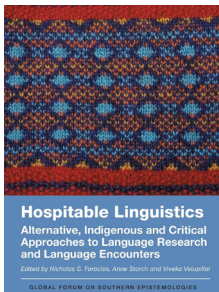




HOSPITABLE LINGUISTICS: ALTERNATIVE, INDIGENOUS AND CRITICAL APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE RESEARCH AND LANGUAGE ENCOUNTERS

edited by Nicholas G. Faraclas, Anna Storch, and Viveka Velupillai

(A Book Review)



In an era when academic disciplines are increasingly called upon to reckon with the legacies of colonial extraction, epistemic violence, and methodological inertia, *Hospitable Linguistics* arrives not as a correction but as a reorientation.¹ It does not offer a mere supplement to established linguistic paradigms; it opens a wholly different terrain—one where language is not a system to be decoded but a rela-

tion to be honored, where the method is not a means of control but an ethic of vulnerability, and where the “speaker” is not a data point but a sovereign presence. Across twenty-four chapters (including the afterword) authored by a remarkable range of scholars, activists, artists, and community members, this volume insists on a foundational shift: from the structural, cognitive, or pragmatic traditions of “hardcore” linguistics toward a sociologically,

Monika Grotek
Institute of Linguistics
University of Silesia in Katowice,
Poland



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6846-2784>

1 Yuri Lotman’s concept of the *semiosphere*—introduced in his later work and most fully elaborated in *Universe of the Mind*—provides a compelling theoretical parallel to the notion of *hospitable linguistics*. The semiosphere is defined not as a mere collection of semiotic systems, but as the enabling environment for all signification: a heterogeneous, dynamic space marked by internal boundaries, dialogic tension, and the interplay of untranslatable codes. Like hospitable linguistics, Lotman’s model foregrounds openness, polyphony, and the capacity of culture to absorb and generate new meaning through encounter. Both frameworks reject monologic normativity, instead envisioning language as a site of cultural transformation. For a complete discussion, see Yuri Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, translated by Ann Shukman, introduction by Umberto Eco, Indiana University Press, 1990.

affectively, and culturally situated practice that listens otherwise, witnesses otherwise, and thinks otherwise.

To characterize this book as “interdisciplinary” would be to undersell its ambition. What it undertakes is disciplinary displacement. While traditional sociolinguistics has long been attentive to variation, power, and social embeddedness, *Hospitable Linguistics* ventures beyond even these frameworks. It does not merely study language in society; it studies language as a society—as gesture, silence, inscription, textile, music, and migration. More importantly, it invites epistemologies that do not originate in the academy: Indigenous, diasporic, feminist, spiritual, and oral traditions enter not as colorful supplements but as foundational ways of knowing.

At the heart of this intervention is the concept of hospitality—a term that diverges both from the administrative multiculturalism of academic institutions and the philosophical paradoxes of Derridean “hostipitality.” In this volume, hospitality is not a metaphor. It is a method, a stance, a risk. It names the practice of welcoming silenced knowledges, refusing mastery, and remaining accountable to the people, lands, and stories that make language possible in the first place (Derrida).

The volume is organized into four thematic parts: *Language as a Gift*, *Language and Sharing*, *Language, Resisting and Undoing Enclosures*, and *Language and Reassuming Sovereignty*. This structure mirrors the arc of decolonial praxis itself—from reframing epistemic foundations to enacting relational ethics, resisting colonial violence, and finally reclaiming agency and future-making. However, the book resists linearity. It is not a march from premise to conclusion, but a constellation of situated knowledges, each chapter a sovereign voice in polyphonic dialogue, adopting various forms—from academic essays (many illustrated with photos) to conversation transcripts, stories, letters, poems, and songs—disrupting the genre of the scholarly monograph and embodying the ethos of hospitality.

The book’s conception of hospitable linguistics resonates strongly with decolonial theory and hemispheric American studies. Like Walter Mignolo’s call for “epistemic delinking” from Western knowledge hierarchies, *Hospitable Linguistics* seeks to pluralize linguistic inquiry (Mignolo). The volume foregrounds voices from the Global South and historically marginalized communities, in effect enacting the “pluriversality” of knowledge that decolonial scholars advocate. For example, the editors explicitly align with Southern epistemologies by publishing the book as the fourth volume of the *Global Forum on Southern Epistemologies* series and inviting contributions rooted in Africa, Asia, and Indigenous diasporas. They note how chapters will address

“the agency and power of refugees and migrants” (e.g., Ghanaian labor migrants, Romani diasporas in the Americas), “Indigenous people’s (in)hospitable responses to strangers” (e.g., Herero speakers refusing to participate in certain research), and “hospitable language” in art and rituals (e.g., inscriptions by enslaved African Americans, or Shetland knitting). This wide lens is consistent with hemispheric American studies’ emphasis on transnational connections. Ian Hancock’s contribution to the volume, entitled “Trans-Atlantic Shipment of Romanies (‘Gypsies’) to the Americas” (Ch. 5), explicitly traces the colonial-era silencing across continents. At the same time, Melinda Maxwell-Gibb’s account of “Pluri-living in the ‘In’ Hospitable Deep South of the US” (Ch. 12) examines language and identity in an African-American context. Likewise, the chapter authored by Nalini Natarajan, “Women: The Hospitable ‘Race’ Who Were ‘Already There’” (Ch. 17), touches on the entwined histories of Indigenous and colonial communities in the Caribbean (Puerto Rico) and South Asia.

The book’s editors frame the individual authors’ contributions as part of a broader decolonial epistemology. In the introduction, they cite the decolonial imperative to challenge Western “hegemonic” knowledge: the book “sets out a different form of linguistics” that takes responsibility for colonial legacies. This mirrors Ramón Grosfoguel’s critique of “epistemic racism/sexism” in Western universities, which hierarchizes European knowledge while erasing subaltern worldviews (Grosfoguel). Indeed, by treating language as a gift of human connection rather than an abstract system to be dissected, the volume rejects Saussurean and Chomskyan binaries as inherently colonizing and instead honors local, embodied practice. This is explicitly shown in Arpad Szokolczai’s essay “The Decline of Hospitality and the Rise of Linguistic Imperialism” (Ch. 3), which links linguistic prescriptivism to colonial expansion, and in Charleston Thomas’s contribution “The Art and Role of Listening and Verbal Gestures in Tobagonian: Returning to the Oral/Aural,” (Ch. 8), which privileges sound and community performance of Tobagonian gesture over written analysis. In this sense, the volume resonates with Gloria Anzaldúa’s vision of linguistic borderlands: just as Anzaldúa celebrated code-switching and hybridity as survival strategies on the US-Mexico frontier, these authors celebrate linguistic hospitality as a site of resistance to colonial “domestication” of language (Anzaldúa).

Equally, the volume engages with Indigenous studies and critical heritage frameworks. Several chapters foreground Indigenous methodologies of refusal and consent—e.g., Renathe Meroro-Tjikundi and Hoffmann’s essay “(Not) Speaking to a German Africanist in Namibia in 1954:

On Refusal and Hospitality as Responses to Linguistic Research” (Ch. 6) on Herero speakers choosing what to share—echoing Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s call for research *with* rather than *on* Indigenous peoples (Smith). The contributors to the volume often act as “guests” or interlocutors rather than authorities. For instance, Andrea Hollington’s text “The Fieldworker as a Human Being” (Ch. 14) models the humility of participant observation rather than extractive fieldwork. The focus on material and performative forms of language—from church pew inscriptions to knitting patterns—aligns with critical heritage perspectives that view culture as lived practice, not frozen in monuments (Harrison). For example, in her essay “The Pew Inscriptions at First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia” (Ch. 7), Fiona Mc Laughlin presents her study of West African names carved on the pews of a Savannah church, which shows how enslaved people inscribed their languages into American-built heritage. In turn, in the contribution entitled “Shetland Stories in Knitting” (Ch. 13), Alison Rendall examines the acts of knitting as a living, communicative act of storytelling—material, patterned, gendered, and deeply relational. Such examples underscore that linguistic heritage is co-constructed by communities under subjugation—a theme consonant with scholarship on intangible heritage as contested and recuperative.

Living up to the high standards of diversity and inclusivity boldly set by the leading notion of hospitality, the volume—with its broad thematic scope, global references, and variety of presentations and discursive forms—can be criticized for treating the central concept of hospitable linguistics quite loosely and metaphorically, as such approaches to language that are opposite to the neo-colonial ones in Northern/Western academia. The volume could have been more explicitly engaged with hospitality literature—for instance, Derrida’s analyses of conditional/unconditional hospitality are alluded to in the introduction but not fully theorized (Derrida). Besides, some contributions lean more on narrative than analysis, which, though stylistically engaging, might frustrate readers seeking concrete theoretical or methodological guidance. Also, focusing on hospitality risks glossing over conflicts: one might ask, for instance, what happens to dissent or refusal when hospitality becomes a virtue. A few chapters do address refusal (e.g., the Herero case in Namibia), but the normative emphasis on generosity may underplay ongoing power imbalances in language encounters. Finally, the *RIAS* readers, interested in American cultural hemispheric studies, can only find a rather implicit reference to their academic focus; despite engaging the Americas historically, few chapters grapple directly with Latin American or US linguistic debates (one exception is Maxwell-Gibb’s

US Deep South case). There is relatively little on Spanish, Portuguese, or Indigenous American languages, and no exploration of US–Latin interactions except via the Romani and African diaspora threads.

In conclusion, hospitality, as theorized and enacted in *Hospitable Linguistics*, resists codification. It is at once epistemic (inviting knowledges that have been silenced or discounted by dominant systems), relational (grounded in accountability, humility, and co-presence), affective (attuned to grief, joy, trauma, shame, and intimacy), temporal (refusing urgency in favor of slow listening and delayed understanding), and political (confronting the colonial underpinnings of language work in institutions and public spaces). This hospitality is not benign. It demands that scholars and language users risk transformation. It means accepting opacity, resisting categorization, and engaging not with a language “object” but with a living, situated subjectivity. For scholars in linguistics, the challenge is methodological: how might one reconceive data collection, fieldwork, or even transcription through hospitable paradigms? For sociologists, the challenge is relational: how does language instantiate—and sometimes interrupt—social reproduction and epistemic enclosure? For cultural theorists, the book invites new engagements with embodiment, multimodality, and symbolic inheritance. Moreover, for Americanists—RIAS readers—*Hospitable Linguistics* provides essential tools for undoing hemispheric erasures, reframing indigeneity and migration not as thematic but as epistemological grounds, and reimagining the very concept of “America” through voices and languages long held outside its myth.

Abstract: As the author of this review argues, *Hospitable Linguistics* represents a radical epistemological and methodological reimagining of language research, foregrounding relational, affective, and decolonial approaches in place of traditional structuralist and extractivist paradigms. The volume reconceptualizes language not as a system to be decoded but as a site of encounter, care, and epistemic risk. Central to its ethos is the notion of “hospitality,” which the editors reframe beyond the Derridean paradox into a lived ethics of recognition, vulnerability, and co-presence—especially in contexts marked by colonial violence and epistemic erasure. Through contributions ranging from Indigenous language revitalization and Afro-Caribbean verbal gesture to sonic border-crossings, knitting as a form of storytelling, and refusal as a mode of speech, the collection expands the field’s boundaries both conceptually and methodologically. The volume prioritizes co-authorship, embodied listening, and non-verbal semiotics as acts of linguistic sovereignty, challenging institutional norms and calling for reparative and relational modes of scholarship. Eschewing synthesis in favor of polyphonic resonance, the book enacts the very hospitality it theorizes. As such, it is not merely a compendium of alternative methods but a manifesto for transforming the ethical foundations of linguistics. This analysis evaluates the volume’s structure, key innovations,

and intellectual stakes, proposing that *Hospitable Linguistics* is indispensable for scholars committed to decolonial, plural, and justice-oriented research in language and culture.

Keywords: decolonial linguistics, hospitality, Indigenous methodologies, linguistic methodology, book review

Bio: Monika Grotek, PhD in linguistics, is an assistant professor in the Department of Humanities at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. On the one hand, her research interests include applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, as well as EFL teaching to adults. On the other hand, exploring the linguistic image of the world through English in cross-cultural contexts, she does not refrain from projects involving comparative cultural and literary studies. As Deputy Director of the Institute of English in the years 2016–19, she has expanded the curriculum to include “Introduction to andragogy with elements of applied linguistics” and supported the development of modules that would combine processes of learning and acquiring a foreign language with sociolinguistic aspects of cross-cultural contact.

WORKS CITED

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4th ed., Aunt Lute Books, 2012.

Derrida, Jacques. “Hostipitality.” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2000, pp. 3–20. Originally published as “Hostipitalité,” *Cogito*, no. 85, 1999, special issue *Pera Peras Poros*, edited by Ferda Keskin and Önay Sözer, pp. 17–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09697250020034706>.

Grosfoguel, Ramón. “The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century.” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2013, pp. 73–90. <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol11/iss1/8>. Accessed 10 May 2025.

Harrison, Rodney. *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. Routledge, 2013.

Lotman, Yuri. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Translated by Ann Shukman, introduction by Umberto Eco, Indiana University Press, 1990.

Mignolo, Walter D. “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality.” *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, nos. 2–3, 2007, pp. 449–514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647>.

Hospitable Linguistics: Alternative, Indigenous and Critical Approaches to Language Research and Language Encounters. Edited by Nicholas G. Faraclas, Anna Storch, and Viveka Velupillai, Multilingual Matters, 2025.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 3rd ed., Bloomsbury, 2022.