

## Closing questions

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As the ‘dialogue’ heading suggests, the papers in this section of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* really have taken shape within interaction between the contributors (via email). As well as focusing on particular points raised in individual contributions, several general questions have emerged from this discussion, and three stand out:

- a) Why this now? Why should sociolinguists interested in everyday social relations want or need to talk about (in)securitisation just at this point in time?
- b) So, what exactly is ‘(in)securitisation’? The term has recurred in our discussion of different fields and topics: IR, research methodology, language policy, gender and sexuality, new media. But just how clear and consistent a concept is this?
- c) So what? What – if any – are the broader implications of (in)securitisation for sociolinguists who study everyday communicative practices?

We can take each of these in turn.

### a) Why this now?

Violent conflict, fear, suspicion and surveillance are hardly novel or limited phenomena, and our papers mention the legacies of war (in Cyprus and the Middle East), an estimated 68.5 million people forcibly displaced worldwide (Zakharia), homophobia and the criminalisation of same-sex activity in 70 UN member states (Levon), and “the acute ways in which young Black boys, undocumented families, materially poor and gender fluid children experience (in)securitisation (ie with their bodies and their lives)” (Zakharia note 2; also Jones; Mangual Figueroa). Processes like these certainly haven’t been ignored in sociolinguistics, but for a long time in the Global North, it has been possible for university sociolinguists studying everyday communication to think of such processes as happening elsewhere spatially, and/or belonging temporally only to earlier moments in their own national histories. But this detachment is now much harder.

In the UK, for example, central government’s Prevent Strategy enjoins academics to watch their own students for signs of radicalisation (e.g. HM Government 2015); university security surveils students and staff with CCTV footage and access gate information (*The Guardian* 2019); faculty are instructed to be more rigorous checking international students’ attendance to ensure that they are *bone fide*; and scholars from Africa and the Middle East are routinely denied visitor visas to participate in UK conferences (APPG 2019). Much of this is underpinned by the UK government’s coordinated, cross-departmental ‘hostile environment’ strategy (Liberty 2018), in which new forms of racism become official policy, to be enacted both by the state and the organisations, businesses and NGOs contracted or compelled to develop or carry it out (Yuval-Davis et al 2019). Mangual Figueroa shows how in the US, similar “[s]ocial policies and institutional practices... turn the... forms of human connection [underpinning ethnographic research] into liabilities [and] jeopardise the possibility for solidarity and truth-telling that the field of sociolinguistics can offer us” (this issue). The distinction between research and surveillance visibly blurs, and on our own doorsteps, urban education starts to show patterns of securitization that resemble the security agendas governing education in contexts of humanitarian crisis in the Global South (Zakharia this

issue). So it is more difficult now for sociolinguists to think that fear and suspicion only operate as political principles somewhere else, at some other time.

The factors driving this securitisation are multiple, and our papers refer to major conflicts and upheavals, settler colonial histories, technological developments, and specific policies and laws. At a more abstract level, one could also point to the increasingly consequential interplay of neoliberal globalisation, structural racism, inequality and nationalism<sup>1</sup> – factors buttressed by digital infrastructures of surveillance and accountability (Jones). These wide-reaching/large-scale processes and events certainly fall within the ambit of sociolinguistic research on language policy or political discourse – as Zakharia notes, “language policy is a powerful conduit for observing global and localised phenomena such as the enactment of global security and neoliberal agendas in schools, and sectarianism and surveillance at national and community levels” (this issue). But the case for seeing them as being too big to figure at the centre of sociolinguistic analyses of interaction, as being different/separate from the stuff of research on mundane language and communication, also falls away if we turn to the meaning of (in)securitisation.

## b) (In)securitisation?

Insecurity has of course been a sociolinguistic theme for a long time, made prominent in Labov’s account of *linguistic* insecurity, the “strongly negative attitudes” that certain social groups hold “towards their [own] native speech pattern” (Labov 1972:117). This gains sociological weight in Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction, where linguistic insecurity is attributed to “symbolic violence”, involving “*intimidation* that is not aware of what it is (to the extent that it implies *no act of intimidation*) [and] can only be exerted on a person predisposed... to feel it, whereas others will ignore it” (1991:51; original emphases). This insecurity is also linked to the body when Bourdieu argues that “[t]he sense of acceptability which orients linguistic practices is inscribed in the most deep-rooted of bodily dispositions... Linguistic, especially phonetic, competence is a dimension of bodily hexis in which one’s whole relation to the social world... [is] expressed” (1991:86). These are all certainly very important insights into everyday sociolinguistic experience, but they have at least two shortcomings.

First, there are many environments in which language-linked insecurity is much more than just an internalised condition, and the violence is more than merely symbolic, only impacting on embodied self-presentation (see Burawoy & von Holdt 2012 on Bourdieu’s relevance to South Africa). As Mangual Figueroa notes, many US community members have much more to worry about than the embarrassment of linguistic *faux pas* - “due to federal and local law enforcement policies... [t]hey also live in fear of detention and deportation in a state that seeks to remediate their presence by forcible removal” (this issue). In the UK’s officially hostile environment for migrants, signs of foreignness can close access to employment, housing and free health care, and/or result in being reported to the immigration authorities (Liberty 2018; Yuval-Davis et al 2019). And for LGBT+ people in many

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<sup>1</sup> Since the 1990s in countries like the UK and US, neoliberalism has (as elsewhere) intensified inequalities, and “the ‘iron fist’ of the penal state” has joined “the ‘invisible hand’ of the market in conjunction with the fraying of the social safety net.” (Wacquant 2012:67). This has produced something of a ‘dual society’, where “a hypercompetitive, fully networked zone coexists with a marginal sector of excluded low-achievers” (Fraser 2003:169). But as the benefits of the market are experienced by fewer and fewer people, there has been a loss of faith in traditional politics, and in their attempts to regain credibility, a number of governments now declare themselves opposed to globalisation, targeting migrants and racialised minorities, reasserting borders (Yuval-Davis et al 2019).

countries, dominant ideologies of gender and nation generate threats of exclusion, discrimination and physical violence navigated *inter alia* in linguistic practice (Levon). So the conception of linguistic insecurity that we draw from Labov and Bourdieu clearly needs to be extended to very material, sometimes existential insecurities.

There is also another limitation which is overcome by the '(in)' and '-isation' affixes in '(in)securitisation'. Traditional sociolinguistic discussions of linguistic insecurity talk of a condition produced by largely invisible processes, occurring almost by osmosis in, for example, standard language schooling, and they seldom show us the damage actually getting done (Rampton 2006:276). In contrast, rather than treating it as a tacitly developed state, the suffix 'isation' relocates insecurity in practice theory. This is consistent with Huysman's definition of insecurity as "the *practice* of making 'enemy' and 'fear' the integrative, energetic principle of politics" (2014:3; added emphasis), and it fits with the conception of government as a complex assemblage of activities, people, knowledge, texts etc (Jessop 2007). Crucially, this alignment with practice theory opens up insecurity as an issue for linguistic ethnographies of interaction, and when this happens, there are at least two effects: elaborations and inversions of the practice start to emerge, and it becomes less clear exactly who the agents, targets and victims are.<sup>2</sup>

So for example, the question of exactly who is watching whom in a surveillance relationship stands out in the account of Alvin's encounter with the police in Jones' paper. Mangual Figueroa describes how as researchers, she and other academics have been securitised by the state during fieldwork, revealing a "collective fragility"; "in the face of extremism", she notes, "we all become more vulnerable" (this issue); and Jones illustrates how, albeit reluctantly, he himself routinely colludes in his own on-line surveillance clicking cookies. In Zakharia's formulation, the dividing lines between the ordinary and the 'extraordinary', between the normal and the securitised, are "contingent and perspectival", "as much about how a phenomenon is experienced as it is about the conditions that produce it and the gaze it is put under" (this issue n.2). Indeed, as Levon's phrase "insecuritisation management strategies" suggests (cf Goffman 1963), the closer one focuses on practical activity, the less likely it is that on its own, the 'in-' prefix will be sufficient to cover the plurality of ways in which people and institutions are positioned and manoeuvre around suspicion and fear (see for example C. Charalambous et al 2017 on 'de-securitisation'). All this is compatible with Rampton & Charalambous' characterisation of the "lived experience of (in)securitisation as an intensifying apprehension of institutionally authorised vulnerability and existential threat, produced (and received) in communicative practice in a range of social settings, both vernacular and elite" (this issue). But it underlines the potential instability in secure/insecure relationships, the scope for collusion, and the tactical intricacy of the positioning involved.

Recognition of this complexity certainly doesn't erase massive differences in the precarity of different groups and individuals, and in their resources for resisting securitisation. As Mangual Figueroa notes, some people come to 'embody the breach' (this issue), and activities that are relatively free of precarity for many, like walking down the street, are for others "sites of constant uncertainty in which at any moment they might be detained, accosted, searched, or even shot by the very agents of state security that promise to keep us safe" (Jones, this issue). Indeed, the notion of (in)securitisation can operate as a powerful 'scalar bridge', allowing us to connect large-scale, institutionalised inequalities to ground-level practices, potentially extending to the psychology of individuals (Levon). But at the same time, there are elements of unpredictable instability in relations of (in)security

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<sup>2</sup> On some of the (previously uncharted) interactional complexities around specifically *linguistic* securitisation in practice, see e.g. Rampton 2006:Ch.8, P. Charalambous et al 2016, and Clark 2003.

that can create unexpected possibilities for solidarity (Mangual Figueroa), and in at least some circumstances, an understanding of the range and subtlety of (in)securitisation management strategies can be constructively shared – for example, in post-conflict reconciliation settings, or helping school teachers handle acute insecurities in class (Levon; Rampton & Charalambous; Jones).

So there is a good case for claiming that our conceptualisation of (in)securitization goes beyond canonical notions of insecurity in sociolinguistics, tuning into political changes that are now increasingly salient while also incorporating perspectives developed in ethnographic and situated interaction analysis. Does our discussion have any more general implications for sociolinguistics?

c) Broader implications for sociolinguistics?

This dialogue certainly isn't asking sociolinguists to abandon their traditional focus on mundane language and communication. An overwhelming sociolinguistic emphasis on exceptionality could miss the way in which many people still do produce liveable lives in very difficult conditions (Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2013), and if analysts thematise fear and suspicion in their description of sociolinguistic actors as a matter of routine, they could end up supporting rather than interrogating the (in)securitising discourses that call for special measures for particular groups. Even so, the tradition of elevating mundane interaction to the be-all and end-all of empirical research – whether this is referred to as 'unself-conscious talk' or 'natural conversation' – obviously isn't sufficient (cf Briggs 1997). On its own, the differentiation of routine and special framings of interaction is also unlikely to capture the significance of the ordinary/exceptional binary in (in)securitised conditions, since in such circumstances, 'ordinary' and 'everyday' are themselves heavily ideologised. So, for example, for people living in precarity, an 'ordinary' life with similar opportunities to others can be a driving ideal; in post-conflict peace-building, routine social relations are a thematised objective; and conversely, regimes of suspicion scrutinise everyday appearances for signs of threats beneath the surface.

So (in)securitisation intensifies and complicates the significance of the canonical sociolinguistic distinction between the ordinary and the exceptional. It also complicates the ways in which we imagine the dynamics of social structure.

Securitisation is often closely linked to what Yuval-Davis et al (2019) call 'everyday bordering', a set of discourses and practices that extend far beyond "counter-terrorism, territorial border control, and frontline policing". Everyday bordering determines who is and isn't protected by rights legislation and policies "on the basis of the citizenship and immigration status as they intersect with[,for example,] racialised and gendered identities" (2019:98). "Everyday bordering", suggest Yuval-Davis et al.,

"has become a major governance technology, controlling diversity and constructing hierarchies of exclusion and exploitation. As such, it affects not only migrants and racialised minorities; and it affects other people not only when they actually cross a border or are in employment in a border zone. Bordering has become a new citizenship duty and major influence on social and communal solidarities... [I]n different and new contexts, citizens are required to become untrained and unpaid border guards, and more of us are falling under suspicion as illegitimate border crossers" (p162,17)

In sociolinguistics, the relationship between 'gatekeeping' and inequality is a very well-established research topic (cf Gumperz (ed) 1982; Erickson & Shultz 1982), and scholars like

Blommaert (2009), Maryns (2006) and Jacquemet (2011) have extended these analyses to asylum application procedures, where the stakes are raised from wealth and status stratification to territorial exclusion. But the notion of ‘everyday bordering’ takes this further, pointing to the pervasiveness of these practices, operating well beyond the offices of the immigration authorities. Comparably, with (in)securitisation, our conception of sociolinguistic subordination expands beyond denigration, inhibition and misunderstanding to scaled-up surveillance, and this means that among other things, sociolinguists need to think twice about celebrating the resistance of their informants, since “documenting... grassroots efforts to resist surveillance... can in fact increase police gaze” (Mangual Figueroa, this issue). Indeed, Bigo’s 2002 ‘banopticon’ captures the hard edge of the (in)securitisation regimes in which this surveillance is embedded, going well beyond the disciplinary ‘soul-training’ that Foucault’s panopticon entails (1977; Fraser 2003).

For certain aspects of (in)securitisation, sociolinguistics does need to develop new avenues of enquiry, surveillance being the prime example (Jones; Rampton & Charalambous). More generally, it may well be a matter of mainstreaming topics that have hitherto featured more as specialist niches within the discipline, or extending established concepts in the same way that we now need to supplement but not replace ‘gatekeeping’ with ‘bordering’. But whether or not there are already resources to hand, ‘enemy’ and ‘alien’ need to be added to the list of ‘Othering’ identifications that sociolinguists analyse; ‘endangered’ as well as ‘expressive’ bodies deserve consideration; and suspicion, coercion and violence require attention alongside ideology, conviviality, and consent.

As Mangual Figueroa notes at the end of her contribution, serious engagement with (in)securitisation may well lead beyond research, and it is very difficult to understate the importance of democratic politics, policy and law. But whatever hope of balance and moderation democratic processes offer in themselves, the impact of policy documents and legal texts still depends on their situated interactional interpretation (Jones, this issue), and here once again, sociolinguistics can provide essential insight.

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