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Participation on whose terms?
Applied linguistics, politics and social justice

Highlights

- We need to understand participation in relation to structural constraints.
- Fraser's theory offers a useful framework to capture what constrains participation.
- Initiatives aimed at enhancing adult migrants' participation may result in reproducing inequality.
- Social justice should be a priority for applied linguistics.

Abstract

The aim of this position paper is to engage with the focus of this yearbook on language and participation by revisiting some of the arguments advanced by the North American political philosopher Nancy Fraser, who theorized (1) the structural components that enable and/or constrain participation, and (2) the ways in which we can transform the *status quo* with a view to achieving a more just society. The paper begins by outlining Fraser's main ideas; it then moves on to illustrate how this theoretical framework may help us shed light on the dilemmas and/or pitfalls of well-meaning initiatives that seek to enhance adult migrants' participation. The empirical focus is on courses in civic orientation (*samhällsorientering*) for newly arrived adult migrants in Sweden. The paper ends with some reflections about the importance of a politically engaged applied linguistics.

Keywords: migration, participation, social justice, transformation

1   Introduction

The English word participation comes from the Latin verb *participare*, which, in turn, is made up of *pars* ('part') and *capio* ('to take'), that is, 'to take part'. As such, the semantics of the Latin verb is quite similar to that of its English counterpart. However, in English to participate is intransitive, that is, it cannot take a direct object; we can say *I participate **in** an activity* but the sentence *I participate **you** in an activity* is ungrammatical. In Latin, in contrast, the verb could also be used in the transitive voice to mean to 'share a part', or simply 'to share'. Why do we start this position paper with an etymological observation? Because the Latin meaning of the word highlights the two-sided nature of participation, namely the fact that participation is not simply something an individual or a group does or is responsible for. Rather, it is something that one does within what Judith Butler (1990: 30) would call "a rigid regulatory frame" that depends on what other people and institutions are willing to share or not. Put simply, we might indeed wish to participate; we might even be desperately keen to take part in a variety of activities and organizations, but other individuals, groups and institutions might have produced structural conditions that make our opportunity to participate difficult – impossible even. In this case, individuals, groups and institutions have created an unjust framework that inherently favours some people's possibility to act, that is, their agency while disadvantaging others. And language choice is one of the structural components that enables or hinders participation. The role played by language as a gatekeeper for participation can be understood if we ask ourselves (1) which languages, varieties, registers and styles are allowed (or not) in political debates, schools, workplaces, or (2) what educational and other provisions are put in place for migrants to learn a country's majority language and simultaneously retain (or not) one's linguistic repertoire.

Against this backdrop, in this position paper, we want to engage with the focus of this yearbook on language and participation by revisiting some of the arguments which the North American political philosopher Nancy Fraser first advanced in the article *From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a 'post-socialist' age* published in the *New Left Review* nearly thirty years ago (Fraser 1995) and subsequently developed in other publications (Fraser 1998, 2000). Granted, Fraser is a political philosopher, not an applied linguist. Yet, we argue that her theoretical insights are particularly significant at this historical juncture when applied linguistics seems to be undergoing a social justice turn (see in particular Ortega 2019; Mackey et al. 2022) at the same time as, or perhaps precisely given that, basic tenets of fairness, equal access and democracy are being increasingly curtailed around the world. This is also the case in Sweden, a country that boasts a long history of welfare state and openness to migrants, and which we use as a case in point in this paper.

In what follows, we begin by outlining Fraser's main ideas; we then move on to illustrate how this theoretical framework may help us shed light on the dilemmas and/or pitfalls of well-meaning initiatives that seek to enhance adult migrants' participation. We focus in particular on courses in civic orientation (*samhällsorientering*) for newly arrived adult migrants in Sweden. We conclude with some reflections about the importance of a politically engaged applied linguistics.

2 Redressing injustice

In her influential article, Fraser (1995) is concerned with theorizing injustice and reflecting upon which political remedies might be best suited to redressing societal inequalities. She begins by making a distinction between *socioeconomic injustice* and *cultural/symbolic injustice*, and the remedies associated to each of them, *redistribution* and *recognition*, respectively. Let us begin with socioeconomic injustice: it is the direct outcome of the political economic structure of a particular society and can take the forms of (1) *exploitation*, through which "the fruits of one's labour [are] appropriated for the benefit of others" (Fraser 1995: 70-71); (2) *economic marginalization*, which relegates some people (but not others) to unwanted or badly remunerated jobs; and (3) *deprivation*, which entails "being denied an adequate material standard of living." (Fraser 1995: 70-71).

On the other hand, cultural/symbolic injustice is "rooted in patterns of representations, interpretation, and communication" (Fraser 1995: 71), and can manifest itself in (1) *cultural domination*, which involves "being subjected to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture and are alien and/or hostile to one's own" (Fraser 1995: 71); (2) *nonrecognition*, which is the systematic invisibilization of some people through specific communicative and representational patterns; and (3) *disrespect*, which indicates how some individuals or

groups are "being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions" (Fraser 1995: 71).

While this distinction is analytically relevant, Fraser cautions, economic inequality and cultural/symbolic discrimination are "far from occupying two airtight separate spheres" (Fraser 1995: 72). Rather, they are deeply intertwined in such a way that the bias of certain cultural norms can become entrenched in the very structure of state and economic institutions at the same time as economic differentials among individuals dispense unequal possibilities for participation in those institutions and in the production of culture.

Who is affected the most by the synergies of these inequitable structures? At the receiving end of the imbrication of socioeconomic and cultural/symbolic injustices, Fraser would say, are "bivalent collectivities", that is, groups that "may suffer both socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition in forms where neither of these injustices is an indirect effect of the other, but where both are *primary* and *co-original*" (Fraser 1995: 78; emphasis added). Because of the mutual constitution of structures of discrimination affecting bivalent collectivities, Fraser would go on to say, the only way for redressing such inequalities is through a twofold approach in which cultural/symbolic injustice is addressed with the help of recognition at the same time as socioeconomic injustice is countered with redistribution. How can a polity go about bringing together recognition and redistribution?

Fraser outlines two types of remedies. On the one hand, there are affirmative strategies, which aim "at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them" (Fraser 1995: 82). Mainstream multicultural politics and liberal welfarism are, according to Fraser, examples of affirmation. Liberal welfare states seek to redress socioeconomic injustice by expanding "the consumption share of economically disadvantaged groups" (Fraser 1995: 84). In this way, capitalism, and the labour inequalities inherent in it, remain intact. Following a similar political economic logic, mainstream multicultural politics seeks to amend cultural/symbolic injustice by valorizing previously "unjustly devalued group identities, while leaving intact both the contents of those identities and the group differentiations that underlie them" (Fraser 1995: 83).

On the other hand, transformative strategies redress inequities by unsettling and dismantling the very structures that underpin social and economic divisions. Socialism and deconstruction, in Fraser's view, are cases in point of transformative approaches. The former aims to completely overhaul the underlying political-economic structure of labor relations while the latter seeks to destabilize "existing group identities and differentiations", and thereby "would change *everyone's* sense of belonging, affiliation, and self" (p. 83), opening up possibilities of regroupment and new coalitions.

Ultimately, for Fraser, it is only through recognition and redistribution that a just society can be achieved. This is because "justice requires social arrangements

that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers" (Fraser 1998: 5). In saying so, Fraser takes a normative stance that questions the belief that equality before the law or equal rights are enough in order to achieve participatory parity in a polity. Rather, in line with her reflections about redistribution and representation outlined above, Fraser argues that equality of participation can only happen provided two conditions are met: (1) the (re)distribution of material resources so as to "ensure participants' independence and voice" (Fraser 1998: 5), and (2) institutionalized patterns of representation that safeguard "equal respect for all participants" and "equal opportunity for achieving social esteem" (Fraser 1998: 5).

As a political philosopher, Fraser mounts important theoretical arguments but is less interested in testing them empirically. For us, it is imperative to put her theoretical ideas to work. We investigate "whether institutionalized patterns of interpretation and valuation impede parity of participation in social life" (Fraser 1998: 4) in the context of Sweden, which not only boasts a long-lasting democratic tradition but has also highlighted the importance of migrants' participation in Swedish society for decades. In what follows, we first provide some historical context about Sweden's contemporary migration politics before outlining the aim and scope of courses in civic orientation for newly arrived adult migrants.

3   Sweden, migration, and integration

In the social sciences, Sweden has consistently been herarlded as an example of good state, that is, a political entity that "controls its demonic proclivities by cleansing itself with, and internalising human rights" (Mutua 2002: 10). With regard to issues of immigration, the Swedish government stated in a legislative proposal in 1968 that "migrants shall have the opportunity to have the same standard of living as the host population" (Prop. 1968:142). Underpinning this statement was the realization that the assimilationist approach taken by Sweden until then had not been the most effective equalizer. As a result, the government appointed a parliamentary committee with the aim "to chart migrants' and minorities' situation and propose societal measures with a view to facilitating their opportunities to adapt (*anpassa sig*) to life in Sweden" (SOU 1971:51). Read through the lens of Fraser, it is clear here that the Swedish government wanted to tackle existing unjust structures that continued to contribute to migrants' economic marginalization and deprivation. That said, the choice of the verb adapt also betrays the government's view of integration as a one-way process through which migrants would be expected to adjust to Swedish society.

A very different view of integration was developed by the parliamentary committee, which proposed three principles that should guide Swedish politics in the future: *jämlikhet* ('equality'), *valfrihet* ('freedom of choice'), and *samverkan* ('partnership'). The first principle indicated the wish to achieve equality of opportunity for im-

migrants and Swedes; the second highlighted the freedom of choice for immigrants to decide to what degree they wanted to preserve their cultural/linguistic traditions; and the third emphasized the importance of collaboration between immigrants and Swedes in the creation of a multicultural society. Unlike in the government directive, the parliamentary committee viewed integration as a two-way process involving both migrants and Swedes (see SOU 1974:69; Prop. 1975:26).

This is the ideological framework that informed Sweden's management of migrants over the last decades. It not only offered migrants "easy access to full social and political rights" (such as for example the right to vote in municipal and regional elections after two years' residence), but also actively supported "ethnic difference by recognizing immigrant groups as 'ethnic minorities' with their own cultural rights and privileges" (Koopmans and Statham 1999: 661) (see e. g. the right to mother-tongue education). Within this multicultural ethos, it is unsurprising that "nationhood is a highly sensitive concept that politicians tend to evade because it is typically associated with a repertoire of ethnic symbols and sentiments" (Jensen et al. 2017: 618). As a result, while national identity is certainly felt and cultivated, "there is no official set of Swedish norms and values, because integration is believed to equally rely on the majority's ability to accept and adapt to new cultures" (Fernandez and Jensen 2017: 3).

While these principles are supposedly still valid today and still frame Swedish official politics, the ideological regime has been shifting dramatically since 2010, the year that marked the entry into parliament of the Sweden Democrats, a far-right party with (neo-)Nazi roots, with an overtly anti-immigration agenda. The Nazi ancestry has recently been recognized by the party itself in an internal inquiry, which reveals that a section of the party's founding members had connections with (neo-)Nazi or fascist movements (Gustafsson 2022). As Milani et al. (2021) have recently demonstrated, while all mainstream political parties have until recently distanced themselves from – ostracized even – the Sweden Democrats and their views on immigration, their rhetoric on issues of immigration has become increasingly more similar. While concepts such as Swedish values (*svenska värderingar*) were nearly unspeakable within the context of the explicitly multicultural politics of the 1980s and 1990s, they have become buzzwords employed by nearly all parties across the political spectrum. Thus, the period from 2010 until today has been characterized by a tension between, on the one hand, the relic of multiculturalism and diversity, and on the other, the resurgence of an overtly assimilatory rhetoric arguing for the need for migrants to adapt or even assimilate, that is, acquire a set of Swedish norms and values (whatever these may be). As we point out in this paper, it is precisely this tension that is also at the heart of courses in civic orientation for newly arrived adult migrants, to which we now turn.

4　Civic orientation for newly arrived adult migrants

Knowledge of Swedish society and its laws has been a part of integration programs aimed at migrants since the 1960s. While the teaching of civics was originally included in courses in Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), the Swedish government decided to separate Swedish language tuition from civic content in the mid-2000s. This was done with a view to (1) making SFI more efficient by turning it into a provision that purely focuses on language education, and (2) offering information about Swedish society at an early stage of migrants' arrival in Sweden and in a language that they know well, as they could otherwise risk missing or misunderstanding important information (SOU 2010:16). As a result, civic orientation was officially instituted in 2010, and is compulsory for all migrants who are enrolled in the establishment program (*etableringsprogrammet*) of the Swedish Public Employment Service[1]. The main policy document governing these courses states that:

> Civic orientation aims to facilitate the establishment of newly arrived migrants in work life and society. Civic orientation must provide a basic understanding of Swedish society and a basis for continued knowledge acquisition. The goal should be for participants to develop knowledge about human rights and fundamental democratic values, the rights and obligations of the individual in general, how society is organized, and practical everyday life. (2§, SFS 2010:1138)

Organisationally, the municipalities are responsible for offering civic orientation, and while there is no formal curriculum regulating these courses, it is stated in the main policy document that several content areas need to be covered. These range from how to support oneself and to take care of one's health to political participation and ageing (3 §, SFS 2010: 1138). The courses are led by civic communicators (*samhällskommunikatörer*), who usually do not have similar educational backgrounds or qualifications but are employed mainly because of their own experience of migration, their multilingual repertoire, and their knowledge of Swedish society (SOU 2010: 16). Different materials are used in these courses: mainly PowerPoint presentations and information taken from the textbook *Om Sverige* (About Sweden), which has been translated into 10 different languages, or the website *informationsverige.se*. In 2019, the duration of civic orientation increased from 60 to 100 hours, and more focus was placed on gender equality and human rights.

What is perhaps most important to point out because of the focus of this yearbook on language and participation is that the law emphasizes that civic orientation

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[1]　According to the information available on the website of the Swedish Public Employment Service, the aim of the program is for newly arrived migrants "to learn Swedish, find a job, and become self-sufficient as quickly as possible". The program targets migrants of a certain age (20-66) who have been recently granted a residence permit. Those who are enrolled in the program can apply for social benefits.

should provide spaces for dialogue and reflection. And such a discussion should take place in migrants' mother tongues. The fact that participatory parity is a key goal of civic orientation can be seen even more clearly in the report of the parliamentary inquiry leading to the establishment of these courses (SOU 2010:37):

> Civic orientation must be characterized by equal treatment and respect for individual participants. […] The purpose of civic orientation is to *strengthen participants' ability to shape not only their own lives, but also participate in the shaping of Swedish society*. (SOU 2010:37, p. 18, emphasis added)

In line with the principles of equality, freedom of choice, and partnership, this document does not frame migrants' participation in Swedish society as a process of fitting into a pre-existing social mould but as the possibility to contribute to changing social arrangements. A similar perspective on participatory parity also underlies the rationale for using migrants' mother tongues in civic orientation, namely that "teaching in Swedish with the help of an interpreter does not provide the same opportunities for active participation with questions and discussion as teaching in their mother tongues" (SOU 2010:16, 16).

In light of Fraser's ideas outlined above, one might be tempted to conclude purely on the basis of existing policy documents that the establishment program (*etableringsprogrammet*) of the Swedish Public Employment Service and courses in civic orientation for newly arrived migrants are initiatives at the crossroad of affirmation and transformation. They are geared to giving migrants access to material resources so as to "ensure participants' independence and voice" (Fraser 1998: 5) at the same time as they constitute institutional platforms of representation that safeguard "equal respect for all participants" (Fraser 1998: 5). Indeed, these were the intentions underpinning the establishment of civic orientation courses. However, the reality on the ground offers a more complex picture.

5   Participation in civic orientation classes

It lies beyond the scope of this position paper to give a comprehensive overview of the literature on courses in civic orientation for newly arrived adult migrants in Sweden and elsewhere (see however Bauer et al. 2023a). Therefore, in what follows, we will focus nearly exclusively on the research results of a large interdisciplinary project entitled *Medborgar- och demokratifostran för vuxna nyanlända migranter?* (Citizen and democracy education for newly arrived adult migrants?)[2], which we have conducted over the last four years thanks to a research grant from *Vetenskapsrådet* (Swedish Research

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Council) (Dir. 2018-04091). The overall aim of the project is to investigate how civic orientation for newly arrived migrants is interpreted, implemented and discursively negotiated in three parallel field studies in three Swedish metropolitan municipalities. More specifically our aim is to study civic orientation for newly arrived immigrants at three societal levels: at the policy and organization level, at the institutional educational practice level, and at the participants' individual and personal levels with their stories about their experiences of the course. For this purpose, we have collected a large corpus of policy and media texts about civic orientation (2010-2020); we have interviewed key stakeholders in civic orientation; we have observed six civic orientation courses (three in English and three in Arabic), and we have conducted focus group interviews with course participants.

Needless to say, our results are not representative for civic orientation as a whole in Sweden. Moreover, it is not our intention to point fingers at the communicators, who "have very little room to influence the actual content of the meetings; they follow a script that has been developed by the organizers of civic orientation at the municipal and regional level in line with broad guidelines established by policy regulations at state level" (Milani et al. 2021: 768). With these caveats in mind, the results of our research project point nonetheless to a fundamental discrepancy between the intentions about participatory parity expressed in policy documents, on the one hand, and the actual practices in some civic orientation courses, on the other.

Let us take an illustrative example. We saw earlier that policy documents emphasize how civic orientation should provide migrants with basic knowledge about how Swedish society is organized. While this information is indeed given in the courses we observed, we also noticed that a substantial amount of time was devoted to what Foucault would call biopolitics, that is, a form of regulation that "exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it" (Foucault 1978: 137). In civic orientation courses, biopolitics took the shape of a plethora of advice about how to brush one's teeth, which vitamins one should take, how much water one should drink, what types of bread one should eat (or not), and how many times one should do pelvic floor exercises in order to avoid urinary incontinence. Crucially, these were not presented as suggestions but as instructions. For example, it was not uncommon for communicators to ask each participant to promise that they would change their eating or drinking habits. As we have argued elsewhere (Milani et al. 2021), we do not dispute the nutritional value of some grains or the importance of brushing one's teeth, drinking water or doing pelvic floor exercises regularly. What is important to point out is that civic orientation and the integration it advocates is monodirectional and does not create a dialogue based on equal treatment and respect, through which individuals not only "shape their own lives but also participate in the shaping of Swedish society" (SOU 2010: 16), as committed to in policy documents. Moreover, based on their ethnographic observations of six civic orientation courses, Milani et al. argued that mother-tongues, in

this specific case English and Arabic, rather than providing the best conditions for dialogue, become conduits through which adult migrants are socialized to become better Swedish citizens than the Swedes both in the mind and in the body (Milani et al. 2021).

That equal treatment and respect do not fully inform classes in civic orientation for newly arrived adult migrants also transpires from the innumerable occasions during which a rather homogenous and essentialized "Arab world" is presented in negative ways as the anti-thesis of an otherwise positive Swedish haven (see Bauer et al. 2023b). Such a dichotomy was particularly evident in discussions about the history of Swedish democracy and gender equality. As feminist scholars, we certainly do not wish to downplay the impact that women's struggle has had on Swedish politics and the considerable advancements that have been accomplished with regard to gender equality. However, on the basis of our ethnographic observations, we were surprised that courses that are allegedly built on dialogue and respect only present Western feminist ideas, and do not entertain discussing alternative feminist traditions such as Islamic feminism, Jewish feminism, Indigenous feminism, which might be more relevant for the participants in civic orientation classes (see Bauer et al. 2023b). As a result, civic orientation ultimately contributes to reproducing a rather problematic "gender equality mantra" that "recreates a hierarchical order between an imagined modern, highly developed 'we' and a less developed 'other' that lacks those attributes" (Martinsson et al. 2016: 6).

The book *Om Sverige*, which as we saw above is one of the materials used in civic orientation, includes a similar opposition between Sweden as a feminist state informed by the principle of gender equality and a rather undifferentiated group of migrants who need to be educated (if not rescued and saved). As Carlson et al. illustrated through close textual analysis, the textbook represents the historical process that led to universal voting rights and to gender mainstreaming in Sweden as "effortless" (2021: 203). Moreover, the lack of comparison with historical developments in other national contexts makes Sweden appear unique. Even in those few instances where other contexts are mentioned, such as in the case of honour-related violence, these societies are invoked in order to highlight "migrants' presupposed patriarchal customs" (Carlson 2021: 204) and thereby justify the need for migrants "to alter in order to fit into Swedish society" (Carlson 2021: 205).

The migrants who attended the civic orientation classes we observed have reacted differently in relation to the different topics they were presented with. Some were quite vocal, while others behaved like "docile bodies" (Foucault 1977: 135), who were eager to please, agreed with what the communicator had just said, and promised to follow the advice they had been given. But we really do not know if this is what they ended up doing outside the classroom. These observations are very much in line with the ambivalent research results provided by other scholars (e.g. Abdulla 2017; Abdulla & Risenfors 2013), who noticed that there is both readiness

and resistance to the image of the "good citizen" conveyed through the courses. Some participants are critical because they feel they must learn to become "good" Swedish citizens and defend themselves against a strong disciplinary perspective (Abdulla 2017). Others are positive, as they appreciate the opportunity to discuss areas such as individual freedom and children's rights (Abdulla & Risenfors 2013: 123). Gender also plays a role in migrants' experiences, with men often being more critical than women to the courses (Bucken-Knapp et al. 2019: 232). So what can we learn about language and participation from civic orientation for newly arrived adult migrants?

6   Concluding remarks

As always, the answer is: it is complicated. There is no doubt that the migrants we have met are not like automata that obediently accept whatever they are told. However, one thing is certain: Rather than being given the opportunity to participate in the shaping of Swedish society as policy documents suggest, migrants are given the conditions to adapt, if not assimilate into a system characterized by a pre-existing set of norms. Drawing upon Fraser's theoretical framework of justice and participatory parity, we would suggest that civic orientation for newly arrived adult migrants, and the establishment program of which it is part, are in theory good examples of well-meaning attempts to put to work ideas about justice and equality. However, they are in practice far away from satisfying the two conditions which according to Fraser are the harbinger of social justice, namely the (re)distribution of material resources so as to "ensure participants' *independence* and *voice*" (Fraser 1998: 5), and (2) institutional-ized patterns of representation that safeguard "equal respect for all participants" and "equal opportunity for achieving social esteem" (Fraser 1998: 5).

The ultimate question, however, is whether a social justice framework *à la* Fraser is what a democracy like Sweden intends to pursue? To judge from current political developments, the parties forming the new centre-right government have recently indicated a new course in Sweden's migration politics. In a document sealing the agreement between these parties (the so-called *Tidöavtalet*), the word participation is used in relation to migrants nearly exclusively with a negative semantic aura, such as "participation in criminal gangs" or "participation in violent or extremist organ-izations or environments that threaten fundamental Swedish values" (*Tidöavtalet* 2022). One might wonder about the referent of "violent and extremist organiza-tions". Since the far-right wing party with (neo-)Nazi roots, Sweden Democrats, is a signatory of the agreement, it is possible to infer that the threat to Swedish values is viewed as coming exclusively from Muslim migrants rather than from the violent white supremacist and paternalistic ideas that this party itself espouses. Such an in-terpretation can be justified by considering not only the overtly anti-Muslim rhetoric

used by the Sweden Democrats – its party leader has famously called Muslims "our greatest threat" on the pages of one of Sweden's most read dailies (Åkesson 2009) – but also the no less blatant forms of Islamophobia in more mainstream Swedish political discourse (see e.g. Milani's (2020) analysis of a Moderate Party's video with problematic references to jihadist gangs in Gothenburg).

Taking into account the current political developments both in Sweden and elsewhere, a social justice approach in applied linguistics is more needed than ever, not least because applied linguistics with its focus on real-life problems related to language can contribute to a more just world. That being said, we are less inclined to outline in this position paper how such contribution can be done in practice. Such resistance on our part is not tantamount to intellectual laziness but is the result of a particular stance about the relationship between academic critique and the practical implementation of research results. As another political philosopher, Wendy Brown, has argued, critique, as a form of academic practices, is

> […] an effort to comprehend the constitutive elements and dynamics of our condition. It elaborates alternatives to the order it illuminates and only occasionally identifies possible strategies for resisting the developments it charts. However, the predicaments and power it illuminates might contribute to the developments of such alternatives and strategies, which are themselves vital to any future democracy. (Brown 2015: 27)

Whichever position one takes about the relationship between research results and their operationalization, it is precisely academic critique that has roused the ire of some scholars, who bemoan social and political engagements in applied linguistics and other disciplines (see e.g. Forsberg Lundell 2019). They aptly use a positivist rhetoric in order to laminate patently ideological positions with a veneer of scientific objectivity. In doing so, they present themselves as the bastions of good true science against a bad ideological Other, that is, us and other scholars committed to social justice. Perhaps the main challenge is being able to participate in these discussions on equal terms given that our arguments have already been dismissed *a priori* by these positivist scholars. Not defending social justice in applied linguistics, however, is not an option, at least for us, and we believe that the time is ripe for revisiting Fraser's ideas because they offer a solid grounding for how we might wish to theorize language and participation in socially and politically engaged applied linguistics.

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