



Interdisciplinary Collaborations around Language and Social Justice

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

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In recent years, AAA's Society for Linguistic Anthropology (SLA) has generously supported a range of efforts intended to create interdisciplinary dialogues. In 2014, this support took the form of an Invited Colloquium at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL), conceived of by then presidents of AAA and AAAL, Monica Heller and Aneta Pavlenko, respectively, and organized by Angela Reyes. Aneta also organized a related roundtable at the 2014 AAA meeting. Both the Invited Colloquium, "Conceptualizing Linguistic Difference: Perspectives from Linguistic Anthropology," and the roundtable, "Dilemmas and Complexities of Multilingual Fieldwork," provided forums for SLA members and applied linguists to enter into scholarly dialogues about recent developments in our fields.

More recently, Kathleen Bailey, current AAAL President, and Netta Avineri, Co-Chair of SLA's [Committee on Language and Social Justice/Committee for Human Rights Task Group](#), sought to build upon previous AAA/AAAL collaborations during the AAAL 2016 conference. Kathleen approached Netta about organizing an Invited Colloquium at the 2016 AAAL Annual Meeting, focused on the Committee's recent efforts in diverse areas.

Netta collaborated with Jonathan Rosa, former Co-Chair of the LSJ Committee, to shape an Invited Colloquium focused on interdisciplinary connections for applied linguists and linguistic anthropologists, "Applied Linguistics, Linguistic Anthropology, and Social Justice: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Linguistic and Social Change." We invited scholars heavily involved in various LSJ initiatives, Ana Celia Zentella, Jonathan Rosa, Bernard Perley, Eric Johnson, Kate Riley, and Susan Blum. This Invited Colloquium was also generously supported by the Society for Linguistic Anthropology, which has now begun an ongoing [fund](#) dedicated to interdisciplinary collaborations of this kind.

These interdisciplinary dialogues contest the strict dichotomies between "applied" and "pure" research. Scholars in both fields debate different forms of public intervention, and have much to offer one another. For instance, linguistic anthropologists' focus on the embedded and contextual linguistic practices of diverse social groups complements applied linguists' attention to language policies and practices across contexts.

In the 2016 AAAL Invited Colloquium, we highlighted several themes and questions in language and social justice-oriented work. In particular, we explored the question: How can language become a component of social justice movements? Colloquium participants discussed a range of examples of "engaged" scholarship, including community collaborations, pedagogical efforts, drafting and publishing Op-Eds and other statements, and lobbying efforts. Presenters demonstrated ways of simultaneously centering language in our social justice oriented work and focusing on the broader processes of which language is just a part.

Ana Celia Zentella focused on efforts to engage the US Census Bureau (CB) and the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE), two major institutions that have contributed to the disparagement of the English and Spanish abilities of US Latin@s. She showed how our group's collective efforts have successfully challenged the CB's designation of "linguistically isolated" speakers and households, and the RAE's definition of Spanglish as a language practice that "deforms" Spanish and English. Despite their retractions (i.e. the CB no longer uses the label "linguistically isolated" and the RAE removed the term "deforms" from their definition of Spanglish), much work remains to be done on these and other issues.

Jonathan explored the interplay between language and social change, with a particular focus on calls for popular media and the public to refrain from using the term "illegal" in representations of (im)migration. He pointed to the ways that the ["Drop the I-Word"](#) campaign resonates with a central tenet of linguistic anthropology: Language is not merely a passive way of referring to or describing things in the world, but a crucial form of social action. He showed how language change is not necessarily equivalent to broader social change, while also suggesting that struggles over representations of (im)migration make it possible to imagine and enact an alternative politics of inclusion in which migration is valued as a fundamental human right.

Bernard Perley and Netta Avineri discussed sports team mascot names as genres of naturalized hate and LSJ's advocacy around these issues, including the AAA Statement on Sports Team Mascot Names, [Huffington Post](#) and [Anthropology News](#) pieces, Bernard's comic strips "Having Reservations," the AAA 2015 Welcome Ceremony, and visual exhibits. In addition, they highlighted the importance of "audience coalescence," in which social justice activists and audiences come together through this collective work. These embodied social justice efforts constitute emergent platforms for contesting the role of language in the reproduction of inequality and stigmatization, serving as opportunities for the public's experiential participation in social action.

Eric Johnson and Kate Riley provided an overview of the pervasive and problematic notion of a "language gap" of 30 million words by age 3 between children from higher and lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Their intertextual analysis revealed the ways that misleading metaphors like language as wealth, language as health,

and language as food pervade popular discourses related to minority communities' language practices. The presenters proposed an alternative model, "anthropolitical language socialization," inspired by [Zentella \(1997\)](#) and posed key questions including: What counts as "language" input in the socialization process?; Who is socialized to what, where, when, why, and how?; and ultimately, What are some alternatives for achieving an anthropolitical language socialization agenda that focuses on institutional inequalities rather than on individual behaviors?

Susan Blum, Core Member of the LSJ Task Group, framed language and social justice efforts in broader terms and discussed the Task Group's current initiatives. These initiatives include work on language and refugees, the criminal justice system, gender and cultures of assault, interpreters and global economies, sign languages, language and health care, bilingual education, and debates about commemorative names. Throughout her presentation, Susan effectively highlighted different approaches to communicating linguistic anthropological insights to broader publics, while also discussing some of the potential contradictions of 'applied' or 'practicing' anthropology.

There was a great deal of energy and excitement at the invited colloquium, with scholars from around the world exchanging ideas about how to move language and social justice efforts forward. Over 100 invited colloquium attendees indicated interest in becoming more involved; in order to facilitate the continued conversations among these scholars, Netta created a google group on applied linguistics and social justice. (Scholars interested in learning more about this group or the LSJ can contact [Netta Avineri](#).) President Kathleen Bailey has expressed her commitment to exploring these initiatives within the structure of AAAL. There is a collective hope that these fruitful dialogues will result in future interdisciplinary collaborations, and that by working together we will continually reinvigorate our shared commitment to connecting language-related research to broader social justice efforts.

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