

Language as part of the diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda

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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 for some time that salient linguistic features play a role in discrimination (as they relate to variables such as race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, geography, etc).

Linguistic discrimination in the campus environment

- Speakers of languages other than English but also speakers 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 of society”
 - 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.”

'Personally mediated racism' (cont.)

Holliday & Squires (2021)

Sociolinguistic experiences of black American students in 2 higher education settings

- Negative messages about language can be experienced as microaggressions
- Speakers feel like they need to work harder to prove their intelligence
- The experience of 'stereotype threat' (being at risk of negative stereotyping based on their language) is possible in every campus context (in class, at work, in dorms, online, etc.)

Research on UW campus (Panicacci & Resnik)

OBJECTIVE: investigate students' emotions, engagement, and inclusion in class in relation to their linguistic background

METHOD: combination of quantitative & qualitative data collected through a survey

- Demographic questions
- Language background
- 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
- Inclusion & socialisation in class – inspired from UW Climate Survey & others
- Inclusion attitudes
- Open-ended questions exploring experiences of discrimination and all the above

Panicacci & Resnik

Department of Psychology, UW - Department of Linguistics, Queen Mary University of London
Department of English, University College of Teacher Education, Vienna/Krems

Research on UW campus (Panicacci & Resnik)

Demographics

- 186 UW Students recruited through pool systems
- 61% Females, 37% Males, 2% Non-Binary, 0 Other
- Average age=20 years
- 49 % USA, 51% born in other country (31% – China)
- 47% two L1s
- 55% L1 speakers of English and 46% LX users of English

Research on UW campus (Panicacci & Resnik)

'emotion'	Defined by	Based on
Inclusion	sense of belonging to the class, feeling valued, social engagement with peers, and instructors' attention to diversity	standard climate surveys distributed to educational institutions, including the UW
Anxiety	lack of confidence when speaking in class	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCAS) scale (Horwitz and Cope 1986)
Enjoyment	'teacher appreciation' (whether the teacher is perceived as friendly, supportive, and encouraging), 'social enjoyment' (e.g., 'We laugh a lot'), and 'personal enjoyment' (e.g., 'In my English class, I feel proud of my accomplishments')	Short Form Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2020)
Engagement	skills engagement, participation/interaction engagement, emotional engagement, and performance engagement	Student Class Engagement Questionnaire (SCEQ) (Handelsman, Briggs, Sallivan, & al., 2005)
Boredom	Level of boredom in class	Foreign Language Boredom (FLB) subscale (Dewaele, Botes, & Greiff 2021)

Research on UW campus (Panicacci & Resnik)

- Inclusion: Ratings for perceived inclusion in class were statistically higher for L1 speakers compared to LX Speakers of English
- Anxiety: L1 speakers of English reported statistically significant lower ($p=.03$) levels of anxiety when interacting in class ($M = 3.1, SD = .693$) compared to LX Speakers of English ($M = 3.44, SD = .852$)

Research on UW campus (Panicacci & Resnik)

- linear regression model indicated English proficiency, enjoyment, and anxiety as reliable predictors of students' inclusion in class
- High levels of English proficiency, paired with high levels of enjoyment and low levels of anxiety, translated into higher inclusion in class
- Students who feel confident of their language skills feel more included

Research on UW campus (Panicacci & Resnik)

Whether English is your L1 or not, do you think that your level of English affects your **performance** in class?

- **69% (n=124) of respondents said their level of English affects their performance in class**
- Suggestions: Slower pace in lectures, multimodal learning, use of chat and subtitles online, provide summaries & reviews, chance to prepare responses and material vs spontaneous group discussions

*“I think **the institution has created an environment with very high standards** where everyone has a really wide range of vocabulary, where **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.”*

*“English is not my first language. It influences my performance a lot. Currently I'm stuck on such a problem. **Even though my gpa for many classes are higher than 3.5, I cannot understand what my classmates say sometimes, and I don't know how to answer their questions, which make me feel so terrible.**”*

Research on UW campus (Panicacci & Resnik)

Whether English is your L1 or not, do you think that your level of English affects your **inclusion** and socialization in class?

- **75% of respondents said their level of English affects their inclusion in class**
- Suggestions: clubs to improve language skills, smaller classes, smaller group discussions (one-to-one), sharing experience of struggle with others, ask questions anonymously

“Some people would simply not talk to you when you seem not to have perfect English [...] The more fluent my English became, the more confident I was to speak in front of people and even make jokes.”

“Yes. Non-native English speakers may feel inadequate or afraid to speak in fear of being embarrassed or messing up. Both my parents are non-native English speakers, and my mom especially messes up a lot, which is perfectly okay but sometimes I think she gets embarrassed about it. I think more inclusive class discussions with predetermined groups are helpful.”

Research on UW campus (Panicacci & Resnik)

Have you experienced any discriminatory events related to your linguistic background?

- 37 respondents said they experienced discrimination
- not worth reporting, hard to report, get used to discrimination as a norm, unsure about it

*“I have had people make comments on my accent or ask me why I pronounce a word a specific way [...] As for reporting incidents of discrimination most of these incidents would come from strangers so they are **hard to report.**”*

*“Yes, but it's minor and **not worth reporting.**”*

*“I have not experienced that, but **I do worry about it from time to time.**”*

*“Sometimes people will refer to AAVE as “improper” English, I haven't reported them because often **nothing comes of it.**” (female, 23, African American/Bahamian/Jewish, L1 speaker, proficiency: 5)*

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 currently include language in [form](#)

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 ¹⁵

Resources at UW

- **Associate Dean for Equity, Justice and Inclusion** - Maya Angela Smith
- **Linguistic Bias Working Group** -
- **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

What can we do?

- Raise awareness about linguistic discrimination via:
 - Workshops/sessions for faculty, staff, TA orientation, undergrad orientation, etc.
 - Videos, posters, informational campaigns
- Many models for this already on campus
 - Student Disability Commission workshops
 - Crip Riot www.cripriot.com
- Additional research
- Suggestions welcome

Instructional video

- New instructor, employee, student orientation
- First key step is for community to recognize their bias, recognize the detrimental effects of their bias
 - they have to see the need for changing their behavior before they will do it
- Pedagogical/interactional adjustments can follow

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 DEI & B activity**

Thank you!

UW Linguistic Bias Working Group: [Lx bias wg@uw.edu](mailto:Lx_bias_wg@uw.edu)

Link to the survey:



UW Linguistic Bias Working Group

The working group on Linguistic bias aims to engage all members of the UW community in the acknowledgment of language diversity on campus and the role of linguistic bias in diversity, equity, and inclusion. The role of language in this can be framed in terms of the endeavor itself:

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

- Speakers and students 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.

- Speakers 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.