as organizers of this session also felt humbled and unsure of our expertise in this area. After discussions amongst ourselves, we developed two strategies for addressing this concern. First, recognizing our need for continuing development, we reached out to others for guidance. In the unit on Justice and Equity, for example, the organizers invited Wesley Y. Leonard to discuss Indigenous data sovereignty, a topic on which he has considerable expertise and which the organizers were eager to learn more about. Second, we identified and affirmed the value of our own skills and experience. As can be seen in each of the demonstration activities, organizers in this session do have concrete ideas for putting critical issues into practice, and all of us came to this topic with curiosity and critical thinking. Through the coalition that we built with each other as the organizing team, we recognized each others' gifts and were inspired by each others' ideas, just as we recognize that we all still have much to learn. We hope that that spirit of support and continual growth is part of what participants in this organized session took away.

The first step toward teaching social justice in the classroom is therefore not to quickly absorb decades of sociolinguistic and social justice research, but rather to ensure that we do not undermine our values with inequitable or exclusive classroom practices. For example, training students to only be able to write IPA for a hegemonic language variety reinforces that only certain varieties are worth analyzing — the opposite of linguistic equality. For another, other-ing discourse when referring to communities of language users (i.e., “we say it this way, they it this way”) implies that people from some language communities don't belong in this classroom — the opposite of linguistic inclusivity. Reflecting on our teaching goals, revisiting our lesson and course objectives, and reviewing scholarship of teaching and learning in linguistics can all help us decide what to do instead.

The second assumption is that we must drop everything to make social justice the focus of our teaching. It is important to remember that “social justice” is not a stand-alone outcome, nor is teaching about social justice antithetical to teaching Linguistics as a science. If we do our jobs well, undergraduates with degrees in Linguistics should be equipped to think critically and scientifically about linguistic claims they encounter, and to dismantle them as needed. This requires a complex social scientific toolbox, and many pieces of that toolbox are already present in a linguistics curriculum. But there is also plenty of room for growth in how our field teaches linguistic science and linguistic justice. We invite similarly concerned readers to consider a Small Teaching framework for building a curriculum with linguistic justice at the core (Bjorndahl et al. 2024; see Lang 2021 for Small Teaching). Change can be implemented in small doses, and each change may look quite different from the previous: one change may be to the content of a lesson, and the next to the structure of an existing assessment. By revising and building on previous interventions over time, you may be surprised at how quickly a course changes — and how invigorated the course feels. To aid readers in identifying opportunities for change in their teaching, we offer the following reflection questions based on the discussions held during the organized session:

- Diversity & Inclusion
 - What is one way you could diversify and contextualize the linguistic data used in one of your lessons?

- What issues do you see arising in your attempt to use a more inclusive and diverse data set in teaching?
- How will this change further linguistic and/or social justice in the classroom?
- Justice & Equity
 - Who are the sources for the linguistic data you use in your classes?
 - What kinds of discussions can you have with your students about these sources?
 - How do you want to model responsible language work in your teaching?
- Resistance & Response
 - Have you encountered examples of student or institutional resistance to integrating social-justice-related topics in your classrooms? How did you respond?
 - How can we best support our colleagues when they encounter resistance to their work, whether research, teaching, or otherwise?
 - What are the best strategies for responding in-the-moment to a student who is expressing resistance during a classroom discussion?
- Lifelong Learning & Engagement
 - What are some ways that your linguistic background or previous linguistic classes have shaped your views on social justice outside of the classroom?
 - How can we provide these same learning opportunities for our students?
 - Where do you think linguistics has the most opportunities to support lifelong learning in students? How can we promote lifelong learning in theoretical fields beyond sociolinguistics?
 - Are there community programs you want your students to engage with? How can linguistics be integrated into these programs?

7. Conclusion. Many linguists in academia have teaching responsibilities, but teaching is often not valued as highly as research and tends to be neglected — except in times of crisis. We continue to endure the ramifications of several recent and longer-term crises, and even the most stubborn of teachers have had to make changes along the way. The COVID-19 pandemic required widespread changes to online/emergency remote format, forcing anyone who was not already teaching online to assess and re-make teaching materials (Bunger 2021, Geer 2021, Lee 2021). For some teachers, this included consideration of issues of accessibility and student wellbeing more seriously (Blaylock et al. 2021, Miller 2021). The emergence of AI continues to demand that teachers change their old teaching strategies — considering the role of AI into the classroom and in the Linguistics curriculum (Konnolly & Sanders, 2024). Concurrent with these have been re-invigorated calls for social justice. And the recent political climate has brought on a time of great fear and uncertainty for many, particularly members of groups that have been minoritized and marginalized as well as their allies, due to the subversion of efforts toward justice and a waning trust in science (Milkoreit & Smith 2025).

These crises have turned linguists’ attention to their teaching over and over again, forcing many to pause and consider what can and should be done differently. If the question is how to build a coalition that brings together linguists’ many different but related interests, then one answer is to leverage these unifying moments of crisis into collective pedagogical action—reimagining a polycrisis as a polytunity (Ang 2024). Teaching affords no protections, but the corollary virtue is that it imposes no barriers. Each teacher can focus on their own unique teaching context, working with the students in front of them and representatives from local communities to support their linguistic needs. Even if we never say “justice” or “diversity” or

“inclusion” or “equity” or the letters “DEI”, we can teach as though justice and equity and diversity and inclusion are normative practices in Linguistics — and if we teach it like we believe it, the norms may soon change. Outside the classroom, we can support each other in this effort by sharing ideas and learning from each other with openness and humility. Such a pedagogical revolution will better serve individuals, communities, and the discipline of Linguistics for years to come.

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