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Article:

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Introduction: applied linguistics, ethics and aesthetics of encountering the Other

Abstract

This article explains the rationale for proposing an applied linguistics of ethical encounters. It does so by extending the current reach beyond the critical and ideological commentary of unjust linguistic practices and considers how applied linguistics research might play an active role in both theorising and enabling ethical encounters. By ethical encounters we mean those that enact the political vision of an inclusive and just society in face-to-face meetings with particular others, i.e. the Other. We ground our inquiry in a relational framework, which places the subject's responsibility at the heart of ethical relationships and as a basis for a political achievement of just society in settings of trauma, social stigma and unequal power relationships. We argue that the subject's ethical responsibility is not merely inter-actionally accomplished but also aesthetically experienced in particular moments of proximity to others. We examine opportunities for an engaged applied linguistics that arise when its inquiry is pursued through the ethical and aesthetic lens.

Keywords: relational ethics; aesthetics; ethical encounters; responsibility

1 Introduction

This special issue advances current debates by asking what it means and what it takes for people to encounter one another ethically in settings within as well as without particular affinity groups, where ideological systems and sociological imaginations clash. We are writing in times of political and societal polarization when encounters across divides are hard to achieve if they are desired at all. We ask how the project of building inclusive societies might unfold in particular social encounters and how it can be advanced through linguistic and social inquiry. We propose that bringing applied linguistics, relational ethics and aesthetics into a conversation offers a set of promising theoretical and methodological opportunities.

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In this position paper, we chart how we understand these opportunities for advancing an applied linguistic research praxis.

We take up recent conversations led by Deumert (2023) who suggests that applied linguists contend with "ways of listening, thinking and writing that grapple with the sensuous and recognize the limits of language as system of representation" (2023: 919). She proposes extending epistemological and ontological repertoires to include the "chaotic realm of knowing and unknowing." Hers is a decolonizing political project of epistemic justice which argues for other ways of knowing beyond language as a system of representation. She invites "listening to listening" and points to music as a shared experience, producing the collective listening subject. She pays attention to timbre of the singer's voice, the atmosphere created in the music and song, the spectre of absent presences who nevertheless haunt the aesthetic moment (Deumert 2022). Listening, Deumert (2023) argues, exposes the "force of sound" and its "affective intensities" pointing to a diversity of struggles in contexts of coloniality.

Similarly, we are persuaded by Canagarajah's recent work on decolonial crip linguistics (2023) and his argument for a distributed practice which builds on notions of ethical disposition, selflessness, humility, patience, and tolerance. Canagarajah's desire is to expand applied linguistics in the direction of nonrepresentational meanings, stressing instead the affective, performative, and sensory in his account of disability. He is critical of an applied linguistics which reproduces "methodological individualism" and its focus on the neurological processes of an individual speaker. He is similarly critical of an applied linguistics which adopts an "ethnic lens", producing an emphasis on shared norms and their construction. He argues this potentially leads to tribalism, division and a continuation of othering rather than co-existence and trust.

These conversations are creating a shift in the field of applied linguistics not only because they are arguing for important new directions in interpretation, indeterminacy and representation but also because they insist the study of communication be approached aesthetically and ethically through the prism of new ontologies and epistemologies. And this is where we hope to join the conversation. We propose that social space be widened to include ethical and aesthetic space (Bauman 1993). Between cognitivist individualism and social constructivism there are methodological opportunities available which describe human subjectivity neither in terms of social categories nor individual isolation but rather in terms of responsibility for others in ethical relations which encompasses both.

This special issue has been informed by a two-year-long inquiry[1] that examined the question of ethical encounters in dialogue with others and their diverse

disciplines and practices (Kubanyiova and Shetty 2024). One of the core themes emerging from this collaborative pursuit has been the emphasis on epistemological discomfort and vulnerability as a basis for practising responsibility in particular encounters. Each article in this collection addresses an angle of this kind of aesthetically experienced vulnerability. Each assesses implications for an applied linguistics inquiry which decentres the need to know or explain and gravitates instead towards a call to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway 2006: 1) as a way of living-with - rejoicing-with, suffering-with, dying-with - each other. The call for the aesthetic is a call for approaching applied linguistics phenomena "as a situation to be experienced and interacted with" (Lorde 1984: 249) through senses.

The articles in this special issue, then, take up the 'ethical' in social encounters by (1) treating human subjectivity not as an ontological category or a discursive phenomenon but as an ethical relation through which the subject is addressed by the Other; and (2) moving away from the urge to understand towards a commitment to attend, through senses, to the face of the Other. Across the papers, this means standing in the midst of un/comfortableness under a protest placard (Krause-Alzaidi); dwelling in embodied performance which undermines the fixity of an othered human body (Williams); attending to semiotic ambiguity in the case of ethical research procedures (Beiler and Dewilde); moving away from the sociolinguistic propensity to categorise (Creese); resisting the urge to narrate the Other in a deeply saturated ideological landscape that insists on 'knowing' (Kubanyiova); and dwelling in the disturbing, (un)aesthetic materiality of the Other's voice (Brizić). The notion that standing face-to-face to the Other, aesthetically experienced as destabilization, surprise or rupture, may be the beginning of an ethical encounter is central to the papers assembled here. Locating our inquiry in settings of trauma, social stigma and unequal power relationships, the purpose of this special issue is to chart theoretical and methodological possibilities for approaching questions of ethical responsibility in a broad range of social encounters.

2 Applied linguistics and ethics

2.1 Relational ethics and events of subjectivity

As a starting point for our thinking about ethical encounters in social interactions, we take up Emmanuel Levinas' (1972/2006) notion of the 'Other' which departs in significant ways from contemporary (socio)linguistic understandings. Levinasian ethics centres on ineradicable difference and fundamental unknowability of the Other. In English translations of Levinas' texts, capitalised 'Other' is often used to distinguish this unique personal other (autrui), from otherness, i.e. 'other', in general

(autre; cf. Biesta 2016). It is the former sense that is relevant to our discussion. Thinking about another being in ethical terms after Levinas means going beyond any taken-for-granted symbolic, conceptual or ideological categories to contain it. An imposition, even well-meaning, of the subject's own conceptual categories, understandings, or narratives on the Other as a basis for encountering is seen as an ethical failure. Parallel arguments with regards to consequences of such a failure have been convincingly presented elsewhere (cf. Yancy 2004). Certainly, as Levinas (1972/2006: 11) points out, "Pure receptivity, like pure sensibility without signification would be a myth or abstraction." Similarly, what the subject knows about others, based on past experiences or understandings, matters and makes social encounters possible. Yet, the notion of ethical encounters suggests that the presence of the particular Other inevitably interrupts this knowledge, making a unique and unpredictable demand on the subject.

Ethical encounter, then, is not a function of the subject's grasp of the Other. The I of the subject is in fact not a starting point for Levinasian ethics (Levinas 1985, 1998). Instead, the subject's acknowledgment of epistemological vulnerability calls for "a radical generosity of movement" (Levinas 1972/2006: 27) toward the corporeal presence of the Other. For Levinas, the face of the Other elicits obligation even before the notion of 'being' in the world. Put differently, ethics precedes ontology. Before the subject rationalises who the Other is and whether or how it ought to be encountered, the Other's face is already there, making a demand on the subject to respond.

Following from such a position, human subjectivity is not understood as a socially constructed or discursively negotiated difference from the Other (e.g. as social and cultural identity categories or practices). It also has little to do with "a narcissistic exploration of the unknowable within the self, a self-absorbed meditation on the ethical implications of the self's unquestionable subjectivity" (Lionett and Shih 2011: 8). Instead, central to this understanding of human subjectivity is the subject's irreplaceable responsibility for the Other. It is in the embodied facing of the Other that the subject's subjectivity is called into question and, thus, into becoming. Relational ethics allows us to appreciate ethical encounters as invitations to this radical generosity. They can be conceived of as 'ethical events' in which the subject is uniquely addressed by the radically unknowable Other and begins to attend to its ethical responsibility (cf. Biesta 2016). This special issue explores ways in which applied linguistics, and its sociolinguistically-informed lines of inquiry in particular, can illuminate, create or participate in such events of subjectivity. In short, if ethical encounters do not explain or reproduce the Other, the aim of our endeavour is to grapple with consequences for the applied linguistics research praxis.

2.2 Ethical notions of the listening subject

The notion of the listening subject is not new in applied linguistics. Through the lens of a raciolinguistic perspective, for instance, Flores and Rosa (2019: 146–147) have repeatedly called for a shift from the focus on "language practices of a racialized speaking subject toward the uptake of the white listening subject". This resonates more widely with research into the historical, political and ideological embeddedness of the listening subject's perceptions of the speech production of the other. This research has shown an othering effect not simply on a particular individual in question, but on entire racialized, gendered or otherwise stigmatized populations (cf. Inoue 2003; Piller 2016; Snell and Lefstein 2017).

The papers in this special issue are all situated in complex social and political settings where the often harmful effects of the ideological forces shaping the practices of the dominant or more powerful listening subject are real, both structurally and experientially. This special issue asks therefore what an ethical practice of the listening subject might look like and how applied linguistics inquiry might begin to describe or enable it through its research praxis. All six papers centre around the practices of the listening or, more broadly, perceiving/sensing subject, which variously include the field researcher, the author or the audience, including the reader. In each instance the authors consider the listening subject as both implicated in power and hierarchy while simultaneously unsettling these relations. Across these papers, the ethical listening subject is brought into being through ethical responsibility for another person, object or source whose address the subject experiences, or is invited to experience, through senses.

Erasmus (2018: xxiii) has talked about "humaning" as a historically and contextually specific praxis of "life-in-the-making with others," which she contrasts with "humanising," that is, a dominant group's imposition of a pre-conceived meaning of what it means to be human. It is the listening subject's role in the former in contrast to the latter process that this issue primarily seeks to examine through the lens of applied linguistics. In short, the papers attempt to make visible the practices of the listening subject that signal a move away from othering and towards ethical events of subjectivity, or, in other words, towards ethical encounters.

Doing so does not mean eschewing the politics of listening, a process of discursive recognition that disrupts power and privilege that construct the 'Us and Them' binaries in the context of conflict (Bassel 2017). How the public arena is semiotically and agentively (re)assembled to repair omissions of previously silenced or deemed unintelligible groups remains a critical question for applied linguistics in moments of tension, inequality and injustice (cf. Peck et al. 2020; Stroud and Williams 2017). Yet, one of the objectives of such research, namely, to "ensure others listen"

(Bassel 2017: 5) remains unaddressed without also investigating the linguistics and, we argue, the aesthetics of the subject's ethical listening act itself. Ethical practice always involves shuttling between the politics and aesthetics of listening. The contributions to this issue describe the ethical, aesthetic and political dimensions of languaging practices where contingency and indeterminacy are primary discursive and aesthetic strategies of the listening subject.

3 Applied linguistics and aesthetics

3.1 An aesthetic approach interrupts existing orders of indexicality

Aesthetics is in this paper used as a reference to the embodied sensory perception and attending to the Other (Gadamer 1975/2013; Guyer 2014; Lorde 1984; Saito 2015). We are mindful of the risks that come with advocating for an approach that might be accused of removing discussions of power from the equation, further silencing the Other. And yet it is precisely its opposite effect that has informed our inquiry: the power of an aesthetic approach to interrupt the anaesthetising effect that comes with a habitual recourse to the 'known' in encountering the Other. We certainly do not propose an aesthetics that makes "people indifferent to the suffering of the world and keeps them in this indifference" (Herzog 2020: 19). Quite the contrary. We adopt aesthetics that guards against the potentially numbing effect of indexicality which offers too much and yet not enough meaning to encounter the Other ethically. What interests us are situations that generate openness of interpretation, and how events of subjectivity might emerge from these experiences. An aesthetic orientation brings to accounts of reality an incompleteness in which voices are un-finalised and un-finalisable, yet demanding an ethical response.

Research in interactional sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, or semiotic landscape studies has advocated for the phenomenological and sensory aspects of everyday languaging (Ochs 2012) and shown diverse ways in which signs mediate meaning: creative, playful, discriminatory, subversive, or revolutionary (Deumert 2018; Dovchin and Dryden 2022; Peck and Williams 2020; Tankosić and Dovchin 2023). There is an increasing recognition in current theorising of the performative power of language and its effects on the material conditions of inequality (cf. Cavanaugh and Shankar 2017). Similarly, scholars have continued to emphasize the view of language as affective and embodied (Bucholtz 2016; Valente 2020; Wetherell 2013).

This special issue joins these conversations and enquires about the capacity of languaging, translingual practice, and material-discursive assemblages to inaugurate

ethical relations. We ask: What kind of aesthetic engagement/assistance is needed to unsettle the listening subject into hearing the Other's call? How can semiotic assemblages of public spaces (Canagarajah 2018; Kusters 2021; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015) be mobilized aesthetically in the service of events of subjectivity? And how might applied linguists' dissemination practices draw on this knowledge to bring the Other into the listening subject's, including the reader's, presence? Building on recent debates in applied linguistics of creativity (Swann and Deumert 2018), this special issue's aim is to recognise aesthetics and affective perception as core elements of ethical meaning making practice, and thus of applied linguistics theory and dissemination. The goal is not to produce feelings of beautiful otherness (Adorno 1973), sublimity or entertainment, but of attention, interruption and an impetus to respond.

We draw on an aesthetic approach for its insistence on limits of knowing and communicability, while at the same time claiming that ethical encounters are those that actively and continuously disrupt the listening subject's 'knowledge' of the Other (Blackledge and Creese 2022, 2023; Boldt and Valente 2021; Erasmus 2018; Kelz 2016). This special issue explores how applied linguistics inquiry can similarly disrupt the symbolic and indexical and drive an interdisciplinary agenda for understanding ethical meaning-making across a range of sociocultural and sociopolitical settings.

3.2 Attending to what is difficult to put into words

Debates remain about how best to capture the underlying indeterminacy of language. Applied linguistics has led this conversation, attending to situated semiotic phenomena as people engage with communicative resources. Researchers have made visible the ways in which broad sets of communicative practices are creatively and strategically interwoven, producing accounts of people's agentive action towards various social, political and interactional goals (e.g. Lytra et al. 2022). Nevertheless, there are uneasy contradictions facing applied linguists working with indeterminacy. On the one hand, the research seeks to retain the complexity and "manyness" (Lugones 2003; cited in Deumert 2022: 9) of social life, while on the other is drawn into the inescapable propensity to evaluate, explain, and elucidate. In striving for indeterminacy, linguists immediately crash into determinacy, producing disjuncture as attempts to interrupt discourse are met immediately with retying its threads (Herzog 2020). Applied linguists know better than most that language categorizes, labels, positions, judges, names, and claims to know. A prevailing direction in applied linguistics has been the study of indexical signs. The capacity for indexical analysis to point to subjectivities, identities and person types is well-established. Indeterminacy is factored in through the way speakers re-accent others' voices (Eckert 2012; Jaffe 2016; Wortham 2001) allowing narrators and ordinary speakers to establish shifting positions for themselves.

The approach we propose in this special issue offers a different direction to representing multiple voices without an insistence on the imposition of meaning or explanation. Once we accept that the perspective of the researcher is not the only perspective, we are confronted with questions of how to go about including other voices without commentary, finding ways to articulate the complexity of sense-experience. If we wish no longer to explain the other, to make claims of familiarization, or reproduce the other by naming them, or if we wish to confront our own responsibilities as listening subjects in the way we represent the other, what then?

Paying attention to people's creativity is one way forward. Deumert (2018: 10) suggests attending to the way interactants "produce ways of speaking and writing that are …. skilfully crafted, directed towards an audience and aimed at producing a felt and sensual experience in both speaker/writer and listener/reader". This does not mean advocating for agency outside structures of power, but it does propose a more active role for imagining existing relations in the moment, or as Deumert (2018: 10) puts it, drawing on Bhabha (1994), "Creativity, our ability to bring a sense of 'newness into the world', enables us to overcome not only the 'fatigue of language', but also – and this is important in, especially, decolonial–postcolonial contexts – its violence". Creativity here points to "voices which break through" and the ability of people to "dream of a different world" (Deumert 2022: 5) which nevertheless requires struggle and resistance.

Involvement, as applied linguistics has already established, is relationally driven (Tannen 2007), but involvement is also ethically driven as people look for ways not only to be with others but to be for others (Bauman 1993). To approach subjectivity in ethical terms is to attend to the unpredictable nature of communication relationally, and to account for the way people are disposed to keep meaning open, despite its risks. As Butler (2005: 23) puts it,

> the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the demand to offer and receive acknowledgment: to someone else who is there to be addressed and whose address is there to be received.

Within the encounters described in this thematic issue, we consider how aesthetic treatment of languaging, translingual practice, spatial repertoires and material artefacts opens a pathway towards a relational ethics in which the listening subject pays attention to the address of the Other, not through claiming to know the Other but through being open to the Other's call. The portrayal of the human experience in all its complexity demands an interpretive openness and it is in the aesthetic approach through sensing rather than sense making that openness might be found.

For Levinas, language does not begin with the signs that one gives, with words. Language is above all the fact of being addressed (Levinas et al. 1988: 169). And the beginning of language is in the face and in the body. The face "is a notion through which [the Other] comes to me via a human act different from knowing" (Levinas et al. 1988: 174). Levinas pushes back against semiosis as 'sign' in the linguistic sense. His concern is not with what we know through language or other modalities, but, rather, the signification gained through being in contact with others. The face therefore provides the possibility of ethical kinship, but also political action, because meeting the face of the Other is a call to address injustice.

3.3 An aesthetic approach to listening brings an epistemological openness to sociolinguistic accounts

Sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have studied ideological, cultural and phenomenological connections between language and music and approached the listening act through a range of perspectives. Duranti (2010), for instance, has considered the subject's interpretative experiences as embedded in the material and cultural practices of listening literacies, while Faudree (2012: 530) has proposed a holistic approach to studying sounded and textual signs, advocating for a Peircean semiotic approach, which allows a "broadly human rather than narrowly linguistic or textual" approach to audition.

Our focus on listening as an aesthetic emphasizes the sensory and creative elements in the way people craft interactions. The art of listening is an attentive state distinguishing itself from the "simple nature" of hearing (Nancy 2007: 5). Philosopher Jean Luc Nancy develops his theory of listening by turning to music, arguing that when we listen, what comes first is not the naming of perceived meanings, but the capacity to be in the presence of others through sound. He develops the concept of a "resonant subject" which he describes as "an intensive spacing … that does not end in any return to self without immediately relaunching, as an echo, a call to the same self" (Nancy 2007: 21). Unlike the phenomenological subject "posed in itself to its point of view", the resonant subject, or the "subject of listening is always still yet to come, spaced, traversed, and called by itself, sounded by itself". We take Nancy to argue here that listening involves remaining open to ongoing meaning. He describes listening as an evocation, or a call which resonates and reverberates so that the listener is "straining to end in sense (rather than straining toward, intentionally)" (Nancy 2007: 26). Meaning is indeterminate in music requiring different temporal and spatial temporalities, appearing as "a coming and a passing, an extending and a penetrating" (Nancy 2007: 13).

We find inspiration in Nancy's thinking because his attention to listening as "acoustic penetration" deprivileges the indexical referent and extends meaning to more sensory and contingent accounts of communication. Nancy asks what affordances are offered up "when we listen to a voice, an instrument, or a sound just for itself?" (Nancy 2007: 5, italics added). He suggests that in listening to the voice of the other we might create a space in which "I hear myself" (p. 28). In this space signification is "grasped" via voices "resounding in me" (p. 28). Throughout we pay attention to the processes of listening as the researcher encounters the voices of others aesthetically. This special issue presents examples of how these voices are heard and how their reverberations lead to ethical response even in publications limited to print.

4 Key questions for this special issue

As our position paper shows, the relational ethico-aesthetic framework that we adopt in order to advance an applied linguistics of ethical encounters, generates a range of possible lines of conceptual and empirical inquiry. Broadly, these questions pertain to three key concerns of applied linguistics. We see the proposed overarching framework as a way of beginning to address them through the interdisciplinary lens of ethics and aesthetics:

4.1 How does applied linguistics move between categorising and indeterminacy?

The papers in this thematic issue are situated in social contexts that make an ethical demand on those participating in them. They speak to social interactions in which individuals are asked to take up their responsibility to listen to the Other's address instead of silencing, stigmatising, stereotyping or reducing them. Yet one of the key questions that all papers grapple with is the core concern of the applied linguistics of ethical encounters: How can, or indeed why should, the listening subject counter the predilection to categorise the Other where such a move is mandated by well-meaning institutional regimes to safeguard ethical conduct in multilingual and multicultural settings (Beiler and Dewilde), firmly aligned with disciplinary concerns to study and represent societal diversity (Brizić, Creese, Williams), required for taking direct social action towards racial justice (Krause-Alzaidi) or necessary as a basis for recovering a collective moral imagination in settings of polarisation and social stigma (Kubanyiova)? All papers show that categorising may be indispensable and indeed crucial for furthering social justice. But they also point to ethical and aesthetic moves that can destabilise the categories and thus open them up for ethical encounters.

4.2 What kind of analyses produce accounts of ethical encounters?

As we outlined earlier, capturing social interactions ethically is hard when what we are dealing with is the listening subject's aesthetic attentiveness to and experience of the Other. Such sensibilities appear well outside of the applied linguistics' remit. Yet, the papers in this thematic issue illustrate how the conceptual or methodological tools of applied linguistics research can be treated aesthetically to account for (Creese, Williams), enact (Krause-Alzaidi, Brizić), anticipate (Beiler and Dewilde) or create openings for (Kubanyiova) ethical encounters in languaging practices. This includes attending to communities' semiotic repertoires through senses (Kubanyiova), "getting in touch" with the discursive-material realities of a protest placard (Krause-Alzaidi), listening to participants' aesthetic responses to the language of an informed consent letter (Beiler and Dewilde), accounting for evaluative, affective and epistemic stancetaking effects of transgressive body pop performance on the audience (Williams), participating in intense discursive and aesthetic engagement with the material voice of the Other (Brizić), or a gradual moving away from categorising in an ethnographic vignette (Creese). All these analytical approaches, while embedded in recognised research practices of applied linguistics, use the ethico-aesthetic lens to move beyond traditional text analyses and signal opportunities for new ways of engagement.

4.3 What is the ethical responsibility of the sociolinguist as a researcher and as a reader?

We have proposed in this position piece that ethical encounters can be understood as events of subjectivity. The papers in this thematic issue do not neutralise or erase the researcher. While researcher reflexivity has long been a crucial aspect of applied linguistic research reflection (Bucholtz 2001; Consoli and Ganassin 2023; Coupland and Jaworski 2004; Creese and Blackledge 2012), the papers position and/or document the researcher's participation in events of subjectivity as central to pursuing ethical applied linguistics research. But what of the applied linguist at the receiving end of a research account which aims to disrupt habitual ways of reading to invite an ethical response? This is perhaps a more radical challenge for it disrupts the expectation of a homogenous applied linguistic readership and makes a demand on the reader to stand in epistemological uncertainty long enough and deep enough to forge an ethical response, regardless of what is assumed as 'known'. The different kinds of writing, such as aesthetic invitations (Kubanyiova), aesthetic walking around in words

(Krause-Alzaidi), discursive-aesthetic analysis (Brizić) or the more familiar genres of sociolinguistic analysis (Williams) and a personal narrative (Creese; Beiler and Dewilde) are explored with this end in mind: to address the reader as the listening subject.

The answers to the three questions are certainly not exhausted by the papers in this thematic issue. They rather open a space for a broader debate about future applied linguistic research. A sociolinguistically-informed applied linguistics of ethical encounters might, for example, extend the scope of future inquiry by asking: In what way is the "performance of contact" (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010) linguistically and aesthetically distinctive from a discursive enacting of responsibility for the Other? After Goffman (1959), what does the ethical presentation of the self, that is, a self for the Other, look like in social encounters? How are the Other's "bodily displays read" by the observing/listening subject in the "interaction order" of ethical encounters (Goffman 1983: 4)? And how does applied linguistics begin to describe communication rituals of the listening subject's not knowing which allow the cracks in existing orders of indexicality (Silverstein 2003)?

5 Overview

The six papers which make up this special issue share several features. They document processes of othering but signal efforts made to disrupt this kind of knowing. They focus on communicative events in terms of relational ethics, considering the ethical demands of responsibility which flow from such encounters. They approach subjectivity as located both within and beyond discourse. They bring an aesthetic treatment of representation which asks that we think expansively about what constitutes evidence in sociolinguistic accounts. Finally, across a variety of scales, they consider the building of political connections, based on the ethical demands of responsibility they reveal.

In what follows we acknowledge that we speak from particular geographical, historical, bodily, and ideological contexts (Diniz De Figueiredo and Martinez 2021) and are compelled to unmask and disclose these biographies.

5.1 "When we use that kind of language … someone is going to jail": relationality and aesthetic interpretation in initial research encounters

Beiler and Dewilde provide an account of how they became attuned to the initial unwillingness of a group of adult migrants to sign a consent form for a project they

were undertaking on multilingual resources in an adult education centre. Although Beiler and Dewilde were aware of the varying experiences of trauma faced by their potential participants before they arrived in Norway, the authors did not predict how a move intended to improve access and engagement would lead to a refusal to participate. The authors describe how research ethics routines in applied linguistic research are aesthetically laden experiences which are best interpreted through the lens of relational ethics. Using Biesta's (2016) concept of 'event of subjectivity' Beiler and Dewilde describe how they came to see their own responsibility towards the adult migrants.

5.2 The humanism of the other in sociolinguistic ethnography

Creese offers an account of sociolinguistic team ethnography in the context of neoliberalism. She illustrates researcher propensity for relational ethics in the face of asymmetrical conditions of power. She reflects on her own role as a listening subject within a team of researchers who are listening subjects to others. Following Levinas, Creese locates ethics in human relations, seeking to understand how ethnographers attend to dilemmas faced in the field. The paper argues the vignette brings a missing aesthetic dimension to capturing the centrality of ethics in meaning-making processes.

5.3 Towards a sociolinguistics of in difference: stancetaking on others

Williams investigates an R&B female pop group in Cape Town who appear on a breakfast show with a rendition of the Beyonce Knowles' song 'Irreplaceable' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYUn4TvXpsI). In their performance Woman2Woman parody the original song changing it to make explicit their own multilingual repertoire which includes English, Kaaps and Afrikaans. The women draw on these varieties to transform an American English song into a multilingual version, making evident culturally-specific indexicals in their use of phonological and lexico-grammatical features that only speakers who know Kaaps and who live on the Cape Flats will recognize. Williams warns against binary frameworks of difference choosing to highlight the shared experience of managing difference. William shows how fixed categories of differences (culture, race, sex, ethnicity, language, and so on) remain problematic because they are reproduced as determinate, removing ambiguity and indeterminacy in performance. He proposes 'in difference' as a stance that refutes the 'essentializing tactics' of categorisation.

5.4 Becoming response-able with a protest placard: White under(-)standing in encounters with the Black German other

Krause-Alzaidi's self-reflexive analysis centres on a placard that she encountered in the wake of a Black Lives Matter protest in Leipzig, which stated: I understand that I will never understand but I stand with you. An aesthetic involvement with the matter of the placard and of the white body that is assumed to and eventually does carry it interrupts traditional meaning making and creates openings for ethical responses to racialization. Instead of moving away from words, Krause-Alzaidi invites an attentive 'walking around in' and 'getting in touch with' them. Such an aesthetic treatment, as her paper illustrates with forensic detail, is capable of unsettling habitual narratives, analyses and conclusions. How the words (whether those in the placard or those in a journal article), and therefore the worlds that they construct, are handled is where Krause-Alzaidi places the subject's, hers as well as the reader's, ethical responsibility.

5.5 (Im)possibility of ethical encounters in places of separation: aesthetics as a quiet applied linguistics praxis

Kubanyiova's study is a search for human connection in settings of social stigma and physical segregation in which the listening subject systemically refuses to connect. The context is rural eastern Slovakia with a significant presence of a Romani-speaking minority living in conditions of exclusion and poverty. The paper does not attempt to provide answers to deeply entrenched social and historical injustices, nor offer hopeful sociolinguistic accounts to soothe the reader. And yet the 'me' of the researcher is still implicated and Kubanyiova explores her own responsibility in the face of ongoing discriminations. Drawing on relational ethics, her paper exploits the performative power of semiotic repertoires of the Other to affect the perceiving subject. She documents her own encounters in the field and similarly invites the reader's sensory entanglement with others through a series of 'aesthetic invitations'. She proposes a 'quiet' applied linguistics as a form of activism.

5.6 Unsettled hearing, responsible listening: encounters with voice after forced migration

Brizić takes up the notion of ethically motivated listening "as the deliberate will and effort of the listener to communicate at eye level, and to become attuned to the

Other's Sociolinguistic Voice in its full range of knowledge and communication forms." She anchors her examination in a personal vignette – an earlier rejection of her responsibility to listen to the Other's crying. Brizić goes on to argue the necessity of making visible the inextricable link between ethically and aesthetically-motivated listening to the sociolinguistic and material voice of the Other. The research context of the study concerns Kurdish migrant communities in Austria and Turkey and examines their transgenerational experiences of social injustice, institutional inequity and linguistic discrimination. She argues that in contexts of racial injustice and power inequity, the listener's expectations on what the latter should sound like can be a significant obstacle to developing ethical listening to the former.

6 Conclusions

The broad field of applied linguistics has a long tradition of using its theories, methodologies and activism in the service of furthering social justice (Avineri et al. 2019; Heller 2014). Its many concepts and approaches, such as translanguaging (García and Wei 2014; Zavala 2019), language and materiality (Cavanaugh and Shankar 2017), or raciolinguistics (Rosa 2019) are part of the larger political project that seeks to redress inequalities by highlighting the role of language in producing them. An applied linguistics of ethical encounters is a commitment to direct our analytical gaze to how individuals become ethically responsible in face-to-face encounters. As Bucholtz (2016: 7) notes,

> it is crucial to bear in mind that vast global processes work their effects not in the aggregate but on the level of specific human – and nonhuman – bodies. Even as we scale up our analyses and theoretical ambitions, we remain responsible to the immediacy of embodiment, its refusal to be generalized or abstracted away, and this responsibility has consequences for our theoretical, methodological, political, and ethical commitments.

This position paper has outlined what we understand these consequences to be. We have asked questions about researcher responsibility, arguing that it is not enough to name processes of othering and otherness but additionally to address them in particular encounters. We have considered our own researcher subjectivities and the material advantages which come with them, acknowledging the social and economic privileges which flow from race, class, language, and ethnicity. We have offered an interdisciplinary theorization of difference with the intention of pointing to the listening subject's responsibility for action towards creating inclusive political connectivity. We have re-appraised the subject, refuting its centrality in discourse, arguing that the subject comes into being through encountering the humanism of the other. Finally, we have paid attention to the sensory and experiential in documenting

a series of events in which human difference is encountered not only through the categorizations of language but in the proximity to others where meaning and an impetus to action reside.

The proposed relational ethico-aesthetic approach, while sharing the political vision of an inclusive and just society, nevertheless does not lend itself easily to political manifestos of any kind. The politics of encounter concerns forms of public engagement and human togetherness that do not solely rely on political affinity but are in addition concerned with generating events of subjectivity. True, the shift from subjective to political requires a shift from duality to plurality, from a particular face-to-face encounter to a social bond among those who do not look one another in the face. But the political and institutional realm "must contain the memory of the first encounter and be derived from that directness of facing" (Webb 2016: 200) because "only the individual can see the tears of the other, the tears that even the just regime cannot see" (Alford 2004: 17). Solidarity, then, is not primarily concerned with consolidating a sense of community based on sameness. Instead, it "builds political connections based on an ethical demand of responsibility for the other, the stranger or outsider, while at the same time calling the 'inside-outside' distinction itself into question" (Kelz 2016: 157).

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