Spring 2024

Inclusive Approaches to Teaching Writing to Users of Diverse Englishes in the Secondary ELA Classroom

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by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

May 2024

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

In our globalized and interconnected world, English is increasingly considered an international language and is used to facilitate communication across cultures and countries. As English becomes more widely used, the language itself becomes more varied. English is not the property of native speakers in Great Britain or the United States (Milroy, 2001), and many non-Western countries name English, or a variation of it, as their official language.

Students in English classrooms in the United States are often members of non-White,[1] non-Western cultures and bring with them rich linguistic backgrounds that shape their English language use. And yet, the American education system appears to value "standard" English over all other variations. In addition to excluding their language from academic spaces, this prescriptive valuation marginalizes multilingual speakers and produces expectations that teachers train students to communicate in the manner of privileged people. Devaluing students' unique language variations is a method of discrimination, and discrimination has no place in the classroom. In our increasingly segregated yet increasingly diverse society, it is more imperative than ever that teachers, one, become aware of how language is used as a means of division and, two, deconstruct the racism present in language usage, which raises the question: *Are academic language requirements in secondary ELA classrooms inclusive of multilingual learners and*

[1] APA (7th edition) considers racial and ethnic groups proper nouns, thus necessitating capitalization. The capitalization of "White" throughout this paper is not intended to promote White supremacy. It is also not intended to suggest that all people who consider themselves "White" belong to the same cultural group or share lived experiences. The capitalization is intended to follow APA (7th edition) guidelines and describe established social structures.

students who are being marginalized, and, if not, what more linguistically-inclusive approaches to writing instruction can teachers use?

In this chapter, I first illustrate my personal interest in and experience with language-related judgments. I then introduce my professional concerns with standardized language demands and their marginalization of diverse student populations. Finally, I briefly explain how traditional language expectations may be exclusionary and outline the rationale for approaching language instruction from an anti-racist standpoint.

Personal Interest in Linguistic Othering

I grew up in metropolitan Minnesota. To my ears, the way my friends, relatives, and I spoke sounded the same as the "accentless" newscasters on the TV and radio. But in eighth grade, I realized I had an accent when someone mocked my speech for the first time. I was attending a national leadership conference in Washington, D.C., and I became referred to as "The Minnesotan" after saying only a handful of words. Throughout the conference, my speech was constantly interrupted by my peers mimicking or giggling at my accent, and my conversational contributions seemed more valued for their peculiar sound than their insights.

During my junior year of high school, my pronunciation was made fun of again. My line in the fall musical included four utterances of the word "those" [ðowz], and my fellow cast members found it amusing that, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't shorten the lengthened /ow/ sound. In front of the entire cast and crew, my director told me that I needed to sound "less Minnesotan" if I had any hope of convincingly playing my role as a New Yorker.

Then when I attended college in the Upper Peninsula, my roommates from

downstate Michigan spent four years teasing me about my pronunciation of words like "bag" [beyg] and "coat" [kowt], regardless of the fact that my speech was closer to the local Yooper dialect than theirs was. To their ears, my accent (and the Yooper accent of many of our classmates) was irregular.

When I student taught in New Zealand, my pronunciation again became a source of humor, but this time for my general "American" accent rather than my Minnesotan pronunciation. Words I had no idea that I said "funny," like "apple" [æpəl], were suddenly hilarious to my students. And for the first time, my orthography was ridiculed, as I, their English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, could not spell simple words such as "honor" or "realize" correctly.

To this day, my out-of-state friends comment on how my accent is "cute" or "quaint." They "love" how people talk in Minnesota. But to their ears, my neighbors' and my speech doesn't sound sophisticated; it instead conjures images of a plump, homely, and sweet—yet simple—mother stirring a mixing bowl in a Midwestern kitchen.

In all of these situations, the way I spoke and wrote was considered abnormal at best or wrong at worst, but was always intelligible. And yet, in spite of my listeners' and readers' ability to clearly understand my speech and writing, my productions were seen as lesser than.

I'm White, and educated, and I grew up in an upper-middle class family. I am socioeconomically and racially privileged. I am also linguistically privileged because, in spite of my "kitschy" accent, I generally speak and write in Standard American English (SAE). In most situations, my language use doesn't prevent me from being taken seriously or viewed as intelligent. But for multilingual learners (MLs), many of whom are

not White, are not wealthy, and are not SAE users, society *does* diminish their intelligence and opportunities because of their lack of adherence to prescriptive linguistic standards.

Professional Concerns with Standard Language Requirements

I am currently in my sixth year of teaching ELA at a high school in metropolitan Minnesota. Of our 1100 students, approximately 40% are MLs, and there are 26 different languages spoken by our student body. The most prominent home languages (L1s) are Spanish (42%), English (39%), and Somali (11%). Forty-five percent of our students are Hispanic or Latino, 34% are Black or African American, 13% are White, 3% are Asian, 2% are American Indian, and 3% identify as two or more races. Eighty-five percent of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch. As demonstrated by these statistics, the cultural and linguistic diversity in our student body is rich, and, while this diversity is the norm in our school, most of our students are being marginalized in the broader society of the United States and discriminated against for their race, language, or both.

The Minnesota Academic Standards in ELA (2020) demand that I teach my students "appropriate" language use (9.2.1.1, 9.2.8.1, & 9.3.2.1). They demand that I require my students to differentiate their language use in academic versus social contexts. They demand that I oblige my students to produce "formal English" (9.3.2.1). But when I look around my classroom, listen to my students, and read their writing, it is obvious that they are already effective communicators who are constantly making intentional language choices—even though very few of them use SAE. It doesn't feel right to tell my students that their language is "wrong," and when my students ask why they have to speak and

write inauthentically in order to earn full points on their assignments, the only (and unsatisfying) answer I can provide is, "That's just the way it is."

I don't want my students to be limited by their language usage. I don't want them to experience the linguistic "othering" that I have—because for so many of my students, who are not privileged in the ways that I am, the othering they will experience will *not* be good-natured, as it was at the hands of those who mocked my Minnesotan accent. To some extent, teaching the standard form could spare them from this ostracization and even shrink the opportunity gap by enabling them to engage with texts, resources, and opportunities that use or require SAE.

But I also don't want to force my students to change how they use language. I want to teach them how to use language effectively, but I don't want that effectiveness to be contingent upon adherence to a standard form. I don't want my students to believe that, in order to be effective communicators and to be regarded as intelligent, they have to sound White and wealthy. I want to demonstrate that their unique language variations *are* already powerful and academically valuable.

In my opinion, "that's just the way it is" is an inadequate pedagogical justification. If standardized language is nothing more than a tool used to maintain the racist systems in our society and there is truly no "right" form of language, I want my instructional methodology to reflect this fact.

"Standard" Language and its Intersection with Race

According to Lippi-Green (2011), standardized language is a myth. In reality, all languages have variations, and no variety is inherently more correct, more prestigious, nor more valuable than another (Lippi-Green, 2011; Milroy, 2001). Standardized

language and beliefs about its correctness and prestige are instead social constructs that are used to reinforce and maintain the power hierarchies in society (Alim et al., 2016; Lippi-Green, 2011). When speakers "deviat[e] from prescriptive norms," their language is often seen as less respectable, less intelligent, and less correct (Rosa, 2016, p. 23). Often, these speakers are members of communities who are being marginalized because of their race, socioeconomic status, or education, and the inferiorizing of their language further marginalizes the speakers (Alim et al., 2016; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2011; Milroy, 2001; Rickford & King, 2016).

It is crucial that language is not ignored as a means of division in the hyperracial society of the United States (Alim et al., 2016). Prescriptive language norms are "stigmatizing and contribute to the reproduction of educational inequality" (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 150). If language and race are both means of maintaining societal power structures and the opportunity gap, then it stands to reason that language use can be racist. Therefore, teachers need to be armed with both an awareness of the discrimination present in language use and a toolkit of anti-racist language teaching strategies that enable them to truly set *all* of their students up for success.

Summary

This capstone project seeks to answer the question: *Are academic language requirements in secondary ELA classrooms inclusive of multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized, and, if not, what more linguistically-inclusive approaches to writing instruction can teachers use?* In this chapter, I have provided an overview of my personal and professional interest in the topic of anti-racist ELA teaching. In Chapter Two, I build on the cited information briefly introduced in this

chapter by reviewing existing research on the intersection of race and language and examining how discriminatory linguistic practices can be deconstructed in the secondary ELA classroom. In Chapter Three, I describe the toolkit I created to support teachers in their implementation of inclusive writing instruction. In Chapter Four, I reflect on this project and topic as a whole; revisit the literature review; and identify the implications, limitations, and benefits of this project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I review literature relevant to the question: *Are academic language requirements in secondary ELA classrooms inclusive of multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized, and, if not, what more linguistically-inclusive approaches to writing instruction can teachers use?* After defining terms frequently used throughout this paper, I examine the basic principles of language variation and the implications of standardization. I then make connections between standard language and academic language before providing an overview of the ongoing academic language debate. Next, I describe teacher attitudes towards students' language usage, as well as the effects of these attitudes on students. In the final section, I introduce strategies for writing instruction that are inclusive of and validate the varieties of language used by students.

Definitions

Throughout this paper, the term *Standard American English* (abbreviated as *SAE*) refers to the "language of the educated, in particular those who have achieved a high level of skill with the written language," that society values as the most correct form of the English language (Lippi-Green, 2011, p. 59). It is an "idealized, homogenous" variety "which is imposed and maintained by dominant" institutions and "is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class" (Lippi-Green, 2011, p. 67). I use the term *diverse Englishes* to refer to varieties of English that are not SAE. In an attempt to avoid othering language, I do not use terms such as *vernacular*, *nonstandard*, *foreign*, or *subordinate*, except when directly referencing the terminology used by cited authors. The

term *multilingual learners* (abbreviated as *MLs*) indicates students who speak more than one language and includes identified *English learners* (*ELs*) who are receiving or have received instructional support in developing their English language proficiency. *L1* refers to a speaker's native, first, or home language(s), and *L2* refers to the target language. To differentiate from English as a second or foreign language courses, I use the term *ELA* to refer to *English Language Arts* courses, which are classes dedicated to reading and writing English texts in English-speaking countries.

Language Variation

The first section provides an overview of the basic tenets of language that are shared by linguists. The next section explores the range of diverse and world Englishes that exist in and outside of classrooms. The following section examines social beliefs regarding a standardized form of English and the implications of its prescribed value.

Basic Tenets of Language

According to Lippi-Green (2011), all linguists agree upon the same basic tenets of language, and the first of these principles is that all languages are systematic. Every language has a grammar system: a set of patterns that describe how words in a language can be combined to create meaning (Chambers, 2002). These patterns can be acquired when encountered in meaningful contexts and through social interactions (Chambers, 2002).

Another principle is that all languages are equal. Lippi-Green (2011) asserts that languages are equal in their ability to express meaning, their adaptability, their efficiency, and their correctness. She suggests that, since every language is uniquely "suited to its community of speakers" and "changes in pace as that community and the demands of the

speakers evolve," no language is better than, superior to, or more correct than another (Lippi-Green, 2011, p. 9).

A third principle is that all languages, including English, have variations. These varieties arise due to "social, geographical, ideological, or cultural factors" (Milroy, 2001, p. 541) and their interaction with the language itself, the context, and the purpose (Lippi-Green, 2011).

Diverse and World Englishes

Globalization appears to be another factor with the potential to change language. According to McKay (2010), the increase in the use of English as an international language has caused new varieties of English to develop between and within countries. When a speaker uses a localized variety of English, which has been shaped by the geographical, cultural, and social context in which it developed, they "signal their local and global identity" (McKay, 2010, p. 91). These varieties, or *World Englishes*, were initially categorized by Kachru in his 1986 three circles model (McKay, 2010). Kachru posited that there were three types of English users: members of the inner circle ("native users of English for whom English is the first language in almost all functions"), members of the outer circle ("non-native users of English who use an institutionalized second-language variety of English"), and members of the expanding circle ("non-native users of English who consider English as a foreign language and use it in highly restricted domains") (McKay, 2010, p. 89). Lowenberg (2002) points out that the boundaries between these circles are not hard and fast; as the populations of the outer and expanding circles of English users grow, more varieties are introduced and "nativized" in their communities. Bamgbose (1998) notes that these linguistic changes are often seen as

erroneous rather than innovative, even though, linguistically, local English practices are just as valid as standard norms.

Standardized English

As established by the basic tenets of language, no variety of a language, whether it develops in a historically English-speaking country or in a different international context, is more correct or more valuable than another (Lippi-Green, 2011; Milroy, 2001). However, although linguists maintain that all varieties are equal, society disagrees (Chambers, 2002; Cross et al., 2001; Lippi-Green, 2011; Milroy, 2001).

Speakers of a language typically consider it common sense that there is a regular, invariable form of language that is more correct than other variations (Lippi-Green, 2011; Milroy, 2001). Contrary to popular belief, however, the "standard" form is not an objective linguistic category; it is instead the form used by the dominant societal group (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2011). It is through the persistence of this prescriptive, yet linguistically-unfounded, belief that standardization occurs, regardless of speakers' inability to clearly define what the standard variation is and their limited use of this form in practice (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2011; Milroy, 2001).

However, in spite of the prescriptive belief that SAE is more correct than diverse Englishes, it is important to note that these varieties are not "frivolous," "sloppy," or "imprecise" (Lippi-Green, 2011, pp. 21, 38). They are not ungrammatical, nor are they erroneous; instead, like standard variations, diverse Englishes adhere to predictable grammatical systems (Reyes, 2010). Additionally, speakers often intentionally use linguistic variations to more fully express their messages and negotiate their identities, as language variation can be used to "construct ourselves as social beings, to signal who we

are, and who we are not and do not want to be" (Lippi-Green, 2011, p. 66).

Implications of a Standardized Form. However, because SAE is often seen as correct, prestigious, and legitimate, it is implied that all other forms, even when strategically chosen, are illogical and illegitimate, and the people who use diverse Englishes are thus inferiorized and dismissed (Chambers, 2002; Cross et al., 2001; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Hall & Cunningham, 2020; Lippi-Green, 2011; McGroarty, 2010; Milroy, 2001; Rosa, 2016). Milroy notes that:

> Although common sense attitudes are ideologically loaded attitudes, those who hold them do not see it in that way at all: they believe that their adverse judgments on persons who use language 'incorrectly' are purely linguistic judgments sanctioned by authorities on language . . . People do not necessarily associate these judgments with prejudice or discrimination in terms of race or social class: they believe that, whatever the social characteristics of the speakers may be, these persons have simply used the language in an erroneous way and that it is open to them to learn to speak correctly. If they do not do this, it is their own fault as individuals, whatever their race, color, creed, or class: there are plenty of models for them of 'good' speech. (p. 537)

In reality, these "common sense" judgments *are* prejudicial because, by valuing certain forms of language over others, they introduce ideas of linguistic inequality and insinuate that there is less value in certain communities' language usage (Bonnin, 2013).

Often, the communities who use diverse Englishes instead of SAE are populated by people who are already being marginalized because of race, ethnicity, lack of education, lower socioeconomic status, and L1 (Lippi-Green, 2011; Rickford & King,

2016; Rosa, 2016). Their language use is stigmatized, and these stigmatizations are then passed on to the speakers themselves, which can cause them to be marginalized even further (Bonnin, 2013; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Reyes, 2010; Rosa, 2016).

For example, Milroy (2001) observes that the diverse Englishes spoken in urban settings were originally not considered varieties of English at all; instead, they were seen as "ignorant attempts" that "threatened to vulgarize and contaminate" the English language (p. 548). Likewise, African American English is often stereotyped as unintelligible, crass, and improper, even though it follows a grammatical system that is comparable to SAE's (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rickford & King, 2016). These linguistic prejudices can be detrimental to the speakers of these varieties because society begins to believe that the speakers are "incapable of producing any legitimate language" (Rosa, 2016, p. 163).

Contrastingly, when the language of those in positions of power does not conform to SAE, their language is not automatically seen as deficient. This linguistic inequality functions as a "reproducer of wider social, economic, and cultural inequalities" (Bonnin, 2013, p. 502), and the imbalance suggests that other social factors, such as racialization, may be at play in the delegitimization of diverse Englishes and their users (Reyes, 2010; Rosa, 2016).

Conclusion

In the words of Lippi-Green (2011), "the variety of English a person speaks, highly regarded or stigmatized, standard-like or vernacular, cannot predict the quality and effectiveness of any given utterance or that person's worth as a communicator" (p. 15). In spite of this linguistic truth, society appears to uphold the value of SAE and use linguistic

differences to make judgments about diverse Englishes. These judgments then affect perceptions of diverse English users and their language in multiple settings, including the classroom (Cross et al., 2001; Rickford & King, 2016).

Academic Language Debate

Just as SAE is considered a superior language form in society, academic language enjoys a similar status in education (Baker-Bell, 2020; Brady, 2015; Flores & Rosa, 2015). As defined by Krashen and Brown (2007), academic language is the syntactically complex and lexically specialized variation of language often used in school, as well as in scientific, political, and business fields. Although developing students' academic language proficiency is a common goal across content areas, theorists, researchers, and teachers appear to lack consensus on whether or not academic language should be required in educational spaces.

The first section builds on Krashen and Brown's definition to paint a broader picture of what, exactly, academic language is; how it relates to SAE; and what being considered proficient in academic language entails. The second section explores the importance of academic language and the benefits that it may provide to students. The third section examines the possible detriments of academic language expectations for MLs and students of color.

Definition of Academic Language

According to Baker-Bell (2020), researchers and educators created the idea of academic language in response to civil rights and other social justice movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Their goal was two-fold: one, to remedy the exclusion of diverse peoples from academic spaces, and, two, to distinguish between the linguistic practices

typically used in classrooms versus outside of them. Since its inception, the term *academic language* has come to refer to a language variation that is used (and expected) in academic settings and is characterized by its syntactic complexity and lexical specificity (Baker-Bell, 2020; Flores, 2020; Krashen & Brown, 2007). Flores posits that researchers and educators consequently view other variations "as less specialized and less complex" than academic language (p. 23) and argues that this dichotomous perspective delegitimizes the use of diverse Englishes in the classroom, as the apparent difference in sophistication suggests that varieties other than academic language are deficient (Flores, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Connections to Standardized Language. Although all languages are equal in correctness, as well as in their ability to express complex meaning and use specific vocabulary, variation is not welcomed in dominant societal groups or in the classroom (Flores, 2020; Lippi-Green, 2011). Instead, academic language is the variety considered most appropriate in academics, just as SAE is considered the most legitimate variety in society (Flores & Rosa, 2015). In fact, McKay (2010) suggests that SAE shapes academic language; since SAE is seen as the norm, language-related standards in education are then based on its features and patterns.

Many of the researchers mentioned in the earlier section entitled *Implications of a Standardized Form* worry that valuing SAE over all other varieties may further marginalize users of diverse Englishes. Baker-Bell (2020), Brady (2015), and Flores and Rosa (2015) share many of the same concerns with the valuation of academic language. Baker-Bell argues that the term *academic language* is simply "a proxy for WME [White Mainstream English], and it reveals a covert racist practice that maintains a racial and

linguistic hierarchy in schools" (p. 10). Brady concurs, noting that when teachers promote and students conform to expectations for academic language use, they are complicit in upholding systems in which "the privileged few and the unprivileged are continually re-empowered and disempowered, respectively" (p. 150). Flores and Rosa refuse to view academic language as an "objective linguistic categor[y]," dismissing it instead as a notion used to reinforce discriminatory ideology (p. 152). However, other theorists, such as Cummins (2021), argue that academic language is more than a racializing construct because it *can* "be empirically distinguished from the language typically used in everyday social interactions" (p. 17).

Academic Language Proficiency. Regardless of the validity of the concept of academic language, students worldwide are often expected to become proficient in academic language in order to be successful in school (Baker-Bell, 2020; Krashen & Brown, 2007). Since mastery of sophisticated, complex language is a primary goal of many education programs, it appears that students do not naturally acquire academic language features and must instead be taught these norms explicitly (Rosa, 2016). It is thus part of a teacher's job to equip students with the skills necessary to first understand and then produce academic language (Cummins, 2021; Krashen & Brown, 2007). Many researchers and educators believe that MLs and users of diverse Englishes need remediation to support their academic language proficiency (Flores, 2020; Hall & Cunningham, 2020). This deficit-based perspective, however, does not take into account the existent linguistic repertoire of MLs and the intentional ways in which they already use language in order to communicate effectively (Flores, 2020).

Advantages of Academic Language Proficiency

Aside from often being required by national and state standards (Brady, 2015), academic language can support students' language development and their comprehension of concepts across content areas (Krashen & Brown, 2007). Krashen and Brown claim that being proficient in academic language leads to benefits such as increased lexicons, more accurate spelling, stronger reading and writing skills, and better understanding of complex syntax. Students often encounter densely-written texts in school, and academic language proficiency can make these texts more comprehensible, thus providing students access to new information (Krashen & Brown, 2007).

Brady (2015) agrees that making subject matter accessible is a benefit to academic language instruction, but questions if it is possible to teach standardized norms "without devaluing the identities which [students] may associate with other dialect forms" (p. 149). However, in a qualitative study conducted in a high school in the United Kingdom, Brady found that some adolescents actually appreciate that "their non-standard language practices [do] not achieve a status equal to standard English within the classroom" because they want to rebel and "preserve the boundaries of 'teenagers' and the 'other'" (p. 156). In addition to the academic and social benefits in school, academic language proficiency can also open up post-secondary opportunities that may not be otherwise available to students. Brady acknowledges that continuing to teach standardized forms may be important; otherwise, educators risk "further entrench[ing] existing social and economic inequalities" if options are made unavailable to students because of their language use (p. 155).

Drawbacks of Academic Language Proficiency

Supporters of academic language requirements believe that opportunities that would otherwise exclude students who are being marginalized can be accessed if students master standardized language norms. However, researchers such as Flores and Rosa suggest that if educators continue requiring speakers who are being marginalized to assimilate to standardized language forms, the diverse languages and variations used by these speakers will never be fully accepted and will continue to be considered inferior in academic spaces (Flores, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015). Flores (2020) argues that, in order to dismantle language-related inequities in societal systems, language expectations in schools need to change first.

Flores (2020) posits that the language practices of many MLs are already aligned with state standards, and the rejection of their languages in the classroom is instead the result of an "underlying framing of linguistic deficiency" (p. 23). Brady (2015) extends this argument by suggesting that academic language requirements are nothing more than an "attempt to hyper-standardise and hyper-control language" so that the dominant group who uses the standardized form is able to remain in power (p. 150). Baker-Bell (2020) similarly criticizes the standard form as a reflection of White language usage and points out that this relationship forces "most linguistically and racially diverse students [to] begin [their education] at a disadvantage because their language and culture do not reflect the dominant [W]hite culture that counts as academic" (p. 10). When students' diverse languages are not accepted in academic spaces, teachers, peers, and the students themselves may begin to doubt the value and legitimacy of their language practices and

their identities (Baker-Bell, 2020; Brady, 2015; Cross et al., 2001; Lippi-Green, 2011; Rosa, 2016).

Conclusion

Although the value of academic language, like SAE, appears to be socially-determined rather than linguistically-sanctioned, this variation is awarded higher academic clout and has become the expectation in educational settings (Flores & Rosa, 2015). There are advantages to academic language acquisition, as observed by Brady (2015) and Krashen and Brown (2007), but those benefits may be outweighed by the drawbacks, such as further marginalization of and loss of identity for users of diverse Englishes (Baker-Bell, 2020; Brady, 2015; Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Teacher Attitudes Towards and Perceptions of Student Language

Teachers' beliefs about their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds have the power to shape students' experiences in the classroom and their perceptions of their identities, for better or worse (Hall & Cunningham, 2020; Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial that educators are aware of their potential prejudices towards MLs' language practices, races, and cultures (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021). The first section provides an overview of teachers' attitudes towards standardized and academic language forms versus their attitudes towards diverse Englishes. The following section explores how these attitudes influence teachers' perception of students' use of diverse Englishes in writing. The final section examines the effect of teachers' language ideologies on students and how teachers may inadvertently discriminate against users of diverse Englishes in their classrooms.

Teacher Attitudes Towards Standardized Academic Forms Versus Diverse Englishes

As authority figures in the classroom, teachers often decide which language forms are considered acceptable and which are not; since these decisions are informed by teachers' language ideologies, it is important to consider what teachers' beliefs are in respect to language variation (Cross et al., 2001). According to Siegel (2007), even though there is nearly 50 years' worth of linguistic study that has established that all languages and variations are equally systematic, meaningful, efficient, correct, and valuable, many teachers and administrators are unaware of or disagree with these facts. McBee Orzulak (2013) and Cross et al. (2001) share concerns that this ignorance may lead teachers to adopt a deficit-based view of multilingualism, reject diverse Englishes in academic spaces, make misguided assumptions about students' abilities based on their language use, reinforce the societal power structures that are implicit in SAE, and further marginalize minority students.

Hall and Cunningham (2020) note that many educational programs make a "distinction between 'more valuable' languages [that are] legitimized by being taught in schools and 'less valuable' languages brought to schools from home" (p. 8). This distinction implies that students are not allowed to speak diverse Englishes in the classroom and are instead expected to use SAE (Siegel, 2007). Furthermore, barring diverse Englishes from the classroom has led to the development of a common misconception amongst educators that diverse Englishes are "detrimental to students' progress in formal education" (Siegel, 2007, p. 66), when, in reality, drawing on students' multilingual repertoires aids them not only in acquiring academic language but also in strengthening their overall academic performance (Blake & Cutler, 2003; Siegel, 2007).

Correction of Diverse Englishes. Research has shown that teachers often "correct" student use of diverse Englishes, suggesting that teachers believe these varieties to be incorrect (Cross et al., 2001). Of the students surveyed by Brady (2015), "90% claim to have observed a teacher 'correcting' the use of non-standard English in the classroom" (p. 154). Teacher responses to students' use of diverse Englishes included "verbal warnings, explanations, fines, laughter," and even detention (Brady, 2015, p. 154). However, educational researchers and linguists have proven that these responses are not effective and actually work against language learning (Siegel, 2007).

Appropriateness-Based Approaches. Hall and Cunningham (2020) are quick to note that many teachers *do* value students' linguistic diversity and are not opposed to variation in the classroom—but even in the instances when diverse Englishes are welcomed into academic spaces, they are still awarded "only qualified or subordinate worth" (p. 9). Teachers appear to value diverse Englishes as an instructional support but maintain that, eventually, students should transition to using SAE (Hall & Cunningham, 2020). Blake and Cutler (2003) note that even though teachers value diverse Englishes in specific contexts, teachers believe that these varieties don't belong in the classroom long-term because they are "inappropriate" for academic contexts and "unprofitable for [their] speakers" (p. 188). Brady (2015) and Flores and Rosa (2015) both offer a forceful criticism of these appropriateness-based views, claiming that these perspectives continue to legitimize SAE by upholding existent power imbalances and delegitimizing all other varieties.

Teacher Attitudes Towards Student Use of Diverse Englishes in Writing

While it appears that MLs and users of diverse Englishes are generally expected

to conform to standardized language practices in both spoken and written production, these expectations are perhaps even more rigid for writing (Kubota et al., 2021). According to Weaver (2019), many educators believe writing to be more formal than speaking and consequently expect students to write in SAE, the variation society deems most appropriate for formal contexts. Lippi-Green (2011) observes that:

> The demands on written language are considerable: we want it to span time and space, and we want it to do that in a social vacuum, without the aid of paralinguistic features and often without shared context of any kind. Thus, the argument goes, written language needs to be free of variation: it must be consistent in every way, from spelling to sentence structure. (p. 18)

This description suggests that standardized ideology is firmly entrenched in the beliefs teachers hold about written language (Weaver, 2019). Rosa (2016) even observes that when MLs' language use does not follow conventions of SAE, teachers sometimes draw the conclusion that they do not know how to write at all.

Kubota et al. (2021) have found that MLs' writing is frequently criticized by instructors, even when language choices are made purposely, and that teachers are unaware of or choose to ignore differences in conventions between languages and varieties and most often frame the difference as deficits. Contrastingly, these same students' speech is frequently complimented while their writing continues to be judged as poor (Kubota et al., 2021).

Although both teachers and researchers appear to agree that "zero tolerance for language variation is not an acceptable goal for writing instruction" (McBee Orzulak, 2013, p. 16), there appears to be a dilemma between the desire to accept students' diverse

Englishes while still meeting school expectations, state standards, and societal norms for academic writing (Weaver, 2019). Locked in that dilemma, many educators approach writing from the "appropriateness-based stance toward language variation" (Weaver, 2019, p. 49) that is criticized by Brady (2015) and Flores and Rosa (2015). This approach, although well-intentioned and intended to validate students' diverse language usage, as well as supply them with the linguistic tools needed "to level the playing field," actually backfires by upholding the commonsense and prestigious view of SAE observed by Milroy (2001), as mentioned in the earlier section entitled *Standardized English* (McBee Orzulak, 2013, p. 14).

Effect on Students

When teachers intentionally or unintentionally uphold the value of standardized and academic variations at the expense of diverse Englishes, students are negatively affected (Blake & Cutler, 2003; Brady, 2015; Cross et al., 2001; García, 2009; McBee Orzulak, 2013; Reyes, 2010; Rosa, 2016; Siegel, 2007; Wright & Bougie, 2007). These effects may include: less academic success, disengagement, invalidation of cultural identities, and becoming targets of prejudice.

Lower Academic Achievement. Blake and Cutler (2003) have observed a "correlation between negative teacher attitudes" toward diverse Englishes and "lowered expectations and evaluations" of users of these varieties (p. 165). These low expectations are based solely on students' language use (Blake & Cutler, 2003; Cross et al., 2011). When teachers hold low expectations for their students, students are less likely to achieve academic success (Blake & Cutler, 2003; Cross et al., 2001). Additionally, when these students' language use is stigmatized, the students themselves often do not perform well

in class and are often relegated to remedial classes (García, 2009; Rosa, 2016; Siegel, 2007).

Disengagement. Brady (2015) notes that students' "unwillingness or inability to emulate the prestigious language practices required by the curriculum" may lead them to silence themselves and refuse to participate (p. 151). For some students, the "oppression and derision" of their linguistic practices may "result in rebellion and resentment towards school" (Brady, 2015, p. 151). Other students may experience a crisis of confidence and become more insecure and anxious (García, 2009). Cross et al. (2001) point out the "self-fulfilling prophecy" at play here: when teachers hold low expectations for their multilingual students, these students doubt their own abilities, refuse to invest in coursework, and thus end up failing, just as the teachers originally expected (p. 212).

Invalidation of Languages and Cultures. In addition to limiting academic success, requiring that students produce the "standard" variation invalidates all other variations in the classroom (Reyes, 2010). Cross et al. (2001) warn that:

> If the majority of teachers believe that there is one "correct"' dialect and that their duty is to uphold that dialect while eradicating all competing dialects, many students will come to believe that not only their language but their culture is invalid. (p. 212)

When students are taught that their linguistic practices are deficient or inappropriate, they may experience feelings of shame and reject their cultural backgrounds (Rosa, 2016). Wright and Bougie (2007) note that this rejection then alienates students from their communities, therefore preventing them access to important relationships, to the advantages of multilingualism, and to aspects of their social identities.

Inadvertent Discrimination. Wright and Bougie (2007) also point out that rejecting diverse Englishes from classroom spaces, thereby limiting students' linguistic expression, is "seldom represented as 'discrimination,'" but it is (p. 158). Rosa (2016) argues that deeming diverse Englishes and other languages as inappropriate for academic spaces may also suggest that the students themselves are inferior, and this implication is prejudicial. Hall and Cunningham (2020) agree that perceptions of language forms as deficient and problematic are often transferred onto the users of these forms themselves and become "conflated with other identity categories such as race, ethnicity, nationality/legal status and socio-economic status" (p. 11). These assumptions then result in students being seen as "illegitimate and incompetent" and becoming "targets of suspicion, hostility, and exclusion" (Kubota et al., 2021, p. 760).

Conclusion

In general, teachers appear to be misinformed about language varieties that are being marginalized, as well as the fact that their own language ideologies may be socially, rather than linguistically, founded (Blake & Cutler, 2003). In order to value and validate students' unique linguistic practices, teachers' pedagogy must go beyond ideas of appropriateness and be firmly rooted in social justice, which cannot occur "if the [students'] home language practices are not included in education" (García, 2009).

Inclusive Strategies for Teaching Writing

Blake and Cutler (2003) suggest that most teachers do not intend to dismiss students' linguistic practices, but may simply lack awareness of and training in how to include and utilize diverse Englishes in the classroom. As observed by Rickford and King (2016), "the ideological barriers" to fully accepting variation in the classroom "and

building on that to teach [students] reading and writing and to extend their repertoires" are "formidable" (p. 979). However, the challenging nature of these barriers does not mean they are insurmountable.

The following sections explore linguistically-inclusive approaches to writing instruction. First, research is reviewed that provides justification for challenging and changing the way writing is taught in secondary ELA classrooms. In the following sections, two guiding theories and three preliminary strategies for teaching writing are introduced and examined.

The "Why"

Cummins (2021) asserts that effective pedagogy must not only be evidence-based, but must also "challenge the operation of coercive power structures and ideologies" (p. 5). When instructional strategies make use of and develop students' multilingual assets rather than reject them, students' academic achievement may increase, their linguistic knowledge may deepen, and their multifaceted identities may develop and be affirmed (Cummins, 2021). Additionally, inclusive instructional practices coupled with intentional writing activities, such as code-meshing, metacognitive annotation, and explicit discussions of prescriptive grammar, can deconstruct the notion that SAE and academic language are superior variations and, as a result, validate languages that are being marginalized and excluded from most classrooms (Brady, 2015). Flores and Rosa (2015) build on Cummins' and Brady's assertions, arguing that pedagogy needs to change, as "the solution [to] the marginalization of language-minoritized students cannot be to add objective practices to their linguistic repertoires . . . but instead to engage with, confront, and ultimately dismantle the racialized hierarchy of U.S. society" (p. 167).

Transforming existent instructional norms lifts the burden of assimilation from diverse English users; rather than giving students who are already being marginalized the additional responsibility of changing their language and conforming, the responsibility instead lies with educators to change the system (Flores, 2020). Lippi-Green (2011) agrees that the onus of change should lie with educators, noting that, since language is a tool speakers use to negotiate identity, asking MLs to drop their language is effectively asking them to strip themselves of their cultural affiliations. She analogizes that the demand to change their language is akin to requiring students to change their race, gender, and religion, which is illegal. Therefore, it is imperative that instructional approaches allow students to use the forms of language that feel most comfortable so that they can most authentically express themselves (Siegel, 2007).

Key Theoretical Backings

According to Brady (2015), students should not only be given opportunities to explore and express themselves, but also to examine, challenge, and potentially transform societal norms and expectations. Although the implementation of inclusive linguistic practices may not be enough to dismantle the complex relationship between language and power, Brady posits that strategies grounded in culturally sustaining pedagogy, such as code-meshing, may foster the development of students' unique and powerful voices, which they may be able to use to spark change in society.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. To address the inequities underlying social norms, many educators, researchers, and teacher preparation programs have embraced asset-based pedagogies such as culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching (Paris, 2012). While these pedagogies acknowledge the value in students' cultural and

linguistic backgrounds, Paris (2012) questions if they do enough to cultivate multiculturalism and multilingualism. As an alternative, he suggests that educators transition to culturally sustaining pedagogy as a means "to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Though this pluralism is not typically encouraged in classroom language use (Horner et al., 2011; Lowenberg, 2002), fostering, rather than simply welcoming, linguistic diversity in academic spaces can validate both the varieties themselves and the users of these diverse Englishes (Bamgbose, 1998; Paris, 2012).

Code-Meshing. As mentioned in the earlier sections entitled *Appropriateness-Based Approaches* and *Teacher Attitudes Towards Student Use of Diverse Englishes in Writing*, many well-intentioned teachers, in an attempt to validate diverse Englishes, accept variations in their classrooms, but only in specific contexts (Blake & Cutler, 2003; Hall & Cunningham, 2020; McBee Orzulak, 2013; Weaver, 2019). In classrooms guided by appropriateness-based approaches, code-switching—the practice of switching between languages and variations depending on context—is common (Young et al., 2018).

Both Baker-Bell (2020) and Young et al. (2018) criticize the support of code-switching as an approach to including diverse Englishes in the classroom. Baker-Bell argues that when teachers require students to code-switch, teachers do not truly recognize the legitimacy of students' L1s, only accepting these languages and variations until students are able to switch to academic language or SAE instead. Young et al. further this argument by asserting that "code-switching is a racialized teaching method that manufactures linguistic segregation in the classroom and unwittingly supports it in society" and proposing code-meshing—the practice of blending multiple

languages or variations within the same text—as a more inclusive approach (p. 58). Code-meshing activities, such as revising standardized writing, examining words and phrases unique to or commonly used in diverse Englishes, and observing real-life examples in popular media, can build students' awareness of the flexibility, creativity, and power of blended language (Young et al., 2018).

By allowing students to continue writing in diverse Englishes and thereby "extending the range of grammatical forms that students may use to express themselves, code-meshing recognizes the importance of both the standard and undervalued varieties" and increases students' literacy skills across variations (Young et al., 2018, p. 43). The ability to navigate, understand, and use multiple forms of language also prepares students to be effective communicators in today's interconnected, globalized society (Young et al., 2018).

Strategies for Teaching Writing

In order to better support *all* students, teachers need instructional strategies (like code-meshing) that do not racialize or delegitimize students who are being marginalized and their diverse linguistic practices (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Young et al., 2018). Such strategies can transform the teaching of grammar, inform the selection of mentor texts, and support the development of students' voices.

Grammar. McBee Orzulak (2012) suggests that the first step towards reframing grammar instruction is to avoid deficit-based views and over-correction of student language. Instead of criticizing students for their unique means of expressing themselves, McBee Orzulak proposes teachers take advantage of the learning opportunity to help students dig into the differences between descriptive and prescriptive grammar. By

"discussing explicitly the prescriptive model of standard written English," teachers can engage "students in thinking descriptively about how they actually write and speak" (McBee Orzulak, 2012, p. 23). To access this critical analysis, McBee Orzulak encourages teachers to guide students through pattern identification and to explore the purposes that drive language choices in different genres.

Modeling. According to Snyder and Staehr Fenner (2021), modeling is a crucial part of the learning process. When learning to write effectively, Shanahan (2021) notes that:

> Students need opportunities to consider how language works in texts to create tone, rhythm, and meaning and how it should be used with intention by writers for these same purposes. Students need opportunities to read with these frames of mind and to write using language geared for specific audiences and purposes. Students need opportunities to reflect on the dialects that they bring to the classroom, the value of linguistic diversity, and how language is used for expression and communication. (p. 14)

In her classroom, Shanahan incorporates authentic, real-world texts from diverse authors when helping her students begin to make intentional stylistic choices in their own writing. She also invites students to bring in texts from their own lives in order to provide more authenticity and variety. Inviting these texts into the classroom and validating them as academic models not only legitimizes diverse Englishes but also "support[s] students in developing understanding of and the skills to navigate other cultural perspectives" (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021, p. 207).

Developing Authentic Student Voice. Activities such as annotating their own essays in order to "explain their rationale for employing concepts or the rhetorical effect they intended to achieve by using them" activates students' metacognition and helps them develop intentionality in their linguistic choices (Shanahan, 2021, p. 16). The open-ended nature of this task does not require students to conform to prescriptive standards, or even make decisions based on what is considered "appropriate" in academic writing, but instead allows them to express their thoughts in forms which feel most natural and to exercise their unique voice.

Conclusion

Although the proposed strategies for inclusive writing instruction are somewhat limited, they provide preliminary steps secondary ELA teachers can take to be more mindful of the ways in which they include and critique students' language use in their classrooms. Teachers must reflect on and revise their pedagogy so that it does not invalidate, but rather affirm, students' diverse identities and does not uphold, but rather dismantle, the racism lurking in traditional approaches to teaching writing (Brady, 2015; Cummins, 2021; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Young et al., 2018). Only when students' languages are validated in academic spaces will they be free to fully and authentically express themselves (Siegel, 2007).

Summary

Through review of the literature synthesized in this chapter, I have sought to answer the question: *Are academic language requirements in secondary ELA classrooms inclusive of multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized, and, if not, what more linguistically-inclusive approaches to writing instruction can teachers use?* In

this chapter, I first explored tenets of language and the process, as well as implications, of standardization. After examining multiple facets of the academic language debate, I highlighted teacher attitudes towards students' language usage, as well as the potential repercussions of these attitudes. Finally, I introduced a brief collection of teaching strategies that seek to make writing instruction more accessible to and supportive of diverse English users. In the following chapter, I describe how this research helped me create a practical toolkit of inclusive writing strategies for secondary ELA teachers.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

This capstone project seeks to answer the question: *Are academic language requirements in secondary ELA classrooms inclusive of multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized, and, if not, what more linguistically-inclusive approaches to writing instruction can teachers use?* In my literature review, I discovered that, while most teachers believe there is value in multilingualism, there is a disconnect between this ideology and the practices implemented in English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms. It also appears that most teachers lack awareness of the linguistic principles surrounding language variation and instead adhere to socially-constructed beliefs about language. Academic language requirements, which are rooted in these social assumptions, devalue, stigmatize, and ostracize diverse Englishes and multilingual learners (MLs). In order to better foster the writing skills of *all* students, classroom practices surrounding the teaching of writing need to change.

To facilitate this change, I created a digital toolkit for secondary ELA teachers that repackages the theoretical information and writing strategies included in my literature review into a practical, accessible format. In this chapter, I describe the website I designed, as well as the supporting research for this type of project. I provide an overview of the setting for which I created this resource and outline the timeline for project creation and dissemination. Finally, I brainstorm how the website's effectiveness could be assessed once it is shared with its intended audience.

Project Description

For my project, I created a Wix website entitled *Inclusive Writing Instruction: Information, Strategies, and Resources for Secondary ELA Teachers*. This instructional toolkit details two guiding approaches (culturally sustaining pedagogy and code-meshing) and four recommended activities (rubric revision, mentor text selection, metacognitive annotation, and explicit discussion) that can be used to promote linguistic inclusivity in the secondary ELA classroom. Each approach and strategy page features a definition, suggestions for implementation, and links to related resources.

In addition to these strategy pages, the website also includes pages entitled *Language 101* and *The "Why." Language 101* provides an overview of basic tenets of language and debunks common misconceptions. *The "Why"* explores the rationale for modifying traditional instructional practices and language requirements by describing the impact of teachers' language ideologies and their effects on students.

The website also features downloadable infographics that I designed using Canva. These infographics offer additional information on the following important topics: the academic language debate, appropriateness-based approaches, basic tenets of language, common misconceptions, and the effects of teachers' attitudes on students. While these infographics were created for teachers, there are also two student-facing infographics available that address the following questions: Why is "good" language considered good? Do students have to change their language?

The final component of the website is a forum that comprises four discussion boards. One is for general questions and answers about the information contained on the website. Another provides a space for teachers to share strategies that they have used in

their classrooms, and the third an opportunity to share additional resources that support inclusive writing instruction. The final topic is dedicated to networking.

Rationale for Project Type

The ultimate goal of this project is to make linguistic theory and its instructional implications available to teachers so that they can dismantle marginalizing language expectations. Since it is unrealistic to assume that practicing teachers have time to read this capstone in its entirety, I chose a medium that could organize the most pertinent information into a practical, engaging format. Websites are convenient, easy to access and share, versatile, and visually appealing—as are infographics. Designing a website and an accompanying collection of infographics enabled me to translate my research into a relevant, useful toolkit that teachers can always have at their fingertips.

Although not a traditional form of professional development (PD), this toolkit, like PD presentations and courses, is designed to expand teachers' skills and knowledge. Therefore, when constructing the website, I followed guidelines for effective PD to ensure that I presented information effectively (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) assert that there are seven characteristics of effective PD. The first is that the PD must be geared towards specific content areas and classroom contexts. My website fulfills this requirement, as it focuses on strategies for writing instruction in a secondary ELA classroom with a linguistically-diverse student population. The second element of effective PD is that it must be engaging, interactive, and practical; the strategies introduced in the PD must be directly applicable to teachers' classrooms (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). My website is interactive, as it makes use of buttons, hyperlinks, embedded resources, and downloadable files to provide teachers

opportunities to engage with their learning and seek out the information most relevant to their classrooms, needs, and interests. The explanations of and suggestions for each strategy make their implementation feasible in the classroom.

Effective PD must also be collaborative, provide both expert support and feedback, and include models of best practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The forum offers opportunities to ask and answer questions, receive feedback, and collaborate with other educators. The supplemental resources linked on each page not only connect teachers with linguists, teacher-researchers, scholars, and other experts, but also contain examples of what inclusive writing instruction looks like in practice.

Finally, effective PD must "provid[e] teachers with adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon new strategies that facilitate changes in their practice" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. vi). Because my website will always be available online, teachers will be able to reference the materials, try out the strategies, and reflect on their learning at their own pace.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also note that PD may be more accessible if facilitated via technology. When PD is delivered through an online platform, teachers can collaborate beyond their immediate teaching community; individualize their learning by focusing on the pieces of information most relevant to and needed for their unique classrooms; and refer back to models and information. My website satisfies these conditions by connecting teachers through the forum; organizing content by topic so that users can easily find the information they require; and being permanently published and always available.

Rationale for Website Design

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), it is not only the content that matters, but also the way in which it is presented. Therefore, the layout of the website itself was crucial to the success of my project.

Ng (2014) emphasizes the importance of user-friendliness, noting that navigation and general usability is crucial in determining if a website is usable or not. My site features a clickable menu that is organized and labeled by topic and viewable on every page so that users can easily find and access desired sections of the website. On the home page and individual strategy pages, there are buttons that allow users to navigate between sections of the website. The hyperlinks also take users directly to outside resources, but open them in secondary tabs so that users don't lose track of where they are in the toolkit.

In addition to navigation, Ng (2014) notes that another measure of user-friendliness is the web designer's ability to communicate effectively with users. As an ELA teacher, I know that deliberate diction and tone are essential to successful communication and that misinterpretation of tone can lead to miscommunication. When phrasing the content on my website, I strove to employ a straightforward, non-accusatory tone so that when teachers access the website, they will not feel judged or criticized for gaps in their understanding of language. If the way in which the information is presented seems demeaning, educators may be defensive of their language requirements and less open to the changes I propose, which would inhibit the efficacy of the toolkit.

Ng (2014) also stresses the importance of visually-appealing multimedia elements, which "includ[e] color, graphic, fonts and typography" (p. 111). My website uses a homogeneous color palette, as well as a consistent font family, so that the site

appears neat and tied together. Additionally, I used Wix's text elements to guarantee consistent sizes for different types of text (e.g. page titles, section headings, and captions). I also followed these aesthetic principles in the infographics that I created using Canva.

Conclusion

Overall, the digital toolkit that I created adheres to standards for effective PD and practical web design. By meeting these standards, I was able to enhance the accessibility and relevance of my website. The content and format of the toolkit will hopefully encourage teachers to revise traditional language requirements and support them as they transform the ways in which they teach writing to linguistically-diverse students.

Setting and Audience

I currently teach at a metropolitan high school in Minnesota with a student population of approximately 1100. Roughly 40% of our students are MLs, and there are 26 different languages spoken by our student body. The most prominent home languages (L1s) are Spanish (42%), English (39%), and Somali (11%). Forty-five percent of our students are Hispanic or Latino, 34% are Black or African American, 13% are White, 3% are Asian, 2% are American Indian, and 3% identify as two or more races. Eighty-five percent of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch.

I designed my project with this context in mind, as my goal is to clarify best practices for teaching writing in a setting, like my school, where most students are MLs or users of diverse Englishes. Few (if any) of my students regularly communicate in Standard American English (SAE), and I want to ensure that my writing instruction does not invalidate their diverse, yet effective, means of communication. If I want to

implement these inclusive practices in my classroom, I need to share the rationale and strategies with my colleagues, as department-wide and cross-curricular consistency is one of our school's professional goals.

The primary audience of this project is secondary ELA teachers, including ELA teachers who work primarily with English learners (ELs), at the aforementioned high school. Eventually, in accordance with professional goals, the toolkit will also be shared across content areas and with the middle school. Disseminating this information will facilitate collaborative exploration of new approaches to writing instruction that may be more relevant to and inclusive of our diverse student population. I will introduce the website and refer to its resources during our ELA department's professional learning community (PLC) meetings, but I hope that individual teachers will also independently explore the research and implement the strategies in their own classrooms.

This toolkit is not exclusively relevant to my school context; its information, strategies, and resources are also applicable to schools with similar demographics, as well as to schools with less diversity. Linguistic awareness is important for all students, whether or not they themselves are multilingual, as exposure to diverse forms of language fosters students' ability to navigate the multitude of languages, cultures, and perspectives they will encounter in our global community (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021; Young et al., 2018). By sharing the toolkit with friends, relatives, and colleagues who teach in other districts, the website will be more widely circulated, and, if implemented by middle and high school teachers in other districts, it may have the potential to reshape academic language requirements beyond those of my school community.

Conclusion

Designing this website with my colleagues and our professional goals in mind ensured that the toolkit's content would be relevant to our school context. The more relevant the materials and strategies are, the more meaningful a resource this website will be. If my colleagues believe the website to be useful, they will be more likely to implement the strategies in their classrooms, thus leading to more inclusive writing instruction across our department and, eventually, across our school and district. I know that my colleagues want to reach all of our students and increase their writing proficiency, and this toolkit provides them with a practical means of getting started.

Timeline

The first step in creating this toolkit was amassing research. The research that informs both my literature review (see Chapter Two) and website was gathered throughout the fall semester of 2023 and the spring semester of 2024. This website itself was created during the spring semester of 2024.

To facilitate the web design process, and because I do not have experience with coding, I chose to use a website builder. Initially, I considered creating my website with Google Sites, which, in my current teaching position, I have used to design course, department, and team websites. Although I am familiar with Google Sites, and it is free and intuitive to use, I am often frustrated with its lack of customizability. After comparing alternative website builders such as Wix, Weebly, and WordPress, I chose Wix, since its free version is user-friendly, supported by a robust tutorial system, offers hundreds of professional templates, and allows extensive customization (Haan, 2023).

Getting started with Wix was relatively straightforward, and the design process

was streamlined by the option to use a “Create with AI” tool. I used this AI chat feature to solidify my brainstorming and better focus the overall goals of my website—namely, to educate teachers about language and share alternative pedagogical strategies. Based on the AI chat, Wix generated a collection of educational website templates. The template I chose from the curated list enabled me to present the information and strategies detailed in Chapter Two of this capstone in a user-friendly, aesthetically-appealing format.

After laying out my Wix site, I used Canva to create a collection of infographics. As it was unrealistic to include all of my research on the website, I focused its content on the most important ideas, then designed the infographics as supplemental materials. The information captured in these infographics also stems from the research in Chapter Two. I chose to use Canva because, in my current teaching position, I have used it extensively to create posters, slideshows, and student-facing resources. Since Canva for Education is free for teachers, I had access to premium templates and graphics that enhanced the style and layout of my infographics.

In addition to the supplemental infographics, I compiled links to books, articles, and videos that offer additional information on the strategies included in the toolkit. I also revised one of the rubrics that I use to assess writing in my ELA classes and posted it as a resource on the *Reword Rubrics* strategy page.

A preliminary draft of the website was shared with my project facilitator and content reviewer in March of 2024. Their feedback granted me insight into the types of resources practicing teachers might find most useful and aided me in identifying holes in the information I presented. A revised draft was then reviewed by my peer reviewer and an ELA colleague. Their feedback on content and usability informed my final revisions.

The website was finalized in April of 2024 and will be made publicly available in May of 2024. Following its publication, the website will be shared first with my ELA department, then school-wide, then district-wide. It will also be shared with contacts in other districts, who will hopefully continue to circulate the toolkit by recommending it to their colleagues.

Conclusion

This capstone project was created over the course of the fall semester of 2023 and the spring semester of 2024, and the research collected for Chapter Two proved essential in determining the content, purpose, and format of my project. Using a website builder (Wix) and graphic design tool (Canva), I was able to develop a digital toolkit of information, strategies, and resources for secondary ELA teachers. The feedback I received from practicing educators was a crucial step towards making this project meaningful for my colleagues and to the profession.

Potential Assessments of Website Efficacy

As mentioned in the earlier section entitled *Setting and Audience*, this digital toolkit could be used to guide PLC work in ELA departments. If teachers decide to implement the strategies outlined on the website, their PLC could first gather and then discuss data on how the new approaches affect student engagement and achievement. This data would likely need to be collected in multiple data cycles over the course of a school year (if not multiple years), and the teachers' observations and ideas could be used to inform revisions to the website.

If this toolkit is used to guide language expectations across content areas, it could be used as the basis for a staff PD session. After attending the session, teachers could

complete a survey that assesses their understanding of and elicits their feedback on the website's materials. If there are subsequent PD sessions, teachers could share how they found the strategies helpful (or unhelpful) in practice, and their reflections, questions, and ideas could be used to revise the toolkit, just like the feedback from PLCs.

Educators' posts on the website's forum could also be used to determine the effectiveness and applicability of the toolkit. For example, if there are many questions about the content, the information may need to be more clearly explained. On the other hand, if teachers begin posting about strategies they use in their classrooms, this share-out of information could indicate that users consider the website an advantageous pedagogical resource.

Conclusion

Assessing the effectiveness of this digital toolkit will take time, as adopting new instructional approaches can be a lengthy process. Since educators are the website's intended audience, gathering feedback from practicing teachers will be necessary to determine whether or not this project is achieving its goals of informing teachers and reshaping language requirements in secondary ELA classrooms.

Summary

This capstone project seeks to answer the question: *Are academic language requirements in secondary ELA classrooms inclusive of multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized, and, if not, what more linguistically-inclusive approaches to writing instruction can teachers use?* In this chapter, I have provided a description of the toolkit I created; reviewed relevant research that informed the project type and its design; described the intended audience; outlined the timeline for project

completion and implementation; and offered suggestions for assessment of the toolkit's efficacy. While this website was created with a specific school context and ELA department in mind, it has applications beyond this school setting. In the next chapter, I reflect on this project as a whole and discuss its implications, limitations, and benefits.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

This capstone project sought to address the question: *Are academic language requirements in secondary ELA classrooms inclusive of multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized, and, if not, what more linguistically-inclusive approaches to writing instruction can teachers use?* Through my research and project creation, I examined how language is used as a means of division; increased my own and, hopefully, other educators' awareness of the prejudices that underlie academic language requirements; and learned what English Language Arts (ELA) teachers can do to deconstruct the racism present in language usage in order to better support students of all cultures and backgrounds.

To conclude this project, I first reflect on my major learnings from the capstone process as a whole. I then revisit the literature review that constitutes Chapter Two by summarizing the most important points and sources, as well as by describing new understandings and connections that I have made. Next, I explore the implications and limitations of this project before making recommendations for future research, after which I outline how I will both share and use the digital toolkit. Finally, I conclude by brainstorming how this project may benefit the field of language education.

Major Learnings

Undergoing the capstone process has taught me a great deal, both as a learner and a researcher. As a practicing ELA teacher with a background in language learning and teaching, I thought I knew a lot about language, but there is so much that I didn't—and

still don't—know. Language is complicated. Even though it's something I use every day, I often do so without conscious thought. I don't always pay attention to the ways in which I construct and communicate ideas—but, in order to deconstruct normalized yet discriminatory language practices, I need to actively practice linguistic awareness. As someone who has always taken pride in their writing, prescriptive grammar know-how, and communication skills, this capstone has forced me to question and critically reflect on my own ideologies because my beliefs about language and how it "should" be used shape my instructional practices and expectations. Knowing what I know now about how language usage and academic language requirements can be racist and exclusionary, I want to be intentional about my own language practices and those I demand of my students.

I've also learned that undoing traditional academic language expectations will not only take time, but also requires buy-in from both educators and students. This project reminded me that awareness truly is the first step towards change. If teachers are unaware of the basics of language and the systemic ways in which it is used to discriminate, they cannot be expected to understand how their instructional approaches may hurt, rather than help, multilingual learners (MLs) and users of diverse Englishes. But once teachers expand their linguistic knowledge, they can begin empowering their students to use their language in powerful, creative, and affirming ways, which is a preliminary step towards dismantling the racist systems that exist in the classroom and in wider society.

Prior to working through the capstone process, I did not see myself as a researcher. Now, however, I understand that being a teacher researcher is an important facet of my identity as both an educator and a lifelong learner. This process has shown

me that, as challenging, overwhelming, and time-consuming as research may be, it is incredibly rewarding and stimulating. It's exciting to discover connections between theories, studies, and practice, even though it can be disheartening when the patterns that emerge illuminate how common pedagogies are used to disadvantage and discriminate against students. At times, the studies I read broke my heart. It's difficult to imagine a classroom environment in which teachers blatantly ridicule, reproach, and even reject students for their language usage, yet I myself am guilty of doing so by way of the criticisms I've made of students' writing and the language norms I've enforced in my classroom.

This research has challenged, and will continue to challenge, me as an educator. It has inspired metacognitive reflection of my language ideology and its intersection with my instructional practices. This work has made me eager to continue exploring the effects of academic language expectations; to learn more about the beliefs my colleagues and students hold about their own and others' linguistic practices; and to implement, revise, and possibly invent new instructional strategies that are inclusive of the bright, eloquent young people from whom I have the privilege of learning every day.

Conclusion

There is still so much to learn about language, pedagogy, systemic racism, and the intersection of all three topics. The capstone process has deepened my appreciation of research; emphasized the importance of professional reflection; and shown me that if I want to effect change, that change needs to start with my own reeducation.

Literature Review Revisited

The literature review in Chapter Two of this capstone synthesizes information

from over 30 sources and highlights relevant discoveries, questions, criticisms, ideas, and implications of the last 25 years of linguistic and educational research. These sources were fundamental in my understanding of and ability to answer my research question.

Most Important Points and Sources

The first three sections of my literature review (*Language Variation*, *Academic Language Debate*, and *Teacher Attitudes Towards and Perceptions of Student Language*) are dedicated to the first half of my research question: *Are academic language requirements in secondary ELA classrooms inclusive of multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized?*

In answering this question, I relied heavily on the work of Lippi-Green (2011); her observations of "the linguistic facts of life" form the backbone of this entire paper and are the inspiration for the section entitled *Basic Tenets of Language* (p. 5). In spite of these established linguistic facts, many educators appear to be unaware that all languages and variations are equally systematic, meaningful, efficient, correct, and valuable (Kubota et al., 2021; Lippi-Green, 2011; Siegel, 2007). Likewise, many teachers do not seem to realize that their language ideologies may be rooted in social beliefs rather than linguistic facts (Blake & Cutler, 2003).

Flores and Rosa's (2015) groundbreaking criticism of these socially-constructed ideologies, their condemnation of academic language expectations and appropriateness-based approaches, and their insights into the intersection of race and language were instrumental in my comprehension of how language and teacher expectations can be means of division. Additionally, the works of Baker-Bell (2020), Brady (2015), Cross et al. (2001), Hall and Cunningham (2020), and Milroy (2001) broadened my understanding

of these language expectations and their often detrimental impact on multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized.

These main points and prominent sources, among many others, form the rationale for the call to action presented in the fourth and final section of my literature review (*Inclusive Strategies for Teaching Writing*), which addresses the second half of my research question: *What more linguistically-inclusive approaches to writing instruction can teachers use?* Although this section is admittedly less robust than the three that precede it, the models proposed by Paris (2012), Snyder and Staehr Fenner (2021), and Young et al. (2018) were key in taking the theoretical understandings from the first three sections of my literature review and transforming them into a preliminary list of practical strategies and approaches. These strategies, supplemented by those of McBee Orzulak (2012) and Shanahan (2021), are included in the digital toolkit that I created and are recommended for implementation in secondary ELA classrooms.

New Understandings and Connections

Writing Chapter Two made me realize just how passionate I am about teaching writing inclusively and learning how to move away from traditional academic language expectations. This research transformed my understanding of academic language because, while I am familiar with—and have promoted—the use of academic language in ELA, I didn't realize that academic language was a social construct rather than an objective linguistic form (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

I recognized many of the other linguistic topics discussed in my sources, such as variation and intelligibility, as I have personal experience with linguistic othering due to my Minnesotan accent and American English orthography, and I have studied linguistics

in both undergraduate and graduate-level courses. Although I had previously read Flores and Rosa's (2015) and Rickford and King's (2016) articles as part of the coursework for a graduate-level sociolinguistics course, the majority of the sources that focused on the intersection of race and language presented information that was entirely new and sparked questions on how language functions as a social system.

Prior to conducting this research, I had not explicitly reflected on or considered how my language expectations could be a factor in the disengagement and poor academic performance that I have observed in my own classroom. Now that I understand how academic language requirements and prescriptive grammar exclude MLs, diverse students, and their languages from educational spaces, I have realized that my instructional practices must change to better build upon, extend, and sustain my students' rich cultural and linguistic assets.

In spite of these connections to personal and professional experiences, much of the information in my literature review was still new to me, and my ignorance suggested that this material might be new to other teachers, too, especially if they have never taken a linguistics course. The desire to share this pertinent information and, in doing so, challenge traditional expectations for writing inspired the creation of the website that I designed (see the section entitled *Project Description* in Chapter Three).

While seeking resources for the fourth section of my literature review (*Inclusive Strategies for Teaching Writing)*, I came to the realization that although teachers (myself included) want professional development (PD) to supply them with hands-on, ready-to-apply strategies, many of those strategies haven't been widely disseminated or studied yet. Articles such as that of Shanahan (2021) make it clear that inclusive

approaches to writing instruction *are* being used in secondary ELA classrooms, but I did not easily find examples or explanations of these approaches among peer-reviewed sources. Through this difficulty, I gained a new perspective on and appreciation for the PD sessions I've attended throughout my career. Previously, I was disappointed and frustrated with sessions that covered theories but never quite bridged to practical classroom applications; now, however, I understand that it's quite possible that, just like I discovered when attempting to compile actionable strategies into my literature review and digital toolkit, those strategies have not yet been studied or developed.

Conclusion

The resources synthesized in my literature review not only enabled me to fully address my research question, but also made it clear that academic language requirements are usually not inclusive of multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized. As such, it is important that secondary ELA teachers' approaches to teaching writing are revised, or possibly replaced by more inclusive pedagogy, and I can begin this work in my own classroom.

Implications

The biggest implication of this project is that academic language requirements exclude and discriminate against multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized and should thus be replaced by more inclusive expectations. As described on my website, some states' standards (including Minnesota's) have made progress towards reshaping language requirements in secondary classrooms, but they still show evidence of bias against diverse Englishes. Other standards, such as the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2021), still expect students to conform to "the conventions of

standard English grammar and usage when writing" and to use "academic" language (9-10.1; 9-10.6). In April of 2024, I found out that one of my school district's literacy goals for the 2024-2025 school year focuses on academic language proficiency. Like many state standards, this goal, while well-intentioned, may actually be discriminatory and could potentially further marginalize our students rather than support the development of their language skills. My project is thus a timely call for changes in mindset, pedagogy, and language requirements at the classroom, school, district, and state levels.

Limitations

The set of norms that this project strives to tackle is enormous. One paper, one digital toolkit, and one teacher are nowhere near enough to justify, necessitate, or undertake the dismantlement of the academic language requirements that are currently present in so many classrooms, schools, districts, and states. But by fostering discussion of language ideologies and expectations in my teaching context, as well as by making changes in my own classroom, I can be part of what will hopefully grow into a larger movement. However, in its capacity to facilitate these conversations across districts and departments, as well as in its future relevancy, my project may be somewhat limited.

Modifications

Although the website I created will be helpful to secondary teachers, both within the ELA content area and in other subjects, it may not be adequate for elementary school teachers. The strategies proposed on the website are designed for secondary ELA classrooms. Many of them can be adapted for elementary instruction, but since I did not provide those suggestions, the responsibility for developing them lies with the teachers,

who may not feel qualified or may not have time to redesign their approaches to language instruction. I do believe, however, that the background information provided on the pages entitled *Language 101* and *"The Why"* is relevant in both elementary and secondary contexts.

Similarly, I realized that my digital toolkit does not offer modifications for teaching English learners (ELs) or students who receive Special Education (SPED) services. In EL and SPED classrooms, language instruction and expectations inevitably look different from the approaches and requirements found in mainstream classes. Although the theories and strategies I included are intended to benefit MLs, they are geared towards teachers who teach MLs in their mainstream courses.

Forum Moderation

While designing my website, I did not anticipate all of the behind-the-scenes logistics that must take place in order to host an effective online forum. I appreciated the tools available on Wix that allowed me to take precautions and mitigate potential issues in advance. For example, my website is designed so that users must create an account and become members of the forum before they can post or comment (but they will be able to view others' posts without registering). I had the option to approve or deny each membership request, but I chose not to enable this feature; I am concerned that I will not see requests in a timely manner and may lose out on valuable ideas if potential posters grow tired of waiting for their requests to be approved.

I did take advantage of the option to design forum guidelines (e.g., be respectful and stay on topic) to encourage professional and considerate posting. I was also able to limit the number of posts members can create in their first week, which is a measure to

prevent spamming irrelevant or inappropriate posts. While there is an option to limit attachment sizes, or prohibit file attachments altogether, I left the setting at the size recommended by Wix because I don't want to prevent teachers from sharing their resources. However, I am worried that inappropriate images or links could be shared. As the website's moderator, it will be my job to monitor new posts and remove any that do not follow community guidelines. To support this monitoring, Wix has a setting that allows moderators to preemptively censor words (such as slurs and profanity) from posts and comments, which is another feature of which I made use.

New Research

Since inclusive instruction and anti-racist practices are "hot topics," more and more research is being conducted and published that will add to, challenge, and possibly even disprove the information included on my website. This growing body of research necessitates regular updates to the website itself, which I did not consider when choosing my project type. In order for this toolkit to stay relevant to the field, I will need to continue researching and make regular updates to the content contained on my website to keep users abreast of new understandings. These new understandings may reshape the strategies I have already proposed, and new strategies will no doubt come to light—both from new research and potentially from teachers' forum posts. The strategies page, particularly since it is currently somewhat limited in its suggestions, should be an ever-growing collection of ideas and resources if it is to remain useful to educators in the field.

Conclusion

In order to support educators in their implementation of inclusive writing

pedagogy, the website I designed needs to be regularly monitored and updated. Additionally, it could become more useful if revised to include modifications for EL, SPED, and elementary populations. The more current the information and widely applicable the strategies, the more useful the toolkit will be in deconstructing marginalizing language requirements.

Recommendations for Future Research

While there is absolutely value in conducting additional research on language variation and the process of standardization; the advantages and disadvantages of academic language proficiency; and the effects of teachers' language ideologies on students, there already exists a large body of research on each of these topics. Based on the difficulty I had in curating a list of actionable instructional strategies and the frustrations I have experienced with theoretical PD, I believe that there is much to be gained from further exploration, description, and refinement of strategies that secondary ELA teachers are already using, or could use, in their classrooms to promote linguistic inclusivity. Having a wider repertoire of instructional strategies available may make teachers more willing to deviate from traditional approaches and try something new. The pedagogical changes proposed by this capstone may seem less daunting if teachers are not tasked with developing new methodologies from scratch, particularly if they are unsure if they can—or should—stray from traditional methods of teaching writing.

Communication and Use of Results

The primary result of this capstone project was the creation and dissemination of a digital toolkit entitled *Inclusive Writing Instruction: Information, Strategies, and Resources for Secondary ELA Teachers*. Once published in May of 2024, the website will

be shared first with my ELA department, then school-wide, then district-wide, and potentially with other districts as well.

I have also committed to using the website as an instructional tool in my own classroom. Putting new strategies into practice will no doubt require some trial and error, as well as intentional reflection, collaboration with colleagues, and continued research. Although the effects of these pedagogical changes may not be immediately apparent, I eventually hope to see growth in my students' language skills, an increase in their engagement in and enjoyment of writing, and improvement in their overall academic performance.

To communicate the successes and challenges I encounter as I attempt to make my writing instruction more linguistically inclusive, it may be beneficial for me to add a blog page to the website where I can share my reflections, post lesson plans, and showcase artifacts that demonstrate how my students are using language in meaningful and effective ways, even when not conforming to "standard" or "academic" forms. These reflections, lessons, and artifacts, coupled with feedback from my students, could aid me in advocating for change at the department, school, and district levels.

Benefits to the Profession

Empowered teachers empower students. If teachers are armed with an accurate understanding of language and variations, as well as knowledge of how standardized and academic forms can be used as tools to uphold racist systems, they can work to change these systems by reshaping their mindset and adjusting the expectations in their classrooms. When students' language is affirmed, so are their identities, and as a result, they may experience more academic success and reach their potential, which, after all,

are some of the primary goals of education. Additionally, instruction that legitimizes languages that are being marginalized can foster open-mindedness and broaden both students' and teachers' linguistic repertoires, thereby helping them become more effective, cross-cultural communicators, both in the classroom and beyond.

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed and reflected on the capstone process as a whole. I summarized key takeaways from my research and addressed both the implications and limitations of this project. I offered recommendations for future research and shared how I plan to disseminate the project, as well as use it in my own teaching. Finally, I posited how this project may be of benefit to the field of language education.

This capstone project answers the question: *Are academic language requirements in secondary ELA classrooms inclusive of multilingual learners and students who are being marginalized, and, if not, what more linguistically-inclusive approaches to writing instruction can teachers use?* It is my hope that this capstone helps teachers expand their understanding of language; raises awareness of the exclusionary nature of academic language requirements; and inspires educators to work together to deconstruct inequitable systems so that all of our students are empowered to become authentic, effective communicators who can use their diverse voices to change our world for the better.

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