

# Liberatory Linguistics

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*While the college population in the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, few studies focus on the goal of linguistic justice in higher education teaching and learning – a critical factor in achieving all forms of social equity. I offer liberatory linguistics as a productive, unifying framework for the scholarship that will advance strategies for attaining linguistic justice. Emerging from the synthesis of various lived experiences, academic traditions, and methodological approaches, I illustrate how a structural ignorance of language justice affects the lived experiences of people across the world. I present findings from my work with Black undergraduates, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and faculty members as they endeavor to embed a justice framework throughout the study of language broadly conceived. I conclude by highlighting promising strategies that can improve current approaches to engaging with structural realities that impede linguistic justice.*

The authors in this volume have presented a comprehensive overview of the study of language and social justice. The authors' varied lived experiences and disciplinary lenses have richly added to our own knowledge of language and justice. They also leave us squarely and directly with marching orders on what we need to do next.<sup>1</sup>

As authors and linguists, our own appearance in this volume is a double-edged sword. The writing we covet as scholars can, at the same time, be used as a racialized weapon to keep students and other people out. For example, I have worked for several years on a Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) research initiative grant with Hannah Franz of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. To support Black students' linguistic agency, she launched the website entitled Students' Right to Their Own Writing, which offers guides for writing instructors and for their students. The project stages included creating content for the website based on our prior work, gathering feedback from student and faculty focus groups, updating the content based on this feedback, designing the web format, and disseminating the website through targeted outlets. Students who offered feedback suggested that the information on African American English and grading can help them view previously confusing instructor feedback in the light of language variation. Our recommendations for "questions to ask your instructor" give students a way to turn instructor feedback into a conversation and, in the

process, advocate for the right to their own writing. These findings show a need to use specific examples and guidance to educate faculty and empower students to advocate for grading that enacts students' right to their own languages.

In this volume, we have veered into that taboo territory of explaining how we – the people who would write or read *Dædalus* – are complicit in both the creation and maintenance of linguistic ignorance and, through these essays, have attempted to lay bare how that work benefits us, even as we critique it and seek institutional change. Through these tensions, our conversations have given us new ways to disrupt these patterns and dominant narratives. Our ways of interacting aren't limited to the grammatical and rhetorical conventions favored in the academy. We have to delve even deeper into our notions of who is a "good speaker" and even whom you want to be around and communicate with. Our language ideologies help us get through the day and have helped us to be successful academics, but they also betray us.

For my part, I have tried to be a disruptor, but I am keenly aware of my own complicities. I am deeply committed to change, but I also have worked tirelessly to keep my sparkling academic record. I was born to two Black physicians who were part of two large, privileged Black families in the Upper U.S. South. My family members have been multigenerational graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Ivy Plus universities. I work every day to use that privilege to bring about educational justice in the world in service of Black lives and Black students. I identify as Black/African American in the one-drop rule style of the Upper South, growing up in an area with three-way segregation between Black, Indigenous, and white people. I walked a fine but proud Black line between all three. I'm lighter-skinned with straightish yet curly hair, but my looks are deceiving. My mother was a brown-skinned Black woman, and that's the energy that I bring into most rooms and even to the writing of this essay. And years of chemotherapy and immunotherapy have straightened my previously very-telling-that-I-am-Black hair.

All of this begs the question, "How did I come to be writing here?" I first found the American Academy of Arts and Sciences on one of my long walks as an undergraduate at Harvard. I thought it was a Harvard building, so I went in to ask what it was. When the person at the front desk told me it was the Academy, I asked how I could become a member. The person took their time to explain it all to me. Attaining membership was at the same time all so close and tangible, yet so many life experiences and pathways away. That experience stands as a metaphor for what it means to pass through elite higher education spaces as a Black Southern Woman.

Black women like me spend a lot of time trying to figure out our place and our truth and where we belong. A lot of that sorting and figuring is linguistic; it is spoken, written, and signed. It is what we produce, and it is how what we produce is read, heard, and seen. Yet we have roadmaps and warnings to support us in this

process. In his 1979 essay, “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?” James Baldwin contended:

The brutal truth is that the bulk of white people in America never had any interest in educating black people, except as this could serve white purposes. It is not the black child’s language that is in question, it is not his language that is despised: It is his experience. A child cannot be taught by anyone who despises him, and a child cannot afford to be fooled. A child cannot be taught by anyone whose demand, essentially, is that the child repudiate his experience, and all that gives him sustenance, and enter a limbo in which he will no longer be black, and in which he knows that he can never become white. Black people have lost too many black children that way.<sup>2</sup>

This statement shapes my creation and spread of liberatory linguistics as a key theoretical framework and active methodology for linguistic justice. We need liberation in linguistics to repair the exclusionary and colonizing harms done in pursuit of linguistic knowledge as well as to recenter the study of language on liberation and the personal and institutional ways that language is cocreated and used. As we continue to work on institutional and structural changes in pursuit of linguistic justice, we are also in a constant process of linguistically liberating our individual selves and our collective communities.

**I**n our book *Talking College: Making Space for Black Language Practices in Higher Education*, Christine Mallinson, Mary Bucholtz, and I define *liberatory linguistics* as linguistics designed by people from marginalized and racialized communities focused on liberating their forms of communication and expression while humanizing their connections.<sup>3</sup> Liberatory linguistics stems from the fourth wave of sociolinguistics, the scholarship of dissemination, which I first started to lay out in 2016.<sup>4</sup> It is truly linguistics done by Black people rather than (presumably and sometimes even questionably) for Black people. It takes as literal both the creation of linguistics and the intended audience. We work with allies and stand in solidarity with other groups in linguistics who are focused on liberation but refuse to be intellectually or practically lumped together. Liberatory linguistics recognizes the material and intellectual profit from the linguistic value of community knowledge.

In our book, which speaks directly to Black undergraduate students and their teachers, we ask: How can we change the system to center Black students’ knowledge in the study of Black language practices? How can we ensure that Black students are fully supported educationally and holistically in ways that challenge linguistic and cultural anti-Blackness? To achieve these goals, over my fifteen-year working relationship with Christine Mallinson, we have intentionally engaged in collaborative partnerships with thousands of students and teachers to cocreate educational equity and linguistic justice in classrooms across the United States.

Our work, grounded in our backgrounds as Black and white women scholars who were born and raised in the South, centers language and culture by centering people and communities. Our most recent student-focused work tackles linguistic justice in higher education, offering a model of linguistics that puts the comprehensive educational, social, emotional, and cultural needs of Black college students first. Our Black student-centered model prepares students to be the leaders of the linguistic *new school*. Their insights and interests are at the heart of socially relevant, community-centered, participatory teaching and learning about language, culture, and education.

Thus, liberatory linguistics is more fully linguistics intentionally designed by Black people (as well as people from other communities in solidarity) and expressly focused on Black languages, language varieties, linguistic expression, and communicative practices within the ongoing struggle for Black liberation. The components of linguistic liberation include 1) self-determination, in how Black language is used and how it is studied; 2) action and resistance, as both practical and aspirational strategies; and 3) humanization, fully recognizing Black people's humanity in the ways they connect to each other linguistically, culturally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. We focus our model on linguistics, but it is relevant to all of higher education.

Liberatory linguistics also manifests for us in a current and ongoing Build and Broaden 2.0 Collaborative Research project entitled Linguistic Production, Perception, and Identity in the Career Mobility of Black Faculty in Linguistics and the Language Sciences.<sup>5</sup> Our mixed-methodological study examines how Black faculty in the language sciences and related areas linguistically navigate their professional experiences. Black faculty are skilled at navigating between varieties of English, with strong perceptual and linguistic abilities and linguistic flexibility. At the same time, linguistic inequalities may cause Black faculty to experience the structural realities of racism through the continuous evaluation of their language. These findings give us very detailed and nuanced insights into how language discrimination plays a role in the systemic underrepresentation of Black scholars in academia and how language plays a role in those processes. The study also examines professional inequalities for Black scholars in the language sciences and related areas to provide precise data that language researchers can use to broaden participation in linguistics departments and programs. The following narratives, taken from my forthcoming article with Aris Moreno Clemons and Dan Villarreal, humanize the researchers themselves and put our Blackness front and center.<sup>6</sup>

Several of the Black diasporic scholar interviewees emphasized that their personal understanding of and lived experiences surrounding Black language, identity, and culture led them to linguistics and language study as places where they could embrace their positionality as Black scholars in their academic pursuits. In her interview, Shelome Gooden described her upbringing as a Jamaican Creole

speaker. Both Creole and English were used in her school, and Gooden recalled how her first exposure to language differences was in elementary school: “[My teacher] was doing what I now know is contrastive analysis, where he would ask a question, he would receive responses from his mostly Creole-speaking students in Creole. And then he would ask us, ‘How would you say this in English?’ And then he would . . . show us these differences.” Gooden noted that these insights were foundational to her career, which proceeded from the inherent validity of Creole languages: “[My] pursuit became about not validating the language in a linguistic sense, per se, but looking for theories that can tell me something about my language.”

Similarly, Marlyse Baptista recalled: “I became a linguist because, later in life, I realized that Cape Verdean Creole, the language that I speak, was actually stigmatized.” Although she was raised in France and attended French-speaking schools, Baptista recalled that “the language that I really could connect with, for me as a marker of identity, was Creole. And to me, when I first realized in my early twenties, that actually the language was stigmatized, it made no sense to me.” Baptista explained, “That’s what brought me to linguistics because I identified the field as providing me with some scientific tools that I could use to demonstrate to myself primarily, and to others, to a community, that the language that my parents spoke is a language like any other natural language.” Linguistics provided Baptista with the tools to refute linguistic racism and marginalization and honor her and her family’s linguistic experiences.

Shenika Hankerson also recalls moments when her language, African American Language (AAL), was stigmatized in educational settings. Hankerson was raised in Romulus, Michigan, and remembers the years around 1985 to 1996 as being particularly traumatic. During this time, she was taught by several teachers who used “eradicationist” language pedagogies in the classroom. These pedagogies prevented Hankerson from using AAL in speech and writing, and when she attempted to do so, she was penalized (for instance, received lower grades). She encountered similar harmful and unjust experiences after 1996, during her college years. These experiences led Hankerson to her career in linguistics, with her research and scholarship focusing on topics such as dismantling anti-Black linguistic discrimination in language and writing pedagogy.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Aris Moreno Clemons discussed how her family ties to linguistics for Black liberatory struggles made the field and its potential for social justice meaningful, and were a key motivation to keep studying language. Growing up in Oakland, California, Clemons’ grandmother

was very involved in Stanford and politics, and she worked with Stanford. Now I’ve come to find out my Stanford aunties were also linguists. I remember very clearly them fighting for the rights of African American Language, in what would lead up to

the Oakland Ebonics debate of the 1990s. . . . They helped to start a school called the Nairobi School in East Palo Alto in California, which is, and was, the Black region. Everything was done in English, Swahili, and French. . . . [It was an] educational space for kids to learn using their own languages and using other kinds of historically Black *lingua francas*.

Years later, in graduate school, Clemons realized that her Stanford aunts were linguists Faye McNair-Knox and Mary Hoover:

I was like, wait a minute, is this Auntie Faye? Is this Auntie Mary being cited in these books? . . . Having familial ties to linguistics is what keeps me doing it because I do see the liberatory values of linguistics . . . that linguistics can be used in order to argue for liberatory frames and for pedagogical frames that support Black students and their development and rail against the machine that is academic and “appropriate” language.

The diasporic multilingualism of the Nairobi school was also a feature in the up-bringing of other Black scholars of language, like Kahdeidra Monét Martin.

Martin credits her love of language to two things: Brooklyn and Pan-Africanism. Reflecting on the quizzical look that hearers often assume when wondering where she is from, she notes, “My accent skirts the edges.” Born in Savannah, Georgia, and raised biregionally in Brooklyn, New York, and the cities of Atlanta and Savannah, Martin developed a range of multicultural and multilingual competencies at an early age. She states, “My step-father was Jamaican, and I spoke Gullah Geechee, African American Language, and Jamaican Patwa in my home. In neighborhood schools, I learned that ‘kaka,’ ‘dookey,’ and ‘doodoo’ were all names for what you definitely did not want to get caught stepping in during field trips, or you would never live it down.” In the Crown Heights and Flatbush neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Martin bolstered her linguistic repertoire with words from Puerto Rican and Dominican Spanishes and Haitian Creole, the latter of which she currently uses in prayers and conversations on a daily basis as a priestess in Vodou. These lived experiences have spurred her current theorization on Afro-phobia and convergent discourses of deviance and disability applied to African diasporic languaging and spiritual practices. “In the wake of the latest diasporic wars on social media and the newest cycle of attacks on antiracist teaching,” she says, “I think back on the Pan-African liberatory project that fortified me during my childhood and kindled my love of literature, literacy, and linguistics.”

These histories show the direct engagement that Black linguists have with research on Black language and culture for the benefit of Black people and Black communities. It contrasts with the often disembodied and detached linguistic approach that a predominantly white-oriented linguistics has set as the traditional frame of study. Through our stories, we are also creating a place for us – in the academy in general and in this Academy.

Why do we need a Black-centered model of linguistics? Because current disciplinary models, as well as academic frameworks focused on “diversity” and “inclusion,” are woefully inadequate to the task of Black liberation: Black scholars and students aren’t just “underrepresented” and “under-served” (in the parlance of academic diversity discourse) but “misrepresented” and “disserved” (to quote a graduate student interviewed by Kendra Calhoun, Mary Bucholtz, and me), both in linguistics and in the academy generally.<sup>8</sup> Our model of liberatory linguistics aligns with the Demand for Black Linguistic Justice, written by a team of Black language scholars who wrote the CCCC position statement on anti-Black racism and Black linguistic justice, April Baker-Bell, Bonnie J. Williams-Farrier, Davena Jackson, Lamar Johnson, Carmen Kynard, and Teaira McMurtry.<sup>9</sup> We are inviting ourselves in as we resist.

When it’s all said and done, liberatory linguistics aligns with multicultural education, culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies, and critical theories. It emphasizes needed pedagogical innovations that facilitate the spread of information about Black language and culture to Black people in service of the liberation of users of Black languages, varieties, and language practices. It takes a broad, transdisciplinary, Black-centered sociocultural linguistic approach to humanistic inquiry.

Liberatory linguistics advances self-determination in Black language and communication through “applied” and “translational” – that is, immediately useful and socially beneficial – research, as well as community-based participatory methodologies. It involves collaborative efforts that center Black students and faculty in all aspects of the research, particularly faculty at HBCUs. It privileges modes of scholarly communication and public dissemination that are directly accessible to Black scholars, students, and the Black community and use culturally relevant language and ideas. Mallinson’s and my first coauthored texts – *Understanding English Language Variation in U.S. Schools* in 2010 and *We Do Language: English Language Variation in the Secondary English Classroom* in 2014 – were directly addressed to in-classroom educators to help support them in the challenging task of supporting students home languages and varieties while helping students be successful in contemporary educational systems, which are often ignorant of and even aggressively negative toward the use of language varieties in educational contexts.<sup>10</sup> Each text engaged directly with educators and students as they dealt with the linguistic tensions they faced in schools and communities.

Liberatory linguistics also imagines a liberated expressive future for Black people in the academy in general, in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in particular, and in the world. It stands with work on liberatory education – and abolition, fugitivity, and emancipation – to say, “In liberating you, I also liberate myself.”<sup>11</sup> This is a tangible call as academic leaders grapple with the reality that historical looting has left people from unrepresented backgrounds lower on their

strategic academic priority lists because they aren't the most prominent donors; their rhetoric walks that delicate balance. And now, we must balance with the race-ignorant rulings by the majority of the Supreme Court. What is diversity and inclusion work without a comprehensive budget and the support of the law? And because of that balance, we are witnessing institutions and organizations craft statements condemning police brutality and anti-Black racism while ignoring the anti-Black skeletons in their own classrooms. In this collection and in our work, we are calling the question, which forces us to face the imbalance. These guiding challenges help frame how students, instructors, and other readers can use this entire volume – including white allies in high-resource spaces, who must also take up this charge – to advance racial, linguistic, and educational justice.

Order, predominately white people constructed and dominated models of academic success that relied on the values of competition, individual work, and narrow notions of excellence and merit. New models, such as the *Imagining America* consortium, rely on the values of intellectual community, collaboration, and an emphasis on socially beneficial research.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, white supremacy preserves old values within the academy, including in the discipline of linguistics. These values privilege the research interests of the over-represented, overserved majority of influential white scholars, framing them as the most pressing theoretical questions. Everyone else, and particularly misrepresented Black scholars and disserved Black students – whose home, community, and heritage languages and varieties are often the focus of colonizing research – are then expected to orient their work to these questions, rather than setting their own research agendas. “Academic freedom” is often touted as a scholarly right, but in our Black-centered model, academic freedom does not exist without Black liberation. In the old model, research on pedagogy that involves direct community engagement is devalued, cast as unintellectual and “applied,” and therefore unworthy, unscientific, and outside the bounds of “real,” “theoretical” scholarship. These values, in turn, directly support structural barriers that maintain white supremacy and demand assimilation in the academy, erase the intellectual contributions of generations of Black scholars, and prevent social change.

Our model of linguistics is a liberatory effort in response to this history and ongoing reality – a direct intervention and a value shift. Black education is a key tenet of our liberation model. As John Baugh has compellingly argued, language has been central to the “educational malpractice” facing African American students from the slavery era to the present day.<sup>13</sup> Fortunately, old academic hierarchies are now crumbling as the next generation of Black students works collectively and courageously, in solidarity with faculty and other allies, demanding greater change from institutions of higher education. It's a wonderful time to be bold and active, and, in the words of the late Congressman John Lewis, to make “good trouble.”



This volume represents the open, direct conversations about liberation that linguists have been having. Liberatory linguistics frees our research from old values and enables students and scholars to do work that is valued, endorsed, and needed by their own communities. And our conversation is broad. So how do we disrupt all of this and create linguistic space in the academy and in linguistics?

**I**n my engagement with linguistics faculty and students across the world, I have been promoting a three-stage model of addressing inclusion challenges in the language sciences. The model recognizes the current pressure between existing inclusion models and the nature of academic relationships.

- The STEM model: The STEM model follows National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health inclusion model directives. From a critical race theory perspective, the STEM model follows an interest convergence model that relies on adherence to current government mandates and narratives of “broadening participation,” in which diversity and inclusion are good for the individual and good for the state.
- The racial value model: This stage in the model emphasizes social justice and the intellectual values of scholars presently in linguistics from groups that are underrepresented, particularly in highly resourced linguistics departments and programs. This intellectual valuing is at the heart of intellectual liberation, and requires more inclusion in publication and hiring in particular. A focus on racial valuing doesn’t just call the question; it reframes and reauthors it. It asks, what questions do Black scholars who study language have and how can scholars comprehensively center their questions?
- The partnership model: The third aspect of the model states that to create genuinely interdisciplinary models of linguistic justice and liberation, it is essential to work with neighboring disciplines and research areas and with racial/ethnic and gender studies programs. In this volume, the essays by Aris Moreno Clemons and Jessica A. Grieser and by Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores give thorough examples of the work that happens when the study of language overlaps with Black feminism and Latinx studies.<sup>14</sup> To make this succeed, we need all of you to engage with us and our work to make it stronger.

The key to the model is active work. Our theories will only take us so far. An article I and my colleagues wrote for *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America* in 2018 led to the first-ever statement on race for the Linguistic Society of America, which was adopted by the association.<sup>15</sup> We drew on this statement to write a subsequent theoretical paper, “Toward Racial Justice in Linguistics,” which inspired a set of published responses on racial equity in the field.<sup>16</sup> That work then led to

the forthcoming Oxford University Press edited collections *Inclusion in Linguistics* and *Decolonizing Linguistics*.<sup>17</sup>

Conceptualized as a two-volume set, *Decolonizing Linguistics* and *Inclusion in Linguistics* establish frameworks for the discipline's professional growth and create direct roadmaps for scholars to establish innovative agendas for integrating their teaching, research, and outreach in ways that will transform linguistic theory and practice for years to come. *Decolonizing Linguistics* focuses on how to decolonize linguists' theories, methodologies, and practices. *Inclusion in Linguistics* presents theories, resources, and models for achieving inclusion and broader participation in linguistics. Both volumes center social justice as an urgent priority for linguistics as a discipline. Forty contributions were received across both volumes, all of which have gone through an intentionally inclusive process of development, workshopping, and revision that we adopted in deliberate contrast to the traditional paradigm of scholarly writing, editing, revision, and anonymous critique, which is often isolated and isolating, as well as susceptible to processes of injustice and exclusion.

This intentionally inclusive scholarly conversation has included colleagues in applied linguistics as well. The 2022 *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* focused on social justice in applied linguistics. Nelson Flores and I noted that the volume was brave in the level of content and disruption it offered:

When thinking about the role of linguists in promoting social justice, it is tempting to focus our attention solely on what we can contribute to the world “out there.” Indeed, in light of the many struggles for justice and liberation throughout the world, it is easy to see the urgency in wanting linguistics to contribute to social transformation. Equally important, however, is to recognize that the study of language has been shaped by the world and that oppression doesn't simply exist “out there” but also in research and practice in higher education.<sup>18</sup>

We also note that our next task is to think about how we help each other both in our scholarly development and in our local context across experiences. If we don't, we risk reinventing and rewriting the wheel in our scholarship, even with the nuances of local realities and nuanced solutions that undergird this new work. At the end of the day, this work is meant to sustain and support learners worldwide. Being explicit about that mission and who we need to reach to make it happen should be our guiding principle as we continue the work of this tremendous volume.

The education and inclusion of new and emergent scholars are central to the model. For too long, introductory courses in linguistics have been white-centered by default. By centering Black language and culture throughout the course and tailoring content to the knowledge, interests, and educational experiences of the students in the class, my colleagues and I designed an introductory linguistics course that was more accessible to and equitable for Black students as part of a larger effort

to create a more liberatory linguistics. The course was grounded in our experiential knowledge as Black people living in the United States as much as peer-reviewed research on Black students' experiences and barriers to equitable education. In our description of the course and explanation of our pedagogical choices, we highlight how moving away from teaching to an imagined (white) linguistics student and directly to Black students forces instructors to confront the anti-Blackness – and white supremacy more broadly – that shapes their teaching choices.<sup>19</sup>

It is time to move away from simply advancing linguistic scholarship and make the intellectual leap toward research that has articulated immediate tangible benefits for marginalized communities and communities of color. That model is needed now more than ever – people are dying in the damn streets. And we need to be the audience for our own work, examining our own campuses to discover answers to the following questions:

1. What is taught to linguistics students about education, culture, and diversity?
2. What is taught to education students about language, culture, and diversity?
3. What is taught to everyone else?

In 2009, Christine Mallinson and I described the dissemination of linguistic knowledge in the professional development of teachers, where contrastive analysis (of African American English versus Standardized English) plays a major role.<sup>20</sup> In 2010, we presented a linguistic awareness model that is designed to facilitate the sharing of knowledge about language variation between researchers and community members.<sup>21</sup> The goals of the model are to:

1. Partner with community members, particularly in underserved areas where universities may not already have such partnerships, including K–12 schools and others who provide for the educational, social, and health welfare of the community;
2. Communicate sociolinguistic information about language variation to community members in ways that are effectively tailored to their skills and their needs;
3. Disseminate accurate linguistic knowledge to community members, both to train them in the science of linguistics and to help them better serve dialectically diverse students;
4. Assess the results of providing linguistic information to community members; and
5. Apply these findings to public policy and social justice models.

We contend that more effort and energy should be spent on disseminating relevant information that has already been gathered about language variation, par-

ticularly when integrated with existing literature from education, sociology, psychology, and other related fields. Researchers must share knowledge while also adding to this body of information by continuing to document and analyze how language variation interacts in real-world educational settings within the contexts of local communities. This volume contributes to that work.

Linguists and related scholars should also be more involved in creating easy-to-implement and realistic language-based strategies to help educators and students facing larger social and educational issues. These strategies must be both linguistically and educationally informed; that is, they must be oriented toward helping students understand sociolinguistic concepts and be practical enough to implement in everyday settings.

**F**uture research centered on liberation should have a focus on the study of language across disciplines and the academy rather than just within linguistics and related areas. We see such rich strands of research across scholarly traditions come together in the essays in this volume. We've had enough basic research extensions in the study of language at this point, such that to try to stay within a small technical band now, people are wading into the dangers of re-researching and rewriting previous work in an attempt to stay intellectually and technically relevant, as they try to stay apolitical enough to appease tech giants they don't even know. Our model, as exemplified by the essays in this volume, is to decolonize this work, and our approach is one of direct refusal and of recreation of our language ideologies and practices. All linguistics needs to be applied with an articulated and transparent purpose for the work.<sup>22</sup> As Aris Moreno Clemons, Dan Villarreal, and I write in a forthcoming article:

The 4th wave of sociolinguistics, as Charity Hudley first outlined in 2013, notes that scholarly communication must be the focus of our needed research because our people are out here dying in the streets, and we're losing our fundamental civil rights; as we write. As scholars & communities of color, in particular, we must be the audience for and arbiters of our own work. The stakes are too high at this moment, after everything we have been through, to revert to some delicate dance that relies on the niceties of the technicalities of consonants & vowels.

Liberatory linguistics is alive at this moment. Liberatory linguistics is scientific, but it is also lyrical. It is our community and our soul.

Liberatory linguistics pays homage to a long lineage of scholars who have persistently asked: who is all this linguistic work for? And it gives the center intellectual stage to those who have been punished and ignored even for the asking.

I'm writing fire fueled by the heat of climate change in California and my mother's spirit, magic, and memory. I'm writing for the American Academy right now under Paula Giddings, who is making history as the current chair of the or-

ganization's council. Her monumental work *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (1984) established a frame to which this work is responding.

I'm riding the fourth wave of sociolinguistics and laying it all the way down for my people.

Liberatory linguistics extricates, but it also remembers. It says that you have a place here because I am here.

I'm the first Black woman to edit *Dædalus*. Who got next?

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Calvert Watkins, “Language and Its History,” *Dædalus* 102 (3) (Summer 1973): 99–111, [https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/Dædalus\\_Su1973\\_Calvert-Watkins\\_Language-and-Its-History.pdf](https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/Dædalus_Su1973_Calvert-Watkins_Language-and-Its-History.pdf). I am so grateful to my undergraduate advisor Calvert Watkins, whose essay “Language and Its History” appeared in the 1973 *Dædalus* volume on *Language as A Human Problem*. I want to thank Kahdeidra Martin and Christine Mallinson for their careful feedback on this essay.
- <sup>2</sup> James Baldwin, “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?” *The New York Times*, July 29, 1979, [https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-english.html?source=post\\_page](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-english.html?source=post_page).
- <sup>3</sup> Anne H. Charity Hudley, Christine Mallinson, and Mary Bucholtz, *Talking College: Making Space for Black Language Practices in Higher Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2022).
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