

Dockum, Rikker and Caitlin M. Green. Toward a big tent linguistics: Inclusion and the myth of the lone genius. In press in Anne H. Charity Hudley, Christine Mallinson and Mary Bucholtz (eds.), *The Oxford Collection on Inclusion in Linguistics*, Oxford University Press.

## Toward a big tent linguistics: Inclusion and the myth of the lone genius<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Linguistics has a documented history of divisiveness and remains poorly understood by the general public. Nevertheless, linguistics also has great unrealized potential for positive impact on global society, hand in hand with scholarship. We argue for an inclusive big tent linguistics that will help the discipline achieve its potential, and we outline three sources of current exclusion: (1) socialization into gatekeeping what counts as linguistics, with legitimacy tied to outdated opinions of what is more “scientific”, “rigorous”, “rational”, or “prestigious”, (2) epistemic injustice, including a tendency for hero-worship of “lone geniuses” of the field, and (3) a pattern of ignoring power imbalances in interactions, such as the demand for “civility,” often from the discipline’s least powerful members. We discuss the origins of these problems, some recent events that exemplify them, and suggest ways that all linguists, inclusively defined, can contribute to helping our scholarly community achieve a more uplifting culture.

### Introduction

In the preface to his book on the “linguistics wars”, Randy Allen Harris (1993:vii, 2021:xiii) laments that “widespread ignorance and trepidation about linguistics” hamper the study of language, something “unutterably fundamental to our humanhood.” While progress has been made, the field of linguistics remains poorly understood by the general public and often still lives up to its reputation for the fractiousness, dysfunction, and exclusion that Harris documented. Until we can fearlessly identify root causes for this reputation, we cannot expect the full participation of those who are excluded by a culture that communicates that it will reproduce and reinforce hierarchies of race, gender, class, and professional renown, undermining and endangering marginalized scholars at every turn.

Our field is rife with binary divisions like ‘formal’ vs. ‘functional’ (Mackenzie, 2015; Newmeyer, 2016), ‘theoretical’ vs. ‘applied’ (Newmeyer, 1990), ‘p-side’ vs. ‘s-side’ (Sarvasy, 2015), or ‘academic’ vs. ‘industry’ (Trester, 2022). At every stage of professional advancement,

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linguists may feel pressured to identify with one side or another or find ourselves involuntarily lumped into one side of a binary. Whole linguistics departments often consider themselves aligned with one side or the other of some of these binaries, and students are socialized into choosing alignments, whether implicitly through selecting departments and programs or explicitly as part of their training (e.g. Sarvasy, 2015). Constructing a field mainly in terms of mutually exclusive teams encourages the thinking of a single approach, or subset of approaches, as superior, as more rigorous or more explanatory, and to elevate those who do our preferred kind of research above others. This situation has led to territorial gatekeeping, which is often felt on both sides of a given dichotomy. This gatekeeping is fueled and exacerbated by the academy's more general problem of competition for limited grant funding and the increasing reliance of higher education on precarious faculty (AAUP, 2020).

Further, gatekeeping in linguistics intersects with white supremacy (Charity Hudley et al. 2020), hegemonic gender ideologies (Ayres-Bennett & Sanson, 2020), classism, and other structural harms by devaluing approaches that focus on social or applied approaches to language, disproportionately impacting work by minoritized and marginalized scholars (Charity Hudley, 2020). To give one example, gatekeeping is deeply felt by linguists outside of theoretical paradigms like generative linguistics, and research that takes language as inextricable from the social bodies that produce it is often considered too interdisciplinary to be accepted by journals that focus on certain methods or subfields (Charity Hudley & Flores, 2022). At the same time, lack of critical attention on the nature of power in the academy and how it shapes scholarly interaction, whether in publication, in person, or on social media, perpetuates exclusion and marginalization within our field and has resulted in conflicts where participants and onlookers alike are in disagreement on how linguists at different career stages should engage with one another. One thing is clear: The intersection of disciplinary rivalry with power hierarchies is detrimental to the field. This problem is not unique to linguistics, of course, as shown by recently documented issues in anthropology (Jobson, 2020), sociology (Meghji, 2020, 2021), and others. Regardless of the general nature of many of these issues, we as linguists must reckon with those issues. It is doubly important because how we address them impacts the way the field is perceived by the public.

In this chapter, we identify and reject disciplinary and social divisions as false dichotomies and a hindrance to the great potential of linguistics to have a positive impact on global society. We respond to the call in Anne Charity Hudley et al. (2020) to move from theory to action, informed by both past events and recent ones, such as those documented in Itamar Kastner et al. (2021, 2022). We identify and discuss three major sources of these problems within linguistics: exclusionary socialization, epistemic injustice, and unexamined power imbalances. These practices uphold an exclusionary version of our field, what we term small tent linguistics, which is often better known to the public for its disputes than for its successes and core principles. The metaphor of a tent originates in political discourse to describe the restrictive

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or expansive nature of the backgrounds, viewpoints, and interests represented by a political party's members. We reject small tent linguistics and outline actionable ways to better achieve an inclusive big tent linguistics that welcomes and makes space for all. The goals of this chapter are, first, to make the discipline's hierarchies more visible and show linguists where they have influence to ensure constructive professional interactions, and second, to invigorate linguists at all levels of training and professional development to feel empowered to make a positive impact on the field within their sphere of influence.

Part of doing thorough research is making our positionality explicit. This chapter has two authors: Rikker and Caitlin. Many of our experiences are similar: We are both white linguists of millennial age who grew up in predominantly English-monolingual households that valued learning a European second language. We are both the first in our families to earn a PhD degree, but we both come from households where our parents attended college or higher. We have benefitted from both whiteness and the class advantages entailed by having access to guidance by those who have navigated higher-education institutions before us. We have both been positioned as professional, knowledgeable and easy to work with because of language ideologies held by professional gatekeepers. We have also both experienced the jarring realization that our whiteness and class advantages have shielded us from scrutiny by a discursive environment that treats us as the default, and as a result we have been energized by the examples of many colleagues to help seek out and foreground the expertise both of people who have worked toward a more equitable and inclusive linguistics and of those who would most benefit from achieving that goal.

Rikker: I earned my PhD in linguistics at Yale University in 2019. I grew up in rural communities in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, which were predominantly white, politically conservative, and extremely Christian. I attended an Ivy League college in the Northeast United States, and spent about ten of the past twenty years living in Thailand, with Thai as the primary language of my home life. Since completing my PhD I have taught in the linguistics department of an elite liberal arts college in the Northeast United States as a non-tenure track ("visiting") faculty member on time-limited contracts. As an undergraduate, I was in Anne Charity Hudley's first ever solo-taught course, so I had some excellent training in sociolinguistics early in my linguistics career, but it did not become my research focus, and my graduate program offered no formal training in sociolinguistics. I began to work on inclusion in linguistics toward the end of graduate school, and have co-authored papers on gender representation in linguistic example sentences (Kotek et al., 2021), on the summer 2020 Open Letter to the Linguistic Society of America (Kastner et al., 2021; Kastner et al., 2022), and on decolonizing the historical linguistics curriculum (Bowerman & Dockum, *Decolonizing volume*).

Caitlin: I earned my PhD in linguistics at University of California, Davis in 2018. I have always lived in middle-class, liberal, mostly white areas in or near large cities in the western half of the United States. My father funded his college education with military service, attending a

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combination of junior college and a small local college and graduating just before my birth. My mother attended various colleges off and on while working for an hourly wage, earning a bachelor's degree when I was four. Despite their early life experiences, my parents raised me with the expectation that I would be able to attend a high-ranking public university straight after high school without having to work full-time, which I did thanks to upward class mobility afforded them by their positionalities as educated white Americans. After graduate school, I chose not to pursue a career in higher education due to concerns about relocating and starting a family. Instead, I have been working as a teacher, an independent researcher and a public linguist specializing in discourse studies, pragmatics, and foreign language pedagogy. Having found some moderate success on social media, I try to use that platform as well as contributions to online publications to do public linguistics. I also use social media to connect with justice-oriented scholars and call attention to issues of equity.

We came together in the aftermath of the 2020 Open Letter to the Linguistic Society of America (Kastner et al., 2021; Kastner et al., 2022), at first informally and then as part of a group of linguists who were exploring various methods of correcting the public record and providing support to those impacted by the public and private harassment visited on the signatories. We were deeply upset by the ways public scholars and media worked together to reproduce harmful discourses around fraught political concepts like “cancel culture” and “freedom of speech” and silenced the fact-checking efforts of less prominent scholars. We worked together and consulted on separate projects to this end (Kastner et al., 2021; Green, 2021, 2022). We began to discuss other related events that exemplified the kinds of problems we identify in this chapter as they came up, which led us to share theoretical explanations for what we were witnessing. We know that as signatories of the letter and recipients of abuse, we cannot see all angles of the events in question, but in the interest of political transparency (Clemons, this volume), we choose to take that closeness as motivation for finding ways to address the culture of exclusion, fractiousness and abuse of power that we have witnessed. We are limited in our search for avenues for justice by our own imaginations: we can only conceptualize the kinds of social changes that are allowed by our own epistemologies. Similarly, while we might be able to imagine sweeping systemic changes, we are focusing on the kinds of decisions that people can make in their own individual practice in a context that is so heavily shaped by systemic and historical wrongs.

### **Exclusionary socialization: The myth of the lone genius in linguistics**

Like many other academic disciplines, linguistics has suffered from ill effects of the myth of the lone genius, which is a variation of Great Man theory. The Great Man approach to history, popularized by Thomas Carlyle in the 19th century, considers progress to be the result of actions by a sequence of individual heroes (Sorensen & Kinser, 2013). This paradigm privileges wealthy white men who have been the primary recipients of formal education and professional opportunities and accepts as valid the values of the white supremacist heteropatriarchy in which

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it is situated (Lerner, 1975). The great man is to historical leaders as the “lone genius” is to scholars: it is the idea that great academic discoveries are each attributable to one incredibly brilliant person, someone like Albert Einstein or Aristotle. Laura C. Ball (2012) notes that narrativizing the development of the discipline in the form of a chronological list of scholars is a common pedagogical tool. For some students, learning about the lives of the field’s geniuses allows them to see themselves, their interests, and their struggles in the story of the people described. But for so many others who pass through our classrooms, departments, and degree programs, the parade of lone (predominantly white, male, abled, American/European, cisgender, straight) geniuses held up as representatives of the field is as alienating a picture of linguistics as it is incomplete. Most importantly, for all of our students, from those who will pursue careers in linguistics to those taking only a single course and everyone in between, the myth of the lone genius socializes them to buy into and perpetuate the false notion that scholarly progress is led by individual geniuses rather than by and with communities. It also discourages them from seeking help when they need it, as they may become convinced that their worthiness to be a scholar depends on their ability to do it alone (Nobel Prize Outreach, 2019). A tentpole of the big tent approach, in contrast, is that linguistics, just like language itself, is a team effort.

The myth of the lone genius means treating linguistics as a ladder with a genius on each rung leading from the dark ages of early linguistic writing into an enlightened “modern linguistics.” This thinking is mired in Western chauvinism, Eurocentrism, scientific racism and prejudiced language ideologies masquerading as objective facts. Treating our discipline this way reinforces colonialist perceptions that the history of an academic discipline is a series of forward leaps bringing us from an irrational past into a rational, empirical, and enlightened present. Discourses that assume rationality and science as the domain of western whiteness have been critically investigated in many fields, including cultural studies (e.g., Quijano, 2007) and education (e.g., Ideland, 2018). This issue is rarely addressed in linguistics (but see Aris Clemons, this volume). Continuing to promote the myth of the lone genius imbues each genius of our discipline with a halo of rationality, casting the marginalized voices that might disagree with him as irrational by contrast. It also exposes us to the danger of considering our field to be finished with making social progress, since identifying weaknesses or shortcomings in linguistics or its theories threatens the mythological progress already brought about by recent geniuses. One way that this danger exhibits itself is in declarations that the removal of bias and discrimination from our work has already been sufficiently accomplished. Another frequent variation is when well-meaning linguists, upon hearing calls for greater inclusion and justice in the field, defensively cite more inclusive subfields as if to suggest that we can stop there.

Tying ideas in our field so tightly to individuals can also make critiquing or rejecting their work or their behavior feel equivalent to rejecting that figure personally, and because many prominent figures in linguistics are still alive, and because we live in the age of television, online media, and social media, they can continue to “manage their brand” and respond to criticism

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using multiple wide-reaching platforms that their critics may simply not have access to. In some cases the lone geniuses of linguistics may even have attained celebrity status, often both within and outside of academia, which brings with it fans who can be summoned to defend them or who volunteer to do so on their own. Prominent linguists who claim the mantle of public scholar especially present such a problem, as their reach extends far beyond the linguistics community in which they ground their epistemic authority. They cross a strange threshold from lone genius academic into a public brand, whose reputation must be actively and constantly defended (Kastner et al., 2021 and online appendix). This situation further reinforces the ideology that the best ideas are those with the best publicity, while limiting the privilege of publicity to only those ideas that resemble those already voiced by the most famous “geniuses.”

A significant factor in the exclusionary nature of linguistics research and teaching is linguists’ tendency to place ourselves on tracks modeled after and credited to famous lone genius figures. The greater the figures associated with your particular research interest, and the closer your academic lineage is to them, the more prestige your work (and by extension, you) will garner. The past—and present—of linguistics is filled with such figures (see M. Thomas, this volume), yet when scholars in other disciplines were questioning this tendency at the end of the 20th century, linguists were not doing the same regarding our best-known lone genius characters (Ayres-Bennett & Sanson, 2020a). These men are often granted monikers like “Father of (Modern) Linguistics”. Men referred to this way include Noam Chomsky (e.g. Shenker, 1971; Fox, 1998; O’Regan, 2013), Edward Sapir (Britton, 1972), Roman Jakobson (Boudraa et al., 2008), Ferdinand de Saussure (e.g. Lepschy, 1975; Pilcher & Richards, 2022), William Jones (Cannon, 1990), and Pāṇini (e.g. Karsten, 2011; Bod, 2013; Singh, 2017). No linguist has ever been referred to as the “Mother of (Modern) Linguistics” with any frequency that permits detection. Rather, the phrase “Mother of Linguistics” has been used exclusively for abstractions, including academic disciplines—such as semiotics (Barnstone, 1993) or psychology (Chomsky, 2004), a language, especially Sanskrit (Kidwai, 2015), or a country, such as India (Bhuvaneshwar, 2020).

It is no accident that some of the most prominent recent “lone geniuses,” especially starting in the mid-20th century, focused their work in formal linguistic theory: “As linguistics becomes institutionalized, notably in the mid-twentieth century with the work of the American structuralists, the crystallization of the definition of linguistics as the ‘scientific study of language’ means that the focus narrows to particular approaches to language study which favour a canon of male figures holding academic posts” (Ayres-Bennet & Sanson, 2020a, p. 5). This epistemological narrowing coincided with an influx of funds from the U.S. military, which added to the prestige and power of formal theoretical lines of inquiry (Hutton, 2019). This injection of funding and attention created a center of gravity of funding and plaudits that drew linguists to work on the questions of the most interest to well-funded and prestigious academics and

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universities and to the U.S. government, contributing to a sense that other approaches to linguistics were less valuable and, by extension, less rigorous.

One manifestation of this narrowing of the field is in what the unmodified term *linguistics* includes and excludes. As more linguistics departments started to appear in the 20th century, domains that were once integral to linguistics stayed in other departments. The notion of the ‘core’ areas of linguistics that emerged in this era represented a clear shrinking of the tent. Much human-focused and culturally-focused work, rebranded as “linguistic anthropology,” “anthropological linguistics,” or “ethnography of communication,” remained in longstanding anthropology departments. The field of applied linguistics established itself as a reaction to this narrowing definition (Davies & Elder, 2006), becoming home to the study of discourse and conversation analysis, language pedagogy, second language acquisition, language planning, speech-language pathology, and more. Linguistics and sociology diverged in the same period, with sociology of language mainly being pushed into the latter field—a divide that still persists (Mallinson, 2009). Evidence of this narrowing is also found in which types of linguistics are represented by the tenure lines of linguistics PhD programs, by which types they continue to hire, and by their required courses. For far too many linguists, *linguistics* became mutually exclusive with social and “applied” research so that other linguists often spent their whole careers hearing their work dismissed as “not (real) linguistics” (Lanehart, 2021; Charity Hudley & Flores, 2022). That narrow view, now increasingly seen as counterproductive, has proved difficult to undo (Eckert & Inkelas, 2018; Charity Hudley, 2020; Ayres-Bennett & Sanson, 2020a). It is quite the irony that linguists struggle to reject linguistic and scholarly prescriptivism around the term *linguistics* itself.

Feminist history has a long history of discussing how to treat marginalized figures in the field’s metadiscourse. Gerda Lerner (1975) shows that thinking about marginalized figures in history tends to follow a similar progression: First, exceptional individuals from marginalized backgrounds are celebrated. However, as Wendy Ayres-Bennett and Helena Sanson (2020a) note, “[t]he danger associated with this approach is that it may result in overshadowing the experience of those who could not escape exceptionality because of a number of limitations, including not least social class” (p. 1). For example, 17th-century intellectual Anna Maria van Schurman is known for her writings on language (McLelland, 2020). She was the first woman to attend a Dutch university, a groundbreaking achievement that she was able to negotiate thanks in part to her elevated class and social connections. Spotlighting her life and work brings important attention to the existence of women as analysts of language throughout history, but it is just as important to remember and highlight the stories of women who are marginalized not only by gender but also by race, class, and other social forces. In the next step in Lerner’s progression, “contribution history” focuses on the contributions that the less-celebrated have made to the work of others, an approach which continues to reinforce the hegemonic perspective as the measure of value. Nicola McLelland describes the treatment of women translators in 17th-

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century Germany, whose work involved considerable linguistic analysis but which textbooks and historians treat as simplistic, and even dismiss it as a hobby rather than the scholarly pursuit it was. Lerner argues that women--and, we would add, by extension all marginalized groups--should be recognized as operating within an unequal hierarchical frame but on their own terms, so that their work is not devalued when it differs from hegemonic scholarly views. If we hope to reverse this course, we must own up to the fact that since its inception, 'modern linguistics' has been exclusionary, quite literally by definition.

### **Epistemic injustice: The outsized influence of small tent linguistics**

The potential for linguistics to contribute to social good in the mid-20th century was more limited than it is today. The field was too young, too white, too narrowly focused, too paternalistic, too deeply rooted in unexamined colonialism and racism. The fights were too fierce, the borders too strong. Linguistics had certainly not matured enough then, and some may argue it still has not. We argue that today the potential for linguistics to be a force for good in the world is vastly increased, yet still largely unrealized. A key factor preventing this realization is epistemic injustice (Dotson, 2012; Fricker, 2007). The concept of epistemic injustice highlights that someone can be wronged or undermined in their capacity as a knower, and in their way of arriving at knowledge. Epistemic injustice is an attack on marginalized people's status as linguists and shuts off avenues for them to be full participants in the study of language.

Epistemic injustice can come in the form of overvaluing the work done at one institution at the expense of others, and by extension, only giving resources and respect to the academic lineages of a limited set of scholars. In a study of hiring practices of linguistics departments that offer PhD programs, Jason D. Haugen and Amy Margaris (2020) show that 'market share' of job placements is distributed very unevenly across departments. Of 733 full-time permanent positions in the United States and Canada, Massachusetts Institute of Technology placed 89, or 12.1%. The next highest program is University of Massachusetts, Amherst with 49 (6.7%). The third highest, University of California, Berkeley, placed 47 (6.4%), meaning that fully 25% of all permanent linguistics faculty positions in the United States and Canada were trained in these three departments. It bears repeating that linguistics is not unique in this regard, as the Haugen and Margaris study was itself inspired by studies on hiring trends in archaeology (Speakman et al., 2017) and anthropology (Kawa et al., 2018; Speakman et al., 2018). The field has not yet had a widespread reckoning with how this imbalance has been impacting hiring pipelines for decades and contributing to the outsized influence of a small number of departments and researchers.

Departments obviously change their membership over time, but given that a faculty member can spend three decades or more in a department, and considering the diminishing supply of tenure-track positions in favor of precarious employment and casualization (Brenn & Magness, 2018; AAUP, 2020; Los Angeles Times Editorial Board, 2021), we argue that there is no way that a field so small and so lopsided in theoretical and methodological approaches can



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currently be considered inclusive or representative of much beyond the interests of a small contingent of disproportionately white, male, Anglophone linguists and their academic progeny, who graduated from a small number of departments and study a relatively narrow range of topics.

At the same time, the unfounded and harmful belief among some linguists that to produce a “rigorous” account of a community’s language, one should be an “objective” community outsider, has created conditions where the people most qualified to describe the community--its members--have regularly been deprived of the opportunity to do so. Scholars who refuse to divorce language from the bodies and communities that produce it have been devalued and discouraged from their work (Charity Hudley & Flores, 2022). Many communities have a history of negative encounters with outside linguists and view us with well-earned suspicion, meaning much reclamation and documentation work simply never gets done, or what does get done is exploitative (see Gregory, 2021 for one such cautionary tale). The work of Indigenous linguists and others with training in anthropology and ethnography can show us how to produce high-quality research while advancing and prioritizing community perspectives (e.g. Leonard, 2018; Tsikewa, 2021). Furthermore, the casual erasure of signed languages continues to plague our field (Henner & Robinson, 2021; see also Hou & Ali, this volume); if we cannot adequately represent signing in our analyses, we will continue to see troubling public misconceptions, such as that signed languages are not full languages, that they are simply pantomime or iconic representations of spoken languages, or that all signed languages are mutually intelligible. Instead, the practical linguistic needs of minoritized and endangered language communities have almost always come second to perceived scientific and pedagogical value or the career value to linguists (Henner & Robinson, 2019; Flores, 2019; Hochgesang, 2019; Keicho, 2021; see also Henner, this volume).

To be maximally clear: Whether or not you personally value or agree with the work of any given cult figure in our field is beside the point of this chapter. We do not argue for dismissing their work. Rather, we ask you to recognize that the linguists who disproportionately represent our field have always carried out their research within their own political frames, and thus a linguistics that perpetuates the propping up of a small number of voices is inherently flawed (see also Clemons, this volume). We need to abandon pretensions to being above or outside of politics and think about our impact as researchers, as members of an academic community, as workers, as mentors, as ambassadors for our field. Linguistics can take as a model Ryan Cecil Jobson (2020), who makes the case for ‘letting anthropology burn’, identifying academic discourses of ‘moral perfectibility’ and liberal humanism as insufficient in creating work that combats existential threats of climate change and authoritarianism. We must let small tent linguistics -- the idealized, unrealizable concept of linguistics as a disembodied pursuit by naturally superior minds -- burn, or risk continuing to ice out scholars we should be welcoming with respect and joy. Research and the communication thereof, as human activities, cannot be

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divorced from the structural inequities that humans create, and these inequities must be acknowledged for us to be able to see beyond them to lift up the contributions of people who are not traditionally seen as candidates for lone genius cult figure status.

As the present volumes illustrate, a growing body of linguists are working toward making these visions for our field into a reality. Another recent example of positive improvement is the renewed interest in how our teaching and publishing perpetuate gender stereotypes and bias (Cépeda et al., 2021; Kotek et al., 2021, both building on Macaulay & Brice, 1997). Linguists have also frequently raised the issue of citational injustice, a pattern in which minoritized scholars are not cited in an equitable share (Charity Hudley & Flores, 2022; **Charity Hudley, this volume**). We should document and discuss how citational injustice affects various groups as has been done for gender in sociology (King et al., 2017), physics (Teich et al., 2021), astronomy (Caplar et al., 2017), neuroscience (Dworkin et al., 2020), psychology (Hill, 2019), and other fields. In a recent statement, the American Psychological Association acknowledged and apologized for how scholars and gatekeepers in psychology appraise, train, and reward only limited knowledge production, and how psychologists have harmed the research participants on whom their work relies (APA, 2021). Linguistics would benefit from similar investigations and apologies, as well as reparations and restorative justice.

Linguists who fight for a more just and equitable linguistics, who are not a homogeneous group but skew younger and more junior in rank, have faced an evolving range of criticisms for their efforts, everything from ‘political correctness’, to ‘wokism’, to ‘illiberalism’, to ‘cultural Marxism’ and ‘cancel culture’ (see discussion in Kastner et al., 2021). Those who engage in liberatory linguistics are told that their work is not ‘real’ linguistics because it does not resemble the work of the lone geniuses (Lanehart, 2021; Charity Hudley & Flores, 2022). It is interesting to note, then, how the history of modern linguistics has ties to the 1960s U.S. counterculture. Even as formal theoretical approaches were reshaping the field, U.S. military and intelligence agencies were finding ways to use formal linguistics to strengthen the power of the state (Hutton, 2019). Noam Chomsky became and remains a household name for his reputation as a left-wing political dissident, ultimately authoring many dozens more books on politics than he has on linguistics. Many of today’s elder U.S. linguists were youths of this counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s who came of age during a period of historic turmoil and social progress. They may feel as though they are under uncomfortable scrutiny within linguistics, are not given the benefit of the doubt by younger scholars, and are at risk of being publicly criticized for any gaffe. Nevertheless, it is the nature of social progress that unless a person’s views evolve, they may very well go from being progressive to conservative in the course of their adult life. Without necessarily having changed, their opinions may come to be viewed by society as regressive, even bigoted, and even debunked by the very academic disciplines that formerly supported those views. Add to that new methods for accountability in the form of democratized publishing and social media, and the perception of amplified risk for senior scholars is understandable.

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However, this trepidation is also constantly exaggerated and used to whip up outrage (Clark, 2020; Kastner et al., 2021; Green, 2022, *inter alia*). Both participants and onlookers in any conflict around making linguistics more inclusive should be conscious of the current debate regarding ‘cancel culture’ and ‘free speech’. These are volatile issues that are often weaponized by those with the most power (Clark, 2020) and that extend well beyond the boundaries of our profession (Norris, 2021), taking on aspects of a moral panic (Ng, 2020; Sailofsky, 2021). We should resist reinforcing those toxic discourses, which only serve to exacerbate the damage done to the careers and well-being of less powerful scholars, keeping the tent small.

It is important to bear in mind that youth-centric movements pushing for change against the status quo by their very nature will always be alienating or offensive to some in older generations. It takes real work to continue to learn and grow with a changing society. For that reason, rather than being criticized, dismissed, or simply ignored, the activist energy of linguists who make the time to do that work and share it with the field is an invaluable resource that needs to be supported and amplified by senior linguists.

For some of our most prominent linguists, who perhaps even grew up supporting their own youthful ideals in the 1960s and 70s counterculture, a different kind of political activism now holds the greater allure (see also [miles-hercules, this volume](#)). These champions of the status quo, branding themselves as brave truth-tellers in the face of an “intolerant orthodoxy”, are still de facto representatives of the field and regularly appear in some of the largest media outlets on the planet.

How can we improve this state of affairs? One way is to democratize access to linguistics research methods and findings, especially those with practical applicability beyond academia. This could mean creating or identifying outlets that allow for the dissemination of work to communities that most need it ([cf. Villareal and Collister, this volume](#)). This includes anyone heavily involved in language work who is unlikely to identify as a linguist: teachers, podcasters, journalists, public relations and marketing professionals, and more ([cf. Plackowski, this volume; Gawne et al., this volume](#)). Linguists would benefit from a linguistics-specific outlet similar to *Nature*, *Science* and *Smithsonian Magazine* to communicate with the public so that when harmful language ideologies are promoted in high-profile places, we have a public-facing venue to tell people that the popular line is not right, while also diffusing the influence of the top two or three prominent names, who tend to be the first invited to comment or give interviews on language-related topics. Even without such an outlet, as linguists we need to be more strategic in how we share our expertise in news and other media contexts. There are already good examples to look toward. When in the midst of a global pandemic involving an airborne virus, a significant part of the United States was arguing for children to forgo wearing masks due to misplaced concerns about their language development, Megan Figueroa spoke with an Arizona radio journalist to correct this misinformation (Gilger, 2022). When public discourse about ‘cancel culture’ was weaponized against the left, Nicole Holliday spoke about it to the NPR show

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*Consider This* (National Public Radio, 2021). When the most famous linguists in the US were spreading misconceptions about slurs, denying the very concept that words might have a material effect on their recipients, mainstream outlets were not receptive to counternarratives. Instead, Caitlin appeared on the politics podcast *Polite Conversations* (Mohammed-Smith, 2022) to explain the most commonly adopted semantic and pragmatic theories regarding the effects of slurs, and distributed the same arguments in text form as a blog post (Green, 2021). Linguists should reach out to media outlets as much as possible and work together to raise the profile of those doing liberatory linguistics, despite the structures that work to prevent liberatory messages from reaching mainstream outlets.

### **Power imbalances in linguistics: making the hierarchy visible**

To illustrate the ways in which power, civility norms, and disciplinary fractiousness have caused dysfunction in our discipline, in this section we present a composite case study (Willis, 2019). A composite case study is a narrative in which elements of multiple separate events are woven together to create a coherent story, with general applicability beyond the specific incidents, without drawing further undesirable attention to those involved. Readers may recognize elements of this case study from recent public conflicts involving Steven Pinker, John McWhorter, Noam Chomsky, Daniel Everett, and other publicly prominent linguists, but the details are a compilation of several events. Quotes are invented or paraphrased but convey the general message and tone of real statements made by participants in the original interactions.

One goal of presenting this case study is precisely to draw attention to the fact that there will be future incidents of this kind, and it is important both to recognize how they reflect on the field and to be prepared to handle them appropriately in the future. We were both involved in some of these events, and therefore partiality is not a reasonable or achievable goal. The details are represented as accurately as possible in honor of the larger goal of justice.

We present here the case of a famous academic, whom we call Big Linguist, who is well known for his scholarly work as well as his popular science writing. Big Linguist is a tenured professor at one of the most influential institutions in the world. He recently made disparaging remarks about what he called "gendered language", taking shots at singular *they* and other non-binary language, sometimes in ways which struck audiences as racially insensitive or dead on racist. He made these comments to his nearly one million followers, most of whom were not linguists, as well as in his radio programs, and he even wrote up a blog post complaining about non-binary language in the guise of linguistic analysis, critiquing its proponents for their "bustling wokeness" (see also [miles-hercules, this volume](#); [Zimman and Brown, this volume](#)).

When an anonymous group of presumably junior linguists arrived at the conclusion that Big Linguist should no longer be treated as a spokesperson for the field, they solicited support for this view in the form of signatures to an open letter calling for some small professional consequences for his history of misrepresenting current issues in linguistics. Graduate student

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Lilly tweeted that she “can’t stand” Big Linguist, referring to his work, which she considered culturally chauvinistic and lacking in anthropological rigor. This remark prompted a securely employed linguist to comment on her tweet from an account associated with his research lab, asserting that it was inappropriate to speak this way about a serious scholar such as Big Linguist. A close associate of the disapproving linguist took this comment and quote-tweeted it, recirculating it to her own followers, while using the opportunity to further chastise Lilly. In this new stream, Lilly no longer received notifications when linguists said something about her. Linguists began threads on Facebook discussing Lilly’s behavior on social media. When some linguists suggested that the tweets about Lilly amounted to harassment, one tenured professor asked, “How was it harassment to inform her that they’d been uncivil? If you tweet something mean, it’s you who are in the wrong, not people who inform you of such.” Because the primary political frame by which we interpret academic conflict is ‘free speech,’ (Scott, 2017; Green, 2022) the conversation inevitably centered itself around this frame: “Do students have the freedom to say anything they want just because they are supposedly less powerful? Do securely-employed scholars have no intellectual freedom because their insights might hurt the feelings of someone below them on the ladder?” Emotions ran high, and those who had defended Lilly were called childish and entitled. Her statement was exaggerated in the retelling, and several participants minimized the senior scholars’ admonitions as mere disagreements.

When Big Linguist became aware of the open letter, he wrote a social media post that the letter seemed like a satire on “woke” irrationality and that such incidents of “cancel culture” were a threat to academic freedom, even to science itself. He shared the letter, along with the list of signatories, with his followers. Other household names and prominent academics outside of linguistics became involved, using inflammatory language describing the signatories as “illiberal” “monsters”, “barbaric hordes” who “would seem at home in Maoist struggle sessions.” Big Linguist himself insisted that the signatories were “a bunch of jealous nobodies” who seemed like they had “a screw loose,” though the signatory list in reality included many of his peers at all levels of seniority. Others questioned the legitimacy of the signatory list, and some trolls signed the list with fake names or falsely signed the list with someone else’s name. Big Linguist was interviewed by major news outlets about the “traumatic” experience. “I’m Being Attacked By Woke Big Brother,” read one headline. Opinion writers and journalists weighed in with comments like, “His academic achievements insulate him from the dangers of cancel culture, but you won’t be so lucky when the mob comes for you.” When readers who knew the stories were factually incorrect attempted to alert the journalists, they were met with mockery; one responded to factual corrections by a signatory by saying, “You’d better hope none of your colleagues dig through your old tweets and find something they can use to get you in trouble based on skewed interpretations of what you said.” No signatories were able to get their side of the story told in major media outlets—when Big Linguist has something to say, the media can

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make room, but the same is not true for some random “nobody”—so they resorted to self-publishing their counter-arguments.

The letter’s signatories, including Lilly, were criticized for their lack of civility, while the incivility of the securely employed and celebrity linguists was not questioned despite its much larger impact. Big Linguist was cast as the victim of baseless ad hominem attacks no matter how many factual arguments the signatories made, while he and his allies used as many hateful names as they wished without significant pushback and with no negative consequences.

What can we learn from the experiences of Lilly and the signatories? We reflect on this composite case study in the context of the recommendations we have made in previous sections. People who were interested in ensuring the future success of Lilly and the signatories expressed the belief that they needed to be made aware of the ways they were potentially harming their standing in the field, including their reputation among future employers. Because of the nature of public correction and the risk of making someone the target of condemnation outside the sphere of those directly involved, the benefit of doing so is outweighed by the potential for reputational damage -- and also abusive communications from bystanders -- in a context such as this.

We should allow for variation in how people use social media. For some, it is a place to share and discuss professional linguistic work only. For others, it is a place to be a social individual without having to be professional. For others still, it is both (Chugh et al., 2021). When expectations are misaligned on this dimension, misunderstandings and even damaged relationships can result. We should also be conscious that the power to set the frame for discussing conflicts belongs to those with the most to protect, and be mindful that academic work involves not only arguing for the relevance and correctness of our research, but also fostering a culture in which those we work with are able to engage constructively and healthily. We should consider the face threat (Carson & Cupatch, 2000; Rees-Miller, 2000; Green, 2018) typically associated with correcting someone with less institutional power and the ways in which face is interactionally negotiated in ways that interact with identities, including power relations (Bousfield, 2018). A deeper understanding of who are participants and who are bystanders is needed (Haugh, 2013). This is not new information to linguists: we are supposed to be reading about the findings of people in our field who study interaction and power. We have to turn that knowledge into action: when we see someone critiquing the so-called fathers of our subfields, even in a way that seems impolite, we have to resist the urge to police them on grounds of civility. And when we see someone with institutional or cultural power bringing negative attention to a junior, we have to stand in solidarity with that junior scholar and defend their right to belong.

Assumptions about the types of discourses that can take place on social media should be re-examined. For too many, it is assumed that social media is necessarily and naturally a place where bullying and insults take place, and where attempts to engage in deeper conversation will be fruitless, and that this reality should therefore be expected and accepted. We should refuse to

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accept this view, both by avoiding participation in discourses that reinforce animosity and by actively trying to shape the norms of acceptable online discourse in just the same way we would in the halls of our campus buildings or in our classrooms. One of the troubling aspects of Lilly's treatment was that the more powerful figures who expressed disapproval of her conduct were not conscious of the ways in which an individual's vulnerability is magnified when the audience is shifted from that individual to all members of a social media platform. More consideration and explicit discussion of the mechanics and pragmatics of social media use are needed to reduce such incidents, and to provide onlookers with the tools to identify and critically discuss them when they do.

Moreover, those who objected to the language used by Lilly and the signatories were interested in directing them toward "playing the game" the way they expect it to be played, rather than interrogating (working to change) the ways in which "the game" is unfair. The content of Lilly's critiques of Big Linguist were ignored for several reasons: the reverence some feel for Big Linguist, Lilly's informal language in formulating the critique, and the fact that her arguments came from one side of the formal/functional false binary, while Big Linguist's work was more focused on the other side. A big tent linguistics should recognize that a well-rounded and well-argued linguistic analysis should involve considerations from all camps in order to avoid the pitfalls and assumptions that can hamper each.

In an interview for *the Chronicle of Higher Education*, David Bromwich joined a chorus of respected senior academics who fundamentally misunderstand the challenge facing young scholars. He recalled, "A student said, "I want to piggyback on what Raymond just said, and add ..." But what he was adding was *the exact opposite* of what Raymond just said. So, if you're saying the opposite, you still have to say it in the grammar of agreement" (Gutkin, 2022). In a conversation about students being afraid to disagree with each other, Bromwich provides an example in which a student easily disagrees with another, but objects to the way he framed his disagreement. At the same time, his interview does not consider the ways that early career researchers and minoritized scholars are policed by people like himself, those with institutional power. How can students' politeness strategies possibly compare to the effects of knowing that your professors might unite against you should you choose to report a serial sexual harasser for his crimes, as a group of Harvard professors did (Anthropologists, 2022)? Or that they might suddenly choose to rescind your honors and degree after being contacted by your abuser (Aviv, 2022)? Or the fear that your name and contact information could be listed by a conservative watchdog group, resulting in harassment and even threats (Tiede et al., 2021; Green, 2022), and that that group's materials might even be shared by respected academics even as they argue that it is progressive students who create a chilling effect on free speech in academia (e.g., John McWhorter as cited in Friedersdorf, 2020)? Is it really more important that we encourage our students to use fewer face-threat mitigation strategies, or that we take opportunities to

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proactively affirm our dedication to promoting psychologically and physically healthy environments in which to engage in knowledge production?

Creating opportunities to reduce the salience of professional hierarchies in students' day-to-day life would do more to reduce student discomfort than chiding them for their politeness strategies (Green, 2018). We should consider the ways in which a standard of civility, unevenly applied, is often a tool to reinforce power imbalances rather than one which encourages collegiality (hooks, 1991; Itagaki, 2021; Zamalin, 2022). Simply questioning the reasons behind norms or hegemonic discourses can be seen as disruptive, a threat to the status quo which requires correction, regardless of the style or politeness strategies involved in that questioning. Conventionalized politeness practices should not be confused with true civility, which we understand as actions undertaken to improve the ethical and professional practices of linguistics and thus may be achieved through language not typically considered 'civil' by established members at the top of the professional hierarchy. The Linguistic Society of America (LSA) has a policy on civility in its annual meetings and sponsored events (Linguistic Society of America, 2017), which notably focuses on discrimination and harassment rather than any particular concept of politeness. We ought to continue to develop our position on civility in more detail, as power disparities are exacerbated by unexamined ideologies around civility due to the hypervisibility and therefore overpolicing of minoritized scholars (Settles et al., 2018). Emotions such as anger and indignation in the face of systems of oppression or individual cruelty are important and valid, yet are often dismissed (Lorde, 1981; Srinivasan, 2017). As such, minoritized scholars advocating for their own rights and dignity are often denied, in what Koritha Mitchell calls an act of "know-your-place aggression" (Mitchell, 2018). The repression of this questioning and advocacy on the basis of tone will not bring us closer to either a just field or a just world.

The insistence on suppressing critique in order to preserve the existing hierarchy, often expressed as "civility," in public discussion on the LSA website regarding a proposal by a group of ten scholars to adopt a lightly modified version of the controversial Chicago Principles of Freedom of Expression (Stone et al., 2015). The Chicago Principles have been criticized as overly vague, as protecting the "rights" of non-minoritized, securely-employed scholars to promote unfounded and potentially anti-justice views at the expense of less powerful researchers, and as playing into a moral panic that supports political efforts to weaken higher education as a public good (Ben-Porath, 2018). The majority of comments posted on the website in response to the proposal were critical, and virtually all comments focused on the content of the arguments presented and their relevant context. Outside of the LSA website, critical comments were similarly focused on these issues (e.g., Fruehwald, 2022; Stickles, 2022). Despite a clear lack of ad hominem or defamatory comments toward those who had proposed the resolution, they nonetheless began their own response by saying they would reply "in the interest of constructive debate, to what we take to be the main substantive objections and questions raised, at a length



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that the resolution format itself did not permit (while disregarding comments that we take to be ad hominem and/or defamatory)” (Patel-Grosz et al., 2022). By claiming that there had been personal attacks, the group used “civility” as a cover for shifting the discourse away from critiques that are difficult to answer on the merits. Civility is also a way to sneak in uncivil ideas under the cloak of politeness: The signatories to the proposal state that they “support the LSA’s work on making the field more inclusive, and do not see such inclusivity work to be in conflict with the expression of controversial ideas where such ideas are expressed in a civil and professional manner.” As several LSA members had pointed out in their comments on the proposal, the academic terrain is littered with long-debunked ideas that rest on bigoted logics, whose defenders insist on relitigating them despite their lack of evidentiary support. Very often they do so under the auspices of precisely this argument: that the expression of so-called “controversial” ideas is a cornerstone of any organization that values freedom, and that any idea is acceptable if it is delivered with all the trappings of professionalism.

### **Conclusion: A way forward**

In this chapter we have identified and examined three major sources of inclusion problems in linguistics: exclusionary socialization, epistemic injustice, and unexamined power imbalances. In order to move forward, we urge all who consider ourselves part of the linguistics community to rethink and update our socialized norms at all career stages, as a way to help reshape the field into one where we achieve “ambient belonging” for scholars of all backgrounds (Cheryan et al., 2009). The focus must be twofold: first, on reversing the narrowing of the field by adopting an inclusive definition for *linguist* and *linguistics* and by consciously creating a culture that recognizes the collaborative nature of research; and second, promoting discussion of ways for all linguists to evaluate our power and influence in order to act to increase inclusion towards the big tent linguistics we hope to build. Because this effort requires us to make systemic cultural changes within our field, every person has a role regardless of their level of experience or seniority. We all have different positions regarding our ability to effect change, but we all have the potential to contribute. As such, we briefly consider the variety of professional stages and positions within linguistics and examine how each stage offers you, the reader, opportunities for proactive inclusion. And since many of these ideas and resources apply to more than one career stage, we also encourage you to read through suggestions for all stages.

- 1) **Undergraduate students**, who study a linguistics curriculum. You may additionally occupy a role such as teaching assistant, writing tutor, or other peer mentor positions. You can offer feedback to your instructors, whether directly or in the form of course evaluations, on topics like equitable citation in course syllabi, or inclusion of signed languages in basic course materials. You can advocate for inclusive major requirements, such as requiring training in sociolinguistics, or for a selection of different major tracks,

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allowing greater flexibility for courses outside conventionally ‘core’ subfields, to better serve the needs and interests of all students. You also have the opportunity to spread the message against everyday linguistic prejudice with your full networks of acquaintances, especially those who have never studied linguistics. The LingComm project, which includes events, advice and grants about communicating linguistics to a wider audience, is one place to get started (McCulloch & Gawne, 2021). Similarly, you can follow podcasts like *The Vocal Fries*, social media accounts like @sunnmcheaux or @LaymansLinguist on Tiktok, or YouTube channels like MikeMena or Crash Course Linguistics (Gawne et al., this volume).

- 2) **Graduate students**, who are taking steps toward professionalization in the field. In your role as students you can advocate to your instructors for topics such as citational justice and inclusive degree program design. You may also teach undergraduates or fellow graduate students and have the ability to build solidarity and provide positive mentorship in that sphere. You may start to participate in peer scholar interactions such as reviewing, publishing, and editing. You may run reading groups, organize speaker series, or plan conferences. These all present opportunities for inclusion advocacy. You can reach out to other students who have done these things, like the chairs of the Cluster on Language Research at University of California, Davis (Cluster on Language Research, 2022). You can also seek and contribute to professionalization training from your department and help ensure that it covers inclusive topics, including career opportunities beyond academia. In departments where student representatives formally participate in faculty meetings, you have another avenue for advocacy and influence. Some resources to use as a starting point include books about navigating linguistics career paths like *Surviving Linguistics* (Macaulay, 2011) and *Employing Linguistics: Thinking and Talking About Careers for Linguists* (Trester, 2022).
- 3) Post-degree **early-career academics**, who are in the (increasingly long) phase of non-permanent employment, including postdoctoral research and temporary teaching positions. Although employment precarity is a serious obstacle to the large number of linguists at this stage, you may have significant teaching duties and influence within that sphere. Opportunities for influence arise as you design courses, plan and run events, or advise students. You may also be active in research, bringing the opportunity to practice inclusion in your own writing, especially by lifting up junior and minoritized scholars by reading, citing, as well as teaching, their work. Teach students how to be critical of the hero status afforded those society treats as “lone geniuses.” As a reviewer for conferences and journals, you can adopt a constructive view of the peer review process as one of peer support rather than gatekeeping. Be conscientious about building the field, while avoiding fractious pitfalls. It is also important for more senior and more stably employed academics to acknowledge that many early-career linguists are in a state of constant

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employment precarity and therefore lack power in the field; they are in special need of mentorship and other support in this stage.

- 4) **Tenure-track faculty**, who though still professionally vulnerable, are entering a stage of increasing autonomy, stability, responsibility, and influence. Many of the opportunities in this stage mirror those of early-career academics. In addition to opportunities for influence through teaching, course design, and other professional activities, you may increasingly oversee student research, apply for grant funding, run research labs, plan larger conferences, and take journal editorial roles. All of these provide opportunities to exert positive influence on the field. You may influence more inclusive representation among invited speakers at events. Your service responsibilities may also give you a voice in academic job searches and curriculum planning, which bring their own opportunities to strengthen the field. Make sure you are aware of the ethics of journal editing (e.g., Committee on Public Ethics, 2022) and course design (e.g., Culver et al., 2021) to maximize your effectiveness. Look into ways to challenge dominant ideologies about pedagogy that might hamper a just teaching environment in your classroom by reading works like *Antisocial Language Teaching* (Gerald, 2022) from the field of English Language Teaching and finding ways to incorporate its lessons in other kinds of linguistics teaching.
- 5) **Tenured faculty**, who enjoy significant stability and increasing responsibility. You have opportunities for influence that mirror all those of your junior faculty colleagues. You are also likely in a position of greater influence within your department, and may have substantial reputation and influence within your research areas or the field at large. You may be holding journal editorial positions, serving on grant review panels, leading job searches, or filling an administrative role in your department. You may have more freedom to steer your research towards issues that contribute to the greater good for both society and our field. At this career stage, you are also especially well situated to amplify the work and voices of junior and minoritized scholars, to implement better practices in your department, and to work with other linguists to make the field more inclusive. For inspiration in the classroom, look to projects like *Talking College* (Charity Hudley et al., 2021), and for inspiration in creating inclusive student research experiences, see guides like Charity Hudley et al., 2017.
- 6) **Full professors**, who are in a position of maximal stability and influence, which you may occupy for decades. You may serve as a department chair, lead influential committees, or occupy other executive roles within your university and the discipline. This stage presents perhaps the greatest opportunity to influence trends of socialization in the field, both structurally through administrative roles, but also often by acting as a role model to students and more junior scholars, as your work and name are often what draw in new students. For some, this might be a frustrating stage as you rise high enough in the

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decision-making ranks to see many of the limits on the influence that academics have within contemporary higher-education institutions, but you have all of the opportunities for influence that those at more junior stages have, and you can use the substantial power and influence you have for positive impact and listen to and amplify the voices of junior colleagues. It is important to become familiar with the various ways that academics can abuse their power, including undermining their victims' ability to seek justice (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Mahmoudi, 2019; van Scherpenberg et al., 2021). If you are contacted by another senior linguist asking you to defend them against a complaint of harassment or bullying, it is crucial that you not take their claims at face value and speak on their behalf in public--or private--without knowing the details of the case from all sides.

- 7) **Public linguists**, who are a very small group that wield a disproportionate influence on the public perception of linguistics. This group also includes linguists who engage with the general public on a large platform, whether in traditional media or social media. You are uniquely situated to influence public perception of our field for better or worse, because people in this group are often the only linguists known to the wider public, to leaders in industry, or to politicians in a position to influence public policy and control public grant programs. Maintain—or exercise, if atrophied—the humility to acknowledge that being a famous linguist does not qualify you as an expert in all aspects of linguistics, let alone on all public issues of the day. Be intentional about sharing opportunities to access large platforms with like-minded colleagues who do not typically have this access, such as suggesting other names when invited for media comment or appearances. Actively combat the myth of the lone genius by refusing to become a brand that defines you as synonymous with academic advancement. Name and credit linguists who are more junior and/or members of marginalized group in your work, and advocate for the funding and public recognition of underappreciated kinds of linguistics.
- 8) **Linguists beyond academia**, who are employed (or hobbyists, or unemployed) in areas that involve discussing and working with language. This group includes the many linguists in tech or other industry roles, as well as speech-language pathologists, teachers, public relations and marketing professionals, journalists, and more. Take whatever steps are available to you to improve diversity in your workplace. Resist harmful language ideologies and participate in the implementation of liberatory linguistics in your sphere of influence. You can also become a member of organizations like the LSA, if you currently aren't, and exercise your voting rights to support officers who share these goals. Participating in social media with your linguist colleagues in academia may be another way for you to maintain your connections to the field, and help be a voice in support of justice.

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Furthermore, it is important for our field to recognize that there are many who have chosen to leave academia at any stage, or who have received minimal or no formal training in linguistics, but who nonetheless identify as linguists and seek to be part of the linguistics community. We strongly assert that our field must be inclusive of those who do not follow the traditional academic path. We must consider how socialization in linguistics is relevant to adjacent academic disciplines, careers in industry, P-12 teaching, government, and beyond. We must also confront how the academic/non-academic divide is yet another false dichotomy that has frequently been a source of exclusion. In part this false dichotomy can be addressed by committing ourselves to live by an inclusive definition of *linguist*, like the one given by the LSA demographic data workgroup: “By ‘linguist’, we mean people who have a graduate degree in Linguistics, as well as people who knowingly recruit knowledge of linguistics or teach linguistics as part of their profession, avocation, or advocacy work” (Brosselow et al., 2019).

All linguists have some power to challenge harmful discourses, and this responsibility must be undertaken by everyone to some degree. However, power differentials mean that different strategies are available to each person, and there are different consequences for challenging dominant discourses. To readers at all career stages, we invite you to consider your present positionality, your potential future career stages, and the influence—realized or unrealized—that you have on those in other stages, both earlier and later. We urge you to take action wherever you see exclusion and injustice to the extent that you safely can, given your structural and institutional positionality.

As we stated at the start of this chapter: linguistics has incredible potential for doing transformative good in society, and a big tent vision will enable us to better realize this potential. We hope that the preceding discussion will help to energize all linguists, in the inclusive definition, to identify ways that we can each contribute to achieving that potential, hand-in-hand with our professional advancement. By rethinking our disciplinary norms, we will move beyond the small tent approach that linguistics has inhabited and which has prevented it from achieving the widespread understanding and appreciation by the general public that other branches of the social sciences and humanities enjoy. Our field is changing, and it must continue to change. We each have a role in rehabilitating and resocializing it, to create an inclusive and just linguistics.

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