

A Response to the Response to the Responses

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Many senior linguists, particularly about 25% of senior White linguists, are still persistently telling their students and their junior colleagues that if they do work in linguistics that is inclusive of culture and community work, they won't be successful. I have seen it and heard it first hand as I give talks across departments and have follow up sessions with grad students from around the world.

That's a racist pragmatic argument that relies on assimilatory replication models of academia that are designed to maintain white supremacy and prevent social change. Such models are born out of intellectual greed and fear. They also ignore the scholarly and intellectual contributions of generations of scholars from underrepresented backgrounds, and in that way, it is an intellectually violent form of erasure.

In addition, the information isn't even accurate. It may have been accurate for a larger number of schools at one point, but that number of schools is getting smaller as people get less racist and exclusive.

A more accurate statement is that a professor may not want their student to be known for a kind of work because that reflects on them. But the reality is when that student gets into their own job, they have great latitude to study and do whatever they want. In 2020, the worst discipline policing you may experience may actually be as a graduate student before you find your own scholarly community.

There are obvious parallels between what is going on nationally and what is going on in linguistics. It's not a coincidence. From the White House, to corporations, to universities to disciplines including linguistics, old White men are freaking out as they realize that we're not propping them up anymore or giving them any undeserved props.

The pyramid scheme hierarchy that undergirded injustice for so long is crumbling because we are collectively less afraid, and there are a lot of us. It's a wonderful time to be bold, to be active, and to make good trouble.

The pyramid is reliant on the idea that teaching and outreach are unworthy, unscientific, and extra. The things Black people need—better teaching practices—a focus on service that strengthens an institution's ability even to be inclusive have all been devalued. This devaluation is an important narrative to maintain to keep a hold on power structures. In short, the hard, daily work of educational justice has been devalued in the academy in service of the maintenance of White supremacy. Most of the scholars who work against this are in the field of education—which has also been devalued to the point where there aren't even undergraduate majors in education at most universities. So, when Black scholars and our allies articulate our values, they

are immediately decried by that 25% of mostly White senior people to be invalid and incompetent.

So once again, why is your linguistics so small?

One of the reasons that linguistics is so small because of the money that has been infused into it from computer science and artificial intelligence. And that money was often made on shaky political and corporate ground.

We need to further interrogate how linguistics, computer science, and artificial intelligence overlap. One key tactic that I have witnessed is aggressive attempts is to make social justice facing scholarship and reasoning and logic look weak. That then serves the purpose of making oppression look like the only logical option.

Linguists have to have much more of a conversation in linguistics about the power and economics across the vastness of intersectional racism that we are witnessing and participating in.

Yet people are still asking me directly-- what does all of this messaging have to do with linguistics. Even still. People are still asking me: "what about the value of basic science?" "Why a focus on my work Black people" I want to make clear that these weren't real questions but meant to unnerve and undermine in public spaces. And these events happened at major universities, and that isn't just intellectual interchange at this point. It is intimidation. So, let me explain how that plays out:

Graduate students and newer professors, including super progressives, are the ones calling for change. Yet over time, many of them will leave linguistics or be forced or weeded out of graduate programs or won't be hired into faculty positions.

That exodus leads to the mitigation of risk, particularly for vulnerable faculty. The vulnerable faculty group includes contingent faculty as well as faculty who are pre-tenure and those who have had issues in their reviews. But because of the aforementioned value differences, issues can always be found- those in power can always find something wrong.

Linguistics does not yet have a plan for how discrimination and inappropriate behavior even handled. This lack of a plan, in turn, leads to a lazy, willful ignorance, particularly on the part of faculty who are happy to have a job and do what they do. Just like Martin Luther King Jr.'s moderate Whites, they are the bulk of people who keep this system going. They, not the upper 25%, are the bulk of the problem. As my students say, they want to play Sudoku all day despite whatever else is going on in the world, and they feel that either that is their birthright or everything else is beyond their pay grade. But in reality, many of them, especially those who are the most entrenched against social change, have contracts and consulting to do work that isn't immediately apparent, so their face forward puzzle making is all the more baffling to new linguists who enter the discipline.

The two most outwardly dangerous groups after that are the power elite. The power elite consists of faculty who are able to monetize their careers or teach at elite universities. These faculty run the LSA and have the power to make political decisions across constituents. They have reasons to defend their elite status and to maintain their top of the heap power dynamic. In addition, there are those who are jockeying for elite status by co-opting progressive causes or misrepresenting their own cultures or communities in order to align with White people in power positions. To them, I say people died for your right to exploit the system in such a way. As Titus Kaphar warns us:

A MacArthur won't protect you.

A Yale degree won't protect you

Your well-spoken plea will not change hundreds of years of institutionalized hate.

You will never be as eloquent as Baldwin,

you will never be as kind as King...

<https://time.com/5847487/george-floyd-time-cover-titus-kaphar/>

If we can't have open, explicit conversations about what is going on, then there is no realistic path for greater inclusion in linguistics. We'll just be doing surface-level assimilatory work, which may be more damaging than just abandoning linguistics as a framework and engaging in other intellectual approaches that are bold enough to confront these issues directly.

Despite all of my experiences, however, I am an eternal optimist. The courage and collective intellect of linguists who are working for justice and inclusion is growing, and their actions and publications are changing the course of our discipline forever. I'm glad to have lived to see it.