

## AUTHOR RESPONSE

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**Critical and collaborative reflexivity**

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I wrote my article in the spirit of deepening conversation about social change and sociolinguistics, so I am delighted that this conversation can move forward so quickly with the simultaneous publication of responding commentaries. I am grateful for Jenny Cheshire's work collecting the commentaries and the work of their respective authors. As a scholar early in my career, I see it as a rare privilege to have so many senior and personally influential scholars respond to my work. As I have the benefit of reading all the commentaries together, I use the limited space available here to explore some of the extensions, critiques, and other themes emerging across the responses.

My article argues that the principle of error correction implies a theory of social change with two major problems: (i) a reliance on an idealist theory of racism, and (ii) a misplaced emphasis on evidence and rationality in understanding representations of language. While these problems are not unique to sociolinguistics, examining Labov's and others' influential writings on social engagement was the best way to explore how idealist and rationalist approaches to social change have shaped the field. My article argues that critical reflexivity, particularly focused on how researchers define social problems, can guard against limitations of the principle of error correction. Although far from an exhaustive review, the article discusses research that exemplifies critical reflexivity, including underappreciated approaches to social change within sociolinguistics that do not appear based on the PEC.

For some commentators, my argument that the PEC is inadequate for addressing racism and other social problems was persuasive. These commentators added examples of instances in which an error correction approach was not effective, including linguists' advocacy for intercultural bilingual education (IBE) in Peru (Zavala) and critiques of the connection between Standard English and class mobility in the UK (Snell). Bucholtz's example of student projects that gravitated toward error correction or raising awareness served not only as an example of idealist theories of racism and other forms of oppression but also as support for my assertion that error correction is by no means unique to sociolinguistics. Finally, Mallinson & Charity Hudley convincingly describe how in some cases of work with teachers

to change classroom practices, error correction can be not only ineffective but also personally alienating.

Others defended the capacity of error correction efforts to address material aspects of racism or to work in concert with more materially focused efforts. As one example, Rickford discusses the work of Voigt and colleagues (2017) who analyzed police body camera footage to show a pattern of greater respect given by police officers toward White drivers versus Black drivers. For Rickford this work is an example of how the PEC allows linguists 'to provide more accurate diagnoses of language-related social issues than nonlinguists could, and thereby paving the way for their successful (re)solution' (Rickford, this issue, p. 364). This gives me an opportunity to further clarify the boundaries of my critique, as I see important differences between the Voigt et al. study and error correction efforts discussed in my article. Unlike many of the field's public efforts to defend the use of marginalized or racialized language practices in schools, the police body camera study does not center mistaken beliefs about language. In the ways that Voigt et al. document racist practices, I see similarity between this case and Baugh's work on linguistic profiling over the telephone, one example discussed in my article of sociolinguistic work on racism that does not rely on the PEC. In my article, I tried to limit my critique to ways that the application of the PEC meant employing an idealist theory of racism in diagnosing language-related problems. I certainly did not wish to suggest that sociolinguists should avoid diagnoses entirely. Additionally, my critique does not ask that we cease our efforts to defend the use of marginalized language in education or to help improve the education of those targeted by racism, a tradition Labov defended in his commentary and has helped form. However, my critique does ask that we reconsider the premises about racism, language, and social change dominant in those efforts, and furthermore that we see defense of marginalized language not as scientific truth but as part of larger anti-oppressive political movements targeting material circumstances. DeGraff and Wolfram agreed that social change efforts beyond error correction should continue to be developed and valued, and DeGraff's example of the MIT-Haiti projects certainly exemplified a broader political focus. They joined Rickford in explicitly arguing that work with a material or political focus was not incompatible with error correction, contrary to my argument that attention to individual beliefs is counterproductive when material circumstances are more direct targets for change. I am confident this disagreement can continue to be productive by encouraging all of us, skeptics and supporters of error correction alike, to explore, justify, and critique our own work toward social change.

This conversation already emerges across the many commentaries that discussed the practical implications of my arguments, an area in which some commentators found the article lacking. My article was primarily focused on contributing to a conversation about how and why we engage in social change efforts, and I wanted to leave room for implications of the argument to be more developed in specific contexts and projects. Many commentaries offered extensions that do just that, and I

was grateful and excited to read them. Bucholtz's commentary raised the theme of collaboration, which offers a fitting lens to consider many of the extensions presented, involving collaboration with fellow sociocultural linguists, with other scholars, and with communities and participants.

#### COLLABORATION WITHIN THE FIELD

As reiterated in several commentaries, sociolinguists' values of social engagement and social justice are among the field's greatest strengths, and these values are evidenced in the work of all the commentators. For these values to be fully realized, however, they require continued reflexive attention, a complementary value my article attempts to embody and that was endorsed explicitly by most of the commentators. I see the conversations through these commentaries, along with ongoing and future collaborations to refine social change efforts, as a significant contribution in this area. Bucholtz extends the critical reflexive questions I suggested researchers ask themselves, pointing out that the questions may serve much better as collaborative exercises than as self-examinations. Mallinson & Charity Hudley also argue for incorporating more of the professed values of the field around inclusion and multilingualism into sociolinguistics classrooms and departments. Overall, most commentators agree that there is significant need and opportunity to, as Rickford wrote, 'sit and work together' to refine our efforts in pursuit of social justice.

#### COLLABORATION WITH OTHER FIELDS

If most of the commentators agree that sociolinguistics can grow and improve its engagement with injustice, there is disagreement about the role of other fields in this effort. Bucholtz writes that my article is a positive example of applying insights of other fields. DeGraff notes similarities between my argument and the work of scholars who, while not traditionally labelled as sociolinguists, have had a recognized influence on sociolinguistic scholarship that draws on related fields such as sociology or political theory, only a small portion of which I had the space to include in my article. By contrast, Rickford cautions against joining too closely with related disciplines and thus abdicating our specific linguistic expertise. A conflict over the right amount of other fields to employ appears productive, and perhaps we would all agree that efforts to further refine strategies for engaging with social problems must consider both the unique contributions of sociolinguistics as well as its limitations.

#### COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITIES AND PARTICIPANTS

DeGraff's reading of Kreyòl proverbs as critical race theory or materialist analysis of language is a pointed reminder of the continuity between scholarly and lived

critiques of linguistic and other injustice, and his full commentary offers many connections between community partnerships and the critical reflexive tradition I highlighted in my article. Similarly, Rickford notes the limitations of considering social problems from a scholarly perspective alone and advocates greater responsiveness to community perspectives. Zavala argues that objectivist approaches to language obstruct rich engagement with communities, and identifies ethnographic sociolinguistics, decolonial epistemologies, and critical reflexivity as productive alternatives. Snell highlights joint data sessions as a valuable practice in collaborative research relationships, a suggestion that fits with Mallinson & Charity Hudley's critical view of the typical asymmetrical teacher-linguist relationship. Bucholtz specifically asks that we find more opportunities to make common cause with political movements that resist the same injustices that our research seeks to understand. As in the other areas of collaboration suggested by the commentaries, it seems there is room for continued discussion of ways that community-researcher relationships shape researcher efforts toward social change.

Once again, I am grateful for commentators' thoughtful responses to my article. I am inspired by the commentaries' commitment to refining the ways we confront injustice, just as I have been by the prior work that made this contemporary conversation possible.

## R E F E R E N C E

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