Language Bias Workshop

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Objectives

You will leave today's session with:

- An increased ability to recognize **language bias**

- A greater understanding of the **role of language** in shaping **people's identity**

- A greater sense of the **effects of language bias**

Introductions

1. Your name

2. Pronouns (**optional**)

3. What is your role at UW (staff, student, faculty, post-doc etc.,)

4. What word or words would you use to describe your linguistic identity…? (**optional**)

   a. Think about: your language or languages, dialects, the way you speak, your accent, your ethnicity…

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Introduction

- Universities have pledged to increase diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) on their campuses yet plans for DEI often overlook language beyond the lexical level (e.g., pronouns, dispreferred labels)

    - e.g., UW statement on DEI:
      "Our goal is to foster a welcoming climate that is accessible, inclusive, and equitable across our research, healthcare, virtual, and campus environments."
      Washington's Diversity Blueprint 2022 – 2026

- Research has demonstrated that linguistic features play a role in discrimination as they relate to variables such as race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, geography,…

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Words!

There are many resources available for thinking about which words are appropriate to use…

- [Accessibility at UW](#)
- [UW IT inclusive language guide](#)
- [UW equitable language guide](#)

Yet, none of these resources focus on different types of language users…

Inclusive language about language?!

QUICK TIPS:

- **Avoid the terms 'native' - 'non-native'**
  These terms emerged in the 19th century to contrast 'home-born English' with 'immigrant English'
  - Reflect **unjust ideologies**: linguistic competence centers on the fact that one is born into the language
  - Perpetuate **racism**, **social exclusion**, and **inequality**: native speakers are the best models. This can lead to discriminatory practices (e.g., vs teacher employment)

- **'First language users' - 'non-first language users'** (focus: chronological order of onset, general use,...)

- **'User' is preferable than 'speaker'**
  - Language is not just used orally
  - This term is more inclusive towards sign language users

Using the right words is a good way to start, but there is so much more work to do...

Dewaele, Bak, & Ortega, 2020; Holliday, 2005

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Linguistic discrimination in the campus environment

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Language is an area where society seems to be more tolerant of bias.

Think about…

- Users of languages other than English
- Users of non-mainstream dialects
- Language features related to gender, class, region, etc.

Subtle forms of discrimination regarding language are equally as damaging as other types

Holliday & Squires 2021

'Personally mediated racism'

Charity Hudley (2017), in order to capture the diversity and subtlety of racism, has described three types of racism:

- Institutional racism
  - how "government, corporations, religious organizations, and other entities have racist practices that allow for differential access to goods, services, and opportunities"
- Internal racism
  - "the acceptance by members of stigmatized races of negative messages about their own abilities and intrinsic value"
- **Personally mediated racism**
  - "the specific prejudicial attitudes involving differential assumptions about abilities, motives, and intentions of others according to race."

Linguistic discrimination in the campus environment

Holliday & Squires (2021) show, in their study of Black university students, that "campus climate includes linguistic climate, undergirded by raciolinguistic ideologies."

- Black students described adjusting the way they speak to be "both active and tiring work" that Holliday and Squires define "sociolinguistic labor"

- They feel like they need to work harder to prove their intelligence

- This labor is a response to the linguistic climate; students perform it to prevent activating negative black stereotypes but it is also for the comfort and ultimate benefit of their white peers (and instructors)

Holliday & Squires 2021: 427

Research on UW campus

OBJECTIVE:

What is the link between students' linguistic background, their emotions, and belonging in class?

METHOD:

Combination of quantitative & qualitative data collected through a survey

- Demographic questions
- Language background questions
- Course enrollment
- **Engagement** in class – adapted from Handelsmann et al., 2005
- **Boredom** in class – adapted from Li, Dewaele, & Hu, 2021
- **Enjoyment** of class – adapted from Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2021
- **Anxiety** in class – adapted from Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2016
- **Belonging** in class – inspired from UW Climate Survey, Wilson & Secker, 2015, Wise 2022
- Open-ended questions exploring **experiences of discrimination** and all the above

Panicacci & Resnik, in progress

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Instruments

Belonging (α = .832, n = 15) (1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree') - Wilson & Secker (2015) & climate surveys

- Focus: perceived belonging, feeling valued, socialization with peers, teacher's attention to diversity

Enjoyment scale (α = .835, n = 8) – (1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree') Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff (2020)

- Focus: teacher appreciation (friendly, supportive, encouraging), social and personal enjoyment (laughing in class, feeling proud of accomplishments)

Anxiety scale (α = .795, n = 8) – (1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree') - Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014)

- Focus: anxiety in class, lack of confidence or fear when speaking in class

Boredom (α = .79, n = 8) – scale (1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree') - Dewaele, Botes, & Greiff (2021)

- Focus: level of boredom in class

Engagement (α = .926, n = 23) – (1 'not characteristic of me' to 5 ' very characteristic of me') Handelsman & al. (2005)

- Focus: skills, participation/interaction, emotional engagement, and performance

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Demographics

186 UW Students recruited through Psychology pool systems

- 61% Females, 37% Males, 2% Non-Binary, 0% Other

- 18-38 years old (M = 20, SD = 2.5)

- 49 % USA born, 51% born in another country (31% – China)

- Race: 58.7% Asian, 22.8% White, 19% Multiracial (3.2% Asian-White), 4.9% Black/AA, 0.5% American Indian, 5% Other (1.1% Latinx)

- Ethnicity: 51 more in-depth description of their racial identity

  17% 'Chinese' (also paired with other descriptors, e.g. 'American'), 4.85 'Korean', 4.8% 'Hispanic/Latinx' or 'South American', 2.7% 'Native American', 1.1% 'Middle Eastern'

The 'hidden language variety' at UW

186 UW Students recruited through Psychology pool systems

- 103 First language (L1) users of English - **83 English Non-first language (LX) users of English**

- English self-reported proficiency (*1 least proficient – 5 highly proficient*): **M = 4.38**, SD = .856

- L1s: 43.6% One L1 (58% of cases = English), **47.3% Two L1s, 9.1% Three L1s**

- LXs: **41.9% None**, 40.3% One LX (44.1% of cases = English), 14% Two LXs, 2.7% Three LXs, 1.1% Four LXs

- English variety/accent: **18.3% reported speaking a variety of English** (e.g., Pidgin, Southern, Midwestern, Afro-American Vernacular English)

- English Socialization (*use - social networks & contexts: 1 never – 5 all the time*) : **M = 4.16**, SD = 1.12

- Exposure to English: 13.4% 0-3 years, 12.4% 3-5 years, 11.3% 5-10 years, 10.8 % 10-15 years, **52.2% life**

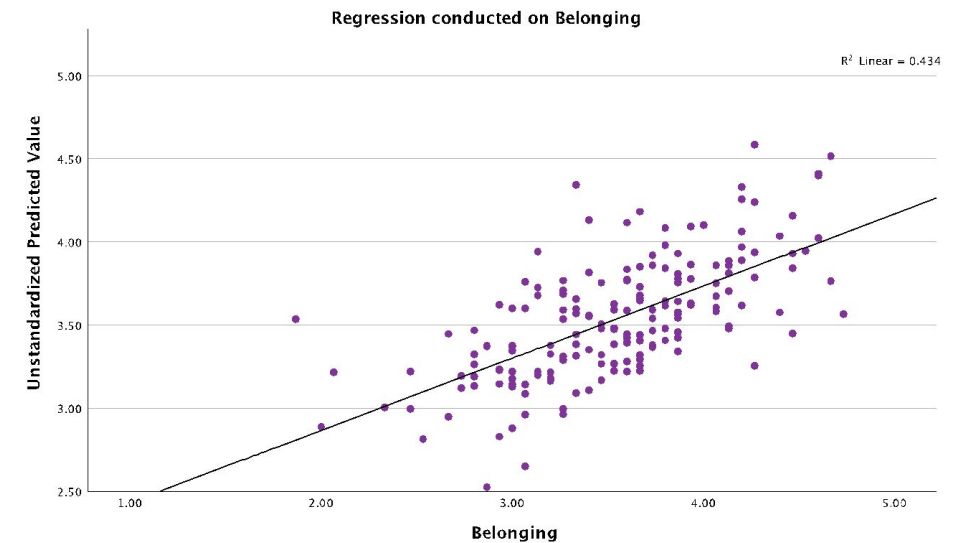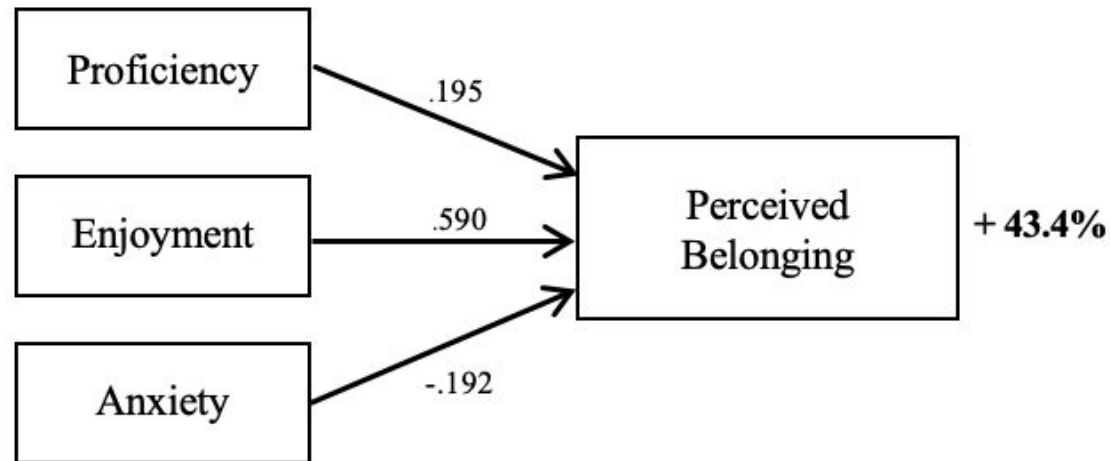- Exposure to other languages: **52.2% = Yes**, 47.8% = No

Results

First language users of English reported **lower levels of anxiety (- 43.8%) when interacting in class** and **higher levels of perceived belonging (+ 33.9%)**
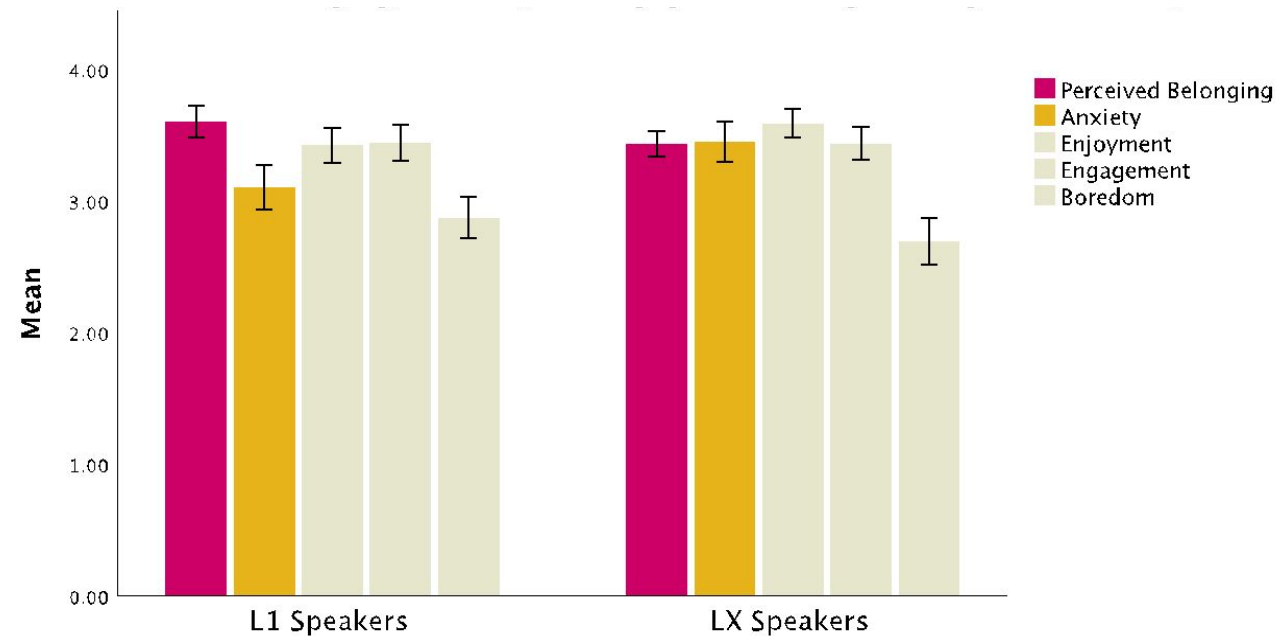
Results

English proficiency, enjoyment, and anxiety in class predict students' **belonging** (change = 43.4%)

In sum…

Students with non-mainstream linguistic backgrounds:

- Feel less enjoyment and more anxiety in class

Students who feel confident of their language skills:

- Feel more enjoyment and less anxiety in class
- Feel like they belong

Group Activity

In small groups spend the next **ten** minutes reading your assigned scenario(s) and discussing the following questions:

1. **What is the language discrimination that's occurring here?**

2. **How might it affect the people involved?**

We will then reconnect and discuss each scenario all together. Please choose a 'team captain' to share your group's thoughts!

Scenario 1

A student complains in the course evaluation about their instructor who uses English as a second language:

"This professor has a foreign accent that makes it hard to understand them. If instructors are not understood because they speak broken or heavily accented English, their teaching skills don't matter much. Even the prof's slides sometimes had grammatical mistakes! This is unacceptable in college.

Sometimes I am not sure the prof actually understood my questions. They suggested we visit them during office hours for help, but I don't think this is ok, because it means that I have to make the effort to visit their office to understand what they tried (and failed) to effectively communicate in class. UW should check instructors' English proficiency the same way they check international students' English proficiency before admitting them in the program."

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Scenario 2

A first-generation college student writes about their experience in a class:

"I feel like in this class everyone is expected to have a certain vocabulary range. I am a native English speaker, but also a first-generation college student and I attended a public school. I often feel very inferior to other students who have had a more privileged education because my English is not as academic and refined as theirs. Sometimes I am socially excluded because of that. In class there are definitely people who use "upper-class English" and people from other backgrounds.

A student once even corrected my English in a class discussion. The instructor didn't say anything about it, and this made me uncomfortable… Last quarter, some students were not thrilled to be assigned to work with me on a group project and did not let me do any of the writing. They told me they were worried that how I write would lower their grade. I didn't report this stuff to the instructor because he uses proper English too and probably wouldn't understand. Sometimes he would use words I've never heard of before. Once I asked what he meant and his response made me feel embarrassed so I never asked again. I feel like nobody else is struggling and I'm afraid that if I can't catch up to the kind of English people here use, I'm going to fall behind."

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Scenario 3

A non-white member of staff writes about their experience at work in the climate survey:

"It's hard for me to socialize with anyone at work because there's nobody else here with my ethnic background, and I don't feel like I belong. I think people socialize with those who are similar to them. Some people talk to me very slowly or condescendingly, as if I am uneducated or I cannot understand English. English is the only language I know!

Others feel the need to correct the way I say things, like 'you mean this…?' I always ignore them and think the problem is theirs because they understand me just fine if they can correct me!

I know people find the way I speak funny… I tried to change how I speak, even if it feels wrong… like rejecting my ethnic identity. Then most people look at me confused when I try to speak like them, as if I shouldn't speak English the same way they do… as if that's 'their language'. Like they question my ethnic identity if I try to speak like they do, but if I don't change the way I speak, they make fun of me… I don't know what to do."

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Scenario 4

A member of staff welcomes a new employee at work:

A: How's your first week going so far?

B: Not bad! I really like this job. Everyone is very helpful, and Seattle is such a gorgeous city!

A: Oh… your accent is… I didn't know you were not American! Where are you from?

B: Yeah, uh… I am British…

A: Yeah! I was going to say! You sound like Harry Potter a bit! Do you like it here?

B: I have been in the States for over 15 years… I like it, yes. My family moved a lot, you know.

A: Wait… now I am confused. It's weird… your accent. So you are British? I have a friend from London, but he sounds a bit different… you don't sound British-British…

B: Well, I was born in Italy and spent my childhood there...

A: Oh yes! Definitely! I can hear the 'Italian'!

B: I don't really speak Italian anymore, but I guess my Italian roots must still be there…

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Students' voices

"The institution has created an environment with very high standards. Everyone has a really wide range of vocabulary, even I as a native English speaker who attended a crappy public school district sometimes feel very inferior to other students who have had a more privileged education." (male, 21, Asian/Native Hawaiian, First language user)

"I often feel isolated since the classes are so big and refrain from asking questions." (female, 19, Asian/White, First language user)

"Some people would simply not talk to you when you seem not to have perfect English." (female, 22, Asian, Non-first language user)

"Hiding my accents is a more effective strategy to "stay out of the trouble" than confronting these situations directly." (male, 21, Asian, Non-first language user)

"When I was little, *having trouble speaking English I used to be ridiculed.* My mom also urged me to speak English as it meant passing my classes […] I subsequently lost my native language. My mom got mad at me for losing my language. But it was her and *the American public education system that forced English down my throat so much that I lost my native language. I didn't report these incidents because how could I? It's just the curriculum. I needed to learn the language obviously. Even if it meant losing my own."* (female, 21, Filipina, Non-first language use)

Results on Campus

STUDENTS:

- **69.3%** (half of these use English as L1) **said their level of English negatively affects their performance in class** and **31% think instructors could put more effort in making sure they feel at ease in class**

  Suggestions: Multimodal learning, use of chat & subtitles, time to prepare responses vs spontaneous group discussions, slower pace, provide summaries & reviews, smaller classes

- **64.2%** (40% of these use English as L1) **said their level of English negatively affects their inclusion in class**

  Suggestions: Clubs to improve language, smaller & diverse group discussions, sharing experience with others, ask questions anonymously

- **21.6%** (half of these use English as L1) **said they experienced language discrimination – None reported**

  Reason: not worth reporting, hard to report, used to discrimination, unsure about it

INSTRUCTORS / TAs:

Those that use a non-mainstream variety of English or aren't first language users of English encounter employment discrimination, have lower evaluation scores, and feel like their teaching skills are often questioned
<div align="right">Panicacci & Resnik; Holliday, 2005</div>

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Tips for Challenging Discriminatory Language

(adapted from The Diana Award Anti-bullying Campaign)

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ask questions	responding to the language with a question, such as "what does that mean?", or "Can you explain that to me?"
challenge the language not the person	If someone has said something unkind, it doesn't mean that they are an unkind person Ask "How do you think that word might make someone feel?"
mention how it makes you/someone feel	if they have said something that makes you feel uncomfortable, let them know
help them understand	an educational approach to what has happened might help someone see things differently

Resources at UW

Bias reporting tool - Report incidents, created in partnership with the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, the Office of Student Life, and the president's Race & Equity Initiative

It does not include language

Basis	Count
Race	34
Ethnicity	23
General Climate	16
National Origin	13
Gender	12
Employee/Coworker Relations	8
Retaliation	8
Accommodation Request	6
Disability	6
HR Policy	6
Religion/Creed	6
Age	5
Sexual Harassment	5
Gender Identity/Expression	4
Sexual Orientation	3
Pregnancy/Family Responsibilities	2
Childcare/Eldercare	1
Marital Status/Family Status	1
Ex-Offender Status	0
Veteran Status	0

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Resources at UW

- **Associate Dean for Equity, Justice and Inclusion** - Maya Angela Smith

- **Linguistic Bias Working Group – lxbias@uw.edu**

- **Counseling Center** - support for students that have been impacted by racial trauma

- **Race and Equity at the UW** - Confronting individual bias and racism, transforming institutional policies and practices, accelerating systemic change

- **Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center -** The largest college cultural center in the nation. It serves and empower historically marginalized and underrepresented students by providing educational and cultural opportunities for holistic development

In conclusion

- **University faculty in particular play key roles in reproducing these ideologies**, as both 'language workers' (Urciuoli & LaDousa, 2013) and 'language authorities' (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

- **To provide equity** for all faculty, staff and students, linguistic discrimination must be addressed.

- **Language must be part of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging activity**
  - A key step is recognize our bias and the detrimental effects of our bias
  - Individuals must see a need for changing their behavior before they will do it

Takeaway points

- Everyone uses language in different ways, but all languages, dialects, and varieties of languages are equal and valuable.

- Language is a crucial part of people's identity, denying people the chance to speak their language variety means denying their identity.

- Language bias causes not only psychological and emotional harm, but also economic and academic disadvantages.

- We all need to make an effort to understand each other: we should not put the burden exclusively on people with a minoritized linguistic background.

- We must provide accessible resources for everyone to succeed, regardless of their linguistic background.

Thank you!

UW Linguistic Bias Working Group: lxbias@uw.edu

Diversity: We must acknowledge the value of diverse languages and varieties of those languages on campus.

- Users of languages other than English or so-called 'standard' English face multiple barriers to academic success and inclusion on campus.

Equity: We must recognize that all languages and varieties of languages are equal.

- Users of marginalized languages or varieties of languages encounter discrimination based on society's lack of knowledge of and/or value of their variety. This may be realized in the assessment of written work, face to face interactions, appointments to jobs, etc.

- We must address the campus community responsibility with respect to linguistic power imbalances *off campus* as well (e.g., decolonizing study abroad programs, English proficiency measures for incoming students, competency-based credits for less commonly taught languages).

Inclusion: We must welcome the use of all varieties of language in the campus community.

- All members of the campus community have the ability to acknowledge and understand the role of language in personal identity and to deny this is to cause damage.

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Feedback Survey

Thank you for your time, energy, and thoughtful discussions today.

This was our first workshop on this topic. We would love your feedback to improve our future workshops and events!

https://forms.gle/fg7vDyFAb3VMuzp97