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Beyond empowerment

Accompaniment and sociolinguistic justice in a youth research program

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Introduction

For many scholars hoping to make a real-world impact through sociolinguistic research, the ultimate goal of such work is the empowerment of research participants. Building on the similar concepts of conscientization and critical or liberatory pedagogy (Freire 1970), the rise of the notion of empowerment in scholarship during the 1980s coincided with the emergence of a range of general critical perspectives on race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, capitalism and social class, (post-)colonialism, and other structures of inequality. Throughout the next decade, empowerment discourse swept across the academy, including not only fields centrally concerned with inequity such as race and ethnic studies, gender studies, education, sociology, and anthropology, as well as the more socially oriented subfields of linguistics, but also such areas as social services, international development, and even corporate management.

Within sociolinguistics, the idea of empowerment has primarily circulated via the work of Deborah Cameron and her colleagues, who propose a three-part taxonomy of relationships between researcher and researched, which they label *ethics*, *advocacy*, and *empowerment* (Cameron et al. 1992, 1993). In their shorthand characterization, traditional social science scholarship, or “research on,” positions research subjects as no more than research objects and reduces the obligations of researchers to a matter of professional ethics, or the protection of basic rights overseen by institutional review boards, such as confidentiality and informed consent. The second type of relationship, advocacy, adds to and reframes the ethical model by emphasizing “research for” participants. In the advocacy framework, linguists seek to use the insights of their scholarship in the public realm to influence opinion and policy, with research participants positioned as beneficiaries and researchers as their spokespersons. Finally, when scholars set aside objectivizing methodologies and restructure the research relationship as a partnership in which participants as well as scholars set the agenda, such work involves not only “research on and research for” but also “research with” – in other words, empowerment. (Cameron and her colleagues explicitly reject “research by” participants, which they associate with action research, an approach that they view

as too removed from academic dialogues and too uncritical of participants' perspectives to be of significant scholarly value [Cameron et al. 1993].)

The authors' thoughtful discussion and explicit engagement with issues of power in sociolinguistic scholarship opened up a (still) much-needed conversation within the field regarding the purposes and obligations of research. Even as they argue for empowerment as the most desirable form of sociolinguistic research in many contexts, Cameron and her colleagues note the difficulties with this perspective, including such fundamental questions as what counts as power, what counts as research, and what counts as knowledge. Although their argument has been embraced by many researchers, some commentators defend the scholarly status quo, while others, despite sympathizing with the authors' commitment to social change, doubt the possibility of empowering research. Indeed, in a later article Cameron herself raises significant concerns about the idea of empowerment but ultimately affirms its importance as a goal for sociolinguists (Cameron 1998; cf. Siegel 2006).

Beyond sociolinguistics and related fields, however, the idea of empowerment has come in for more extensive critique, primarily among those who, like its proponents, view scholarship as a crucial site for explicit sociopolitical engagement (e.g., Troyna 1994; Cheater 1999; Cruikshank 1999). For such critics, both the macropolitics and the micropolitics of empowerment discourse are deeply problematic. The macropolitical critique stems from the concern that the notion of empowerment often reproduces the hegemony of neoliberalism by focusing on individual actors rather than collective action (Calvès 2009). Consequently, critics argue, such discourse does nothing to dismantle systems of power but merely produces good neoliberal subjects, who are imagined to be self-empowered to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps with minimal governmental intervention. The micropolitical critique focuses instead on language. One strand of such criticism argues that the very term *empowerment*, which often carries self-aggrandizing and patronizing overtones, refers to a transitive act of beneficence from the more powerful to the less powerful that leaves the institutional inequalities of supposedly empowering interactions intact (Gore 1993). A second language-related concern is that the concept of empowerment is frequently elaborated through a variety of speech-centered metaphors, such as "giving voice" to disempowered groups or engaging in "dialogue" with them (Bhavnani 1988; Ellsworth 1989). Critics of these sorts of metaphors note that they erase the diversity of participants' perspectives (Cook-Sather 2007) as well as social actors' decidedly nonmetaphorical and profoundly material experience as producers of discourse in social settings (Weidman 2003). Such metaphors may thus imply that socio-politically marginalized groups lack the capacity to speak, let alone act, on their own behalf without expert assistance, or that members of these groups speak with a single voice.

Given the significant problems with the concept of empowerment, we find a useful alternative in the idea of accompaniment as advanced by George Lipsitz and his coauthors (Fischlin et al. 2013; Tomlinson and Lipsitz 2013).

These scholars extend the concept from its use in the writings of Salvadoran archbishop Óscar Romero on human rights to offer a broad perspective on all forms of political action and social change:

In Central American social movements, the word *acompaniment* (connected to the verb *acompañar*) designates an approach to collective mobilization. In contrast to the atomized individualism of liberal capitalism and the elitist vanguardism of Leninist left-wing parties, the idea of accompaniment envisions political action as a journey taken together, an excursion in which people from different backgrounds and experiences can work together respectfully as equals. . . . Like the musical practice whose name it shares, accompaniment in politics enacts the social relations it envisions. It succeeds best when it engages people in unpredictable and ephemeral yet meaningful acts of listening, speaking, and sharing. . . . Through accompaniment, some of our biggest achievements will come through small acts.

(Fischlin et al. 2013: 235)

In this framing, accompaniment, above all, is a joint activity, illustrated through such metaphors as collective travel or musical performance; as Lipsitz and Barbara Tomlinson write in a piece urging scholars to engage in sustained collaborative efforts toward social justice, “Accompaniment recognizes the inescapably and quintessentially *social* nature of scholarship and citizenship” (Tomlinson and Lipsitz 2013: 10; original emphasis). They argue that academic acts of accompaniment necessarily involve collaboration across both scholarly and social boundaries, with researchers engaging substantively with perspectives and practices quite different from their own within as well as beyond the academy: “People from different walks of life have different skills, different speech patterns, and different problem-solving strategies. Working together entails a sometimes painfully slow process of learning from each other, of working hard to forge mutually beneficial relations and relationships” (Tomlinson and Lipsitz 2013: 12). Thus accompaniment is an ongoing, negotiated social process of learning to talk and work together, in which all participants contribute different forms of expertise and understanding and from which they benefit in different ways. Researchers of language, culture, and society are especially well positioned to participate in a relationship of accompaniment, given such scholars’ commitment to recognizing and valuing diverse linguistic and interactional practices.

In our own efforts to forge university collaborations with public school students and teachers in Southern California centering on language as a sociocultural phenomenon, we have found the concept of accompaniment much more useful than the notion of empowerment in guiding our work. Whereas empowerment implies an endpoint to politically engaged activities (i.e., when a group has “become empowered”), accompaniment underscores the ongoing, incomplete nature of social justice efforts. Further, accompaniment highlights the mutuality of social

relationships across parameters of difference. This perspective leads us to reconceptualize the usual relationship between adults and young people from a one-way transmission of information and knowledge to a multidirectional exchange of ideas and understandings. That is, rather than seeking to “empower” youth, our work has a more modest goal: to acknowledge and engage with the young people we work with as sociopolitical agents who already have rich life experiences and insights that we can learn from and contribute to as we accompany them for a short time along their educational paths. Finally, accompaniment does not conceptualize political engagement as a mere addendum to the more valuable work of research – or vice versa – but positions both activities as equally necessary for scholars who work in the social realm. As researchers of the sociocultural dimensions of language, we have found accompaniment to be a valuable guiding principle for conducting socially transformative scholarship on language without the potential pitfalls of empowerment discourse.

Sociolinguistic justice and educational equity

Our own journey of accompaniment begins with our intellectual collaboration across our home disciplines, as scholars whose professional affiliations range from linguistics to Chicana and Chicano studies to education. What brings us together as researchers is our shared recognition of the close connection between linguistic inequality and social inequality and our commitment to sociolinguistic justice, a concept that developed through our work with local communities. We understand sociolinguistic justice as a fundamentally bottom-up collaborative effort by linguistically subordinated communities and individuals that inevitably involves negotiation and debate; sociolinguistic justice therefore includes accompaniment among members of local communities as well as potentially between such communities and outsiders, including academic researchers.

Elsewhere, members of our research team have discussed five interrelated goals of sociolinguistic justice: (1) the valorization of language variation and diversity; (2) the legitimation of local linguistic varieties in the public sphere; (3) the opportunity to use and learn about one’s own linguistic varieties, however these are conceived; (4) access to politically powerful varieties; and (5) recognition of the linguistic expertise of all language users (Bucholtz et al. 2014). Importantly, all of these goals are driven by an underlying fundamental goal: (6) a critical understanding of the social, historical, and political processes that reproduce linguistic inequality, as well as the ways in which such processes are often obscured or distorted through the workings of language ideologies. Although scholarly projects that aim for sociolinguistic justice may focus on only one or two of these goals, the close connection among them means that efforts in one area often further the other goals as well.

With respect to the linguistically marginalized California youth with whom we have worked most extensively, obstacles to sociolinguistic justice are often

rooted in the educational system, in which young people's ways of using language are typically devalued, misrecognized, and targeted for eradication (cf. Levasseur, this volume, on the explicit sanctioning of English in French immersion education). This issue is of course familiar to sociolinguists and other researchers concerned with language, and many scholars have advocated pedagogical approaches that can directly or indirectly foster sociolinguistic justice in schools and other learning settings (e.g., Rickford and Rickford 1995; Egan-Robertson and Bloome 1998; Wheeler 1999; Smitherman 2000; Denham and Lobeck 2005, 2010; Siegel 2006; Alim 2007; Reaser and Wolfram 2007; Wolfram et al. 2007; Labov 2010; Charity Hudley and Mallinson 2011, 2014; Watson 2013; Lidz and Kronrod 2014; McCarty and Nicholas 2014). A number of these undertakings valorize young people's own linguistic and cultural knowledge and experiences and take these as a starting point for further learning, an approach that has been theorized as crucial for socially transformative pedagogy (e.g., González et al. 2005; Paris 2012; Paris and Alim 2014).

This student-centered perspective also informs our own pedagogical approach. Most speakers of minoritized linguistic varieties, especially those who are racially and/or economically subordinated, have experienced the deprecation of their linguistic and cultural practices; for youth of color in California, this situation is worsened by a long history of racist and xenophobic laws that have profoundly shaped educational policy and practice (Fillmore 2004). Such young people must overcome considerable structural obstacles to attend college, including economic hardship, lack of mentoring, lack of academic opportunities due to educational segregation or "tracking," and racism (cf. Carter 2014). When they do manage to pursue higher education, these students contribute significantly to the academic community not only through their diverse life experiences but also through their unique and valuable linguistic and cultural expertise. This expertise is of special importance to sociolinguistic knowledge, given the ability of such students to identify, document, and analyze a rich array of under-investigated linguistic phenomena in their local communities (e.g., slang, phonological changes in progress, code-switching practices, language attitudes and ideologies), as well as their firsthand insight into the politics of language and inequality.

Yet the linguistic and cultural expertise of youth is often not simply overlooked but actively marginalized and dismissed within traditional educational settings (Watson 2013). This situation discourages many young people with substantial academic promise from pursuing higher education, a result that does lasting harm not only to the students themselves but also to their families and communities, to the larger society, and to scholarly advancement. In the collaborative program that we have developed, we pursue the six interlocking goals of sociolinguistic justice together with youth and their teachers by recognizing students as linguistic and cultural experts and by working with them both to examine their own and others' substantial knowledge and to challenge the devaluation of that knowledge within existing systems of power.

The SKILLS program

The School Kids Investigating Language in Life and Society (SKILLS) program, established at the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2010, combines research, training, academic preparation, and activism. SKILLS brings teams of graduate student teaching fellows and undergraduate mentors together with young people, teachers, and staff in schools and after-school programs throughout Santa Barbara County. In a recent implementation of the 20-week program (January–June 2014), SKILLS was based in three high schools and two after-school programs in five different municipalities within the county. On average, SKILLS involves around 100 students per year, mostly of high school age. Reflecting the demographics of public schools in the region, SKILLS students are primarily second-generation immigrant Latinas and Latinos from working-class homes who are the first generation of their families to be college-bound. However, the program has served students ranging in age from 6 through 19 and representing varied socioeconomic and ethnoracial backgrounds, including participants of African American, Asian American, European American, and Native American heritages.

Most of the students in the program, as children of Mexican immigrants, regularly experience linguistic subordination firsthand. Not only have they witnessed their parents' economic marginalization in the United States as Spanish-speaking laborers, but the students themselves have often been routed through the California educational system's English Language Development program, which focuses exclusively on standard academic English and dismisses the Mexican Spanish, Chicano Spanish, and Chicano English that youth bring from their peer groups and communities. As a result of this monolingual educational policy, many Latina and Latino students are experiencing or have already undergone rapid language shift from Spanish to English, leading to communication barriers with their grandparents – and in some cases, even with their parents. Those who have managed to retain their communicative ability in Spanish, meanwhile, speak a variety that is not institutionally valued, so that even those who have the opportunity to study Spanish in the school setting are taught that their home variety is incorrect. Moreover, students from other ethnoracial and linguistic backgrounds may speak varieties of English that are stigmatized in the academic context, and nearly all have a family history of linguistic subordination and/or language shift either in their own or in earlier generations, limiting young people's access to and appreciation of their linguistic and cultural heritage (cf. Coleman, this volume, on how educational neglect of minority languages in developing countries leads to language shift).

We have developed the SKILLS program in response to how these inequities affect the lives of youth in our local community, which likely reflect the realities in many other communities as well. The heart of the program is an innovative inquiry-based curriculum collaboratively developed by graduate student team members and annually revised at each site based on instructors' and students'

needs and interests, the expertise of each teaching team, and our own continually developing understanding of the most effective topics and pedagogical strategies for engaging students. Throughout the program, SKILLS students explore and extend sociolinguistic concepts by carrying out empirical research and community action projects. At the same time, participants develop a deeper understanding of their own and others' linguistic heritage and expertise as language users while strengthening their academic skills and participating in mentoring relationships and friendships with university graduate and undergraduate students that often extend well beyond the end of the program each year.

Recognizing that young people have linguistic and cultural expertise that should be fostered by both educators and scholars, SKILLS acknowledges youth as intellectual agents, and frames their learning process within the program as research inquiry and knowledge-sharing rather than as schoolwork. The student-researchers must obtain informed consent from their research participants, and they are trained to carry out every step in the research process, from developing research questions, to collecting and analyzing data using technological tools, to sharing the results in a variety of written and oral formats. Throughout this process, they critically examine the relationship of language to both identity and power. The academic bar is set very high – at most sites, students receive college credit for their participation – and the SKILLS students, who have often been classified by their schools as academically “deficient” in some way, regularly meet and exceed these expectations.

SKILLS draws on fundamental tools, concepts, and frameworks of the broad interdisciplinary field of sociocultural linguistics (Bucholtz and Hall 2008) and relates these to students' everyday life experience; it also draws theoretical and political inspiration from socially transformative pedagogy such as the now-banned Mexican American studies curriculum in Arizona and other social justice-oriented programs (e.g., Cammarota and Aguilera 2012; Cabrera et al. 2013). The SKILLS program is loosely structured around four units: language in the peer group; language in the family; language in the community; and language in the world. In each unit, students carry out an original empirical research project or community action project, or a combination of the two. For example, in the first unit students may examine youth slang in their friendship groups or raise public awareness of the systematicity of code-switching among young bilinguals. In the second unit, students may conduct a linguistic oral history of a family elder or develop a plan for how to maintain Spanish in the home. In the third unit, students may critically analyze the presence of Spanish-language and bilingual signage in area organizations and businesses, or they may carry out a collaborative video-based ethnography of language and culture in a local community of practice. In the final unit they may debate bilingual language policy or create a video or a radio public service announcement to combat linguistic racism.

The results of students' work are shared with community members, families, and scholars through presentations at the annual SKILLS Day conference at UCSB. In addition, students' work is made available to a wider audience through

inclusion on the SKILLS website, along with lesson plans and other materials related to the program (<http://www.skills.ucsb.edu>). The public dissemination of students' research and activism further underscores their status as linguistic and cultural experts and agents of social change. Finally, students' work forms the basis of larger research projects involving faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates from the SKILLS team, so that their work goes on to have further impacts on scholarship oriented to social change (e.g., Bucholtz forthcoming).

Despite its academic emphasis, SKILLS is not conceptualized simply as an outreach program but rather as a collaboration with youth and adults in the Santa Barbara community to work against social, linguistic, and educational inequities. Socially, the program aims to unsettle the conventional status of young people in society by positioning students as producers rather than consumers of knowledge and by publicly recognizing their authority as linguistic experts. Linguistically, the program challenges the use of language as a tool for perpetuating inequality by working with youth participants to examine and expose processes of sociolinguistic injustice in their own lives and more broadly. Educationally, the program seeks to remedy systemic inequities in access to higher education by acknowledging and further developing students' academic abilities and working with them to address the structural challenges they face in earning a college degree. In these intertwined efforts to create social change, we strive to act in accompaniment with student-researchers, teachers and administrators, families, and our own graduate and undergraduate students.

SKILLS as accompaniment

To illustrate the idea of accompaniment, we offer instances in which SKILLS instructors and students have negotiated the goals and practices of the program in order to make their joint work toward sociolinguistic justice as beneficial as possible. Each of our examples also involves (at least) one of the six goals of sociolinguistic justice and how the SKILLS program aims to advance that goal.

The first and overarching goal of sociolinguistic justice is the valorization of all linguistic varieties, or broad awareness and appreciation of diverse ways of using language. SKILLS addresses this goal through its sustained focus on the minoritized languages and dialects used by the students in the program, in conjunction with discussion of other marginalized linguistic varieties in California and elsewhere. In our work with the primarily Latina and Latino youth within SKILLS, this goal necessarily centers on the Spanish language. Classroom discussions with students, however, quickly showed us that simply promoting the value of Spanish as a monolithic linguistic system rather than as a diverse set of ways of using language would be not only ineffective but potentially detrimental to students' learning experience. Many students enter the program feeling ashamed of their Spanish knowledge, either because they speak an English-influenced variety that is stigmatized by native Mexican Spanish speakers, or because their knowledge of the language is primarily receptive and hence often goes unrecognized as a form

of competency. Valorizing Spanish – as well as other minoritized languages – in the context of SKILLS, then, involves discussing such topics as contact-induced change as a process of linguistic innovation rather than linguistic corruption; the considerable linguistic ability required for receptive bilingualism; and larger sociopolitical structures and processes rather than personal or familial failing as the primary driver of language shift. Such reframing helps students to understand their relationship to Spanish as one of ability rather than inability and their varied experiences as socially shared and power-saturated rather than individualized and nonpolitical. Thus our most basic act of accompaniment is to acknowledge and incorporate students' complex linguistic realities into the program and to avoid taking an oversimplified approach to linguistic valorization that may unintentionally ignore or depreciate young people's ways of using language.

The second goal of sociolinguistic justice is the legitimation of the linguistic varieties of local communities through their authorized use in public, institutional settings such as schools. This goal directly challenges the monolingual regime that has been imposed on California's educational system. By the time they reach high school in California, the majority of bilingual students avoid Spanish even in many private interactions at school; hence, the use of Spanish in a formal educational context is a significant political act. We have worked to legitimate all forms of Spanish in SKILLS classrooms alongside English and other varieties, beginning with some graduate student instructors' own incorporation of Spanish into their academic talk within the program. This act of accompaniment is especially powerful for SKILLS students to experience because they themselves know firsthand the risk involved in the public use of Spanish. Indeed, whether graduate students are native speakers of U.S.-based or other Spanish varieties or second-language learners, they acknowledge their feelings of vulnerability in using the language, either because of their own linguistic insecurity as speakers of non-normative varieties (Zentella 2007) or because of the ideological clash involved in using such a politicized and racialized language in the "white public space" (Hill 1999) represented by the school.

The goal of linguistic legitimation is further promoted in the SKILLS program by encouraging students to use their own linguistic varieties not only as resources for data collection and analysis, but also for publicly sharing the results of their research. In student presentations in the classroom, at Family Night events at local schools, and at the SKILLS Day conference on the university campus, students choose which variety or varieties they want to use to communicate their academic ideas and arguments. Students and instructors also ensure that such public forums are as linguistically inclusive as possible. For example, at one Family Night event, the graduate student instructors serving as MCs addressed parents and other family members in Spanish as well as English, with bilingual volunteers on hand to provide individualized interpretation in each language; meanwhile, the SKILLS students presented their work in various forms of English, Spanish, and Spanglish, the mixed code preferred by many bilingual youth. In the final part of the event, an in-depth audience discussion conducted primarily in

Spanish enabled Spanish-dominant parents to participate more actively and extensively in the academic lives of their children than is possible in most other school-sponsored activities. This unusual opportunity also enabled students to see their parents as skilled language users in an institutional, public setting. Through these and other strategies, the SKILLS program works in accompaniment with students, families, and schools to legitimate local forms of language as valid for academic and public discourse (cf. Douglas, this volume, on including university student work in definitions of impact).

The third goal of sociolinguistic justice, which is closely related to the two foregoing goals, is for all language users to be able both to use and to learn about the language varieties of their background, to whatever extent they wish. However, in dialogue with students we soon recognized the danger of linguistically and ethnoracially essentializing them by emphasizing specific varieties instead of incorporating their full linguistic repertoires. Most obviously, the focus on a few varieties marginalizes students from other backgrounds; but just as importantly, even students who are in the ethnoracial majority within the classroom do not necessarily identify strongly with their linguistic heritage, narrowly construed. For example, some Latina and Latino teenagers in the program have shown less interest in their familial connection to Spanish than in other forms of language that they consider more central to their identities, such as youth slang, a foreign language learned at school, or a variety tied to their youth-cultural interests, such as British English or Japanese. Similarly, at a SKILLS partner site that serves members of a local band of Chumash Indians, some students we worked with were eager to learn the tribal language through after-school classes with community elders, while others felt stereotyped and constrained by discussions of their Native heritage. Rather than imposing essentialized categories on students, then, we encourage them to explore their own linguistic – and nonlinguistic – interests in classroom discussions, activities, and projects, even when these diverge considerably from our own initial expectations and plans. Through these efforts to expand our original vision of what counts as students' language and culture, and hence to accompany students where they want to go rather than where we think they should go, we understand the identities of the young people we work with in a much deeper way, and the youth themselves are able to find greater personal meaning within the program.

The fourth goal of sociolinguistic justice, access to politically powerful ways of speaking, is incorporated into program activities through the development of the student-researchers' spoken and written academic English (and, often, Spanish) abilities via regular academic presentations and written documents in a variety of genres and formats. Moreover, students have helped us to more fully appreciate that the disciplinary jargon of linguistics can be a powerful resource for them, both in legitimating their experiences as valid topics of scholarly interest and in endowing their public discourse about those experiences with academic authority. We avoid burdening students with lists of keywords that they must memorize and define as in a traditional classroom; indeed, the curriculum involves no

decontextualized tests or quizzes, only context-rich projects, activities, and discussions. However, we have found that the use of one or two carefully chosen key terms in introducing each topic gives young people a new way of talking and thinking about the linguistic phenomena they experience every day, such as language brokering (Orellana 2009) or family language policy (King et al. 2008). At the same time, we encourage students to share their own metalinguistic terminology, and we recognize such terms as legitimate in the classroom as long as they do not carry offensive connotations. For example, we embrace the term *Spanglish*, which some linguists reject (e.g., Otheguy and Stern 2011), as a socially meaningful, non-derogatory term for the complex linguistic practices of many Latinas and Latinos (cf. Martínez 2013). We use the term as an entry point for investigating with youth the various aspects of this bilingual way of speaking, from the integration of English loanwords into Spanish to systematic code-switching between the two languages. Thus within the SKILLS program, accompanying student-researchers as they explore politically powerful varieties includes ensuring that they have access to the powerful language of linguistics itself.

The fifth goal of sociolinguistic justice involves recognition of the linguistic expertise of all language users, including young people. Most crucially, participants' research projects within SKILLS are acknowledged as original contributions to scholarship, and so instead of using pseudonyms as in traditional forms of research, we give student-researchers full credit for their work on the SKILLS website and in any publications, with their and their parents' permission. This research often yields productive new insights and lines of inquiry: For example, a student project on language brokering revealed the increasingly central role of technology in this practice (Aviles et al. 2014), an important development that is as yet all but unexplored by adult researchers. Such acts of accompaniment reverse the traditional expert–novice classroom relationship by creating opportunities for the adult participants to learn from youth experts.

Finally, all of these goals are driven by a commitment to scrutinizing the processes of power that underlie sociolinguistic injustice. We join our youth partners in difficult discussions of the historical roots and ongoing workings of social inequality in relation to language, race, class, immigration, and other issues, and we accompany them as they share painful experiences from their own lives. In this process, a genuine commitment to accompaniment as human connection across difference is a vital component of our work. Rather than speaking from the safe analytic distance of traditional academic discourse in such conversations, we seek to engage with students first and foremost through their own and our subjective responses to these potent issues and then work together to find tools to expose and challenge inequality. In this way, we are able to connect and collaborate while acknowledging how the privilege of our positions as university faculty and students can sometimes limit or distort our understanding.

Building on our work throughout the program, the final SKILLS Day conference offers a setting in which the student-researchers most profoundly and publicly experience themselves as recognized experts. At this event, youth participants at

different partner sites come together to share their research and activism work with university faculty and students as well as family and community members. Taking up the role of expert in this largely adult context is daunting for most students, especially in light of the fact that very few young people have experience with public speaking. Yet the student-researchers regularly report that these presentations serve as an exhilarating capstone to the entire program, as they discover their ability to command the attention and respect of an audience on the basis of their own knowledge and ideas. And because students from multiple sites participate in SKILLS Day, they have the opportunity to enter into sustained scholarly discussions and debates with peers, jointly examining knowledge claims in a way familiar to academics but new to most high school students. This experience thus helps young people to see themselves and be seen by peers as well as by adults as authoritative contributors to knowledge and important agents of social change.

Social change through SKILLS

Although the SKILLS program strives to promote sociolinguistic justice in our local community in a variety of ways, this goal of course can never be fully achieved. We evaluate the effects of our ongoing work through a variety of means, including surveys of students before and after their participation in SKILLS, matched with a comparison group whenever possible; video recordings and analyses of classroom interactions; tracking of students' academic performance both during and after the program; and written and/or oral comments from all program participants, including master teachers and UCSB graduate and undergraduate students as well as SKILLS students. Survey results reveal, for example, that compared to their peers, students in SKILLS report feeling more prepared for college in a range of areas, as well as having a greater knowledge of and appreciation for their own and others' linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Table 2.1).

And although systematic tracking of academic trajectories presents a number of difficulties, the information we have been able to obtain about students' pathways after high school suggests that SKILLS participants enter college at higher rates than their peers. Such measures suggest that the program yields general benefits for participants, and we continue to collect and analyze data that will enable us to evaluate and improve the program in an ongoing way.

However, a focus on generalizations and outcomes underplays the significance of individual students' experiences at specific moments during SKILLS as they participate in the process of accompaniment. The transformative potential of these moments may not be visible in surveys administered immediately after the program's conclusion; indeed, we regularly hear from students and their teachers that SKILLS influenced their lives in unexpected ways even long after their participation had officially ended. We have not yet found a practical way to measure these longer-term effects, but doing so is a high priority for our team.

Table 2.1 Mann-Whitney *U* Test comparing intervention and comparison groups across select outcomes (adapted from Wigginton 2013)

Comparison	<i>p</i> value	<i>z</i> statistic	Mean	
			Intervention	Comparison
In my classes I often learn about the linguistic behavior of different groups.	< 0.001	-5.56	2.16	3.51
My classes overall have improved my understanding of different cultural, racial, and/or ethnic groups.	< 0.001	-3.52	1.97	2.68
My classes overall have improved my understanding of the ways people use language.	< 0.001	-5.63	1.75	2.93
My classes overall have improved my understanding of myself, my experiences, and my history.	< 0.001	-4.73	1.84	2.81
My classes have taught me a lot about my town, city, or community.	< 0.001	-2.97	2.50	3.09
My classes have taught me a lot about my family history.	< 0.003	-4.21	2.69	3.64
I feel comfortable giving oral presentations.	< 0.001	-3.83	1.69	2.59
I feel comfortable collecting and analyzing data.	< 0.001	-3.53	1.50	2.12
I feel comfortable writing academic papers.	< 0.005*	-2.82	1.75	2.27

*Significant differences at $p < .005$

In considering the effects of the program, then, we focus not simply on institutional impact but just as importantly on the incremental work of social transformation at the individual level. With regard to institutional change, although SKILLS is deliberately not designed to affect policy in a top-down fashion, our work with schools helps lay the foundation for systematic educational change as teachers, administrators, and parents see the beneficial effects of youth-centered learning. Moreover, SKILLS has shaped educational practice and policy at participating schools by teaching linguistics content in high school classrooms, something that to our knowledge has never before been implemented in California's public schools. Because the SKILLS program trains teachers in the discipline of linguistics (including providing graduate and professional development coursework for university credit whenever possible), it is able to change teachers' perspectives on language and help them

to appreciate their students' linguistic capabilities. Further, the program challenges the longstanding ideology that only students classified by schools as high-achieving are able to perform at the college level. Our primary target population is youth whose abilities have not been recognized through traditional education and we ensure that these students get a jump start on college by earning college credit, just like their more structurally advantaged 'high-achieving' peers. The program also seeks to reach a wider audience by making all its curricular materials and research projects available on the SKILLS website so that they can be used in a variety of ways by other educators, scholars, and students around the world.

With regard to individual change, SKILLS is transformative for the youth who participate in it, both in helping them to recognize their own and others' vast linguistic and cultural knowledge and appreciating its value, and in preparing them to further develop and share their expertise through higher education. Students who do not aspire to a degree or career in linguistics – that is, the vast majority of SKILLS participants – and even those who do not initially aim for college at all benefit from the experience of critically examining language from a youth-centered sociocultural perspective. And students who may have rarely received positive feedback from teachers discover academic abilities of which they were previously unaware and which may draw them toward higher education. In addition to the academic impact of the program, students are often deeply affected at the emotional level by what they learn in SKILLS. Discussions of language shift and loss, linguistic discrimination, and language politics are not simply academic for these young people but part of the landscape of their everyday lives. The chance to evaluate these experiences critically and analytically with linguistic tools enables youth to engage in debates over language in the public sphere in an informed way, while the opportunity to learn more about their own families' and communities' language use is also personally moving for many students and helps strengthen intergenerational bonds.

Finally, and crucially for the accompaniment perspective, SKILLS is both institutionally and individually transformative for the university students and faculty who work together within the program each year. We have witnessed with admiration and awe the dedication, creativity, and wisdom of our graduate and undergraduate team members, who find in the program the kind of personally meaningful learning experience that is unfortunately all too rare in traditional university coursework. Their contributions to SKILLS have greatly strengthened the program, and through their example they have taught us a tremendous amount about how to be innovative and passionate teachers and mentors. Indeed, for us as scholars with a commitment to social change, embracing the idea of accompaniment has profoundly changed our own teaching and research in ways that extend well beyond our work related to the program. At the same time, our experiences have helped us to appreciate the potential for locally based community partnerships such as the SKILLS program to effect real social change.

Conclusion: Fostering accompaniment in sociolinguistic research

The SKILLS program seeks to address a fundamental sociolinguistic injustice of socially and racially stratified multilingual societies: the devaluation of the talents and abilities of youth who speak politically subordinated linguistic varieties. Rather than seeking to “empower” such young people, who are already powerful agents of social change in their own right, we aim to work in accompaniment with them and their teachers, families, and communities in order to achieve the goals of sociolinguistic justice: the valorization and legitimation of all ways of using language, access to both locally meaningful and institutional powerful varieties, the recognition of all language users as linguistic experts, and an understanding of the material and ideological bases of linguistic inequality.

The accompaniment process pervades all aspects of the SKILLS program. At the most fundamental level, accompaniment continually occurs as all participants – regardless of their institutional status as students or instructors – take up roles as experts or novices in particular topics or domains within the program and thereby learn from one another even as they gain additional expertise (Lee and Bucholtz 2015). Accompaniment is also evident in interaction within the classroom, as students collaborate across social boundaries of race and ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, immigrant generation, and youth-cultural style. And it is central to the work that students do within the program as they enlist peers, parents, and others as research participants in their investigations of the role of language in social life. Above all, accompaniment involves mutual recognition and negotiation. Whereas the goal of empowerment can too often devolve into power relations as usual, as well-intentioned powerful outsiders impose their own political agendas and perspectives on those they hope to empower, accompaniment requires that scholars who aim for social justice set aside their own agendas, give up their certainties, expose their vulnerabilities, and engage in joint activities that lead to shared understanding, collective meaning-making, and social change. Accompaniment is necessarily gradual, and the process is as crucial as the outcome. The real-world impact of such work, admittedly, is often hard to see, and as we have discussed, despite our best efforts it may at times reinforce as much as undermine existing structures of power.

In the foregoing discussion, it would have been tempting for us to succumb to the triumphalist rhetoric that tends to dominate accounts of scholarly efforts to enact social change, or to the equally tempting confessionalist discourse of failure, error, and naïvété by academic do-gooders. But both of these framings place scholars, not communities and their members, at the center of the story. The idea of accompaniment emphasizes that social interaction is a vital component of social action.

Our goal in this chapter has been to describe the workings of a particular community partnership as an illustration of the accompaniment perspective rather than to make broad-based recommendations that can be generalized to other

settings. Elsewhere, we offer practical advice for teams of scholars interested in forging partnerships with educators and students (Bucholtz et al. 2015). Here, however, we summarize the lessons we have learned about how to foster a relationship of accompaniment in any educational partnership focused on sociolinguistic justice:

- 1 Work to valorize partners' and participants' full linguistic repertoires, including those ways of using language that they themselves value highly and those that they and/or the broader society devalue or may not recognize as a form of linguistic expertise. Meanwhile, as students come to see their linguistic practices from new vantage points, it is important for their academic partners to accompany them by rethinking our own received wisdom about language (such as who counts as a fluent speaker, what qualifies as bilingual ability, or how to conceptualize language itself [cf. García and Leiva 2014]).
- 2 Legitimate the use of students' non-hegemonic linguistic varieties in both formal and informal learning settings for the expression of ideas and knowledge. To the extent that it is acceptable to students, it can be a powerful act of accompaniment for academics to try to use these varieties ourselves, perhaps especially if we are not adept in them, and to explore the difficulties of such efforts with students (cf. Gutiérrez et al. 2011).
- 3 Don't make assumptions about students' identities or which forms of language are most meaningful to them, especially when these differ from our own expectations and/or areas of expertise. Get to know students as individuals and give them the space to set the terms of what they want to learn based on their own needs and goals.
- 4 Offer students access to powerful ways of speaking, including specialized academic language, as well as the opportunity to decide for themselves which aspects of these resources are useful for them.
- 5 Recognize students as linguistic experts, knowledge producers, and agents of change, while embracing the role of learner. Accompany students through the process of intellectual discovery and critical engagement by asking questions, offering suggestions, and then standing back to let them do their work.
- 6 Make issues of power, inequality, and ideology central to the discussion of language, and accept that this entails difficult and uncomfortable conversations that academics often prefer to avoid. Accompany students in meaningful dialogues in which all participants are recognized as real human beings with emotions and experiences and not mere academic thinking machines.

What we have learned in our work of accompaniment within the SKILLS program can be reduced to a single principle: *Follow, don't lead* – or, in Tomlinson and Lipsitz's words, "sometimes accompaniment means *saying less so that others can be heard*" (2013: 12; original emphasis). When we set aside our own scholarly and political agendas, keep quiet, and let our youth partners teach us what is

important to them (and, of course, these priorities are often different for different groups and individual students), we learn from them and discover how they can best learn from us and from one another. As sociolinguists and other scholars continue to engage with communities and politics to effect social change, it is crucial that such work not be reduced either to charitable acts of service or to mere “applications” of scholarship. Rather, acts of accompaniment reside at the very heart of scholarly theory and inquiry, shaping and giving meaning to the knowledge we produce. If scholars and communities are truly to work together toward social, educational, and linguistic justice, a commitment to accompaniment is an important starting point.

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