



Center for Teaching & Learning
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

JUST & EQUITABLE TEACHING (JET) CAPSTONE PROJECT SPRING 2022

You will be submitting a JET Capstone Project Proposal that will be attached to your electronic JET badge. Your project should address a social justice issue in education, demonstrating a commitment to challenging social, cultural, and economic inequalities imposed on individuals arising from any differential distribution of power, resources, and privilege.

Please use this Word template to craft your proposal. You can begin filling out this form with your Project Mentor at your first meeting. When the document is complete, upload a PDF to [DocuSign](#). Submit the final document with signatures in the Canvas course ([click here for the assignment](#)).

Participant Name: Rebecca Lee

Department: Linguistics

Project name: Integrating Sociolinguistic Approaches to Identity and Linguistic Analysis in Introduction to Linguistics (Ling 2000) at CU Boulder

1. Describe the question or issue that this project addresses.

This project seeks to address two problems: first, a trend within linguistic classrooms and the field of linguistics more broadly to separate cognitive approaches to language structure and social approaches to language use as distinct fields of study, and second, a lack of representation of theories and methods from linguists of color, Disabled linguists, and queer linguists in CU's introductory Linguistics course. Most introductory linguistics courses present sociocultural linguistics at the end of the course, or not at all (Calhoun et al 2021). However, separating linguistic structure from social use reifies common prescriptivist stereotypes that the structures of languages are static and uninfluenced by social phenomena (and/or that they exist outside of the humans who speak/sign them). In addition, introductory linguistic analyses traditionally involve reasoning tasks that focus only on the data immediately in front of the student, which prevents students from integrating this analysis with their prior knowledge about the world. This privileges students who have already had the opportunity to work on logic-based problems, rather than allowing students to reason with and build knowledge from other sources of world experience. Finally, the central theories in linguistics have been created by white cis heterosexual men from an earlier era, and thus young marginalized students do not see much representation of scholars whose experiences match their own in our introductory course at CU Boulder.



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2. Describe how your project addresses social justice in the classroom. (*how are you challenging social, cultural, and economic inequalities imposed on individuals arising from any differential distribution of power, resources, and privilege?*)

Building off Calhoun et al's (2021) foundational work designing an introductory linguistics course catering to Black students specifically, I engage in this re-design of CU Boulder's Introduction to Linguistics course in order to make linguistics more accessible and appealing to students from marginalized backgrounds, and to engage all students in integrating their understandings of language with knowledge about identity, power, and social life. During units on each of the "traditional" linguistic subfields, ie phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, I will highlight sociolinguistic research that connects these subfields to social life, and specifically, identity, inviting students to share their own experiences in the social use of language.

For example, during the phonetics and phonology units, I will incorporate discussions of phonetic variation and social meaning, for example Cardi B's use of [s]-elision at the ends of words in Spanish to index a Dominican identity (Toribio & Clemons 2019). During the morphology and lexical classes units, I will incorporate discussions of innovative morphological forms that index nonbinary identities in Romance languages (Papadopoulos 2019), as well psycholinguistic research on different uses of singular they in English (Conrod 2019). During the syntax unit, I will highlight the intersection of language variation, discrimination, and the justice system, with a discussion of the sociolinguistic ideologies surrounding Rachel Jeantel's testimony in the trial of George Zimmerman (Rickford & King 2016), as well as the importance of identity and social meaning in situational variation, exemplified by Tracey Weldon's account of code-switching and style-shifting in different parts of her life, as a Black woman professor (Weldon 2021). I will also highlight some research in ASL looking at multi-word expressions and grammaticalization (Hou 2022). Finally, in the semantics unit, I will discuss semantic changes in the word *tongzhi*, which was extended from a greeting used in Communist China, to a reference term for LGBTQ activists in Hong Kong, and the sociocultural context that prompted this extension. These bodies of research will be presented alongside a profile of the researcher, in order to represent marginalized linguists as a part of the linguistic canon. Students will also be prompted to discuss these bodies of research and find examples that relate to their own experiences, as well.

Although students in this course will still engage in *some* of the same decontextualized "logical" data analysis problems as in other iterations of this course (in phonology and morphology for example), this redesign will present these problems as of equal importance to discussion of how morphology and



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phonology (for example) are relevant to social life and imbricated in student's personal experiences. This will not only make it easier for marginalized students to succeed in this course, by grounding discussions of structural subfields of linguistics in real social issues that students care about, but it will make all linguistics majors more aware of the interplay between linguistic structure, identity, and power differences in society.

References:

- Almeida Toribio, & Clemons, A. (2019). Se comen la [s] pero a veces son muy finos. In W. Valentín-Márquez & M. González-Rivera (Eds.), *Dialects from Tropical Islands: Caribbean Spanish in the United States* (1st ed., pp. 71–87). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315115443>
- Calhoun, K., Charity Hudley, A. H., Bucholtz, M., Exford, J., & Johnson, B. (2021). Attracting Black students to linguistics through a Black-centered Introduction to Linguistics course. *Language*, 97(1), e12–e38. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2021.0007>
- Conrod, K. (2019). *Pronouns Raising and Emerging* [Dissertation]. University of Washington.
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- Papadopoulos, B. (2019). *Morphological Gender Innovations in Spanish of Genderqueer Speakers* [Undergraduate Thesis, University of California, Berkeley].
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- Rickford, J. R., & King, S. (2016). Language and linguistics on trial: Hearing Rachel Jeantel (and other vernacular speakers) in the courtroom and beyond. *Language*, 92(4), 948–988. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2016.0078>
- Weldon, T. (2021, October 19). *Middle Class African American English and Why It Matters*. New Ways of Analyzing Variation 49, University of Texas at Austin (virtual).
- Wong, A. D. (2008). On the actuation of semantic change: The case of tongzhi. *Language Sciences*, 30(4), 423–449. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2005.12.003>

3. Describe the audience that your project aims to impact:

In this project, I aim to impact undergraduate CU Boulder students in the introductory to linguistics course (Ling 2000) who identify as students of color, queer students, low income students, Disabled students, or students of other marginalized identities, or who may not have had experience working on logic/puzzle-based problems, or for whom these types of problems seem irrelevant to their daily lives. I also aim to make the broader linguistics discipline more equitable, by encouraging students (hopefully some future academics) to be more well-rounded in their approach to language, by not attempting to divorce the study of language from its material and social context.



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4. If applicable, list the partners that would be involved in this project.

There are no current partners involved in this project. However, I would like to encourage other teachers of this course to utilize these materials after they are created.

5. Detail the timeline for your project.

I plan to implement these changes during the upcoming Maymester 2022 (3 week) intensive course. Although this is not the ideal time to impart these changes, I believe integrating sociolinguistics throughout the course will keep students motivated to finish this intensive course.

6. Describe the methods of assessment for this project. How will you know if it made an impact on your audience?

I will implement three course surveys (part of the participation grade) to assess whether I have met my goals for this course redesign, one in the beginning of the term, one in the middle, and one at the end. The survey at the beginning of the term will gauge students' current understandings of identity, language structure, and the relationship between the two. The mid-semester survey will gather feedback on the structure of the course so far. The survey at the end of the term will again ask students about their understandings of identity, language structure, and the relationship between the two, and also gather feedback on the structure of the course (specifically the decision to teach sociolinguistics throughout the course rather than at the end of the course). If I have met my goals, students will demonstrate an improved understanding of the relationship between identity and language than at the beginning of the semester, and will express that the structure of the course, with sociolinguistics woven throughout the term, made them invested in the course.

7. Describe the resources that would be needed to carry out your project.

This project does not require any resources beyond those normally needed to teach a course at CU Boulder.

(Optional questions, for projects that involve the collection of demographic data)

8. If you are collecting data as part of your project, describe the steps that you would take to ensure you are collecting data from your students ethically.



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9. Please describe any steps that you will take to inform your department about your project. Include your department chair contact information here.

10. If you plan to use the data collected from your course for publication, you are required to submit an IRB for your project. Do you intend to collect data for publication?

Yes/No

Participant signature:

DocuSigned by:

Rebecca Lee

4/22/2022

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Mentor signature:

DocuSigned by:

Spencer Johnson

4/28/2022

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