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REVIEW ARTICLE

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Researcher positionality in linguistics: Lessons from undergraduate experiences in community-centered collaborative research

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Abstract

Researcher positionality has come into focus in a number of fields, as scholars increasingly acknowledge the impact of their lived experiences and identities on all aspects of the research process. In most areas of linguistics, however, researcher positionality remains underdiscussed, even as many linguists from dominant groups conduct research on the language of subordinated groups without community self-determination regarding the research direction and goals. While the growing emphasis on collaborative community-centered research overcomes some inequities, another key step toward a more inclusive linguistics is the involvement of undergraduate researchers who are members of the partner community or whose backgrounds, experiences, and identities overlap with those of community members. Such undergraduate team members can contribute special insight and knowledge to the research. This article describes the role of a mostly Latinx team of undergraduate research interns in a community language maintenance survey project as part of a collaboration between a Hispanic Serving Institution and a nonprofit organization supporting the Mexican Indigenous community on California's Central Coast. Undergraduate interns strengthened the project by drawing connections between

their own linguistic experiences and those of the survey respondents, thus enabling the research team to better support community goals. The article concludes with recommendations for centering researcher positionality in linguistics in order to produce more inclusive, just, and rigorous linguistic science.

1 | INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER IN LINGUISTIC RESEARCH

Many scholars whose research directly or indirectly involves human beings acknowledge that our own experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, and identities inevitably shape all aspects of our research: which communities or groups we work with or have an impact on, which research questions and topics we pursue, which theories and methods we choose, which audiences we address, and how we write about our work. This focus on the researcher is grounded in a large body of social theory from the past several decades that problematizes the ideology of scientific objectivity, including poststructuralist theory; various strands of critical race theory; queer and trans theories; critical disability theory; Black, intersectional, and other feminist theories; and critical Indigenous and decolonizing theories, among others (e.g., Collins, 1998; Foucault, 1970; Halpin, 1989; Haraway, 1988; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Smith, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Willey et al., 2017).

Explicit attention to what is variously referred to as *researcher positionality*, *researcher reflexivity*, or *researcher subjectivity* is most visible in humanistic and qualitative research, particularly in fields such as anthropology, sociology, and education, where researchers often form close connections with research participants via ethnography, qualitative interviewing, and similar methodologies. Crucially, the implications of this scholarly approach are not only methodological and theoretical but also ethical and political, with many researchers interrogating historical practices of scholarly representation and working toward more just and humane forms of research (e.g., Paris & Winn, 2014).

However, linguists have been slow to join this trend, perhaps due to the tension in the discipline between science-oriented and humanistic approaches, which has limited the influence of critically engaged perspectives in many areas of linguistics. Researcher positionality is most often discussed in the overlapping subfields of applied linguistics (e.g., Consoli & Ganassin, 2023; Lin, 2015; Ramanathan et al., 2005); linguistic anthropology (e.g., Jacobs-Huey, 2002; Muwwakkil, forthcoming), linguistic ethnography (e.g., Hou, 2020; Patiño-Santos, 2019), and language reclamation and revitalization (e.g., Chew, Greendeer, & Keliiaa, 2015; Cruz Cruz, 2020; Leonard, 2021a). Much of this work considers how social differences or similarities between the researcher and research participants may heighten or reduce power inequities, limit or expand the researcher's analytic perspective, or otherwise shape the research process and results.

Discussions of researcher positionality from the standpoint of scholars who are themselves from marginalized groups are particularly valuable in exposing how traditional research conducted by members of hegemonic groups may be harmful or may miss key insights. This problem is especially acute in linguistics, which relies on racially minoritized communities as sources of data yet lacks adequate (or any) representation of those communities among faculty researchers (Bhattacharya et al., 2020; Charity Hudley et al., 2020; Rickford, 1997; Tsikewa, 2021). The long and continuing

history of structural exclusion, colonial extraction, and scholarly exploitation within the discipline has led Anne Charity Hudley to propose the "Charity Hudley Rule for Liberatory Linguistics":

> Any published research that you conduct in a community that you are not a part of should include an explicit discussion of the inclusion of members from that community in your research process and your efforts to increase the participation of community members at your university, in your department, and in your research area. (Charity Hudley et al., 2022: 136)

In light of this rule, involving undergraduate researchers who are members of the community that is the focus of research or who share some of the same lived experiences can be crucial in helping to bridge the gap between outsider linguists and community members, while also fostering a sense of belonging in linguistics for students from structurally marginalized groups. Undergraduate participation can thus be especially meaningful in collaborative models that emphasize community goals and self-determination, an increasing trend in applied linguistics (e.g., Avineri & Martínez, 2021), sociolinguistics (e.g., Bodó et al., 2022; Bucholtz et al., 2014; Charity Hudley et al., 2022), and language reclamation and revitalization (e.g., Bischoff & Jany, 2018; Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009; Hermes, 2012; Bax et al. under review). The crucial role of undergraduates in strengthening the quality of research, however, is rarely addressed (but see Charity Hudley et al., 2022; Suyemoto et al., 2009). Instead, current discussions of undergraduate research experiences primarily focus on the benefits for students, an important issue in its own right (Bucholtz et al. in preparation; Charity Hudley, 2018).

In this article, we offer one example of how researcher positionality strengthens linguistic research. We discuss a community-centered collaboration in which undergraduate researchers are essential partners who improve research by drawing on the perspective of their lived experiences, their interdisciplinary academic training, and their expertise as language users. Our example demonstrates that the benefits of undergraduate research are most fully realized when students are not viewed as mere novices and apprentices in the research process—or, worse, as exploitable cheap or free labor—but rather are recognized as full-fledged team members with invaluable knowledge. This perspective is especially important in Minority Serving Institutions like the university partner in our own research collaboration.

In the next section, we describe this collaboration as well as our own positionalities and roles. In Section 3, we explore how undergraduate researchers' lived experiences and backgrounds shaped their intellectual contributions to the project. Finally, in Section 4, we outline key dimensions of researcher positionality and call for linguists across subfields to reflect on and discuss this issue throughout their work.

2 | THE MILPA COLLECTIVE AND THE ROLE OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCHERS

The project that we describe here emerged from the Mexican Indigenous Languages Promotion and Advocacy (MILPA) collective, a research collaboration that brings together faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates from the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) and community partners connected to a nonprofit organization, the Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP), that advocates for the rights of the diasporic Mexican Indigenous (Indígena) community on California's Central Coast, near UCSB. Most community members have their roots in La Mixteca—a region comprising parts of the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Puebla—and use a range of

Tu'un Savi (Mixtec) varieties, many of which are not mutually intelligible. Other languages used in the diasporic community include Zapotec, which, like Tu'un Savi belongs to the Otomanguean language family, and P'urhépecha, a language isolate originating in Michoacán. MILPA works toward Indígena language justice through a variety of interrelated activities (Bax et al. under review), including community-centered documentation of local Tu'un Savi varieties, and more recently varieties of Zapotec and P'urhépecha; community literacy classes, which involve developing orthographies that reflect the phonology of the varieties used by class members, informed by previous work on Tu'un Savi (e.g., Julián Caballero, 1999); a free annual college-level class on sociocultural linguistics for members of MICOP's youth activist group; development of language and literacy materials for community use; and a sociolinguistic community survey. The survey, which was conducted orally in Spanish and Tu'un Savi from 2018 to 2020, is the focus of this article.

Undergraduate researchers are essential members of the MILPA collective and played a vital role in the community survey. Twenty-four interns were recruited to help process and analyze survey data beginning in 2018, both through open calls within the UCSB Department of Linguistics and through the university's directory of undergraduate research opportunities. Interns were selected based on their academic background in linguistics, their multilingual expertise in Spanish and/or a Mexican Indigenous language, their interest in issues of language and social justice, and/or their familial connections to Latin American Indigenous communities. Most of the interns' training and supervision was led by graduate student team members Alexia and Simon. All interns received training in research ethics and confidentiality; additionally, depending on their role, each received training in the specific forms of technology required for their work on the project (Box and Excel for data management; ELAN and Qualtrics for data coding and analysis), data transcription, coding, thematic analysis, and appropriate attribution and citation of excerpts from the survey responses. Throughout the project, regular team meetings were an important part of intern training and activities to ensure consistency and quality in data processing and coding.

Before turning to the undergraduates' contributions to the survey project, we discuss our positionalities and roles within MILPA. As the following statements indicate, the research team's expertise and experiences complemented one another and informed how we carried out our work in MILPA.

Mary: I was a professor in the UCSB Department of Linguistics during my involvement in the research described here. I'm a white cis woman with no familial connections to any Indígena community. As a sociocultural linguistics professor, I became part of MILPA through my research interest in language, race, and youth in community contexts as well as my commitment to advancing social justice in and through linguistics. I led the initial development of the survey and provided general guidance and supervision throughout the survey process. Because I'm a community outsider and was department chair during the research, I felt I could be most helpful playing a behind-the-scenes role, especially accessing institutional resources.

Eric: I was an assistant professor in the UCSB Department of Linguistics during my involvement in this research. I am a cis man of Western European descent, born and raised in the U.S. Midwest, and I have no Indígena roots. Since 2007, I have participated in collaborative documentary and descriptive language work with Indígena community members as well as the teaching and training of Indígena students in Mexico and the United States. My work is motivated by relationships that have grown out of collaborations begun with Indígena classmates during graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin, which have led me to teach and mentor Indígena students and develop expertise in Otomanguean languages that I can share to help Indígena language workers advance their goals. In 2015, as a linguistics professor, I helped initiate the MILPA project with MICOP personnel. I advised students and community members in their work on the language survey.

Teresa: I was a third- and fourth-year undergraduate during my involvement with MILPA; I graduated from UCSB with a Global Studies degree in 2021. I am a Latinx cis woman with Indigenous

Latin American heritage whose family immigrated from Mexico and Ecuador to the United States. My primary role as an intern on the project was to code, translate, and transcribe the surveys.

Veronica: I was involved with MILPA as an undergraduate in my sophomore through senior years; I graduated from UCSB in 2021 with a double major in Sociology and in Language, Culture, and Society and with minors in Applied Psychology and in Educational Studies. I am a cis woman whose family immigrated to the United States from San Juan Luvina, Oaxaca, Mexico. I joined the MILPA project as a way to connect with my Zapotec culture and community. I worked on the project as an undergraduate research assistant at UCSB for 2 years; my primary roles included coding and transcribing surveys for the project as well as checking the consistency and quality of the Qualtrics data entry.

Alexia: I was a graduate student in the Department of Linguistics during my involvement in this research. I am a white cis woman from the Northeastern U.S. with no familial connection to the Indigenous communities with whom I work. As a PhD student, I participated in Mixtec literacy workshops at MICOP and a field methods course working with a speaker of Tù'un Na Ñuu Sá Matxí Ntxè'è (San Martín Duraznos Mixtec) at UCSB. I maintained involvement in MILPA, providing feedback on multiple versions of the survey and supervising undergraduate researchers in the work described in this article. I have been keen to work on aspects of this collaboration which enable me not only to learn more about languages of the Americas, but also to use my skill set (Spanish, familiarity with general linguistic concepts, research methods, etc.) to bolster the work of others, deepen connections with community partners, and facilitate learning and growth for students.

Bethany: I was a fourth-year undergraduate during my involvement with MILPA; I graduated from UCSB in 2021 with a major in Psychological and Brain Sciences and a minor in Linguistics with an emphasis in Speech-Hearing Sciences and Disorders. I am a mixed cis woman from a half-Mexican/Indígena and half-white household. My desire to connect more with my Mexican culture was a driving force in my motivation and interest in the MILPA lab. For the project, I translated and coded surveys, extracted relevant quotes, and identified and analyzed linguistic and cultural ideologies.

Katie: I joined the MILPA project during my sophomore year and remained involved through my senior year. I graduated from UCSB in 2021 with a major in Political Science and a minor in Professional Writing. I am a white cis woman from the West Coast with no Indígena roots, and I joined this project after taking a Linguistics class my freshman year. The class exposed me to the relationship between language and identity and inspired my interest in linguistic analysis. The MILPA project stood out to me as a unique opportunity to act on this interest within a local context and allowed me to learn about the linguistic history of Ventura County. As an undergraduate researcher, I conducted quality checks of the survey data, which involved reviewing respondent answers as coded in Qualtrics as well as collaborating with my peers to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the coding.

Inî: I was in my senior year at UCSB when I participated in this research; I graduated in 2020 with a degree in Linguistics. I am a Mixtec cis man and a member of the Central Coast's Na Ñuu Savi (Mixtec) community. I have been involved with MILPA since before I entered UCSB as a senior transfer student from Ventura College. As an undergraduate, I conducted interviews for the survey and led Tu'un Savi literacy workshops at MICOP, among other activities. Currently, I am a Ph.D. student in Linguistics at the University of Chicago.

Simon: I was a graduate student in the Department of Linguistics during my involvement in this research. I am a white cis person from the U.S. Mountain West region and have no Native or Indígena familial connections. I have been working with MILPA since 2015, participating in community literacy workshops, enrolling in two field methods courses, and twice co-teaching the semester-long college-level sociocultural linguistics class at MICOP. Prior to joining the linguistics department at

UCSB, I graduated from a public university in the Pacific Northwest, where a friend and a co-worker, both from the Mixtec diaspora in Oregon, first introduced me to the language issues their communities face and encouraged me to bring these issues into my studies of applied linguistics and language justice. I was involved in the initial development of the survey and helped to coordinate the pilot survey and intern training. I supervised teams of undergraduate research interns responsible for processing and managing data, coding surveys in Qualtrics, and transcribing wordlists.

Griselda: During the time of this research, I was a laboratory assistant at UCSB as well as program coordinator for the Maintaining Indigenous Languages project at MICOP. I am a cis woman with Indigenous Mexican roots, and I speak Tu'un Savi. Since 2015, I have collaborated with Eric and other members of UCSB's Department of Linguistics in research about my community on the Central Coast of California. I was involved in revising and piloting the language survey from the start. I recruited participants at MICOP's monthly community meetings and through outreach by using MICOP's telephone lists and creating public service announcements for airing on MICOP's Radio Indígena (https://mixteco.org/radio-indigena/). I was in charge of making appointments and administering the survey with a large majority of survey participants. I also provided feedback to the team for adjusting and improving the wording of the survey questions. In addition, I was in charge of managing the recordings and their metadata and passing them along to the team for processing. Finally, I provided reports of activities and progress at the monthly meetings of MICOP's leadership table.

In Spring 2021, Alexia proposed to that quarter's cohort of interns—Bethany, Katie, Teresa, and Veronica—that they collectively develop a presentation about the interns' research experiences in MILPA for UCSB's annual graduate-student-run Hispanic and Lusophone Conference, which that year had the theme "(Re)framing Knowledge: Critical Approaches to Scholarly Literacy." Simon, who had previously worked with most of the cohort and remained involved in the survey work, also participated in developing and presenting the talk. The resulting coauthored presentation (Cevallos et al., 2021) was the inspiration for this article as well as the source of the quoted excerpts from the undergraduate researchers in Section 3.

3 | UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCHERS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO LINGUISTIC RESEARCH

The undergraduate researchers had a profound impact on the direction and results of the survey research due to their deep familiarity with the data, their lived experiences of the issues discussed by survey respondents, and their insights into how MILPA could best support the Na Ñuu Savi community. After coding the data, the interns took the lead in the analytic process by focusing on language ideologies related to young people, a topic that was of great personal interest to many of them as young multilinguals themselves, as well as a crucial issue for community language maintenance and reclamation, given the centrality of youth in such efforts (e.g., Wyman et al., 2014). Each intern selected what they considered to be some of the most significant or representative responses from the survey data they had processed and coded; they then transcribed these responses and presented them to the rest of the intern team for initial discussion and analysis. In this way, they helped guide the focus of the survey analysis.

Although the interns' research role was not explicitly structured to facilitate reflection on their own lived experience and how it related to the survey data, these issues frequently emerged in students' work on the project and their contributions to group meetings. Consequently, this process yielded rich insights into some of the parallels between Tu'un Savi and Spanish as minoritized languages in the U.S. context, as well as the ways in which Spanish, which is often devalued by non-Latinxs, is

highly valued by Na Ñuu Savi people as a language of economic opportunity and mobility. Below, we present some of the quotations from survey respondents that the interns selected and translated, along with their comments based on their own experiences and observations; we include the age, gender, and ethnoracial self-identification of each respondent. The undergraduate researchers highlighted in particular the complex feelings, ideologies, and politics surrounding multilingualism in the U.S. context.

One frequent theme in the survey data was the importance that many respondents placed on maintaining the use of Tu'un Savi in the United States for various reasons. The following examples from the data illustrate this theme:

> Para mí es bien bonito hablar otra idioma que sea aparte de español. El mixteco pues, uno sabe de dónde vino y hablar ese idioma y cuando se siente orgulloso uno de hablar un idioma cuando te preguntan. (34-year-old woman; Mixteca, Mexicana)
> 'For me it's really nice speaking another language that isn't Spanish. With Mixteco, well, one knows where they come from and how to speak that language and when you feel happy to speak a language when they ask you'. (Translated by Veronica Cruz)

> Pues, personalmente, yo lo hablaría por solo, por guardar mis raíces, pero no es beneficioso … digamos para en otras ciudades. Yo lo hablo por mis raíces nada más, por conservar[las]. (18-year-old man; Mixteco, Oaxaqueño, Indígena, Mexicano, Mexicano-Americano, Latino, Hispano, Chicano, Americano/Estadounidense)
> 'Well, personally, I would speak it only, to save my roots, but it's not beneficial … say in other cities. I speak it for my roots, nothing else, only to save them'. (Translated by Veronica Cruz)

For Veronica, these responses resonated with her own experience of being raised by parents who knew Zapotec as well as Spanish:

> **Veronica**: Growing up, my parents always emphasized the importance of being bilingual. While I would inevitably learn English through school, speaking Spanish was just as important to them as a means of communication with them and other family members, but also because employers would prefer to hire someone who is bilingual versus someone who is monolingual, especially in a place like Southern California. Essentially, English and Spanish would open more doors for my future in academia and in my career. That was not the case when it came to learning Zapoteco, my parents' first language. It's what they used in their homes with their parents, siblings, and community members. When they started school, they recall being hit by teachers for speaking their Indigenous language because even in Mexico, Spanish is regarded as a more "beneficial" language. As such, this experience set a precedent for me not learning Zapoteco from a young age because they didn't think it would help me in the future. In their eyes, there would be no career field where someone would specifically seek out someone who spoke their language.

Conversely, in response to a question about whether translanguaging is good ("bueno"), bad ("malo"), or neither, a number of respondents expressed the widespread and erroneous belief that this multilingual practice is a sign of linguistic deficiency and incipient language loss:

> Malo … porque no se enfocar en uno, en una idioma … ni aprendemos el inglés o español completamente. (30-year-old man; Mixteco)
> 'Bad … because one can't focus on one, on one language … we're neither learning English or Spanish completely'. (Translated by Bethany Guerrero)

> Pienso que como que se confunden, no sé, o se les olvida la palabra, como decirlo en español o en inglés. … Para mí malo porque yo les digo a mis hijos que cuando hablan si están hablando español, que hablen puro español … (35-year-old woman; Zapotec)
> 'I think it can be confusing, I don't know, or you forget a word, how to say it in Spanish or English. … For me it's bad because I tell my kids that when they speak, if they're speaking Spanish, that they should speak pure Spanish …'. (Translated by Bethany Guerrero)

> Pues al menos no me parece bueno porque así no ellos al final no aprende, están perdiendo nuestros, nuestra lengua de nosotros entonces … preferible que hablen puro español o puro inglés en los lugares donde se necesitan pues como en la escuela. (35-year-old woman; Mixteca, Mexicana)
> 'Well at least it doesn't seem good to me because in the end, like this they don't learn, they're losing our language of ours so … it's preferable that they speak pure Spanish or pure English in places where it's needed like in school'. (Translated by Bethany Guerrero)

As Teresa noted, these comments reminded her of her own feelings of inadequacy about her Spanish-speaking ability due to Latinx community ideologies of linguistic purity:

> **Teresa**: The perspectives [expressed in the above extracts] reflect ideologies challenging … institutional perspectives on multilingualism. There seems to exist an ideology in professional and academic settings that knowing multiple languages across many proficiency levels is a positive thing. It is interesting that outside these settings, this can feel far from the truth. There appears to be an existing fear that learning multiple languages leads to deficiency in both, so it is better to just stick to one. In my own experience, speaking Spanish as a child was a terrifying experience in the Latinx community because unless I could speak it one hundred percent fluently, there was a "don't even try" mentality perpetuated and also a shaming of those who spoke it "incorrectly" or "broken." In this case, multilingualism for me signaled a loss of identity with the Latinx community as I began to shy away from the Latinx space I no longer felt comfortable in because of my inadequate language abilities.

Veronica and Teresa, two of the undergraduate researchers from Latin American Indigenous backgrounds, also emphasized the broader sociopolitical context of multilingualism, especially racism. In fact, racist slurs such as *indio* 'Indian' and *oaxaquita* 'little Oaxacan' have led to such profound cultural and linguistic shame among Indígena schoolchildren in the Central Coast's Na Ñuu Savi community that MICOP's youth activists launched a campaign against these racist terms (Esquivel, 2012; see also Perez et al., 2016).

> **Veronica**: As Indigenous people, we are often seen and treated as lesser than other members of the Latinx community. There was an instance a few years ago where my mom was called *oaxaquita* by a new Latinx neighbor, a term meant to belittle people of darker skin that are also presumed to be of lower class because of the state in Mexico they

> come from. Discrimination and colorism within our own community is not new. A few of my Indigenous friends and I sometimes feel like we are a minority within a minority.
>
> **Teresa**: This project made me reflect on the transnational anti-Indigenous sentiments and the loss of Indigenous language I have observed in my own culture and background. My grandfather is the last person in my family to have tried to learn the primary Indigenous language, Quechua, of our home country in Ecuador. Moreover, anti-Indigenous sentiments persist in the language that I hear within my family in South America. It is not uncommon for me to hear Indigenous people used as insults or in derogatory terms. The word and connotations of *indio* that came up during the project reminded me of the way I have heard people attach derogatory language to this word in order to describe someone as disgusting or negative.

In the end, through their involvement in the survey project, the interns' lived experiences, undergraduate education, and research activities enabled them both to gain and to contribute new insights into multilingualism as a dynamic process in which multiple factors and pressures play a role. This point was made by Katie:

> **Katie**: Respondent answers regarding multilingualism and its importance and benefit for their lives completely changed my perspective—I remember being shocked that I was getting a completely different outlook on multilingualism from what I had learned in [Political Science], and it made me realize how complex multilingualism is and that multiple factors contribute to someone choosing to speak a certain language (especially regarding different settings) and it is not something that boils down to "good" or "bad."

These insights from the undergraduate researchers, both academic and experiential in their basis, inform MILPA's ongoing work to support the language maintenance goals of the Na Ñuu Savi community, including educating parents about the myths and realities of multilingual practices, recognizing young people's linguistic expertise in ways that do not reproduce ideologies of fluency and purism, and addressing head-on the role of racism in language ideologies and vice versa. Many undergraduate team members had encountered in their own lives the perspectives and situations discussed by the respondents. Drawing on their own experiences thus enabled them more easily to identify generalizable patterns and emergent themes in the data. In addition, because they were already familiar with many of the issues the respondents discussed, they were able to engage more deeply in the analytic process, recognizing pragmatic nuances and other contextual details that a researcher who lacked this insider linguistic and cultural knowledge might fail to notice.

Most importantly, undergraduate team members who shared some of the lived experiences of the survey participants had a special commitment to amplifying the participants' stories and honoring their humanity throughout the research process, rather than reducing them to mere "data." As several interns stated, working on the survey project felt like a contribution not only to research but also to their own families and communities, and they could hear echoes of these familiar voices in the survey recordings, making them feel more connected both to the respondents and to their home community. In fact, for some student researchers, the project served as a catalyst for re-engaging with their community and their family language, whether an Indígena language, Spanish, or both, and many found the experience of hearing other young Indígena and Latinx people talk about their language use powerful and even healing. Especially at a Hispanic Serving Institution like our own, creating a close alignment between students' lived experience and their research experience can have wide-ranging

positive effects (Bucholtz et al. in preparation). All students deserve access to research opportunities that recognize and value their linguistic and cultural expertise and experiences, and in the future, the MILPA collective will ensure that such reflection is explicitly and regularly invited and encouraged from all team members as a central component of our work.

4 | CONCLUSION: CENTERING RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY IN LINGUISTIC RESEARCH

Researchers' positionalities shape every aspect of the research process, yet until recently linguists have been largely disengaged from the growing interdisciplinary discussion of researcher positionality, and even now the issue is only discussed in a handful of subfields. As the experience of MILPA's undergraduate team members illustrates, centering researcher positionality leads to more careful, complete, and consequential scholarly inquiry, especially when this work is done in the context of a community partnership. Yet too often the inevitable impact of positionality has been ignored in linguistic research or, at best, treated merely as an object of study and at worst, as a resource to exploit.

We therefore conclude by inviting all linguists to reflect critically throughout the research process and in published work on the impact of positionality on linguistic research, as well as ways that the larger discipline can center positionality in research and publications.

When we as linguists reflect on our positionality, we need to consider the following:

- **Our disciplinary, subdisciplinary, and interdisciplinary training and expertise.** Discussing our academic background is an opportunity not to credentialize, but rather to recognize how our training may sometimes clarify and at other times obscure particular issues. For linguists, the discipline's central focus on (a particular understanding of) language often leads researchers to downplay or overlook issues that are equally or even more significant to community members.
- **Our social background and lived experiences.** We should not simply inventory our demographic categories, but carefully assess how our background shapes the research, which may include the scholarly aspects of the work as well as our emotional and embodied experiences throughout the process.
- **Our relationship to the community or group that is the focus of the research, the research topic, and the other members of the research team.** Reflecting on the relational aspects of research includes how and why we came to work with a particular community and with other researchers (Galla, 2021; Leonard, 2021b). These questions may have both intellectual and personal answers. Both should be considered.
- **Areas of unequal power within the research relationship and how these are addressed.** These inequities may involve structural, social, institutional, and other areas of difference. As individuals situated in the social world, we may have power in one area and not in another, but as researchers, we always have power that must be critically examined.
- **How our knowledge of the language(s) and variety/varieties that are the focus of the research affects the research process.** Our language abilities, from beginner-level to conversationally fluent, from receptive understanding to scholarly knowledge of linguistic structure, can impact the research and our community partners in a variety of ways (Fine, 2021; Tanu & Dales, 2016; Thomas, 2022).
- **How all of the above and potentially other aspects of our positionality inform, enhance, and limit the research and how limitations are addressed.** These impacts can affect research design, data collection, data analysis, and write-up.

- **How all of the above and potentially other aspects of our positionality shape relationships between members of the research team as well as community members who are not part of the team.** Such reflections should take into account challenges, conflicts, and misunderstandings as well as successes.
- **The importance of maintaining our humility as researchers.** We need to acknowledge our limitations as well as our strengths, avoid self-aggrandizing or triumphal rhetoric, and resist the urge to downplay or ignore problems.
- **For instructors and departments:** Issues of researcher positionality should be addressed at multiple points in all graduate and undergraduate courses, training, and research experiences.
- **For reviewers, editors, and funders:** Authors should be strongly encouraged, and in some cases required, to include positionality statements or similar discussions in conference presentations, scholarly publications, and grant proposals. One recent example in which such statements were required is the two-volume edited collection of work on advancing social justice in linguistics (Charity Hudley et al. forthcoming a, b).

The goal of centering researcher positionality is to recognize the researcher as a whole person, connected to other people in a complex research relationship, and to examine how all of us as people, both individually and collectively, shape the research process and outcomes. In collaboration, if we draw on our own and our collaborators' positionalities in our research, then we enrich the research experience, strengthen our work, and amplify its benefits for those whom our research is designed to support and serve.

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