



The instability of meaning in metapragmatic neologisms

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Abstract. In this response I address the discussion notes written in reply to my focus article, “Explaining *-splain* in digital discourse.” In the remarks from Andrea R. Leone-Pizzighella, Bárbara Marqueta Gracia, Chaim Noy, François Cooren, Barbara Fultner, and Ursula Lutzky and Robert Lawson, some common themes emerged regarding the instability of meanings, how we treat neologisms, and some research methods for understanding the equivocal nature of metapragmatic neologisms. My reply addresses these issues. With the intent to accomplish the sort of productive, interdisciplinary conversation that *Language Under Discussion* promotes, I hope my reflection and final contribution helps us better understand language and communication.

Keywords: Neologisms, *-splain*, polysemy, normativity, metapragmatics, morphopragmatics, citizen sociolinguistics, prescriptivism 2.0, ventriloquation, catchphrase culture

First, I would like to thank all of the authors who took the energy to read and contemplate my focus article (Bridges, 2021), and to offer inspirational, encouraging, and important comments in their discussion notes. I must also express my gratitude to the *Language Under Discussion* editors for their patience and guidance, and for this opportunity to engage in dialogue about language with scholars from diverse theoretical perspectives.

In what follows, I reply to the discussion notes from Andrea R. Leone-Pizzighella, Bárbara Marqueta Gracia, Chaim Noy, François Cooren, Barbara Fultner, and from Ursula Lutzky and Robert Lawson. As a salute to the ontological plurality of voices and cacophonous nature of discourse that is under examination in this volume, I attempt to address certain points brought up across the discussion notes, and hopefully do so in a way that conveys their connection to one another and to the implications that our dialogue might have on understanding human exchanges. I draw from the six discussion notes to examine the volatile nature of meaning, the issue with neologisms in the inconsistency of meanings, and the methodological approaches

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that might offer not only explanations of these variable neologisms but also estimations regarding the substantial yet covert impact they have on the constitution of society.

Catchphrase Culture: Out with semantic normativity, in with polysemic intensification?

The first topic to address is that of neology in the age of “catchphrase culture” to use Noy’s (2021) term. The word *mansplain* is not just a neologism born from the lexical and phonetic blending of *man* and *explain*, but it also serves as the source for an endless list of neologisms that get constructed by way of {-splain}, a bound morpheme (i.e., a morpheme that must be affixed because it cannot stand alone.) In part because it is fun, and also because it is an important element of understanding the bigger picture, I first cover some qualities of neology and lexical semantics. Then, as the highly abstract and semantically instable aspect of *-splain* words is referenced in some manner across each of the commentators’ responses to my paper, I address a larger question that arose concerning how the variability of *-splain* words link to broader issues across the six discussion notes.

I would like to thank Bárbara Marqueta Gracia for introducing me to morphopragmatics in her response, “Metapragmatic neology in digital discourse: Solid groundwork for morphopragmatics and construction morphology.” My excitement over learning about this approach to language study is accompanied by my incredulity that in my years of enthusiasm about morphology and pragmatics, I somehow remained oblivious to the notion of morphopragmatics. As she explains, morphopragmatics explores how morphological functions intertwine with pragmatic functions, and the variation of morphemic meaning and function across affixational patterns. An understanding of how new words get constructed is especially worthwhile in the digital era. As she puts it, “Indeed, prior to the appearance of the Internet, most innovations by anonymous speakers in spontaneous spoken conversations surely received little attention, leaving as they did no or little trace, and thus did not lead to neologisms or become part of the language. On the other hand, the instantaneous spread of language facilitates the quick conventionalization of new words” (p. 39).

In his discussion note on the ethnomethodology of metapragmatics, Chaim Noy also pays attention to the potential for neology afforded by communicative technology. Accounting for the “semiotic inflation” of *-splain* words, Noy describes a “culture of catchphrases and hashtags” (p. 44). Both Marqueta Gracia and Noy bring up this point, that trendy new words pop up constantly and even more easily nowadays with social media, micro-blogging, and open dictionaries. One of many reasons for this is because humans love to find creative ways to express themselves. While anyone can create new words, we are interested in the ones that catch on and why they do so. Neologisms are like baby turtles hatching from their eggs on a beach. A small fraction of them actually make it into the ocean and grow up to be adult turtles; for the majority, their existence is a momentary one, in which they serve to feed a recurrent hunger of those that consume them, and then they are gone and forgotten. Words, like languages, (and like humans and turtles), are alive, developing and evolving over time, usually living a mostly unremarkable little life.¹ Not all of us get to stick around for a full lifespan of intertextual

¹ I should clarify my tone and intention here, which is to playfully illustrate my view that languages and humans are inextricably connected and mutually emblematic. In saying that languages, and pieces of language like lexemes and morphemes, are like living organisms, I intend only to offer a simile that conjures the parallels in how

influence and do what *man* and *explain* are doing, and so far, what these young *-splain* terms seem to be doing. Take a look at almost every entry of creative wordplay on Urban Dictionary and consider how few of the newly coined words actually become circulated into the languaging of even tiny, specific discourse communities. Even then, its shelf life is likely set to expire as soon as another catchy new word siphons the interest of language users for its own proverbial fifteen minutes of fame.

In the world of words, neologisms are tender-aged, making them more vulnerable and easily manipulated by others. “A neologism cannot be right or wrong,” as Barbara Fultner states in her discussion note “Languaging in the age of Meta” (p. 56). Fultner also asks a question that I had not previously considered: “Can a neologism be too successful?” (p. 58). She addresses here an important aspect of *-splain* words in that they can “attract attention to the speaker or blogger” for their “amusing and eye-catching cleverness.” This question comes up in some form throughout this issue’s multivocal discussion of language: that *-splain* words are evidence that there is something happening in the accountability of language use and semantic normativity (Fultner, 2021), in the relationship between discourse and action (Cooren, 2021), in the relationship between prescriptivism and the moral order (Lutzky & Lawson, 2021), in how language is harnessed for social power and control (Noy, 2021), in how polysemous meanings are represented as knowledge in the minds of individual speakers (Marqueta Gracia, 2021), and how on the internet, anyone at all can add to the mix their own individual interpretation of who is “X enough” to authorize what language means (Leone-Pizzighella, 2021). If it is the collective actions of individuals that invoke social and linguistic change, then, whether we like it or not, even “contradictory, offensive, conspiratorial, and unreliable” (p. 35) contributions, as well as Humpty-Dumptistic claims of words meaning whatever the speaker wishes them to mean (Fultner, 2021, p. 57), all get to add some flavor to that recipe for social evolution. To describe it using Cooren’s (2021) lens of ventriloquation, innumerable and diverse ontologies are linguistically mediated into existence in the form of utterances, gestures, and texts that we produce. The crucial point is that all acts of languaging exert some level of force in shaping discourse.

Of course, depending on your perspective on (or current mood about) fellow humans, this process could seem equally beautiful and terrifying. What Fultner points out is that the nature of discourse in microblogging environments unfortunately stifles extended dialogue where meaning and stances could be teased out. Obviously online communication can be a complicated task; complicated, for example, by the challenge of successfully embedding the illocutionary force of an utterance into a text box to then be interpreted by an audience we can only imagine, an audience that is likely exposed to your text in the same minute they encounter a dozen others. But on top of that, what is the likelihood that interlocutors, when confronted with a misunderstanding, will do the work to sort it out? Why would they when it is far less laborious to resort to ignoring, blaming, retaliating, or some other unproductive or counterproductive action that they almost certainly will not be held accountable for?

languages and humans develop. As they experience isolation from or contact with one another, as their diverse reputations and roles change over time, humans and languages share similarities. My comparison does not intend to overlook or oversimplify critical differences between the natural forces of biological life/death and the egocentric forces behind language genocide and displacement. I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out potential glitches in what explanation might get conveyed by my analogy.

Bakhtin's (1981) notions of centrifugal and centripetal forces on language come to mind here. There are always influences on language that either aim to maintain conventions (centripetal) or push boundaries through creativity (centrifugal). Fultner brings up reclaimed slurs, such as "gay" and "queer," widely used and affectively neutral terms that were once highly offensive slurs used against members of the LGBTQ community. Conversely, some terms that were originally proudly self-avowed labels, e.g., "social justice warrior" and "SJW," became tools of mockery by the out-group. Similarly, Fultner gives the example of "political correctness," which described a type of language encouraged by the left. Like "SJW," conservative groups have appropriated "political correctness" to instead connote something negative. However, returning to ways that words get used to carry out actions, it is worth mentioning that while it is inevitable that the semantic value of words might shift over time and across space, what we are seeing in some instances, such as with *-splains* and other socially or politically charged terms (e.g., "Critical Race Theory" in the United States, as Fultner discusses), is that the semantic shift happens deliberately because enough people wanted it to happen. So, terms can take on contradictory or reverse meanings, resulting in divergent polysemes that can make it very difficult to critique someone's position. In the form of misappropriations, they are imbued with new connotations that "seem to be entirely defanged" and "reduced to amusing cleverness" (Fultner, p. 58) or, more severely, that reject the existence of the social issues indexed by the term. Rebranding a term like "Critical Race Theory" (CRT) with "a non-standard and ill-defined meaning," means that to critique the viewpoint of the theory now "requires debate over meanings as well as the actual educational policy" (p. 58). These points demonstrate that sometimes when terms are recontextualized, it feels like someone is cheating at the game of language, mobilizing counterfeit signs or engaging in deceptive usage of signs for self-serving reasons, instead of using signs the way they are intended to work.

In examining the structure of *-splain* words, Marqueta Gracia asks, "provided that speakers access pragmatic knowledge in the context of retrieving and coining new *-splain* words, how is this knowledge represented in the mind of the individual speakers?" (p. 39). Marqueta Gracia shows how Constructional Morphology gives insight in how new *-splain* words can easily be created and interpreted. Yet at the same time, the complexity of the formula hints at some potential reasons why *-splain* words are so easily recontextualized—as did my own inconsistency in the focus piece in referring to *-splain* as a bound morpheme, a suffix, and a verbal root. I am grateful to Marqueta Gracia for pointing out my error in using these terms interchangeably to refer to *-splain*, when in fact it is not a suffix nor a root according to morphological theory, but rather a member of a *constructional idiom* (p. 41).

In Andrea Leone-Pizzighella's note, "The evolution of *-splain* terms and the spirit of Citizen Sociolinguistics: A note on methods," she devotes some time to the ways that citizen sociolinguists discuss *-splain* words and who participants in interactions are and their epistemic authority. Her point brings up, for one, the notion of intersectionality, since men, for example, are not just that; obviously men are simultaneously men and people of various ethnicities, sexual orientations, ages, etc. Noy also writes that the element {*man-*} also has a "critical semiotic and indexical charge [that] it has come to carry during the last few decades (when the underlining patriarchal meaning of such terms as *man-kind*, has been exposed)" (p. 44). It is understandable that one reason *mansplain* is disliked comes from the interpretation that it refers to men as a monolithic group, and therefore the sense that it automatically accuses all men of mansplaining.

On the instability and ambiguity of *-splain* and possible reasons behind it, Lutzky and Lawson (2021) also make a crucial point: while all *-splain* formations share similarities, a difference that must be taken into consideration is how the terms affixed to *-splain* (e.g., *man-*, *rich-*) vary in relation to perspectives of morality. The meaning of each variant is infused with its position on a “moral gradient” (p. 58). There is a perceived level of moral severity associated with various *-splain* accusations, as well as a moral currency potentially gained by calling out others for a form of *-splain*ing. Being accused of one type (for example, *thinsplain*) might be perceived to have “a higher level of acceptance or legitimacy” (p. 58), while another form (e.g., *whitesplain*) is likelier perceived as a more severe breach of moral norms and principles.

But returning to Leone-Pizzighella’s essay, even if the focus is isolated to one social group based on categorizations of sex, skin color, weight, tax bracket, etc., the question of epistemic authority can still come up. Discourses around *-splains* shed light on this theme of a speaker being “not [X] enough.” These distinctions of identity are what Blommaert and Varis (2011) refer to as discursive orientations of “enoughness,” where “one has to ‘have’ enough of the emblematic features in order to be ratified as an authentic member of an identity category” (p. 4). These enoughness discourses shake up the *-splainer/-splainee* divisions, thus illuminating how boundless, really, is the range of possible utterances that could potentially be considered instances of *-splain*ing. As Leone-Pizzighella points out, the context of each call-out via *X-splain* brings up a viewpoint: that someone is X enough to be an X-splainer, and/or that they themselves are non-X enough to make the accusation. (Whether that viewpoint is shared by anyone else besides the speaker of a specific call-out is not necessarily the point, since “the *ethos* of Citizen Sociolinguistics says we need to consider it” nonetheless if we want to get the whole picture, p. 35).

An example that comes to mind (from Bridges, 2019, p. 204) is in an interaction about fatphobia² in which *thinsplain* was used: one person said, “I think smallfats who can’t address their privilege are a problem for myself and for ssbbw [super sized big beautiful woman].” Here, it is not a thin person, but a “smallfat” who was accused of *thinsplain*ing to a “ssbbw.” In this instance (like several others in my dataset), the authority to speak on experiences of fatness narrows further to exclude non-thin speakers who are viewed as “not fat enough” to speak on issues such as fatphobia. This links to Fultner’s discussion of Humpty-Dumptism (p. 64) and speakers believing they need not be accountable to semantic norms. It supports the idea that while there are times where the word getting misused is just a case of ignorance or misunderstanding, for the most part, people know what they are doing with language.

Most of the time, when we interact with one another, we are able to achieve successful communication of our thoughts. However, surely everyone has experienced moments in which our utterances do not do the things for us, or to us, that we intended. This process of communication can betray us. After we express the signs and put them out there, what they will do next is not entirely in our control. This is because, according to Cooren, the construction of interaction cannot be understood solely as a localized, individual accomplishment of humans in conversation, since context is a “dislocated exogenous materialization” of multiple “ontologies incarnate in our discussions” (Bartesaghi, 2012, p. 472).

² *Fatphobia* refers to a disgust and disrespect towards fat people for their body size and/or shape.

I often wonder how any communicative act is ever successful, though, when you really think about all that is involved for us to shape language that is appropriate for the particular context and then hope that it is inferred by our addressee in a way that is close enough to how we intended it. I have found Cooren's theory of ventriloquation immensely helpful in my attempts to explain how this happens—not to mention, also for explaining how powerful language is in shaping our realities and what parts of the world around us get to come into existence to co-author our reality. Ventriloquation identifies the links between language users and the structures and constraints that their language creates in consequence.

On figuring it out

I would like to give attention to the specific methodological and theoretical approaches of the six discussion notes, all of which are remarkably useful for understanding the constantly shifting semantics and fluidity of language in digital communication.

For Noy, it is ethnomethodological metapragmaticians who do the work of dissecting and interpreting contemporary sociolinguistic phenomena across online and offline communication in order to prompt “a web of dense meanings, indexicalities, and the power-language nexus” (p. 43). I appreciate Noy's point that contemporary digital communicative practices are indeed creating the need for us to unthink and rethink approaches to understanding language and the ways that discursive practices reflect society. But not always. Despite the ever-evolving tools that we use to mediate our communication, what remains constant, and what is conceptualized by the tradition of Jakobsonian linguistic reflexivity is people's routine and ubiquitous metapragmatic work. At the core of Jakobson and Halle's (1956) understanding of language was the idea that for language to function at all, it required reflexivity. That is, language must be able to refer to itself, otherwise the notion of language as we understand it would be obsolete. As Verschueren (1995) wrote, the phenomenon of linguistic reflexivity is “so central to the process of language use that it may even be regarded as one of the original evolutionary prerequisites for the development of human language to be possible at all” (p. 369). This reminds me of the Cartesian notion, “I think therefore I am,” and maybe we can also say “language metalanguages therefore language languages.” Noy says it best, though: “the way metapragmatic terms are adopted, adapted, and recalibrated in and to different contexts” reveals that “it is not just about the reflexivity of language, but also and always about metapragmatic entitlements and pragmatic power/force more generally” (p. 44).

Citizen Sociolinguistics brings different ways of knowing into public discourse and emphasizes the *agentive involvement* of citizen sociolinguists, which is not quite the same thing as crowd-sourcing information based on questions posed by a linguist agent, which is done in Folk Linguistics. I agree with Leone-Pizzighella's complaint that in recent years, Citizen Sociolinguistics has been confused with Citizen Science and Folk Linguistics. In fact, the methodology has been split into two camps because the meaning of Citizen Sociolinguistics has drifted off from the meaning that was originally intended by Betsy Rymes and Andrea Leone-Pizzighella, who first proposed the idea. As people used Citizen Sociolinguistics to describe what is actually closer to citizen science or folk linguistics, they effectively added new definitions of it. This adds an example to what I have been discussing in this paper on the instability of meaning.

I am pleased that Leone-Pizzighella put my study in the Rymesian camp of Citizen Sociolinguistics. I appreciate and would like to highlight her note that Citizen Sociolinguistics allows

for the discovery of more perceptions and principles that exist amongst the cacophony of sociolinguistic interpretations. For me, it seems like in mainstream discourses, the type of scientific inquiry that is generally regarded as trustworthy and valuable, skews heavily towards quantitative studies based on big data. Like anything else, it is tempting to just rely on the clear-cut straightforward explanations, which are more easily achieved with numbers-based studies; a major flaw of humans is taking the path of least resistance and too easily accepting the myth of black-or-white explanations. While generalization and categorization is useful (not to mention, evolutionarily-speaking, it accounts for how we have learned to survive life and just get through each day), obviously, it is dangerous to limit our explanation of the world around us in such a way. I will not continue to preach to the metaphorical choir on the (undervalued) importance of qualitative research, but I wanted to highlight Leone-Pizzighella's note on the dissonant and noisy nature of discourse that Citizen Sociolinguistics tackles, especially the highly heteroglossic discourse of online language. I would like to see more applications of Rymesian Citizen Sociolinguistics for doing investigations of chaotic and messy communication, because, the way I see it, it would be scientifically irresponsible to *not* describe the multifactorial and vacillating nature of sociolinguistics.

Having said that, understanding *-splain* words need not always be a knotty endeavor. A mathematically clear-cut formula that condenses the meanings of *-splains* is offered by Marqueta Gracia through Construction Morphology. The formula considers the patterns in how pragmatic meaning gets constructed via morphological processes by plugging morphemes and metapragmatic effects into the schema's formula. It involves a hierarchy in the lexicon based on levels of abstraction and concreteness—where all morphological schemas “are interconnected via their shared phonetic, morphocategorical, semantic, and morphopragmatic features” (p. 41). Therefore, when the [Noun]+*splain* pattern that we see (e.g., in *mansplain*, *whitesplain*, and *thinsplain*) gets disrupted by new constructions like *covidsplain*, the analogical approach falls short: if *man+splain* refers to *splaining* like men to non-men, then *covid+splain* must mean *splaining* like covid to non-covid. Instead, Marqueta Garcia views *-splain* words as *constructional idioms*, i.e., schemas where part of a word gets fixed (e.g., *-splain*, *-gate*, other affixoids), and stored in the speaker's lexicon as an independent morpheme. As it is combined with other morphemes, which also receive a specific interpretation in the new context, the resulting constructional idiom takes on a new and specific meaning. Marqueta Gracia's approach is valuable in that it offers potential future help on understanding cognitive semantics, how we map words (pieces of words, strings of words, suprasegmental features of words, etc.), their polysemous meanings, their associations with other words and pieces of language, etc. in our brains.

Fultner approaches the relationship between convention and creativity in dialogue by questioning the role of semantic normativity in meaningful public discourse. She writes, “What matters to Bridges is that, regardless of ‘the users’ viewpoints on the word or the debates it provokes,’ the term gets users to think metapragmatically about their and others’ language use and interactional behavior. However, more can be said here” (p. 64). Fultner, probably unknowingly so, points out the boundaries of my comfort zone, recognizing that my analysis takes a strictly descriptive approach without venturing much past the description. It is true that my intention in the focus piece was not to do more than show and describe how people approach, respond to, and deploy these lexical resources to do a variety of things. I admit that much is left up to the reader in regard to interpreting how the patterns in language and languaging that I

described might then connect with other social trends, patterns that could be evidential in understanding the sociopolitical unrests that are astir and the background context from which they developed. But of course it is also true that many of those things people do with the commentary on or usage of *-splain* words have social implications that *should* be talked about, a task that Fultner takes on (among others like Nicole Dular). So I appreciate Fultner attending to more than just what people are doing and how they do it with *-splain* language, bringing up necessary questions on the consequences of “the slipperiness of language in the age of Twitter, microblogging, and cancel culture” and “why it seems increasingly difficult to have meaningful public discourse” (p. 54). It is crucial to identify linguistic practices *and* discuss if and when they are symptomatic of a social malady, what might be the causes of the infection and what possible treatments should be applied.

In the discussion note by Lutzky and Lawson (2021), *-splain* is situated in the context of prescriptivism, representing a new strategy in which rules of language use are proclaimed. As opposed to the prescriptivism of the 19th and 20th centuries, characterized by institutionally enforced usage guides and dictionaries, “*-splain* variants can be seen as a broader strategy of *discursive* prescriptivism... a type of bottom-up prescriptivism” (p. 56). The authors suggest that when looking at evaluations of language correctness in the contemporary context, we need an updated strategy. First, there is the increasing number and variety of online resources offering advice on language use and lists of acceptable definitions, spellings, and pronunciations. These online resources essentially reflect the diversity of discourse in the digital world. But more significant than the diversity of language guides is the change in the type of prescriptive behavior. Discursive prescriptivism, or “prescriptivism 2.0,” illustrates this behavior in which, rather than referring to a grammar handbook to correct language forms, people draw from sociolinguistic and pragmatic ideologies to police discourse in a specific context.

Functioning as a form of “communicative gatekeeping” by highlighting the appropriateness of interlocutors’ communicative behavior (p. 58), Lutzky and Lawson’s notion of prescriptivism 2.0 is similar to that of “Citizen Pragmatics” that I mentioned in the focus paper (p. 10, see also Bridges, 2019). When citizen sociolinguists engage in discussions around *-splain* terms, they are not only making sociolinguistic observations such as how specific features index regional or social variations in language, but they also take a moral stance, focusing on the appropriateness of an utterance given the interlocutors’ social identities and the relative power relations ascribed to those social positions.

In tandem with prescriptivism 2.0, Lutzky and Lawson (2021) also offer the notion of “moral gradience,” specifically the level of moral severity that is associated with various *-splain* accusations. In the section above, I addressed some aspects already; however, there was one particularly resonant point made by the authors that is valuable when discussing frameworks for studying metapragmatic neology. In their essay, they questioned the extent to which *thinsplaining* is part of a wider strategy of left-wing political discourse, and they recommend more corroboratory analyses for interpreting the moral strategies that align with *-splain* variants. Indeed, more research on the metapragmatic commentary of various *-splains* could help us better understand a hierarchical order that any given society might have for its various

moral dilemmas and the reasons behind them.³ It is perfectly imaginable that issues of body size, for example, might be viewed as a trivial matter amongst members of one society, as a taboo topic in another culture, and then perceived as a top issue in another place.

Lastly, Cooren's notion of ventriloquation provides an effective analytical lens in understanding culture in action. It allows a comprehensive perspective on interactions through micro-level analyses of actions that are implicated by what is said, analyses of actions or thoughts that are called into existence through language. From Cooren's perspective, communication is always an act of delegation. When we produce meaningful language (word/signifier connecting with a concept/signified), our signs take on agentive power; they become agents that do things for us, namely, perform actions on our behalf. Without language, doing things like making a promise or expressing an apology become very difficult, if not impossible. Cooren brings up the fact that accusations of digilantism can represent different ways that language delegates or different ways that language as an agent does things for us. For example, speakers, based on their language, can be accused of *coming across* a certain way, or *being* a certain way.

Cooren also describes ventriloquation that can be upstream or downstream. I have to say, upon reading his note for the first time, I understood nothing. The notion made no sense to me. But eventually, something clicked, and now I cannot "unhear" it. I agree with him that all communication takes on some form of upstream or downstream ventriloquation, where in producing signs to express ourselves, we are also delegating the sign to do something on our behalf (and therefore ventriloquizing downstreamly). We also draw on things in the upstream direction, referencing existing things like principles, cliches, or someone else's speech to do things like justify, reject, or authorize credibility of our own or other's language.

Conclusion

My focus essay (Bridges, 2021) aimed to emphasize how *mansplain* and its variants all illustrate linguistic reflexivity, creativity, and gatekeeping. For me, *-splain* words epitomize the bidirectional influence between language and its speakers. My conceptualization of this bit of language has now been multiplied by the ideas shared across six discussion responses from seven scholars of various fields of study and with unique experiences and perspectives. In my final reply here, I have aimed for a reply paper that both spotlights the invaluable contributions from the other authors and echoes the expansion of my own perception on language and discourse. Adding to my initial points on the ways that the meanings of terms can shift across time and space, we have also examined in this journal issue: some reasons behind these semantic shifts alongside the polysemic intensification of catchphrases and hashtags in contemporary digital discourse; some potential consequences of the semantic instability observable in trendy terms, especially those relating to political issues; and the lack of accountability for deliberate misappropriation of terms and its effects.

The discussion of *-splain* and metapragmatic neology has brought up all the beautiful, silly, annoying, problematic, and confusing ways in which language can be used. The reason for studying it is defended by Citizen Sociolinguistics, i.e., by considering the metapragmatic judgments of online citizen ethnographers, as I attempted to demonstrate, and as did Leonne-

³ As for the moral gradience of racism, sexism, classism, and body-shaming within the United States, see Bridges (2019) for some closer analyses and discussions of *-splain* language that illuminate intersectionality and varying levels of moral legitimacy.

Pizzighella and Noy. Its capacity to uncover how language is used to do things to the lexicon, to its speakers, to its listeners, and to the world around them is demonstrated in ideas from Fultner, Cooren, and Noy. How we can connect this linguistic behavior of metapragmatic neology to other lexical reconfigurations and to sociopolitical strategies is demonstrated by Marqueta Gracia and by Lutzky and Lawson. These scholars' work continues to show the value of thinking about words as active participants of dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological ontologies. I hope that this dialogue has been as productive as I believe it to be, and I want to thank once more all the respondents for their contributions. It is also my hope that the conversation will continue in new ways, and that scholars studying language will keep learning from one another's methods and perspectives.

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