Michelle Gonzales & Karin Spirn
Flex Day Spring 2024

Linguistic Justice
Is For Everyone!

Linguistic justice is an antiracist and equity-based approach to language use.

Raise your hand if you have an accent!

What IS an accent, anyway?

Turn to someone nearby (preferably someone you don't know well) and tell them what you think an accent is!

Are these names pronounced differently?

Don

Dawn

Caught-Cot Merger

The *cot-caught* merger, also known as the *lot-thought merger* or *low back merger*, is a sound change present in some dialects of English where speakers do not distinguish the vowel phonemes in words like *cot* versus *caught*. *Cot* and *caught* (along with *bot* and *bought*, *pond* and *pawned*, etc.) is an example of a minimal pair that is lost as a result of this sound change.

—"Cot-Caught Merger," Wikipedia

Some Useful Terms

Accents

All speakers have an accent.

In the American educational system, we use the term accent to describe the sounds of speech that do not match the sounds of English or the English of a particular region.

Sometimes speakers of languages other than English write with an accent too.

Regionalisms

Words, expressions,
or pronunciation used by
and/or preferred by those
from a particular region.

Idiolect

Particular features of the speech of an individual speaker

Features can be a combination of many factors

- languages are spoken at home,
- in your community,
- where your city/region
- accents, pronunciation, word choices, speech features/differences.

Dialects and Vernaculars

The terms often used interchangeably

Both refer to the common language spoken by people in an area, a group or a profession

Dialect often implies nonstandard or even substandard*

Linguists use term vernacular to refer to language a person grows up with and uses in everyday life **

What is Language Bias?

Rosina Lippi-Green defines the term *standard language ideology* as:

...a *bias* toward an abstracted, idealized, homogeneous spoken language which is imposed from above, and which takes as its model the written language. The most salient feature is the goal of suppression of variation of all kinds.

How it Harms: Treatment

- Deficit minded thinking about bi/multi-lingual students and/or colleagues with accents

- Impatience and/or indifference

- Maltreatment due to discomfort, impatience, xenophobia, racism

How it Harms: Stereotype Threat

- Assimilationist conformity in workplace: code switching, hyper-professional style of dress
- Anxiety about school or workplace replication of discrimination
- Hypervigilance for fitting in
- Withdrawal, shrinking
- Double-consciousness

Double-Consciousness

W.E.B. Dubois:

"It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."

Language Bias:
How It Harms

Accent
Study

Language Prejudice Study

- Researcher Fredrik Williams
- Played teachers videos of different students
- The audio was altered
- Teacher might see a White student but hear voice of Mexican American child and vice versa
- Experiment found that African Am. and Mexican Am. students rated as "poorer speakers" of SE

-Rusty Barrett

"Even if a minority child is speaking pure Standard English, it is arguable that teacher will "hear" that child speaking undervalued English simply because the child is not White. This suggests that even if we were able to to teach all children to communicate in SE, the result would not prevent minority children from being faced with language prejudice."

How it Harms: Code Switching

- Code Switching: Encourages students or employees to switch from a "home" dialect to a standardized dialect at school or work

- Implicitly or explicitly suggests that the standardized language is superior and the home dialect is improper or shameful

- Privileges the comfort of standardized-dialect speakers over the comfort of all others

Code Switching

- Many educators including [Paulo Freire](#) have believed that we must teach students to speak a dominant dialect to gain access to social power.

- However, studies have shown that the expectation of code-switching leads to internalized racism and decreased self-esteem.

- It also has been shown to lead some students to reject education as an act of resistance.

Gloria Anzaldúa:

"So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself."

Code Meshing (not code switching)

Speech or writing combining the words, grammars, and sentence structure of two or more languages/dialects, a combination of codes that can expand the possibility of communication

How it Harms: Effects on Students

- Students may be graded lower based on language bias, even if language use is not a course outcome.

- Students shown to have lower self-esteem when their language is denigrated in school

- Students who are subject to language bias may receive less access to resources and care.

- Students who do not speak the standardized dialect may be overlooked for recognitions and special awards

Language bias leads to inequity and exclusion
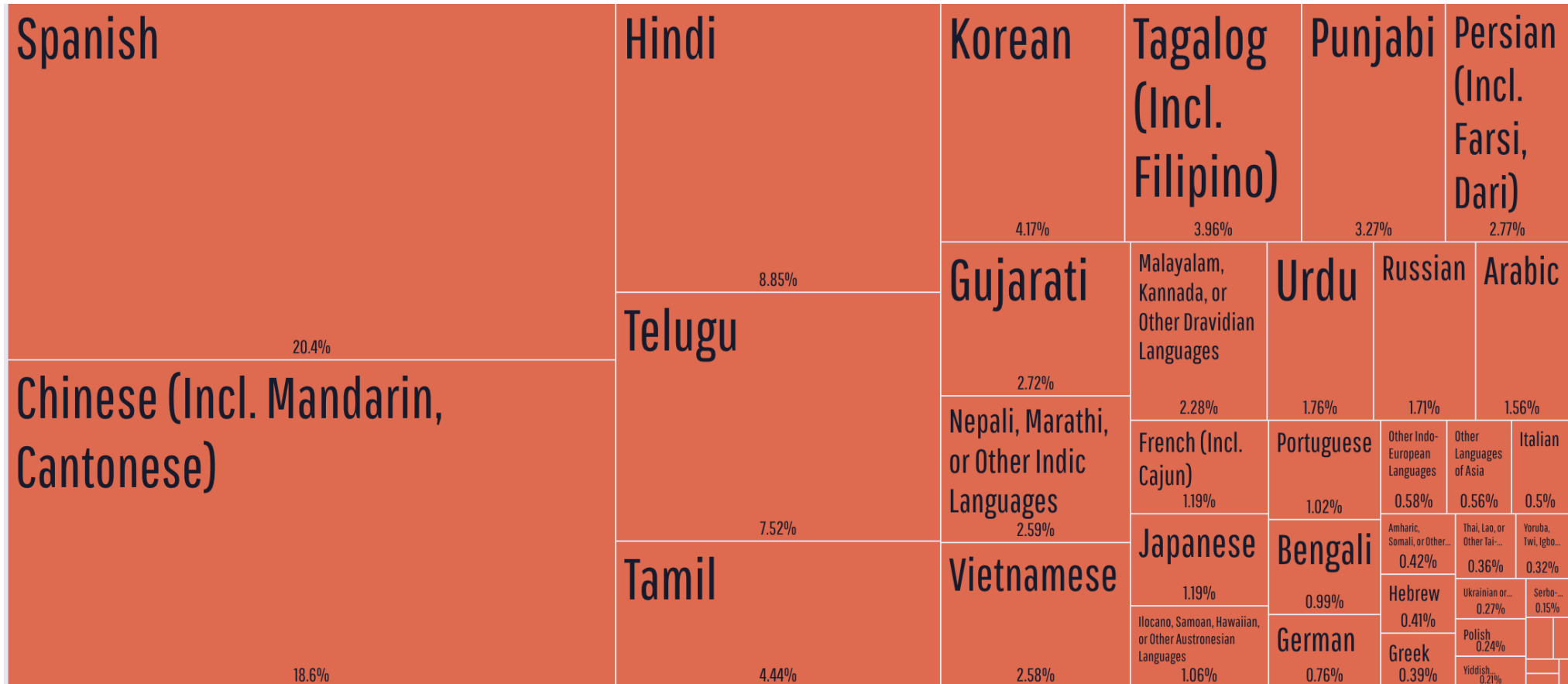
Pragya Agarwal:

Research has shown that speaking with a non-native accent is linked to career possibilities and progression, as it can influence managers' perceptions of speakers' fluency, and expectations concerning non-native speakers' performance abilities. Moreover, this research also suggests that speaking with a non-native accent may lead speakers to feel excluded and devalued at work.

Languages Spoken in the Tri-Valley

Higher than the national average

37.3% of the households in Livermore, Pleasanton & Dublin Cities PUMA, CA reported speaking a non-English language at home as their primary shared language, which is higher than the national average of 21.7%.

Language	Percent
Spanish	20.4%
Chinese (Incl. Mandarin, Cantonese)	18.6%
Hindi	8.85%
Telugu	7.52%
Tamil	4.44%
Korean	4.17%
Gujarati	2.72%
Nepali, Marathi, or Other Indic Languages	2.59%
Vietnamese	2.58%
Tagalog (Incl. Filipino)	3.96%
Malayalam, Kannada, or Other Dravidian Languages	2.28%
French (Incl. Cajun)	1.19%
Japanese	1.19%
Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian, or Other Austronesian Languages	1.06%
Punjabi	3.27%
Urdu	1.76%
Portuguese	1.02%
Bengali	0.99%
German	0.76%
Persian (Incl. Farsi, Dari)	2.77%
Russian	1.71%
Other Indo-European Languages	0.58%
Amharic, Somali, or Other...	0.42%
Hebrew	0.41%
Greek	0.39%
Polish	0.24%
Yiddish...	0.21%
Arabic	1.56%
Other Languages of Asia	0.56%
Thai, Lao, or Other Tai-...	0.36%
Ukrainian or...	0.27%
Italian	0.5%
Yoruba, Twi, Igbo...	0.32%
Serbo-...	0.15%

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How can we learn about the features of our local language communities to help us better serve them?
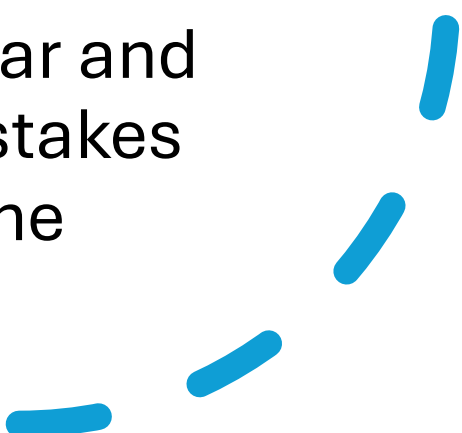
Working w/Students and Public

- Start by learning what you can about local languages
- Put people first not processes and efficiency
- Practice active listening
- Verify understanding
- Practice patience
- Make an effort to pronounce student's names correctly
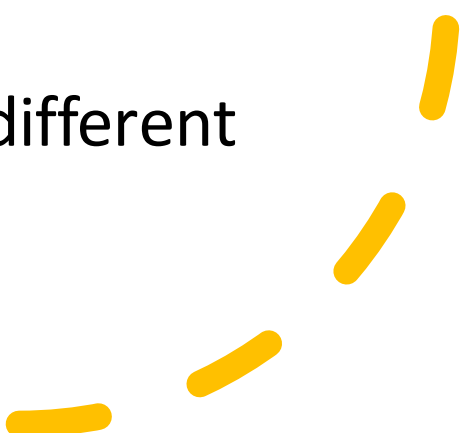- Develop appreciation for the fact that language variation is part of our students' diversity

Working w/Students in the Classroom

- Encourage belonging through welcoming authentic voices in speech and writing
- Create a language statement for your department/syllabus
- Learn how authentic voices can work as ethos and pathos
- Provide feedback on language appropriate to students' writing styles and goals
- Resist the urge to grade grammar and punctuation or to make it high stakes when NOT on your course outline

Working With Colleagues

- Avoid correcting people's grammar or diction (no one appointed you the grammar police!).

- For English-language learners, only correct them if they have asked you to do so.

- Feel free to suggest correcting a typo in a document, but remember that typos or "errors" aren't as important as content and ideas.

- Develop an appreciation for the different ways we use language!

Hiring Committees

- Avoid ranking criteria that invite subjectivity and bias around language, such as "eloquent use of English."

- If needed, use more specific criteria such as "clear and engaging communication style."

- Remind the committee and yourself that you are judging the candidate's ability to perform their job well, not their accent or dialect.

- Remember that linguistically diverse employees will reflect the identities of our students and make LPC more welcoming!

Put it in Practice

- Turn to your new friend sitting near you!
- Tell them: What is one thing you could do next week to put linguistic justice into practice?
- Consider emailing your colleague next week to let them know how it went!

L.E.A.R.N. CONFERENCE AT LPC
29 MARCH 2024
9:00AM - 4:30PM

Join the conference in person at Las Positas.
Room: 21112
Lunch will be provided.

RSVP by 3/21 with the link below.
Click here to RSVP!
https://forms.gle/FbiPEEZLUDEN4cuPA

Language Equity in Academia: Reimagining kNowledge (LEARN) Online Conference (formerly Linguistic Justice Practice in Community College Conference)

SUNN M' CHEAUX
KEYNOTE SPEAKER

LAS POSITAS COLLEGE

REGISTER HERE
http://tinyurl.com/LEARNConf24Reg

GLENDALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Linguistic Justice is for Everyone: Follow-Up Session

- What questions did you have about our presentation?
- What questions do you have about how you could implement linguistic justice at work or in life?
- How has language bias impacted your life? What resonated with you based on your experiences?

Workshop Evaluation