

Charleen Adams
Harvard School of Public Health
677 Huntington Ave
Boston, 02115
Phone: 626-841-3937
E-mail: cdadams@hsph.harvard.edu

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Linguistic Society of America
522 21st St NW 120
Washington, DC 20006

Re: Response to the letter against Prof Pinker

Dear Alyson Reed and LSA Members,

I write with concern and disappointment having had the misfortune of seeing a letter signed by colleagues asking for Prof Pinker's removal from certain aspects of the LSA.

While my doctorate is in genetics, I also have an MA-TESL degree in applied linguistics from Northern Arizona University and am part of the linguistics community.

I have long-prided myself in having gained knowledge of how language works and apply this knowledge, as a geneticist, to study the causes of disease in humans. Linguists are some of the most enlightened and informed people on the planet, due to a uniquely specialized understanding of social discourse and being culturally meta-literate. But on this matter, our colleagues who went after Prof Pinker appear caught up in a discourse they do not understand. Their actions, which seem deeply clouded by ignorance and cultural *illiteracy*, can cause harm to the academic community in proportion to the power that linguists hold. For this reason, I am concerned about the reactive and authoritarian demands set out in the letter.

Specifically, the signers engaged in a performative ritual, demanding Prof Pinker's credentials in the group be removed (ritually exiled), so as to purify the LSA from ideological crimes they hold him to have committed. The evidence for the supposed thought-crimes are a handful of cherry-picked tweets they claim "inevitably" mean what they think they mean. The signers try to paint a story of guilt, more strained and more painful than an exegetical work of art, worse (and more embarrassing) than an uncompromising, literalistic claim that the Bible is a cohesive, singular narrative. Having scoured Prof Pinker's tweets back six years, they plucked a few, divined, and gave them their least-charitable reading possible: they claim, with their omnipotent powers of interpretation, that the tweets downplay racism. "Downplaying racism", is, of course, a sin, and euphemistically tantamount to calling Prof Pinker a racist.

There isn't a more serious non-criminal accusation. Going after Prof Pinker, who has spent years documenting declines in violence concomitant with a rise in heightened moral sensitivity is

an unconscionable waste of resources and unethical. As linguists, at least those of us in applied linguistics, should be focused with laser precision on the causes of suffering and how we can use our knowledge of language to intercede. It's a distraction from our goal of using language to help the world to kill off one of our own. To sacrifice someone who has worked his entire life to understand the roots of the very things we as linguists try our hardest to understand is irresponsible and a squandering of our time and talent. We can do better.

The fields of linguistics are known to question orthodoxies. But the letter of demands demonstrates that the signers lack awareness of their involvement in a quintessential (and defining) cultural moment.

I believe it is a mistake to cave to the pressure of authoritarian demands that characterise academia at present, and I sincerely hope that the LSA listens to the voices of reason and not those of mobs with minds set on ritual purification.

Let's return our focus to where it should be: on how we can use language to do something good.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Charleen Adams'.

Charleen Adams, PhD MPH
MA-TESL