

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN PRACTICE



Edited by
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and Jonathan Rosa

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Introduction

Reimagining Language and Social Justice

*Netta Avineri, Laura R. Graham, Eric J. Johnson,
Robin Conley Riner, and Jonathan Rosa*

Language is a central concern in contemporary conversations surrounding social justice, as evident in issues as diverse as bilingual education, racial epithets, gendered pronouns, immigration discourses, sports team mascots, and signage in public spaces. Developed as a collaborative effort by members of the American Anthropological Association's Language and Social Justice Task Group, this volume presents case studies of language and social justice in a range of contexts spanning five thematic areas: race discourse, education, health, social activism, and law and policy. The case studies illustrate with striking detail the meaningful relationships among language, social action, and broader social change. The chapters cover a diverse set of topics in a range of global contexts, and provide concise overviews of key concepts, debates, and approaches in the examination of language and social justice. Each case can be read on its own or together with others in sets of complementary essays on a common theme or, as we hope, the volume as a whole. Essays are deliberately brief in order to facilitate access to a broad range of examples and for use in teaching. Taken together, these case studies powerfully demonstrate how language provides a crucial vantage point from which to (re)imagine, understand, and contribute to the achievement of social justice.

A broad range of U.S.-based scholarship concerned with relationships between linguistic diversity and social inequity emerged in the 1960s when sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication diverged from strictly formal approaches to the study of language. Within these newly developed fields, scholars systematically began to focus attention on the social uses of language and linguistic variation (for example, see Erickson 1979; Gumperz 1982; Heath 1983; Hymes 1962; Labov 1966; Wolfram 1974). Moreover, the fields of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics (as well as related disciplines) have strongly established histories documenting the constitutive relationship among social hierarchies, linguistic difference, and social inequality. A number of these studies draw upon the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1999), for example, who used apt economic metaphors to describe ways that distinct languages, language varieties, and linguistic resources have greater or lesser "symbolic value" and thus become associated with differential access to social, economic, and political resources and power. Over 40 years of

scholarship in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics consistently demonstrates that language is neither a neutral communicative medium nor a passive way of referring to things in the world, but rather a crucial form of social action in itself (Ahearn 2011; Austin 1962; Duranti 2011). Numerous studies highlight that language use is socially, politically, and economically consequential and that language and speech are fraught with power (Fairclough 1995; Gal 1989; Irvine 1989). Crucially, these approaches consider not only how language is implicated in the constitution and maintenance of social hierarchies and social inequities, but also in their contestation (Heller 2017; Hoffman-Dilloway 2018).

A concern with what we today call “social justice” was an implicit focus of much of the early, influential work in linguistic anthropology, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics (Heller 2014). Despite this fact, discussions that explicitly frame linguistic diversity and language use in terms of “social justice” are relatively recent. Language-focused scholarship in the field of education has played a pioneering role in forwarding these discussions. In *Language, Minority Education and Gender: Linking Social Justice and Power*, David Corson (1993) argued that language is central to minority success in education, and educational equity is a matter of social justice. This study, and many others, counter influential socially regressive deficit arguments, such as those of “elaborated” and “restricted codes” (Bernstein 1971) and “verbal deprivation” (Bereiter and Engelmann 1966), that locate blame for differential success in education and other arenas *within* minority populations. Even so, socially disparaging deficit arguments, such as a “language gap” or immigrant populations’ “failure” to speak English, persistently reassert themselves in scholarship as well as in popular discourse (Avineri et al. 2015). Chapters in this book continue the tradition of challenging these arguments by demonstrating ways that language in education and other spheres is central to social justice.

In her 2016 book, *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics*, Ingrid Piller directly framed the discussion of linguistic difference in relation to social justice. Through a review of contemporary research and media reports, Piller places social justice at the center of discussions of linguistic diversity and demonstrates how linguistic participation mediates social participation. The present collection complements and extends Piller’s efforts to put linguistic diversity “on the map” of social justice debates. In this diverse set of cases, scholars conceive of and explicitly frame their discussions in terms of social justice. We view social justice as a contested concept and existential problem that remains to be realized rather than a pragmatic challenge that can be reconciled in any straightforward way. As James Baldwin (1972, 149) noted long ago:

Ask any Mexican, any Puerto Rican, any black man, any poor person—ask the wretched how they fare in the halls of justice, and then you will know, not whether or not the country is just, but whether or not it has any love for justice, or any concept of it.

Indeed, the hierarchical structures of power that have produced profound injustice across societal contexts are often endemic to and constitutive of these societies, such that the creation of justice requires the radical reimagination of alternative worlds instead of simply championing the legitimacy or inclusion of stigmatized populations and language practices (Salinas and Guerrero 2018; Tuck and Yang 2018). Rather than claiming there is one way to define and address social justice, the cases in this volume present a variety of perspectives on experiences of (in)justice, providing an emergent, variegated view of the concept.

The American Anthropological Association's (AAA) Language and Social Justice Task Group was founded in 2008 when linguistic anthropologists with interests in these issues (Charles Briggs, Laura R. Graham, Marco Jacquemet) converged within the Committee on Human Rights (CfHR, Graham 2009). Eventually, the Task Group evolved into the joint Society for Linguistic Anthropology (SLA)/AAA Task Group on Language and Social Justice. Today this is one of the most active, vibrant, creative, and socially engaged committees within the AAA, an international professional organization with over 10,000 members. The present volume grows out of the leadership and work of this Committee (see more below on how this collection emerged). It is a deliberately collaborative project which is characteristic of the efforts of this committee and collective scholarly thinking about ways language is implicated in social inequity and how language can be an instrument of positive social change toward a more equitable and just society. Given the book's focus on social justice, it is helpful to consider what this term means in contemporary discussions and how the concept entered into public discourse.

Social Justice

"Social Justice" became an important theme within late 19th and early 20th century political and legal philosophy, and the work of political philosopher John Rawls (1971) was particularly influential. Although there is no single, agreed upon definition of "social justice," common themes addressed in social justice scholarship include equitable distribution of resources, respect for human rights, equitable access to opportunities, political representation, cultural respect, and social recognition (Picower 2012). The concept generally entails a notion of group or collective rights as well as individual rights (see Young 1993)—though it has been applied to a variety of specific socio-cultural contexts in recent decades (see Adams et al. 2013). Bell (2007, 3), who conceptualizes social justice as both a process and a goal, emphasizes that the concept entails full and equal participation of all groups in "a society that is mutually shaped to meet the[ir] needs." Efforts at social justice can be facilitated or restricted by a variety of actors, including national governments, international agencies and instruments, NGOs, individual activists, and scholars. Language, as cases in this volume demonstrate, is key to social justice and can play a powerful role in bringing about positive social change.

Social justice assumed prominence in public debates and international legal arenas during the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Capenheart and Milovanovic 2007). It has become ever more salient during the neoliberal era with its increasing disparities between those who have access to resources and those who do not (Flores 2013). In the early 20th century, social justice became central within international law, institutions, and legal instruments. The Constitution of the International Labour Organization (ILO), an entity that was established in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles (and is now a United Nations agency), states, “Universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice” (International Labour Organization 2011, 1). In the late 1960s, the notion of “social justice” became prominent within various United Nations documents and instruments that seek to place people and equity at the center of debates about economic development (see United Nations 2006, 53).¹ Within the UN at the time, the spheres of “development, growth and equity” and “human rights” operated independently and were disconnected from each other (United Nations 2006).

Like the idea of social justice, a universal definition of “human rights” and agreements on how they should be implemented are elusive. As Wynter (2003) notes, the reference point for the human in normative conceptions of human rights is often deeply circumscribed along lines of race and gender, such that only particular human populations are indeed eligible for or guaranteed human rights. Anthropology has a uniquely conflicted history with, and relationship to, the concept (see Goodale 2009), particularly in its complicity with colonial projects that have positioned populations as more or less fully human. Despite debates, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948) and subsequent covenants provide an internationally agreed upon set of principles and standards. Accordingly, human rights pertain to individuals and include the right to life, liberty, and security, the right not to be held in slavery, servitude, or be subject to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, as well as the right to be recognized as a person before the law and various other civil rights. Within the UN, while human rights concentrated on the rights of *individuals*, the work of development agencies focused on *societal* levels of rights violations and international cooperation for economic and social development (United Nations 2006, 53–54). “Social justice” was increasingly used to bridge this dichotomy between discourses of individual and societal rights within the UN. The Copenhagen Declaration that resulted from the 1995 World Summit for Social Development represents an attempt to present a coherent vision. It is replete with references to “social justice,” and “just societies,” as well as “equity” and “equality.”

This volume focuses on case studies to provide a deep understanding of local contexts and to identify common threads around social justice more broadly. Therefore, we take a “bottom up” approach to our discussions of language and social justice. The topics covered here demonstrate how social justice comes to take on multiple meanings in specific contexts. Taken together, they uphold Bell’s (2007) assertion that social justice is both a process and goal. Each chapter

points to nuances of the term and together they illustrate the utility of the concept in terms of language and linguistic diversity and respect for language as culture and a right (for discussion of language as a human right, see May 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1995). Our discussion of language and social justice in this volume highlights the following areas: access, equity, power, privilege, and marginalization.

Language, Interaction, and Social Justice

This book explores cases in which language is central to social justice issues. While chapters present different aspects of and perspectives on language, the book overall espouses a view of language as more than a system of signs that refer to abstract ideas and things in the world. Rather, language is understood as having the capacity to change people's awareness of status quo injustices.

Here, we recognize language as social action; in other words, language and language practice can actually effect change. Obstructing linguistically minoritized groups from participating in civic and community practices in their home languages not only limits their access to broader social institutions, but also:

- limits their participation and representation in the dominant political, economic, and social institutions;
- prevents them from opportunities of self-advocacy;
- diminishes their cultural and linguistic identity;
- restricts their access to inter-generational knowledge;
- denies them from cherishing and maintaining their historical, filial, and personal connections;
- prevents them from having equal opportunities and privileges;
- denigrates their social positionality and legitimacy; and
- denies them access to content knowledge and materials reflective of their cultural norms and linguistic practices, thereby constraining their learning opportunities.
- denies humanity itself.

Language, in this view, includes interactional practices, their contexts, and participants. The social justice case studies addressed here thus recognize societal, structural, systemic, institutional, and interpersonal modes of participation in creating equitable and just spaces across contexts. In addition, the chapters highlight how certain narratives get foregrounded while others are marginalized due to harmful presumptions made about individuals, social groups and communities. As readers will note, professional roles/responsibilities and personal identities/experiences are contested in contexts in which social justice is at issue.

The book also highlights how language can serve as a critical resource in achieving social justice, as highlighted by other recent works in language education and intercultural communication (cf. Glynn and Wesely 2014; Hastings

and Jacob 2016; Sorells 2013). In particular, the chapters identify how and why certain linguistic forms are situated to either perpetuate or limit access to information and networks of interaction. Language is often positioned as a barrier to or facilitator of such access. The chapters emphasize ways people use language as a means, or instrument, to bring about change. Together they demonstrate change in language, through language and beyond language. Changes *in* language and language practice can bring attention to injustice and inequities. In that social justice entails not only conceptualizations of but also ways of communicating about the fair distribution of opportunities and resources to all people, language constitutes a significant part of this process.

In serving as a resource either to stymie or enable social change, language is often understood as an attribute of a particular group or identity. Some of the cases in this book thus examine instances in which linguistic rights—or the right of a people, community, or individual to have and use a particular language variety—are pursued. Limiting access to have and use a language can serve to erase a culture, identity, or recognition of a people. However, these cases consider not only social justice efforts focused on securing linguistic rights, but also the ways in which language becomes a medium for the articulation and contestation of inequities.

Access, Equity, Power, Privilege, and Marginalization

Social justice issues often come down to access; seeking social justice involves ensuring that all people have equitable access to available resources and opportunities. Questions surrounding this understanding of social justice include who is or should be responsible for providing access to such resources? Instances of social justice include creating and implementing policies that expand access to a variety of resources and institutions, including law, education, and health care. Social justice efforts thus include making sure people are not barred from access to these institutions and support because of linguistic differences.

Issues of access necessarily entail the equitable distribution of resources so that people may live their fullest lives. This involves, for example, ensuring that minoritized languages are given equitable status and utilized in ways that demonstrate respect and value towards the speakers of those languages. Institutional action is often a critical mechanism for leveling social inequities and expanding access to valuable resources for all communities. However, it is crucial to frame efforts toward access not simply in relation to inclusion within existing institutional or broader societal frameworks, but also to the fundamental transformation of structures that have systematically privileged particular populations and marginalized others. Language is as central to inclusion as it is to such transformations.

The chapters in this volume highlight power, privilege, and marginalization in different ways. Many social justice efforts include advocating for languages and dialects, as well as communities and groups that have been historically marginalized and remain socially subordinated. An accurate portrayal of how

issues of language and social justice emerge in a variety of contexts must take into consideration the existence of entrenched social hierarchies of power as well as the ideological assumptions that maintain them. Indeed, an ongoing concern in social justice efforts is the need to situate contemporary inequities in relation to historical hierarchies of power so as to identify and address root causes of various disparities. By doing so, it becomes possible to understand inequity as a systemic phenomenon rather than a specifically contemporary or narrowly pragmatic challenge. In solidarity with such efforts, the topics in this book highlight issues of oppression, power, privilege, hegemony, and identity as well as consciousness, agency, and resistance. The following descriptions provide an overview of the thematic sections covered in this book.

Part I: Language and Race

Race has been a longstanding consideration in analyses of language and social justice. Research on this topic includes considerations of the stigmatization of racialized language practices as well as discourses that perpetuate the racialization of particular populations (Labov 1966; Santa Ana 2002). Building on conceptualizations of racial formations as sociocultural and historical constructions rather than biological phenomena (Omi and Winant 1994), examinations of race, language, and what has been characterized as “sociolinguistic justice” seek to understand and unsettle entrenched societal hierarchies and power relations (Bucholtz et al. 2014, 2016; Rosa and Flores 2017). The broader goal is to connect scholarship on race and language to political struggles over access to rights, resources, and institutions.

The chapters in this part frame these issues in relation to education, media representations, and popular discourses. Daniels focuses on White public school teachers’ fraught positionality in classrooms predominated by students of color. She presents teachers’ reflections on their role in reproducing the racial and linguistic marginalization of their students, as well as their attempts to mitigate the potential harm they cause in these educational spaces. Hodges explores media discourses surrounding the 911 call made by George Zimmerman before he killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African American teenager. He powerfully demonstrates how efforts to determine whether Zimmerman uttered a racial slur frame racism as a problem of individual beliefs rather than institutional structures. Rosa focuses on efforts to eradicate the use of the term “illegal” in reference to immigration in mainstream media representations. He argues that such struggles over language must be understood not as ends in themselves but rather as part of broader projects of social change. Durrani investigates the discursive enactment of Islamophobia through instances of the profiling of race, language, and religion of perceived Muslim populations. She shows not only how anti-Muslim sentiments circulate with dire consequences for targeted populations, but also how various groups organize to communicatively contest this stigmatization. Smalls looks at the role of digital discourses in the Black Lives

Matter movement. Focusing specifically on Black Twitter, she highlights the creative ways in which social media users have transformed these platforms into profound sites of racial protest. Collectively, these chapters present a critical view of the role of language in reproducing racial injustice as well as its potential to contribute toward efforts to disrupt inequity.

Part II: Language and Education

Social justice has become a central focus in educational research and practice (see Allen and Reich 2013; Picower 2012). Intersections between language and social justice manifest across a variety of educational contexts (for examples, see Adams et al. 2007; Hastings and Jacob 2016). Articulating a cogent depiction of these intersections first necessitates viewing “education” as a process that spans a broad spectrum of sociocultural spaces and practices. Whether taking place within settings of formal schooling, community events, religious ceremonies, political movements, or the family sphere, it is essential to point out that the process of education is fundamentally mediated through language that reflects the interests of broader social structures. Thus, an accurate portrayal of how issues of language and social justice emerge within education must take into consideration the existence of entrenched social hierarchies of power as well as the ideological assumptions that maintain them.

By examining contexts where minoritized languages and/or dialects confront dominant norms of communication, we can identify how/why certain linguistic forms are situated to either perpetuate or limit access to information and networks of interaction. As demonstrated in the chapter by Viesca and Poza, instances of social justice in formal education contexts often involve creating and implementing policies that expand access to academic content by developing programs that integrate students’ home languages and cultural experiences within the curriculum and classroom settings. The chapters describing contexts surrounding dual language programs (see Lindholm-Leary et al. and Henderson et al.) illustrate that while ensuring access to the language of instruction is fundamental for academic progress in formal school settings, it also has additional unfolding sociocultural repercussions.

Shank Lauwo’s discussion of translanguaging practices in Tanzania demonstrates how the same social justice thrust applies to community education contexts when minoritized languages are given equitable status and utilized in ways that demonstrate respect and value towards the speakers of those languages. On one hand, when diverse languages are represented as a resource in community settings, individuals from those linguistic groups are empowered. On the other hand, when diverse languages are framed as deficits, community members often feel obligated to assimilate to dominant language norms. These two sides of the social justice spectrum are often conflated by policy-makers. For example, Johnson’s description of the “language gap” illustrates why some people might assume that promoting social justice involves teaching linguistically diverse communities the language, behavior, and knowledge

of the dominant groups—which, in turn, influences policymakers and implementers to promote educational programs designed to assimilate (or transition) minoritized students into the dominant culture and language. These attempts often spawn from good intentions; however, social justice means valuing and advocating for minoritized groups—including their full cultural and linguistic identities. This involves ensuring the educational conditions for them to take ownership of their learning and make their own decisions about their own lives without having to negotiate linguistic discrimination on a daily basis.

Considering the far-reaching potential that educational contexts provide, the authors in Part II view language education as a critical mechanism for leveling social inequities and expanding access to valuable resources for all communities. Essentially, any instance of advocating for languages and dialects that have been historically marginalized and remain socially subordinated is an act of social justice. Educational policies and programs need to meet the linguistic needs of minoritized groups as well as the needs of their local communities by promoting dynamic interdependency and interrelation between schools and community settings.

Part III: Language and Health

The chapters focused on language and health foreground the roles of community, equity, access, and participation in social justice efforts. All of the chapters recognize societal, structural, systemic, institutional, and interpersonal modes of participation in creating equitable and just spaces for health care across contexts. Power, privilege, and marginalization are highlighted in different ways in every case study in this section. The chapters span foci including global health efforts in South Africa, language and healthcare in indigenous communities in Guatemala, Deaf AIDS activism in the US, and the treatment of epidemics among marginalized populations in Venezuela. All of the chapters highlight how certain narratives get foregrounded while others are marginalized due to harmful assumptions made about individuals and communities. As readers will note, professional roles/responsibilities and personal identities/experiences are contested in all of these health care contexts.

Black's paper focuses on multiple levels of presuppositions, power and authority, and inequity in biomedical contexts in South Africa, highlighting the constraints on what is possible for South Africans with HIV. Briggs examines the experiences of indigenous families in Venezuela, highlighting how (racialized) ideologies around communities and communication can have harmful and fatal consequences. Byrd and Monaghan foreground the health care experiences of one of the authors who is Deaf and HIV positive, noting that systemic inequities in language and health care can mean the difference between getting care and not getting care. Flood et al. highlight the interconnectedness of language revitalization and healthcare outcomes, focusing on the ways that simultaneous attention to language and health among indigenous communities can allow increased access to social goods. Overall, the chapters

in Part III provide us with unique ethnographic perspectives on the experiences of marginalized individuals and communities, and the ways that intentional partnership, communication, and activism can provide pathways towards full and equitable participation across contexts.

Part IV: Language and Social Activism

Authors in this section, like others in this collection, are activist scholars who are specifically engaged in sociolinguistic activism and work toward sociolinguistic justice (Bucholtz et al. 2014). Activist scholars, as Charles Hale (2008, 96) notes, “establish an alignment with an organized group of people in struggle and accompany them on the contradictory and partly compromised path toward their political goals” (see also Low and Merry 2010). Taking strong positions in scholarship is one form of activism.

The chapters in this part explore direct relationships among language, social action, and broader social change. They emphasize ways people use language as a means, or instrument, to bring about change. Since activism is taking action to effect social change, agency is prominent in all of the essays in Part IV. The cases highlight specific ways that social actors (agents) use language to bring attention to injustice in the forms of discrimination, racism, homophobia, social and linguistic exclusion, and political and economic inequities to effect social change. Several highlight relationships among language and other communicative modalities stressing the importance of considering language within a broader semiotic field.

In their analysis of the linguistic landscape (LL) of Argentinian university campuses, Abas and Damico show how student activists use text and images on posters to make social justice issues visible to the public, stimulate critical consciousness, or *concientização*, a concept they borrow from activist-educator Paulo Freire, and promote critical reflection on past and current social, political, and economic injustices in Argentina. Bucholtz, Casillas, and Lee draw attention to ways that high school students in California resist racism and linguistic exclusion by asserting their right to speak and use Spanish and Indigenous languages in educational contexts. Through acts of sociolinguistic agency youth bring attention to sociolinguistic exclusion and in doing so become agents of social change. Zimman, in his discussion of translanguistic activism, argues that the goal of translanguage activism is “to rehaul not only language but also how people think about gender.” His chapter demonstrates that ultimately translanguage activists seek to promote and affirm greater inclusivity.

Chapters in Part IV show how people may harness language and speech in efforts to dismantle existing inequities. Avineri and Perley discuss their own and others’ scholarly and extra-scholarly activism in relation to the naturalized racism against Native Americans embedded in sports teams’ names and mascots. They underscore the importance of working across various semiotic platforms to present multiple and varied opportunities for turning audiences into engaged participants, and for building audience coalitions that have the

potential to bring about meaningful social change. They also highlight distinctions and complementarities between awareness-raising and social change. Alim challenges readers to think about how language can be used in “ever more liberatory and transformative ways.” Like activists Angela Davis and Toni Morrison, he advocates using language as more than an instrument for change. As an example of “linguistic deoccupation,” Alim offers the Afrikaaps linguistic movement in Cape Town, South Africa, where Hip Hop artist-activists creatively reconfigure languages and linguistic practices that are marginalized and racialized by White South Africans to raise consciousness and disrupt and transform the legacies of apartheid. Ultimately, Alim exhorts readers to use language a means for revolution.

Insofar as authors bring attention to social injustices in the chapters of this collection, they may be considered activists or “engaged scholars.” In this part and others, authors take explicitly activist positions through the forms they choose in their writing itself. They perform activism by consciously choosing to use specific forms, such as certain lexical items (words) or pronouns, that—as discussed by Zimman—make political positions explicit. For example, by using the form “Latinx,” as opposed to “Latino” (generic masculine for a person who has Latin American heritage) or “Hispanic,” Bucholtz et al. make a non-binary conceptualization of gender explicit in their writing. This spelling choice stands out for readers who are used to seeing the forms “Latino,” “Latina,” and even “Latin@” (male/female inclusive). Latinx brings attention to spelling on the page. The act of choosing Latinx denaturalizes standard spelling practice and underlying ideologies, and causes readers to reflect not only on spelling conventions but also on cisgender norms and expectations. This exemplifies the point that changes in language and language practice bring attention to injustice and that inequities are often inscribed in language, in this case cisgender expectations that are embedded in orthography.

Part V: Language, Law, and Policy

Social justice efforts involve trying to achieve a fair distribution of opportunities and resources to all people. Realizing such conditions requires institutions set up to protect individual freedoms and, at the same time, to assure that the “greatest good” is shared with the greatest number of people (Sandel 2009). Law is perhaps the primary institution tasked with achieving justice, but there is no single, fixed legal definition of justice. In fact, justice is a concept that people disagree about and may define differently.

Legal theorists identify two types of legal justice. First is substantive justice, which is the desire for our laws themselves to be just. Again, justice in this sense is not an absolute quality; it can change and usually relies on the moral principles of a time and place. The second type is formal justice, which involves making sure laws are applied equitably. This type entails assuring that similar cases are treated similarly and that biases do not influence how laws are

applied. Both types of justice operate in and through legal institutions in efforts to achieve social justice. That is, to achieve social justice we must be sure that all people have the same access to and treatment under the law (formal justice) and it is in part up to our laws as written to ensure that this is achieved (substantive justice). The chapters in this section discuss instances of social justice embroiled in various legal systems, in which the ideals of social justice are far from assured. The case studies presented address social justice in two main forms: as an issue of rights and an issue of access.

Some of these cases examine instances in which linguistic rights—or the right of a people, community, or individual to have and use a particular language variety—are pursued. In these instances, social justice is understood in the context of human rights. Social justice in this sense refers to the ability for all humans to have their rights upheld and social justice action involves the mechanisms by which this may be achieved. Even when rights are purportedly granted to people, social justice action involves ensuring that these rights are in fact recognized and enacted. These efforts at social justice can be facilitated or restricted by national governments, as in Graham's case of Brazilian indigenous peoples. Graham illustrates how indigenous activists work to attain recognition of their language by the national government, as well as the local non-indigenous population, through bilingual road signage. Efforts to ensure human rights are also often taken on by NGOs, as Milambiling discusses in regards to the International Declaration of Linguistic Rights. Graham and Milambiling argue, along with others, that limiting access to have and use a language can serve to erase a culture, identity, or recognition of a people.

Zentella's chapter addresses the issue of rights and social justice from a slightly different angle. In her discussion of the U.S. Census's categories for English language proficiency, it is not the ability to speak a language that is at issue, but the ability for speakers of languages other than English to be recognized as competent members of U.S. society. By classifying certain people as "less than proficient in English," the Census Bureau is endangering the rights of many, including limiting their access to benefits bestowed on those considered to be "true citizens" (i.e., English-only speakers) of the United States.

In that social justice entails the fair distribution of opportunities and resources to all people, language constitutes a significant part of this process. Social justice issues often come down to access; seeking social justice thus also involves maintaining access to available resources and opportunities for all people. Questions surrounding this understanding of social justice include, who is or should be responsible for providing access to such resources? Language can often serve as a barrier to or facilitator of access. Baran and Holmquist address this issue in their discussion of interpreters in North Carolina courts. Speakers of many minority languages do not have access to legal knowledge and procedures because interpreters who speak their language variety are not available. Social justice efforts should thus include making sure these people are not barred from access to the justice system simply because of linguistic differences. Riner and Vartkessian also address access within the legal system as

mediated by language. The death penalty trials they investigate require a unique kind of legal language—mitigation narratives—in order for defendants’ lives to be fully considered during the sentencing phases of their trials. Attorneys’ proficiency (or lack thereof) in this narrative form can affect whether defendants receive the full consideration they are entitled to by the Constitution.

Underlying the varied law and policy issues explored in these chapters are ideologies of language that classify certain people as undeserving of rights and opportunities that should be afforded to all. Addressing social justice in these contexts thus involves not merely a critique of specific rules and laws, but also of the insidious ideologies that sustain inequitable institutions and their policies.

How the Book Came into Being

The chapters in this book provide us with unique ethnographic perspectives on the experiences of marginalized individuals and communities, and the ways that intentional partnership, communication, and activism can provide pathways towards full and equitable participation across contexts. The idea of bringing together a collection of brief essays to illustrate the broad range of ways contemporary scholars are engaging with language and social justice was born in meetings of the AAA’s Task Group on Language and Social Justice. Discussion among members and leaders over time eventually led to the suggestion of compiling a variety of language and social justice topics into a volume. The five editors responded to an invitation posted on the Task Group listserv and engaged in a series of dialogues regarding how to approach the project.

We drafted a call for abstracts and solicited abstracts through a variety of platforms in efforts to ensure contributions representing a diverse set of perspectives, contributors, and social justice issues both in and outside academia. Once a set of essays was agreed upon, themes were identified and each editor assumed the role of coordinating one of the five parts. This involved curating chapters, managing peer review, and collaborating with contributing authors (which entailed facilitating a dialogue among the authors in each part to identify both shared insights and points of distinction). Through our collaborative approach toward presenting a range of language and social justice case studies, we envision the process of creating this book as an enactment of social justice principles and commitments discussed in the chapters that follow. The case studies point to social justice as a contested potentiality that critical perspectives on language can help us to interrogate and reimagine. Our hope is that the volume as a whole provides opportunities for critical dialogue and collaboration around the important issues of language and social justice highlighted here.

Note

- 1 “Social justice” first appears in an official UN Document within the Declaration on Social Progress and Development (United Nations 1969).

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