Rethinking Language Barriers & Social Justice from a Raciolinguistic Perspective

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The trope of language barriers and the toppling thereof is widely resonant as a reference point for societal progress. Central to this trope is a misleading debate between advocates of linguistic assimilation and pluralism, both sides of which deceptively normalize dominant power structures by approaching language as an isolated site of remediation. In this essay, we invite a reconsideration of how particular populations and language practices are persistently marked, surveilled, and managed. We show how perceptions of linguistic diversity become sites for the reproduction of marginalization and exclusion, as well as how advocacy for language and social justice must move beyond celebrating linguistic diversity or remediating it. We argue that by interrogating the colonial and imperial underpinnings of widespread ideas about linguistic diversity, we can connect linguistic advocacy to broader political struggles. We suggest that language and social justice efforts must link affirmations of linguistic diversity to demands for the creation of societal structures that sustain collective well-being.

In December 2021, CNN reported on the creation of a digital platform – an app – to "eliminate miscommunication by changing people's accents in real time."[1] The app is specifically designed to modify the English language practices of call center employees in the Global South such that they would become more intelligible to presumed Global North customers. The report suggests that "a call center worker in the Philippines, for example, could speak normally into the microphone and end up sounding more like someone from Kansas to a customer on the other end." While the platform's "algorithm can convert English to and from American, Australian, British, Filipino, Indian and Spanish accents . . . the team is planning to add more." The broader vision is for this app to be used in any context in which there are communication barriers, including language learning, health care provision, film dubbing, and digital voice assistants.

Depending on one's outlook, this technology might be interpreted as utopian or dystopian. From a utopian perspective, this app could be perceived as a prelude to a *Star Trek* style universal translator that facilitates communication across what might otherwise be experienced as fundamental linguistic divides. From a dys-

topian perspective, by continually positioning dominant languages and varieties thereof as target reference points, such apps could contribute to the production of global homogeneity through the elimination of linguistic diversity. Yet these seemingly opposing perspectives are united in their orientation to language varieties as discrete and disembodied sets of forms and structures.

This understanding of language varieties as separable from the people who use them and as objectively classifiable into bounded categories (such as "American English") is a reflection of modern language ideologies that serve particular political and economic interests.[2] In the case of accent-modification technologies designed to facilitate global commerce, as well as local classifications of language difference and its management, the recognition and mediation of linguistic diversity is often framed as progress toward social justice. Language ideologies scholarship, however, has taught us that purported recognitions of linguistic diversity can, in fact, function as deceptive forms of regimentation, stigmatization, and commodification in service of particular populations' accumulation through others' dispossession.[3] For example, sociolinguists Nelson Flores and Mark Lewis show how stigmatizing stereotypes about low-income Latinx students' perceived linguistic diversity function as rationalizations for their racial and socioeconomic marginalization.[4] Thus, linguistic recognition is always about more than language, requiring careful analysis of deeply intertwined relations among languages and political economies.[5] In the discussion that follows, we invite a reconsideration of how particular populations and language practices are persistently marked, surveilled, and managed. We show how perceptions of linguistic diversity become sites for the reproduction of marginalization and exclusion, as well as how advocacy for language and social justice must move beyond celebrating linguistic diversity or (re)mediating it through an app. Thus, language and social justice efforts must link affirmations of linguistic diversity to demands for the creation of societal structures that sustain collective well-being.

Digital platforms, such as the app described above, are a continuation of long-standing accent-modification efforts in educational, professional, legal, medical, and broader societal contexts. Such efforts have been famously dramatized in widely beloved popular representations such as George Bernard Shaw's 1913 play *Pygmalion*, later adapted into a 1938 film with the same title, as well as its 1956 Broadway musical adaptation, *My Fair Lady*, starring Julie Andrews, a 1964 film musical by the same title starring Audrey Hepburn, and many subsequent revivals and remakes. These various representations center on the figures of Henry Higgins, a phonetician and professor, and Eliza Doolittle, a working-class woman who sells flowers in the public commons of London. Higgins offers Doolittle elocution and etiquette lessons, with the goal of modifying Doolittle's stereotypical working-class Cockney accent such that her language use would

become less marked and stigmatized. The implication is that Higgins's accent-modification support would improve Doolittle's ability to find employment in and effectively navigate "higher" societal settings. For Doolittle, the aspiration is to sound like someone who sells flowers in a proper shop rather than on the street.

In Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins initially encounter one another serendipitously, with Doolittle attempting to sell flowers to one of Higgins's associates. When Doolittle is informed that the linguist Higgins has taken an interest in her language practices and is documenting everything she says, she initially presumes he is a police officer. While a language analyst and police officer might seem to have little in common, research on accent modification, language policing, and various forms of linguistic profiling demonstrate powerful links between language and population management.[6] Moreover, linguists' systematic participation in domestic and imperial state projects of population surveillance and management, including long-standing colonial language-brokering practices and their contemporary recontextualization as part of development and democratization efforts, suggests that the perception of a linguistics professor as a state agent was not simply by chance.[7]

Professor Higgins explains to his associate that by modifying Doolittle's speech, he could make her sound like a duchess instead of a flower girl. Higgins's coached modifications of Doolittle's phonological patterns seem to effectively, if not completely, eliminate the sonic dimensions of her Cockney accent by assimilating it to received pronunciation. However, the referential content of Doolittle's speech, her affective and gestural stances, and her infamous use of the term "bloody" – which in the context of the play and its reception was regarded as an obscenity and thus highly provocative – signaled that the markedness and stigmatization of her class status through her accent had not, in fact, been eradicated but rather shifted to other semiotic targets. Eventually, Doolittle is left feeling fundamentally transformed and alienated from her previous life. Meanwhile, when Doolittle stops working with Higgins, he experiences ambivalence about his desire for what Doolittle was and what she has become. In fact, the Greek mythological figure of Pygmalion, perhaps most widely recognized in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which served as inspiration for Shaw, is a sculptor who falls in love with his own creation. While interpersonal accent modification might function as a form of narcissistic projection, commodified and institutionalized accent-modification efforts require structural analysis to understand the interplay between perceptions of linguistic diversity and population management strategies.

With this context as a reference point, it is crucial to reconsider the logics that inform contemporary digital accent-modification platforms and the broader ways that purportedly benevolent efforts to help marked subjects modify their language practices become institutionalized as assimilationist projects masquerading as assistance. These dynamics are reflected in the tropes that informed the creation and

uptake of Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins as characters. Note that the characters of Doolittle and Higgins were inspired by the family of Alexander Graham Bell, who is credited with creating electronic speech technology that led to the invention of the telephone. Bell's work was shaped not only by his grandfather who instructed speech etiquette classes for young women, but also by his father's and his efforts to hone language-teaching methods for deaf individuals, including their respective wives, Mabel Hubbard and Ma Bell.[8] These efforts centered on oral methods that discouraged sign language based on theories that "deaf persons speak by reading the lips of others . . . in other words, they speak by becoming *operators*."[9] This ableist logic ignores the complexity and robustness of deaf linguistic and broader cultural practices by approaching deafness as a functional challenge of linguistic transduction. Ableist objectifications of deaf persons combined with misogynistic objectifications of women in the invention of the telephone, which came to be reflected in a gendered division of labor such that "women claimed 87 percent of the public service positions in telephone offices as early as 1907."[10] Thus, stigmatizing ideas about the need to manage linguistic diversity associated with gender and disability shaped the invention of the characters of Doolittle and Higgins, as well as the invention of the telephonic technology that subsequently inspired accent-modification platforms for telephone operators.

Relatedly, one of the earliest digital language processing platforms and a key precursor to contemporary accent-modification apps was created at MIT in 1966 and called ELIZA in reference to *My Fair Lady*.[11] Such technologies are often framed as advances toward using artificial intelligence to overcome language barriers. Allegedly benevolent projects of helping people accommodate and adapt to dominant communicative norms could be framed as social justice commitments that attempt to challenge systematic experiences of linguistic marginalization. In practice, however, these initiatives often misunderstand the nature of the problem by orienting to it pragmatically as a matter of linguistic mismatch necessitating individualized remediation, rather than systemically as a matter of endemic structures of discrimination necessitating societal transformation. By continually identifying and modifying language practices positioned as deviating from standardized norms, accent-modification projects never address the fundamental causes of linguistic marginalization and discrimination. Insofar as the focus is on modifying marked forms, whether through individual practice or digital mediation, the structures that position particular forms and the populations with which they are associated as dominant or subordinate – idealized or deficient – remain unquestioned. While many contemporary linguists might object to Higgins's work to eradicate Doolittle's stigmatized accent and to aspects of the accent-modification platform described in the CNN story, we suggest that these various efforts resonate with liberal humanist linguistic logics that shape the foundation of the discipline of linguistics, as well as applied linguistics and sociolinguistics as

its engaged offshoots. These liberal humanist logics are characterized by the overrepresentation of particular populations' interests as universal norms and rights, producing intersecting marginalizations in relation to axes of difference including race, class, gender, ability, and language.[12]

Liberal humanism is the foundation of the Chomskyian framing of linguistic competence as a context-free, underlying universal cognitive capacity.[13] While Chomsky's universalist conceptualization of competence might seem to be radically egalitarian, it is crucial to note his framing of "an ideal speaker-listener, in a homogeneous speech community who knows its language perfectly" as the proper object of linguistic science.[14] Although Chomsky frames linguistic competence as a universal human cognitive phenomenon, societal assumptions about and assessments of linguistic competence have perpetually positioned particular populations and practices as more or less competent, or even as fundamentally in/competent. These dynamics are reflected in accent-modification efforts aspiring to produce linguistic ideals, perfection, and homogeneity to remediate purported linguistic problems, deficiency, and diversity, which Chomsky positions as outside of the scope of a science of language.

This liberal humanist project is also the foundation of the Hymesian framing of communicative competence that has sought to account for the social dimensions of language through a focus on the interactional norms that shape linguistic practices within specific speech communities.[15] The reframing of linguistic competence as communicative competence might seem to present a more affirming orientation to linguistic and cultural diversity. The shift from linguistic competence to communicative competence, however, perpetuates the structural positioning of particular populations and practices as fundamentally problematic, deficient, and nonstandard. This is demonstrated by the uptake of the concept of communicative competence in language-teaching in ways that reify the idealized native speaker from a homogeneous speech community that communicative competence was ostensibly developed to challenge.[16] As with the case of linguistic competence and its particularism framed as universalism, communicative competence reifies language ideals under the auspices of recognizing and affirming diversity. The institutionalization of communicative competence often takes the form of efforts that identify distinctive language norms but exclusively target marginalized populations' language practices for remediation. The implication is that while all populations might possess different forms of communicative competence, only particular populations' communicative competencies are appropriate for success within schools and other mainstream institutions.[17] Therefore, while communicative competence has often been offered as an alternative to the theoretical abstraction of linguistic competence, its logics contribute to the reproduction of social hierarchies and dominant language ideologies under the guise

of appropriateness. This is because communicative competence, like most mainstream approaches to (socio)linguistics, frames language discrimination primarily as a matter of affirming the legitimacy of stigmatized language varieties on the grounds that all languages are legitimate, rule-governed, and share universal underlying structures. Thus, we are left with the assumption that linguistic justice is primarily a matter of establishing and promoting knowledge of the systematicity of stigmatized language varieties and the skillfulness of their users, which leaves unaddressed the structural barriers that ultimately anchor the stigmatization of populations and communities associated with these practices.[18]

A raciolinguistic perspective offers an alternative approach to these conceptualizations of language. As opposed to efforts to create universalizing typologies of language structures and proficiencies, such as linguistic or communicative competence, a raciolinguistic perspective seeks to denaturalize contemporary conceptualizations of language by pointing to their roots in the globalization of the modern European colonial project.[19] A raciolinguistic perspective emphasizes 1) the colonial anchoring of racial and linguistic classifications and hierarchies, 2) the modes of perception through which race and language are jointly apprehended across contexts, 3) the production of naturalized typologies of racial and linguistic features, forms, and categories imagined to emanate from and correspond to one another, 4) the intersectional matrices of marginalization that dynamically (re)structure racial and linguistic hierarchies, and 5) the need for radically reimagined theories of change that move beyond modifying the linguistic practices of racialized populations to challenging colonial, imperial, and capitalist power formations that continually reproduce disparity, dispossession, and disposability.

A raciolinguistic perspective further rejects essentialist notions of race. It frames race as a dynamic process of sorting populations into those deemed more or less fully human, a process that is shaped by histories and contemporary realities of settler colonialism, enslavement, and imperialism, but plays out differently in distinctive local contexts. A rejection of essentializing static understandings of race provides us with conceptual tools for analyzing racialization beyond the logics that inform its stereotypical construction in any given context. For example, anti-Black U.S. racial logics of hypodescent have historically relied on the "one-drop rule," a biological ideology presuming racially distinctive blood in which one drop of "Black blood" constituted Black legal status regardless of physical stereotypes like skin color.[20] Thus, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Homer Plessy was white-identified based on physical stereotypes such that the Court suggested his "one-eighth African blood" was "not discernable in him," yet the Court ultimately reaffirmed his Black legal status, which in turn reestablished legal segregation targeting all Black legal subjects.[21] In contrast, Mexican American racialization was developed via the "reverse one-drop rule," a logic in which one drop of "Spanish blood" constituted white legal status regardless of one's skin color.[22] While this

provided certain legal rights, it was also used to justify the continued oppression of Mexican Americans by denying them the right to make claims under the equal protection clause in the face of systemic discrimination across societal contexts, including labor, education, and housing.[23] In this way, the legal status of whiteness was simultaneously a privilege in certain ways while also part of the continued racialization of Mexican Americans in the context of an ongoing colonial relationship. Here, the Spanish language, which in other geopolitical contexts was colonially imposed on Indigenous populations, became a mechanism for racializing Mexican Americans based on the assumption that the presence of Spanish in their communities justified their segregation in schools and other facilities.[24] Meanwhile, the imposition of the English language and the rigid maintenance of linguistic borders in these communities was linked to the broader regulation of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, socioeconomic, and religious borders, and the violent colonial and imperial population management projects of which they are a part.[25] The goal of a raciolinguistic perspective, therefore, is not to decide which people and language practices coincide with which ethnoracial categories, as if this were an objective process. Instead, a raciolinguistic perspective seeks to understand how racial and linguistic discourses are conaturalized in ways that position particular populations as less than fully human and in need of perpetual containment and (re)mediation.

A raciolinguistic perspective also rejects the essentializing linguistic assumption that each named language possesses ontologically discrete boundaries corresponding to a particular territory and belonging to a specific group of people. It traces the emergence of these ideologies linking named languages, territories, and populations alongside the rise of European nation-states and the globalization of the European colonial project.[26] It also locates the creation of the modern science of language within this broader colonial history, calling into question its empiricist impulse to separate language from bodies as part of the scientific study of language. Rather than approaching languages as disembodied sets of forms and structures, a raciolinguistic perspective examines how hegemonic modes of perception (trans)form interpretations of what are ostensibly the same linguistic practices based on the racial status of the producer.[27] For example, in the U.S. context, the same linguistic tokens that are framed as nonstandard, incorrect, or inferior English when produced by Black language users can be interpreted as cool, youthful, and desirable when produced by white language users.[28] Similarly, Princess Charlotte's Spanish language use is positioned as worthy of laudatory newspaper headlines, whereas U.S. Latinx Spanish language use is presented as a problem in need of careful management and remediation.[29] Therefore, the goal of a raciolinguistic perspective is not to decide which racial categories correspond to which linguistic forms and varieties, but rather to interrogate and contest the power structures that organize the conaturalization of race and language.

Taking this nonessentialist view of race and language as its point of entry, at the core of a raciolinguistic perspective is critical examination of ideologies that frame the language practices of racialized communities as inherently deficient and in need of remediation.[30] Raciolinguistic ideologies differ from the standard language ideologies that shape the marginalization of Eliza Doolittle. Understanding this difference requires careful conceptualization of race and racialization. As ideological justifications for the globalization of modern European colonialism, race and racialization center on the imposition and contestation of "what is to be the descriptive statement of the human": that is, the epistemological battle over sorting populations into those deemed fully and less than fully human.[31] Decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo traces the origins of contemporary race and racialization to religious distinctions that characterized the European premodern world, which were remapped onto enslaved and colonized Black and Indigenous populations.[32] European whiteness emerged in part through Christian ideologies that positioned Jews and Muslims as possessing the wrong religion and, by extension, as inferior humans. European settlers in the Americas presumed that Black and Indigenous populations had no legitimate religion and were, therefore, not fully human. Ideologies distinguishing between populations framed as possessing the wrong religion and those framed as possessing no religion are linked to the distinction between standard language ideologies and raciolinguistic ideologies. While standard language ideologies frame working-class white individuals like Eliza Doolittle as producing the wrong form of a legitimate language, making them inferior humans on a case-by-case basis, raciolinguistic ideologies frame racialized populations as having no legitimate language or being altogether languageless, collectively rendering them as less than fully human.[33] Whereas standard language ideologies draw individualized distinctions in terms of perceived degrees of correctness, raciolinguistic ideologies draw collective distinctions in terms of perceived ontological kinds.

Raciolinguistic ideologies were instrumental to the rise of European nation-states and the European colonial project.[34] For example, raciolinguistic ideologies were integral in producing justifications for white settler colonialism, with white settlers often depicting Indigenous languages in the Americas as animal-like forms of simple communication incapable of expressing Christian doctrine.[35] In addition, raciolinguistic ideologies were integral to the dehumanization of Black populations as part of the justification for the transatlantic slave trade and the forced segregation of African Americans within the context of the Jim Crow South.[36] In a reconfiguration of early anti-Semitism framed in religious terms, raciolinguistic ideologies were also central to the racialization of Jewishness in the context of the Holocaust. Specifically, Jews were represented as having no loyalty to a mother-tongue, thereby posing an existential threat to the integrity of the German language, paralleling their framing as an existential threat to German

society.[37] In short, raciolinguistic ideologies that called into question the inherent legitimacy of racialized populations' language practices were part of the framing of these populations as a threat to the national polity in need of containment and perhaps even elimination.[38]

Studies of raciolinguistic ideologies are also anchored in a distinctive ontological and epistemological perspective from dominant sociolinguistic approaches to the studies of standard language ideologies. Sociolinguistic approaches to the study of standard language ideologies often begin from an empirical perspective presupposing standard languages as sets of disembodied linguistic features associated with higher social status groups in a particular society that can be used by anyone regardless of their social status.[39] In contrast, raciolinguistic ideologies build on conceptualizations of race as a fundamentally colonial-ontological problem of being made to exist as an object in advance of one's presence through processes of conaturalization.[40] From this perspective, language varieties are not sets of disembodied linguistic features. Instead, hegemonic modes of perception can frame what are ostensibly the same language practices as standard when produced by someone inhabiting a dominant racial status but nonstandard when produced by someone inhabiting a subordinate racial status. From this perspective, racialization can render particular populations' language practices as inherently deficient and fundamentally illegitimate.[41] Thus, raciolinguistic ideologies' systematic attributions of un/intelligibility disrupt ontological distinctions between languages and varieties thereof. These conceptualizations can help us better understand distinctive articulations of linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic marginalization. For example, while Eliza Doolittle experienced socioeconomic and linguistic marginalization, her whiteness provided provisional access to elite spaces that are systematically denied to racially minoritized communities. This by no means negates the marginalization that Eliza Doolittle experienced or the alienation that it produced, but rather illustrates the importance of attending to the ways that linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic stigmatization coarticulate and disarticulate.

Adult-education scholar Vijay A. Ramjattan characterizes various contemporary "accent reduction" industries as "raciolinguistic pedagogy" that attribute deficiency and value to different populations' language practices in deeply contradictory ways that obscure the reproduction of racial and class stratification.[42] This focus on race can sharpen understandings of contemporary linguistic marginalization. One example that we have written about previously is "Long-Term English Learners," a label for students institutionally classified as English Learners for seven or more years and subjected to perpetual remediation due to their supposed lack of English language proficiency.[43] Based on its association with systematically racialized attributions of linguistic illegitimacy, Long-Term English Learner has become institutionalized as a deeply stigmatizing raciolinguistic classification in U.S. schools. We have examined how racialized experiences of students designat-

ed as Long-Term English Learners are linked to the experiences of students designated as "Heritage Language Learners" and "Standard English Learners," which also function as raciolinguistic classifications. These linguistic designations are produced through hegemonic modes of perception associated with *white listening subjects* that frame racialized students' language practices as inherently deficient and in need of remediation, even when these practices ostensibly correspond to standardized norms that are institutionally affirmed or even prized for white language users. Indeed, even researchers who accept these raciolinguistic categories as objective descriptions of students' purportedly limited linguistic capacities acknowledge this overlap, with one prominent report focused on Long-Term English Learners describing them as sharing "much in common with other Standard English learners – the mix of English vocabulary superimposed on the structure of the heritage language and the use of a dialect of English that differs from academic English."[44] Default assumptions about the linguistic deficiency of students designated as Long-Term English Learners systematically obscure their demonstration of profound multilingual skills that in many ways meet or exceed stipulated educational standards.[45]

Raciolinguistic ideologies associated with the U.S.-based Long-Term English Learner label are rooted in the nation's white settler colonial and anti-Black logics, which also undergird the Standard English Learner category. This underlying logic is demonstrated by Standard English Learner linguistic screeners used in the Los Angeles Unified School District that seek to identify students who "would particularly benefit from mainstream English language development."[46] The screeners provide separate lists of "African American linguistic features," "Hawaiian American linguistic features," and "Mexican American linguistic features." Each list includes approximately twenty sentences that are represented in Standard English and the respective nonstandard racialized variety, highlighting the particular linguistic features that distinguish between the two. The screeners are designed to identify students whose attributed lack of Standard English abilities make them eligible for a remedial program focused on correcting their purported linguistic deficiencies. Here, we once again encounter the distinction between standard language ideologies and raciolinguistic ideologies in that, based on the screeners available, the working-class white U.S. equivalent to Eliza Doolittle would not be targeted for formally institutionalized linguistic screening, and would, therefore, not be threatened with remediation and marginalization regardless of their perceived linguistic deviation from Standard English.

Despite African American and Native Hawaiian students' display of tremendous communicative dexterity, dialect variation is framed as an endemic educational problem for them, which reflects how anti-Blackness and white settler colonialism are deceptively reproduced through raciolinguistic ideologies.[47] Mexican American students' targeting as part of these screeners underscores the impor-

tance of understanding the racialization of Latinxs in relation to the foundational anti-Blackness and white settler colonialism of U.S. society.[48] As a result of such English language screeners and assessments, millions of students are designated as English Learners annually, a significant percentage of whom are relegated to a perpetual classification as Long-Term English Learners and assigned to remedial classrooms for the entirety of their elementary and secondary schooling experiences. These experiences of perpetual linguistic remediation constrain the opportunities available to racialized students, often reproducing intergenerational socioeconomic vulnerability and societal marginalization. Sociologist Brian Cabral conceptualizes this as a racialized process of "linguistic confinement," and argues that state-based educational language assessments come to be institutionalized in conjunction with broader carceral dynamics of surveillance and containment.[49] In this way, raciolinguistic ideologies that produced contemporary categories such as Long-Term English Learner are rooted in the nation's white settler colonial and anti-Black foundations. These educational language learning assessments, designations, and curricula are presented as helpful interventions that serve to (re)mediate linguistic barriers. A raciolinguistic perspective on linguistic (re)mediation attends to the historical colonial underpinnings of contemporary language classifications to examine how deeply stratified political and economic structures are rationalized through ideologies of linguistic deficiency. The broader goal is to refuse behavioral linguistic explanations for challenges requiring broad institutional and societal transformation to sustain collective well-being.

Whether in terms of the contemporary emergence of digital language technologies such as accent-modification apps, or past popular representations of upward socioeconomic mobility through elocution lessons, the trope of language barriers and the toppling thereof is widely resonant as a reference point for societal progress. Central to this trope is a misleading debate between advocates of linguistic assimilation and pluralism, both sides of which deceptively normalize dominant power structures by approaching language narrowly as an isolated site of (re)meditation. This dynamic can be recognized in assimilationist efforts toward Standard English remediation in U.S. schools that systematically target racialized students regardless of the extent to which their English language practices might seem to correspond to standardized norms.[50] It is also at work in dual-language programs that systematically support the achievement of economically dominant white students, many of whom enter these programs identifying as monolingual English users, over their racialized and economically marginalized peers, many of whom use multiple languages and varieties thereof throughout their everyday lives.[51] Thus, it is insufficient to challenge assimilation through advocacy for linguistic diversity as an end in itself. Reconnecting contemporary advocacy for multilingual education in the United States to its history as part of broader civil rights demands for institutional and societal transformation is one strategy for refusing

generic affirmation of linguistic diversity as the solution to hierarchies rationalized in relation to linguistic differences.[52]

These rationalizations and narrow, instrumentalist framings of language dovetail with prevailing approaches in U.S. linguistics that separate the study of languages from the populations and communities among which they are used. In contrast, a raciolinguistic perspective interrogates the fundamental relationship between linguistic and racial classifications, thereby refusing to separate the study of languages from the experiences, positionalities, perspectives, and political projects of their users. By recognizing the colonial underpinnings of widespread ideas about linguistic diversity, we can connect linguistic advocacy to broader political struggles. This is what the digital app as the newest attempt at bridging linguistic diversity misses. Its design presupposes that the marginalization of those positioned as having a marked accent is primarily linguistic, leaving uninterrogated the colonial and imperial structures that shape contemporary racial and economic inequities. While such an app may benefit the primarily Global North customers who will no longer have to navigate linguistic diversity, it does little to improve the social outcomes of the call center workers, primarily of the Global South, whom the app was reportedly developed to help. Through their primary commitment to maximizing efficiency in service encounters, such technologies contribute to the reproduction of dominant political and economic power structures under the auspices of brokering linguistic diversity. Yet mainstream approaches to sociolinguistics, which often celebrate linguistic diversity without situating it in relation to broader colonial and imperial histories and their effects on contemporary political and economic realities, also do little to challenge prevailing power structures. Thus, language must be understood as a central medium and object in *all* justice struggles, including those focused on issues such as climate change, education, health, reproductive rights, migration, labor, housing, race, gender, sexuality, disability, anticapitalism, prison abolition, and decolonization.[53] We look forward to continued dialogues about the role of language in these various political struggles, as well as the role of different scholarly approaches in supporting or constraining them.

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