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Participation in sociolinguistic research

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Abstract

Involving speakers in research on their linguistic practices has been at the core of sociolinguistics since the inception of the field. In contrast to social sciences, however, sociolinguists have rarely addressed the issues surrounding the participation of those involved *and* engaged in the research process. This paper aims at reviewing the state of the art and outlining critical dimensions and aspects with relation to participation. We explore previous studies and study designs with the help of the following questions: Who has been involved? How and with what impact have stakeholders participated in different strands of sociolinguistic research? Current developments are presented and reviewed with particular reference to language expertise of those outside academia, as manifested in everyday talk about language, and the link between the production of this knowledge and social inequalities. We point out that the interconnectedness of everyday language expertise

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and social (in)equality can only be interpreted in highly localised contexts, whose diverse understandings and conceptualisations provide and, at the same time, limit the possibilities of social transformation.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Participation, defined here broadly as the involvement and engagement of all interested parties, has recently gained momentum in several societal domains, including not only political decision-making, cultural and mass media spaces, whether online or offline, but also academic research. This change has been expressed in the notion of ‘participatory turn’ (Bradley & Simpson, 2020; Escott & Pahl, 2019; Saurugger, 2010). In sociolinguistics, there is a well-established tradition of involving the ‘researched’ into the research process itself. Key aspects of participatory research, as elaborated in the social sciences (see e.g., Nind, 2014), however, have rarely been discussed in the study of language. Our paper aims at scrutinising the state-of-the-art in participatory research, seeking answers to the following questions: Who has been involved? How and with what impact have stakeholders participated in different strands of sociolinguistic research?

In this article, we discuss recent advances in sociolinguistics through a systematic review of participatory research methodologies and principles. Current developments are presented and reviewed with particular reference to language expertise of those outside academia, as manifested in everyday talk about language, and the link between the production of this knowledge and issues of social inequalities. We point out that the interconnectedness of everyday language expertise and social (in)equality can only be interpreted in highly localised contexts, whose diverse understandings and conceptualisations provide and, at the same time, limit the possibilities of social transformation.

2 | LANGUAGE EXPERTISE IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Sociolinguistics, concerned with the relationship between language and the social world, has always sought to understand this relationship by involving the speakers. From the very beginning, it has been part of the sociolinguistic undertaking that linguistic data is not generated through introspection, as in the structuralist and Chomskyan tradition, but through linguistic interactions with speakers who are thus involved in the research. It was also realised that by involvement, linguists would gain access to the locally significant metalinguistic knowledge of others, while remaining mostly detached from their (often marginalised) social reality. Scholars of language and society considered the language expertise of the ‘researched’ to be relevant knowledge for addressing social inequalities, but only to the extent that the research community can transform it into socially useful knowledge. Yet in what ways could it be achieved? The following section is an overview of sociolinguistic endeavours to relate local language expertise to the social impact of scholarly research.

Issues of local linguistic expertise and the social impact of scholarly work on it have been taken up in various ways by prominent scholars belonging to a more ethnographically oriented qualitative sociolinguistic tradition (e.g., Gumperz et al., 1979; Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1980). Doing ethnography means an active participation in the reality which is researched, and this is hardly conceivable without mutual involvement between the researcher and the researched. As an outstanding example, Hymesian ‘ethnographic monitoring’ was a programme for educational contexts, in which ethnographic

micro-analysis of schools involved participatory engagement with stakeholders in order to achieve social change (Hymes, 1980, 1996). It is no coincidence that ethnographic monitoring has recently been reinvigorated by a new wave of interest into the link between research and social action (Hornberger, 2014; McCarty, 2011; van der Aa & Blommaert, 2011). Rampton et al. (2018) state that this shift is strengthened by neo-liberal developments in academia: the economisation of research, the commodification of teaching and the growing demand for social impact contribute to the quest for new approaches with outreach potential (cf. Nind, 2014, p. 20).

A different insight has given rise to a participatory approach in a subfield of applied linguistics, which is known as language documentation and revitalisation. It is widely recognised that any programme or activity aiming to revitalise a language can be successful or have meaningful results only if it includes the active participation of the community or of the members of the community itself (Hinton, 2010; Lemus, 2018); thus, language documentation and revitalisation is understood as a priori participatory. However, participation is not an end in itself; the documentation activities, seeking for 'good' speakers and standardisation centred revitalisation often result in creating new hierarchies and frictions among the speakers of endangered languages (Gal, 2017). That is, in language documentation and revitalisation, the participatory approach appears rather selective, concentrating and supporting certain types of participants chosen according to research objectives.

Scholars working in the variationist quantitative paradigm set up general principles to be followed to serve and engage the investigated community. As leading sociolinguists committed to social responsibility, Labov (1982) provided the 'principle of error correction' and the 'principle of debts incurred', to which Wolfram (1993) later added the 'principle of linguistic gratuity'. What are these concepts about? First, error correction aims at clarifying widespread societal misconceptions and misinterpretations about language, presuming that such exist at large. Second, debts incurred oblige the linguist to 'use knowledge based on data for the benefit of the community, when it has need for it' (Labov, 1982, p. 173); and third, the principle of linguistic gratuity states that researchers should seek 'positive ways in which they can return linguistic favours to the community' (Wolfram, 1993, p. 227). A common feature of these principles is that they are post hoc applications of sociolinguistic knowledge, obtained during fieldwork. This is also an aspect of Wolfram's approach, as can be seen despite the efforts of his team's dialect awareness programme in Ocracoke to proactively engage the host community in sharing the linguists' expertise. The focus of collaboration was on 'return', which admittedly established 'an asymmetrical relationship of authority about language matters' (Wolfram, 1998, p. 273), rather than co-created such an expertise. At the same time, Rickford (1997) called attention to the disparity between linguists and the communities being studied regarding the benefits of research; sociolinguists should strive to improve this unequal relationship in their research programme.

Sociolinguistics has made great progress in putting these principles in practice (Charity-Hudley, 2018; Wolfram, 2018; Wolfram et al., 2008). Lewis (2018), however, criticises the 'dominant error correction approaches' as counterproductive to social change. According to him, these approaches limit potential action to demonstrating that representations of language are either false or true. Instead of such positivistic error correction, Lewis calls for the investigation of how 'academic scholarship has produced and continues to produce knowledge about language in ways linked to existing systems of marginalisation' (p. 340). That is, for example, the Labovian principle of error correction implies a hierarchy of knowledge, where the researcher has access to reliable and more valid knowledge, whereas the local community has erroneous knowledge to be corrected. What is more, typically the communities and participants investigated by prominent sociolinguists, such as Labov, were socially marginalised, whereas the researcher is privileged by birth or education and social status. Although it should be noted that sociolinguistic research is not limited to the study of marginalised groups and their language, when it comes to them, the differences are even more significant. Recognising such

paradoxes has pointed to the urgency of critically re-examining the researcher positionality and epistemological premises (Charity-Hudley et al., 2020). The participatory approach, where research is carried out in collaboration, together *with* interested parties not just *for* them, is one way to remedy this challenge (Bucholtz et al., 2016).

3 | EVERYONE IS A LANGUAGE EXPERT IN AND BEYOND SOCIOLINGUISTICS

The increased interest in including the speakers' language expertise and their metalinguistic knowledge among the research foci appeared in the 2010s; however, we connect its origins with three earlier theoretical and technological developments. One of these is the concept of language ideologies, which was coined by Silverstein (1979) and gained momentum in the 1990s (see Woolard, 1998). Silverstein introduced a perspective on linguistic anthropology in which the study of language ideologies as naturalized beliefs about language emphasises that the knowledge produced by language scholars is not neutral, and all speakers mobilise notions on what different speech modes are relevant for. The rise of Internet-based social media, along with digital hyperconnectivity and participatory culture, is another development that made language ideologies even more visible and accessible than before (Rymes, 2020; Rymes et al., 2017). The research on language ideologies and the Internet in general helped Citizen Science (CS), as a third impetus, to gain foot in sociolinguistic inquiry.

Rymes had developed the study of how views and talk about language are represented and circulate in participatory spaces such as the Internet. Rymes and Leone (2014, p. 26) define citizen sociolinguists as 'people who use their senses and intelligence to understand the world of language around them'. Rymes (2020) interprets Citizen Sociolinguistics as a study of speakers' everyday metalinguistic commentary mainly on the Internet. This principle, however, has not yet led to the citizen sociolinguists' involvement and engagement in the processes of academic knowledge production.

Following this line, other scholars have also employed CS as an observatory data collection method (see SturtzSreetharan, 2020). In one such study, CS was used to collect everyday examples of 'fat talk via direct observations in public spaces' (SturtzSreetharan et al., 2019, p. 5). In that study, engaging non-linguists in data collection enabled access to real life forms of fat talk instead of accounts of the same phenomenon gathered by researchers, which had been the case in previous sociolinguistic studies on fat talk. In other words, the observations of citizens were used to outsource the task of data collection. Volunteers were trained by linguists to be able to document the naturally occurring data, but they were not involved in other scholarly activities, such as articulating research questions. In this sense, citizen scientists were not treated as potential language experts. Rymes (2020), however, also acknowledged citizens' metalinguistic work as having the potential for social and linguistic change; in these terms, her approach already treats speakers as social actors and experts in language issues. The same is presupposed in the PanMeMic Manifesto that argues that a Socratic tradition today is combined with 'affordances of the online medium, to make conversations transnational, live and permanently traceable' (Adami et al., 2020: 13). PanMeMic is an international research group launched during the COVID-19 pandemic established by semioticians worldwide. PanMeMic is specifically concerned with how communication and social interaction are changing as a result of the pandemic. The group advocates for a collective semiotic research that draws on the following principles: voluntary character, individual responsibility, sharing and collaboration, public and live conversation. The PanMeMic website (<https://panmemic.hypotheses.org/>) is understood as a 'transmedia space for those who want to develop understanding on changes in communication and social interaction' (Adami et al., 2020, p. 14). The participants of the PanMeMic project are thus not only treated as language experts but

individuals also capable of documenting sociolinguistic changes and producing knowledge collectively in a lively and public form of inquiry.

Svendsen (2018) expands the circle of participants into the youth. Her agenda is set as follows: 'citizen sociolinguistics requires the inclusion of non-professionals in doing sociolinguistic research, in collecting data, in registering them, analysing and interpreting them relative to the level of citizen involvement and collaboration, the research questions and design of the CS-project' (Svendsen, 2018, pp. 139–140). She reports a citizen sociolinguistics project in Norway, where linguistic diversity was investigated in education. Their starting point was that young people can reflect on their language practices and they can be trained to work as 'amateur scientists' and language experts. As a part of a research campaign in Norwegian schools, the project aimed to create a national inventory of knowledge of languages and language varieties spoken by young people in Norway and to promote sociolinguistic research and linguistic awareness among pupils (Svendsen, 2018, p. 144). Svendsen's team made sure to include the pupils' research needs in the design of the project; however, scientific analyses, reported in academic publications, were carried out by researchers. In sum, for mainstream CS projects (e.g., SturtzSreetharan et al., 2019) the hierarchies between different agents are profound: academic researchers plan and design the study, recruit and train students to work as assistants, who in turn recruit volunteers to collect data, which is then analysed by researchers, who publish the results.

As a new perspective, Svendsen's (2018) approach envisions the democratisation of the entire research process. However, Svendsen (2018) does not reflect on how social inequality could be tackled by citizen sociolinguistic inquiry. For instance, when discussing results on the spoken languages at home in Norway, she also mentions unconventional glottonyms, such as 'Kebab-Norwegian' without initiating change or critical stance towards them (Svendsen, 2018, pp. 147–148). That is, there is no investigation into whether these are self-ironic terms used by the members of the community or (racial) slurs towards ethnic minority groups, in addition, there is no mentioning whether this issue was brought back to the classrooms or not. A participatory approach also deals with critical questions of justice and equality.

4 | INEQUALITY, EMPOWERMENT AND THE RIGHT TO RESEARCH

Participatory research aims at dissolving the unequal relationship between the researcher and the researched parties as much as possible. It is about democratising the research process, empowering all research stakeholders and seeking to enhance social justice in the given sociocultural contexts through the shared production of knowledge which can lead to social transformation. Appadurai (2006, p. 168) introduces the concept of the right to research, defining it as 'the right to the tools through which any citizen can systematically increase that stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens'. By democratising the research process, an atmosphere of shared learning can be nurtured by all participants. All stakeholders will have the opportunity to experience an empowered position in order to take shared responsibility for the processes of participation and engagement. Participatory research 'involves a joint process of knowledge-production that leads to new insights' (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, p. 196). Its main goal is to ensure that all engaged parties construct, de- and re-construct the meaning of everyday reality here and now in a self-reflective process. Opening and maintaining a 'communicative space' (Gayá Wicks & Reason, 2009) enables participants to share their experiences and to negotiate conflicting interests and values. However, this does not necessarily lead to an engagement with the issues that have to do with language-related inequalities, which are pervasive in social life and they are never only about

language (see e.g., Flores & Chaparro, 2018, for a materialist anti-racist approach, Piller (2016) and De Korne (2021) for a social justice approach). Through engaged participation, the transformative effects of research can be realised by drawing on the linguistic expertise of all participants.

Participatory approaches include reflection on the positioning of all actors in the research process, and a continuous negotiation between participants on how to create shared knowledge. This requires taking into account the sociocultural, economic and political differences and hierarchies between the participants, which are shaped along structural inequalities of language, race, gender, ethnicity and age, affecting the possibilities for joint action. The aim of such endeavours may be either to better understand and co-create common interpretations of the lived experience, or to initiate desired and sustainable transformation towards more socially just human conditions. To achieve the latter, joint social actions and interventions are performed. These vary in their extent and quality of targeted change and transformation, in the aims they want to achieve (van Willigen, 2002), as well as the quality of their impact in the individual (mental, cognitive) or societal (policy, living conditions) level (see e.g., Pataki & Bodorkós, 2009).

The idea of joint endeavour in sociolinguistic inquiry was first raised in Cameron and her associates' (1992, 1993) manifesto, which called for emancipatory and democratic research *on, for and with* non-linguists. The authors criticised the unequal power relations between researcher and research subjects which is consecutively (re)constructed during the linguistic knowledge production process. In addition, they also reflected on the lack of impact on public opinion and the (alleged) need for giving voice to the disempowered. Despite all the efforts to reframe the relationship between the sociolinguist and the research participants, Bucholtz et al. (2016) pointed out that the concept of empowerment recreates the hegemony of neoliberal (and thus individualist) insights on the macro-level, while addressing social questions with a paternalistic overtone on the micro-level. Instead of empowerment, they proposed an alternative concept called *accompaniment*, an idea that originated in Central American social movements. Research, in this approach, is understood as a joint activity, in which scholars and local participants accompany each other, they learn to speak and work together, and they contribute to the success of their project with different skills and expertise. Therefore, Bucholtz and her colleagues did not see the 'researched' (young people from Southern California, in their case) as a population for whom power should be given, but as socio-political agents with rich cultural and linguistic experience. In order not to presume any privileged interpretations on the social world of these agents, the authors' principle can be summarised in one short sentence: '*Follow, don't lead*' (2016, p. 40).

This well-founded critique of empowerment is linked to the wide-ranging debate around the concept (see Del Percio, 2018; Kamruzzaman & White, 2018; Kraft & Flubacher, 2020; Ladegaard, 2017; McLaughlin, 2016). As part of this, proponents of empowerment models have been criticised for assuming that power structures are inherently hierarchical, whereas, from a Foucauldian post-structuralist approach, power is decentralised and power relationships are essentially relational in their nature. That is, every person has some kind of power and can use it as an everyday form of resistance, such as cultural protest or non-cooperation (Scott, 1985; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Based on post-positivist approaches and the 'empowerment paradigm' of sociolinguistics (Flores & Chaparro, 2018, p. 368), we frame empowerment as both 'power-to' and 'power with' (Clegg & Haugaard, 2009), understood as the inclusion of all participating stakeholders in deliberative, autonomous and mutually responsible processes of knowledge co-production and co-creation.

In practice, the principle of participation can be carried out on different levels and at various stages of the research process, therefore the extent of transforming power relations also varies. Just to mention a few examples of the sociolinguistic inquiry, Jones et al. (2000), for instance, reversed the roles in their studies on multilingual literacies, and asked their participants to write their own diaries

about their linguistic practices instead of drawing on the observations of the scholars. This method helped them to counterweight the hierarchical positions of the researcher and the 'researched' because the participants were acknowledged as experts of their own sociolinguistic environments. Elsewhere Hodge and Jones (2000) made an attempt to share as much control as possible with their participants and acknowledged them as co-researchers. The co-researchers did not merely take photos, and thus select what to document from their literacy practices, but they were also involved in the phases of planning the research, analysing the data and discussing the results. Alexander and Androutsopoulos (2021) did not include their participants in so many phases of research, but they created a recursive framework for their collaborative study, in which they visualised the data provided by the participants, and invited them to give feedback on the validity of the visualisations and to select more data excerpts for analysis. In this sense, their collaboration with research participants was aimed at making the results more valid.

The degree of participation varies in participatory research. The use of participation and the co-creation of knowledge can serve either functional or empowering goals (Lilja & Bellon, 2008, p. 482). It is functional when it is used as a tool for making the data collection process more efficient or the research data and results more relevant. It can also serve the empowerment of stakeholders through the joint study of their own life-worlds. Endeavours to facilitate empowerment in this sense aim to enhance the stakeholders' social and human capital and to build their capacity to become conscious and active citizens through raising critical awareness on their living conditions. Participatory research might also acknowledge that empowerment processes are full of tensions, negotiations and contradictions, and might contribute to reinforcing existing power relations, gender inequalities and hierarchies. Thus, participation in research can be imagined on a scale, dialogic in nature and changing in time. Also, the level of collaboration and participation depend on the involvement of the participants and the particular research context. Attempts to democratise academic knowledge production are well known in the history of sociolinguistics, but the endeavour to transform the whole process into participatory research has been scarce so far.

As participatory research is conducted in groups; this format significantly influences the responsibility and the role of the sociolinguist, who is not the main initiator and proprietor of the research anymore. The linguist has a multi-layered role as a co-producer and co-creator of knowledge, and a facilitator and participant of the research process. Having a role of both researcher and participant, sociolinguists need to systematically reflect on their own roles and positionality as well as on the interconnectedness of the other participants and their own socio-cultural environment, thus the research context. When discussing life stories of marginalised and traumatised migrant women in Hong Kong, Ladegaard (2017, p. 172), for instance, points out how interactive research methods contributed not to objectify the women, who were involved in the research as co-producers of knowledge about their life-worlds and how the interactions with them resulted in his becoming 'empowered through an amazing testimony from a group of resourceful and spiritually powerful women'. However, co-production does not mean that the academic researcher role is dissolved among the ones of the other participants.

In a participatory approach, sociolinguists have a wide range of responsibilities. Within the generally established research framework, academic participants are to be responsible for the costs and budget as well as for accomplishing the indicators of research outcomes—a role that is hardly compatible with a participatory approach. Indeed, the standard conditions for research are designed to establish a hierarchy between the researcher who is funded and the 'researched', and this has far-reaching material consequences (Benedicto, 2018). In this respect, the collaboration with the funding institutions is crucial. A positive example is the language revitalisation research project in Vancouver Island Salish communities: a steering committee consisting of representatives from the communities ('Elders') and the funding institutions (including academic researchers from the University of

Victoria) was set up to make all major decisions of the project, from research design to financial matters (Czaykowska-Higgins et al., 2018). Nevertheless, partnership between researchers and other actors does not always work. The role of the funding institution is usually limited to selecting projects to be financed and monitoring the delivery of the promised results. Even if the research initiative comes from the non-academic sector, sociolinguists are accountable for creating the opportunities for the highest possible degree of participation and involvement of all parties in the entire scope of the whole research process.

5 | SOCIOLINGUISTIC CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

A crucial step in any participatory research is to create and maintain stakeholder involvement and engagement, which can only be achieved by reflecting on the unequal relationships between researchers and other participants in research. Challenges of this process are discussed next, including the potential of performing acts of Linguistic Citizenship as well as incentives for stakeholder involvement and engagement. Two such incentives are briefly discussed in relation to action research in language teaching and to community-based language research. In this section, we also address issues of measuring the impact of participatory research. The challenges of engagement are illustrated by Wolfram (1998, p. 275), who, in the course of implementing a programme to raise dialect awareness in Ocracoke, was confronted with the fact that one of the very active local participants, when interviewed by a journalist, identified the limits of local commitment: ‘The only person who worries about the dialect is Walt Wolfram’. A decade later, Wolfram et al. (2008), writing on the operationalisation of linguistic gratuity, argue that if community members consider everything else more important than dealing with linguistic differences, the condition for working together is not only the sharing of knowledge about language differences as related to other (social, economic, political) differences, but also the joint construction of knowledge about knowledge. This requires a radical rearticulation of the researcher's role, according to the negotiation with local actors and the agreed framework.

Concepts of language, rights and (in)equality can only be understood from a participatory approach, if they are situated in local contexts. As Pennycook (2018, p. 29) states, ‘abstract notions of equality only make sense when they are realised in concrete social and political contexts’. From this point of departure, one of the possible future directions is a participatory reconfiguration of Linguistic Citizenship research (LC). Stroud (2001) argued that the Linguistic Human Rights paradigm, offering a universalist answer to language-based inequality, supports a top-down and essentialist view of language and ethnicity, marginalises non-standard speakers, and follows an affirmative political agenda. In contrast, LC does not define language and identity as fixed features of the Self, but offers grassroots agency and the eradication of the boundaries between state, regional and local management of linguistic issues. LC is an agentive and transformative uptake of citizenship, which fosters a more ethical stance to others through language. While LC's perspective coincides with the trends of participation in sociolinguistic research, including advocacy for utopist transformation (Stroud, 2015), decolonisation (Stroud & Kerfoot, 2020), democratic access to voice and agency (Rampton et al., 2018) and a dynamic, non-linear involvement of diverse stakeholder groups into research activities (Matras & Robertson, 2017), it fails to propose a systematic approach for involving the ‘researched’ in the research process itself. For example, it has been recently established that the sociolinguistic critique of named languages as essentialising constructs (e.g., Jaffe, 2012) does not ‘travel well’ to the non-linguist citizens, and, as Rampton et al. (2018, p. 72) put it, ‘in certain circumstances, the invocation of named languages helps to advance political causes that they deem progressive’. This call for flexibility,

however, addresses the sociolinguist and there is no elaboration of how to make the potential co-researcher's metalinguistic practices more reflective and not only based on the categories of named languages. Although LC provides a progressive theoretical framework, the question whether the claim for participation and democratisation will be extended fruitfully to research in practice remains open and can only be answered locally.

Having participation as an inherent part of the research design, one of the main questions is who becomes a stakeholder and how they can share their own perspectives and have a voice in different stages of the research. A participatory research design means, in general, that all stakeholders involved in the inquiry should take part in various or all parts of the decision-making process. However, stakeholder involvement and engagement is often not equal and can lead to the reinforcement of existing hierarchies, even with the best intentions of researchers. We illustrate this by action research as a well-established practice in applied linguistics, especially in language teaching (Banegas, 2019; Banegas & Consoli, 2020; Bergroth et al., 2021; Burns, 1999; Dikilita & Griffiths, 2017; McDonough, 2006; Sowa, 2009). One aim of such research has been to make teachers more conscious about the impact of their work on language learners. Therefore, it has a transformative effect on what happens in the classroom in order to improve the learning process.

The teachers are in the centre of action research: they are the ones who identify problems in their teaching and set up a strategy to find solutions through research and action. Although action research has often been carried out collaboratively (see e.g., Wallace, 1998), participation tends to be limited from the students' part. The main collaborators are language teachers working on the improvement of their professional practice. Students are only involved if the teacher invites them to add their own reflections on the teaching and learning process. According to Burns (2009), teachers conducting action research aim to gather systematic knowledge about their teaching practice and intend to share their findings with other teachers. This type of action research does not strive for changing the hierarchy in the classroom or in the iterative cycles of anticipation, action and reflection of the research. The teacher, however, finds students' empirical knowledge a valid resource for creating better teaching and learning practices. Following the thread of participatory action research in education (Alonso & Le, 2020; Fielding, 2011, 2018), research on language teaching can benefit from the involvement of students into a cooperative teaching and learning process, eventually leading to a restructuring of the student-teacher relationship into a more equal one in terms of decision-making. If this happens, students will be in a position to be able to reflect on and to influence their learning.

Further difficulties can arise if stakeholders are involved with the promise that their collaboration will represent the interests and values of the whole group. This becomes particularly apparent in situations where the group concerned is not united in its approach to language issues, such as language shift and, as a reaction, language revitalisation. One widely used attempt to address this is community-based (language) research (shortname: CBR). According to Bischoff and Jany (2018), there is an increasing interest towards CBR in anthropology and linguistics, because CBR is understood as having at its core some type of community involvement through all stages of the research project and it is community-situated, collaborative and action-oriented. There are at least four components of CBR upon which there seems to be general agreement in language revitalisation literature (see e.g., Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009; Olko, 2018; Rice, 2011). First, CBR always involves the collaboration between researcher and community. Rice (2018) goes even further, saying that the relevance of the research topic itself is identified or verified by the members of the community, and the research process and the results should be accessible and understandable to the members of the community. Second, research is both an intellectual and a practical act with practical implications and applications, especially for improving social conditions, for example, the production of knowledge and materials that can be useful for the communities in language education and/or language revitalisation.

Third, CBR is 'social action and social change for the purpose of achieving social justice' (Strand et al., 2003, p. 8, quoted in Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009, p. 26). Finally, CBR involves the democratisation of knowledge, with academic researchers recognising and addressing the power imbalances between themselves and members of the community (Rice, 2018).

One of the central aspects of CBR is community itself: Czaykowska-Higgins (2009) argues that the way 'community' is defined depends on the language-using group itself, as well as on the specific research project. However, it is rarely discussed in what ways can the limitations be overcome and how can as many community members be involved in the research process as possible (for an exception, see Stenzel, 2014). These constraints could be related to the 'paradox of participation' in the context of transformative research, meaning that 'action researchers, acting to actualise participatory and democratic values, unintentionally impose participatory methods upon partners who are either unwilling or unable to act as researchers' (Arieli et al., 2009, p. 275, emphasis removed). Moreover, they pertain to the sociolinguistic criticism of the ideological underpinnings to the concept of a language-based community. Concepts such as speech community, language community or the community of practice are based on assumptions of shared values and (potential) consensus among group members, prioritising internal relations rather than external connections (Blommaert & Rampton, 2016; McElhinny, 2012; Rampton, 2009).

In its social, historical, and political context, the diversity of human communication and of the different linguistic features has been classified and categorised in such a way that it is almost never neutral: the categories and values assigned to the varieties result in the creation of power, social distinction and social hierarchy (Agha, 2007). As CBR in language revitalisation contexts aims at transforming sociolinguistic settings in flux, where former language practices diminish, collapse or become irrelevant, 'outsider' researchers face the imperatives of both not assuming a pre-given community around the linguistic activities they promote and assuming an emerging community of those who are willing to collaborate. As Wolfram's example points out, it is the reflexive process of participatory research that needs to create this community. More generally, a significant risk of a participatory approach is that it is based on the privileged researchers' historical experience and interest at the expense of other ways of understanding the life worlds that are researched. There is a danger that linguists will research marginalised groups and their language in such a way that they will take their own perspective and language as the default and interpret linguistic differences in relation to them, which only become data as deviations from that default (cf. Charity-Hudley et al., 2020). In the participatory paradigm, all kinds of knowledge may equally serve effective and long-term problem solving. It cannot thus be set down a priori which of the knowledge realms should be given priority, since all knowledge is considered similarly heterogeneous, mostly full of suppressed and hardly reflected prejudice (Rahnema, 2010 [1992], p. 134). The researchers 'as knowers participate and get involved as subjects in the experiences that are to be known and that are the focus of the inquiry' (Heron, 1996, p. 20). That is, the researcher becomes a co-subject and all 'researched' parties become co-researchers.

In connection to the mainly social constructivist approach of participatory research, this research practice has rarely addressed the issue of how to measure the impact of joint action, whether it be scientific or social in nature. This may be due to the well-known neophyte practice that participatory researchers are hesitant to report their failures and the unintended impacts of their actions, when trying to establish the legitimacy of their work and methodology. While there is an urgent need to develop, together with all participants, procedures for measuring the social impact of research, it is less clear how the publication of research results in collaboration with non-linguist participants can be reconciled with widely accepted research dissemination practices. In participatory research results are extensively published in multimodal and non-conventional ways (Gubrium & Harper, 2013;

Pitkänen-Huhta & Pietikäinen, 2016), based on the premise that everyone, and especially the stakeholders, has a right to conduct and understand research and its outcomes. Dissemination strategies for participatory research can only become part of mainstream research practice if scientific and social impact are combined in the evaluation of research.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

The new trends being there, participatory approaches are still far from being regarded as being a central trend in sociolinguistics. The reasons might lie in three aspects. First, the positivist roots of sociolinguistics are an obstacle to bridging the traditionally desired distance between the researchers and their 'subjects', which is the guiding principle of participatory research. Second, in practical terms, the development of participatory engagement and collaboration is difficult to fit into the standard framework for research funding, which does not include support for these initial processes. Existing structures for obtaining academic recruitment, tenure and promotion also hinder the wider uptake of participatory approaches. And finally, the critical and ethnographic turns in sociolinguistics have not yet resulted in a renewal of the sociolinguistic methodological toolbox or in a consensus on post-positivist terminology that could be used for wider cooperation with stakeholders at large. At the same time, there is a tendency to increase participation in sociolinguistic research, which is supported by the growing importance of participatory approaches in many areas such as online communication, the democratisation of political decision-making, and social justice research.

If sociolinguistics is to contribute to these developments, it should not only open pathways to local language expertise and knowledge production in research on human communication, but also strive to ensure that the newly emerging knowledge has a transformative effect on all involved and engaged participants both within the democratic processes of research and beyond. Shared research activities should serve the situated needs of the stakeholders involved. In this vein, no grand theory or universal methodology is called for. Therefore, a Participatory Sociolinguistics aiming to be critical, reflective and responsible can best deal with intertwined social, cultural and situated needs of the future.

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