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DECONSTRUCTING STANDARD ENGLISH IDEOLOGY: ELEMENTS OF EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EDUCATION FOR OUR TIMES

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EDUCATION FOR OUR TIMES

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A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

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In Partial Fulfillment

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by

Gricelda Carbajal

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Approved by:

Dr. Sunny Hyon, First Reader

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I argue for the deconstruction of the standard English ideology, which holds that standard English is inherently superior to other English varieties. I examine the ideology's detrimental effects on those who speak and use nonstandard English varieties, mostly minorities and people of color, who are linguistically profiled and marginalized because of the ways they speak. The ideology can also generate intensified reactions to perceived grammar and usage errors in those who subscribe to its prescriptivist views, and can promote judgments and stereotypes which break down communication and connection between people. To help dismantle the standard English ideology, I review the work of scholars in linguistics, sociolinguistics, and various English fields that provide support for the essential equality and legitimacy of all English varieties and ultimately, their speakers. Critically informed by linguistic fact, socio-historical analyses of the origins of standardization, and the ways the ideology feeds racism, language and literacy instructors can then implement balanced pedagogies that are inclusive and take students' home language into account while simultaneously teaching standard English to help close the achievement gap between linguistically diverse students and more privileged groups. Such critical language awareness is buttressed by knowledge of seminal U.S. court cases and education policy which have sought to redress social justice, language, and education concerns in a society that continues to be segregated along racial and poverty lines.

Studies show that current trends in language educational policy reveal a shift away from discourses of achieving equity and toward rhetoric that reflects more privileged student groups. This new era is anti-bilingual education and in favor of foreign language enrichment programs, which benefit more students, but permit educational inequalities to remain unchallenged.

Studies also show that language practitioners' attempts to be inclusive can result in an attitude of avoidance in which the explicit teaching of standard English is evaded. Such contradictions and complexities of shifting conceptual grounds are reflected in Writing Center scholarship which details how an attitude of avoidance has left many multilingual and even monolingual students nowhere to go for sentence-level instruction, making it even more difficult for many students to access structures of privilege. I find theoretical and practical guidance in writing centers' shifts towards transformative language and literacy praxis that is truly inclusive and aims to leave no one out.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to the memory of *mi papá*. *Mi padre*, like all

immigrant fathers, had a dream for all his children and grandchildren. He missed

his chance to learn to read and write, but he dreamed that we would not and that

we would have good jobs and do well in life. *Te extraño, mi viejito.*

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CHAPTER ONE

DECONSTRUCTING STANDARD ENGLISH IDEOLOGY

Introduction

This thesis deconstructs standard English ideology. It outlines its negative effects on students, cultural groups, and the society at large. It examines the ways in which the ideology is used to disenfranchise language users of other English varieties, most commonly people of color and lower socio-economic status. This paper argues for the dismantling of the standard English ideology so that a critical approach to language and literacy education rooted in linguistic fact and linguistic and social justice can emerge.

I compare the writing of this thesis to the project of growing a garden. In this analogy, the goal was to create a "garden" that is not only visually attractive, but sustainable in its conception and design. So, visualize, if you will, a tract of beautifully landscaped land displaying clusters of diverse trees and plants. A soft walkway winds gently through an easy maze of grassy pods. A magnolia, a maple, cherry blossoms, and some evergreens dot the well-tended, stately plot. Rocks of various shapes and sizes encircle and display groupings of organic, well-trimmed shrubs and flowering plants. In this balanced ecosystem, all the elements belong. The cultivated garden is integrated, life-giving, and sound.

As in the metaphorical garden of magnificent diversity, in this thesis, all the languages, language varieties, and accents belong. The essential value of all

ways of communicating lending life and beauty to the sliver of paradise, is the point.

A bird's eye view reveals three chapters. Chapter One deconstructs the standard English ideology. To this aim, I review literature that helps dismantle standard English ideologies and affirms the equality of all Englishes. I integrate an approach to English grammar that is descriptive and informed by research in linguistics and sociolinguistics. I include an overview of the beginnings of standardization and the subsequent stigmatization of nonstandard variations. I call attention to the intense and unwarranted reactions to grammar error experienced and promoted by language teachers (including myself, pre-graduate school intervention), and review a set of warrantable linguistic facts as set forth by Rosina Lippi-Green (2012) in *English with an Accent, Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States.* I end this section with a compelling exposition of arguments for the dismantling of standard English ideology, which Greenfield (2011) shows feeds racism.

In Chapter Two, I lay out pedagogical elements reflective of a deconstructed standard language ideology. I describe critical language awareness that strives for inclusive and equitable language and literacy education. Critically, the teaching of standard English is integral to equitable education, as is the inclusion of students' home languages. In the "garden" of my analogy, teaching standard English is part and parcel of the work we do as language teachers. We want our students to communicate with awareness,

agency, and creativity. Some will one day write a novel, a rap song, a thesis, or a

dissertation that will call on all the languages of their linguistic repertoires. Hence,

in Chapter Three I make a case for the translingual stance. I align with Gilyard

(2016), when he declares, "The arc of moral composition studies is long, King

might say, but it bends toward translingualism" (p. 284). I end with a nod to

García's (2017) call to cultivate "mindfulness of difference." He calls on the

language fields to resist "the imperative to retrofit Mexican Americans into a

white/black race paradigm" (p. 32). In light of this call, I highlight the framework of

cultural wealth narratives, a game-changing conceptual theory for me as an

immigrant and an educator. Throughout the thesis I foreground a trajectory of

personal and intellectual growth and the value of an education as a Latina

woman returning to school in middle age and discovering liberating conceptions

of language, literacy, and culture. Together, these analyses help shape a 21st

century understanding of language and literacy for our times—one that can heal

linguistic prejudice, help disable a racist system, and celebrate the linguistic

hybridity that resides within each of us.

What is Standard English Ideology and Why is it Harmful?

In simplest terms, standard English ideology refers to the belief in the

inherent superiority of standardized Englishes over all other English variations. At

the core of the standard English ideology is the belief in the supremacy of the

standard dialect over all other dialects. Sociolinguists Wardhaugh and Fuller

(2021) write that "the term 'dialect' often implies nonstandard or even substandard, and can connote various degrees of inferiority, with that connotation of inferiority carried over to those who speak a dialect" (p. 27). While linguists and sociolinguists recognize and study the socially-prescribed prestige of standard English, and the stigma associated with the word dialect, they also speak of every variety of the language as a dialect—as a legitimate, non-inferior dialect, "a particular way of speaking a language which is associated with a particular region or social group" (Wardhaugh & Fuller, p. 402). The standard is the dialect of prestige, yet its power is derived from sociopolitical factors, not linguistic factors. In sociolinguistics, which is the study of language in relation to social factors, the epigram "a language is a dialect with an army and a navy," is a common observation. (p.30).

The standard English ideology is hegemonic—dominant. The term hegemony attempts to conceptualize how power operates in society. According to Gee (2012) dominant discourses are "(re)produced through the social action of everyday life in institutions, communities, families, and individuals to reflect the principles and values that comprise seemingly universal truths. They are inherited from the past and often passively accepted and reproduced in ways that maintain power imbalances, although with some degree of resistance." (Gee, as cited in Valdez et al, 2016, p. 605). The standard English ideology, like other hegemonic discourses, has achieved its dominance in society "through broad consensus and acceptance of [the ideology] as some sort of 'truth'" (Wardhaugh

& Fuller, p. 66). The so-called "truth" of the inherent supremacy of standard English necessitates the assumption that there is a scientific system of language appraisals through which languages can be evaluated. However, there is no such objective system of language evaluations. It does not exist. Still, many believe that standard English is the one correct language variation—a dangerous assumption to subscribe to, as the evaluative judgements about languages tend to extend to their speakers. Ultimately, when we believe in good and bad languages, we come to believe in good and bad language speakers—we end up believing in good and bad *people*.

In this socially constructed order of hierarchical language evaluations, one dialect becomes the standard, the only standard that matters, against which all other varieties of the language are measured. Since the standard language ideology maintains that "that there is one dialect which is superior to others, and that this is a 'natural' order of things," (Wardhaugh & Fuller, p. 55), it uncritically degrades other language varieties, especially varieties "spoken historically by people of color in the face of oppression" (Greenfield, p. 44). In this seemingly "natural" order of things, the ideology comes to form the foundation of economic and political theory or policy. Fortified by unquestioned habit and belief, the ideology's structures legitimize the evaluation of language varieties, and as a deeply regrettable result, their speakers, who under the ideology's doctrine, are also deemed deficient.

The standard English ideology is used to discriminate against many groups of people, among them English language learners and second language speakers. Their English is often compared to the way native speakers speak the language. However, within the language multi-competence perspective, which centers second language users as "independent persons in their own right rather than the shadows of native speakers," many so-called "normal" language issues such as accent, "are neither here nor there" (Cook, 2016, p. 3). For those of us concerned not with the monolingual perspective, which yields research "inextricably linked to monolingual native speakers," (p.3) nor with the subordinate status it confers upon multilinguals, but with the distinctive qualities of second language users, the multicompetence perspective constitutes "'revolutionary' rather than 'normal' science" (Kuhn, 1962, as cited in Cook, 2016, p. 3).

The harmful effects of the standard English ideology are insidious. Not only does the ideology privilege some and disadvantage others, it also undermines the confidence of speakers of non-standard Englishes. Sociolinguists Wardhaugh and Fuller write that "it is not uncommon for speakers of nonstandard varieties to consider their own language deficient because they have accepted the standardized language ideology as 'truth'" (Wardhaugh & Fuller, p. 67). Generations of English speakers repeatedly disadvantaged by race, wealth, and language, then come to believe the deficit narratives that are circulated about them. Lindemann and Moran (2017) write about how the term

"broken English" is used in the context of the non-native English of English learners. They find that "this term is used to construct the 'other' in U.S. society and is often used as a descriptor for people who are described negatively in other ways (e.g., criminals)" (Lindemann & Moran, as cited in Wardhaugh & Fuller, p. 67). Thus, when it's not the discourses of the "broken English" of "criminals," it's the "deficiencies" of the nonstandard Englishes used by black and brown people that target and profile linguistically marginalized groups. These deficit discourses lead marginalized groups to internalize negative societal views about their language varieties and about them, as people.

Related to the standard English ideology are the purist and monoglossic ideologies. The purist ideology demands that language not be subject to change, that it retain a pure state. Monoglossic ideologies value monolingualism over multilingualism. The "one nation-one language ideology," for example, "demands strict indexicality between a language and a nation" (Wardhaugh & Fuller, p. 67). These belief systems, like the standard English ideology, function to manage difference and buttress racist attitudes.

In "The 'Standard English' Fairy Tale: A Rhetorical Analysis of Racist Pedagogies and Commonplace Assumptions about Language Diversity," Greenfield (2011) writes that "language prejudice is not a figment of the imagination. People across the world form strong opinions in response to the negative assumptions they make about different languages, and those attitudes undoubtedly have material consequences for the opportunities made available to

speakers" (p. 50). A central goal of Greenfield's project is to show that "it is not language which causes listeners to make assumptions about speakers, but the attitudes held by the listeners towards the speaker that cause them to extend that attitude towards the speaker's language" (p. 50). She provides plentiful examples of the systemic injustices of a system hyperconscious of race. Before we get there, I offer an anecdote of my own experience as a former proponent of the standard English ideology.

An Awakening

The year is 2021, I am 50 years old, and I am about to take a graduate level course titled English Grammar, which is a required course for the master's in English and Writing Studies that I have finally returned to school to pursue. I'm thrilled to be back in school, the dream of additional formal education too long deferred. I am an English teacher and I've come to the master's program expecting to clarify and reinforce my knowledge of the language and its grammar rules which ensure that I can use and teach "good English." In my mind, that "good English" is the variety called standard English—the one correct and superior form of the language.

For our English Grammar class, my professor has selected the textbook *Navigating English Grammar, A Guide to Analyzing Real Language,* by professors of English and linguistics Lobeck and Denham (2014). The co-authors begin their book by writing that "humans have always been fascinated by

language, and the study of language has always been a fundamental part of intellectual inquiry" (Lobeck & Denham, p.1). Indeed, I know! Since I was young, I have always enjoyed learning about and working with language, both my native Spanish, and English, the language of the country I immigrated to at the age of five, the United States of America. Now that I am in graduate school to continue learning all there is to know about the English language, it seems logical that I should have to take this course. I like grammar. I am ready to learn its rules.

Or am I?

For, what if, through this study of language, one discovers that the ideas and beliefs about language one has subscribed to and the rhetoric about language one has been using all along are wrong? That they are not based on objective data, that they do not reflect what we know about language today? What happens when a class and its textbook suddenly awaken one from a kind of ideological sleep, to see, for the first time, that her notions about language are based on erroneous, problematic, and prejudicial beliefs?

Several things happen upon this kind of seismic discovery. I know. It's a shock to the system. All my life I thought the word "correct" applied only to the language variety called standard English that I learned in school, a notion at the core of my standard English ideology, which new learning suddenly poked and like a bubble, it burst. I woke up.

All at once, the delusion of my standard English ideology became glaringly clear. Right away, three ideas presented in my new grammar textbook stood out.

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One, I had never paused to consider that there are multiple standard Englishes across the globe, all of which naturally exhibit ample variation between them. (In addition to General American and Standard British English, there are standardized Englishes of Australia, Scotland, New Zealand, Canada, and India, among others). How exactly, was my American Standard English variation the one correct form I had taken up the banner to defend? Two, since I considered nonstandard Englishes deviations from the standard form, I believed those variations to be wrong. And three, the worst of the misconceptions that flow from the belief in a hierarchy of language evaluations—the automatic judgment that follows such a presumption—that *the speakers* of nonstandard Englishes are wrong, that *people* are wrong.

In an instance of clarity, the implications of my unexamined belief in the supremacy of standard English became devastatingly stark. I saw my ignorance, bias, and prejudice. My belief system began to unravel. A particularly revelatory moment comes to mind when I read a passage on prepositions in my class's grammar textbook, which, as its subtitle states, analyzes not the fixed English grammar of my fantasy, but the structure of the *real* language of people everywhere. A tiny bit of data on prepositions, a category of words I tend to nitpick and fuss about in my own and others' language use, stopped me in my tracks:

Prepositions have been losing their lexical meaning as they have come to serve more grammatical functions over the last 500 years or so. One

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piece of evidence for their lack of real meaning is that prepositions can

vary by dialect. So if you live in New York, you wait *on line* for a movie,

while you wait *in line* most other places. In the Pacific Northwest, you do

something *on accident* while elsewhere you do it *by accident.* And are you

sick *to your stomach* or sick *at your stomach?* Depends on where you're

from! (Lobeck & Denham, p. 190).

Here was a kind of grammar textbook that was new to me. It did not

prescribe inviolable rules but was descriptive of various English grammars and it

affirmed the diversity of English at all levels of the language. The authors'

conception of English is not as a single language, but more accurately as "a

continuum of (many) different language varieties or dialects," and "as a (vast)

collection of different varieties spoken by both native and non-native speakers

around the globe" (p. 2). The authors preface their guide by stating key

intentions, such as to describe how language works, to tease out linguistic fact

from linguistic fiction, and to equip students with tools to make informed

decisions about language usage. They assert that "the idea that some version of

grammar is more 'correct' than another has no basis in linguistic fact, and that all

language varieties are equally valid grammatical systems worthy of study" (xiii).

Their approach to language reflects key principles of linguist Noam Chomsky's

scientific approach to language, and sociolinguist William Labov's findings that

variation is inherent to linguistic structure.

From there my standard English ideology continued to crumble, like when I said out loud in class something about the importance of learning the grammar of the standard variety in order to preserve its beauty and my professor pointed out that beauty is subjective, that what one person considers beautiful might differ from what someone else finds beautiful. Though I knew that beauty is subjective, I had failed to apply this common-sense wisdom to language, and I remember feeling embarrassed and wanting to hide somewhere for a while. My hierarchy of language values had blinded me to the essential legitimacy *and beauty* of all ways of communicating. Soon, however, my embarrassment changed to sadness, as I thought about all the missed opportunities to affirm other Englishes and natural language variations, but most importantly, their speakers—my students.

In the end, my sadness has given way to gratitude. I am thankful for the opportunity to learn, and for the freedom from the rigid constraints of my standard English ideology, which continues to dissolve. Absent my tendency to react with linguistic judgment, my appreciation for other languages, language variations, *and their speakers*, has gained life and vitality. Learning has unlocked my mind and heart. My interests now extend to all ways of speaking, to the many questions of social and linguistic justice surrounding language and literacy, and to the creative and healing potential of translingual societies. I feel capable of grappling with the complexities of language with new eyes, with the intellectual

curiosity which, like language itself, is a natural part of the human DNA, an idea that will be discussed in the next section.

Real English Grammars

<u>Descriptivism</u>

Noam Chomsky revolutionized the field of linguistics in the 1950s, when he posited that humans are genetically endowed with the ability to intuit the grammar of the languages that they are exposed to as children. In other words, we learn the grammars of our childhood language(s) organically, because we are innately wired for it and because languages are naturally rule-based systems—all languages and all language varieties—which our brain then processes with facility (especially as children!). Whereas language experts had previously derived a language's grammatical structures from studying large amounts of language data, Chomsky helped turn the focus to the individual's use of language. From people's intuitive understanding of a language's grammatical structures, what he termed a Universal Grammar (UG) that is part of the innate biological component of the human language faculty, people acquire a language's syntax and subsequent use of the language. Chomsky developed models and principles that are common to all languages. He views language as a uniquely human behavior and one we can study "just like we study the circulatory system or the solar system by examining data … constructing hypotheses that attempt to explain and describe these data and testing those hypotheses against

additional data. In so doing, we construct a model of how language (or the solar or circulatory system) works" (Lobeck & Denham, p. 20). Chomsky's study of language grammar is descriptive, it describes the natural and contemporary use of language—with explanations of how language structures function as they do. His approach to language is objective, devoid of "socially evaluative opinions about good and bad and right and wrong ways to use language" (Lobeck & Denham, p. 273).

William Labov, known as the father of variationist sociolinguistics, also promoted the idea that all language varieties are equally legitimate linguistic systems. Unlike Chomsky, whose approach tends to downplay language change and variation in quest of a fundamental uniformity, Labov shows how language variation is pervasive, highly structured, and normal. Labov studies language empirically, from a perspective that considers how a diverse range of speakers uses the language in everyday situations. His variationist studies are socially realistic and responsible; they have helped counter misconceptions about stigmatized English variations like African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and other dialects. Labov looks at how a community of users utilizes a language, the how and why people speak their languages as they do. When we study language as Labov does, through a sociolinguistics lens, we see that "it makes no sense to talk about someone's naturally acquired grammar as 'better' than someone else's" (Lobeck and Denham, p. 273).

In 1974, objective and responsible approaches to language study such as Chomsky's and Labov's propelled the National Council of Teachers of English (NTCE) to put forth its Resolution on the Students' Right to Their Own Language which states:

We affirm students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their upbringing or any dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars have long denied that the myth of a standard American dialect is valid. The assertion that any dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt by one social group to exercise its dominion over the other. Such a statement leads to false advice for speakers and writers and immoral counseling for humans. A nation proud of its heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We strongly affirm that teachers must have the experience and training that will enable them to respect diversity and defend the right of students in their own language. (NCTE, 1974, p.1)

However, thirty-five years after the NCTE Resolution, cultural critic Stanley Fish (2009) would advise professors of composition courses as follows: "First, you must clear your mind of [the following…]: 'We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style' (Fish, as cited in Young, 2010, p. 110). Fish bases his rejection of students' dialects on the rationale that it makes them "vulnerable to prejudice," and while standard English serves to protect the status quo, that should be reason enough for teaching it to students. In short, the NCTE Resolution had done little to dismantle the standard language ideology for Fish and others, and the language and literacy battlefield was rife with controversy. To Fish's argument that composition instructors

dismiss students' home language, scholar Vershawn Ashanti Young (2010) fires back:

> But dont nobody's language, dialect, or style make them "vulnerable to prejudice." It's ATTITUDES. It be the way folks with some power perceive other people's language. Like the way some view, say, black English when used in school or at work. Black English dont make it own-self oppressed. It be negative views about other people usin they own language, like Fish expressed in his *NYT* blog, that make it so. (Young, p. 110).

In his response, Young implicates the language attitudes that would discriminate users of nonstandard Englishes. Although sociolinguists distinguish between language ideologies and language attitudes, in this writing I work in the areas where these two strands of study overlap and influence each other, where entrenched ideas and practices about language are not easy to change. Language ideologies influence generations and can continue to thrive through decades and even centuries. For example, I would be born at least a decade after Chomsky's proposed theories of universal grammar and Labov's language variation studies, and right around the NCTE's resolution, yet, somehow, I still absorbed the idea of standard English as the fixed and ideal form, a conception of language more aligned with how scholars viewed language in the eighteenth

century, not the mid-twentieth century. I attribute my antiquated education to the sleepy English Literature and teaching credential program of my undergraduate studies, but also to my nearly thirty-year delay in returning to school for advanced studies. The result was that for the better part of three decades I was a secondary education English teacher who regularly interacted with fellow prescriptivist colleagues. We constantly complained about our students' "poor" English and failed to see our role in the perpetuation of linguistic prejudice and racist pedagogies. Thus, before returning to school and being exposed to critical language and literacy research, before learning about "The Linguistic Facts of Life," as Rosina Lippi-Green (2012) titles the first chapter of her book, and before I understood how standard English ideology feeds systemic racism, I went through life lost in my reactions to the experience of grammar error.

Prescriptivism and the "Experience" of Grammar Error

In his essay titled "The Phenomenology of Error," Joseph M. Williams (1981) writes about "the unusual ferocity" with which "otherwise amiable" folks react to errors of standard English grammar and usage. (p. 152). Williams' exploration of "those deep psychic forces that perceived linguistic violations seem to arouse in otherwise amiable people," (p. 153) is illuminating because it sheds light on the exaggerated reactions to grammar error that afflict many English teachers. His inquiry is useful in the way that clearly depicting the nature of something brings it into sharp focus and perhaps we see it clearly for the first

time, sort of in the way that reading Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is helpful. We continue to study this classic American novel in middle schools and high schools despite its inclusion of racial epithets and depictions of a stomach-churning, very ugly type of racism in the United States in the 1930s; yet, it is precisely the portrayal of the ugliness of racism that makes plain for its readers the malignancy of prejudice. Likewise, Williams' essay on how standard English ideology can generate unreasonable reactions to perceived language grammar and usage errors is helpful in shining a light not only on said absurd reactions, but also on the relationship between the standard English ideology and prescriptivism, which in grammar refers to the rules of how one should speak and write a language "according to some authority … rules [which] have social, even moral, values attached to them" (Lobeck & Denham, p. 5). A prescriptivist mindset generates judgment and injustice, yet grammar and usage mistakes are common, i.e., we all make them.

In his essay, Williams quotes Zinsser (1981), who in his English language manual *On Writing Well,* uses terms like "*detestable vulgarity … garbage … atrocity … horrible … oaf … idiot … and simple illiteracy*" (Zinsser, as cited in Williams, p. 152) to critique common English grammar and usage which Zinsser disapproves of. Zinsser also finds it problematic when writers write the word *OK* or use the word *myself* in nonprescriptive ways, as in *He invited Mary and myself to dinner.* (p.152). Williams writes that he is puzzled by the intensity of emotion some language experts experience in their perception of grammatical error and

observes that "the language some use to condemn linguistic error seems far more intense than the language they use to describe more consequential social errors—a hard bump on the arm, for example—that require a sincere but not especially effusive apology" (Williams, p.153). It is as if errors of grammar and usage were part of more injurious social behavior, the kind that require that we apologize for them. Yet clearly, grammar and usage errors do not require an apology.

Williams struggles to understand the heat invested in condemning linguistic violations "whose consequence impinge not at all on our personal space" (p.153). So, what is the psychological source of those "feelings on the nerves" when we "make error a part of our conscious field of attention" (p.154) leading us to equate linguistic error to more serious social behavior?

In his search for the origins of linguistic intolerance, Williams comes across one kind of research which has a long tradition: the kind that interviews "hundreds of teachers and editors and writers and scholars about their attitudes toward matters of usage ranging from *which* referring to a whole clause to split infinitives, to [using] *enthuse* as a verb" (p.154). He names the research of Sterling Leonard, Albert Marckwardt, Raymond Crisp, the institute of Education English Research Group at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and the *American Heritage Dictionary* as examples. In a tongue in cheek way, Williams concludes that "the trouble with this kind of research…, with asking people whether they think *finalize* is or is not good usage, is that they are likely to

answer" (p.154). Not only does Williams show that individuals are not always the best judges of their own language use and are likely to give answers that misrepresent their habits of speech, but "merely by being asked, it becomes manifest that they have been invested with an institutional responsibility that will require them to judge usage by the standards they think they are supposed to uphold. So, we cannot be surprised that when asked, Zinsser rejects *impact* as a verb, even though *impact* has been used as a verb at least since 1601" (p.154). Another problem with interviewing various language experts and posing "an indefinite number of questions about an indefinite number of items of usage," is that "we can, merely by asking, accumulate an indefinite number of errors, simply because whoever we ask will feel compelled to answer … we will inevitably end up with more errors than we began with" (p.154). Moreover, many rules that find themselves into language handbooks are of the kind that we do not notice easily. Williams explains, "we note neither their observation, nor their violation, they constitute a kind of folklore of usage" (p.161). Perhaps, then, we should not try to honor every single grammar rule that has found its way into a manual, since more than likely, none will notice when we violate this type of rule that generally goes unheeded. So, already, as common side-effects of prescriptivism, we can list overabundance of possible grammar and usage errors, some of them the kind we do not notice readily; and heightened reactions to those multitudinous errors. Prescriptivism, it appears, generates excessive preoccupation with correctness in language use; if left unchecked, that prescriptivist attitude leads to linguistic

intolerance. The following section further examines the untrue, unjust, and discriminatory markers of the standard English ideology and prescriptivism.

Critical Linguistics Data

As strict prescriptivism has yielded us a plethora of grammar errors to contend with and disproportionate error-reaction ratios, I turn now to research in the field of linguistics to directly refute the standard English ideology. In the first chapter of her (2012) tome *English with an Accent, Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States,* Lippi-Green names and analyzes five data points in linguistics that most linguists agree upon. In an effort to combat language prejudice, linguists have begun to acknowledge consensus on basic field research, and thus, the author begins her book with the following five linguistic truisms:

> ➢ All spoken language changes over time.
> ➢ All spoken languages are equal in terms of linguistic potential.
> ➢ Grammaticality and communicative effectiveness are distinct and independent issues.
> ➢ Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally, and functionally fundamentally different creatures.
> ➢ Variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level, and much of that variation serves an emblematic purpose. (Lippi-Green, p.6)

Ironically, these "least disputed issues around language structure and function, the ones linguists argue least about, are those which are most often

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challenged by non-linguists, and with the greatest vehemence" (p. 7). In this project to disassemble standard English ideology, which influences "personal and institutional policy and practice, with very real severe consequences," (p. 7), each of these linguistic facts merits targeted review.

All spoken language changes over time.

One of the unexamined beliefs of my standard English ideology (and likely of other prescriptivists whose knowledge of language is shallow) was that using standard English grammar ensured the continuity of the superior language of great writers like Shakespeare. Once again, I now notice the impoverished analysis within my ideology, in which a "tiny" fact escaped my consideration, namely, that today's standard English is not quite the English of Shakespeare's time. Lippi-Green (2012) observes that "even the most idealistic and nostalgic of language observers cannot argue that Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Austen, Woolf, Wharton, Morrison, and Eldrich (to take us from the fourteenth to the twenty-first century), some of the men and women who wrote what is commonly regarded as the great literature of the English-speaking world, all wrote the same English" (p. 7). Indeed, these writers all occupy places of distinction in our anthologies, yet each writer wrote in the particular English variation of his/her time.

Animating the standard English ideology is a desire to fossilize language and keep it from changing—a very difficult thing to do, as those who generate language—people—are marked by diversity and change. Our languages, as

everything else about us, will be diverse, too. Lobeck and Denham (2014),

provide an English timeline which depicts some of its change and variation

through the centuries. As an example of the language's evolution they cite

Beowulf, the oldest piece of English literature, written in Old English around the

10th century. Here are three of its lines:

Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
Listen! We of the Spear-Danes in days of yore,

Þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
Of those folk-kings, the glory have heard,

hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
How those noblemen brave-things did. (p. 3)

That was English! As time passed, that Old English gave way to Middle

English, spoken around 1100-1400. Although it looks more like our present-day

version of English, it is still quite different. Consider this excerpt from Chaucer's

The Wife of Bath's tale:

Experience, though noon auctoritee
Experience, though no authority

Were in this world, is right ynogh for me
Were in this world, were good enough for me

To speke of wo that is mariage;
To speak of woe that is marriage;

For, lordynges, sith I twelve yeers was of age,
For, masters, since I was twelve years of age,

Thonked be God that is eterne on lyve,
Thanks be to God Who is for ever alive,

Housbondes at chirche dore I have had five –
Of husbands at church door have I had five –

If so ofte myghte have ywedded bee –
If I could have been married so many times –

And alle were worthy men in hir degree.
And all were worthy men in their degree. (p. 3)

As a few more centuries go by, Middle English morphs into Early Modern English, spoken between 1500-1700, when Shakespeare lived. Although much more familiar to us, this now centuries-old English variation is still distinct from English spoken today. Thus, even a very basic timeline and a bit of objective review reveals many changes in a language and proves that "languages are actually dynamic systems, constantly in flux," (Lobeck & Denham, p. 4).

Greenfield (2011) eloquently asserts that "Living languages cannot be standardized" (p. 39). She points out that "the only standard languages—languages with finite boundaries and comprehensively accountable features—are dead languages" (p. 39). This profound truth, that the only standard languages are dead languages, should give us pause. It should help us realize that languages-in-use do just fine; in their resilience they do not become fossilized, incapable of change, and do not die with the passage of time.

All spoken languages are equal in terms of linguistic potential.

While our social conditioning has led many of us to believe that standard English is "the most proper, sophisticated, and clear way to speak English,"

(Greenfield, p. 35), the truth is that those descriptors can apply to all English varieties. Research has long laid out the rules of grammatical, lexical, phonological, and rhetorical structures of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), for example. Scholars like Geneva Smitherman (2001) show that Ebonics is "emphatically not 'broken' English, nor 'sloppy' speech nor a result of 'linguistic deficiencies,' or ignorance" (as cited in Greenfield, p. 36). The speakers of all languages and dialects deeply experience their languages' properness, sophistication, and clarity, as all are rule-governed and logical linguistic systems. Their users not only communicate meaningfully but do so "with a significant sense of historical, cultural, and personal importance" (Greenfield, p. 37).

Lippi-Green writes that "all spoken languages are equally capable of conveying a full range of ideas and experiences, and of developing to meet new needs as they arise" (p. 8). In the dissolution of my language ideology, it now seems obvious that "it's simply not a useful exercise to compare Swahili to Tagalog to Finnish in order to determine which one is the better or more efficient language: these are not cars" (p. 9).

While living languages are not material objects to be compared and evaluated, they are flexible vehicles for communication and can stretch and mold. As an example of this flexibility, English has recently changed to include new technological vocabulary that reflects advances in fields like science, medicine, and engineering. Similarly, speculates Lippi-Green (2012), "If through an unexpected shift in the world's economy the Arawakan speakers of Peru

suddenly were sole possessors of some resource everyone else needed, then Arawakan would develop a variety of new vocabularies and grammatical strategies to deal with their new power on the world stage" (p. 9). Languages adapt to suit the needs of their community of users, and they are efficient, too. When a language does not have a very clear way of dealing with a grammatical or semantic distinction, such as English, itself, which lacks a precise way of dealing with singular/plural distinction, some Chicago varieties will say *you/you guys*; in Belfast and some regions of the U.S *you/youse*; in much of the Southern U.S. *you/you'uns* or *ya'all*; and in parts of Pennsylvania, *you/yousns* will be used. (p.10). Variation, it turns out, is not only normal, but a necessary language characteristic that we employ as needed to communicate clearly.

Grammaticality does not equal communicative effectiveness.

Linguists and non-linguists think of grammar differently. Although both groups see grammar as a rule-driven structure of language, the rules which linguists study originate in the natural use of the language, while non-linguists focus on prescriptive rules, those that we learn in school, such as the rule of avoiding double negatives at all costs. Non-linguists consider *I don't know nobody* bad grammar. Linguists do not concern themselves with such socially-prescribed rules. In addition, non-linguists think of grammar as including the spoken and written languages, plus matters of style and punctuation. A sentence like *I would of helped if I had known* would be considered grammatical to a linguist, because its meaning is clear, because unlike non-linguists, linguists

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don't uphold "socially motivated grammaticality" (Lippi-Green, p.11). Lippi-Green

cites the analogy by Steve Pinker (1994), sometimes called the taxicab example,

to further illustrate the distinction between how linguists and non-linguists view

grammaticality. "The Taxicab Maxim: A taxicab must obey the laws of physics,

but it can flout the laws of the state of Michigan (or Massachusetts, London, etc.)"

(p.11). In other words, a sentence like *I ain't got none* would be deemed

ungrammatical by a prescriptivist, by someone who understands grammar as

socially constructed grammar. This sentence might get a rebuke such as "I hate it

when you use such ignorant, slovenly language. We do not talk like that" (p.12).

This example also hints at the power that social conventions have over us—they

can block communication. Importantly, Greenfield clarifies that communicative

effectiveness depends upon the judgments of the listeners. "For example, if a

listener has a preconceived notion about the educational background, social

status, or intelligence of the kind of person who would choose to say *I ain't*

happy, then upon hearing this statement the listener may tune out, be dismissive,

or feel her preconceptions have been affirmed; the intention on the part of the

speaker to engage meaningfully with the listener may be unsuccessful" (48).

Therefore, Greenfield maintains, "perfectly comprehensible differences in

speech" deemed as ungrammatical, feed prejudice and racism.

Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally, and functionally fundamentally different creatures.

Linguists do not equate or conflate spoken language with written language. Before the printing press was invented, people already spoke many languages. The beginning of printed books and standard written English began around 1476, when the merchant William Caxton opened the first printing shop in London, the center of commerce and education at the time. The merchant had to choose an English dialect for his printing machines, and "for practical reasons Caxton printed books in the East Midland dialect, the dialect (or collection of dialects) of London's rising middle classes, and the East Midland dialect became considered the 'standard' dialect of English" (Lobeck & Denham, p. 8). The invention of the printing press was a key factor that triggered the beginning of the standardization process.

Lobeck and Denham write that at the time, Latin, the language of the Christian church, was the language of scholarship and learning. They explain that "as English inevitably began to compete with Latin as the language of commerce, literature, and scholarship, English was found sorely wanting, and was considered corrupt" (p. 8). Scholars endeavored to "fix" and "improve" English. They enacted spelling reforms, integrated many Latin words into English, and sought to codify its grammar rules. Thus began the process of standardization. (p. 8).

The printing of the first dictionaries also helped bring about the existing sociolinguistic order. Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*, completed in 1755, is the most famous example. According to Lobeck and

Denham, "Although Johnson himself was aware of the futility of trying to fix meanings of words of a living language, his dictionary was nevertheless taken as authoritative, and others followed" (p. 9). In the preface to his dictionary, Johnson writes about the nearly impossible task of trying to pin down the meanings of words, which he compares to trees oscillating in a storm.

Along with the first dictionary writers, grammarians of this period also endeavored to "improve English by establishing the rules of English grammar" and working to keep the language from changing. Notably, John Dryden (1672), author of *Defence of the Epilogue*, laments that English "has been in a continual declination" (as cited in Lobeck & Denham, p.9). Dryden's fears seem to point to the human desire to prevent change, to define and know things, perhaps so as to always "get it right."

But then, as now, not all change was opposed. This period also saw the beginning of a new way to alter one's lot in life—through mastering particular speech patterns. The idea that "using the correct form of English was essential for social success" (Lobeck & Denham, p. 9) was born. Language formally acquired a new function—that of garnering people social acceptance and admiration. Schools got behind this new purpose for language and began using grammar manuals. An excerpt from the Preface of Joseph Aickin's (1693) *The English Grammar,* states, "My Child: your Parents have desired me, to teach you the English-Tongue. For though you can speak English already; yet you are not an English Scholar, till you can read, write, and speak English truly" (as cited in

Lobeck & Denham, p. 9). Moreover, these efforts to codify language yielded "grammar anxiety," which exists to this day. Lobeck and Denham (2014) define grammar anxiety as the dual preoccupation with using "correct" English for "social acceptance and advancement," coupled with the belief that "grammatical change and variation can be overcome and controlled" (p. 9). (If truth be told, I have grammar anxiety as I write this thesis. I work to manage the fears that I, like many others, experience when attempting to write academically and well, but like the students of yore, I need a shot at success, so I press on).

Variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level.

Lippi-Green writes that from utterance to utterance, "spoken language varies for every speaker in terms of speech sounds, sound patterns, word and sentence structure, intonation, and meaning" (p. 20). This is true whether or not a language user is aware of his or her unique and ever-shifting use of the language, and it is true "even for those who believe themselves to speak an educated, elevated, supra-regional English" (p. 21). Language variation is not the consequence of a "frivolous, sloppy, or useless" feature of language, but a feature of language flexibility and utility. While we all naturally learn the language variation(s) of our environment, especially as children, it is also true that language is often consciously chosen by people. Lippi-Green lists the three main sources of language variation:

1. *Language internal pressures*, arising in part from the mechanics of production and perception.

2. *External influences on language*, such as geographic mobility and social behavior subject to normative and other formative social pressures.

3. *Variation arising from language as a creative vehicle of free expression.* (p. 21).

These forces often function in tandem. They create language change as everything from the neurological and vocal apparatus, to perception and production of speech sounds, to factors of social and individual change, all come together in a process that is organic and ongoing.

Lippi-Green ends her chapter on basic linguistic truisms by lamenting that "linguists are outnumbered by prescriptivists, and outgunned, too. Prescriptivists are in a position to broadcast their opinions from positions of authority granted to them automatically, whereas linguists are confined to university settings and conferences. This makes it possible for prescriptivists to simply ignore—or mock—what linguists have to say about language. They make full use of this advantage and that is unlikely to change, ever" (p. 22).

Owing to the experience of my deconstructed standard English ideology through interventions such as graduate studies, and through counterhegemonic discourses of non-prescriptivists, I believe that a more factual and just conception of English and literacy are not only possible, but imminent. Those who oppose

diversity of peoples and their languages are fighting a losing battle. Societies are moving forward, inexorably, toward something new and better, not dogmatically better, but objectively better, because of its inclusion of all people and their languages.

Standard English Ideology and Racism

Keith Gilyard, (2018) a former chair of CCCC and a past president of NCTE, explains that "every utterance contains tracings of migration, mixing, negotiation, or conquest" (p. 284). Of these various social forces which bring about change, Greenfield (2011) homes in on the racism of past enslavement and conquest operations hiding, still, in our rhetoric about language and in our institutions. She argues that standard English ideology serves to feed systemic racism in the United States and calls for the dismantling of the standard English ideology as a guise for racism.

Greenfield (2011) and numerous other scholars identify the ways that the standard English ideology and its beliefs about language difference buttress racist attitudes. She aligns with Villanueva (2011), who in "The Rhetorics of Racism" traces the history of racism up until our times, when racial prejudice is embedded in the language that we use. Villanueva discusses how we came to our current modes of racism, which are steeped in the rhetorical "though now containing the sedimentations of the theological, geographical, biological, and the like" (Villanueva, p.17). To illustrate how racism is embedded in rhetoric, people

make pronouncements such as: "any group that fails does so by virtue of flaws in the group's 'norms,' as in the stereotypical contention that the dropout rate among Chicanos and Latinos is so high because Latino culture does not prize education like other groups do" (as cited in Villanueva, 2011, p. 27). Such stereotypes leave out the countless challenging forces at play in the experiences of peoples in flux. In conveniently blaming cultural groups for their struggles without endeavoring to study and understand the specifics of their plight, in dismissing them back to the margins, lies racism.

As racism continues to morph, today we can locate it even in the "progressive" teaching pedagogies which hold that "in order to be taken seriously and be successful in life a person must know how to speak 'correctly'" (Greenfield, p. 35). Writing scholarly papers in black English, Young (2010) adds that "dominant language ideology also say peeps can speak whateva the heck way they want to—BUT AT HOME!" (Young, p.111). In other words, white spaces, such as classrooms and colleges, must be rid of the speech of people of color.

Greenfield (2011) details the ways that well-meaning educators dismiss "rule-based language systems spoken most recognizably by people of color" (p. 35). She begins:

Here is where my first argument about race comes in: the language varieties deemed inferior in the United States (so much so that they are often dismissed not simply as inferior varieties but not varieties at all—just

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conglomerations of slang, street talk, or poor English) tend to be the

languages whose origins can be traced to periods in American history

when communities of racially oppressed people used languages to enact

agency. It is no coincidence that the languages spoken by racially

oppressed people are considered to be inferior in every respect to the

languages spoken predominantly by those who wield systemic power:

namely, middle-and upper-class white people. (p. 36).

As evidence for her claim, Greenfield points to Geneva Smitherman (2001),

whose prolific work demonstrates "how Ebonics, contrary to popular opinion, is

not the uneducated slang of young black rappers, but a sophisticated and rule-

based language group with origins in the transatlantic slave trade" (as cited in

Greenfield, p. 36). Criticality lies in admitting that the language variations used by

people "as means of survival, solidarity, and resistance," (p. 36) are the English

variations that white people have labeled as inferior. When we dismiss their

legitimacy and deny their equal value to standardized Englishes, we refuse to

acknowledge "that the use of this "spoken soul" resonates with its speakers by

"touching some timbre within and capturing a vital core of experience that [has] to

be addressed *just so*" (Rickford & Rickford, as cited in Greenfield, p. 37). To

refuse to acknowledge and appreciate the power of minoritized Englishes as

symbols of identity is to deny that which gives sustenance to the human soul.

Like black English, Hawaiian Creole English also originated in a period of white colonization and racial strife. Scholar Lee Tonouchi (2004) has published critically acclaimed creative fiction and academic scholarship in this English variation. The publication of *Da Jesus Book* (2000), a New Testament translation into Hawaiian Creole, was received with widespread appreciation as it "affords readers a greater emotional connection than do other translations, and inspiration for families" (Greenfield, p. 37). And so goes for Chicano English and other dialects "that have been simultaneously created and marginalized by their racial histories" (p. 38). It is interesting that only upon receiving detailed explanations of the histories of these languages do many of us stop questioning their legitimacy, when we do not require such knowledge of the etymologies of French, German, or Latin, for example. This telling fact points to the racism in our social conditioning that privileges certain groups and their languages.

Greenfield also uncovers racism in our justifications to teach only standard English in writing classrooms, writing centers, and across the curriculum. When we make pedagogical decisions built upon the faulty assumption of standard English as the superior language, we "implicitly privilege a racist view of history rather than an intellectually sound understanding of linguistic phenomena" (Greenfield, p. 38). Even English teachers who believe in the equality of language varieties inadvertently implement contemporary pedagogies that are driven by racism. We might feel proud of our "antiracist alternative: respect students' home languages while teaching "Standard English" in the classroom or

writing center, not as a superior language but as a ticket for survival and success in American society" (p. 39). Her denouncement of our society's racism in its perpetuation of the myth that standard English guarantees social mobility is instructive and useful. She asserts that "the idea of a standard language as an equal-opportunity tool for advancement works as a perfect foil for the institutionalized racism actually to blame for contemporary racial inequities" (p. 39). This rhetorical tool regarding the imagined power of standard English "gives the false impression that the language practices of individual people of color, rather than the racist practices of American institutions, are responsible for these inequities" (p. 39). Rather than investigate the relationship between language and power, we find it easier to justify that if "those on the margins of society, people of color in the context of this discussion, are not moving up in the economic ranks, it is—so the myth goes—because they are incompetent, lazy, and/or cannot speak correctly" (p. 50). The impulse to blame people's language for the struggles they are met with in life is one of the faces of racism.

As in the myth of standard English's guaranteed social mobility, larger sociopolitical motives that help maintain unequal power relations also animate the "English only" agenda. Given that research data show how language is by nature diverse—"according to age group, social class, gender, political orientation, and other factors, influenced both by proximity to others and as a means of identification," (Greenfield, p. 41) then the myth of standard English as a fixed entity becomes the excuse people in power can use "as a socially

acceptable measure for making decisions about affording access to people of color, obscuring the racist motivations behind their practices" (p. 42). Consequently, while people of color are expected to speak and write standard English and thus be bidialectal or bilingual, "privileged white people—regardless of their actual speech—*always already* speak a language of power … [since] the system as a whole is able to maintain itself along racist lines so long as the criteria for what counts as standard are always (invisibly) determined by the race of its speakers" (p. 43). Yet again, people of color are then conveniently and systematically blamed for failing to learn standard English and for their lower economic status.

How the standard English ideology feeds racism is also made evident in the ways that English language variations in spelling, grammar, syntax, and pronunciation are deemed worthy of standardization "so long as that variation describes usage that has become common within dominant white communities" (Greenfield, p. 43). The author includes multitudinous examples of this prejudice-through-grammar. She points out that "the alternative spelling of the word *color* as *colour*, for instance, is widely accepted as "Standard English" (because, I argue, its British origins, in the American imagination, position it as a sophisticated substitute); the alternative spelling of the word *talking* as *talkin*, in contrast, is not considered "Standard" due to its approximation to some black speech" (p. 43). A comparable example in pronunciation is how "the *r* and *t* in the word *comfortable* are regularly swapped without notice as *comfterble,* which is

considered acceptable; in contrast, African Americans who exchange the *s* and *k* in the word *ask* to result in *aks* are the subject of constant ridicule" (p. 44). Also, grammatical redundancy in markings is allowed depending on who is speaking. For instance, multiple markers of plurality are considered standard English, as in *She has five daughters.* "In contrast, singular marking of plurality, despite clarity in meaning, is not allowed when the usage can be found in the languages of some people of color, as in the phrase 'She has five daughter,' an allowable translation found in some varieties of Ebonics. Nevertheless, this prohibition of redundancy is wavered when it benefits a white speaker" (p. 44). Ironically, the subject-verb agreement structure of standard English, touted for its "superior clarity or consistency," as in "I go/ you go/ she *goes/* they go/ we go" is actually less consistent and less in agreement than "I go/ you go/ she go/ they go/ we go," the more uniform usage in Ebonics and Hawaiian Creole English. (p. 45). It is telling that "the means by which the languages spoken historically by many people of color indicate subject-verb *correspondence* is implicitly denigrated as "disagreement" rather than simply as different markers of correspondence" (Greenfield, p. 45). These, as her many other examples of language-based prejudice, provide support for Greenfield's claim that when we prioritize standard Englishes to the exclusion of other languages and English varieties, "we obscure the fact that we are not really talking about language at all but about which communities we imagine to be superior" (Greenfield, p. 46). If our talk of inferior and superior languages is really about imagined inferior and superior groups,

then the antidote to this racism entails being able to see through the smokescreen of the imagined supremacy of any one group of people. Seeing the fundamental equality of all ways of speaking, one hopes, translates to seeing the essential equality of all speakers, of all people.

In this chapter I have presented research that points to the essential equality of all ways of speaking, of all Englishes, and all languages, truly. I have used findings and illuminating arguments of language experts and dedicated scholars in linguistics, sociolinguistics, and various English fields to help expand our awareness and dislodge prejudice, linguistic and otherwise. If we are open, their work can further propel the kind of human evolution characterized by greater equality.

CHAPTER TWO

DECONSTRUCTING LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Critical Applied Linguistics

In this chapter I explore language and English literacy theoretical

frameworks and pedagogies reflective of a deconstructed standard English

ideology. I outline pedagogies that are informed by a critical language awareness

rooted in equitable and inclusive education.

I first locate this pedagogical exploration in the theoretical approach to

research known as critical inquiry. Critical inquiry is a form of research that

entails discarding "'false consciousness' in order to develop new ways of

understanding as a guide to effective action, confronting unjust social systems"

(Gray, 2009, p. 27). Common assumptions in critical inquiry are that:

- Ideas are mediated by power relations in society.
- Certain groups in society are privileged over others and exert an oppressive force on subordinate groups.
- What are presented as 'facts' cannot be disentangled from ideology and the self-interest of dominant groups.
- Mainstream research practices are implicated, even if unconsciously, in the reproduction of the systems of class, race and gender oppression. (Gray, p. 27).

 Within a critical inquiry approach that "is not content to interpret the world but

also seeks to change it," (Gray, p. 27). I examine pedagogical outlooks by

Pennycook (2022), Alim (2005), Blazer (2015), Draxler et al. (2016), and others

who envision a twenty-first century teaching and learning that is inclusive and

equitable. I synthesize elements of such a productive everyday practice in

English and literacy education with the goal of sketching frameworks for student success in United States classrooms.

After grounding this analysis in the general meta-process of investigation that is critical inquiry, I naturally lean on the case Pennycook (2022) makes for a critical applied linguistics. He first developed that work in 1990 and has subsequently revisited and updated his project, as "critical work has to be responsive to a changing world" (Pennycook, p.1). Critical linguists must continually take stock of the events currently influencing and shaping our communities and world so that our work meets the needs of social issues like racial equality. As an example, Pennycook writes about the Black Lives Matter Movement and how it shed light on "the deep histories and structures of institutional racism" (p. 3). Critically, he interrogates his own field of linguistics in its complicity in bolstering institutional racism. He reflects that:

> In applied linguistics we have started to ask not just why there are so few people of color but why White people feel so comfortable in this field. This is tied to the colonial roots of linguistics, and the separation of language from all that it is part of: bodies, lives, stories, histories, articulations of the past, the present and future. It has been a White applied linguistics that makes it possible for people in the field to avoid their own complicity in maintaining White power. As the #TESOLsoWhite and #AAALsoWhite movements have made clear, the racial disparities within our field run deep. (as cited in Pennycook, p. 3).

The responsibility to locate one's own privilege within structures of power and to simultaneously work and teach to challenge systems of unequal advantage are essential in critical inquiry. If the critical lens is clear, neither focus can be evaded. It locates and examines power where power is. If power rests within us, it is our work to extend that power out, to open doors and bring more and more people into the fold of access and opportunity.

Pennycook calls for critical applied linguistics to be "a form of intellectual activism" (Pennycook, p. 6). He explains that an applied linguistics criticality entails maintaining "a project of intellectual critique – pointing to injustices, calling out discriminations, illuminating inequalities – while also believing that things can be changed by concerted political action" (p. 6). To a recurring question regarding the purpose of engaging in matters of inequality and racism which impinge on our work as applied linguists, Pennycook responds that "this is an attempt to keep applied linguistics safe from matters of concern" (p. 7). Scholars like Davies (1999) also argue that bringing "an overt political stance to issues of inequality, racism, sexism or homophobia, from some perspectives, unacceptably 'prejudices outcomes'" (Davies, as cited in Pennycook, p. 7). In response to this critique, Pennycook points out that "concern about a 'normal' and 'neutral' applied linguistics avoids two significant points: "First, applied linguistics itself has never been politically neutral: ideas about linguistic equality (all languages are equal, standard languages are no better than any others, bilingualism is a good thing, and so on) … have been proposed in opposition to discriminatory positions

on primitive languages, language elitism and bilingualism as a disadvantage, but they are political before they are linguistic" (Pennycook, p. 7). And two, there is no point in working with linguistically profiled and marginalized students "without an element of advocacy. We cannot uncover linguistic inequality before the law … and do nothing about it" (p. 7).

Like Pennycook, I also understand the *applied* element in applied linguistics to include the ability to "articulate projects for change" (p. 7). Furthermore, such a stance "cannot proceed with critical work without a focus on *power"* (p.15). This focus on power should be oriented toward "*redistribution,"* which critical linguists specify as "the reallocation of wealth within a more just political economy" (p.11). Indeed, it is because of the work of intellectual activists that laws have been enacted and resources have been allocated toward important social causes. As outlined below, since the Civil Rights Era, equal opportunity projects have helped our country move toward social justice and inclusion.

Critical Language Awareness

In the U.S., English is the language of power. It is the country's most widely used language, with some states declaring it the official language. That distinction, along with the added advantages of white racial privilege and socio-economic status, help maintain existing power relations in which nonwhite speakers of nonstandard Englishes are consistently underprivileged. In the

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classroom, as in the workplace and in the institutions of society at large, the standard English ideology and its long prejudice against the use of minoritized languages serve to reinforce the ideology of White supremacy. A key way to neutralize this racism is through education that is critical, equitable, and inclusive.

The study of language and racial politics in the U.S. intersect at key points in educational history. For black language expert H. Samy Alim (2005), critical language awareness begins with knowledge of the 1954 court-ordered desegregation ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*. *Brown* was in response to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which in 1896 had ruled that separate but equal schools for Blacks and Whites were to be the norm. Separate but equal was inherently unequal, since "the doe flow where the White man go" (Alim, p. 24), and White facilities were bound to be better funded and better equipped by local and state governments than Black ones. Like the higher prestige of standard English, the better funded and better resourced White facilities also help to reinforce the ideology of White supremacy. (p. 24). For these reasons, in 1979, in *Martin Luther King Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*, the plaintiffs argued that fifteen Black economically disadvantaged children had not had access to equal educational opportunities, also a key concern in *Brown*. They proved that the school board "had not taken the social, economic, and cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the children into account in the effort to teach them how to read in "standard English"" (Alim, p. 25). The evidence indicates that the teaching of standard English cannot be easily achieved, that

questions regarding students' multidimensional needs, issues which remain with us today, also require attention and serious consideration. We cannot just decide to teach children standard English without addressing their needs in more holistic ways. We also cannot teach standard English while perceiving students' home languages as inferior and as obstacles to their learning, as these negative perceptions of students are deficit-based and not conducive to their success.

Decades after these rulings, a review of the current state of desegregation and equal opportunity education efforts reveals that a "resegregation of American society—not just of Blacks and Whites, but of all communities from each other, particularly Blacks and Latinos—has resulted in a situation where most Black and Brown children in the United States attend racially segregated schools (de facto segregation is in full effect in almost every major urban area)" (Alim, p. 25). This resegregation occurs along poverty levels. Over 80% of black and Latino schools are in areas of concentrated poverty, while only 5% of segregated white schools are in areas of high poverty. We have developed into separate societies and separate languages, one White, one Black, one Brown, one Asian, etc. In 1974's *Bradley v. Milliken*, the court recognized de facto segregation. The ruling states that "Children who have been thus educationally and culturally set apart from the larger community will inevitably acquire habits of speech, conduct, and attitudes reflecting their cultural isolation …. This is not peculiar to race; in this setting, it can affect children who, as a group, are isolated by force of law from the mainstream" (433 U.S. 287; as cited in Alim, p. 26). Taking into account "a

longstanding truism about speech—that language is the property of the community, not solely the individual" (Alim, p. 26), the Judge concluded, that whether the isolated group be the Spanish-speaking Mexicans of some Los Angeles communities or the Arabic-dominant Palestinians in some New Jersey communities, all linguistic groups "must be treated directly by special training at the hands of teachers prepared for the task" (433 U.S. 287, as cited in Alim, p. 26).

As these seminal cases make clear, the task of teaching standard English involves many levels of complexity. Alim calls for ongoing collaboration between linguists, sociolinguists, and educators who also understand the many forces that influence learning. According to Alim, what we need are "scholars [who] have taken on research agendas that aim to 'bridge' the out-of-school language and literacy practices of Black students with classroom practices" (Alim, p. 28). Alim outlines four such efforts that reflect linguistically-informed approaches to language teaching and learning. He reviews four approaches that take students' home languages into account in an effort to help them succeed in school. The first is the "linguistically informed approach" inspired by the research of William Labov, whose work focuses on helping teachers distinguish between mistakes in reading and differences in pronunciation by Black children learning to read. Alim writes, "For instance, if a Black child reads, 'I missed my chance' as 'I miss my chance,' teachers should not view this as a decoding error, but rather as an utterance that is consistent with the pronunciation patterns of BL" (p. 27).

Awareness of these possible pronunciation-based features in Black children's

reading, coupled with Labov's Individualized Reading Programs (2001), can only

be helpful and productive. The second method is the "contrastive analysis"

approach, which focuses on teaching writing to students to distinguish

differences between standard English and Black Language (BL). This approach

showed a 91.7% decrease in students' use of third-person singular without the

final '*s'*, while children taught by more traditional methods only had an 11%

decrease. (p. 27). In the third methodology, "dialect readers," reading is

introduced in the home and community language of students and later makes the

switch to standard English. The last approach, the "dialect awareness" method,

entails teaching students about the principles of linguistic variation. This

approach encourages students to become young ethnographers and collect

speech data from their communities. This program excites students because they

learn to appreciate the inherent variability in language, and it is a sure way to

reduce dialect discrimination in schools and society. These and other

sociolinguistic approaches exemplify the New Literacy Studies (Hull and Schultz,

2002)—which are designed by scholars working to provide evidence that

students' home languages are not deficient. Alim's critical language awareness

pedagogical propositions insist on arming students "with the silent weapons

needed for the quiet, discursive wars that are waged daily against their language

and person" (p. 29). The greatest source of this fortification of our students that

Alim speaks of are multi-focus language policies that teach standard English,

affirm students' linguistic heritage, *and* aim to close the achievement gap between students of color and more privileged white students. In the following section I look at the state of dual bilingual education, of pedagogies informed by critical language awareness that honors the unique needs of diverse students.

Dual Language Bilingual Education

At around the same time that *Brown v. Board of Education* sought to desegregate schools, the federal Bilingual Education Act of 1968 also sought to bring into effect greater racial and social justice for Hispanic students. Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) programs emerged as part of civil struggles by immigrant and migrant communities. As with all issues that do not have clear-cut answers, tensions regarding bilingual education and achieving greater social justice also arose. The question of enacting language policy that seeks to achieve equal academic outcomes for students became a central concern for states' education departments. Critical language awareness calls for an understanding of U.S. education policy and current trends in DLBE.

Valdez et al. (2016) contend that language policies serve as gatekeepers in education. In their study titled "The Gentrification of Dual Language Education," they study Utah's dual language education initiative, which was introduced in 2007 and is touted as "a new mainstreaming" of dual language education. Though Dual Language (DL) education originated to serve underprivileged students, DL is currently a growing enrichment educational

model in the United States. It is important to note the absence of the term "bilingual" in many of today's DL programs. The term bilingual connotes compensatory education and folk multilingualism—multilingualism learned at home or in the community, a kind of multilingualism which is frowned upon as a result of current negative discourses about immigrants. (In contrast to folk multilingualism, elite bilingualism, the bilingualism of high-status speakers and prestigious languages—is considered socially advantageous).

The three main types of DL programs are one-way foreign language immersion models, which serve mostly monolingual English speakers; one-way developmental bilingual education models, which serve English Learners (ELs), and heritage speakers of the target language; and two-way immersion (TWI) models, which serve both populations of students. (Hamayan et al, 2013, as cited in Valdez et al, p. 602). DL programs provide "grade-level content knowledge through English and another language to achieve high academic achievement, bilingualism, biliteracy, and intercultural awareness" (Howard et al, 2007, as cited in Valdez et al, 2016, p. 602). Though studies have shown that a well-implemented DL program can help students achieve higher academic levels than those who do not attend a DL program, the research also shows that these learning gains are especially instrumental in closing the academic gap for English Learners.

It is critical that educators recognize that DL emerged during a policy era when the needs of ELs were being addressed through the implementation of

various multilingual educational programs across the nation; they are the product of grassroots struggles towards equity and social justice. While that era came to an end at the end of the 1990s, when many states began dismantling bilingual education programs that provided instruction exclusively for ELs in both English and another language, TWI programs, which also service English speakers, avoided being dismantled (Gandara et al, 2010; Flores & Murillo, 2001; Lincoln & Franklin 2010, as cited in Valdez et al, 2016, p. 602). The current era has been in favor of TWI, but against bilingual education. In some cases, DL in its TWI variety, was "being reserved for 'gifted and talented' students, and other already privileged groups while 'whitestreaming' the non-privileged students that it was [originally] serving" (Cervates-Soon 2014; Flores 2015; Morales & Rao 2015; Valdez 1997; as cited in Valdez et al, p. 602).

In 2008 Utah passed legislation that dramatically shifted language education policy toward a unique form of state-supported DL programs. Utah's DL programs represent 10% of the nation's DL programs, a significant portion considering that Utah has less than 1% of the U.S. population. In addition, Utah represents a novel trend—an increase in one-way foreign language immersion DL programs. Since Utah is predominantly a White (80%), conservative state, which in 2000 enacted English-only legislation, Valdez et al. were skeptical of the interests served by the new policy (Valdez et al, p. 603). Indeed, in previous research Valdez et al found how news media coverage has evolved to reveal a shift away from discourses of achieving equity through using home and heritage

languages for instruction and toward discourses that center more privileged

groups of students. (Valdez et al, p. 603).

Valdez et al. wanted to know what was accomplished by the discourses of

mainstreaming being used by Utah's Office of Education specialists. The authors

use a critical language policy lens to analyze "which student groups were

positioned discursively and materially to benefit the most from this policy across

three types of privilege: white racial privilege, wealth, and English privilege"

(Valdez et al, p. 601). Sadly, their discursive findings "suggest that the core

policy documents largely participate in the hegemonic discourses that help

enforce these privileges. They continue, "We are persuaded that Utah's

'mainstreaming' of DL is really a kind of *gentrification*, that is, an influx of more

privileged inhabitants into a ghettoized neighborhood while less privileged

residents are priced or pushed out" (p. 604). The growth of foreign language

immersion models of DL comes at the expense of the types of DL that include

non-privileged students; it diverts attention and resources away from equity

concerns for marginalized student groups. While it is certainly a good thing that

more privileged students are enriched by multilingual policy, the danger is that

gentrification of DL permits existing educational inequalities to go unchallenged.

Valdez et al. situate themselves within the field of *critical language policy*.

(Tollefson, 2006, as cited in Valdez et al, p. 604). They view "language education

and its policies as political and direct [their] efforts toward equalizing power" (p.

605). While their in-depth study of the hegemonic discourses of normative

whiteness, globalized human capital, and English hegemony which shape current

negative attitudes toward bilingual education, are subjects beyond the scope of

this thesis, it is safe to say that polices such as Utah's have abandoned DL's

equity and heritage goals. Key among the recommendations by Valdez et al. is

that programs such as Utah's should, instead, work to reconceptualize policy to

avoid speaking about "the concerns of marginalized groups as a threat to the

appeal of programs to the privileged" (Valdez, p. 622). The allocation of public

resources toward privileged-student multilingualism need not come at the

expense of equity. This research on DL programs reiterates the ongoing need to

affirm and incorporate the home languages of bilingual and multilingual students

in education. As we teach standard English, we must also integrate students'

heritage languages into our pedagogy, always "advocating for an equity effect"

and honoring "the bilingual education lineage in language education policy."

(p.621).

A Transformative Ethos of Language Education

Discovering elements of a balanced approach to language and literacy

education that values multilingualism *and* sharpens the standard English skills

that help underachieving and marginalized students achieve academically, is an

animating focus for me now. I have examined the many harmful effects of the

standard English ideology, discovered some of its prejudicial attitudes within

myself, and am now investigating more inclusive and productive literacy

perspectives. While in the ignorance of my standard English ideology I mistakenly believed in the standard dialect's inherent superiority, I now understand its linguistic equality to all other varieties. I see the folly in believing in a hierarchical system of languages evaluations, as it translates to a hierarchical system of evaluations of peoples. At long last, and none too soon, I fully comprehend that no languages are "deficient," much less their speakers, and that we need pedagogies that rid us of negative labels that discriminate and further divide peoples.

To combat the standard English ideology, which is dominant and used to discriminate, I find inspiration and practicability in writing center scholar Sarah Blazer's (2015) call for "a transformative ethos for literacy education" (Blazer, p.18). (Blazer, in turn, grounds her project in the work of Nancy Grimm, (2009) who imagined the 21st century writing center consciously reframed in critical ways). Blazer writes that "scholars in writing center studies, composition studies, and TESOL, among other fields, provide compelling theoretical justifications for a transformative ethos in literacy education" (p.18). Indeed, whether we teach English at the primary, secondary, or college level, and whether it is English language arts or TESOL courses, the praxis Blazer articulates is applicable to all educational settings. Her proposed transformative project of language education has three pedagogical cornerstones: one, a reorientation from English to Englishes; two, attunement to increasingly diverse modes of representation; and three, the perception of students as agentive designers of their linguistic and

social futures. (Blazer, p.18). Shifting our orientation from English to Englishes affirms and validates the linguistic diversity that already exists in our classrooms, institutions, and societies. An openness to diverse discourses and modes of representation "better positions us to support literacy development relevant to our times," (p.18) and seeing students as designers of their linguistic and social futures orients us, as teachers, to equip learners to make linguistic decisions with a full deck of cards, with adequate knowledge to consciously make and defend their linguistic choices. Blazer rightly states that "to deny students opportunities to use what they already know from previous and everyday experiences—including linguistic ones—in the process of learning would be a grave mistake" (p.22). It certainly would, as this is deficit-based thinking. Instead, enacting "diversity-as-resource" (p.23) thinking can orient us, as educators, to guide and teach students to effectively integrate elements of their unique language and discourse repertoires into the work that they do inside and outside of school.

However, because the standard English ideology is totalizing, Blazer's (and Grimm's) affirming ideals, though supportive of a transformative 21st century education, can still mask an impulse to "manage" the linguistic and cultural differences of our students. Blazer warns that the impulse to manage difference in our writing centers (and classrooms) leads us to want to get students to "compartmentalize, at best, and erase, at worst, their linguistic and cultural identities" (Blazer, p. 21). The impulse to manage difference stems from flawed premises such as viewing linguistic and cultural diversity as *other* and not the

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norm; that success can only be achieved via mastering standard English (while the standard form matters, other natural variations matter, too); and that using nonstandard Englishes and varied discourse practices inhibits the development of dominant practices and students' ability to influence them. A truly transformative turn in literacy education requires that we move away from wanting to manage difference, that we work to affirm and welcome difference, and that we not shy away from the work of helping students become agentive in their linguistic decisions.

Praxis and The Language of Power

Grimm's (2009) and Blazer's (2015) reorientations towards Englishes, diverse modes of representation, and student agency are common themes throughout contemporary scholarship on language education. To further understand this transformative turn, I pull from the various language fields and offer a distillation of critical literacy praxis.

Praxis, a key concept in Freirean critical pedagogy defined as "reflection and action upon the world to transform it" (Freire, 1998, as cited in Kubota & Miller, 2017, p.141), is grounded in multiple components of criticality, one of which is the recognition that standard English functions as a language of power. As such, providing an equitable education requires that we provide access to this language of power. In other words, as critically aware language practitioners, we affirm the equal value of all languages, English variations, language styles,

registers, and the mixing of all of these, *and* we teach the grammar that gives students access to the language of power. As university writing center scholars are coming to realize, "to *not* teach grammar is to withhold access to that language of power" (Draxler et al, 2022, p. 6). Thus, an essential ingredient of a critical applied linguistics entails equipping students with the linguistic knowledge and skills to successfully navigate a system of privileged language and be able to talk back to its discriminatory forces. Avoiding the explicit teaching of standard English may "inadvertently harm the linguistically diverse writer and perpetuate the structural racism surrounding language and literacy …. [where] dominant discourses will remain impenetrable to students who are true outsiders, and structures of privilege will remain unchallenged" (Draxler et al, p. 6). Thus, an attitude of avoidance is not an option.

When a standard English ideology first crumbles in a mind decolonized, such as mine, it takes some time to find solid ground to stand on, theoretically and pedagogically. For a while, we might fumble as we work through significant questions proper of shifting conceptual grounds. That is as it should, and it's all right. Change is a process, after all, and none of us immediately get it right. Case in point, the writing center team at St. Olaf College in Minnesota write that for a while, "by not correcting grammar, we saw ourselves as inclusive and empowering for all writers" (Draxler et al, p.1). To avoid falling into this kind of idealistic trap, it's important to understand that a deconstructed standard English ideology does not equal a pedagogy or a plan. Overturning linguistic

misconceptions is only the beginning of critical language awareness. In the process of broadening our perspective and operationalizing our intellectual activism, we must avoid falling into avoidance pitfalls, such as shying away from teaching standard English. Inclusivity means including all; therefore, we can heed the advice of writing center practitioners Draxler et al, who write, "in an effort to be more equitable and provide access to the language of power when students desire it, our Writing Center has more sessions that address lower-order [writing] concerns than we used to" (p. 2). When educators avoid working with lower-order concerns (i.e., grammar, word choice, punctuation, etc.—also referred to as sentence-level, local, or micro concerns, as opposed to higher-order concerns like argument, voice, structure, etc.—also referred to as global, holistic, or macro concerns) we engage in gate-keeping; we further disenfranchise already underprivileged groups. This is neither equitable nor inclusive.

Equity is about providing access to power. I first encountered the phrase 'the language of power' in my Writing Center Studies course. The class proved essential to my development as a critically-informed language instructor. It helped crystalize important issues that many English and language teachers wrestle with, particularly within the teaching of standard written English. Since from their inception writing centers have been at the forefront of language issues confronting education, this field has much to offer language practitioners of all stripes. In the ongoing work of equipping students with writing skills to navigate the academy, Writing Center scholarship has responded and continues to

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respond to the changing times with shifts in theory, practice, and institutional policy. In this analysis I examine writing center solutions to matters of language and literacy education. While writing centers largely focus on issues related to the written form of the language, as tutors' work entails helping students with their college writing assignments, the professional journey of writing center practitioners mirrors that of language teachers aiming to teach in ways that help students achieve their academic, linguistic, and social goals.

From Draxler et al (2022), I highlight these questions that apply to language teachers, tutors, and all writing center practitioners alike:

- "How do we function both inside and outside institutionalized systems of linguistic prejudice?

- How do we help students with sentence-level concerns in a way that is empowering, rather than simply policing conformity to the somewhat arbitrary and potentially harmful conventions of standard written English?

- How and when do … [we] address sentence-level issues in student writing?

- How do we differentiate between patterns of error, variations in style, and expressions of voice?

- How do student writers interpret feedback when the focus is on their word choice, grammar and mechanics?

- How do our approaches to English teaching and tutoring shape students' identities, skills, context awareness, confidence, and feelings of belonging?

- How do we address sentence-level issues effectively and equitably, especially for multilingual or linguistically diverse students?" (Draxler et al, p. 3)

Answers to these questions which are grounded in linguistic and social justice can help us navigate the work of helping students access the language of power.

As this project articulates, the work of delivering equitable and inclusive language education comes with its ongoing contradictions and critiques. Draxler et al. recognize that in assisting students who seek help with standard English grammar, the institution is simultaneously upholding the status quo. The authors describe this complicity as perpetuating the "'communicative burden' where non-stream voices (in terms of class, nationality, or race) are expected to accommodate linguistic norms and must do the work of changing to fit other people's expectations" (p. 5). In a real sense, our work "is implicated in the institutional racism that shapes all our work in higher education, … [in perpetuating the idea that] to find success in that space these marginalized writers must learn to write in ways the academy values … [and] become someone else – embody the dominant culture instead of their own" (as cited in Draxler et al, p. 6). It is unfair that multilingual writers must first master a

language, not an easy endeavor, before they can be taken seriously. Multilingual writers, for instance, did not have the chance to learn the roughly 1,000 word families per year that first language speakers learn throughout childhood. (Zimmerman, 2014, p. 289). In a very real sense, all second language learners will always need to learn much more to try "to make up for lost time" (Zimmerman, p. 289).

As the overcorrection of refusing to engage with sentence-level concerns, motivated in part by well-intentioned social justice concerns, proves to "ultimately reinforce a system of insiders and outsiders" (Draxler et al, p. 7), we continue to search for better ways to serve all students, and that means continuing to teach English grammar and conventions even as we critique the standard language ideology.

Writing and the Possibilities for Self-hood

To remedy the potential harm in a minimalist approach to teaching grammar, a new shift in Writing Center theory came about in the 2000s and it focused on student choice. The goal in this new turn in pedagogy is "to affirm writers' identities and give them choices: the choice to learn standard written English, or, the choice to use a non-standard style of English" (Draxler et al, p. 7). In this new twist on writing center pedagogy, the idea is that we can help writers "to see writing as a series of choices rather than a transmitted set of rules, stages, and regimens to which to adhere" (Shafer, 2012, as cited in Draxler et al,

p.7). Pedagogies rooted in identity concepts are an essential component of a balanced approach to teaching and learning in language and literacy arenas.

This post-process theory, based on identity, redefines writing as more than the writing process and upholds that writing is public, interpretive, and situated. Construed within the idea that writing is inherently personal and political, this approach is grounded in translingualism, which welcomes the intentional blending and combining of languages and language variations. The potential pitfalls of this identity-driven pedagogy bears repeating, namely that while this approach recognizes the ways that writers express their identities through writing, it can also render students vulnerable to stereotyping and racial profiling. Tutors and teachers might make negative judgments about writers' abilities; students might feel affirmed in expressing their authentic language, only to be graded down by a professor for those same choices. The trap of well-intentioned language practitioners wishing to affirm all students' languages can adversely affect students' writing experiences. To avoid such blind spots and enact grammar instruction rooted in linguistic justice, Draxler et al worked to identify identity-informed approaches that would better equip tutors to help writers develop writerly self-awareness.

As tutors expressed anxiety regarding their confidence about their knowledge of grammar rules and terminology, as well as about when, whether, and how to correct grammar error (Draxler et al., p.12), the writing center directors implemented training that prepared tutors to become more comfortable

offering sentence-level assistance. Their initial exploration was broad and identity-centered. First, they examined "the ways in which their own language and identity shape their own relationship with SWE (Standard Written English)" (Draxler, et al, p.12). One of several questions the team reflected on was "What are different ways that identity (yours or the writer's) might enter a writing tutoring session? Try to think specifically about grammar, syntax, vocabulary, etc. as you answer this question" (Draxler et al, p.14). The tutors reflected on how academic language is not neutral or even common, yet it is the preferred discourse in the academy, within which the concept of "correctness" is biased and often "only definable in terms of conformity or divergence of expectations" (p.15).

In a comparable goal of guiding the tutors at her writing center to explore their multilingual identities so as to more effectively assist writers of multilingual backgrounds, Blazer (2015) asked her team to reflect on the tutors' own diverse linguistic resources. One of her tutors blogged that she regularly uses three varieties of English, the standard form, the academic style she learned as an English literature major, and the variety she uses with her family and friends. She notices that her family and friends have at times rudely changed the subject to steer her away from the specialized vocabulary of her major, so she rarely uses her academic English outside of the college arena. This tutor writes, "… even though I'm a writing tutor whose first and only language is English, I realize I'm multidialectal. And being able to alternate between Standard English and the academic variety is an asset, especially when it comes to my working with

multilingual learners … [I use] another variety of English that is esoteric and used only in my home among my immediate family members … Here are some examples of phrases and vocabulary we use to communicate: smarterthanpick, purple green dog collar in Riverdale park … stop playing the monkey, lickadesplit, lazy lima bean, and spinards. It's too bad I hardly ever get to use them in my tutoring sessions" (as cited in Blazer, p. 34). Another tutor shares about a "code language" she shares with her twin sister. Their special phrases "solidify a bond between them." She shares: "I don't know if I would call these phrases and other words we use again and again as a dialect or not, however, thinking about this kind of verbal bonding reminds me how rich and varied everybody's unique experience with language is. I think most everyone plays with language, and this suggests a strength and suppleness that can be teased out of students who express a lack of confidence" (Blazer, p. 34).

This exploration of identities can help tutors and teachers alike to guide our less confident writers towards uncovering their own identities and to greater self-expression. Oliveira (2016) writes, "Asking writers about their process of writing, their motivations for the paper they are writing, what they want their paper to show readers and how they want it to be done might reveal aspects of their academic literacy practices relevant for the [tutoring] sessions. Moreover, learning about those aspects may help tutors concentrate on the possibilities for self-hood inside the social context of academia which a writer might not be aware of or has not yet explored" (Oliveira, 2016, as cited in Draxler et al, p.13). These

identity-driven approaches offer enormous potential for our students' development of their writerly identities. I cannot think of something more exciting than helping to shift writers' mindsets about their writing "from a kind of performance to meet some imagined ideal to an authentic expression of who they are. Instead of seeing academic writing as something that hides or denies their true self, it can be something that expresses and affirms that true self" (p. 13). If we can help writers identify parts of themselves which they can consciously integrate into their writing, it would ignite their enthusiasm and that would go a long way in building the confidence and skill that we want for all our students.

However, fighting for social goals of greater inclusion through affirming writerly identities is complicated by the realities of grammar concerns placed in context. For example, writing centers have discovered that effective approaches for working with multilingual students—undergraduate and graduate alike, have been lacking. Writing centers' commitment to the "we don't do grammar" stance that many have stood by in an effort to avoid being seen as remedial centers, has left multilingual students nowhere to go. So, while we need to think about the power structures of linguistic privilege and respond to these concerns with a commitment to nonstandard Englishes and student advocacy, we also must respond to the reality which is staring us right back—that our students often need help with standard English and that this is not a crime, as lower-order concerns are a legitimate part of the writing process for all writers alike.

What language practitioners need is a balanced approach that "is both structural and activist, as it lets tutors and students [or teachers and students] engage with and disrupt the system that would discriminate against them" (Draxler et al, p. 4). Helping students master standard written English, the work of writing centers since their inception in the 1970s, provides "a gateway to linguistic belonging in higher education" (p. 5). Similarly, teaching standard English in the primary, secondary, and adult-level classroom is an essential step toward belonging, even if that belonging is begrudged by racist or anti-immigrant attitudes, it is a non-negotiable; it is one less disadvantage in an unlevel playing field. Such a critically aware approach to language instruction is rooted in the following realities:

- "It is absolutely the case that readers have expectations.
- Disciplines adhere to agreed-upon conventions that convey meaning.
- Genres are recognizable and follow predictable patterns that allow readers to access content quickly.
- … writing at college is graded, and rubrics often evaluate both higher order *and* lower order aspects of writing.
- Professors have expectations and pet peeves.
- Grades matter to many writers, and meeting expectations is often important to them" (Draxler et al, p.15).

These important considerations are part of equitable and inclusive language instruction. Like writing center tutors, language teachers are also "tasked with identifying and addressing sentence-level concerns in a way that affirms natural variations in language, yet gives writers the opportunity to learn from and correct their errors" (Draxler et al, p.16). Therefore, the researchers at St. Olaf developed an approach to sentence-level attention grounded in linguistic justice.

To devise a plan for what sentence-level support would look like exactly, Draxler et al assembled a research team comprised of a writing center director, a multilingual student language support specialist, and two multilingual/international student tutors. (p. 3). They spent a year working collaboratively on a grant-funded research project related to sentence-level support at the writing center. Their writing center surveys and research "painted a complicated portrait of students' relationship with sentence-level concerns. On the one hand, some students express frustration with a perceived over-emphasis on sentence level issues …. At the same time, others express a desire for more attention at the sentence level …. Finally, some students described the satisfaction they felt when they received sentence-level support" (Draxler et al, p. 10). Interestingly, the mixed feedback did not reveal predictable trends related to field of study, class year, or demographics. "Any student, it seems, may desire additional help with sentence-level concerns, and we can't assume that major, year, or identity will shape who does and doesn't want sentence level support" (p. 12). Before college, we do not generally ask our students whether they desire

sentence-level support. At the primary and secondary level language arts and language acquisition classes teaching writing and genre conventions are integral to language education, which as we have seen, is work that entails much more than meets the eye.

Draxler et al.'s year-long study and development of a tutor training plan yielded insightful pedagogy applicable to educational settings across the board. As the team analyzed sentences together, they came to understand that there are several possible reasons why writers use nonstandard forms. The researchers understand that "when writers use non-standard forms, it might be because they are using their own English (their own dialect or variety or register) and not wanting or trying to use SWE (standard written English). Or, it might be that they are using non-standard forms intentionally, perhaps creatively, or even politically. Or it also might be the case that they *are* intending to use SWE but either don't know the correct form, are applying the rule incorrectly, or were busy thinking about the message and not attending to rules" (p.16). These possible reasons for not using standard written English apply to all English users. In this socially just approach, tutors [and teachers] learn to "distinguish between style (linguistic preferences, or expressions of personality that reflect contextualized and conscious choices, such as sentence length, use of metaphor, denominalization, or formatting choices), voice, (linguistic variations that are rooted in an expression of self or identity, such as written accent, code-meshing, or 'interlanguage'), and error (unintentionally breaking rules which may impede

meaning to the point of miscommunication)" (Draxler et al, p.16). To practice

distinguishing between style, voice, and error, tutors tried to answer two related

but distinct questions: "1) Is this an error? And 2) Should I address it?" (p.16). It

is illuminating that at times, the tutors agreed that the use of non-standard forms

reveals a sort of accent, similar to the accents we display when speaking. If it's

decided that the non-standard form is something to be addressed, perhaps

because it's an opportunity for the writer to acquire more language, tutors

practiced providing options so that "the writer can choose the one that sounds

most like what they want to say and maintain ownership of the text" (p.19). The

question of *how* to address error emphasizes the "centrality of the writer/tutor

relationship" (p. 21). On the whole, advice we provide should be embedded in a

"safe-conversation" and not what could devolve into a "face-threatening

conversation" (p. 22). [1]

In conclusion, in this chapter I have outlined theoretical and pedagogical

elements of critically aware and socially just language and literacy education. In

U.S. classrooms, such language education criticality includes knowledge of

important laws and educational policies for equity and inclusion. It also entails

implementing balanced approaches that teach standard English to all students

while simultaneously effectuating practices for language diversity and self-

advocacy. Such balanced practices counter the hegemonic discourses of the

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[1] Draxler et al. created a "Decision Tree for Addressing Sentence-Level Concerns." See study for a more detailed process explanation and diagram.

standard English ideology, they welcome and celebrate language difference. For insight on best practices, and inspiration, I have leaned on the work and scholarship of writing centers, which shed light on such inclusive and equitable language instruction. As educators in step with a world that is constantly changing, we continue to shift, too, always looking for better ways of thinking and reworking practices for just, inclusive, and equitable education.

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS

The Promises of the Translingual Stance

I am a language teacher. As such, I want to help students develop their language resources. That students may successfully navigate the society and its institutions using language with awareness and agency is the exciting affordance of my graduate studies learning. Whereas I used to uphold the legitimacy of standard English to the exclusion of other ways of speaking, the new me will be working to realize the promises of translingualism—as an attitude of openness, as a political and identity-affirming stance rooted in criticality.

An online first year writing essay published by the University of Connecticut defines the approach this way: "Translingualism is an approach to language difference that challenges English-only monolingualism and assumes students' languages are not liabilities but resources. At the heart of translingualism is a disposition of openness and intellectual curiosity toward language and language difference. This disposition of openness to language diversity is a corrective to the standard language ideology.

Furthermore, as the English and writing studies scholarship has helped me understand the connection between language, identity, and community, I wish to support students' agentive exploration of the possibilities for self-hood" (Draxler et al, p.13) through writing. In the educational settings that I work in, I

will try to identify "concrete ways [in which] language is interpersonal and thus flexible" (Blazer, p. 35). Like the self-reflective tutors in Blazer's writing center who explored their multidialectal selves, including within their monolingualism, I feel "primed to imagine, seek out, and respond to students' potential for language flexibility, too—and to consider why students may fear or resist deploying language flexibility in school contexts" (Blazer, p. 35). Ever-mindful of the power dynamics that influence literacy, I will ask myself if students' confidence could be diminished as a result of attempting to write in the language of power. If so, how do I work to ease those fears and to use them advantageously—for students' self-discovery, self-advocacy, and for the development of their writerly selves?

As a pedagogy, translingualism is not defined by any narrow type of languaging, be it code-meshing, which is the intentional blending and combining standard English and a home language, the use of nonstandard Englishes, or the mixing of discourse styles and registers in writing. Narrow definitions are what create "the false perception of a translingual approach as one which uncritically valorizes language difference. Instead, we see translingual pedagogy as much broader – as any pedagogy which works against the "pathologization of different Englishes that do not meet a narrowly defined set of standards dictated by… a privileged few" (Lee, 2017, as cited by Schreiber & Watson, 2018, p. 94). These distinctions point to the general openness that I value in the translingual stance. Furthermore, Schreiber and Watson indicate that a translingual pedagogy does more than permit students to make use of their full linguistic repertoires in their

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writing, that we must also have students "investigate/consider how language standards emerge, how and by whom are they enforced, and to whose benefit, by bringing to light in the classroom how language standards sustain and are sustained by social inequity" (p. 94). In other words, a translingual approach to language and literacy also seeks to equip students with the facts and knowledge necessary to make informed decisions in and about their writing.

However, such critical linguistic knowledge must serve to deconstruct standard English ideology, but not as a ticket to "a linguistic or rhetorical free-for-all" (Schreiber & Watson, p. 95). Gevers (2018) argues that multilingual students and very young students, especially, might not be in a position to "actively negotiate translingual identities as writers" (Gevers, as cited in Schreiber & Watson, 2018). As this could be the case, it is important to clarify for ourselves those areas where L2 writing and translingualism are complementary, such as the purpose and care required in the execution of all writing. It is also essential that at all times the students decide if, when, where, and how to incorporate their languages. Some might not find such a practice empowering, while others will want to integrate their languages in their written work. For matters of agency and self-expression, however, it is important that "learners of English can envision translingual futures for themselves" (Anderson, 2018, as cited in Schreiber & Watson, p. 97). As a bilingual and multidialectal language user, I can attest to the joy of experimenting with and incorporating words and languages in writing, as in speaking—a constant source of pleasure and self-expression available to all.

Critically, the translingual stance does not value difference for its own

sake, or see it as "a 'consumable collage' of linguistic plurality (Lee, 2017, as

cited in Schreiber and Watson, p. 95). Such reductions can "obscure how written

products in standard English can result from a translingual writing process"

(Schreiber & Watson, 2018, p. 95).

Which brings me to *enhorabuena,* a favorite Spanish triple compound

word of mine. Literally translating to "in good time," it is pronounced

/enora'bwena/, with the three words *en, hora*, and *buena,* blending smoothly

together and almost in a single stress intonation. It can be used to congratulate

someone, as in *¡Enhorabuena!* It can mean to be in luck, to be on to a good

thing, and it can be an acclamation of gratitude similar to the phrase "Thank

heavens!" As a clear example of the translingual process, which goes beyond the

visual, this word, like no other in my linguistic repertoire, captures my

transformative learning experience. All the meanings and uses of *enhorabuena*

were with me through every step of my graduate school journey. I even imagine

my ancestors whispering *Enhorabuena,* as the light of awareness and education

filled my life when I needed it most. If words have a spirit, the spirit of

enhorabuena breathed new and abundant life to me through my graduate school

experience.

Community Cultural Wealth—¡Enhorabuena!

This final section is inspired by García, (2017) who in "Unmaking Gringo-

Centers," writes about access, race, and power in the writing center. In his

scholarship, he centers a profound kind of listening taught to him by his uncle working on cars and listening very attentively to the engine running, and by his grandmother, a woman who was told she could not go to school, but taught herself to read and write in Spanish and English—a woman like many other Latinas that I know, have heard of, or read about who hungered for the educational experience. García, born in the U.S, and "raised along the frontera of the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV)," (p. 30) is a border student and a border scholar, now. He writes that border students are not ESL writers or speakers, that they do not fit the non-traditional paradigm and they cannot be taught by traditional approaches; that their needs and expectations are specific. (p. 33).

Like Blazer (2015), who warns about the tendency to manage difference, García writes that "the power of whiteness continues to shape contemporary forms of management and control of practices and writing center scholarship, in particular the imperative to retrofit Mexican Americans into a white/black race paradigm" (p. 32). He argues that "access and success can be hindered by the tendency to reduce or retrofit students of color" (p. 32). Recognizing that lived experiences vary from individual to individual, it makes sense that nuance and difference are reflected from cultural group to cultural group, and that difference matters.

García calls us to name students of color who are not black and to address their unique experiences and needs in our scholarship. For him, the appropriate response to a type of colorblindness at work "involves unmaking

gringo centers and bringing into focus students from a community on the cusp of invisibility" (p. 33). Thus, García centers his work on the LRGV community, on its assigned identity as *the Mexican*, who would remain "uncivilized" and "out of place" in the rhetoric of a modern world still shaped by colonialism.

As a Mexican immigrant, García's message resonates with me. He brings attention to the difference between the black and Hispanic experience, which are often conjoined in discourses of race and power in the U.S. While racialized minorities have struggles in common, I agree with García that it is important for academia to name and put a face to the unique experiences of the distinct cultural groups in America today. Such endeavors not only bring attention to the urgent needs of these unique communities, they also humanize the scholar who learns to see beyond the stereotypes which feed racism.

I do not have a case study that reveals a nuance of the Mexican-American immigrant experience, but I can speak to the brown woman "politics of knowledge" (García, p. 33) that I carry with me, and in this way, heed García's call. I can name myself, a Latina woman returning to school in middle age, and say that the graduate studies experience has changed me. In critical ways, my perspective has expanded. I can now see myself more clearly—intellectually, personally, and socially, and this ability to see myself better also lets me see others more clearly. For example, I now understand that the university belongs to everyone, even when we do not know it, yet. Each individual and her languages

belong—in the world, in the country, in the community, within the halls of the academy, and in the heart of the truly intellectual mind.

In addition to the deconstruction of the standard English ideology, which this thesis focuses on, an adjacent topic encountered in the course of my graduate career also stand out: cultural wealth versus cultural deficit narratives.

In this closing *testimonio*, or sharing of my story, I turn to Guzmán (2019), who describes this rhetorical device as "a form of expression that comes out of the intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else. … *Testimonio* also involves the unlearning of shame to overcome silence" (The Latina Feminist Group 2001, as cited in Guzmán, p.12). I say it again, that I am not the person that I was when I first started graduate school, that the learning changed me.

This little *testimonio* centers a discussion of cultural wealth versus cultural deficit narratives. Guzmán (2019) implements bilingual reading circles as strategies for success for students and community partners in the service - learning component within her English 353: Chicana/o-Latina/o Literature classes at California State University, Channel Islands. Seeking to bridge university culture and the farmworker communities that border the university campus, Guzmán's students go in to read and discuss works of Chicana/o literature with residents in the low-income farmworker neighborhoods.

In addition to "the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and the benefits that reciprocity creates for both the students and the community members," (p. 8)

first-generation Latina/o students participating in this process unearth their own

cultural deficit model of thinking about farmworkers. Guzmán writes that her

"students were able to decolonize their minds by personally engaging with the

very population of whom they had learned to be ashamed; their unlearning of

shame was one of the hallmarks of their literacy education" (p. 9). Like Guzmán's

students, I also needed "to undergo a process of self and cultural affirmation"

(p.12). No one had ever spoken to me about my cultural assets. Before graduate

school, I had not come across the terms "cultural wealth" or "cultural deficit"

discourses. These transformative concepts did not appear in the popular

literature I consumed. Guzmán writes that her teaching is informed by Tara

Yosso's (2005) concept of "community cultural wealth" (p.11). It appears that no

one talks or writes about critical theory such as this outside of the university. I

can say that learning about these two frameworks until middle age was too long

to have to wait. I believe my life and the lives of people I touched would have

been different had I learned to see through the lens that shows me that there is

an immense cultural capital to value in all members of all cultural groups. I would

have been immune to the deficit narratives that are circulated by those who have

a microphone, a platform, or a bully pulpit from which to spew divisiveness and

fear. Instead, I bought into deficit narratives, even if unconsciously. Instead of

affirming all cultures, equally, I was not unlike Guzmán's freshmen English first-

generation Latina students, of whom she writes, "first-generation Latina/o

university students face specific challenges in self-valorization and cultural

appreciation; they largely attend the university with hopes of attaining social mobility—of not working in the fields, like their parents might have." Guzmán continues, "Furthermore, given the disparagement of their culture is normalized in the dominant popular discourse, identifying as coming from a Latina/o and/or immigrant background can be regarded as a social disability" (p.10). Learning to see my own and other groups' cultural wealth has been deeply healing.

Crucially, some of Guzmán's students "are so amazed 'to be taught something' by farmworkers" (p.17) because up to that point, in school and outside of school, they had learned to see farmworkers through a cultural deficit model of thinking. Guzmán's students "have learned that people like them have nothing to teach anyone, not even their own children" (p.17). This deficit model of thinking is "one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in U.S. schools" (Yosso, 2005, as cited in Guzmán, p.17). It is also a type of violence to live in a society that traffics in deficit discourses and social hierarchies based on false assumptions about people's race, ethnicity, culture, language, economic status, gender, or other markers of identity.

Rich theoretical perspectives like community cultural wealth catalyze the deeper social consciousness that I longed for and that our world needs. In Spanish, the word *concientización* refers to a political consciousness, to acquiring "a sense of social responsibility—a desire to use [one's] education to work on behalf of those who are less privileged" (p. 25). I have always wanted to combat oppression in its many forms. Overturning cultural deficit models and

replacing them with cultural wealth narratives, as well as breaking down standard

English ideology and embracing all Englishes and all ways of communicating is

concientización that affords the words, theory, and practice to lift others up.

¡Enhorabuena!

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