



**Symposium title: *Sociolinguistics, Ethics and the Art of Encountering the Other***

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**Symposium format**

- **Symposium Multimodal**

**Symposium mode**

- **Hybrid**

**Sub-themes**

- LANGUAGE IN USE: communication, interaction, conversation analysis, discourse, corpus, media
- LINGUISTIC SOCIAL ISSUES: linguistic (in)justice, power, advocacy, attitude & bias, diversity-emancipation, discriminations, ethnicity and gender, ideology, language & social justice

**Short abstract in English**

Societal polarization can take a heavy toll on equitable relations of power, eroding people's capacity to see "the other" as anything but a threat, resulting in distrust, discrimination or violent social conflict. Interactional sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology have illuminated these dynamics, constructing critically-conscious theories of languaging which challenge hegemonic understandings (cf. Bagga-Gupta, 2018; Canagarajah, 2020; Heller, 2014; Swann & Deumert, 2018). This symposium advances the sociolinguistics of ethical encounters. It asks what it means and what it takes for people to encounter one another ethically beyond the boundaries of what is shared, in settings, within as well as without particular affinity groups, where ideological systems and sociological imaginations clash. To advance the sociolinguistics of ethical encounters, we extend our interest beyond the critical and ideological for which sociolinguistics is best known and consider additional pathways. The papers are grounded in a broad ethico-aesthetic framework, which draws on sociolinguistics, relational ethics and the arts to: (1) redefine otherness and subjectivity as ethical constructs; (2) centralise the role of the listening subject in ethical meaning making, and (3) examine signs' capacity to elicit the listening subject's ethical response and thus reconfigure the political realm of social encounters.

**Argument (2 pages maximum, i.e. about 500 words or 3000 characters including bibliography):**

***Sociolinguistics, Ethics and the Art of Encountering the Other***

This symposium explores how sociolinguistic inquiry can drive an interdisciplinary agenda for understanding ethical meaning-making across a range of settings and social contexts. We advance the sociolinguistics of ethical encounters by adopting an interdisciplinary approach which includes sociolinguistics, relational ethics and the arts. Set within this broader ethico-



aesthetic framework, papers utilise sociolinguistic theories and analytical tools to examine ethical social interactions.

Excluding those who are not like “us”, and including those who are, has been a feature of how human societies organise and identify themselves. Societal polarization can take a heavy toll on equitable relations of power, eroding people’s capacity to see “the other” as anything but a threat, resulting in distrust, discrimination, segregation, and violent social conflict. Language, or more precisely, symbolic fictions of language, have played a major mobilising role in producing such divisions. Interactional sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology have illuminated these dynamics, constructing critically-conscious empirical accounts, and developing theories of languaging which challenge hegemonic understandings (cf. Bagga-Gupta, 2018; Canagarajah, 2020; Heller, 2014; Moriarty & Kusters, 2021; Swann & Deumert, 2018).

Reframing otherness as an ethical construct requires, paradoxically, a serious engagement with the question of subjectivity. This symposium engages with human subjectivity through an ethical construct of responsibility for the Other. Such responsibility, according to Levinas (1985), is “the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity” (p. 95). It does not depend on knowledge, principles, or alliances, but concerns, as Butler (2005:x) suggests, “an infinite ethical relation”. When we respond to the call of the Other – and it is not guaranteed that we do - we participate in what Biesta (2016) calls the “event of subjectivity” (p. 22).

In this symposium we bring together papers which approach processes of othering and otherness as a public engagement issue. We address what it means and what it takes for people to encounter one another ethically beyond the boundaries of what is shared, in settings, within as well as without particular affinity groups, where ideological systems and sociological imaginations clash. To advance the sociolinguistics of ethical encounters, we extend our interest beyond the critical and ideological for which sociolinguistics is best known and consider additional pathways. We ground our inquiry in a relational ethico-aesthetic framework, which

- redefines otherness and subjectivity as ethical constructs,
- centralises the role of the listening subject in ethical meaning making, and
- examines signs’ capacity to elicit the listening subject’s ethical response and thus reconfigure the political realm of social encounters.

The papers share an interest in making visible the ethical responsibility to engage with difference, evidencing the commitment to listen to those we can never fully understand. A tangential strand is the exploration of refusing to know (or explain, comprehend, name or commit to argumentation) and the drama such a stance creates in terms of representation, illumination and vitality. All papers share a relational ethico-aesthetic stance to approaching exclusion, trauma and essentialism, describing ways forward which engage with the political, social and cultural consequences of othering.

## References

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- Biesta, G. (2016). *The beautiful risk of education*. Oxon/New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2005). *Giving an account of oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2020). Transnational work, translanguaging practices, and interactional sociolinguistics. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 24, 555-573.



- Deumert, A. (2018). Mimesis and mimicry in language - creativity and aesthetics as the performance of (dis-)semblances. *Language Sciences*, 65, 9-17.
- Heller, M. (2014). Gumperz and social justice. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 23, 192-198.
- Moriarty, E., & Kusters, A. (2021). Deaf cosmopolitanism: Calibrating as a moral process. *International Journal of Multilingualism*. doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2021.1889561
- Swann, J., & Deumert, A. (2018). Sociolinguistics and language creativity. *Language Sciences*, 65, 1-8.