Editorial

Massimiliano Demata and Natalia Knoblock

Welcome from Massimiliano Demata and Natalia Knoblock to the new issue of the *Journal of Language and Discrimination.* This editorial is quite unique and special for us: we are pleased to introduce ourselves as the new editors of the journal. Massimiliano is an Associate Professor of English at the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society at the University of Turin. His research has focused on discourses of nationalism and populism, border studies, social media and conspiracy theories. Natalia is an Associate Professor of English at Saginaw Valley State University. She has studied xenophobia and verbal aggression on social media, political discourse and propaganda.

We come from two very different academic and personal backgrounds, and this is in keeping with the international profile of the journal. We hope to follow and build on the great work of our predecessors: to Laura Paterson and Isabelle van der Bom goes our gratitude for having chosen us as their successors and for having been instrumental to the foundation of the journal. It is thanks to the initial work by Prof. Sara Mills, joined by Isabelle and later by Laura, together with the contributors to the journal, its Editorial Board and Equinox Publishers, that the *Journal of Language and Discrimination* has become such an important output for original research on all aspects of the relationship between language and discrimination. Our research interests have often been related to issues of prejudice and discrimination, and their dissemination through discourse and language. Like many others, we are bothered by social ills and try to do what we can

Affiliation

Massimiliano Demata: Department of Cultures, Politics and Society, University of Turin, Italy.
email: massimiliano.demata@unito.it
Natalia Knoblock: Department of English, Saginaw Valley State University, MI, USA.
email: nlknoblo@svsu.edu

to improve the situation. With our backgrounds, we feel our best chance to leave a positive mark is by conducting research of socially relevant topics and promoting a better understanding of them, which should help in reducing discrimination and aim at (utopistic as it may sound) eliminating it.

When we encountered the call for applications for the editorship, we felt it would be a worthy service to undertake and were eventually very excited to be appointed co-editors. Choosing the points to include in our application was difficult: what is here to discuss? Discrimination should not exist and language should not be a tool for it, nor indeed a target itself of discrimination. The reality is unfortunately quite different from the ideal. We know that discrimination is pervasive in our world and, despite serious improvements made over the years, there is still too much unfairness and inequality to overcome. There is indeed a growing (and worrying) tendency to normalise discrimination: while it is tempting to believe that we are making progress and increasing tolerance and equality, a more realistic outlook may reveal a more sombre situation.

There are disparities on the world-wide level: the global South and East continue to lag in income and development from the North and West. The legacy of colonialism, when European powers pumped resources out of Africa, Asia, and South America, remains long after the colonial yoke has been thrown off. Racism and ethnic prejudice continue to tear up societies. The position of women remains unequal to that of men throughout the world, even though the width of the gap is different in different places. Religious intolerance remains widespread in many nations, including some of the most 'developed' ones. Sexual orientation remains the basis for discrimination throughout the world, even though improvements have been made in some places: homosexuality is still illegal in many countries and is even punishable by death in some, while transgender individuals remain targets of hate crimes. Age discrimination may be less visible but is very real for millions of older people looking for work. People with disabilities still lack access and resources they need to lead productive lives and reach their potential. Poverty continues to prompt blame and rejection instead of compassion and desire to help. Furthermore, the recent outbreak of the pandemic, the growing importance of new forms of nationalism, and the continuing success of populist parties and movements have all made the issue of discrimination in and through language more relevant than ever.

It is in this difficult but stimulating context that we are starting our job as editors of the *Journal of Language and Discrimination*. We are fully aware of the many challenges that lie ahead in our editorial tasks and because of the thorny and multifaceted nature of the theme of the journal. However, we take over the job with great enthusiasm: as our own interests are aligned

with the journal's scope and mission, we hope to facilitate academic research that would aid in better understanding of the social problems. We plan to continue the journal's interdisciplinary nature, diversity of topics, approaches and views. We want to promote research on languages besides English, and we want to publish more scholars from outside of the West. Starting from 2022, we are planning to have one regular and one special issue per year, and we are very excited to have lined up an excellent special issue for the next year, which will be advertised in due time. We hope you will follow our journal through its website as well as its Twitter page (@ JLangDiscrim), and will spread the word on its activities. We are always eager to publish quality research on any aspect of language and discrimination, and would be grateful if you could pass on information about the journal to colleagues and acquaintances who might be interested in publishing with us.

This issue features three original papers focusing on three distinct aspects of the relationship between language and discrimination. It presents 'A Critical Discourse Analysis of Women's Roles as Mistresses in Chinese Corruption News Coverage' by Yiyan Li from the University of Saskatchewan. She expounds on the negative presentation of mistresses or 'second wives' of male cadres in news coverage of corruption scandals. The critical reading of Chinese mainstream commercial websites reveals a disparaging attitude toward women in such relationships and highlights underlying social, economic, and gender inequalities in contemporary Chinese society. The author demonstrates that moralising anti-corruption discourse is shaped by the gender gap in the social status, and by gender inequality in job prospects, career development, income levels, and cultural norms.

Mats Landqvist from Södertörn University raises several language planning questions in the article 'The significance of activist language policies in public debate – a concern for language planning agencies?' The article advocates for the social function of lexical meaning to receive more attention. The author also recommends for the public debates to be analysed with the application of metapragmatic concepts and supports providing useful links between lexical indexes to (ideological) loyalties and social identity or attribution of social identity. He endorses balancing the plain language principles in official language planning in Sweden with a more complex policy, taking into consideration the breadth of potential lexical significance.

'Segregating sex: heterocentric discourse about intercourse in English dictionaries', by Stephen Turton from the University of Oxford, explores representations of sexual acts in online general English dictionaries. The

paper demonstrates that heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and phallo-centrism continue to shape contemporary definitions of sex and sexual intercourse by sidelining or silencing queer erotic acts and bodies. Turton argues that dictionaries are not mere descriptive records of language if they overlook the diversity of actual linguistic usage. The fact that dictionaries continue to function as prescriptive texts at individual and institutional levels places additional responsibility on them. Not only do dictionaries' semantic rulings have symbolic importance, they may also have real-world consequences. Laypeople continue interpreting definitions as directives of how words should be used, and the use of dictionaries in the courts of law demonstrates that appeals to the 'plain and ordinary' word meaning might exclude alternative understandings. The article calls for lexicographers to be more conscious of diverse groups whose lives and linguistic customs may be affected by lexicographic practices.

Book reviews have always played an important role in the *Journal of Language and Discrimination*. We are very happy that Stephen Pihlaja has agreed to continue to be our Book Review Editor. The spring issue also contains two book reviews. One is by Mel Evans from the University of Leicester, who is discussing *The Power of Language: How Discourse Influences Society* (Second Edition) by Lynne Young, Michael Fitzgerald, and Saira Fitzgerald, published by Equinox. The other presents a review of the *Corpus, Discourse and Mental Health* by Daniel Hunt and Gavin Brookes. This recent Bloomsbury publication is evaluated by Simone C. Bacchini of The British Library.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.