

## Editorial

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We are pleased to present you with this very first issue of the new *Journal of Language and Discrimination*. The topic of discrimination is important across a large number of diverse but related fields, and much research concerning discrimination involves language as a core component. This multidisciplinary journal has been established to encourage researchers from different backgrounds to consider the range of work being undertaken within and outside their specialisms. It has a wide scope and we encourage submissions from scholars at all levels whose work focuses in some way on the relationship between language and discrimination.

Currently, theorists and practitioners publish discrimination-focused work across a wide variety of different platforms. These studies advance research in their specific fields and topic areas, but there is much to gain from bringing these strands of research together to forge a new and dynamic forum that will stimulate intellectual crossover and the growth of multidisciplinary work on this topic. The *Journal of Language and Discrimination* aims to do exactly this, and will appeal to those who are working on language and discrimination across a wide range of fields including linguistics, education, law and criminal justice, anthropology, sociology, psychology, feminism, queer theory, disability studies, race studies, and many more.

As an illustration of the types of research we wish to host, this first issue covers a range of topics from Borba and Milani's investigation into

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gender clinics in Brazil, Hermeston's call for a field of disability stylistics, Sloan Rainbow's take on the disconnection between the term 'hate' and linguistic violence against women, and Zimman's article on transgender language reform. We have also included reviews of books concerned with topics including Palestinian political discourse (Jones), indigenous African languages and the mass media (Graham), representations of religion (Al-Anbar), and the psychology of prejudice (Scott).

Future issues could include studies on linguistic profiling, language attitudes, activist research challenging the pathologisation of non-standard languages, applied linguistics work on the experiences of (non-)native speakers as teachers in the language classroom, a discursive psychology approach to narrated experiences of discrimination in the workplace, legal studies on Brexit debates and legislation, and ethnographic studies of police run-ins. Of course, this list is not exhaustive.

We also invite proposals for special issues, the themes of which might include freedom of speech; language and ageism, disability, gender, identity, class; same-sex marriage and civil partnerships; racist language; religious language discrimination; islamophobia; anti-Semitism; language and the Equality Act; trolling; shaming; offence and political correctness; language policies; language and social justice; challenging linguistic stereotypes; standardisation, education and second language learners; accent and dialect discrimination; minority languages; hate speech; and the language of animal rights campaigns. If you are interested in producing a special issue, please contact one of the editors for more information.

### **Why language and discrimination?**

It is a fact that for many, discrimination forms part of everyday life, and incidences of discrimination come to light with shocking regularity. Discrimination, a negative experience in itself, typically comes with an additional burden of negative consequences for those exposed to it. Language plays a key role in both discriminatory acts and wider discussions of (what constitutes) discriminatory practices. Discriminatory language, for example, can signal to an individual that they are being regarded as a member of a stigmatised group and, even when they do not agree, it is difficult to outmanoeuvre labelling or address of this type. Discriminatory language can act as a form of verbal violence, as Butler (1997) has shown, often working alongside physical violence and affirming and holding in place wider social exclusion. However, language is also the means by which discriminatory language can be challenged, and, if not silenced, it can at

least be made apparent – its discriminatory presupposition made explicit and exposed.

Discrimination is manifest (and can be traced and challenged) discursively; ideological stances and beliefs are produced, reproduced and legitimised through discourse, meaning that language is intertwined with people's beliefs and ideologies, and subsequently with institutional practices. This includes not just people's beliefs about language and language users, but relates to social phenomena more broadly. The relationship between discrimination and language is therefore a crucial one, and is perhaps particularly relevant to study in light of recent discussions in the media about terrorism, migrants, sexism, ageism, disability discrimination and racism.

As an example, in April 2016 Khairuldeen Makhzoomi was ejected from a Southwest flight from Los Angeles to Oakland, California because he spoke Arabic to his uncle on the phone, which another passenger reported to crew. He was detained, searched and questioned by the FBI for nearly three hours, and released without further charge. Although Southwest refunded his flight costs, they did not apologise for their actions. In this case, Makhzoomi was discriminated against because of a mistaken ideology that links speakers of Arabic with terrorism.

Another, perhaps more general example includes instances where people who are offended by the language used towards them are labelled as 'snowflakes'. Their claims of being discriminated against are represented (in certain media) as due to the fact that they are over-sensitive and must learn to be more resilient. The question of whether and how much it is possible to take offence at discriminatory remarks fails to acknowledge the damaging reality of such remarks, instead transferring 'blame' from the perpetrator to the 'victim'. In this way, discrimination is seen not as something which can be associated with particular linguistic features, but as simply a matter of interpretation. This changes the view of language and its relation to discrimination.

Where in the past it was clear that there were certain language items that could be labelled as racist, for example, that certainty has shifted. Changes in legislation, such as the Public Order Act 1986, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 and the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 in the UK, as well as changes to wider social views, tend to prevent/discourage individuals from using overt hate speech, but discriminatory language which does not meet the legal threshold for hate speech may facilitate discrimination implicitly or display harmful ideologies or beliefs. Zoe Williams (2012) debates just this issue in discussing the Feel Free to Insult Me campaign, which aims

to get section 5 of the UK Public Order Act repealed. Campaigners such as Peter Tatchell and the National Secular Society have argued that people should be free to express themselves, even if their beliefs are discriminatory. Williams notes, for example, that a teenager was arrested outside the Church of Scientology in London for holding a placard stating that the church was a dangerous cult. Another person was arrested for saying publicly that homosexuality was a sin (Williams 2012). However, although individuals have been arrested under this law and charges may be brought if someone's words are categorised as incitements to violence, language deemed merely offensive does not lead to prosecution.

Such issues clearly warrant further research. As these examples demonstrate, a journal that aims to show the ways in which the social phenomenon of discrimination functions to support and perpetuate social structures and unequal power relations, and to shape policies and practice to combat this, needs no further justification.

### ***Journal of Language and Discrimination and activism***

As well as encouraging scholarly engagement with issues of discrimination, the journal also has an outward-looking focus. There are many activist groups and individuals who campaign around issues of language and discrimination. The Everyday Sexism Project (Bates 2014) was set up to establish an online space where people could post their experiences of mundane sexism not normally considered newsworthy. It also received reports of rape and sexual assault. Bates (2017) noted her surprise at just how many women contributed their experiences to the project, many of which involved a linguistic element, such as experiencing street harassment or being referred to sexually.

Disability groups have long been active in challenging discriminatory language practices and there have been changes in the vocabulary which some charities use. In the UK, the cerebral palsy charity Scope changed its name from The Spastics Society in 1994, after pejoration had reduced the word to an abusive term (Scope 2014). To change such negative naming practices reinforces the fact that the language we use to refer to ourselves and others is important. But it also highlights the fact that opposition to these pejorations is possible and that changing language can be a first step towards addressing underlying discriminatory practices.

Members of religious groups have also been mindful of the harm done by the media focus on terrorist attacks by Muslims. This consistent yoking of the term 'Muslim' with the term 'terrorist' has led to calls for the term 'Islamist' or political terms, such as 'ISIS', to be used instead. Refugees and

support groups have tried to challenge the use of some of the vocabulary used to describe refugees in the media, such as ‘swarm’ and ‘flood’ (see Baker *et al.* 2008 for an investigation of such metaphors). Once terms like these are used, there is a tendency for the groups of refugees to be viewed not as individuals with whom one can identify and empathise but as a faceless, dehumanised group.

Finally, the campaign group Black Lives Matter, among many others, has been instrumental in drawing attention to discriminatory language and the impact that language has. There have, for example, been campaigns in the United Kingdom and the United States to rename monuments and buildings that were built by those who profited from slavery or colonialism. In Bristol (United Kingdom), the ‘Countering Colston’ campaign aims to rename the music venue Colston Hall, which was named after Edward Colston, a seventeenth century philanthropist who donated funds for the establishment of schools (Saner 2017). This philanthropy was funded by the slave trade and it is estimated that 85,000 Africans were enslaved when Colston ran the Royal African Company. This move to rename the venue has led to claims that people are trying to ‘airbrush history’ and that, in fact, maintaining the name draws attention to the history of Bristol’s relationship to the slave trade. Simply changing the names of buildings, streets and public landmarks is not a solution; however, as John Oldfield, director of the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation at Hull University, remarks:

An alternative strategy might be to use these names as a way of drawing attention to the complexities and to discuss the past, because that informs how we understand the present. (cited in Saner 2017:35)

Such debates about discriminatory language ensure that the history of slavery is not simply consigned to the past.

The *Journal of Language and Discrimination* aims to support such activism by providing research on activist work done and by publishing interviews with prominent activists and academics. Publishing research and resisting discrimination is obviously not the same as political activism, but we hope the journal contributes to bringing about changes in perception and ideologies about particular groups in the long run. We encourage our readers to contact us if they know of any groups who campaign on issues of discrimination who may be interested in being interviewed.

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