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Discussion Note

Are we who we cite?: On epistemological injustices, citing practices, and #metoo in academia

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The #metoo movement reaching academia and Applied Linguistics creates a need for discussion on how we as scholars react to oppressive ideologies and behaviors in our community. However, this is not merely a question of processing cases of sexual harassment and assault. More deeply, we need conversations on who we do and do not know, read, and cite, and how to make our field more epistemologically equitable. This article hopes to elicit comments, reactions, and dialogue.

Keywords: epistemological (in)justice, #metoo, citing practices

The #metoo movement has reached academia and Applied/Educational Linguistics (Flores, 2018). In the spring of 2018, a note was found next to the picture of Dell Hymes at the University of Pennsylvania, asking why the Graduate School of Education was honoring him despite his known acts of harassment and discrimination against female students, staff, and other women.

The Research Collegium for Language in Changing Society (RECLAS) saw a need to (re)act and opened its debate series To The Point with an event entitled “**Citing Dell Hymes? Ethical and epistemological concerns in citing practices, ethical conduct, and disciplinary knowledge construction**” on November 22, 2018. The about 40 people attending engaged in discussion around the following questions: How do we, as a field, process cases oppression like sexism or racism? Can we continue to cite the work of the respective scholars if it was influential and valuable for generations of academics? Do we need to change our practices to avoid being associated with scholars who have committed acts of racism, sexism, or engaged in other dehumanizing behavior? Is there a need to make our field more epistemologically equitable? If so, how do we go about it? The following text is based on my opening statement for that evening. As demanded by the genre, it is written to elicit reactions and comments, hopefully also here as published text.

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Citations as academic power

When I think about citation practices, I wonder what our students learn, or what we as a community teach each other. A lot of our graduate students certainly receive information about how to cite, how to give credit to those whose ideas and words they borrow, and how to make sure their readers can look them up and retrace their steps (likely interspersed with some fear-instilling warnings against plagiarism). But how many, I wonder, receive training, or even just information about *who* to cite? And why should we, all of us, deeply care about who we cite?

The obvious answer of course is who we cite is who we read, who we know. But it can also be who we identify with (even if negatively), and, importantly, who we give power to. In the current academic climate, citations are more than a few names and numbers in our writing. They are more than due diligence or a strategy to avoid plagiarism. To use Fogarty's (2009) poignantly capitalist metaphor, citations have become the currency of academia: We earn them through hard work (or so the common discourse suggests) and we exchange them for status and, to a certain degree, even for jobs. Citations have also become an important way of measuring "impact", a way of putting into numbers how much power our work has, how much it shapes our colleagues' work, and what role it plays in other published academics' writing. If we (or actually our texts that become this "we") don't get cited, aren't we, in some ways, considered lacking, impoverished, and even destitute as scholars? As we work within and hopefully also against such processes, we have a great responsibility as readers, reviewers, editors, writers, and teachers when we decide whether we cite someone or not. Our citations are powerful, they reflect and become our knowledge, our discipline, and, as Sara Ahmed (2013) has pointed out, they are "ways of making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline and others not even part" (para 4).

Key figures and identity politics

This brings me to my next point, which is about the people and knowledges who take center stage in our academic thinking and doing. Let's consider for a moment who they are, the ones we consider "founders", "key figures", or "big names" or the texts and books that comprise our "canon", the things we tell our students they simply *have* to know or cite. These people and names play a key role in our academic ways of being. In Hyland's (1999) words, they shape our "community norms of effective argument" (p. 362). Although names like Dell Hymes' becoming contested can embrittle these norms, abandoning or seriously pushing against them is often a difficult and controversial act. Apart from sparking controversy, we might feel that not citing our "key figures" and thus breaking with the "community norms" would be academically questionable and leave us with a distorted or incomplete picture of our field. Maybe this is a good time to wonder and worry about this picture, to take a step back and ask: How does anyone get to be part of it in the first place? In what ways is the picture already incomplete? How did anyone get to be a "key figure" in it? And why did they get elevated and cited and not others? (see also Ahmed, 2017). My argument here is not to point fingers or overthrow a whole system of practices that has historically grown and contributed to many societal and individual advances, including my

own. I believe, however, that we need more critical awareness of how citing practices develop and become ingrained in our academic behavior and identities and of how knowledges become canonized implicitly and explicitly, so that we can effectively seek out alternatives and resistances against these established but inequitable practices.

Recommended Resource

Why are you not citing an African female expert?

<http://www.languageonthemove.com/why-are-you-not-citing-any-african-female-expert/>

The #metoo movement has been and continues to be accused of identity politics (e.g. Epstein, 2018), which raises the question if #metoo coming to academia will result in a form of exclusiveness that could direct our academic thinking and doing. When I look at my publications, my list of references, my bookshelf, the keynotes at the conferences I present at, I cannot help but wonder, aren't we already there? Isn't much of what we know (by "we" I mean myself and my academic community of mostly white European-heritage scholars), aren't many of our collaborations, networks, references, and academic idols the result of some version of identity politics? Aren't we, in many ways, who we cite? While we certainly have to acknowledge the brilliance and impact some of the so-called "big names" have had and continue to have on many of us, our colleagues, and students, we need to keep in mind that how someone or something gets to accumulate power and status and be impactful, is usually not the result of a neutral or objective process. Such a process of knowing, citing, elevating someone is not carried out by an academic community in which all members are equally represented and heard, regardless of their rank, gender, geographic location, cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious affiliation, discipline, area of specialization, sexual orientation and identity, and other social and professional factors. Given the complexity and bias that is inherent in declaring someone a "big name" or something a "must/read", maybe nothing and no one deserves to have unquestioned or absolute status. We have to be allowed to ask uncomfortable and critical questions about our "key figures", critique their work, struggle with who they were as human beings, and yes, also not to cite them. Why, one may ask (and I sometimes ask myself), is exclusion a legitimate strategy here? When the goal is ultimately to end inequity, is it really OK to impose a personal citing embargo on people or texts we select ourselves? My answer remains yes, under certain circumstances, and if critically and thoroughly substantiated, such measures can be effective and needed to spark change, especially when an unjust system of practices is well established and normalized. People from historically underrepresented groups have the right not to cite those who have systematically underrepresented them. Because in the end, both who we cite and who we do not cite matter for who we are and become as academics and as a community.

#metoo

Our debate at the University of Jyväskylä was not mainly about #metoo, but given the context in which Dell Hymes has recently made headlines, it is important to address the issue of allegations that were brought against him and why they matter. It is still quite common for survivors of sexual violence to be dismissed, ignored, belittled, or blamed for their experiences. The #metoo movement has created a space for them to share their stories. Among the shared experiences of

many survivors is the one of authorities and courts systematically dismissing or failing to hear them. Such a failure to hear survivors is not always due to ignorance and sexism, but sometimes because authorities and courts are not built or equipped to deal with the subtle or fleeting nature of seemingly small harassments (groping, grinding, catcalling...) that many people live with every day. #metoo fills a gap between these experiences and the legal system that courts and official authorities were unable to bridge. #metoo is far from perfect, but if we argue that truth and justice can come from many sources, we need open ears for movements like this to inform our acting, thinking, and knowing. When people criticize #metoo for being a “witch hunt” and “mob justice”, it is worth keeping in mind that the goal of many survivors is not to identify or shame their violators, but to share and thus legitimize their experience, to find a platform to speak the very fundamental truth of “this happened to me, and it wasn’t my fault, and it was not OK”.

Coming back to Dell Hymes, it is true that he has never been convicted because he reached out-of-court settlements with several female colleagues who had filed lawsuits against him. A large amount of evidence and institutional knowledge exists that he did harass and discriminate against women (and I have yet to meet a person who denies that). But we don’t speak as judges here, and this is not a legal debate. As we engage in this discussion as academics, individuals, community members, and more, one thing is important to remember: Every time someone holds up a picture of a harasser, violator, racist, or other offender as a role model, a survivor is doubting their experience thinking that “Maybe it wasn’t that bad, maybe it was my fault after all, maybe I imagined or misunderstood it.” And every time we do this, it confirms that you can grope women and be a respected academic, you can make racist jokes and still be a member of parliament, and you can “grab them by the pussy” and still be president. So let’s consider what we do to those who are trying to survive when we hold up certain people as “key figures” or “big names” in our field. And let’s think about whether this is really the message we want to send and the (academic) world we’d like to live and work in.

Recommended Resource

Citation Practices Challenge by Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang, and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdpbmsJDZ3-zwca-dgGjfePrT_6koBTZRWlvh80fmoYYQRrIw/viewform

The actual point: Epistemological injustice

It all boils down to this: Let’s talk less about who we shouldn’t cite and more about who we should read, know, and cite. In other words, let’s talk about the epistemological biases of our field. In 2018, a colloquium of the annual conference of the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) entitled “Race, parity, and representation in Applied Linguistics: Implications for knowledge construction” (papers by Usree Bhattacharya, Lei Jiang, & Suresh Canagarajah; Ryuko Kubota; Nelson Flores; Patricia Baquedano-López; and Suresh Canagarajah, chair Usree Bhattacharya, discussant Suhanthie Motha; see also Bhattacharya, Jiang, Canagarajah, 2019) offered some statistics on the situation of scholars of color within the organization. Maybe most strikingly, the invitation-only journal ARAL (Annual Review of Applied Linguistics) had only had white

editors-in-chief since its inception, only 7,5% of presidents of AAAL had been scholars of color, only 15,52% of plenary speakers had been non-white, and no scholar of color had received the prestigious Distinguished Scholarship and Service Award (which changed later at that very conference). Another way to approach this debate is to consider where knowledges come from and who gets credit for them and who doesn't. A few years ago, in 2014, Karen L. Michel published some convincing evidence that the Maslow pyramid of needs borrowed heavily from the Blackfoot nation. This is just one of many examples that "giving credit" is not innocent and straightforward and follows the rules of power and oppression, as do many processes in academia that we like to think of as neutral and objective. The real question today is not Do we cite Dell Hymes? – in the end, everyone has to make their own decision about that. The real question is How do we make space for more and especially for underrepresented knowledges? or How do we move towards epistemological equity? We need to talk about the scholars and knowledges we have lost or ignored or erased due to racism or sexism or other -isms and thereby harmed our field. I don't know the answers, and that's really why I am writing this. I am hopeful that this will be a team effort, a process in which we are all learners and critical friends to each other. Let's have this be a first step and move forward together. I look forward to many responses and comments!

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