Why sociolinguistics needs poetics in its politics

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Taking up the challenge to create "conversation across disciplines," this presentation will propose a dialogue among sociolinguistics, poetics, and performance. At the level of methodology, I hope to create a transdisciplinary disturbance by showing that sociolinguistic analysis is impossible without poetics. I will undertake this by examining an important and innovative contemporary political disturbance in the United States, the movement of undocumented youth, who call themselves DREAMERS. From a position of negative political power and near rightlessness, I will examine the forms of performative discursive action these youth have developed to make themselves visible and organize public affect around their plight. For example, they have developed an analogy between "coming out" as an undocumented person and "coming out" as a gay person; they have made fearlessness a key term in their vocabulary; they enact fearlessness in youtube videos in which individuals speak directly to the camera, concretely risking deportation, and in high risk actions at the border. I will argue for an analytical perspective that combines political, poetic, and performative analysis, and suggest other examples, such as truth commissions, that demonstrate the value for sociolinguistics of this kind of trifaceted analysis which makes explicity the role of the poetic and the performative in social empowerment.

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