

Toward a “Both-And” Semiotics of Intersectionality: Raciolinguistics beyond White Settler-Colonial Situations

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ABSTRACT

In proposing a “both-and” semiotics of intersectionality, this special issue responds to recent timely studies of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, settler supremacy, and other oppressive systems undertaken by linguistic anthropologists and other critical scholars of language. Contributors to this issue turn our attention toward two pressing concerns that are at stake in the continued theorization of raciolinguistics: First, we insist that the conaturalization of language and race is flexible and expansive, not reductive, narrow, or epiphenomenal. Second, we situate our projects at what has until now been a point of breakdown in raciolinguistic discussions by examining and theorizing raciolinguistic ordering in situations that are reflexively positioned as lying beyond the white settler colonial.

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Conceptions of language and linguistic practices—indeed of communication more broadly—depend on *differentiations*: the differentiations among signs, among people’s social positions and historical moments, and among the projects people undertake.

—Susan Gal and Judith Irvine (2019, 1)

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference . . . is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening.

—Audre Lorde (1984, 111)

The function, the very serious function of racism . . . is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining over and over again your reason for being.

—Toni Morrison (1975, 10)

We open with a series of voices that approach difference as a pragmatic reality and social fact. Though genealogically and politically remote from one another, these voices coparticipate in their treatment of difference not as a condition or state of being—of ontological alterity—but as multilayered processes of *differentiation*: perspectival and nonintrinsic, yet nevertheless fundamental to our ideological and material-structural senses. Together, these voices serve as a set of productive coordinates for our own elaboration of the semiotics of intersectional stratification: an attention to the myriad historically and culturally conditioned sign processes through which difference gets categorized, ordered, and hierarchically ranked along analytically specifiable, yet experientially and empirically interconnected axes.

In proposing a “both-and” semiotics of intersectionality, this special issue responds to recent, timely studies of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, settler supremacy, and other oppressive systems that have been undertaken by linguistic anthropologists and critical scholars of language across (inter)disciplines.¹ In this introduction, we elaborate what we and the contributors to this issue see as political and analytical imperatives for the continued theorization of the raciolinguistic perspective. We turn our attention to sites that have until now been a point of breakdown for raciolinguistic discussions to examine and theorize raciolinguistic ordering projects unfolding in situations that are reflexively positioned as lying beyond the white settler colonial.

1. Ngūgī (1994); Alim et al. (2016); Rosa and Flores (2017); De Graff (2020); Hudley et al. (2020).

Our intervention comprises three components that have been variously explored both individually and in combination but that, in and through their coarticulations, offer a transformed starting point for investigations of the intersectionality of sign process in social life: First, a move from raciolinguistics to (the) raciolinguistic—lexicosemantically, from noun to adjectival or adverbial modifier, but linguistic-ideologically, from the objectual and thing-y to the processual and dynamic. Second, a move away from “either/or” and toward “both/and” approaches to intersectionality. Crucially, this entails a recognition of the ways that “either/or” approaches work to block the empirical study and analysis of intersectional dynamics for both professional analysts and—as we show in the final section—for participants in social life (Gal and Irvine 2019, 170). Third, a move to attend to and account for the pragmatics of raciolinguistic intersectionalities—to track the projects and practical activities through which conaturalizations of race and language (Rosa and Flores 2017) get materialized—by insisting also on the ethnography of raciolinguistic intersectionalities—on the reflexively constituted, contextually particular, situated encounters in and through which intersectional vectors of raciolinguistic differentiation unfold.

We elaborate on each of these four concerns in turn across the three sections that follow, before turning our attention to the broader genealogies with respect to which our present project is situated, and, finally, to an elaboration of both the particularities and broad continuities across the essays that comprise this special issue. As with the partial and evocative interventions offered by the voices in our introduction’s epigraph, our aim in this special issue is not to aspire to a totalizing or “complete” accounting of intersectionality: what it is, what it does, or how it functions across all possible global situations that structure, and are structured by, variously constituted regimes of value. Rather, the essays collected here are intended to signal an opening for a transformed semiotic inquiry—one that refuses to take a siloed approach, multiplying discrete categories in conjunction. In this view, sign processes have always been intersectional, even if our analyses have not always proven adequate to this reality.

From Raciolinguistics to (the) Raciolinguistic

Notwithstanding the titling of the special issue’s theme, we eschew approaches to the raciolinguistic that start from the presumption of a static thing or entity, whether as an analytic formula, an ontological status, an epistemological known entity, an unexamined background supposition, a mystical force, or the like. It is important that we take inspiration from scholars working to advance a

raciolinguistic perspective—as well as ensuing or entailed conceptual and theoretical innovations like raciolinguistic enregisterment (Rosa and Flores 2017, 631–32), raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores and Rosa 2015), raciolinguistic images (Babcock 2023, in this issue), and raciosemitic domains (Smalls 2020)—rather than raciolinguistics as a disciplinary formation. As acknowledged before, at one interpretive or analytic scale, this is a lexicosemantic shift from the nominal to the adjectival or adverbial, and yet it is also a linguistic-ideological move designed to turn our attentions away from the objectual and thing-y and toward the processual and dynamic: to prefigure our argument in the next two sections, this entails a turn toward reflexive historically, socially, and culturally embedded processes and descriptions thereof.

As we see it, following Rosa and Flores (2017) and others, the raciolinguistic intervention affords an impetus: about where we might look, how, and why, not about what we will find, what its significance will be, or what various racial and linguistic factors' deterministic effects will be, whether individually or in additive conjunction. Rather, the intervention is deeply decolonial in its approach to thinking and doing—refusing the colonial matrix that variously renders race and language as discrete, self-evident entities in ideological perspective while also enabling their shifty interpenetrations and coconstitutions with one another, and with other deeply naturalized categorial constructs like gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, educational attainment, dis/ability, technological appurtenances, and so on. The intervention is also deeply historical, refusing to treat race, language, and other regimes as merely epiphenomenal, immaterial, or atomistically individual in their materializations.

In the move from raciolinguistics to (the) raciolinguistic, we insist that signs of race and processes of sign users' and sign interpreters' racialization—processes that materialize raciosemitically, emergent as both about and from racialized ordering projects (Smalls 2020)—are always a starting point, not a conclusion. The raciolinguistic perspective is not just about the conjunction of known entities, an analytic stance of “race-plus-language” in which “race” and “language” neither require nor tolerate destabilization (Fields and Fields 2012; Nakassis 2016). Instead, both “race” and “language” become permanently problematic objects that are no less real for their being thoroughly constructed. We describe the stakes and entailments of this further over the next two sections.

Toward a “Both/And” Semiotics of Intersectionality

Over three decades ago, critical race theorist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989 and 1991) first invoked the now ubiquitous term, *intersectionality*,

as an analytic to describe the failures of then-popular identity political debates in the US legal establishment. At the time—as in the present—many liberal intellectuals and civil society interventionists sought recourse to the classical theories of Anglo-liberalism (notably those of philosopher John Stuart Mill) and their anthropological homolog, cultural relativism, in its Boasian incarnation: Margaret Mead and James Baldwin’s (1971) coauthored exchange, *A Rap on Race*, stands out as one among many incredible media artifacts in the late twentieth-century Anglosphere that diagram the enduring popular prominence of cultural relativism as a political logic. Such artifacts also reveal fundamental tensions between the stances toward racialization and difference that were taken by racial-pragmatist and liberal-relativist camps. For individuals like Mead, voicing a Boasian cultural relativism, the former stance entailed a continued overemphasis on race in the wake of its having been revealed to be nothing but social constructivism all the way down—an analytical qua political overemphasis that itself made race too powerful, too real, too dangerous. Cultural relativism was frequently proffered as a political panacea for addressing individuated race, gender, and class, all of them dealt with through rhetorical tactics that invoked the “arbitrariness of the sign” (Saussure [1916] 2011) while all too often failing to actually de-essentialize it.

Together with work by her collaborators in, and cofounders of, the field of Critical Race Theory, Crenshaw’s work took the pragmatics of language as its central stakes, broadly speaking, while also paying more particular attention to the material and institutional realities of an explicitly political domain of communicative labor: the law. Considering examples of legal reform in the United States that explicitly targeted independent vectors of gender-, race-, class-, and citizenship-based discrimination, Crenshaw pointed out how siloed approaches to legal interventions tended to compound inequities experienced by the law’s most marginal subjects. This compounding effect frequently generated abjection and subalternity for precisely the subject whom legal reforms were meant to protect—and not only in the social arenas for which individuals and classes (i.e., in the sense of a collective party to a legal proceeding) sought redress for legal harms but also in the very encounter with the law and its jurisdictional representatives. Crenshaw offers an incisive, pragmatic demonstration of the effects of intersectional violence in the lives of culturally, ethnoracially, citizenly, and linguistically marginal women to empirically demonstrate many of the more rhetorical voicings of multidimensional political dispossession addressed by her Foucauldian and Hegelian contemporaries (Spivak [1988] 2010; Butler [1990] 1999, 1993).

Instead of an approach that insists on “either-or,” we begin from the perspective of “both-and.” We ask: how are raciolinguistic ordering projects manifested in, through, and alongside their co(n)textual intersectionalities? This is not to advocate for “race/language plus,” an approach that also multiplies discrete categories in conjunction with a siloed approach. Rather, following founding theorists of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Grzanka [2014] 2019; Collins 2019), we acknowledge that intersectional dynamics are experientially and empirically indistinguishable, even if they are analytically specifiable.

This special issue takes its initial inspiration from lived realities—most proximally those of the guest editors and contributors but also the realities lived by myriad others who engage seriously with racialization in all its multiform complexity. (This is to say nothing of the multiform complexities entailed by living as subjects who inhabit worlds that have been thoroughly shaped by shifty, intersectional conaturalizations of language and race). To return to the voice of Toni Morrison, who appeared in the epigraph to this introduction, we start from the role played by distraction. If “the very serious function of racism is distraction” (Morrison 1975, 10), one of the specific forms that this distraction takes involves forcing scholars and analysts to explain, over and over again, why paying attention to racialization—as well as the central role of language in racialization, and vice versa—does not mean that one has a priori ignored anything else or missed the “real” drivers of semiotic process.

As much as distractions manifest as rank assertions of lack, deficit, underdevelopment, and the like (as in the deficit-based “distinctiveness paradigm” critiqued by Rosa and Flores 2017, 630–34; see also Lo and Reyes 2009; Chun and Lo 2016), they also manifest through deeply normalized routines for performing scholarly “rigor.” Whether in the context of a workshop, a conference presentation, a seminar, a public lecture, a job talk, an anonymous review, or elsewhere, questions doggedly persist: “We noticed you talked about race. But is this really about race? We noticed you talked about language. Is it really about language? Isn’t this about class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, education, citizenship, migration histories, settler status, religion, culture . . . in fact *anything and everything but language or race?*” Questions like these create a distraction; they posit an interchangeability of analytics in isolation, rather than an interrelationship among vectors of differentiation that coproduce marginalization in and through their interrelationship.

The linguistic anthropologist Adrienne Lo (2020) has illustrated this well in a recent critical introduction to the study of language and class versus language and race. As Lo elaborates, race and class are often presented as an incommensurable

choice between moral-sociopolitical unequals: one must choose *either* to account for class *or* to account for race in one’s sociolinguistic analysis. As Lo further describes, scholars who set out to account for race and racialization in their sociolinguistic analyses often focus on (or are taken to focus on) *features*—features that are taken to be freestanding, invariant over time and across groups, and emanating transparently from ethnoracialized personhood (2020, 297). Scholars who set out to account for class in their sociolinguistic analyses, meanwhile, often focus on *systems*—systems that are relational, malleable both across lifespans and other temporal periods, and in which class is always immanent rather than overt (2020, 296–97), manifesting through goal-directed actions. By insisting on “both/and” rather than “either/or,” we heed the calls of other comrades and cotheorists who urge us to open rather than foreclose our semiotic interpretive horizons—to neither pre- or proscribe in advance what can be relevant and how, nor to assert a typology of a-contextual relevant features to be accounted for. We turn to these two interconnected matters in the next sections.

The Pragmatics and Ethnography of Raciolinguistic Intersectionalities

To fully enact a raciolinguistic perspective grounded in a “both/and” semiotics of intersectionality is to attend to the pragmatics of raciolinguistic intersectionalities. This means attending to the practical activity in and through which raciolinguistic intersectionalities come to matter, and how. While race and language—variously and situationally constructed—frequently come to stand as durable, stable effects of differently positioned social actors’ ideological work (Gal and Irvine 2019, 14), as demonstrated by the essays in this issue, together with the work of myriad other scholars, the intersections of race, language, and other differentiating vectors are often seen as far more contingent, unpredictable, inscrutable, or in need of management. We thus follow linguistic anthropologists and other sociocultural semioticians in looking to the processual dynamics and effects that are entailed when participants engage in projects aimed at the conaturalization of language and race and do so in and through other categorially differentiated and differentiating vectors. This entails a denaturalizing move: to step back from any a priori necessity of interpretation or analysis, whether for professional analysts or participants in social life (Gal and Irvine 2019, 170). This further entails a shift in focus away from what raciolinguistics or intersectionality *are*—either individually or in their collocations, logical or empirical—and toward the matter of what they *do*, what *gets done* with them, and what *gets made* (Gal 2018) in and through their emergent, never-final configurations.

At the same time, to speak about the attempted management of raciolinguistic intersectionalities in this way is to speak, crucially, of institutionalization as a fundamental force in the stabilization of enregisterment processes (Agha 2005, 47–53), including processes of raciolinguistic enregisterment (Rosa and Flores 2017, 631–32). While sign processes are neither fixed, determinate, nor a-perspectival (Gal 2016), various projects can be seen to experience this irreducible indeterminacy as a threat and to react by seeking to ensure their fixity, determinacy, and to remove the possibility of perspectival influence. The cases through which scholars like Crenshaw first articulated intersectionality's necessary intervention can be here seen as a case in point: legal tests for labor discrimination were institutionally constructed around the discreteness of race, gender, and citizenship as operationalizable categories—never all of them (and more) in shifting, disentangle-able, yet co-occurrent configurations (Crenshaw 1989; 1991). Other examples from the authors' fieldwork could be given. In institutionalized perspectives, for instance, Singlish, or Singapore(an) Colloquial English, is uniquely Singaporean—never mind that Singapore is not a raciolinguistic monolith (Babcock 2022, 331–33) and that much of Singlish's construction has been reflexively shaped by anxieties about global whiteness (Babcock 2023, in this issue); Singlish is about class—never mind the myriad ways that race, ethnicity, gender, age cohort/generation, racialized majoritarian privilege and critiques thereof, and so on, come to act as situationally stratifying vectors.

Approached from this vantage point, the pragmatics of raciolinguistic intersectionalities are always ethnographically situated. This does not mean that such dynamics are inevitably and inescapably “small-scale,” “local,” or “micro” (Carr and Lempert 2016, 8). Rather, to attend to the ethnographic situatedness of raciolinguistic intersectionalities is to track the dynamic processes via which analytic categories come to be materialized, felt, and critically reflected on in the social worlds in which we engage as professional analysts. That is, we insist that professional analysts must track the ways that raciolinguistic intersectionalities get made in and as historical, institutional, and interactional (Rosa and Flores 2017, 641) processes and projects.

Crucially, this does not mean that we posit a new, totalizing, a-perspectival grid through which to approach the pragmatics of ethnographic situations. In line with approaches that center (*the*) *raciolinguistic*, which turn our attention away from product and toward process, it is also necessary to attend to what comes to matter (and how) in and through the scenes of encounter in which we, as professional analysts, also find ourselves imbricated. Neither a raciolinguistic perspective nor an intersectional methodology purport to exhaustively detail in

advance a checklist of forms, features, phenomena, or categories that an adequately raciolinguistic or intersectional analysis ought to account for. The conjoined markers of participants’ identities that will suffice to affirm the labels “intersectional” or “raciolinguistic” in a given research design or interpretation of findings are analytically selective. Rather, as we argue, and as the essays in this issue exemplify, the things that will come to matter cannot be constrained or anticipated in advance but rather are always emergent out of the sociocultural contingencies of historical, institutional, and interactional life. At the same time, this does not amount to the necessary mystification of methodology or method, a hegemonic insistence among humanistic social scientists and fieldworkers on the “ethnographer’s magic”—the mystical ineffability of the knowledge produced by the fieldworker *qua* solitary genius (Stocking 1994). We can and must account rigorously and systematically for the ways that participants and professional analysts alike exert enormous amounts of labor to deny, reduce, eschew, or bypass the intersectional realities they habitually navigate so as to acknowledge the semiotic reality of continuity—across moments of encounter, sites of ideological work, and modalities of institutionalization (or its rejection).

Genealogies of Ideology, Intersectionality, and Inequality beyond the White Settler Colonial

In addition to refusing the distractions that demand an analytic stance of “either/or,” we further refuse to take the white settler colonial as the sole horizon for engaging with and analyzing global raciolinguistic dynamics. A “both/and” semiotics of intersectionality compels us to turn our attention to settings in which whiteness is treated as foreign or outside, and to track the iterative, flexible, nondeterministic yet pervasive structuring effects of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and the raciolinguistic indices through which they are materialized. By tracking the endlessly malleable, aspirational mobilizations of whiteness across a range of settings reflexively cast as beyond, separate, or exempt from its structuring effects (Babcock 2023, in this issue), we show the myriad local strategies through which it is ideologically positioned as something that resides comfortably “outside” in the domain of white Western racialized chronotopes while nevertheless becoming aspirationally recruitable “within.”

This dynamic has been productively tracked by linguistic anthropologists and other critical scholars of language working in non-Western locales. We offer a nonexhaustive sampling: Jennifer Roth-Gordon’s (2016, 4–26) study of the situation of “comfortable racial contradiction” in urban Brazil is one example of a context where celebrations of the absence of racism get weaponized against

those who draw attention to systemic white supremacy and anti-Blackness, materialized through socioeconomic discrimination, gendered criminalization, and hierarchies among bodies and linguistic practices. In Roth-Gordon's account, the United States in particular serves as a foil for the racism that Brazil is claimed to be without (2016, 4–5, 183–84). Kristina Wirtz's (2014) ethnography of historical memory and the ambivalent constructions and experiences of Blackness through “discursive blackface” (274) that permeate performances of “folklore” as a diffuse, yet institutionalized category in Cuba provides another illustrative example. Joseph Sung-Yul Park's (2021) recent monograph serves as a further exemplar, a work that brilliantly tracks the complexities of moral investment that have driven expansions of English-language prestige, desire, and contexts-of-use in neoliberalizing South Korea in the wake of 1990s–2000s “English fever,” as does Vincent Pak's (2021) recent study of the multilayered re-indexicalization of antiracism as racism in Singapore, in a highly publicized case in which members of Singapore's officially Indian raciolinguistic community were censured by the state for drawing attention to systemic racism following an act of state-sponsored “brownface.”

Joyhanna Yoo Garza (2021) has tracked the mobilizations and resignifications of a category of devalorized Korean femininity through embodied performances of “chronotopic capital” that materialize, and are materialized at, the intersections of K-pop-, US Black-, and Chicana-cosmopolitan sign formations—performances that reproject an empowered Korean femininity via reified images of raciogendered others. Lim and colleagues (2021) have tracked the dynamic processes through which Chineseness in Singapore gets articulated across mandarinized racial formations, ethnicized Sinitic “dialectal” constructs, and xenophobic anxieties that target PRC migrant groups in a reflexively “multiracial-multilingual” polity; elsewhere, Hiramoto and collaborators (Wong et al. 2021) have explored “the contested notion of Chineseness” materialized in the Sino-phone as a matter of pressing sociolinguistic concern, examining “the language ideologies and practices of those who are arguably at its margins” (131) by tracing the malleable deployments of linguistic resources, notions of consanguinity and phenotype, and multiscale discourses on community (non)belonging. Chu May Paing (2020) deftly analyzes the ways that metaphors of gendered familial relations mediate (and articulate with) racialized formations, indigeneity, religion, and nationalism in Myanmar, tracing their workings not as discrete categories in mere conjunction, but as dynamic configurations that get focalized and ideologically simplified via stratified linguistic register contrasts. Still others, like Mariam Durrani (2021) and Eva Michelle Wheeler (2015), have respectively

elaborated the intersectional interrelationships among Western mediatizing institutions, performances of anti-Black colorism, and their rejection by Muslim social media commentators; and the complex raciolinguistic discourses linked to color terminology in the Dominican Republic.

By drawing attention to non-Western locales, we do not intend to deride or erase the powerful intersectional analyses that have been conducted by scholars and analysts whose work is grounded in white settler-colonial contexts. Indeed, contributors to this issue owe an immeasurable debt to these scholars’ nuanced, incisive analyses. Jonathan Rosa’s (2019) ethnography of the institutionalization and contestation of raciolinguistic ideologies in and through bilingual schooling practices in Chicago shows how a raciolinguistic perspective is intersectional, or it is nothing: to insist on the analytic and experiential-empirical centrality of conaturalizations of language and race is by necessity to focus on gendered personae, place and locational formations, brands, sartorial codes, class stratification, institutionalized role inhabitation, and more. Among Krystal A. Smalls’s myriad intersectional analyses (2018, 2020, 2021b) we draw particular inspiration from her work on the intersecting discursive violences of fat talk and anti-Blackness as “social comorbidities” for feminine people (2021a, 18–20). Smalls demonstrates the kind of approach for which we advocate here, analyzing not “either/or,” but “both/and”: “fat, Black, and ugly” (16–20) and “desire and disposability” (20–21) are not discrete categories to be multiplied in analytic isolation, but intersectional vectors that coconstitute not only systemic-oppressive structures but also Black-feminine surviving and thriving (21). Marcyliena Morgan’s work on North Atlantic counterlinguaging (1993, 2002, 2020); Lanita Jacobs-Huey’s multisited ethnography of language, embodiment, and refusal in Black women’s hair talk (2006; also 2002); and Kathryn Campbell-Kiber and deandre miles-hercules’s (2021) overview and intervention into masculinist scholarship on language and sexuality are also crucial sources of inspiration, as are the intersectional analyses offered by decolonial theorists of settler coloniality and indigeneity.²

Following these intellectual forbears, we do not fetishize the “beyond,” “outside,” or “absence” of the white settler colonial through our intervention. In explicitly framing our attention to a “both/and” semiotics of intersectionality beyond white settler-colonial situations, our aim is to demonstrate that geographies, arenas, and regimes of racialization are not limited to locations at which one-drop racialist logics predominate, at which ideologies of bodily difference

2. Deloria ([1969] 1988); Smith (1999); Tuck and Yang (2014); Ndlovu (2019).

encompass linguistic difference rather than vice versa—or, far more often, manifest as a “both/and” logic of endlessly flexible, shifty configurations of selective (non)encompassment. Similarly, while colonial legacies remain crucial to an adequate accounting of the dynamics we encounter, we ethnographically extend our semiotic attention beyond signs overtly acknowledged as colonial legacies (Errington 2001; Reyes 2017, 2021) to ask: What is the function of semiotic phenomena and processes whose status as colonial legacies get actively disavowed? How, in light of such disavowals, does English become more than a language and whiteness more than a race (Ke-Schutte, 2023), especially in the absence of their respective phenotype: “purely” white bodies and “purely” English grammars?

We are indebted to deep, broad genealogies of intellectual and existential labor that are not readily delimited to a historical period or academic (sub)discipline, and for this reason, exploring intersectionality in its “both/and” materializations beyond settler-colonial situations is both necessary and complex—necessary, because demonstrating its analytical force compels an exploration beyond what many non-Western observers perceive as Anglo-American political parochialisms; and complex, because those most intimately familiar with intersectionality’s critical race archive within the Anglosphere struggle to recognize or imagine what its contours might look like beyond the monolingual phenomenologies of the Euro-American academy. A “both-and” semiotics of intersectionality is thus also a theoretically multilingual provocation, as Jay Ke-Schutte has recently suggested. Exploring the ways in which democratic multilingualism in the South African parliamentary setting explicates key affordances for political actors in the postcolony, Ke-Schutte draws attention to multilingual strategies for unsettling Anglo-hegemonies of monolingual parliamentary discourse (Ke-Schutte 2020). These include the adoption of multilingual metapragmatic and metasemantic tactics that explicitly recruit and draw attention to multilingual public sociality as a political alternative to the Andersonian monolingual nation-state and its bounded publics (Silverstein 1993).

Elsewhere, Ke-Schutte (2023) has proposed a conceptual shorthand for an intersectional relationship between Anglocentric monolingualism and its entailed racial capital in Afro-Chinese interactions: what they term the *Anglo-scene*. Drawing inspiration from critical race theory and pragmatist semiotics, the *Anglo-scene* aims to capture the ways in which intersectional vectors of whiteness and English coconstitute compromising indexicalities of aspirational historicity and futurity for African and Chinese students in Beijing. Here, their work aims to explicate how neither English “native speakers” nor white bodies

need to be present for their associated linguistic and racialized vectors to do their stratifying work. They use the metaphor of ideological gravity to analyze the structuring of the Angloscene as a fundamentally intersectional spacetime.

From a different perspective and location, Joshua Babcock has demonstrated many of these dynamics in his work on the ways in which images of standard mediate shifting raciolinguistic assemblages in contemporary Singapore (2022). This work has shown how standardized varieties exert a stipulative, regimenting force—a spatiotemporal distorting effect or ideological-gravitational pull—that shapes what feels “correct” in linguistic performances of Singaporeanness through Singlish, or Singapore(an) Colloquial English, a raciolinguistic assemblage for which no standard exists. By strategically insisting on fidelity to the raciolinguistic communities that serve as gatekeepers for the denotational codes from which Singlish lexical items are sourced, or insisting on the predominance of a national frame of putatively “postracial” Singaporeanness, individuals work to either contest or reinforce racialized majoritarian privilege through meta-linguistic debates over Singlish.

Much of the ideological engagement with language and racialization in this collection emerges out of linguistic anthropology—a genealogy that, as with the work of W.E.B. Du Bois (1935), very much entails the project of pragmatist semiotics. From this perspective, there is no apolitical language, and all languages have a recruitable, social materiality that is never innocent of the ideological forces that potentialize its cultural context. English’s apex normativity—as primary language of translation as well as constant auxiliary framing of most social, linguistic, and discursive interactions—seems curiously understated among a great many premier analysts of identity, intersectionality, and inequality. This is curiously still, given the geographical and historical range that English still circumscribes at present. One need only consider the technological means through which the Angloscene’s contours have been exponentially amplified in the age of “globalization” via Anglo-medicalization and American information technology and software monopolies throughout the world, not to mention Hollywood mass-mediatization and nuclear imperialism.

Beyond these obvious cotexts, English’s raciolinguistic presencing takes on an even more sophisticated, insidious form in our contributors’ research settings, where it frequently emerges as metaregister of language commensuration: as *the* language in relation to which all languages are measured and standardized (Ke-Schutte 2023). For non-Western and nonwhite recruiters of English, the language and its entailed historical indexicalities becomes a precarious technology for navigating contradictions between patriarchal and/or imperialist nightmares,

on the one hand, and liberal, cosmopolitan epistemes, on the other—themes and tensions that frequently emerge in playful Korean, Chinese, and Singaporean narratives about English education’s cosmopolitan horizons or, more ambiguously, in postcolonial fictions and their interactional reiterations in African, South Asian, and Latin American settings. In the Euro-American academy, English is of course frequently framed as an arbitrary lingua franca—commonsensically as merely *a* language. Meanwhile, many “international” subjects in “prestigious” Euro-American lecture halls, frequently indexically alienated from the popular-cultural references and casual interactional registers of their American peers (to say nothing of regional and local variations), find themselves recruited to the very same labor at pretending English’s “arbitrariness” as a medium-neutral invisibility—critical perspectives on this stance notwithstanding (Duranti 2011). We continue to trace these genealogies across the discussion of the contributed essays that follow, noting both the nuances of local particularities and the reality of the broad continuities that materialize across articles and settings.

The Essays: Raciolinguistic Intersectionalities beyond the White Settler Colonial

Building on this work, the essays in this collection recognize that Anglocentrism remains a rigid context within which the overwhelming majority of non-Western encounters still unfold. For this very reason, the further one thinks one is moving “beyond” the Anglosphere, language—and more specifically the indexicalities of English—becomes an increasingly explicit intersectional vector (moving with and through race, gender, class, sexuality, citizenship, dis/ability, media assemblages, etc.). It is precisely when we reach the fringes of the monolingual Anglosphere that the intersectional contours of the Angloscene most explicitly emerge. This arises most clearly in Yoo’s essay (2023, in this issue), where we see Spanish and Korean language/Mexican and Asian identities at play, but where English—as a recruitable, socially indexical space-time—still manifests as a resource in signaling critical orientations toward global, intersectional dynamics (we discuss this further below).

Toward this end, the contributors to this issue are attentive to racialization and the racialized rather than “race” and “the racial” in their settler-colonial incarnations. The former approach imbricates histories, institutions, interactions, regimes of being; we here align with Rosa and Flores (2017) as well as Smalls (2018, 2020) in particular. As opposed to the languaging of race/racing of language (cf. Alim et al. 2016), we favor a thoroughgoing historiographical-historical approach to the genealogies of the category structures we inhabit and institutional

sites we move in and through, from which our knowledge (and other forms of action) are (re)made.

These concerns also arise prominently in Joshua Babcock’s essay, where Singaporean informants “deploy axes of differentiation anchored by binaries of ‘native’ versus ‘non-native,’ ‘correct’ versus ‘incorrect,’ ‘Singlish’ versus ‘Good English,’ and the like” (2023, in this issue). In his ethnography, it is crucial that these axes of differentiation recruit ideal archetypes of personhood that are projectable onto real persons with real, phenotypically racialized bodies: in Babcock’s case, he had to become this very recruited subject position. Equally crucial is the functioning of positional whiteness and white identities as they coarticulate with one another in both historical and contemporary ethnographic contexts. By coprojecting whiteness as at once phenotype and position in a hierarchy of raciolinguistic being, participants bring to bear both local raciolinguistic structures and global strategies for erasing the gaps between distinct constructions of whiteness, thereby insisting that the workings of racecraft (Fields and Fields 2012) remain invisible while foregrounding claims to their embodied conaturalness.

In Vincent Pak and Mie Hiramoto’s intervention, a key dimension of this dilemma is explicated: in local Singaporean discussions of Chinese privilege, Pak and Hiramoto note: “Glimmers of Western ideologies on race present in interpretations of Chinese privilege are apparent, even if it is understood and deployed differently from White privilege; Chineseness in Singapore is not understood as an assumable subject position that can be occupied by non-Chinese individuals, while Whiteness is locatable within a hierarchy of privilege” (2023, in this issue). Unlike Babcock’s essay, aspirational investments in *positional* whiteness get sharply defined against white *identities* as one strategy among many for disavowing Chinese privilege as such—not just specific instances attributed as tokens of a Chinese privilege type, but the very ability to speak about the reality of racialized majoritarian privilege (Babcock 2022) at all. In Pak and Hiramoto’s analysis, Anglo whiteness as a type, emerges as a metachronotope within which whiteness not only retains its status as ideological superstructure but also becomes the default unmarked category from which to voice critiques about various modalities of privilege and inequality—an ironic twist, much like a political perpetrator chairing a truth and reconciliation commission.

Within the many skewed political economies of language presented by our contributors’ essays, we note how various intersectionally marginalized informants and other subjects become burdened with considerable translational labor. Here, Joyhanna Yoo explores the self-compromising propensities of

intersectional interactions among K-pop fans and their Others in Mexico. Against the multiple backdrops of exoticized Asian-ness as an object of both “love” and “revulsion” (whether homogenized or internally differentiated along national and racialized/ethnocultural lines), on the one hand, together with the global rise of the “Korean Wave,” on the other, Yoo shows how the men who dance in the group Guys Generation citationally embody features of a South Korean gestural and prosodic register associated with burlesqued forms of childish femininity. At the same time, the men navigate reflexive curations of masculinity in anticipation of the language community recipients who will hold them accountable to their counterpublic citational act. At issue here are the seemingly contradictory coemergent affordances of compromise and aspiration through which different figures of personhood become available through various forms of language-mediated stratification.

Finally, Jacob Henry’s essay explores institutional whiteness as a particular site of ideological work (Gal and Irvine 2019, 14–17) in an urban Pakistani café, where, as in the essays by Pak and Hiramoto and by Yoo, participants presume the isomorphism of positional whiteness and white identities even as they reflexively orient toward other performances of identity: as Pakistanis, as teammates in a professional setting, as members of socioeconomic classes, and so on. In true “both/and” fashion, Henry draws together approaches in organizational studies, decolonial studies, and linguistic anthropology to explore how Anglocentric ideologies and hierarchies get iteratively reproduced, invested in, parodied, and disavowed, tracking this across a dense interdiscursive web of digitally mediated artifacts and remediating, unscripted dialogue. As Henry shows, organizations make interactions, but interactions make organizations too; and the scalar work of dialectical coproduction can maintain colonial hierarchies in putatively “postcolonial” spaces mediated by the English language—spaces where, despite participants’ assertions of egalitarian flatness, only some can aspire to felicitously occupy white listening-subject positions (Rosa and Flores 2017, 627–28; Babcock 2023, in this issue) in policing others’ language use.

Across the contributions to this issue, we come to clearly see the disavowal of hierarchy as a constitutive site for the reproduction of hierarchy—flexible, iterative, and shifty in their context-dependent transformations, to be sure, and yet revealing of the ways in which the negation of ideological formations necessarily provides a structural sense through which hierarchies get maintained as essential infrastructures for precisely those who become the “objects” of history, power, positionality, and privilege. As seen in the collected essays, individuals may come to be subordinated in and as organizational-institutional

positions, imputed (or actual) gender identities and sexualities, ethnoracialized and linguistic indices of nationality statuses, and intranational raciolinguistic hierarchies; yet what matters most for our purposes here is the convergent functioning of these disavowals of hierarchy as such. In this sense, a refusal of intersectional thinking is not just a problem enacted by professional analysts: it is also part of a widespread, endlessly adaptable assemblage of strategies for simplifying indexical fields, taming them in and as discrete categories in isolation that can be selectively treated in “either/or,” rather than “both/and” fashion.

Conclusion

At this point, two questions emerge: First, why are the explicitly linguistic modes through which personhood gets maintained so frequently occluded in favor of foregrounding essentialized categories of alterity? Second, why do so many non-“whites” and non-monolingual English speakers experience such overwhelming pressure to transform themselves into the ideal subjects of an Angloscene that by its very design consistently sabotages their attempts to game this “global” English-educational, aspirational complex? There appears to be an unbalanced semiotic labor dynamic here. Perhaps, as is demonstrated in many of the contributed essays, the promise of an “equal” encounter in the absence of white colonial bodies remains compromised by ideological and pragmatic (perhaps even postcolonial) conditions that *still* enregister non-Western and non-white subjects in relation to whiteness, English, and cosmopolitan mobility via metahistorical processes of co-occurring semiosis (Agha 2007a).

At stake are two layered, intersectional tensions at the heart of our discipline: a tension between a folk semiotic arbitrariness vis-à-vis the realpolitik of social stratification, which gets inflected by a tension between relativism and pragmatism. In various ways, the essays in this collection have suggested that interactions for differently situated actors cannot be relative—not in the ways insisted on by a white supremacist, settler supremacist, liberal-multicultural settlement in and beyond the academy—because the affordances for closed- or open-ended interactions are not equally distributed. While frequently overlooked in our own disciplinary ideologies today—and in spite of a great deal of cheap talk about disciplinary decolonization—this stratification vis-à-vis semiotic infrastructures has long been apparent to scholars who have been recruited to our own (inter)disciplinary genealogies, from sociologist Erving Goffman (1983) to anticolonial psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon ([1952] 2008).

As these essays continue to demonstrate, interactions resist identitarian equal-opportunism in that personhood can never be equally inhabited by all subjects in

any given interaction (Agha 2007b; see also Butler 1997). By the same token, semiotic stratifications of race, gender, sexuality, class, dis/ability, media assemblages, and so on, are neither reducible, purely arbitrary propositions nor gradable, inevitably commensurable units. As such, framing interactions within such tensions entails a reckoning with the pragmatics of history as their condition of possibility (Ke-Schutte 2019). Such an approach must reconcile the pragmatic, interactional maintenance of history with the kinds of dialectical contradictions that have so carefully been explored by generations of deconstructionist postcolonial theorists (e.g., Spivak [1988] 2010). Further, the situating of interactional insights within dialectical and “materialist” arguments must be understood as an invitation to anachronistic retreats into ahistorical vitalism. In meeting its historical burden, a semiotics of intersectionality should seek to contextualize contemporary raciolinguistic and intersectional encounters within transnational histories of decolonialism, as linguist Michel DeGraff (2020) has recently suggested. Thus, in its focus on non-Western interactions, our semiotics of intersectionality situates transnational, decolonizing subjects’ still prominent aspirations toward a genuinely global commons as a hopeful humanistic horizon in much of the world, despite a tendency toward nihilistic involution within the Western academy. Against a tendency toward anachronism, a semiotics of intersectionality must engage the encompassing history that imbricates such an intellectual project—one that must unfold in the wake of Euro-America’s systemic denials of, and reluctant retreat from, sustained colonial and evolving neocolonial projects.

We end with a quote from Jacob Henry’s contribution to this issue: “As scholars continue the critical work of understanding the relationship between discourses of neoliberalism, race, and global capitalism, it is vital that we pay attention to how actors disguise these ideologies. Notions of spatiotemporal scale are just one semiotic process by which actors empowered by hegemonic hierarchies can obscure the complexities of power that continue to fuel inequalities across the globe” (2023, in this issue). Through a series of key scholarly interventions in the last few decades, our humanistic and social-scientific engagements have continued the steady crawl out of still hegemonic Eurocentric and monolingual myopias—interventions that, in themselves, were deeply indebted to genealogies for the study of ideology, intersectionality, and inequality that we have outlined here, even while credit is so frequently omitted. In being mindful of such discursive erasures, we hope the work presented here will be read as beginning a conversation anew, not as defining or settling its end point.

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