

An Action-Based Roadmap for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Teaching Linguistics

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1 Introduction

In this chapter, we describe aspects of a three-year pedagogical initiative at the University of Toronto to bring more equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into the linguistics classroom and to address language-based biases more generally beyond linguistics courses. We present this work in an effort to provide a model for anyone interested in doing EDI work in their own departments and courses (for other examples, see chapters in this volume by Arnold, Schwartz, and Thomas). We know from our own experience that it can be overwhelming to know where to start, so we focus on implementational details, concrete steps, and outcomes. Throughout, we offer generalizable action-based advice on how individual pieces of our project can be adapted in different contexts.

We begin with an overview of our initiative, including its history, motivation, structure, and logistics. We then discuss several products that resulted from this initiative, including a variety of materials that we developed over the course of the three-year span and collected into a publicly-accessible online repository, as well as numerous connections and collaborations that we built with colleagues in our own department, at other departments within our university, at other institutions, and the public at large. We conclude with a summary of our primary suggestions based on our experiences, as well as further reflections on why this work is important and why linguists must prioritize it.

2 Project overview

Various biases, including language-based biases, permeate society, especially in education (see Fletcher 1983, Charity Hudley and Mallinson 2011, Kohli and Solórzano 2012, Lippi-Green 2012, Flores and Rosa 2015, Blundon 2016, Bucholtz 2016, Russell et al. 2018, Cochran 2019, Zhang and Noels 2021, inter alia). Like many academic fields, linguistics is not immune to these biases, and there have been increasing calls to action by linguists for linguists to address these issues – not just in society at large, but in our own field (for example, Rickford and King 2016, Leonard 2018, Conrod 2019, and Charity Hudley 2020).

Of particular concern is that these issues are often not discussed in core content in linguistics courses (Spring et al. 2000, Hercula 2020). Undergraduate students form the next generation of linguists in the field. They need to know early on how linguistic injustice persists in society, and what linguists can do to combat it. We also want students from racialized and other minoritized groups to feel included and validated as they study linguistics: when students see themselves represented in course material, they may be more likely to see the discipline as a place for them, which might in turn contribute to increased representation of under-represented groups in linguistics (cf. Rickford 1997 and Charity Hudley et al. 2020). Further, Hercula (2020: 13) argues that introductory linguistics courses also have many students who will not go on to become linguists, but who nevertheless “have the potential to impact language-related policy and practice in fields outside linguistics and academia, such as engineering and business.” In short, whether our students continue on to become linguists like ourselves, it is our responsibility to

impart to them the significance of linguistic injustice, so that they may take this knowledge forward outside the academy in whatever way they so choose.

Informed by this backdrop, by our personal experiences with our own marginalized identities, and by long-standing discussions in our linguistics department at the University of Toronto, as well as our Faculty of Arts & Science's emphasis on EDI as fundamental institutional values¹, we put together a proposal for a three-year initiative to help bring an increased focus on EDI to the linguistics classroom. This project, titled "Innovations in Linguistic Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Linguistics Curriculum and Beyond", is described more fully in Sanders et al. 2020. We summarize a few key aspects of our proposal here.

We applied for a grant through the Learning & Education Advancement Fund (LEAF) at the University of Toronto, totaling almost CAD\$45,000, spread out over three years. The majority of the grant was earmarked to pay for the labor of two Lead EDI Teaching Assistants (co-authors Konnelly and Umbal), working a combined 245 hours per year during the academic year. Key information that went into the original grant proposal included relevant background and bibliography on linguistic biases, a clear plan of action for all three years showing expansion of the project from department-internal to other institutions and fields, and description of specific deliverables and plans for sustainability.

For institutional grants like these, the background justification requires careful attention, since the committee adjudicating grant proposals will likely not contain any linguists. Thus, technical terminology from within linguistics needs to be avoided and replaced with phrasing that would be transparent to non-linguists. In addition, the grant justification should connect to larger issues of broad concern to the institution, such as interdisciplinarity, Indigeneity, and public outreach. Extracting quotes from the institution's mission statement is a good way to make it clear that the proposal is grounded in institutional values and will increase chances of being approved.

Departmental and administrative buy-in and support is also crucial. Before submitting the proposal, we shopped it around with other members of the department, the department chair, and members of the relevant decanal office. Rather than submitting the proposal in a vacuum, we worked months in advance to get broad advice and input, which helped better shape the proposal into something that would be useful to as many people as possible, and again, something that would be more likely to be approved.

Finally, giving as many specifics of the proposal as possible helps on two fronts. First, it gives the funding entity a better idea of what they are funding and more security in knowing that the project will actually do something and be successful. Secondly, it gives the project itself a plan to follow. With this outline in place, we were able to start working on the first day knowing what we needed to do, so that less time was wasted on organization and planning. Putting that work in early on, in the proposal stage, left more time during the project for working on the project's goals directly. Of course, no plan is infallible, and we shifted as necessary, but having that structure in place greatly helped our ability to do the actual work.

In the next section, we describe one of the main outputs of our work, the *Linguistics Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Repository*, which we built during the course of the project.

¹ <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/about/strategic-overview/academic-plan-2020-2025/strategic-priorities/equity-diversity-and-inclusion>

3 The Linguistics Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Repository

3.1 Purpose and motivation

Many fields have robust literatures and pedagogical resources concerning social justice education: the fields of education and curriculum and instruction studies more broadly have been highly productive in cultivating a rich canon of anti-oppressive scholarship meant to inform pedagogies across disciplines (such as hooks 1994, Hobbel 2010, and Bettez 2011), reverberating throughout other fields such as math (Brantlinger 2013, Wagner and Stintson 2013, Bond and Chirnoff 2015, Yusun and Gagné 2021), social work (Nicotera 2019), sociology (Alexander 2005, Rudy and Konefal 2007), and health and physical education (Gerdin et al. 2021), among others.

Closer to linguistics, the field of language education has also grappled with these issues. One particular area that has gained attention and is currently being challenged is the rampant heteronormativity in pedagogical materials and classroom practices (Gray 2013, Paiz 2019). For example, most language education textbooks inadvertently foreground heterosexism by containing examples with male and female characters with stereotypical gender roles and heterosexual relationships. In the classroom, questions about gender identity and expression are often not discussed (Neto 2018). These practices reinforce the hegemony of heterosexual relationships and effectively erase LGBTQI2S+ identities and experiences, which in turn often have serious ramifications, especially for queer and/or questioning students (Vandrick 1997). In response, researchers have made calls to action to queer the field of language teaching (Nelson 2007, Neto 2018, Paiz 2019).

In linguistics proper, social justice issues often already organically arise in some subfields, such as sociolinguistics and language revitalization, where the relationships between language and aspects of society play crucial roles. However, many course instructors in other subfields are also equally keen to incorporate EDI principles in their classrooms, but they may assume that these topics are less of a natural fit for their subfields, or they may feel that they do not have the time or expertise to do this work properly. To address these concerns, we used this project as an opportunity to consult with such instructors to find ways that EDI could be incorporated into their courses and to develop relevant course materials tailored to their goals and their courses' learning outcomes.

Further, we recognize that many instructors around the world are already implementing many of the principles outlined here, but within the field of linguistics specifically, these materials are not widely accessible, or their existence is not widely known (with a few notable exceptions, such as the initiative described in Charity Hudley et al. 2020). This is a common feature of linguistics more broadly, because the scholarship of teaching and learning in linguistics is not yet as robust as in many other fields (Hecula 2020: 15), so pedagogical materials in linguistics are challenging to come by, especially for those that specifically integrate a social justice component. To address this issue, we created the *Linguistics Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Repository* (LEDIR, available at <https://ledir.ling.utoronto.ca>, citable as Sanders et al. 2021), which contains the materials we created for this project, including lecture notes, data

sets, the Diverse Names Database, and the Handbook for Inclusive Linguistics Teaching. We describe each of these outputs in more detail below.

3.2 Lecture notes

We created lecture notes to bring EDI content as course material into a standard phonetics course, where these issues do not traditionally arise. The lecture notes we designed are short readings (no more than two pages) that could be used to supplement any phonetics course. The text and references of these lecture notes are available on LEDIR and in Sanders et al. 2020.

We designed these lecture notes following a few guiding principles. First, the content should be directly relevant to phonetics and fully integrated into the course, so that the material would matter to the students and not appear to be tacked on or optional. Second, the lecture notes should be small enough to not detract from the main course content. Finally, the content should be diverse, covering a range of different topics. We ended up with three new sets of lecture notes: (i) two pages on gender and the vocal tract, challenging gendered assumptions about vocal tract length, especially the length of 17.5 cm traditionally used as a default male vocal tract length, and bringing up issues of body and gender diversity, including trans identities and the phonetic effects of hormone replacement therapy; (ii) one page on the effect of social biases on speech perception, highlighting the role of race in the perception of intelligibility; and (iii) half a page on the status of signed languages in phonetics and linguistics more broadly, focusing on the problematic ways that signed languages, deafness, and deaf people are often minimized or ignored in linguistics, with spoken language and hearing people treated as implicit defaults.

Many other such lecture notes can be created for a variety of courses. A basic strategy we recommend is to pick a general topic within EDI (such as gender diversity, racism, or signed languages) and find a unit of the course material where that topic could be inserted in a small way as a natural extension of the existing content. This means that the instructor does not have to do extensive revision of the planned material, minimizing their workload and not disrupting their original course plan. Even just a few of these small changes to the course content can have a large impact on student experience. Not only does it provide students with content that may be more directly applicable to their life outside the linguistics classroom, but for those students with marginalized identities and backgrounds, this increased representation can make them feel more included in the larger conversation about language and linguistics in ways they traditionally would not be.

3.3 Data sets

We also worked with instructors to expand representation of minoritized languages in their course material and problem sets, with an eye toward intentional, purpose-driven diversity of data. We recommend taking into account the sociocultural context of your institution; because we are at a Canadian university, we focused on underrepresented languages that also reflect the linguistic diversity of Canada, in particular, Indigenous languages and heritage languages. Again, this is a way to better represent the backgrounds of the students in the classroom and help them feel more included as part of the field. Further, in introducing these languages, it is important to go beyond the usual background information (language family, number of speakers, etc.). For example, when presenting data for an endangered language, we also include resources pointing to revitalization efforts underway, informed by our department's long-standing commitment to

documentation and revitalization and partnerships with community members. This kind of extra information helps show students that languages are not just data to be analyzed, but that they are used by human beings with real concerns. This information can provide an opportunity to reflect on broader social issues, such as the role of Canada’s colonial history in the severe decline of Indigenous languages.

3.4 The Diverse Names Database

Linguistic example sentences are a core vehicle for linguists in teaching a wide range of phenomena to our students, but it is well-established that these examples, particularly in syntax textbooks and journals, systematically under-represent women and perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes, such as presenting feminine-gendered arguments as non-subjects, as more likely to be unnamed, and more often referred to in kinship terms in relation to masculine-gendered referents often reflect and reinforce unjust hierarchies and stereotypes (Macaulay and Brice 1994, 1997; Bergvall 1996; Pabst et al. 2018; Richy and Burnett 2019; Kotek et al. 2020, 2021; Cépeda et al. 2021).

In the classroom, linguists may not realize that they are relying on their own biases in coming up with examples, particularly when coming up with examples spontaneously in the midst of class discussion. As an intervention on the inequity of names chosen in example sentences for linguistic course content, we developed the Diverse Names Database (DND; see Sanders et al. 2020, Konnelly et al. 2021, and Sanders 2021a), a database of names from 78 languages, categorized three ways by gender (all-gender, feminine-leaning, and masculine-leaning), confirmed with native speakers and/or experts on these languages. An excerpt from the DND is available in Figure 1.

<i>all-gender</i>		<i>feminine-leaning</i>		<i>masculine-leaning</i>	
Amal	Arabic	Anahera	Māori	Aimo	Finnish
Bounmy	Lao	Boróka	Hungarian	Baber	Urdu
Cahyo	Javanese	Chana	Hebrew	Carlu	Corsican
⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮
Xquenda	Zapotec	Xulia	Galician	Xuan	Asturian
Yunuen	Purépecha	Yolotl	Nahuatl	Yama	Pashto
Zhyrgal	Kirghiz	Zuriñe	Basque	Zaharia	Romanian

Figure 1. Excerpt from the Diverse Names Database

Our goal was to create an easily accessible spreadsheet with names for three gender groups for each of the 26 letters of the English alphabet. The underlying design principle was fundamental simplicity: we wanted to create a tool that could be consulted quickly and easily. In finding the names themselves, we largely employed a scavenger methodology, trawling as many sources as possible, prioritizing understudied languages and diversity of language family. We also included IPA transcriptions from our native speaker consultants wherever possible. The resulting database represents over 30 language families from over 110 countries.

It should be noted that the DND is not something that can simply be sprinkled on top; though it can be greatly useful, it also comes with potential drawbacks that must be carefully weighed. While it presents opportunities for greater inclusiveness and affirmation (both in terms

of gender and cultural representation), applications of the DND may raise additional issues that linguists should be mindful of. Not relying on names that depend on English phonotactics is important for unsettling the default status of English in our classrooms beyond its use as the language of instruction (when applicable). However, the inclusion of names that are not easily assimilated to English pronunciations may risk exoticization or may elicit overt commentary or mispronunciations that can be distressing for students to overhear. There is a fine balance that needs to be struck, and instructors need to be prepared to respond when the balance tips one way or the other: either fitting names to English phonotactics and reinforcing English as a hierarchical standard, or not fitting English phonotactics but inadvertently creating situations of othering communities whose names may be treated as marked by Anglophones. There is not a single right answer, and incorporating greater cultural representations will necessarily involve being prepared to deal with issues as they arise, and importantly, advocating for why it matters to get people's names correct.

Put simply, the DND must be integrated with intention and with regard for classroom dynamics and a commitment to anti-racist teaching more generally. Our hope is that the DND will be supportive of both instructors and students in constructing more diverse, inclusive, and affirming examples in assignments and other course materials. This is one possible step forward in increasing gender and cultural diversity and representation in our linguistics example sentences and providing a more equitable experience for linguistics students, and ultimately, for the future of the field.

3.5 The Handbook for Inclusive Linguistics Teaching

As in many fields, linguists often do not receive extensive (if any) discipline-specific pedagogical training as part of their graduate education; they are typically expected to just pick it up as needed from observing what has worked in their own education. As new instructors, they may feel uncertain about teaching in general, and even experienced instructors may not have a strong grasp of inclusive teaching practices or the principles underlying them. Although there has been a shift in recent years, particularly in the creation and expansion of teaching-focused faculty positions and venues for publication of linguistics pedagogy research (such as the Teaching Linguistics section of *Language*), we still have a long way to go in prioritizing how we teach linguistics.

The final LEDIR resource we discuss here, the “Handbook for Inclusive Linguistics Teaching”, is designed to help fill this gap. The handbook is geared towards both instructors and teaching assistants (in linguistics and beyond), containing practical recommendations that can be easily integrated in many aspects of a course. These recommendations come from our years of experience as instructors and teaching assistants in many linguistics courses at the University of Toronto, where the usual course set up consists of large lectures (upwards of 250 students) with the instructor and smaller tutorial sessions (around 35 students) led by teaching assistants. As a living document, development of the handbook is on-going, especially with increasing connections to the robust literature on pedagogy in order to better create stronger links between scholarship on teaching and learning as well as our own teaching practices.

The full handbook is available on LEDIR, and we offer a brief summary here. A major goal of the handbook is to help foster an inclusive space for all students in the classroom. Inclusivity involves acknowledging, recognizing, and working towards combating biases so that all people are included despite their differences. Further, inclusivity normalizes differences; that

is, differences are “natural, acceptable, and ordinary” (Baglieri and Knopf 2004: 525). Inclusive teaching then, for us, is conceptualized as a set of pedagogical practices aimed at creating a learning environment where all students are treated equitably and are provided with equal access to opportunities and resources. There are multiple ways to work towards building a more inclusive classroom.

Course syllabi can contain explicit language about valuing diversity and inclusion. According to Baglieri and Knopf (2004: 527), “when teachers model positive language and attitudes toward difference, students also are affirmed in the development of their peer relationship”. We believe that it is imperative that we begin our classes by being explicit about our commitment to diversity and inclusion. In particular, we should remind students that all languages and language varieties are valid (Martinez et al. 2017). This means acknowledging that non-standardized English as well as standardized English are equally good resources that students can use to facilitate their learning in class discussions.

Within linguistics in particular, we also have a discipline-specific opportunity to empower students as language experts by letting them know their linguistic backgrounds and experiences are valued and can be leveraged in helping to demonstrate and understand linguistics concepts. This can be part of a larger push towards diversification of linguistic examples, and by drawing from the students, it helps to humanize the data more than a decontextualized data set could.

It is also important for instructors to practice self-awareness by reflecting about our own positionalities in order to better understand those of our students and ultimately connect with them (Dewsbury and Brame 2019). By acknowledging certain assumptions that we carry and bring to the classroom, we are able to then be more critical of what we teach our students as well as how. This can also help us to remember to use inclusive language to avoid common linguistic microaggressions (Bucholtz 2016), such as mispronouncing students’ names (Kohli and Solórzano 2012) or using the wrong pronouns or a previous name for transgender or non-binary students (Cochran 2019).

In sum, the handbook provides instructors with multiple ways to think about adopting curriculum design, assessment, and teaching practices that make students feel that they are supported, respected, and valued regardless of their backgrounds. The handbook in combination with the other resources on LEDIR (lecture notes and data sets) provide many tools that can help address a variety of EDI issues.

4 Connections

It is also important for a project like this to foster connections, to build and share expertise and to distribute the work so that others may benefit. In this section, we provide an overview of the types of relationships we established over the course of our initiative, and how these relationships both supported and informed the goals and values of our efforts.

4.1 Workshops

We held multiple workshops with different aspects of our teaching community in the department. One workshop involving teaching assistants from a large introductory lecture course focused on classroom practices that foster inclusion and representation, content which ultimately evolved into the handbook described in Section 3.3. In this workshop, we highlighted common situations

where language-based biases can easily come in (names, example sentences, relying on native speakers in discussions).

We also designed a workshop on affirming writing, in collaboration with the Writing-Integrated Teaching program in the Faculty of Arts & Science at the University of Toronto. In this workshop, we considered the kind of language typically or historically used to describe marginalized identities and people (trans and non-binary, immigrant, deaf, Indigenous), with a focus on harmful terms, descriptors, discourses, and ideologies that make their way into our courses, especially in students' writing assignments. We then discussed numerous ways to mitigate these, including suggesting alternative and more affirming language which does not undermine the linguistic knowledge and scientific rigour being created and shared.

These kinds of small-scale workshops are a great way to plant transformative seeds in a department, especially for inexperienced instructors and teaching assistants.

4.2 Outreach

Being publicly engaged is a fundamental part of this work: getting this work out there and known and recognized is crucial to having it get taken up elsewhere. We quickly realized that there was an immense appetite for conversations on EDI in pedagogy, both within linguistics and outside of our discipline. Of course, it is important to take advantage of the many opportunities we as linguists have to publicize our work to our colleagues in the discipline and solicit their feedback. We presented portions of this project at two annual meetings of the Canadian Linguistic Association (Sanders et al. 2020, Konnelly et al. 2021), a webinar on racial justice in linguistics teaching hosted by the Linguistic Society of America (Namboodiripad and Sanders 2020), and an invited talk for a workshop on inclusive teaching at the Semantics and Linguistic Theory conference (Sanders 2021a).

But the work that we were engaging in does, in our view, have value outside of our own discipline, and to this end, going beyond our field is also important. In the Fall of 2020, we were invited to present our work at an interdisciplinary teaching and learning symposium in the Faculty of Arts & Science. This involved a short presentation similar in scope and purpose of this chapter: to show our colleagues from other departments how to achieve similar initiatives and to highlight the various funding and general support pathways that enabled us to do this work. It also gave us the opportunity to talk about the importance of linguistic injustice to a wider audience, doing double duty as both a how-to guide and an educational talk to non-linguists on the relationship between language and social justice.

As a result of this talk, a faculty member in the department of English reached out to have a member of our team come visit her second-year course and facilitate a discussion on any aspect of our project that would expand her students' understanding of the relevant EDI issues. Lex Konnelly attended the class and presented on prescriptivism, language attitudes, and linguistic injustice, a conversation that students were eager to engage with. As a department that focuses on the study of language, English was in many ways a natural fit for this discussion; as such, we recommend colleagues who are interested in building connections outside of their home department look to these academically related communities first, since making our work accessible to those who already had some base familiarity with the close analysis of language was an ideal stepping stone to moving to more distant fields.

Again, due to word of mouth of our project, Pocholo Umbal was also invited to present on our project at an inclusive pedagogy panel discussion at a satellite campus. The panel

discussion centered around representation of LGBTQI2S+ issues in different departments (including linguistics); situations that show clear gaps in inclusion in curriculum and pedagogy; and initiatives that instructors and teaching assistants have deployed to center LGBTQI2S+ perspectives. As one of our project goals is to make our materials portable to other interested departments and fields of study, we took this opportunity to invite educators to think about ways in which they can integrate discussion of social justice issues within their courses. For example, we highlighted the ways in which the linguistic concepts we teach are often imbued with assumptions that perpetuate heteronormativity (such as binary gender constructions when studying language variation) and how harmful this can be for our LGBTQI2S+ students. We therefore urged instructors to be mindful about underlying assumptions and assumed defaults in their courses: Where do they come from? Who established them? Who benefits from these constructs? Indeed, these considerations are applicable regardless of the academic field, and so we must create classroom environments where students have opportunities to reflect about these in an effort to create more affirming spaces for all.

Beyond academia, our project also drew the attention of ezCPD, a professional development organization for legal professionals, who invited Nathan Sanders to give a webinar on linguistic injustice in legal settings (Sanders 2021b). This kind of public outreach is crucial for projects like this, to highlight real-world applications for non-specialists outside the academy.

Importantly, in all of these cases, the work essentially promoted itself. People heard about the project and wanted to know more. Presentations led to more presentations, and connections led to more connections. Starting outreach as soon as possible, even in just one venue, can pay off down the road in more opportunities to distribute the work.

4.3 Collaboration

Finally, this work has also led to more in-depth collaborations with instructors in other departments and at other institutions. A few examples include our ongoing research with a colleague in the UofT Department of Mathematics on the effects of linguistic biases on assessment of writing in math; ongoing research with a colleague at another university in Canada on the effects of marginalized identities on students in linguistics courses throughout the country; and collaboration with a colleague at a university in the United States to expand the DND into a mobile app for ease of use. Each of these collaborations were completely unforeseen in the original conception of the initiative, highlighting the importance of leaving space for flexibility in a project like this. Many people are interested in EDI issues, and they touch on so many different aspects of our lives – with this in mind, expect that there will be plenty of opportunities to make connections and expand this work.

5 Conclusion

Throughout this project, we have been guided by Charity Hudley and Mallinson's (2018: 514) questions about "what linguistics is, who it is for, and who it benefits." Adopting more inclusive teaching practices and curriculum in linguistics is more than showcasing how linguistics is a scientific field that is deeply embedded in the social world, but actively engaged in the process of making it a reality. Our hope is that through the proliferation of initiatives like this one, we will see a shift towards increased engagement among and retention of students that have been

historically underrepresented in the field and students who come out of our courses with an understanding of how language perpetuates power imbalance and inequality in society.

Our hope for this chapter is not only to highlight how pedagogical interventions like this project can be adopted by others, but also why it is necessary for linguists to prioritize this work. Though we endeavour to provide one model that we hope will inspire other linguists to answer a call to action to combat language--based biases in their teaching, we recognize that there are many ways to address these issues, and a diversity of tactics is both important and necessary. This model is not the be-all and end-all of linguistic diversity and inclusion; rather, it contains only some of the many different tools that can be used to help change the underlying structures of our teaching as part of a larger process of deconstructing how we teach linguistics. We must view this as part of our scholarly and pedagogical practice, because if we do not actively work to combat linguistic discrimination, we are helping to perpetuate it. We encourage our audience to leverage the tools that work for them and to respond to the wide variety of manifestations of linguistic biases with innovative solutions that make sense in their unique context. We do not have all the answers, and no one group or individual can do this kind of work perfectly. Social justice is a communal effort, and we must all contribute and support each other.

Acknowledgements

We thank Naomi Nagy, Keren Rice, and the members of the language variation and change research group in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Toronto for early advice and support, especially in developing the proposal. We also thank Sali Tagliamonte, Alana Boland, and especially Thuy Huynh for helping finalize the proposal and budget. We thank Anne Charity Hudley for initial inspiration and continued wisdom throughout the life of the initiative. We thank audiences at the 2020 and 2021 annual meetings of the Canadian Linguistic Association, the Linguistic Society of America's Racial Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Linguistics Curriculum webinar series, the 31st Semantics and Linguistic Theory conference, the 13th Toronto Undergraduate Linguistics Conference, the University of Toronto Faculty of Arts & Science Teaching and Learning Community of Practice, and ezCPD.ca for their feedback on various aspects of this work. We thank Henry Ivry, Jessie Richards, and Will Heikoop for discussions in helping plan for the future of the project. Finally, we thank Catherine Anderson, Susana Béjar, Marisa Brook, Ann Gagné, Peter Jurgec, Colin McCarter, Laura O'Malley, Avery Ozburn, Virgilio Partida Peñalva, Carol Percy, Jason Siefken, Lisa Sullivan, Guillaume Thomas, and Erin Vearncombe for various discussions and collaborations.

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