

# Language Justice:

*Beyond performative action*



# Presenter

**René García-Hernández** (él/he/him), is the Director of Programming & Community Engagement at Just Communities Central Coast. In addition René is the Co-founder and principal consultant of Bienestar Latinx (@bienestarl原因x on Instagram). Originally from Puruandiro Michoacan, Mexico, René completed his undergraduate education at California State University Northridge. He graduated receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology with a minor in Dance Pedagogy. René graduated from California State University Channel Islands with a Master's in Education and Leadership Administration. René has worked and led alongside commUNITY for over a decade. He has focused on education advocacy and bridging opportunities and access for diverse communities. René has created his unique path by creating a personal and professional career focused on liberating education.



# About Just Communities

## Mission

Just Communities is committed to a world free of white supremacy, xenophobia, and racism. We educate and equip Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and co-conspirators with the tools necessary to take action and advocate for racial justice.

## Vision

Just Communities envisions an equitable and inclusive Central Coast where all people are connected, respected, and valued.

# Workshop Desired Outcomes

---

- A shared language and analysis for understanding Language Justice as foundational to advancing inclusion and equity within institutions.
- Identification of entry points for undoing assimilation and acculturation and advancing language access and justice within institutions.
- Deeper awareness of the ways in which language oppression shows up in ourselves, society, and in our organizations.
- Initial steps to undo language oppression and build Pro-Language Access and Justice organizations.

# Acknowledgment

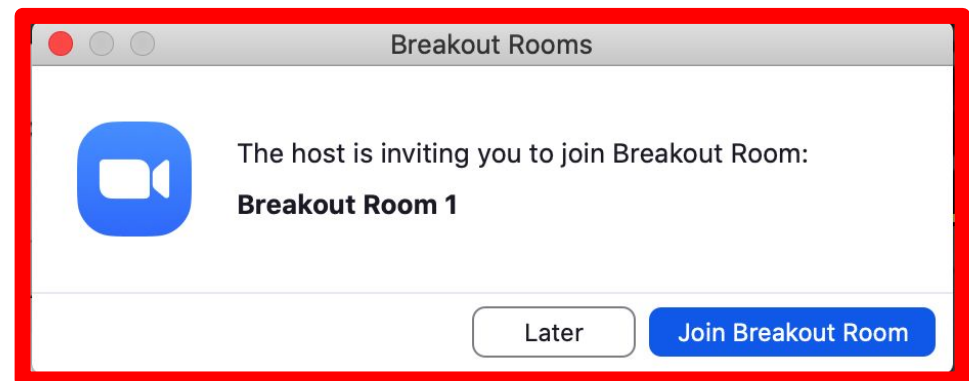
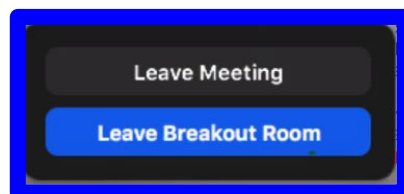
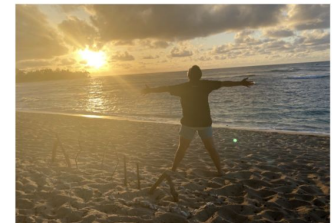
Language impacts us on a multiplicity of levels. It is a phenomenon that is both intimate and exterior, both familial and cultural, deeply connected to our most private thoughts and on display in all manner of public contexts. We dream in language, we sing in language, we think in language. It is language that makes our lullabies, our stories, our jokes. We use language to name our food, our hometowns, our family members, our friends, ourselves. Language is personal, visceral, and powerful; it is tied to our lands, to our bodies, to our relationships, and to our knowledge. Every time we speak or sign in our particular accents and dialects, syntax and rhythms, cadences and inflections, we identify ourselves and bring social history and personal experience with us.

# Cultura Box

## Instructions:

1. Use one of the slides below to create your own cultura box.
2. You can use text, images, photos.
3. You'll then share your cultura box with your partner
4. Please share with them:
  - a. your name
  - b. your pronouns
  - c. 1-2 thing from your cultura box
5. 7 minutes create  
5 minutes to share

### Cultura Box: René (él/he/him)



# Cultura Box: Name & Pronouns

Story behind your  
name?

A value someone  
you love shared  
with you.

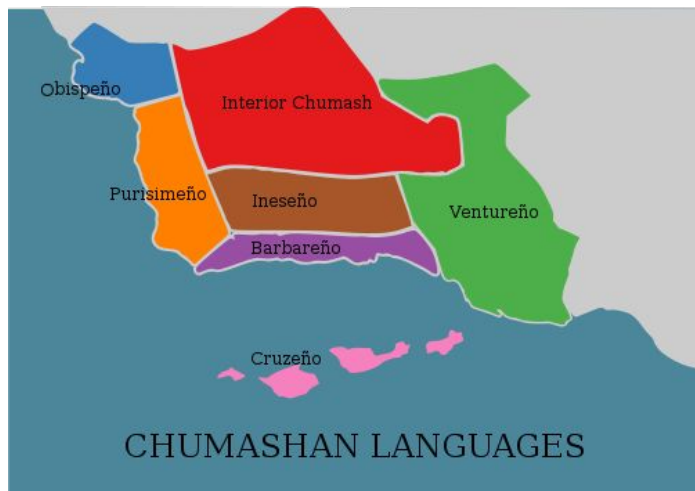
Which indigenous  
language(s) are  
spoken in the land  
you occupy?

How do you  
express your  
cultural/linguistic  
identity?



# Cultura Box:

## René García-Hernández (Él/He/Him)



Haku in Šmuwič language

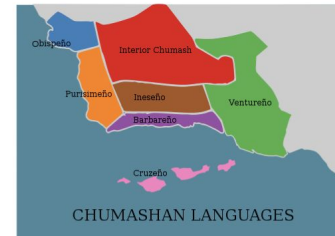


# Cultura Box

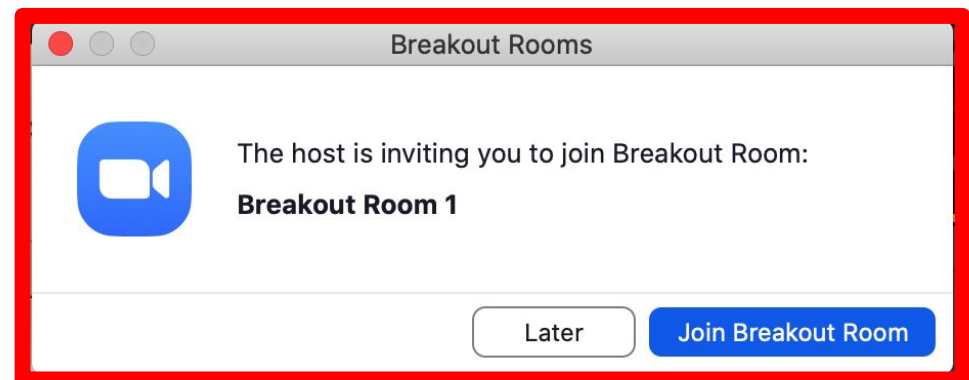
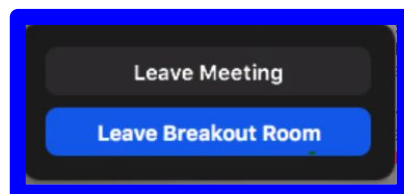
## Instructions:

1. Use one of the slides below to create your own cultura box.
2. You can use text, images, photos.
3. You'll then share your cultura box with your partner
4. Please share with them:
  - a. your name
  - b. your pronouns
  - c. 1-2 thing from your cultura box
5. 7 minutes create  
5 minutes to share

Cultura Box:  
René García-Hernández (Él/He/Him)



Haku in Šmuvič language



# Critical Concepts & Framing

---

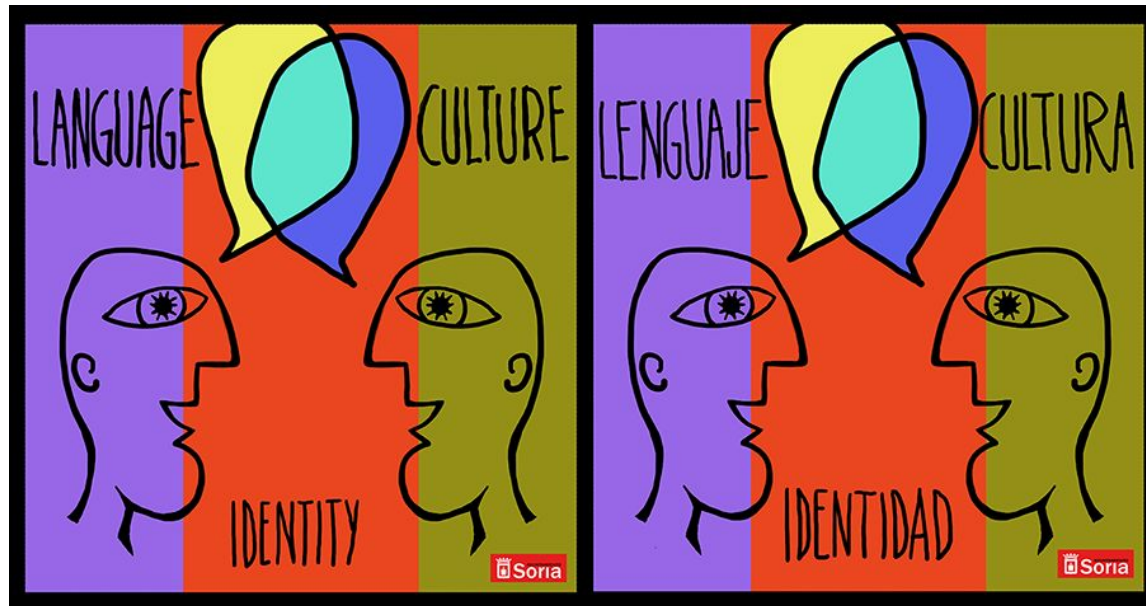
# Culture

“the languages, customs, belief, rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identities and memories developed by members of all social groups that make their social environments meaningful” - American Sociological Association

People that belong to the same ethnicity are tied together cultural ties. Language, ways of speaking and moving, food, clothing, religion/spirituality, traditions, hair styles, etc are all elements of culture that also serve as markers of different ethnic groups of peoples. These traditions are shaped over time through collective human interactions, usually tied to a peoples connection to a particular place (ie. types of foods eaten, types of festivals), experience, or spiritual/religious understanding.

# Culture & Language

“In every culture, past and present, the language is closely connected to the culture of the people. If you remove the language or culture from the people, the other will also be lost.”



# TODAY: Culture & Language



# TODAY: Culture & Language

According to *Ethnologue*, of the 115 Indigenous languages spoken in the U.S. today, two are healthy, 34 are in danger, and 79 will go extinct within a generation without serious intervention. In other words, 99% of the Native American languages spoken today are in danger.

There are 573 federally recognized tribes in the United States, and most are battling language extinction and cultural genocide.

# Power and Privilege

## Power

Power is the ability to exact influence and control over others. Power is relatively distributed on an interpersonal level but systematically distributed on larger scales. Social groups that hold unequal power include but are not limited to men, cisgender, white (racial category), citizen, wealthy, educated, etc. Who has unequal access to power is determined by their membership in particular social groups.

## Privilege

Privilege is the unearned access to goods, services, and resources based on membership to a particular social group. Globally privileged groups inclined but aren't limited to white (racial category), wealth, high income, able-bodied, cisgender, and heterosexual. Religion can also confer a privileged status depending on the particular region of focus (ex. Christianity in the United States, Latin America, Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand).



# English Language Privilege

## Schools:

- Bilingual Programs, labeling of ESL, Multilingual Learner.
- Dual Immersion and Monolingual Schools

## Families:

- Coercion to Assimilation and Acculturation
- Internalized Oppression/ White Supremacy Culture

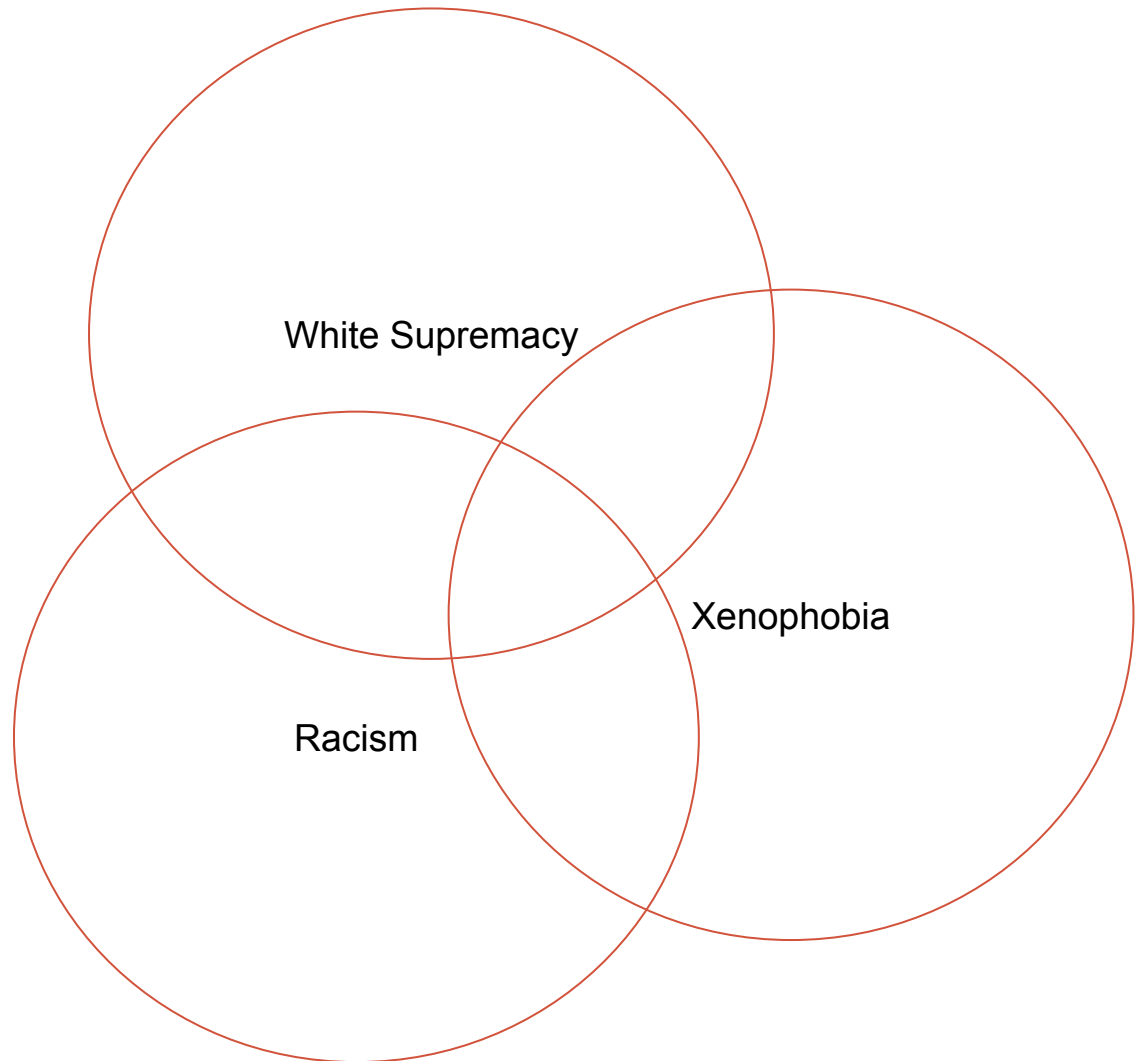
## Society:

- English as Lingua Franca
- bilingualism with European Language are romanticized
- Privilege of bilingual white bodies

# Power, Privilege, and Language

“Doing away with language, or prohibiting its use, tears away at the soul of a people.”

-Dr. Sonia Nieto



# Colonialism

**Colonialism** is the dominance and subjugation of one group by another for the purpose of economic exploitation (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Colonialism usually happens in tandem with imperialism. The key players in colonial regimes are the “adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force” (Aime Cesaire on Colonialism, pg. 33). Colonialism typically involves the invasion or military occupation of one nation by another. It can also include predatory loans and fabricated debt.

Colonialism Is about the invasion of one group into another groups particular region or place of existence with the soul purpose taking over or replacing that group of people.

# Colonization and Language

## The History of Indian Boarding Schools

- Family Separation
- Patriarchal Culture
- Inculcation of Western Culture
- Cultural genocide
- Stripping children of their language and forcing them to speak English only.



“Kill the indian save the man.”

How does White Supremacy,  
Racism, Xenophobia, and  
Colonialism impact Culture and  
Language in the United States?  
What cultures and languages are  
considered valid and which are  
not?

How does White Supremacy,  
Racism, Xenophobia, and  
Colonialism impact Culture and  
Language in your organization?

# Reflective Writing / Escritura Reflexiva

On your Reflective Writing Piece of Paper, answer and complete the following reflective prompt:  
En su papel de escritura reflexiva, responda y complete la siguiente pauta de reflexión:

**What I'm taking away from this is...**  
**Lo que me llevo conmigo de esto es...**

---

**Because**  
**Porque**

---





# Break

---

10 minutes

# Language Justice

---

Beyond performative action

# Language Justice

Language justice is not just theory. Language Justice is about making visible the ways in which language is used as a tool of oppression and resistance, language justice is about the choices we make to imagine and create a more just world. Because language justice is based in practice, it does not have a single definition. In order to begin to imagine and create it, we must learn the histories and ask ourselves critical questions.



# Language Justice

At Just Communities, language Justice is about building and sustaining multilingual spaces in our organizations and social movements so that everyone's voice and lived experience can be heard both as an individual and as part of a diversity of communities and cultures. Valuing language Justice means recognizing the social and political dimensions of language and language access, while working to dismantle language barriers, equalize power dynamics, and build strong communities for social and racial Justice. No single or static definition for language justice exists. We expect that our understanding of the concept of language Justice and its implications for movement-building will continue to change and deepen as the movement grows.



# Language Justice

Language justice is one of the key components of both racial and social justice. There are crucially important things being said in other languages, by people very different from ourselves, whose contexts and experiences are distinct from anything we might have encountered previously; the considered effort to hear those things and engage with them through direct dialogue and dynamic group conversation is central to manifesting the respect and mutual consideration that are the foundation of any truly cross-cultural or cross-racial work.



# Language Oppression

Language oppression' is a form of domination that is coherent with other forms of oppression along the lines of 'race', nation, colour and ethnicity. Alice Taff and her colleagues define **language oppression as the 'enforcement of language loss by physical, mental, social, and spiritual coercion'**. This concept is part of an evolving suite of ideas from linguistics, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology that focus on language discrimination, or 'linguicism'.

Other forms of linguistic/language oppression are accentism (accent discrimination and horizontal collusion) and raciolinguistics (intersectional discrimination associated with race and language (e.g. Black Vernacular English also known as Black English)).



# Language Oppression

Levels	Examples
Individual	<b>Words, Actions, behaviors, and beliefs of individual people</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assuming that all people speak English or should speak English</li><li>• Interrupting, micro-aggressions, and micro-affirmations</li><li>• Over-reliance on bilingual/multilingual employees</li><li>• Second-guessing diverse expertise; tokenizing for lived experience</li></ul>
Institutional	<b>Laws, policies, nonprofits, funders that enact practices that are discriminatory or most adversely impact BIPOC people</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Language Access and Justice efforts and BIPOC-led organizations are least likely to be funded and at lower amounts</li><li>• White cultural norms dictate expectations of “professionalism”<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ “Proficient” levels of English required (both written and spoken)</li></ul></li></ul>
Cultural & Systemic	<b>Dominant cultural narratives that accept and perpetuate anti-inclusion and equity and neglect BIPOC cultural contributions, leadership, and perspectives.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Co-opting of language around “intersectionality” to deflect race and other identities.</li><li>• Appropriating BIPOC cultural practices without appropriate credit.</li><li>• No access for Literacy by law for Black people</li><li>• Enslaved Africans, separated within their groups to not be able to communicate.</li></ul>



# What if...

Your organization adopted a Pro-Language Access and Justice stance, this is to uplift the full humanity of all people so they can bring their full authentic selves, fully participate, and thrive?

*“If you talk to a **person**  
in a language **they** understand,  
that goes to **their** head.  
If you talk to **them** in **their** language,  
that goes to **their** heart.”*

- Nelson Mandela

# Linguistic Awareness

Is a mutual understanding that all language is equally valuable and that no language is inherently better than another. This benefits all people and brings awareness to the diversity of variants in one language and all language present in the space.



# Linguistic Awareness: Cultivating Language Justice in Y(our) Organization(s)

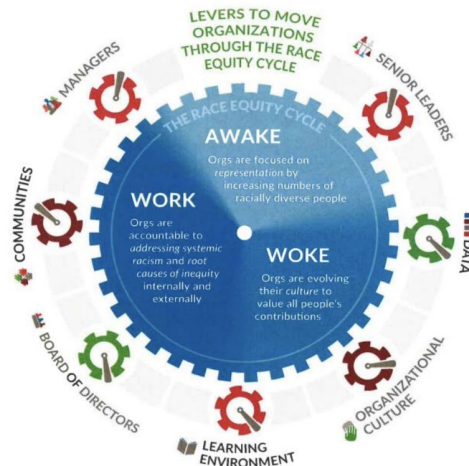
## Individual

- As an English speaking person, to address Linguistic Awareness I need to:
  - Interrogate my own assumptions of the English only narrative
  - Understand how I benefit from denigration of Language
  - Understand when I am pulled to be in competition with non-English speakers or BIPOC.
  - Understand when I am pulled to be in competition with Black people
  - Stop policing BIPOC bodies and gender
- As a Non-Black Identifying Person of color I need to:
  - Interrogate white supremacy in me
  - Root out how I perpetuate anti-Blackness in Language and all
  - Challenge performance of respectability or seek white approval

# Linguistic Awareness: Cultivating Language Justice in Y(our) Organization(s)

## Institutional Change

- Adopting a budget for Language Access
  - Interpretation & Translation
- Translation being an integrated part to protocols and procedures through the entire organization
- Interpretation being a standard practice of the organization (Language Access)



# Linguistic Awareness: Cultivating Language Justice in Y(our) Organization(s)

Building Organizations committed to Language Access & Justice:

- Board: The Board will receive quarterly progress reports on Language justice goals that will be woven throughout the organization's annual strategic plan.
- Leadership: The CEO will have Language justice metrics as a part of the performance review process to ensure accountability and leadership across the organization.

# Linguistic Awareness: Cultivating Language Justice in Y(our) Organization(s)

## Building Organizations committed to Language Access & Justice:

- Culture / Learning environment:
  - We will foster a culture in which BIPOC are able to fully participate and bring their authentic selves, as members of the Board of Directors, members of staff, project directors, employees, and/or volunteers within our network.
  - Training: Conduct racial justice training and decolonization education, including workshops on how we can more intentionally combat anti-Blackness and white supremacy.
  - Vendors: Create a policy to ensure access to opportunity for consultants from marginalized groups. Review and increase the number of BIPOC identified consultants, vendors, and contractor relationships that support our work every day.

# Linguistic Awareness: Cultivating Language Justice in Y(our) Organization(s)

Building Organizations committed to Language Access & Justice:

- Programs
  - Voice: Leverage its external voice and urge for more investments in BIPOC communities to build political power.
  - Policy: Engage on a range of policy and practices within philanthropy as it pertains to BIPOC political power-building efforts.



# Furthering the conversation and work

As you continue to work on the important topic of Language Justice. Some questions to explore and always come back to are:

- What are some strategic questions that will help us advance a shared analysis and identify some common actions to advance an agenda for Language Justice with communities that are most impacted (BIPOC communities)?
- What are the organizing and policy challenges and opportunities on the intersection of Language Justice and organizing work with and by people closest to the harm (BIPOC Communities)?
- What are tools and resources that can help to further this work?
- Who are some of the groups leading the way?

# Language Justice

It is often impossible to create an ideal universe of language justice in which all languages are given entirely equal space at an event.

**Language justice is only as strong as the resources dedicated to it.** Without experienced interpreters for a given language, there is no functional way for a person to speak that language at an event or meeting and be understood. Sometimes there is not enough equipment to accommodate more than two or three languages at a single event. However, **when a commitment to language justice is clearly demonstrated, even when there are languages represented in the room that cannot be fully integrated into the conversation, the feeling in the room is one of openness, acceptance, and willingness to listen. Goodwill combined with good practice can go a long way to derail structures of privilege and language dominance, and construct a space that is truly welcoming to a variety of perspectives, expressed in a variety of ways.**

# Language Justice in Action

On our Jamboard of Action, Answer the following questions:

1. How might you push yourself or do something differently to take a Language Justice stance in your organization? What personal derailers must you manage?
2. What process, protocol, or practice might you put in place in your organization to disrupt Language Oppression and/or advance Language Justice?



