



# Advancing Social Justice in Sociolinguistics: The Impact of Community-Centered Collaboration

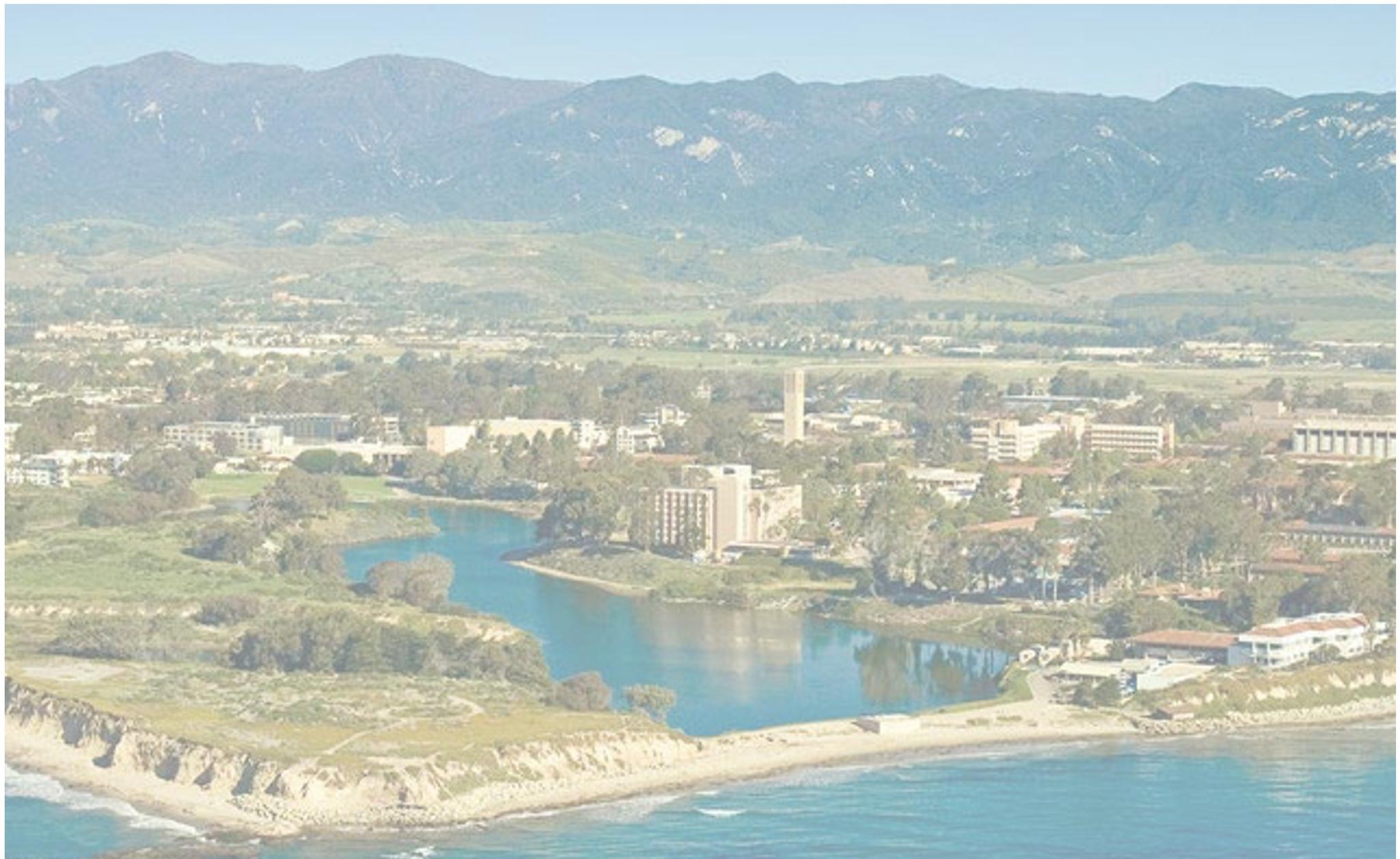
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# Preliminaries

# Land acknowledgment

- The University of California, Santa Barbara, where I teach and conduct research, stands on the unceded lands of the Chumash, the Indigenous people of those lands. I acknowledge their stewardship, as well as their important contributions to linguistic knowledge and teaching.

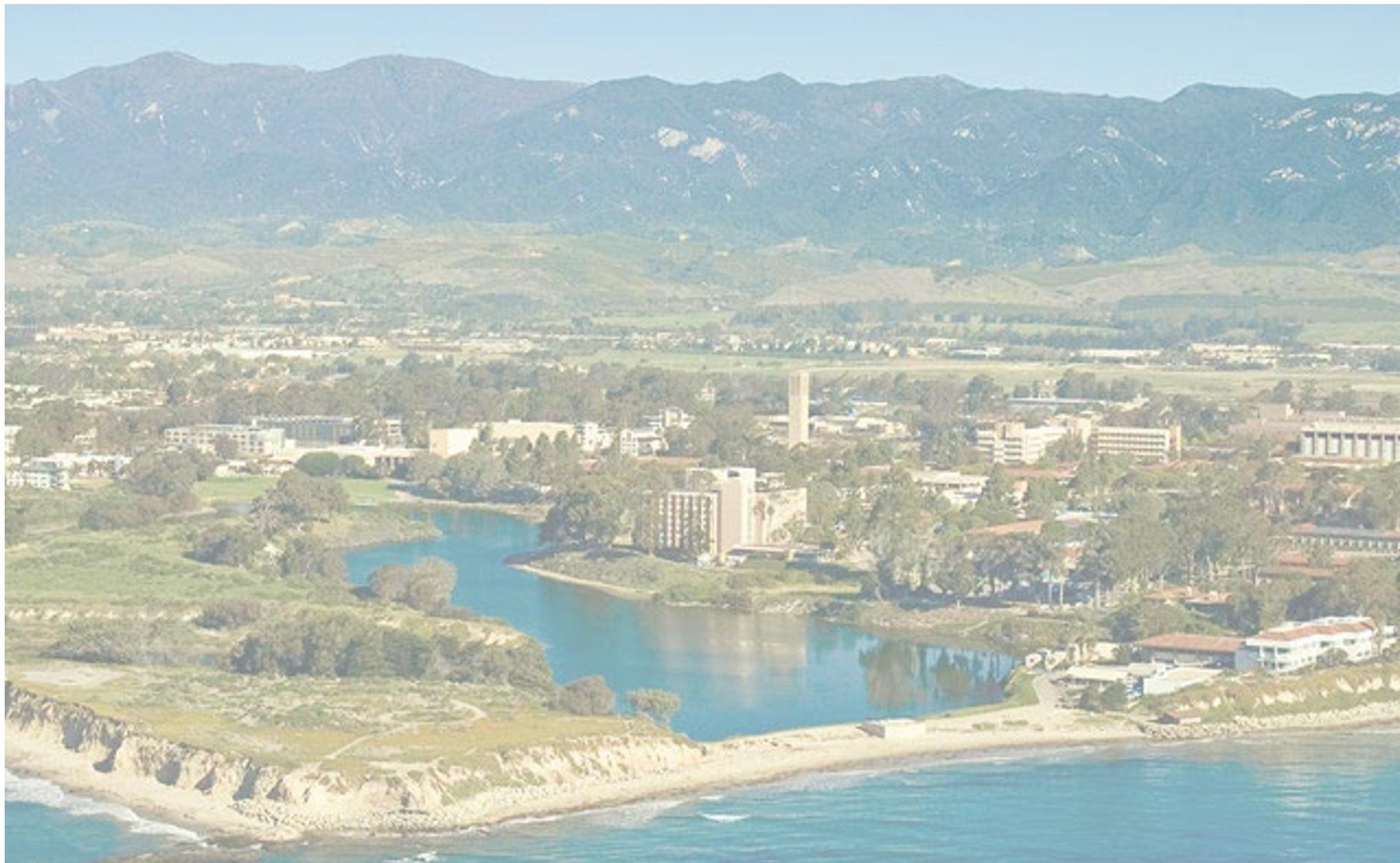


# A note on slides and references

- These slides are now available on my website:
  - <https://bucholtz.linguistics.ucsb.edu/research>
  - Or Google: “**Mary Bucholtz**” research
  - Scroll to the bottom of my research page
- A complete reference list appears at the end of the slides
- Most of my publications mentioned in this talk are available at the link above

# Overview

- Social justice and its limits in sociolinguistics
- Toward a liberatory, liberated, and larger linguistics
- Principles and practices of community-centered collaborations
- Collaborating for social justice: Four examples
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- Participatory conversation



**Social justice and its limits in sociolinguistics**

# 1 The moral responsibility of sociolinguists in an unjust world

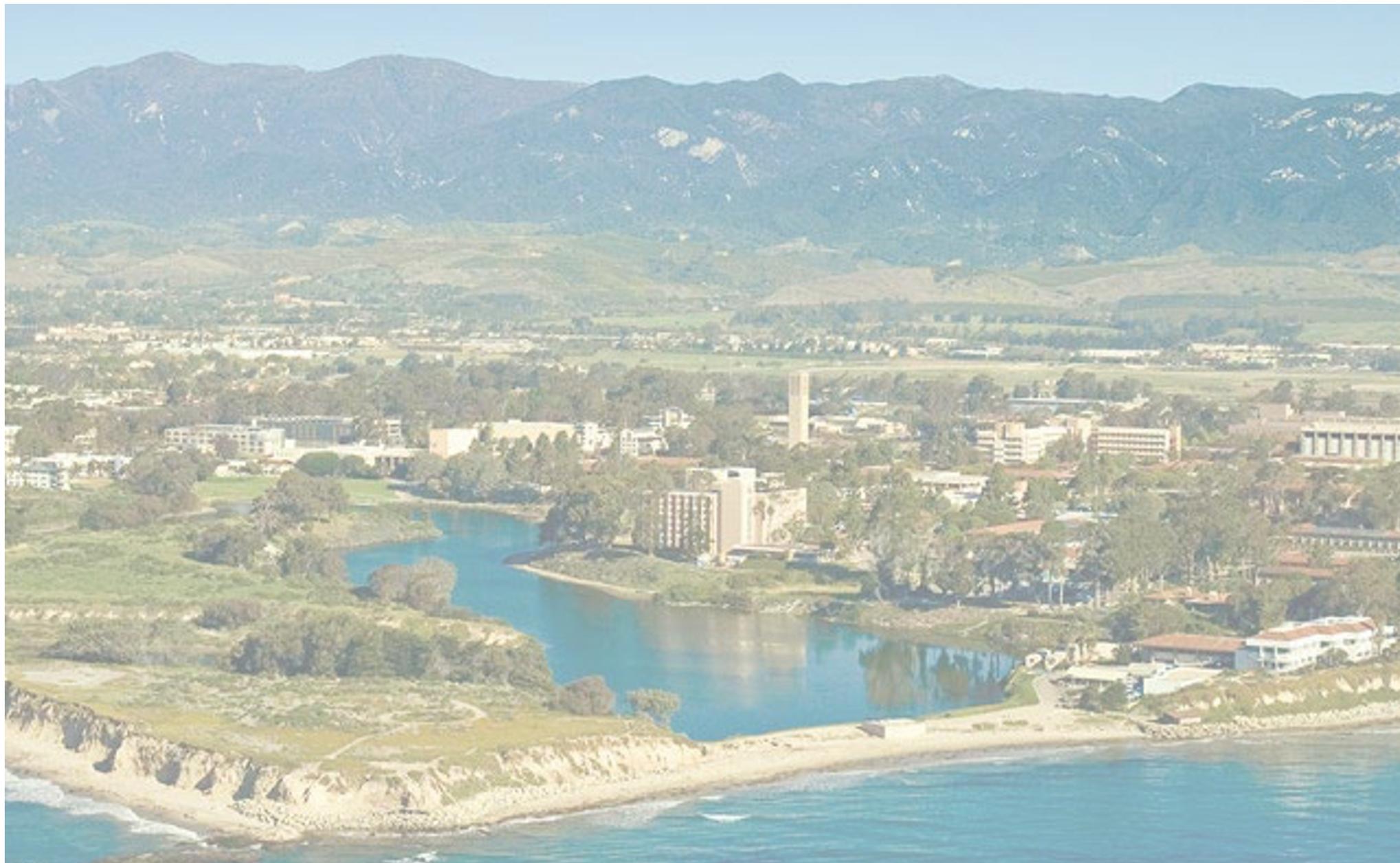
- Many sociolinguists emphasize **social justice as a moral responsibility for the field**
  - e.g., Avineri et al. 2019; Charity Hudley 2013; Labov 1982; Piller 2016; Rickford 1997; Wolfram 1998; Zentella 2018
- But we need to **redouble our commitment to social justice** in light of:
  - The global political rise of the extreme right wing
  - The oppression and scapegoating of (im)migrant and racialized groups
  - Racist violence by police officers and white supremacists
  - Human and civil rights violations on the basis of gender and sexual identity
  - Systemic inequities heightened due to the covid-19 pandemic
  - Global injustice due to climate change, economic inequality, war, ...

## 2 Advancing social justice through linguistics

- The primary focus of social justice work in linguistics is language
- **sociolinguistic justice**
  - “self-determination for linguistically subordinated individuals and groups in sociopolitical struggles over language” (Bucholtz et al. 2014: 145)
  - See also the related concept of **linguistic justice** (Baker-Bell 2020)
    - A pedagogical approach to teaching Black students in the US
  - Differs from legal or policy concepts of linguistic justice and linguistic human rights (e.g., Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994; Van Parijs 2011)
    - Instead centers **community action for social change**
- **Sociolinguistic justice is necessary, but it is not enough**

# 3 Advancing social justice in linguistics

- A **moral imperative** for the field, which is often unjust and inequitable
- The main obstacle to advancing social justice in linguistics is the **discipline of linguistics** itself
- Ideological gatekeeping about **what counts as linguistics**
  - Who counts as a researcher
  - What counts as research
  - What questions linguistics can ask
  - What answers are considered legitimate
    - Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz 2020a, 2020b
- “Our question to those who seek to keep the discipline’s scope artificially narrow is simply this: **Why is your linguistics so small?**”
  - Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz 2020b: e312



**Toward a liberatory, liberated, and larger  
linguistics**

# 4 Liberatory linguistics

- A concept primarily developed by Black linguist Anne Charity Hudley to center Black Language and Black people in US linguistics
- “Liberatory linguistics: **linguistics that is intentionally designed by Black people** (as well as people from other communities in solidarity) and **that is expressly focused on Black languages, language varieties, linguistic expression, and communicative practices** within the ongoing struggle for Black liberation”
  - Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz 2022: 126



# 5 The Charity Hudley Rule for Liberatory Linguistics

- “Any published research that you conduct in a community that you are not a part of should include an explicit discussion of members from that community in your research process and **your efforts to increase the participation of community members at your university, in your department, and in your research area.**”
  - Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz 2022: 136
  - This rule **makes space for less structurally powerful groups within linguistics**
- The **participatory sociolinguistics research** shared at this conference beautifully exemplifies this principle

## 6 Liberating linguistics

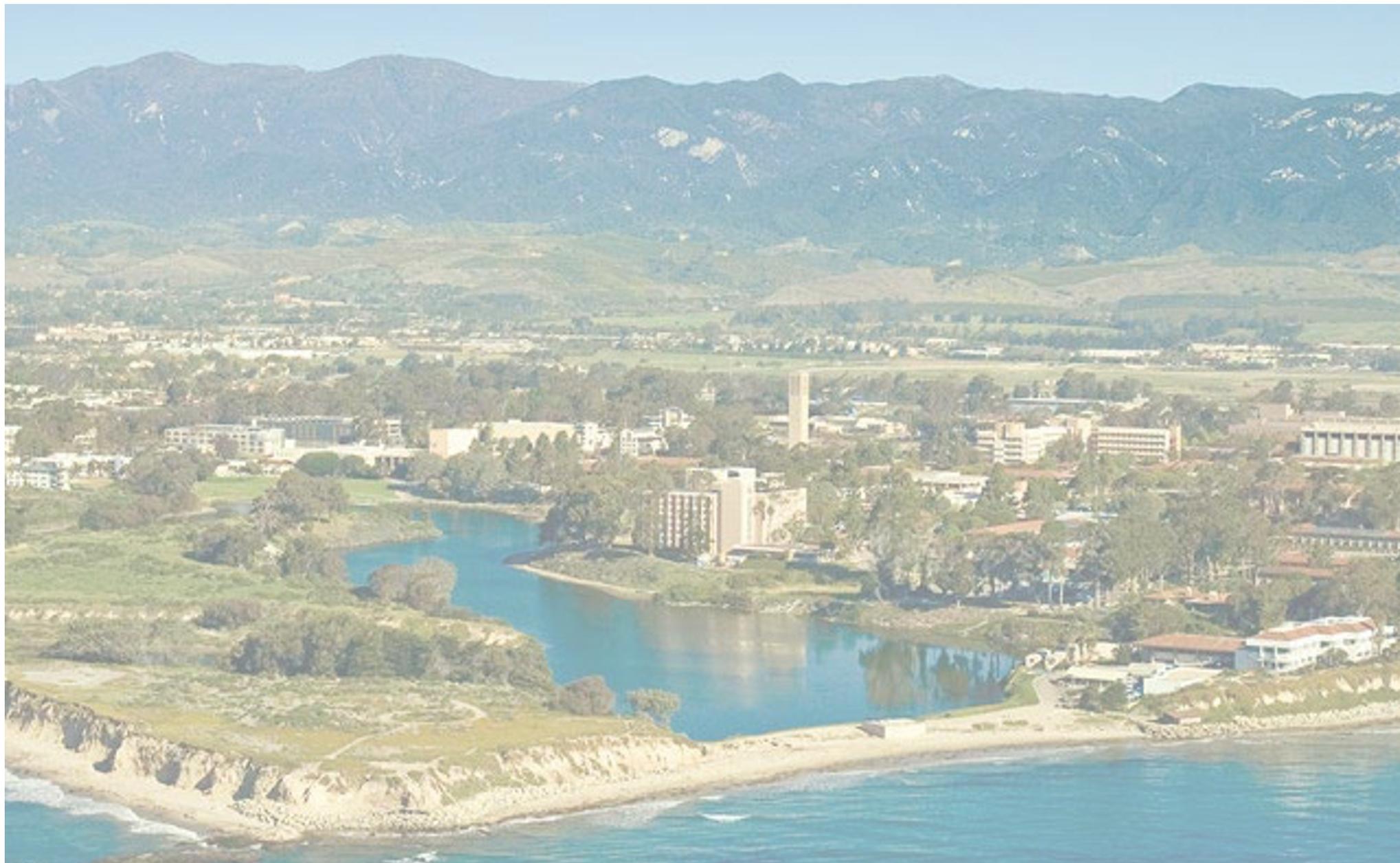
- As a white linguist who does collaborative research with members of racialized and other minoritized groups, I don't see my work as “liberatory” for communities
- Instead, I aim to use my structural power to help **liberate linguistics from oppressive and colonizing ideologies and practices**
  - These limit its capacity to advance social justice

# 7 How to create a larger linguistics: Breaking down the gates

- Who counts as a researcher?
  - **Anyone who has a question and expertise that research can help answer**, regardless of academic credentials
- What counts as research?
  - **Anything that involves systematic examination** to answer a question or solve a problem
- What questions can linguistics ask?
  - **Anything that a linguist can find a way to answer**, whether about language or not
- What answers are considered legitimate?
  - **Anything that advances knowledge that has value for those the research is designed to serve** (especially beyond the academy)
- **Anything we do in our capacity as linguists is linguistics**

# 8 Community-centered collaboration

- **The key strategy** for liberating the discipline and creating a larger linguistics
- Aligned with a number of similar social justice-oriented approaches, such as:
  - **Participatory sociolinguistics** (Bodó et al. 2022, and many presentations at this conference)
  - **Community-based language research** (Bischoff & Jany 2018; Czaykowska-Higgins 2009)
  - **Community-based participatory research** and **participatory youth action research** (Rosa 2018)
  - **Critical sociolinguistic research** (Heller, Pietikäinen, & Pujolar 2017)



## Principles and practices of community-centered collaboration

# 9 (Some) principles of community-centered collaboration (Bucholtz 2021)

Collaboration is required for a **socially just linguistics**

1. Collaboration requires **giving up power**
2. Collaboration is a **redistribution of resources**
3. Collaboration is a **contact zone** (Pratt 1991)
4. Collaboration involves **the whole self**
5. Collaboration is **emotional**
6. Collaboration is **social change**
7. Collaboration is **theory**

# 10 (Some) practices of community-centered collaboration (see also Leonard 2021)



# 11 Honoring community and individual self-determination

- Centering community members (who may be in academia or not) as the **intellectual leaders** of a project
- Self-determination includes **setting the purpose, direction, design, and implementation** of all aspects of the research project, to whatever extent community members choose to define these
  - Self-determination also includes the choice **to turn some decisions over** to outsider researchers
- **Community members are individuals** and may disagree with one another as well as with outsider researchers

# 12 Adopting a stance of accompaniment

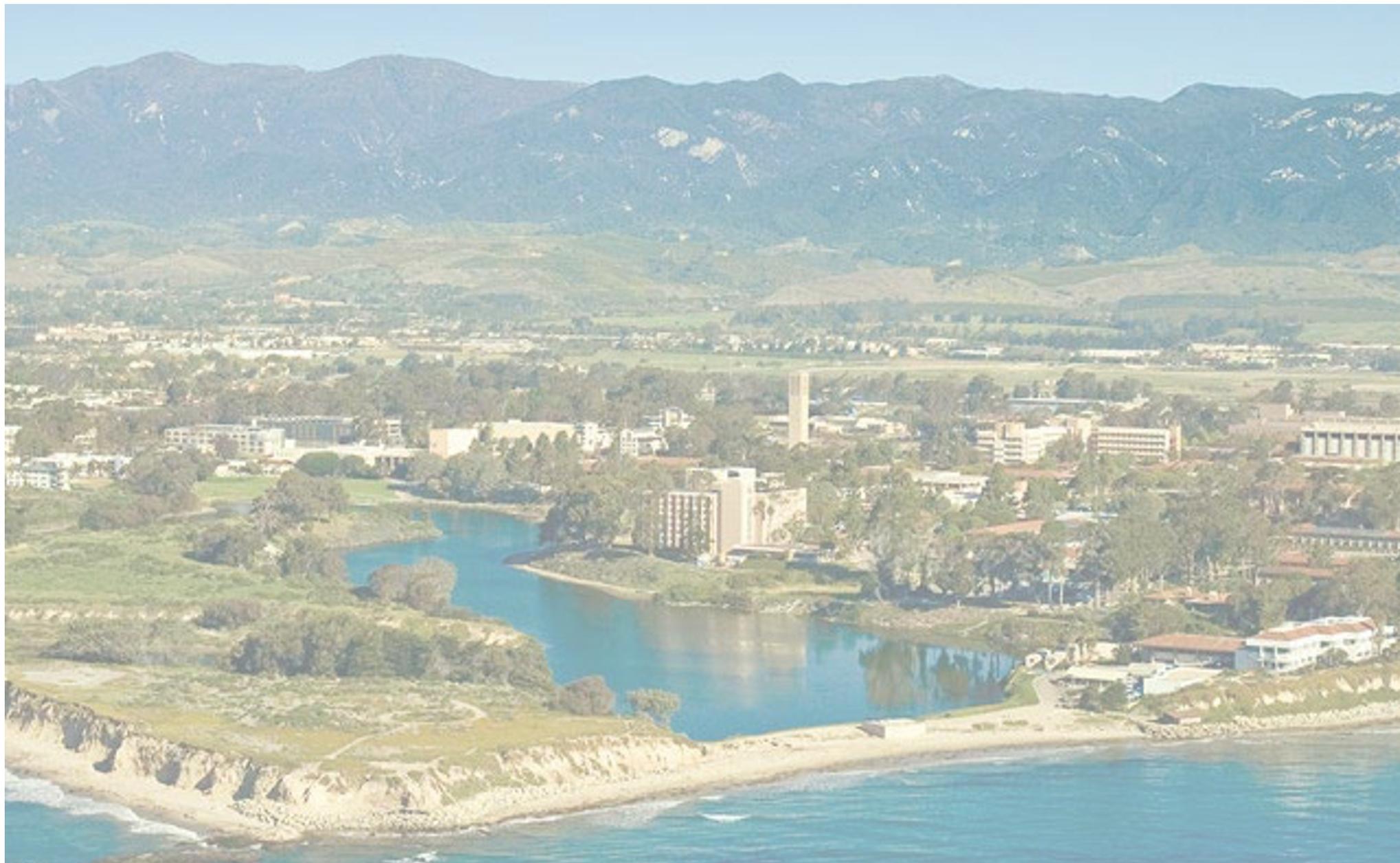
- “an ongoing, negotiated social process of **learning to talk and work together**, in which all participants contribute different forms of expertise and understanding and from which they benefit in different ways” (Bucholtz et al. 2016: 27)
- Accompaniment is a key researcher practice for honoring community self-determination
- **The researcher doesn't set the agenda** but implements community members' agenda
  - Facilitates and supports community members' goals
  - Provides institutional access and resources
- Accompaniment is necessary **even/especially if the community goals “aren't linguistics”** and even if we don't know how to do this kind of work
  - Academics are smart, and we're professional learners: **We can figure it out (or find experts to help)!**

# 13 Acknowledging positionalities and their impact on the collaboration

- The perspective that each researcher (including community members) brings to the project **based on their lived experience**, and how this shapes the project
  - Many researchers and community members have complex, sometimes overlapping and sometimes conflicting positionalities
- Attending to positionality is **crucial to a socially just linguistics** (Bucholtz et al. 2023)
  - Yet this practice is missing in most sociolinguistics research
  - **“Why do you do the work that you do?”** (Jamaal Muwwakkil, quoted in Bucholtz 2021)

# 14 Practicing critical reflexivity throughout

- Reflecting on our own **power** and its effects on social relationships, communication, and the research process and results
  - **Acknowledging** struggles, challenges, and failures to ourselves, **discussing** them with our collaborators, and **including** them in the research record
- An **ongoing practice** before, during, and after all stages in the research process
- Especially crucial (and difficult) for researchers with significant structural and/or institutional power
  - **Intersectionality** means that power in research is often complex
  - However, all researchers (including students and community members) need to recognize that they have **power by virtue of their status as researchers**



# Collaborating for social justice: Four examples

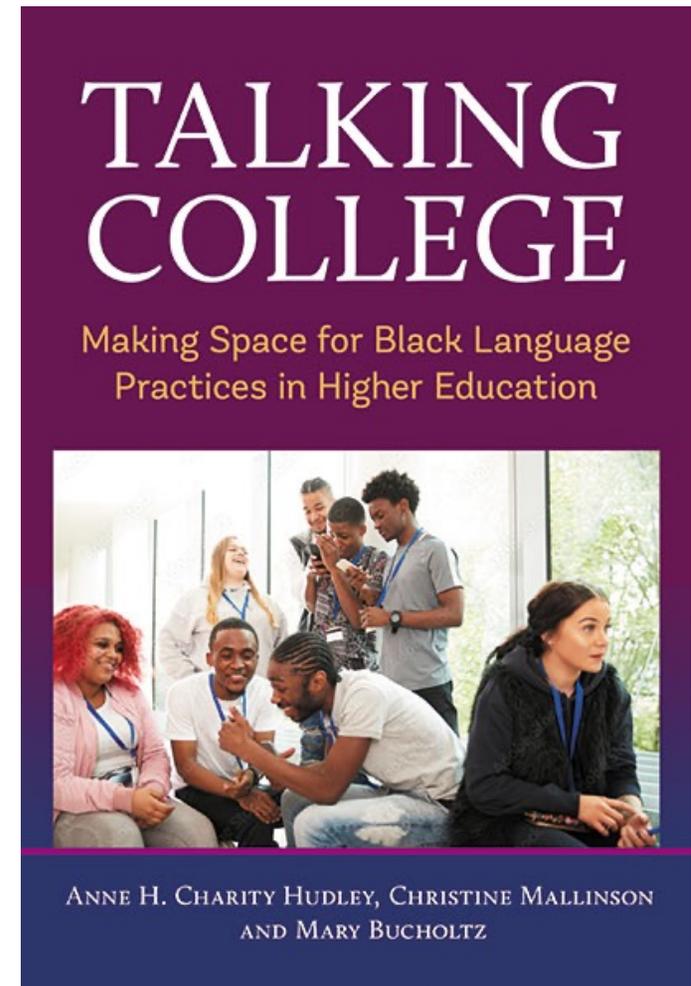
# 15 The UCSB-HBCU Scholars in Linguistics Program

- A three-year program that brought Black undergraduates to UC Santa Barbara for a summer research experience
  - To take **linguistics classes**
  - To celebrate **Black Language as valid**, not “wrong” or “broken”
  - To **collaborate on the Talking College research project** on Black undergraduates’ linguistic and cultural practices
  - To prepare to **apply to graduate school** in linguistics



# 16 Talking College (Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz 2022)

- The book, written *to* and *for* Black students, **features the voices and insights of the Black undergraduate researchers** and other Black students and professors
- “We wrote this book to encourage you, as a Black student, to sustain your linguistic and cultural heritage during your college years, an important time for identity development. **We want to do everything we can to help you embrace Black language and culture as worthy of study, use, and praise.**”



# 17 Mea's reflection on the program's Black-centered Introduction to Linguistics course

Mea Anderson, UCSB-HBCU Scholar:

“The concepts that engaged me the most were the ones that tied back explicitly to AAVE [African American Vernacular English]. In the past, I have taken ‘Introduction to Linguistics’ and ‘African American Vernacular English’ separately, but to see them working seamlessly together was a new experience. For example, during the Phonetics unit, we were asked to give examples of words from our own regional variations of AAVE that contained the indicated sounds. **It is rare in academia that I am asked to present my own life experiences (especially those pertaining to my Blackness), so to do so in this course was deeply validating.**” (Calhoun et al. 2021: e29)

# 18 The SKILLS program

- **SKILLS** = **S**chool **K**ids **I**nvestigating **L**anguage in **L**ife and **S**ociety
- An **educational justice program** for students in the Santa Barbara region
  - Most participants are low-income Mexican American high school students
- Students take a free college-level sociolinguistics course that guides them to carry out **original research and action projects on issues of language, race, power, and identity** in their lives
- e.g., Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee 2017, 2018

## TODOS LOS IDIOMAS SON CREADOS IGUALES



No hay un idioma que supere a otro. Quiero acabar con la creencia de que otros idiomas son de menor valor que el inglés. Todas las lenguas son importantes. Al hablar más lenguas, uno podrá comprender mejor a los demás y entender el valor de cómo se habla. Tenemos que evitar la tendencia de categorizar algunas lenguas como mejores que otras. Valoro el español y el inglés por igual, al igual que otros multilingües valoran cada una de sus lenguas por igual. Mi lengua me hace quien soy. Yo soy mi lenguaje. RESPETA MI VOZ.

POR VANESSA SALGADO

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**SKILLS**  
SCHOOL KIDS INVESTIGATING  
LANGUAGE IN LIFE + SOCIETY

RESPECT MY LANGUAGE | RESPETA MI IDIOMA

FOTOGRAFÍA: DANIEL CHU | DISEÑO: SEBASTIAN FERRADA

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# 19 SKILLS Day

- Student researcher-activists **choose their own topics and present their work** at the annual SKILLS Day event at UC Santa Barbara
- This event is often the first time they have been recognized as **experts** by adults



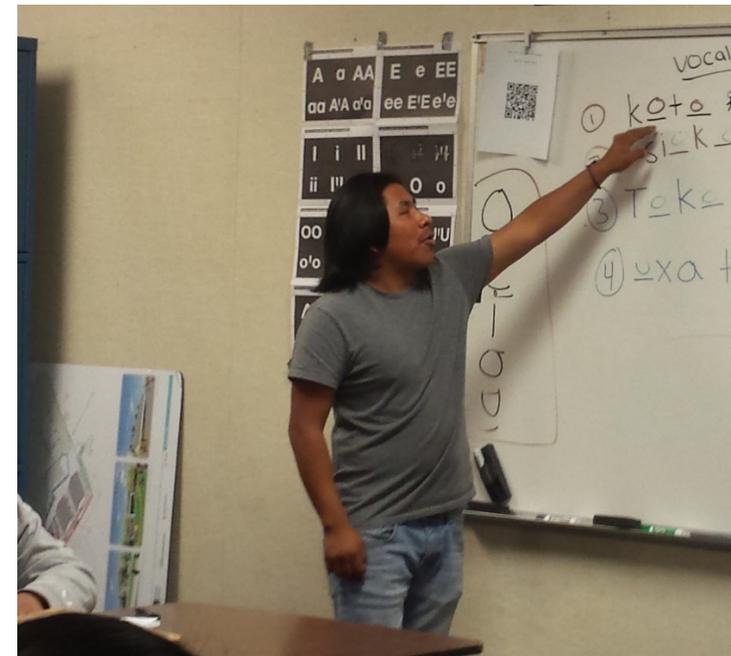
## 20 Valeria's affective agency

- “I became really angry [when she watched the politician’s anti-Spanish speech], because *I’m bilingual* and I speak two languages, English and Spanish. It offended me, it made me cry, because it made me feel unimportant, compared to the people that speak only English. That any other language is inferior to English. *Which is not true. Spanish is as valuable as English and as any other language in the world.*” —Valeria’s practice presentation for SKILLS Day (Ferrada et al. 2020: 90)



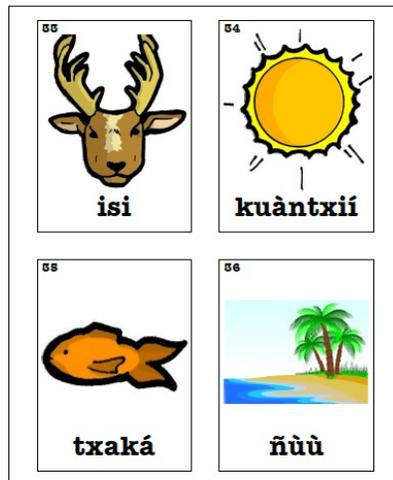
## 21 The MILPA collective

- **MILPA** = **M**exican **I**ndigenous **L**anguage **P**romotion and **A**dvocacy (MILPA 'cornfield')
- MILPA is a collaboration with members of **Mexican Indigenous diasporic communities living in California**, mostly Mixtec
- MILPA uses linguistic research to support the **linguistic self-determination** of these communities
  - Their languages are devalued in Mexico and often not even recognized in the US
- In one project, adult community members meet after a long day of manual labor to **develop writing systems** for their languages
  - Most have very little formal education in any language



# 22 MILPA's language maintenance/reclamation materials

- Once a writing system is developed, it is used to create language and literacy materials for **intergenerational language maintenance/reclamation**
  - Children often shift to English when they start to attend school due to racism



## 23 Veronica's reflection on racism against her Mexican Indigenous community

Veronica Cruz, Indigenous Mexican (Zapotec) undergraduate researcher

" As Indigenous people, we are often seen and treated as lesser than other members of the Latinx community. There was an instance a few years ago where my mom was called *oaxaquita* by a new Latinx neighbor, a term meant to belittle people of darker skin that are also presumed to be of lower class because of the state in Mexico they come from. Discrimination and colorism within our own community is not new. **A few of my Indigenous friends and I sometimes feel like we are a minority within a minority.**" (Bucholtz et al. 2023: 8-9)

"... The research project also led me to try and **be even more involved in my community** and pay attention to Indigenous communities and the struggles they face." (Bucholtz et al. under review)

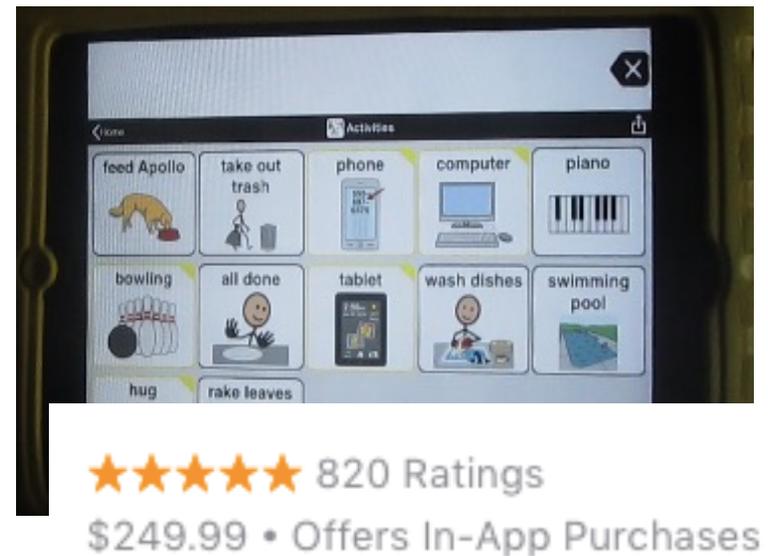
## 24 Communicative justice for bilingual Autistic youth who don't use speech

- Clinical research **pathologizes** children and youth who don't use speech as “deficient”
- Research is **family-centered** and focuses on José's interactional competence
- Research was led by Erika Prado (a first-generation college student who was an undergraduate at the time) in collaboration with José's family



## 25 José's communicative resources

- Gesture, facial expression, touch
- Vocalizations
- Computer tablet app – Proloquo2Go
- Receptive bilingualism



# 26 José's interactional skills in his getting-dressed routine (Prado & Bucholtz 2021)



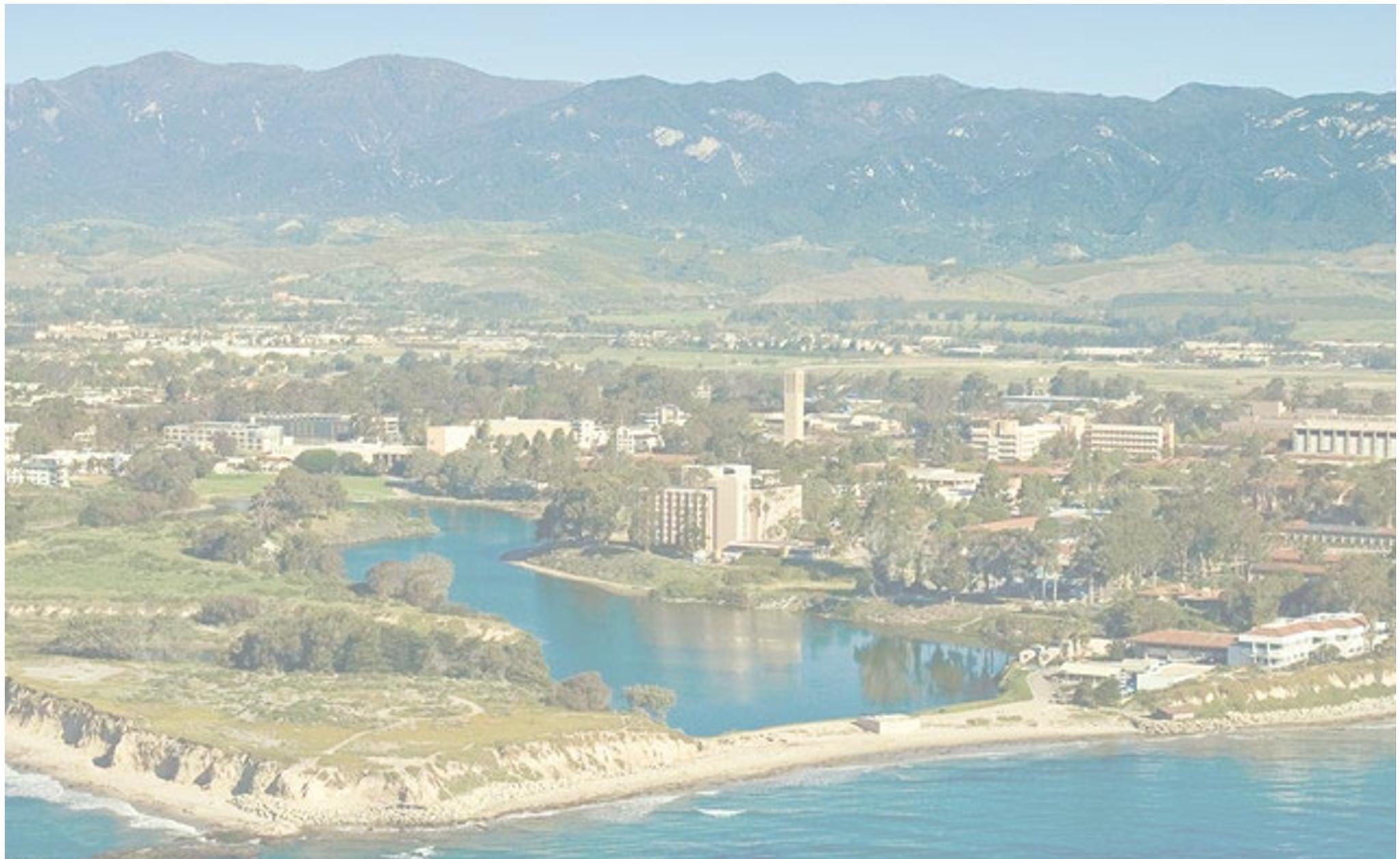
*Fig. 1: José places the shirt over his head and starts to put his head inside the sleeve. Sister says, “Uh oh” and tries to help him*



*Fig. 2: Sister and José jointly notice that there is a problem that needs to be resolved*



*Fig. 3: José hums and smiles as he looks at Sister, thus demonstrating to her that he too recognizes this problem from past experience*



# Discussion

## 27 Self-determination

- Community members chose **whether and how to participate**
- Community members **set the project agenda to some extent**
  - Selecting or shaping the focus
    - Which sometimes didn't focus centrally on language/linguistics
  - Developing interview questions and/or collecting and analyzing data
  - Sharing the results in:
    - academic and community presentations
    - scholarly publications
    - materials for community and/or family use
- But **a lot more work is needed** to achieve full self-determination

## 28 Accompaniment

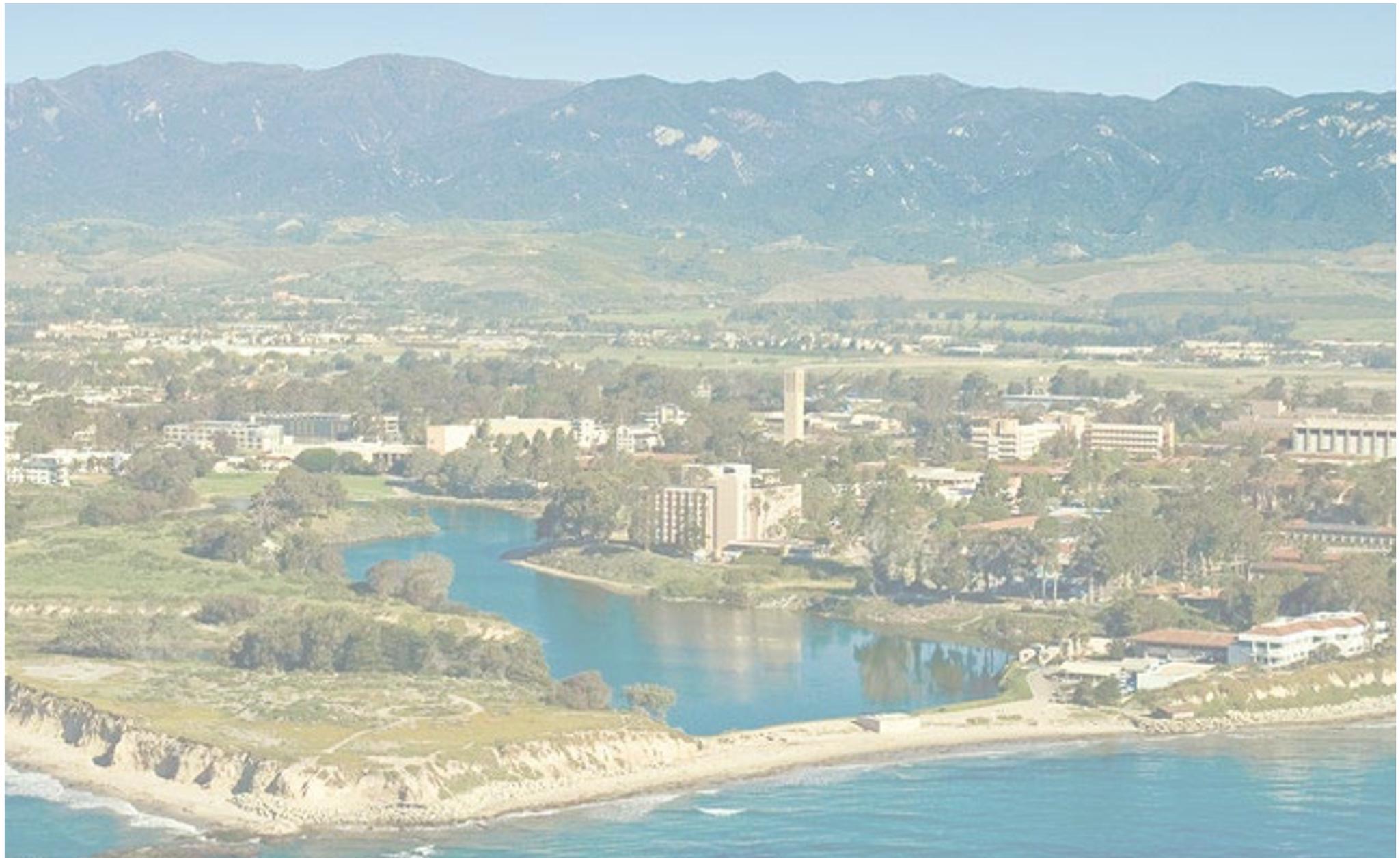
- Outsider researchers and more senior insider researchers **helped implement community members' project goals** as well as their broader personal and professional goals by:
  - Securing resources
  - Sharing knowledge
  - Assisting in the navigation of institutional structures
  - Taking on background tasks as needed
- But there are other, more ambitious and innovative goals we haven't been able to address due to **lack of funding and time**

## 29 Positionality

- In my current career stage and as a relatively privileged scholar, my top priority is to **accompany and support** researchers (especially students and community members) with less structural and institutional power
- But this requires a **behind-the-scenes** (and more superficial) relationship to each project, with less direct social connection with participants
- It also risks a kind of **colonial “collecting” stance** toward other people’s lives
- But this approach also allows me to **respect my own limits as a human being**, so I’ll cautiously continue in this direction

## 30 Critical reflexivity: Did these projects advance social justice?

- **Involved community members centrally** in the research process and were **guided by their priorities and goals**
  - Community-centered, but mostly not community-led
- **Benefits** for community collaborators of certain kinds
- However, **structural changes** are frustratingly small and slow
- As always, **collaborative research benefits academic researchers more than it benefits communities**



# Conclusion

# 31 The transformative impact of community-centered collaboration

- Community-centered collaboration is **more than research**
  - "research may not be the intervention that is needed" (Tuck & Yang 2014: 226)
    - And sometimes linguistics isn't the intervention that's needed (Bucholtz 2018)
- Community-centered collaboration is **social and emotional connection**
- Community-centered collaboration is **collective action**
- Community-centered collaboration **helps advance social justice**
  - in the world
  - in the discipline(s)

## 32 Humanizing linguistics

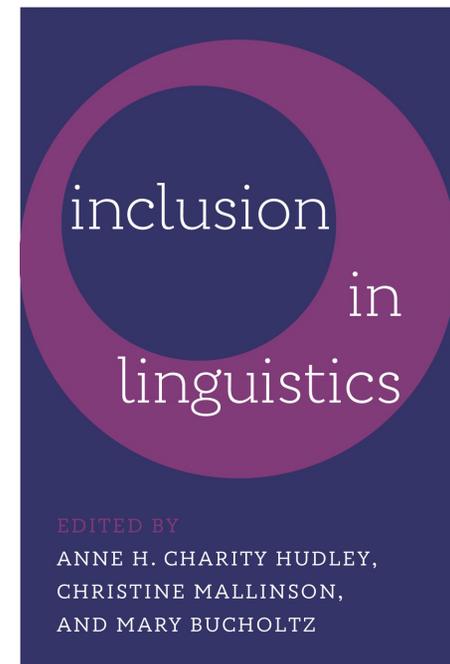
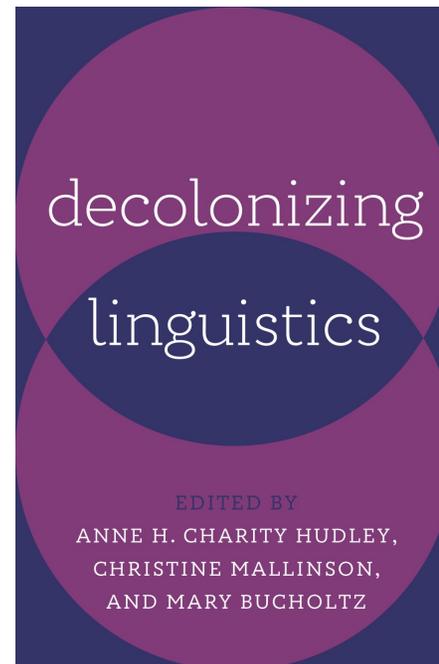
- Cf. Paris & Winn 2014, *Humanizing Research*
- **Centering people** and their expertise, goals, and experiences
  - Rather than analyzing decontextualized language structures (Leonard 2018)
- **Acknowledging our own humanity** as researchers (and educators and members of departments and professions and communities)
- **Bringing our own and our collaborators' humanity into the work we do** (including our scholarly writing) rather than suppressing, denying, or ignoring it
  - Our affects (including negative affects like frustration, doubt, or despair)
  - Our embodied lived experiences
  - Our identity and sense of self

# 33 What sociolinguists can do to advance social (and sociolinguistic) justice

- **We can't advance social justice in the world if we don't advance social justice in our discipline**
- **Resist** the imperatives of the neoliberal academy (Bucholtz et al. 2020)
  - Slow down the research process; don't "scale up"; don't obsess over "deliverables" (if possible)
  - Give up your power when it functions to subordinate others
  - Be humble, listen, read, learn, acknowledge your mistakes
- **Advocate** for different forms of knowledge to be rewarded
- Break down the gates and **change the rules**, no matter who you are
  - Students can often be catalysts of change just by asking the right questions (like Jamaal did in my graduate class)

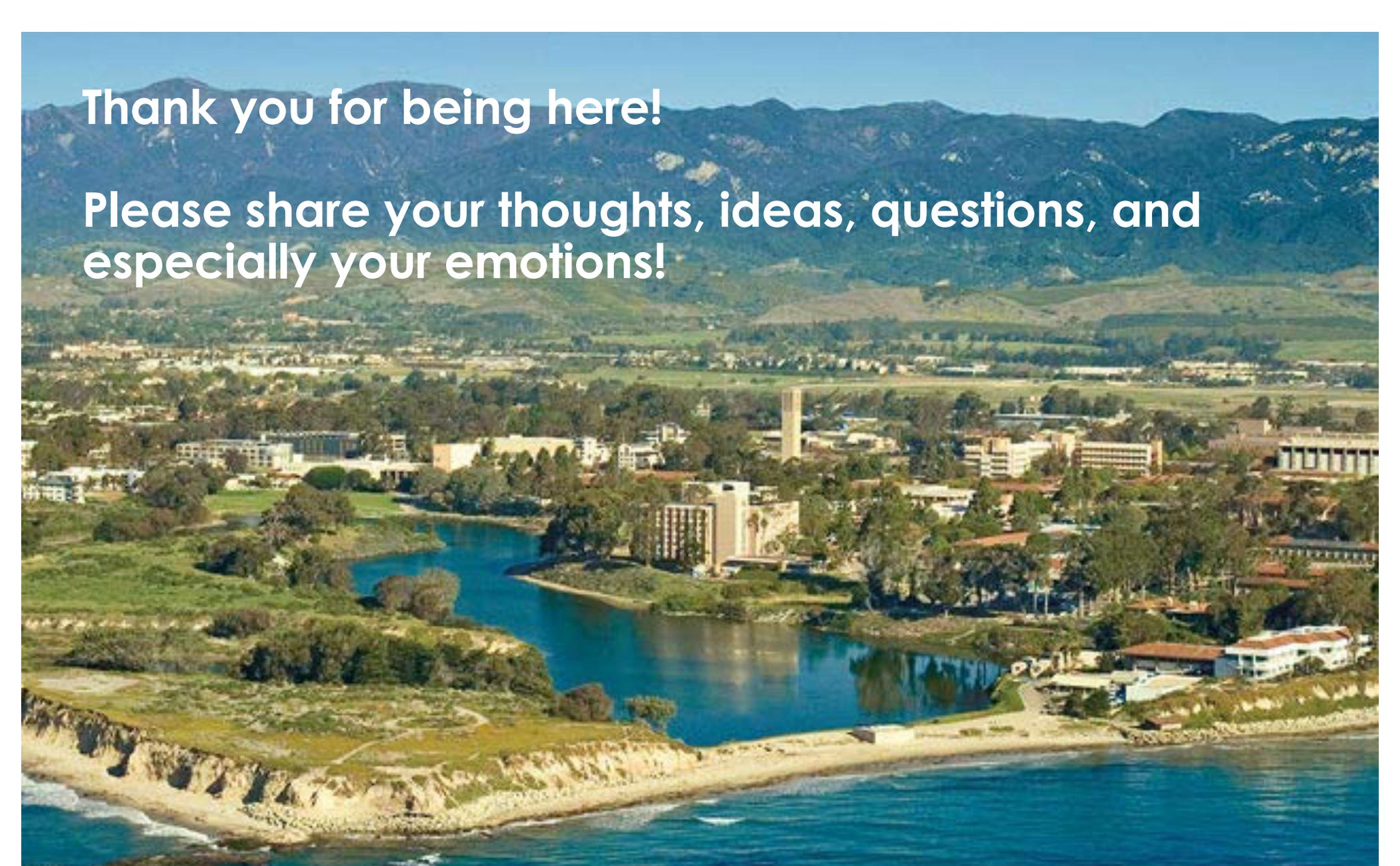
# 34 For more ideas and information: Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz in press a, b

- Expected publication date: **February 2024**
- Created through a purposefully (though imperfectly) **inclusive, decolonizing editorial process**
- 20 chapters in each volume
- Discusses research, teaching, community partnerships, and the profession
- Authors from varied linguistic subfields and adjacent disciplines
  - Mostly in the US—**more work is urgently needed on social justice in linguistics in other parts of the world!**



# Acknowledgments

- I'm grateful to **my collaborators and students**, especially those who are members of the communities that I work with to advance social and sociolinguistic justice
- Thanks to **our funders**: the California Humanities Council (grant 17113845), the National Science Foundation (grants 1650114, 1660355, 1757654), the University of California UC-HBCU Grant program, and the UCSB Academic Senate, Institute for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research, and the Office of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities
- Thank you to the **conference organizers** and all the **presenters**

An aerial photograph of the University of California, Santa Barbara campus. The image shows a mix of green lawns, trees, and various university buildings. A prominent feature is a large, winding blue pond or reservoir in the center. In the foreground, a sandy beach meets the ocean, with waves breaking on the shore. The background is dominated by a range of blue mountains under a clear sky.

**Thank you for being here!**

**Please share your thoughts, ideas, questions, and especially your emotions!**

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