

Editorial

Laura L. Paterson and Isabelle van der Bom

This issue's Editorial takes a slightly different form to our usual introduction to each issue. Rather than focus almost entirely on the content of the papers and book reviews published here, we first take a closer look at the ramifications of COVID-19, both in terms of discrimination and in terms of its impact(s) on higher education and academic research. We have also devoted some space here to consider the role that language has played in recent debates relating to race and the wider depiction of the Black Lives Matter movement. We hope that our authors will forgive us this slight deviation from our normal practices, and assure them that their work is properly introduced at the end of this Editorial.

COVID-19 and discrimination

In the few months since we published our previous issue, it seems that the world has changed rapidly and immeasurably. Even at the very start of 2020, it would have been extremely unlikely that anyone could have predicted the global impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with its unprecedented and wide-reaching health, social, economic, educational and political ramifications. The fallout from the pandemic and the measures taken by governments around the world to slow the spread of COVID-19 have seen discrimination realised in many forms, with language often playing a significant role. For example, the president of the United States labelling COVID-19 as a 'foreign virus' or, more specifically, the 'Chinese virus',

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acted as an implicit attempt to apportion blame for COVID-19 (although the president argued that as the virus originated in China, he was merely being factual) and has also been linked to an increase in racially motivated discrimination and ‘harassment’ (Viala-Gaufrey and Lindaman 2020). Elsewhere, as measures were introduced to decrease the likelihood of transmission, there have been reports of verbal abuse/bullying of people for wearing – or not wearing – face masks in public in both Canada and Australia (Bird 2020; Stevens 2020), while governments across Europe have been criticised for not providing information related to COVID-19 in minority languages (FUEN 2020).

In a broader sense, too, the impacts of COVID-19 have amplified existing discrimination, with COVID-19-related policies being criticised for their focus on (individuals’) health conditions at the expense of addressing wider social issues such as poverty and poor housing provision, thus ignoring the ‘increased vulnerability of those most socially and economically deprived’ (Patel *et al.* 2020:110). Similarly, anti-COVID-19-measures have been implicated in instances of religious discrimination in India, Pakistan, Cambodia, Israel and South Korea (Sarkar 2020), homophobia and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals in Uganda (Bhalla and McCool 2020), and the mask shaming alluded to above has been realised as a particularly acute form of discrimination in the United Kingdom against people who have disabilities, impairments or mental health conditions, which mean they cannot and/or are exempt from wearing a face mask (Hindle 2020; Kindred 2020).

While the examples listed throughout this Editorial refer to specific countries, locations or incidents, they are used for illustrative purposes only. These countries have been named to show the global scope of COVID-19, and there is no implication that these are isolated incidents; there are countless other reports of similar instances of discrimination and/or prejudice in many other countries. Thus, having established a relationship between COVID-19, language and discrimination, we turn to a consideration of the role that this journal can play in drawing attention to discriminatory practices, facilitating the publication of empirically sound, strongly argued and well-evidenced research papers, and influencing wider debates, policies and ideas surrounding COVID-19.

Special issue (call for expressions of interest): We are aware that several journals are now inviting expressions of interest for special issues on the COVID-19 pandemic. We would also like to put this call out to academics from any discipline, but would ask that proposals specifically consider an aspect of the language surrounding COVID-19, and how language and/

or language practices relate to discrimination and/or inequality in wider society. We are particularly interested in international perspectives on the impact(s) of the pandemic and encourage the submission of papers (either for a special issue or as a general paper), looking at the impacts of COVID-19 in lower income countries. Anyone interested in guest editing a special issue is invited to contact one or both of the editors directly.

However, while issuing this call for expressions of interest, we are also aware that no one has been left untouched by the ramifications of COVID-19. Thus, we must also consider how COVID-19 has impacted on academic research and higher education more broadly.

The pandemic and higher education

As COVID-19 began to be felt across the world, a large proportion of academics found themselves having to very quickly adapt to teaching online, familiarising themselves not only with the affordances of particular pieces of software, but also orienting themselves to the nuances of distance learning. Adapting courses effectively on the fly while still ensuring that students were well supported and had access to the resources they needed to succeed is no mean feat, and takes considerable time and effort. While the situation will be different across countries and regions, many scholars now find themselves using the summer of 2020 to prepare distance-learning materials for the coming academic year. In some cases, this has meant postponing research entirely for at least half of 2020.

A related issue about the time pressures some academics now face comes in the form of hegemonic divisions of labour, which has seen women taking on more caring responsibilities, be it home-schooling, caring for family members or working in unpaid community-based roles beyond the household. These pressures were particularly felt in terms of women's decreased research output (Flaherty 2020), with the decline being more pronounced for early career researchers (Vincent-Lamarre, Sugimoto and Larivière 2020). While there may be variability between submission rates for different disciplines, taken as a whole, this decrease in publications has the potential to delay women's career progression both in general terms and in terms of formal promotion. While we cannot completely erase the wider impacts of the pandemic on research, or on any particular group within society, we wanted to summarise the measures we have taken to ensure that we do not add to the negative impacts of COVID-19.

- We have moved to a new website (<https://journal.equinoxpub.com/index.php/JLD/index>) with a streamlined submission process. We have also simplified our formatting guidelines.
 - The submission file should be in OpenOffice, Microsoft Word or RTF document file format.
 - The text should be single-spaced; use a 12-point font; employ italics, rather than underlining (except with URL addresses); and all illustrations, figures and tables should be placed within the text at the appropriate points, rather than at the end.
 - References should be in Harvard style, with URLs provided where possible.
 - The submission files and any supplementary materials should be anonymised.
- The journal now accepts short research reports up to 4000 words. This gives those who are currently unable to complete full-length research papers the ability to publish a shorter summary of their ongoing work in order to keep their ideas visible within wider academic debates.
- We also publish interviews with individuals or groups, within and outside academia, who are interested in foregrounding a specific aspect of language and discrimination and/or acting as a case study to provide recommendations or examples of best practice which aim to decrease discrimination. These interviews can be conducted online by the editors or by individuals who can submit the complete transcript via the journal's website. However, if you are thinking of conducting and submitting an interview, please contact one of the editors in the first instance, in order to ensure it fits within the scope of the journal's remit.
- As always, we encourage submissions from scholars at any career stage and working in any discipline, as long as the submitted paper/research report has a clear focus on the relationship between language and discrimination. The primary reason for a desk rejection of a submission is that it does not focus on language or discrimination.
- When asking people to review submissions, we have offered flexible deadlines to account for the fact that people are still adapting to new ways of working and cannot necessarily predict how COVID-19 will continue to impact on the time they can give to research.
- While we currently cannot offer online-first publication, when papers have been formally accepted we endeavour to publish them

in the next issue of the journal, or in the first available issue where there is space. With the exception of special issues, papers are published in the order in which we receive final submissions.

- Once papers go for typesetting, we have less control over deadlines. However, if an author is unable to meet a deadline for reasons relating to COVID-19, we will negotiate on their behalf and help them with proofing where we can.

By making these changes and putting these processes in place, we aim to keep the journal as inclusive as possible and a site for interdisciplinary perspectives on language and discrimination.

BLM and anti-racist activism

Moving away from the consequences of COVID-19, any editorial in a journal that focuses on discrimination would of course be severely remiss not to also acknowledge that 2020 has seen an increased awareness of how (structural) racism is realised and enacted in the early twenty-first century. This awareness has contributed to anti-racism campaigns that draw attention to and fundamentally challenge systematic, institutional racism, prejudice and discrimination. Perhaps the most well known of these is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which initially came to prominence in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of black teenager Trayvon Martin. Anti-racism protests, marches and campaigns against racist discourse and practices have included high-profile figures showing their support for BLM. Perhaps the most famous example is Colin Kaepernick protesting against police brutality by kneeling during the American national anthem at the start of a National Football League (NFL) game in 2016 (in previous games, he had sat on the bench; Wilner 2020). Kaepernick was subsequently fired by his team, the San Francisco 49ers (Cook 2020), but his actions ultimately led to the NFL stating that it would 'condemn racism and the systematic oppression of black people' (Allen 2020). Furthermore, the act of 'taking a knee' at sporting events as a sign of solidarity with BLM has now become a fixture of Formula 1 and the English football Premier League, to name just two examples.

What really brought issues of racial discrimination to the fore in 2020, however, was when black American George Floyd was killed while being placed under arrest by police officers in Minneapolis. At the time of writing, four police officers have been charged in connection with Floyd's death, one with second-degree murder and the others with aiding and abetting second-degree murder (BBC 2020). The killing of George Floyd

as well as the death of several other black Americans at the hands of (ex-) law enforcement agents, not least Ahmaud Arbery, Atatiana Jefferson, Breonna Taylor and Laquan McDonald, led to protests across the United States (an estimated 500,000 people protested at over 500 sites on 6 June 2020; Buchannan, Bui and Patel 2020) and in many other countries across the globe. These global protestors stood in support of BLM and opposed acts of police brutality in the United States, but they were also a catalyst for protesters to consider racism within their own countries (Kirby 2020).

In terms of the role that language plays in debates about racism in 2020, there are, of course, classic studies on (implicitly and explicitly) racist discourse and practices (van Dijk 1993), and more recent studies (Augoustinos and Every 2007; Gabrielatos and Baker 2008; Kinzler and Dautel 2012), which can act as a foundation for future work. Such work can also ensure that it acknowledges a range of voices, commentators, and both historical and contemporary texts discussing race (Eddo-Lodge 2017; Oluo 2019). One can also take a closer look at the language used in the mass media, in political debates, on protest signs and in more local settings (such as small group interactions, Facebook comments, mailings produced by charities and community groups, etc.) to provide critical commentary and highlight how racist practices and attitudes are normalised and/or challenged. As a litmus test, one might consider whether reports about George Floyd describe him as being *murdered*, *killed* or *asphyxiated*, or whether he simply *died in police custody*.

Special issue (call for expressions of interest): In light of the global protests and widespread media coverage of BLM, we are calling for expressions of interest from scholars who would like to put together a special issue of the *Journal of Language and Discrimination* on race. We encourage submissions with an international focus and a broad range of contributions from a diverse group of scholars. We also invite papers on the language and discourse used to support and/or oppose peaceful protests, be they related to BLM, anti-racist and/or anti-fascist marches, or other widespread political and social movements. Anyone interested in guest editing a special issue on this topic, or indeed any other topic related directly to language and discrimination, is invited to contact one or both of the editors directly.

Ultimately, when opposing discrimination of any kind, we must also look at our own practices. Whether this takes the form of expanding and decolonising curricula to include a broader range of perspectives and human experiences, or whether, as in the case of this journal, we consider how we might address the barriers that people face upon entering (and remaining within) academic circles. While we do not collect data on race

(sex, gender, religious beliefs, disability, sexuality, etc.) and thus have no firm statistics on our contributors, we have published articles written by scholars in several different countries and continents, and wish to keep this international focus at the forefront of future issues. As noted above, we also accept shorter papers and are open to printing interviews with people inside and outside of academia, in order to increase the diversity of voices within our pages. Finally, we acknowledge that our editorial and advisory boards are predominantly white, and we are actively looking at how we can address this. As such, we welcome expressions of interest in joining either of these boards from BAME scholars. Please contact the editors in the first instance if you are interested or would like to nominate someone.

In this issue

The first article in this issue is by Lucy Jones, who draws on approaches from discourse analysis and sociolinguistics to analyse the discursive practices of a support group of young people who are trans and non-binary. The paper demonstrates how the group works collaboratively to construct a mutual identity which foregrounds a shared experience of transgender issues and minimises differences between individual members. Jones' study also highlights the importance of continuing to educate professionals who may encounter trans youth as well as the wider public, and demonstrates the essential need for increased and continued provision for the support of young people who are trans and non-binary.

Adam Scott Clark, in the second article of this issue, focuses on the status of Putonghua (a standardised variant of Mandarin) in the Hong Kong curriculum. Critically examining official documents stemming from late colonial and contemporary periods on education in Hong Kong, Clark shows that although the use of Putonghua in education has been heavily promoted in recent years, with the highly contentious claim made that Putonghua and the Han Chinese ethnicity are somehow inherently linked, there is little space for the subject within the overcrowded Hong Kong curriculum. Rather than attending to learners' needs, the promotion of the language seems politically motivated and encouraging of an ideologically sterilised 'pan-Chinese' identity. In light of recent political changes in Hong Kong and the role that Beijing's central government plays in this, this article warns that Putonghua should not be used as a subversive tool to reform the Hong Kong identity.

The third article in this issue is by Gaëlle Planchenault, who analyses the discursive patterns of Maghrebi-French female characters in French cinema. By examining the voices associated with first- and second-generation

migrant women in three recent French films, the study shows the overt and covert racialisation of these characters' voices, and the discriminatory discourses of gender and race they perpetuate. Planchenault reflects on how the stereotypical erasure and exoticised racialisation of such ethnic voices in film relates to the politics of recognition in the French film industry and French society more widely, and how these portrayals contribute to ongoing discriminatory discursive practices.

The issue also contains two book reviews, co-ordinated by our book reviews editor Stephen Pihlaja. These include Ilse Ras' review of *The Language of Inequality in the News: A Discourse Analytic Approach* and Patricia Canning's review of *The Art of Political Storytelling: Why Stories Win Votes in Post-truth Politics*. If you are interested in writing a book review for the journal, please contact Stephen in the first instance.

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