

THEORETICAL ESSAY

LINGUISTICS OUT OF THE CLOSET: COMMENTS ON A DISCIPLINE'S ANXIETY

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I develop a holistic framework for an anti-disciplinary project based in and encompassing the intellectual critiques of colonialism, imperialism, and racism within linguistics in addition to subsuming queer and trans programs of linguistic thought in queering the science of language. This anti-disciplinary project presents a defense of iconoclastic forms of knowledge production that explicitly reject a priori assumptions of the orthodox linguistic canon's primacy as a body of knowledge and seeks to engage ulterior and auxiliary modes of language science. In rejecting the notion of linear scientific progression – the humanist notion of progress as forward-facing – this project furthermore seeks to move beyond simple critiques, apologetics, and hagiographies and work toward a true repositioning of the field and a productive reimagination of the discipline. To that end, I outline four anti-disciplinary concepts – hetero-cistoriography, transcriptivism, decentralization, and systematic professionalism – which I argue are productive points of departure from the institution of discipline.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet essai, je développe une structure théorique holistique pour un projet anti-disciplinaire un projet anti-disciplinaire basé sur et englobant les critiques intellectuelles du colonialisme, de l'impérialisme et du racisme au sein de la linguistique en plus de subsumer les programmes queer et trans de la pensée linguistique dans la science du langage queer. Ce projet anti-disciplinaire présente une défense des formes iconoclastes



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de production de connaissances qui rejettent explicitement les hypothèses a priori sur la primauté du canon linguistique orthodoxe en tant que corpus de connaissances et cherche à engager des modes ultérieurs et auxiliaires de la science du langage. En rejetant la notion de progression scientifique linéaire – la notion humaniste du progrès comme tourné vers l'avenir – ce projet cherche en outre à aller au-delà des simples critiques, apologétiques et hagiographies et œuvrer pour un véritable repositionnement du terrain et une réimagination productive de la discipline. À cette fin, je décris quatre concepts anti-disciplinaires – l'hetero-cistoriographie, la transcriptivisme, la décentralisation, et le professionnalisme systématique – que je soutiens sont des points de départ productifs de l'institution de la discipline.

KEYWORDS

Anti-Disciplinarity; Historiography; Queer; Philosophy of Science.

MOTS-CLÉS

Anti-Disciplinarité; Historiographie; Queer; Philosophie des Sciences.

INTRODUCTION: A QUEER SCIENCE OF LANGUAGE

When I speak of doing linguistics “out of the closet”, I am referencing a combination of two idioms that is useful for thinking about a queer science of language – and, in its own turn, a queer language science. The first “closet” idiom is fairly obvious: *to come out of the closet*, to tell someone that you are queer; the second is less so: *a skeleton in the closet*, a discreditable or embarrassing fact that a person wishes to keep secret. The malaphoric amalgamation of these two idioms constitutes a sentiment similar to *coming out of the closet and dragging the skeletons out behind you*. For linguistics, coming out of the closet and dragging the skeletons out behind is a call to queer the science of language in addition to simply conducting science on queer language. While a science of queer language – when done well – is inherently queered, the benefits of such are often restricted to queer language science as a subfield of the wider discipline. To queer the science of language itself – and in the process make the discipline of linguistics a more welcoming place for queer linguists and the study of queer language – we must bring the discipline out of the closet, which means confronting what the discipline is and what secrets the discipline would otherwise wish to remain secret.

To understand how we might go about bringing the discipline of linguistics out of the closet, it is first necessary to understand what exactly the discipline is. Linguistics, as a discipline, is first and foremost not the equivalent of language science, as a field of inquiry. The latter is simply the formal inquiry into questions regarding language; the former, is a disciplinary institution which has a vested interest in its own preservation. For example, although it is a ridiculous example, a scientist could devote time and energy to studying whether or not speaking to plants will actually make them grow faster or healthier. This botany experiment is definitely language science because, simply put, it is science involving language. However, it is not – or at least not obviously – included within linguistics as a discipline. The discipline, which is to say the disciplinary institution, is greatly interested in regulating its own composition as the most direct means by which it ensures its own preservation and aggrandizes its own epistemologies. Therefore, linguistics as a disciplinary institution is specifically interested in categorizing the entirety of language science into what is and is not linguistics. This “disciplinary science” is the chief concern of this paper.

Nevertheless, the discipline continually arrives at its own dissolution, redefinition, vassalization, or schismaticization. I am speaking here of the discipline as a monolithic institutional idea, but such ideas and the “institution” of those ideas are always dependent upon the individuals which coalesce around them. The discipline of linguistics as an institution, by no means an exception to this rule, can therefore be observed as “being instituted” in infinitely varied ways and with equally many peculiarities. Here, I will focus on

the (Anglo-) American disciplinary institution of linguistics, and while much of such a commentary will be equally applicable to other various institutions of the linguistics discipline, I will make no pretense as to this commentary's limitations in that sense. Indeed, in that disciplinary science and institutions are inherently tied to geopolitical spaces and actors, it would be antithetical to this paper's argument to even presume to occupy a space from which I could critique the disciplinary science and institutions outside the (Anglo-)American context. My critique and commentary are therefore reserved to largely American scholars and institutions, though I have endeavored in writing my criticisms to do so in a way that is generalizable, in some way, to the disciplinary science and institutions beyond this context. Now, to begin with the institution of an American discipline of linguistics, we must begin with the creation of the Linguistic Society of America as well as the context in which it was created.

Shortly after the founding of the Linguistic Society of America in 1924, Leonard Bloomfield authored an essay titled "Why a Linguistic Society?" (1925), published in the first issues of the society's journal *Language*. The essay presents a series of arguments for not only the formation of an academic society focused on the scientific study of language but also for the formation of a discipline of linguistics, distinct from the fields of philology, psychology, and anthropology which at that time housed many of Bloomfield's would-be contemporary linguists in university departments across the country. He writes of this distinction that:

The Science of language, dealing with the most basic and simplest of human social institutions, is a human science. It is most closely related to ethnology, but precedes ethnology and all other human sciences in the order of growing complexity, for linguistics stands at their foot, immediately after psychology, the connecting link between the natural sciences and the human. (p.1)

It is here that we can observe the origins of linguistics' disciplinary anxiety that pulls at it from opposites ends of the spectrum of natural and moral sciences. It is this tension between the natural and moral sciences, which I refer to as *anxiety*, that exerts the greatest pressures on modern linguistic scholars and effects the greatest constraints on the disciplinary institution of linguistics.

Specifically, Bloomfield (1925) construes the field of linguistics – at that time not quite so much a discipline – as belonging to the human sciences, distinct from the natural sciences, philology, and psychology. For him, linguistics represented the link, second only to psychology, between "the natural sciences and the human". In so doing, contemporary linguists of this tradition have inherited a discipline that is at once the least human of the humanities and the least scientific of the sciences; the most scientific of the humanities and the most human of the sciences. In a way, this multidisciplinary foundation has allowed for the intellectual propagation of an ever-increasing number of specialist subfields. Simultaneously, this hyper-speciation runs counter to the centralization of the

discipline within the formalist subfields of linguistic inquiry during the 20th century. We are thus left with a discipline – which is to say a specialist academic institution – that devotes as much time to the development of linguistic inquiry as to the disenfranchisement of the majority of its subfields, and it is in the context of this intellectual climate that we may encounter queer linguistics.

Queer linguistics – in its position as both a linguistic science of and for queer folk – is inherently agitating to the disciplinary anxiety of a general linguistic science. It represents, as all queer science does, a disruption of the normative modes of knowledge production and a displacement of academic authority. To this extent and as a matter of practical application, a queer(ed) science of language presents a locus from which to engage an anti-disciplinary linguistics, one much akin to the state of the field in America prior to the 1920s. That is also to say, a queer(ed) language science may yet allow for a more clearly unified anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and anti-racist paradigm of linguistic inquiry. This dichotomy and the inquiry into such constitutes the remainder of this essay.

1. DISCIPLINARY ANXIETY AND SCIENTIFIC SKELETONS

First, let us consider more deeply the nature of this disciplinary anxiety which so greatly constrains our science and, as exemplified in the remainder of this section, attempts to closet away the skeletons of our discipline. For understanding the disciplinary anxiety peculiar to linguistics, we can find some inspiration in the disciplinary anxiety of medical science occurring roughly in the 17th and 18th centuries (ALDERMAN 2016). At that time, the received knowledge of medical science was undergoing an epistemological shift as the human autopsy was gaining ground as a more widely accepted medical practice. In so doing, the body became an object of science that was separate and distinct from the person of the body, and medical claims could be tested and more readily examined via the body as a separate entity – the soul had become untethered. The same – or at least a similar – paradigmatic shift, in the sense of Kuhn (1962), occurred in 1916 with the posthumous publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* which untethered the linguistic sign from the speaker and made it an object of pure science (1986). This synchronization of language as an object of study parallels the reification of the corpse in medical science, an analogy which was acutely attuned to by Vološinov (1973 [1929]) and Bakhtin (1987[1934]), the latter of whom criticized:

Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life. (p. 92)

Thus, the linguistic corpse, as it were, is the object of linguistic science par exemplar; however, in comparison to the anatomical corpse, language has no (arguable) existence beyond the interlocutor – a point argued for by Vološinov and Bakhtin, above – which is to say, beyond its analogical soul. Linguistic science, for which we can take 1916 as a convenient though debatable starting point, must then continually try to rectify this paradox and re-assert its legitimacy as a science which takes as its object of study a truly synchronic – though artificial – form. It is this same anxiety that attempts to keep queer linguistics and linguistic skeletons hidden away in the recesses of the disciplinary closet.

In more explicit terms, a discipline is distinct from a science in so far as a discipline is concerned first with the preservation of *the discipline* and only secondarily with the advancement of the science. The science may exceed the bounds of the discipline or may be entirely subsumed within it: science simply continues to develop as it will. The discipline, however, is far more concerned with the control of the science and all of its attendant resources. Disciplinary anxiety arises when that control is threatened in some way. For linguistics, having early on as a discipline positioned itself as a natural science, I argue that disciplinary anxiety stems from the tension between positioning linguistics as a natural science when it is also a moral science, or human science. The discipline of linguistics is built upon the fiction of language as an empirically describable, abstractable object of study, devoid in its purest instantiation from the vagueries of the human condition. Any challenge to this inspires anxiety in the defenders of the discipline. For our metaphorical purposes here, coming out of the closet is a confrontation of that anxiety in explicit terms: a queer science of language coming out of the closet and confronting a disciplinary language science which presumes to be the only natural form of such a science.

Continuing this metaphor, or the malaphoric *coming out of the closet and dragging the skeletons with you*, confronting the anxiety inspired by challenges to the discipline as an institution requires more than just the act of confrontation. We must bring the skeletons into the light. These skeletons are frequently produced by the exercise of disciplinary authority and then quickly closeted away. For example, Comrie's (2019, 2020) historical linguistic work on the Great Andamanese language of Aka-Bea makes extensive use of language documentation produced by Maurice Vidal Portman (1899), a British colonial administrator of a penal colony established in the Andamanese islands in the mid-19th century. Comrie dismisses Portman out of hand as a non-linguist, a non-phonetician, a mere administrator. While criticizing Portman as being a non-linguist is vacuously anachronistic – the linguistic discipline not truly taking shape until a few decades later – the more dangerous issue at hand is the violence (e.g. murder, kidnapping, imprisonment) Portman employed in the name of language documentation and the obfuscation of such in Comrie's treatment of him. These decidedly non-scientific actions on the part of Portman produce a disciplinary anxiety in the work of Comrie (and others

working on the Andamanese languages); and the easiest solution becomes to take the data and dismiss Portman, who then becomes the locus of a disciplinary skeleton in the aforementioned disciplinary closet. Over time, Portman would be forgotten, but his cruelties would be further and further distilled into the disciplinary matrix of linguistics. This, in my opinion, has happened to the greatest degree with missionary linguistics and Christian imperialism (DOBRIN & GOOD 2009; OLSON 2009; SVELMOE 2009; CONROY-KRUTZ 2015) but is observable throughout the entirety of linguistics.

Some may demur that what I have presented here is nothing more than unbridled cynicism, and that the discipline of linguistics is neither inherently good nor evil, that it is an aimless, emergent institution, and that there is a clear line between what is “linguistic science” and what is “language science”. Each point has its merits, but I refuse to wax Panglossian about how great the discipline – or any discipline for that matter – is. A discipline is not the same as a science or a philosophy, that much of my argument is beyond reproach. Where we go from here, however, may yet denote the boundary of acceptable theory within the discipline and within the science. The same anxiety that tries to keep queer linguistics “in the closet” is also the same anxiety that feigns ignorance of all the closet’s attendant skeletons, whose secreting away is essential for the maintenance and furtherance of the disciplinary institution. In this sense, the disciplinary institution of linguistics is fundamentally anti-intellectual and must be admonished and amended as the science progresses, lest it should face its own eminent dissolution in the eyes of its own self-aggrandized state of feigned ignorance. In the following four sections, respectively, I present what I believe are a series of steps which may lead us toward a solution to the conundrum of the discipline through means of an anti-disciplinary philosophy: (1) to confront hetero-cistoriographies of language science, (2) to embrace the contradiction of linguistics as a natural and moral science, (3) to work towards administrative proficiency in addition to academic expertise, and (4) to hold each other accountable for one-dimensional thinking in all forms.

2. ANTI-DISCIPLINARITY: CONFRONTING HETERO-CISTORIOGRAPHIES OF LANGUAGE SCIENCE

The first step that we must take toward an anti-disciplinary, and therefore queered, science of language is to confront hetero-cistoriographies of language science, by which I mean that we must move beyond simply challenging and re-acting to erasure, in terms of both the subject and object of research. We must first attempt to unmake the discipline in a historiographical sense and then progress towards that total paradigmatic confrontation which precedes true change. But let us begin more broadly in this area, and as we begin, I

would like to shift back to a more direct focus on the disciplinary-internal positioning of queer linguistics. The historiography of language science has rapidly developed since its programmatic formulation in the late twentieth century and has done for the discipline of linguistics what the history of science has done for the natural sciences. Its development was in part a reaction to the entangled intellectual traditions of the study of language as constituted through ad hoc disciplinary interpretation (KOERNER 1995). As a necessity, this historiographical project re-figures the disparate intellectual traditions of the past with the discipline of linguistics as we know it today (GOLDSMITH & LAKS 2019). Yet, as with all historiography, the willful or accidental exclusion of sexual and gender minorities – both as researchers and as research populations – persists in obscuring the contributions of these communities to the discipline, both historically and contemporaneously; and such cis-heteronormative epistemologies can be found cooperating fully with those historiographical projects involved in the institution of discipline.

Admittedly, relative to many of the linguistic sub-disciplines, queer linguistics is a fairly new area of study, but it should not be auxiliary to some idealized, objective “historiography of language science” or indeed a “history of linguistics”. Truly, to accurately address the historiographical challenges specific to queer language science, it is perhaps more accurate to distinguish a hereunto established hetero-cistoriography of language science, wherein such models the inherently exclusionary nature of cis-heteronormative productions of history (BOWSELL 1980, 1994; MANION, 2020). The repercussions of such histories are especially dire, wherein queer linguistics is often treated as a mere auxiliary to cis-heteronormative traditions of research rather than as a co-equal sub-discipline – though the institution of such a sub-discipline would be in some ways detrimental to that field of study. So, let us examine these repercussions – in many ways originating among the same processes that have secreted away the disciplinary skeletons – in two genres, so that we can then begin to undo the harm committed by these hetero-cistoriographies to a queer science of language: the hagiography and the biography.

Hetero-cistoriography, as I have figured it here, belongs to this first genre of hagiography amidst the cult of White Cis-Het Science. A hagiography, in broad terms, is the written life of a saint or, in terms less kind, a type of biography that baselessly aggrandizes the subject. Therefore, hetero-cistoriography is that which takes as sacred (i.e. beyond reproach) the codification of cis-heteronormative systems of knowledge production enshrined through theoretical, methodological, and rhetorical paradigms – wherein such constitutes a written genre which begins and ends as a fundamentally and inherently cisgender and heterosexual enterprise. It is a genre that claims to be true to the state of knowledge that it has itself produced and demands its own legitimacy in light of such, even though such cannot, by form, be held to be true: it claims to be such a thing as it is because it is a thing that can claim such, among other tautologies – a corruption of that genre of

knowledge production originating amongst the most natural sciences which is one not meant to account for the complexity of humanity.

For example, let us take physics as a prototypical example of a natural science. As a science, it has a subject and an object – for physics, the object is the matter broadly speaking, and just as in any science that we can know of, the subject is the scientist. For physics, the object can be studied “objectively” regardless of who the subject is. A queer physics can be a physics undertaken by the queer subject, but the object of physics cannot be queer. A full description of physics may be realized in total without the need for a parallel description of queer physics, if such a thing could even be an object of study. Linguistics – wherein “the methods of linguistics resemble those of the natural sciences, and so do its results, both in their certainty and in their seeming by no means obvious, but rather, in many instances, paradoxical to the common sense of time” (BLOOMFIELD 1925, p. 1) – purports to do the same, but in reality, elects to describe language in the absence of intentional, foregrounded engagement with the subject or, if it does engage with these issues, does so in the footnotes, the conclusion, or the references. Unlike in a true natural science, you can have a queer subject and a queer object, only a queer subject, or only a queer object: all are equally queer, but not all are equally objective (or for that matter equally subjective, but that poses fewer problems).

Again, we can here observe the after-effects of a linguistic disciplinary anxiety which has left us only with *the naked corpse of the word*, where the discipline of linguistics, in its attempt to maintain its status as a discipline, has sought to untether the object from the subject so that a description of language may be realized in total, even though such a realization is entirely dependent upon the disciplinary imagination. However, this is not entirely unique to hetero-cistoriography as a subgenre of hagiographical language science, as it is possible to commit oneself to a queer hagiography of language science in order to support the (sub-) disciplinary project of queer linguistics. Such a project would work towards the delineation of a queer object which is quintessentially queer *as object* and not just an object which happens to be queer. For example, a queer hagiography of Oscar Wilde would have you know that he was an unjustly persecuted gay poet of the late 19th century, but a queer biography of Oscar Wilde would have you know – perhaps to your surprise, giving credit to the enduring popularity of the hagiographical genre – that Wilde had a wife, Constance Lloyd, as well as two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan Holland. Therein lies the difference, one does not diminish the other.

Similarly, an anti-disciplinary confrontation of the hetero-cistoriographies of linguistics means accepting the complexity of the subject and object of study in our field instead of simply disciplining it away into the closet. It is to accept and work to reconcile the nature of a science that is both natural and moral, where the object and subject of study can often be unnervingly one and the same. This anti-disciplinary genre is what we might call the

biography, a description of a person's life – not necessarily a saint (and not necessarily a devil) but a person full of life's complexity. The biographical genre of scientific writing, however, is necessarily agitating to the disciplinary anxiety of linguistics – though not specifically linguistics itself. Failing to adhere to the hagiographical genre can often be detrimental to one's career, and I would argue, detrimental to the wider science:

I fairly quickly developed an eccentric genre of writing, quirky (and personal and playful) in both content and style, not conforming at all to the conventions of academic disciplines. There was a lot of stuff in this about linguistic matters and about gender and sexuality, but it wasn't recognizable as academic discourse, and the general consensus was that I had left the academic world. (Personal Correspondence 2019)

This form of biographical scientific writing – *quirky, playful, personal, non-conforming* – is often perceived as someone leaving the academic discipline, as my friend laments above, or is simply not recognized as being relevant to the disciplinary enterprise in the first place. The reader may have observed such in my own style of writing which has been described over the years as *obtuse, hermetic, alchemic, esoteric*, and an assortment of other words denoting polite confusion. An advisor once even admonished me: *You write too much like a philosopher, and not enough like a linguist*. Well I assure the reader that my writing style is entirely intentional and is specifically meant to convey the sensation of reading a short story by the Argentinian essayist Jorge Luis Borges – if it were the case that Jorge Luis Borges was in fact a gay millennial manic depressive, a Scorpio, and a Southern Baptist. It may not be recognizable as disciplinary discourse, but it is – most assuredly – *that which conveys the sensation of reading a short story by the Argentinian essayist Jorge Luis Borges – if it were the case that Jorge Luis Borges was in fact a gay millennial manic depressive, a Scorpio, and a Southern Baptist*.

With regards to the consequences of flouting the received genre of disciplinary writing, Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz (2020) have recently advanced a similar sentiment regarding race and in critique of such disciplinarity: “It may be more comfortable to convince ourselves that linguistics just isn't for everyone, but to do so is to abdicate our professional ethical responsibility to make the discipline an equitable and inclusive place for students and scholars of all backgrounds” (p. 23). Yet, it is essential that we do not abdicate our responsibility here and that we fight for that inclusion, in this case a genre-centered inclusion that seeks the dissolution of the hagiographic enterprise in language science and the discipline of linguistics (KIBBEY 2019). I believe that John Boswell, the openly gay and openly Catholic Professor of History at Yale, is a particularly effective example of such biographical work, though history is far less a science than linguistics, so the distinction is less meaningful there. In his book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (1980), Boswell confronts the complexity of Medieval Christian homosexuality head on – admittedly through the somewhat out of fashion essentialist view

of sexuality – and is left with a far less tidy but infinitely more satisfactory account of such. Much as in my Oscar Wilde example above, the inspiration for which I fully attribute to Boswell, he argues for the importance of acknowledging the complicated personal histories of queer figures in history – their faith, spouses, children, relationships – instead of carving away important aspects of their lives to simply fit a narrative, as we are often – myself included – all too predisposed. Radical inclusivity need not obscure complexity.

A true deconstruction of hagiographical genres such as – and for linguistics especially – hetero-cistoriography, can of course achieve little without practical change. At a minimum this would include Straight and Cisgender faculty working to hire queer scholars into tenure track positions regardless of whether their work is specifically related to queer topics and without expectation that their work is inherently tied to or saturated with their identity (HALPERIN 1995). It means re-examining research priorities and confronting, critically, the object of study within linguistics as a discipline and whether such an object is inclusive of the object that is queer; and if it is not, being willing to admit that the object has hereunto been and continues to be, in the absence of immediate remediation, a practical fiction of the hetero-cistoriographical science. This process of confrontation, in a practical sense, must also necessarily include a reconceptualization of the scientific genre, the review process, and the means by which academic research is published; and as a necessary condition of our age's iniquities, preparing ourselves for the abuse of such initiatives.

3. ANTI-DISCIPLINARITY: TRANSCRIPTIVISM

Hetero-cistoriographies of linguistics and language science, as discussed above, are largely dependent on the hagiographical construction of a natural object of study which can be studied “objectively” independent of any quality inherent to the subject of study. In disciplinary linguistics this “naturalizing” of the scientific object and its relationship with the subject is called “descriptivism”. Contrasted with prescriptivism, or the arbitrary application of rules to languages based on a sense of what is “proper”, descriptivism allows linguistics a sense of determinability in relation to the object of research – to describe is to be neutral to the subject and the flow of time, a description of a natural object either is or is not correct – there is little room left for the moralizing of science. However, as mentioned in the previous section, this is but a (im)polite fiction on the part of a disciplinary linguistics. A purely natural science can claim, to some degree at least in its descriptions of natural objects, that it is morally neutral; however, a science such as linguistics, caught between the moral and natural sciences, cannot claim a moral neutrality in the natural sense without abdicating some due responsibility in the sense of a moral science, therefore ascribing to itself a state of immorality.

Unfortunately, when such a contradiction is pointed out or the unintelligibility of a morally neutral moral science is held to account, those committed to the disciplinary project of linguistics are quick to lash out in defense and as a reaction to the anxiety inspired by such. For example, when admonished for his position on gender-neutral pronouns, one anxiety-stricken scholar said:

Telling me I am required for political reasons to use a construction that strikes me as ungrammatical, and judging me morally and politically for not instantly obeying, is the most extreme manifestation of prescriptivist Stalinism I have ever encountered'. (PULLUM 2017)

But why must we commit to this largely artificial dichotomy? As I have argued above, it is largely a byproduct of the discipline as an institution – it assists in the creation of a natural linguistic object. This is practical for language science, but if left unattended, it is prone to spiral out of control into moral negligence.

I offer here, as elsewhere (KIBBEY 2019), “Transcriptivism” as a supplement to and critique of the descriptive-prescriptive dichotomy which allows for the continued use of descriptivism as a practical analytic paradigm while also abstracting away the moral question inherent to linguistics as a moral science. It is not enough to describe language; we must also work to transcribe those descriptions onto a human world with human complexities. Of course, this is by no means a criticism of similar principles of research ethics advanced in the discipline, in sociolinguistics for example (WOLFRAM 1993, 1998, 2015; ECKERT 2013), but rather seeks to reconsider the foundations of the discipline itself, and in so doing, make these reconsiderations distinct from research ethics. Transcriptivism seeks to reconsider the discipline’s function – not necessarily exclusive to an anti-disciplinary philosophy – without assuming the discipline’s self-justified existence and by attempting to look beyond a science rife with moral abdication to what it could be (BAUGH 2018; BARRET 2014; CHARITY HUDLEY, MALLINSON, & BUCHOLTZ 2020; RICKFORD & KING 2016). Therefore, a transcriptive approach allows for a distinction between a hard descriptivism, observable in Pullum’s stance above, and a weak descriptivism, which allows for descriptive methodology as an analytic concept.

To be transcriptive within the discipline is to weaken the descriptive methodology – that which seeks to naturalize the object of research – up until the point that moral sciences are necessitated in addition to natural sciences. In an anti-disciplinary sense, this requires the explicit involvement of marginalized communities in the production of knowledge about their own communities (HALEPRIN 1995) and further necessitates intentional and thoughtful engagement with the cis-heteronormative underpinnings and

1 Pullum, G. Courtesy and personal pronoun choice. *Language Log*, 6 Dec. 2017. <https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=35688>

hetero-cistoriographical structuring of linguistics. Some such underpinnings make it nearly impossible for the discipline to distinguish the non-cis-heteronormative subject from the object of research. Others present a theoretical complexity – in attempting to account for identities at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and class – that is not always readily accessible to the linguistics discipline – especially when “LGBTQ+” is misconstrued, as it often is, as a uniform community. Simply put, even a weak descriptivism struggles under the weight of human gender and sexual diversity: an additional, moral – transcriptive – approach to descriptivism, as a means of critiquing descriptivist methodologies, offers one possible solution.

4. ANTI-DISCIPLINARITY: DISCIPLINARY DECENTRALIZATION AND DISSOLUTION

Up until this point, I have treated the disciplinary institution of linguistics as a purely intellectual institution: however, this is a simplification of the true disciplinary institution, which is both intellectual and physical. Meaningful change, whether in a disciplinary or anti-disciplinary sense, demands looking beyond the intellectual institution of the discipline and toward the infrastructure of the physical institution, wherein true change must be achieved for marginalized peoples in order to conduct better science, especially one that is both natural and moral. The physical instantiation of disciplinary science, for our purposes here, is that of a centralized institution within a wider institutional framework. Such a centralized system is inherently beneficial to the maintenance of the disciplinary institution in the intellectual sense as it constitutes that intellectual institution’s physical counterpart.

Yet, what is anti-disciplinary in an intellectual sense is not necessarily anti-disciplinary in a physical sense. For instance, recently in the field of anthropology, there was a rather spirited pyromaniacal call to “[let] anthropology burn” – a position that I admit I once held for the discipline of linguistics (JOBSON 2020). It is an alluring position to hold – a noble though self-righteous hill to die on – but it is, sadly, a tad one-dimensional in its conception. A call for the total dissolution or disestablishment of a discipline fails to adequately account for the discipline as both an intellectual and a physical institution: whereas the intellectual institution is upheld only by a tacit agreement among its participants to uphold it as such, the physical institution is a network of legal, social, administrative, and financial entities – it can neither be dissolved nor can it be destroyed in the absence of a total upheaval of society. For the intellectual disciplinary institution, change – and momentous change at that – can occur overnight as it were in a more literal reading of Kuhn’s (1962) already tongue-in-cheek “scientific revolution”. However, the physical disciplinary institution as a network

of physical entities, each possessing their own discrete goals and agendas within both the discipline and their resident state, is not so easily moved.

Observing the scientific society, for example the Linguistic Society of America, as a microcosm of the wider physical disciplinary institution gives the impression of a highly centralized discipline. In some cases, it is, and while viewing one segment of the physical disciplinary institutional network in isolation can be beneficial to an analysis and critique of that entity's particular centralized *institution* of discipline, it is an unfair depiction of the wider network of the physical disciplinary institution made present in, among other things: sister societies (e.g. the North American Association for the History of the Language Sciences), universities (e.g. the University of Kentucky Department of Linguistics, the University of Tennessee Student Linguistics Association), institutes and centers (e.g. the Summer Linguistics Institute, the Lavender Languages Institute), regional associations (e.g. the Southeastern Conference on Linguistics), international collaborative organizations (e.g. the International Congress on Linguistics), linguistic degree markets (e.g. Google, Amazon), benefactors of the nation-state (e.g. the US Army, Navy, the CIA), and so-on and so-on. The true physical institution of the discipline is not just "a" physical institution.

Somewhat counterintuitively, then, an anti-disciplinary approach to the physical institutionalization of discipline is not to seek its dissolution but to rather aim for its administrative and financial decentralization. Rather than eliminating a single organization with a single executive body, letting it burn and abandoning it and the discipline as unsalvageable – it is more effective to seek a decentralization of its authority, in addition to a redistribution of its intellectual and physical "wealth". This, unfortunately, requires concerted engagement with these institutions on the part of the anti-disciplinarian scholar. Rather than entirely abandon the resources of such to the communities who already benefit the most from the physical discipline, who traditionally claim the greatest control of the intellectual discipline, it is more beneficial to work within these institutions – if possible – to seek their decentralization rather than their dissolution. It is not pleasant work; it does not pay well or at all; and it requires an attainment of administrative proficiency that will never be freely offered; but it is necessary work. It is the thankless work of clearing the way for those who will one day pave the way for those who will one day come into possession of a science that does not dismiss them out of hand.

5. ANTI-DISCIPLINARITY: SYSTEMATIC PROFESSIONALISM IN THE RUINS OF THE ACADEMY

I owe my inspiration for this section to Bill Readings' (1996) *The University in Ruins*, a posthumously published essay on – or perhaps lament of –the modern academy. Readings

advances in general an argument that the academic is no longer the hero of the university's story in the context of an ever-globalizing economy; not because of globalization, but because the academic has over the past century continued to abdicate more administrative and financial authority to non-academics who are entrusted with the specialized care of the university as an institution. The academic – especially one who has already been privileged on account of their race, gender, class, or sexuality – has been all too happy to forsake these privileges in favor of an idealized state of “being an academic” precisely because they are at once privileged to do so. An anti-disciplinary perspective, in respect to the previous section's notes on (de)centralization, is compatible with the retention of these auxiliary administrative structures so long as they remain auxiliary. However, we must hold each other to account for a higher standard in all forms of disciplinarity if any disciplinarity is allowed to remain, and this includes administrative work. If, as Readings suggests, the administrator is the new hero of the university's story, then the academic must become the administrator once again.

The society is interesting in this case if we generalize Readings' critique to physical disciplinary institutions. The society, in many ways, represents what the university was once imagined to be, and perhaps offers us a second chance going forward to re-hone our administrative skills as a science. It is in this sense that linguists might pursue a professional society that is at once the same as the scientific society. This is in part what Bloomfield imagined the Linguistic Society of America to be, stating that:

Not only the furtherance of our science, but also the needs of society, make it the duty of students of language to work together systematically and with that sense of craftsmanship and of obligation which is called professional consciousness. For this they need a Linguistic Society. (1925, p.5)

But here, balance is key. We must maintain the balance between intellectual and physical lest the intellectual becomes too detached and the physical becomes anti-intellectual; and we must also maintain the balance between the academic and the administrative, which is to say we must strive for a professional science, one in which the academic and the administrator are one and the same.

The careful reader may be confused here – but “weren't you just advocating for anti-disciplinarity – aren't you now advocating in support of the discipline”? To this I reply: “maybe”. It is definitely possible to look at it that way. Throughout all of this essay, one can find anti-disciplinarity – when a scientist undertakes a project for the pure joy of it or when a researcher devotes their life to a study that they do not particularly like at all in hopes of achieving some greater mercy, there too you can find anti-disciplinarity. What I have attempted to distill here, especially in this and the immediately preceding section, is a multi-dimensional way of approaching anti-disciplinarity that does not devolve into some haphazard multi-, poly-, or inter-disciplinary project. Something that seeks to circumvent

the pyromania of the malcontent with a call for the reimagination of the discipline – an inherently anti-disciplinary position – rather than reinventing it elsewhere. What I have aimed to present is a blueprint for systematic professionalism; whether I do so posthumously here some years from now or a few months hence following revisions – this is not for me to decide – even less so for how such will be received. Whatever be the case and whatever we move towards, we must – as a matter of the utmost importance – avoid the repetition - the perpetuation - of our discipline as an institution, especially one such as ours, which is often the cornerstone of empire.

6. CONCLUSION: QUEERING THE SCIENCE OF LANGUAGE, WITH RESPECT TO THE SCIENCE OF QUEER LANGUAGE

Having spoken at length in this paper on anti-disciplinarity and having offered a number of ideas and concepts which may possibly be of some use in confronting disciplinarity, the reader may be wondering why I am only now beginning a discussion of queer language science, here at the very end. Simply put, I have put forward a critique – a very intentionally limited critique - and as a matter of praxis, have sought to avoid explicit or even oblique criticism of my queer colleagues – what with there being plenty of cisgender heterosexual men to criticize and all. Unfortunately, this has left the paper, one ostensibly in the field of queer linguistics, quite devoid of references pointing to *anything* within queer linguistics. As a lengthy preamble to the actual conclusion, I will offer them here.

There is a problem of intellectual legibility, however. Work in queer linguistics, especially concerning critiques within the subfield of linguistic science, engages in a criticism that does not always distinguish between the science of language and the discipline of language science, and even when it does so, it does so poorly. Arguably all research in queer linguistics by queer linguists is anti-disciplinary in the biographical sense, challenging the prevailing scientific hetero-cistoriographies of language and language usage (see for example HALL 2003; BARRETT 2014, 2017; ZIMMAN 2020). The use of descriptivism as a defense of linguistic violence will force the queer linguist to entertain at least implicitly the concept of transcriptivism (see CONROD 2017² in response to Pullum). Whenever queer scholars of language are forced out of disciplinary institutions and must necessarily create their own spaces to advance a purportedly neutral science, they have put into practice a

² Conrod, K. If you can't say something nice... . *Language Log*, 5 Dec. 2017. <https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=35668>

decentralization of discipline (for example the foundation of the Lavender Languages Conference in 1993). Queer academics must always seek to outmaneuver the mechanisms of disciplinary administration through their systematic self-professionalization, by means of their own resources or through the development of queer scholarly support networks (what pray tell is the citation format for survival). If in my critique of discipline has so far then been devoid of queer linguistics, it is because the discipline (not the science) seeks to devoid itself of queer linguistics. And if I have not engaged as extensively with queer language science, it because my critique is simply of a different order. How do you cite the names of all the scholars who never were?

The four concepts engaged with here – hetero-cistoriography, transcriptivism, decentralization, and systematic professionalism – are all reactions on my own part to the problems of discipline, specifically those of linguistics: the anxiety of being both a natural and moral science as well as the skeletal byproducts of such anxiety. Critiques in queer linguistics have so far engaged with problems of language science, which is a philosophy or sociology of linguistics; the critiques presented here are superordinate and concerns the problems of the science of language, which is perhaps more so a meta-sociological project. These concepts have been presented in a way that is meant to be generalizable to the entirety of the discipline of linguistics, but may not be of much use to the science of language, which simply continues without recourse to the approval of an institution. We are the discipline, and only we can unmake it. These skeletons are our inheritance, and only we can bring them to light. We owe it to ourselves, each other, and the public trust to come out of the closet with the skeletons behind us in tow. Such is the minimum amount of effort needed to engage with a queered science of language – to challenge hetero-cistoriography, to transcribe knowledge, to decentralize if not disestablish, and to work towards systematic professionalism. Such is what animates a queer language science, and such is what is needed for a queer(ed) science of language.

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