

STUDENT VOICES, STUDENTS' RIGHT: LANGUAGE USE IN THE
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM AND "STUDENTS' RIGHT
TO THEIR OWN LANGUAGE"

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STUDENT VOICES, STUDENTS' RIGHT: LANGUAGE USE IN THE
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Right after we arrived in California from Mexico, I began my education career. When the bell rang, all the children jumped off the cafeteria chairs to go to class. At that time, I didn't know what it meant when the bell rang or when to get up. Finally, a white woman approached me and said, "Are you okay honey, do you know where you are going?" Clearly, I didn't understand a single word that came out of her mouth. I responded with the only phrase I knew, "I don't speak English" with my Mexican accent. Of course, she didn't speak my language so she directed me to a lady who did.

Growing up with economic hardship, English not being my first language, and not having a father to look up to, not only served as barriers but as motivations to become the first college graduate in my family.

Andrew I.

This project started with students. When I began working as a graduate student teaching assistant at Texas State University-San Marcos, I quickly realized that students' experiences with language had powerful and lasting effects, as the above excerpt from a student essay shows. For this assignment, I asked students to share past experiences that shaped their views of education. I choose to start with Andrew's excerpt because it highlights many of the struggles nonstandard language users face in American classrooms. Andrew is painfully aware of his "Mexican accent," highlighting his feeling of language panic and his understanding that his language, or the way he uses language, is not valued in American schools. "Of course" the woman who comes to help him does not speak his language. Andrew has no expectation of those in power attempting to communicate with him; he recognizes that communicative responsibility falls squarely,

and solely, on him and in English. Further, he sees his nonstandard language use as a “barrier” to his success in education. Unlike many nonstandard language users, however, Andrew’s is a story of success. He not only saw the acquisition of Standard American English (SAE) as a barrier, but as a motivation, and has worked diligently to reach his goal of attending college. Unfortunately, I more often see nonstandard language users who remain fearful, confused, and frustrated in American classrooms.

My first teaching assignment was in a Developmental Writing class at Texas State University-San Marcos in Spring 2011. I was an instructional assistant working alongside my mentor, Dr. Octavio Pimentel. Of our 25 students, about 80% were English language learners – students whose first language was not English. In this classroom, several language groups were represented: Spanish spoken by students from different parts of Mexico, Venezuela, and El Salvador; African American Vernacular English; several dialects of American English; and American Sign Language. This group of students wanted access to the conventions of Standard American English in hopes of gaining success and opportunity in college.

Having been placed in a Developmental Writing class, these students knew that their future academic success rested on learning the conventions of academic writing that would ultimately allow them to fulfill the requirements of every degree plan: first-year composition. Complicating their journey, these students had begun to internalize the University’s designation of them as deficient; they were unsure of their ability and uneasy about writing, which made them question whether they could be successful in college.

Working with these students, I saw nonstandard language users who feared speaking up and participating in class. I saw students who had been silenced by dominant social norms that tell them their language habits are “unintelligent” or “lazy.” I saw students who looked at me – a white, middle-class woman – with confusion and misunderstanding. At first, I’m not sure they believed that I valued their languages, their ideas, their words. They couldn’t believe it because I was a symbol of the dominant culture that had so many times devalued their cultural ways of knowing; I was a person in a position of power, and I was white. The students were always friendly and respectful, but it took more than half the semester to gain their trust. How could I – a white woman who speaks a standard, accepted dialect of English, who teaches composition, who has privilege – how could I possibly value their languages? And if I did, why didn’t other white, standard language users and instructors respect their diversity?

Very early in the semester, I began looking more closely at the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” (SRTOL) document. Geneva Smitherman had become one of my favorite theorists early on, and the SRTOL document spoke to me deeply. How had these forward thinkers drafted such an important resolution that – from what I had seen – had done little to change the way we think about and teach writing? Why hadn’t these ideas caught on? I was struggling to understand because, in my view, this document could be monumentally beneficial and empowering to students, especially students like those in my Developmental Writing class. I had been aware of the ways we use language to oppress and write one another, but after wrestling with SRTOL and language rights issues, I realized that even when we are careful not to use words like “wrong” or

“incorrect,” in regard to students’ language choices, we might not be sending a clear message that linguistic difference is valued.

As a composition teacher, I think it is necessary to critically examine personal and institutional practices and beliefs that might affect the success of students. When we think about a writing classroom and the goals of first year composition, this reflection must include both language attitudes and what is considered acceptable language use in the classroom. Because of the importance of tolerance of language variation, not only in the composition classroom but in our society as a whole, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) adopted the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” (SRTOL) resolution in 1974. The resolution reads as follows:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language – the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (CCC 25.3 n. pag)

Before its adoption, and in the 37 years since, a language debate has taken place in the pages of the major journals of the field and at local and national conferences. These

debates shed an interesting light on the complicated labyrinth that is language ideology, language attitudes, language practices, and the effects these beliefs can have on students. And while the issues have been widely debated, little has changed in the way of actual classroom practice (and little consensus has been reached).

According to Scott, Straker, and Katz, “In 2003 the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) reaffirmed the Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) resolution” and “felt that this time around, responses to the SRTOL resolution should address what commission member Geneva Smitherman called the ‘unfinished business’ of SRTOL – the praxis, or practice, dimension” (xvii). To this end, my qualitative research project seeks to address the NCTE call to revisit SRTOL and to explore attitudes toward the resolution, how its theories translate into classroom practice, and how we can increase acceptance, awareness, and implementation of SRTOL. I believe that we must come to an understanding of current language attitudes and the purpose and goals of SRTOL before we can turn it into a usable practice. By looking historically to SRTOL and to available scholarship, and placing this in conversation with the experiences and opinions of students in college classrooms, we can inform a practical SRTOL pedagogy for the future. And this is exactly what my thesis seeks to do.

Statement of the Problem

Discussions with students and instructors, as well as a review of the “language debates” literature show that there is great misunderstanding and little consensus in interpretations of the SRTOL resolution. This confusion debilitates SRTOL and disallows its effective implementation in the classroom and in the minds of students and instructors.

Further, with the growing diversity of dialects present in the classroom and the expansion of world Englishes and a global economy, it is no longer sufficient to teach students only to communicate in the limited sphere of standard American academic English, which is based on the traditional, masculine, Western, Anglo rhetoric that is privileged in the university. In a global economy, students must learn to adapt and communicate in many diverse situations; privileging one dialect while silencing, ignoring, or denouncing all others is no longer a viable option.

In relation to the teaching of composition, opinions of language diversity and accepted use are directly related to one's understanding of the goals of first year composition: Is the goal to help students gain success in academic writing, or is the goal more broadly aimed at effective written communication? Are we attempting to aid students in communication only in the limited context of the academy (to please professors), or are we attempting to aid students in effective communication in all (or most) situations by making informed rhetorical choices? While this ideological question over the goal of first-year composition plays a large part in the way instructors communicate language attitudes, standard language ideology is also highly influential. Ideology complicates the language debates because language ideology is an area that remains largely unquestioned by most people, and as Lisa Ede explains, "ideology works most powerfully when we are so immersed in it that we do not even recognize its existence but rather see it as natural or commonsensical – as how things are" (49).

Ideology plays a large role in the misunderstanding of the SRTOL resolution and skewed language attitudes because people assume the validity of their beliefs and do not question or consider the implications of such beliefs for students. Ede reminds us that it is

important to “hold ourselves accountable for our work...” (27) and to “consider the costs and dangers, as well as the benefits, of conventional disciplinary assumptions and practices” (30). A lack of reflection of our personal practices and beliefs is damaging to students because it can perpetuate and recreate skewed views about language and will force students, whose linguistic choices do not easily align with the dominant, to make difficult and unfair choices: they can either silence their personal and cultural voices, or face penalty and rejection in the academy. Further, when we do not reflect on our own practices and beliefs, “It becomes easy, as well, to turn away from such potentially unpleasant and inconvenient realities as to the extent to which composition has largely reproduced our society’s hegemonic structures and relations...” (23).

As important as it is to explore our personal biases and beliefs, we must recognize that students also enter our classrooms with certain assumptions and biases toward language use. We must aim to expose such assumptions and biases and teach students to question these hidden or taken-for-granted beliefs. As composition teachers, often working with first-year students, we must help them not only recognize these ideologies in themselves, but also to locate these personal biases and assumptions in their written arguments and in the arguments of others, and to communicate their opinions thoroughly and thoughtfully.

Because it can be difficult for students to grasp the concepts of hidden ideologies and the way these ideologies influence their thinking, and because such diverse groups of students are present in classrooms, I believe it is important to understand which ideologies most affect our students’ thinking about language use. When we are aware of

the beliefs of our students, we are able to make lessons more personally and individually relevant.

Research Questions

With the ever-increasing diversity of students in our classrooms, we must ask what SRTOL means to teachers and students of composition. How is SRTOL (mis)understood and interpreted by scholars and students? How might different and conflicting opinions of SRTOL negatively affect student success, and are they affecting student success already? How can we, or should we, address these conflicting understandings of SRTOL and language acceptance in the classroom? What dominant ideologies and misconceptions of language are present in student responses to SRTOL, and how might we address these misunderstandings in an informed SRTOL pedagogy and practice? How do student responses to SRTOL show acceptance of and resistance to the status quo? Additionally, what would an SRTOL pedagogy look like? How might such a pedagogy benefit students? And, how can we spread awareness/understanding of the necessity of SRTOL? To investigate these attitudes and practices, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of students' responses to the SRTOL resolution, looking for patterns in response. Before conducting this analysis, I also examine published debates in composition scholarship concerning language use in the classroom, current discussions of SRTOL and teaching in multicultural environments to envision a pedagogy and practice. Through the analysis of students' written responses as well as a review of literature concerning language use in the classroom, this project seeks to answer the questions above and provide a historical background, a current perspective, and a future practice that will enable composition teachers to implement SRTOL.

Limitations

According to the SRTOL background statement, many do not distinguish between speaking and writing: “We have ignored, many of us, the distinction between speech and writing and have taught the language as though the *talk* in any region, even the talk of speakers with prestige and power, were identical to edited *written* English” (CCC 25.3 n. pag.). This distinction between speech and writing still exists, as the most significant limitation to my research. Some students seem to confuse speaking and writing. As one participant explained, “Teachers, perhaps lacking diversity training, or perhaps just grammatical hounds, may spend their time correcting students if they “misspeak” (F, 21, White). While level of formality or word choice may be concerns for speaking in the classroom, grammatical mistakes are common in spoken communication and often go unnoticed.

The confusion over speaking and writing might also have to do with students assuming that the SRTOL resolution is meant to protect students’ speech more than students’ written language. In other words, students seem to think that dialects are not present in written, or formal, communication. Two students addressed the difference between speaking and writing. One respondent addressed this belief:

On the one hand, yes, people have different dialects and they should be able to speak them. However, the spoken language is different from the written word, just as there is a difference between casual and formal.

Casual is the spoken dialect – we speak in our own dialects when we are comfortable and relaxed, but it should be kept separate from the formal, academic world. The academic world needs to be a place where the

language is standard so that as many people as possible can understand and comprehend what is being spoken or written. The language of the academic world needs to be dialect-free. Of course we can use our dialects around others in casual conversation or among friends and family, but we need to keep it uniform in the academic world. Therefore, teachers do not need to follow the SRTOL. And no, I do not believe teachers are following the SRTOL now. (F, 20, White)

While I recognize the conflation of speaking and writing as a limitation, I find that students' responses are still valuable to advance discussions of SRTOL and the inclusion of dialects in spoken and written form.

A second limitation of my project is related to my SRTOL writing prompt. I recognize that including a single paragraph to explain a document as complex and important as SRTOL's is problematic. Due to the vague, political language of the resolution, as well as students' lack of background knowledge or context of the statement, more explanation would have been useful for gaining more thorough, in-depth responses. As previously stated, finding politically and ideologically neutral language to describe/explain the resolution was difficult. However, I found the introductory paragraph to be the most practical and neutral way to provide information to respondents. While this is a limitation, it can also help us identify which parts of SRTOL are most confusing to/misunderstood by students. It is important to note that misunderstanding and/or confusion when interpreting SRTOL is also highly documented in the language debates.

Another limitation of this study is the anonymous nature of responses. I felt that respondents would feel more comfortable/safe answering the prompt honestly if they did not fear repercussions by attaching identifying information. Anonymous responses made follow-up interviews to gain greater insight into student responses impossible.

Literature Review

As previously stated, this project attempts to answer the NCTE call to bridge the gap between the theory of SRTOL and classroom practice, answer questions regarding attitudes toward SRTOL and nonstandard language use in the classroom, and understand how conflicting opinions and approaches to SRTOL might affect student success.

To understand the ongoing debate over the SRTOL resolution, we must begin with a historical look at SRTOL. For example, the political and social environment of the 1960s and 1970s provides a contextual background that unearths the necessity for the SRTOL resolution in its historical moment. Further, the political and social movements of the 1960s had a profound effect on the discipline of composition. In his book *Class Politics: The Movement for the Students' Right to Their Own Language*, Stephen Parks explains that, “to accurately present the social and political structures through which composition developed in the 1960s would mean to create a text in which NCTE minutes, CCCC position papers, Black Power speeches, NUC actions, individual scholarship, Vietnam protest literature, and classroom practice interacted” (4). In other words, political and social activism played a central role in the development of the field of composition and SRTOL and must be examined to understand the context of the SRTOL resolution.

Powerful and emotional arguments erupted from compositionists in the pages of the journal of *College Composition and Communication (CCC)* and elsewhere both before and after the SRTOL resolution was adopted and published in 1974. Since then there has been a steady decrease in emphasis on language in the field and according to Susan Peck MacDonald, current interest in language has dwindled and can be seen in the shrinking number of CCC's sessions devoted to language. In the 1960s, 15% of the sessions were devoted to language related issues, compared to 3% in 2005 (MacDonald). Because emphasis has shifted away from language, it is important to revisit these debates as well as discussions of language ideologies, beliefs, and attitudes.

And finally, after reviewing the history of the SRTOL resolution, the language debates, and language ideologies at play, we should turn our attention to pedagogy and classroom practice. Recently, several collections have been published that discuss both the theory and practice of teaching in multicultural settings. Though only one of these is directed specifically at the SRTOL resolution and language use, an interest in the practical applications of multiculturalism in the classroom seems to be increasing. In 2009, Jerrie Cobb Scott, Delores Y. Straker, and Laurie Katz published *Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language: Bridging Language Policies and Pedagogical Practices*. This collection "gives [PreK-12] teachers and teacher educators immediate access to ways to more fully tap into the unforgettable promises of a pedagogy of success for linguistically and culturally diverse students in PreK-12 classrooms" (xviii). The editors explain that they chose to focus on PreK-12 because most of the previous responses to SRTOL had been directed at composition at the college level. Still, little

work exists that directs college composition instructors to usable classroom practice based on the SRTOL resolution.

The historical context of the SRTOL resolution, the ongoing language debates, standard language ideology, attitudes, and beliefs, as well as pedagogy and classroom practice, informed the creation of my survey instrument and writing prompt, and helped me theorize both future classroom practice and the effect that conflicting understandings of linguistic diversity might have on the academic success of students.

Historical Background and Adoption of the Students' Right to Their Own Language Resolution

The political and social climate of the 1960s and '70s directly affected the field of composition. The Civil Rights Movement and “policies such as Upward Bound, open enrollment, Educational Opportunity Programs (EOPs), preferential/affirmative action admissions, and the development of special courses (‘basic’ writing) brought a new and different brand of student into the college composition classroom” (Smitherman “CCCCs Role” 354). Language debates had also been present in CCC since the 1950s, but the social movements of the 1960s brought students with diverse linguistic, cultural, and racial backgrounds into classrooms for the first time, altering these debates forever. While early CCCs language discussions centered on changes occurring to Standard American English and grammar, debates during the '60s and '70s turned to dialects. Smitherman explains that “The Unhip among researchers, scholars, and intellectuals ... argue, for instance, that even though the linguistic-cultural differences of those oppressed by race, class, or gender were *cognitively* equal to those of the mainstream, they were *socially* unequal” (“Retrospective” 21).

The inclusion of this new student demographic, along with the emotional and sometimes negative responses to language variety in the classroom caused increased attention to language at the 1968 CCCC. Between 12% to 14% of the presentations focused on language that year (MacDonald). According to Smitherman, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was a “symbolic turning point” (“Retrospective”), and the organization could no longer ignore the “linguistic terrorism” minority students faced (Anzaldúa 80). Smitherman writes, “the organization had heretofore simply proceeded as if racial differences did not exist” (“CCCCs Role” 355). This powerful and significant turn of events led CCCC to draft and adopt the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language Resolution” (354). Drafting began in 1972, and the Resolution was passed “by a vote of 79-20” at CCCC in April 1974. A background statement was also produced because CCCC “realiz[ed] that the resolution would be controversial,” and the Resolution and background statement were published in fall 1974 as a CCC special edition (CCC 25.3 n. pag). According to the background statement, the resolution was necessary because

American schools and colleges have, in the last decade, been forced to take a stand on a basic educational question: what should the schools do about the language habits of students who come from a wide variety of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds... Should the schools try to uphold language variety, or to modify it, or to eradicate it? (CCC 25.3 n. pag)

The SRTOL Resolution and background statement stands as a 24-page document accompanied by a 17-page bibliography that includes 129 entries, “keyed to the statements made in the four sections of Students' Right to Their Own Language” (CCC

25.3 n. pag). According to Smitherman, the resolution and background statement “sought to accomplish three broad goals: (1) to heighten consciousness of language attitudes; (2) to promote the value of linguistic diversity; and (3) to convey facts and information about language and language variation that would enable instructors to teach their non-traditional students – and ultimately all students – more effectively” (“CCCCs Role” 359).

The resolution received mixed reviews and, according to Parks, the “Back to Basics” movement and the shifting political climate of the late 1970s effectively quieted the SRTOL call for language reform in the classroom (196). In 1988, CCCC adopted the National Language Policy that, according to Smitherman, “is not a repudiation of the *Students’ Right* resolution ... [and] symbolizes the evolution of CCCC sociolinguistic consciousness and was the next logical stage after the Students’ Right campaign” (“CCCCs Role” 367). As stated above, in 2003, NCTE reaffirmed the 1974 SRTOL resolution and Scott, Straker, and Katz explain that, since 2003, “many of the same conditions that SRTOL was intended to address in the early 1970s have re-emerged with an intensity that cannot be ignored” (xvii). It is the responsibility of compositionists to reevaluate attitudes about language variation in the classroom and recognize the relevance of the progression of the SRTOL resolution through the current language debates.

Language Debates

According to Valerie Kinloch,

The many debates concerning multilingual and bidialectal students
(Baugh, 1983; Jordan, 1985; Kinloch, 2005b; Smitherman, 2003),

particularly in the context of public education in America, reiterate the importance of examining public attitudes toward language as well as teacher dispositions, instructional approaches, and classroom teaching methods. (“Power” 85)

In the years surrounding the adoption of the SRTOL resolution, multiple perspectives concerning language use in the college composition classroom were published in the pages of *CCC* (Hendrickson; Cole; Freeman; Kelly; Duncan; Baxter; Farrell; Dumas and Garber). Though interest in the SRTOL resolution and language diversity in the classroom began to decelerate in the late ‘70s, a few linguists and composition scholars continued to advocate for or deny the language rights of students (Smitherman “CCCCs Role,” and “Retrospective”; McPherson, Thompson and Williamson; Cronnell; Sledd; Horner).

While the perspectives vary widely, most agree that a major shortcoming of the SRTOL resolution is that it is too vague to generate any real change (Smitherman “CCCCs Role”; Duncan). In Milton Baxter’s words, “There is grave danger, however, that the CCC resolution will be propagated without concern for its implications as to actual classroom policy. This danger stems from the failure to spell out explicitly what is meant by the students’ right to their own language” (677). Another common complaint waged against the SRTOL resolution is that it fails to make the important distinction between speaking and writing (Cronnell; Artze-Vega, Doud, and Torres). As Cronnell explains, “Nearly everyone agrees that students’ native oral language should not be destroyed. But there is less agreement as to whether students’ native language should be permitted (much less encouraged) in writing” (10). To respond to these common

complaints, Smitherman reminds us that the “document is a compromise among radicals, moderates, and conservatives ... [;] compromise is what comes from working within the system” (“Retrospective” 24).

Many attribute negative perceptions of the SRTOL resolution to “misunderstandings of what the statement says and the changes it was intended to bring about” (McPherson, Thompson and Williamson 10). What these intended changes refer to is still widely debated. Some see the SRTOL resolution as advocating for the removal of standards from the composition classroom (Duncan; Hendrickson) while others see it as simply promoting recognition and awareness that “instructors must value and acknowledge their students’ ideas and voices” (Baca 153). Still, tracing these debates makes it clear that there is great variation between the attitudes, ideologies, and beliefs that composition instructors hold toward linguistic diversity.

Language Ideology, Attitudes, and Beliefs

According to Fairclough and Wodak, “Ideologies are particular ways of representing and constructing society which reproduce unequal relations of power, relations of domination and exploitation” (275). Language ideologies are “networks of beliefs about language that position human subjects within a social order” (Shuck, qtd. in Pimentel “Critical Race Talk” 8). All language groups contain conflicting ideologies that can affect the language habits of group members. More specifically relevant to this project and the SRTOL resolution is dominant language ideology.

Rosina Lippi-Green’s definition of standard or dominant language ideology is a useful starting point for this discussion of language attitudes and beliefs: “*standard language ideology* ... is: a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogeneous spoken

language which is imposed from above, and which takes as its model the written language ... [.] SL ideology is part of a greater power construct, a set of social practices on which people depend without close analysis of underlying assumptions” (166). For example, Dumas and Garber’s belief that “Everyone ... knows perfectly well that dialects are unequal, just as languages are unequal in any real context” is based on standard language ideology (4). Lippi-Green points out several assumptions and misconceptions about language that are taught in American elementary schools, most notably that “a direct link between ‘nonstandard’ language and a lack of logic and clarity” and the idea that “There is one correct way to speak and write English” (167).

In “The Color of Language: The Racialized Trajectory of an Emerging Bilingual Student,” Charise Pimentel describes different aspects of language ideology that align well with Lippi-Green’s definition and which help paint a more clear picture of SL ideology. Pimentel discusses four common language ideologies that promote what Lippi-Green calls “an abstracted, idealized, homogeneous...language” and will be utilized while analyzing student responses to the SRTOL resolution (166):

Linguistic Conformity. This ideology disseminates the idea that this nation must conform to one linguistic code in order to ensure national unity, social stability, and the preservation of democratic values (Stuart, 2006). (342)

Language as a Liability. Drawing from Ruíz’s (1984) conception of language as a problem, language as a liability is an ideology that constructs non-English languages as social impediments that prohibit students from learning the English language, which stands in the way of

language minority students being able to fully participate in academic, employment, and other social avenues of integration and advancement.

(342)

The Fear of Language. This ideology emerges out of xenophobic sentiments that imagine Latinas/os taking over U.S. cities and resisting assimilation, thereby posing a direct challenge to existing power relations in this country that privilege Whites (Santa Ana, 2002; Stuart, 2006). This fear is exacerbated in a post-9/11 society, wherein racial and linguistic “others” are increasingly under surveillance (Gutiérrez & Jaramillo, 2006).

(343)

Language Elitism. Within this ideology, the English language is perceived as being superior, a language of intellect and enlightenment. This elite perception of the English language has fueled a number of English only movements and legislation across the country as well as led to the perception that the English language is “the language of business” and a “global language.” Within this ideology, non-English languages are imagined as – at best – peripheral (nonessential languages that can be spoken in private contexts) or – at worse – expendable. (343)

Dominant language ideology is a powerful tool of oppression and marginalization because “speakers of stigmatized language varieties internalize the social norms and linguistic value judgments of the dominant group” (Kells 11). Kells “argue[s] that vestiges of regional racism operate insidiously as language ideologies and prejudice that shape and permeate the college classroom” (12).

According to Kells, language attitudes and “patterns of self-labeling can operate as ideological mirrors, reflecting the historical, political, and socially polarized situation of [the] community, in which issues of race, power, and prestige condition all facets of social life, including speech” (16). Standard language ideology not only influences the language attitudes of members of the dominant culture, but minorities and nonstandard language users adopt similar views and devalue their home languages (Kells; Millward, Starkey, and Starkey; Baca; Tatum). Further complicating the internalization of dominant language ideology is the belief that learning English will allow minority and nonstandard language users access to greater power, wealth, or success (Mehan, Hubbard and Villanueva; Prendergast; Kells). According to Lippi-Green and others, the language positions children learn in American public schools are often based on dominant language ideology and promote standard language hegemony (Smitherman; Kells; Scott, Straker, and Katz). As mentioned earlier, Lippi-Green found evidence of the following “factually incorrect” language attitudes “in texts written for teachers and children”: “(a) A direct link between ‘nonstandard’ language and a lack of logic and clarity, with blurring of the written/spoken boundaries ... [;] (b) [t]here is one correct way to speak and write English” (168).

Many language myths, language ideologies, practices, and beliefs fall under the umbrella term standard language ideology. For the purposes of this project, the work of Kells and Pimentel regarding common language myths and ideologies are particularly of interest. Kells discusses common language myths found in student responses while Pimentel discusses language ideologies that affect educational practices in bilingual programs. These categories will inform my analysis of student responses to the SRTOL

resolution. By using these defined language ideologies as a starting point, I can frame students' responses in a way that will allow greater understanding of the interaction between dominant language ideologies and the acceptance or rejection of the SRTOL resolution.

To complicate even further how we can understand the language beliefs and attitudes of others, Gregory L. Thompson reminds us that "people should be observed as to how they act and then determine their beliefs based on the observed behavior rather than on what they say they believe" (537). I believe that this disconnect between what people say they believe and how their actions reflect such beliefs has been a key factor in the inaction after SRTOL; though some say this resolution is valuable and important in the classroom, if little or nothing is done to incorporate this belief into practice, the spirit and ambition of the SRTOL resolution are lost. To empower students to overcome negative language attitudes, we must envision and enact a pedagogy and practice that utilizes the SRTOL resolution's belief in linguistic respect and equality.

Pedagogy and Practice

In 1995, Geneva Smitherman wrote, "Although the CCCC background document [for the SRTOL resolution] was informative in terms of theory, it did not go far enough in practice" ("Retrospective" 24). In other words, for the powerful ideals of SRTOL to be effective in empowering students and removing language stereotypes from the classroom, an effective practice must be realized. Three recent collections of essays address practice in multicultural settings: *Affirming Students Right to Their Own Language: Bridging Language Policies and Pedagogical Practices* (2009, Ed. Scott, Straker, and Katz), *Teaching Writing with Latino/a Students: Lessons Learned at Hispanic-Serving*

Institutions (2007, Ed. Kirklighter, Cárdenas, and Murphy), and *Writing in Multicultural Settings* (1997, Ed. Severino, Guerra, and Butler). Though only *Affirming Students' Right* focuses primarily on pedagogy based on the SRTOL resolution, each collection offers helpful and valuable insights for teachers who face diverse student populations. Many practical elements can also be pieced together from the SRTOL background statement and related composition articles.

As stated previously, the Scott, Straker, and Katz collection is aimed at PreK-12 instruction, but still has valuable advice that can be translated or augmented for a college composition classroom. Mary Carol Combs emphasizes the necessity of getting to know students' backgrounds and "funds of knowledge" (36). Similar ideas can be found in Kirklighter, Cárdenas, and Murphy's collection (Millward, Starkey and Starkey; Méndez Newman). In "Positionality: Using Self-Discovery to Enhance pre-Service Teachers' Understanding of Language Difference," Nancy Rankie Shelton discusses the importance of self-reflexivity and recognition of social and linguistic positionality and explains that her

primary goal is not necessarily to change any of my students' beliefs, but to make sure that they give conscious thought to:

1. their own perceptions of people who speak variations of American English;
2. how perceptions become biases and influence teachers' expectations of students' abilities;
3. how lower expectations for student achievement often translates to lower performance for that student. (119)

All of the collections view multilingualism as an asset and resource, rather than as a hindrance to the acquisition of SAE. While different practices and techniques were offered for different classroom situations, many similarities and common recommendations can be found throughout the literature.

The most frequent and practical advice for the college composition classroom advocates for open communication of language attitudes, academic expectations, and linguistic differences to students (Baxter; Baca; Rámirez-Dhoore and Jones; Millward, Starkey and Starkey; Méndez Newman; Lisle and Mano; *CCC 25.3*; Kinloch “Revisiting”). Another common suggestion/expectation is that teachers and students respect linguistic and cultural diversity by honoring and valuing language diversity in the classroom (Anderson; Baca; Kirklighter, Cárdenas and Murphy; Smitherman “CCCCs Role” and “Retrospective”; Troutman). Many sources also suggest that teachers should help students understand their involvement in multiple discourse communities, and teach them how to negotiate transitions between these communities (Utakis and Pita; Lisle and Mano; Hesford; Wible). As Utakis and Pita explain, “Composition teachers can either reinforce the borders with red ink and restrictions or rethink their own classroom practice in order to help students make sense of their border crossing” (130).

A call for added attention to the rhetorical choices involved in writing (Bean et. al; Artze-Vega, Doud and Torres; *CCC 25.3*; Lisle and Mano), responding more to the message than to the form in student writing (*CCC 25.3*; Farrell; Méndez Newman), avoiding the urge to overcorrect (Méndez Newman; Baca), and an understanding of basic linguistics (*CCC 25.3*; Wible; Kinloch “Revisiting”) are also common in the literature. There is also emphasis on the importance of getting to know and understand the

backgrounds and perspectives of students (Méndez Newman; De and Gregory; Hesford), and the recognition that linguistic variation signifies difference, not deficiency (Smitherman; Troutman; Wheeler). These teaching practices benefit all students by teaching them how to navigate communication in multicultural settings. While I do not argue against SAE, it is detrimental to students' communicative training to learn only one dialect; as stated before, multilingualism is an advantage.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE & METHODS

Theoretical Perspective

A critical lens and philosophical worldview, specifically an advocacy worldview, shape my approach to this study. According to John W. Creswell, “*Critical Theory* perspectives are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender” (62). In other words, my goal is to look at the underlying oppressive values and attitudes held in dominant culture that continue to oppress or marginalize groups because of linguistic, class, race, gender, or other difference. As a compositionist, I am specifically interested in the ways that we use language to either resist or reinscribe these oppressive values.

The effects of such oppressive values can be found in the literature pertaining to what is known as institutional racism, sexism, and ageism (Nieto; Bonilla-Silva; Hidalgo, McDowell, and Siddle). Here, it is important to recognize the difference between individual and institutional understandings of oppression, articulated clearly by Charise Pimentel in her article “Critical Race Talk in Teacher Education through Movie Analysis:”

most White people assume racism resides within the individual – a perspective that defines race as a personal identity that belongs to the individual and racism as a form of prejudice...that emerges in individuals’ overt racist thoughts and behaviors.

Many people of color, while they also acknowledge individual acts of racism, are likely to understand the production of racial constructs and racism as being embedded in the everyday functions of our society that exist outside the individual actor.... (52)

So, while we may not have individual racist (or oppressive) beliefs because our systems are embedded with oppressive values, when we operate within them, we perpetuate oppression and continue to marginalize groups because of difference. Unquestioned ideologies, such as dominant language ideologies, can be seen in the language choices of respondents in my study and are key factors in the continued systematic or institutional racism and oppression that nonstandard language users face in the American academy and society. According to Fairclough and Wodak, currently, “there is a high level of consciousness and self-consciousness about sexist and racist ways of using language, and the critique and change of language are central concerns in contemporary feminist and ant-racist political movements” (259).

It is important to recognize that whether oppression is directed at one’s race, sex, age, or some other difference, my interest lies in understanding difference as deficiency. From an advocacy standpoint, I am interested in advocating and empowering all students to overcome adversity. Because of my focus on the assault and destruction of difference, I will focus on “institutional othering” and “institutional oppression,” looking at the operation of underlying oppressive values. In other words, Western, masculine, white, upper-middle class values are privileged in the university, and any deviation from these traditional norms is condemned; this condemnation is institutional othering and is the focus of my research.

Using an advocacy worldview, I seek to defend the rights and needs of every student, which means advocating for the acceptance of, in this case, linguistic and rhetorical difference, regardless of what the differences may be. According to Creswell, an advocacy/participatory worldview addresses specific issues “that speak to important social issues of the day, issues such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation” (9). I aim to use this view to advocate for the value and acceptance of culturally diverse ways of knowing, communicating, and writing. As Ellen Cushman explains, “The critical pedagogue works with the oppressed to help them name the taken-for-granted nature of conditions and relations that perpetuate their marginalization” (246). Moreover, as Vershawn Ashanti Young explains in a discussion of his teaching pedagogy and practice, “I was ... more interested in helping white kids to learn their way out of the racism I saw in them” (100). I also believe that the goals of empowering marginalized students, exposing the oppressive ideologies held in dominant culture and helping students from the dominant culture overcome oppressive values are of equal need and importance in the composition classroom.

The theoretical origins of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as explained by Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, are also important to my theoretical perspective. Because I believe instructors have the responsibility to advocate for each student, regardless of need, CDA is a particularly effective tool for this project. As Fairclough and Wodak explain, “What is distinctive about CDA is both that it intervenes on the side of dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups, and that it openly declares the emancipatory interests that motivate it” (259). In using CDA, I am interested

not only in exposing the continued marginalization of groups, but also how dominant groups, often unknowingly, perpetuate marginalization and institutional othering.

Approaches to CDA come from a multitude of fields of study, regions, and ideological frameworks. Most important to this study are the theories and understandings borrowed from French Discourse Analysis and Socio-Cognitive Studies. French Discourse Analysis, more specifically the work of Michel Pêcheux, is interested in the relationship between ideology and language: “Discourse in Pêcheux’s theory is the place where language and ideology meet, and discourse analysis is the analysis of ideological dimensions of language use, and of the materialization of language in ideology” (Fairclough and Wodak 262). In other words, discourse creates society and culture while, in turn, society and culture create discourse: “Their relationship, that is, is a dialectical one. This entails that every instance of language use makes its own small contribution to reproducing and/or transforming society and culture, including power relations” (273). This understanding is significant to this study in that it gives me a frame to understand student responses as always already being ideologically weighted. When we talk about something, in this case the SRTOL resolution, we either reinscribe the dominant ideologies or resist them. CDA seeks to highlight the relationship between language and social practice. Highlighting this relationship, and showing the ways that we use language to oppress others might “help develop a critical awareness of the discursive strategies [of oppression] ... which might be one resource in struggles against it” (271).

A composition classroom has transformative power in that it allows a space for the discussion and study of difference. Students can learn to address critical issues and opposing opinions in a space of mutual trust and respect. By allowing students to tackle

controversial and complicated issues, encouraging questions and discussion, and by enforcing an atmosphere of openness and respect, we offer students the opportunity to learn how to discuss issues of difference and oppression in more constructive and productive ways. Students cannot resist the status quo if they are unaware of its existence or implications. And, as teachers, we cannot address the needs of students if we do not take the time to ask questions and listen.

Situating Myself

Before discussing my participants and analysis methods, it is important to share the personal beliefs and biases that influence my work. When I began studying literacy and teaching composition, I began to struggle to understand my role as a composition teacher and how to best help students. I believe that we must teach students (to use Smitherman's term) the Language of Wider Communication (LWC) because we live in a society that privileges this mode of communication over all others. If we fail to teach students the conventions of academic writing, that is, edited American English (EAE), we are not providing them with the necessary tools and information they will need to be successful in college and, later, in the professional world. I struggled with this aspect of teaching writing because I see SAE as a tool of oppression that has long been used to separate and divide the "haves" from the "have-nots," so it is difficult to continue viewing my job as a composition instructor in the same ways. I realized very quickly that I must also teach students about privilege, hierarchies, and ideology in order to help them understand that LWC continues to be a tool of oppression because it is still privileged over other ways of speaking and writing when we know full-well that it is in no way better. LWC is simply different – none is better or worse – none marks deficiency; none

is unintelligent; none is wrong. I want students to understand that this is what I believe, but I also want students to understand a few other things which I believe about language as well.

Keith Gilyard tells us that linguistic oppression is rooted in racial oppression (99). Because of this and because we continue to operate in systems that reproduce oppressive values, we live in an oppressive culture. We live in a society that continues to privilege white, middle-class values including religion, dress, and speaking. While I don't hope to dash the dreams of students, they must recognize that they have been fed ideologies that tell them that learning LWC will allow them access to jobs, power, and opportunities when, in reality, their access will still be limited because of other differences. In other words, an education and SAE are not enough to level the playing field. We are not a color blind society – and just as I cannot get away from the reality that I am white and a woman – students cannot get away from their realities either. Until we live in a culture that values difference, one that truly believes in the equality of all human beings, students of color will continue to struggle to have access to equal opportunities, resources, and privileges.

My beliefs about American mainstream white culture and my reality as a white woman not only frame this project, but my teaching, and my life as well. As a white woman, it can be difficult for students to believe that I practice what I preach. For example, while I say that I value content over form, that I encourage the use of home languages in the classroom, that I value difference, students are still hesitant to believe that such behaviors would be celebrated in an English composition classroom by a white, monolingual, English-speaking teacher. When I tell students to try to write as clearly as

possible and not worry so much about traditional grammar and punctuation rules until revision, they think it is a trick. As difficult as it can be for a white woman to gain the trust of students of color, I must also recognize how easily I can lose the trust of my white students who can view my denouncement of dominant behaviors as a denouncement of white culture. It can be difficult to get around stereotypes and expectations (read ideologies).

Methods

Data Collection

This project began as a journal activity in a Developmental Writing class during Spring 2011 at Texas State University-San Marcos. Every class period in Developmental Writing began with a journal activity. I would give students a topic, and they would have 10-15 minutes to write about it. In these activities, I did not check grammar or spelling, nor sentence boundary issues or other mechanics concerns. I explained these activities throughout the semester as a written conversation between student and instructor. For this particular journal activity, students were given the SRTOL resolution and asked, “Do you agree or disagree with SRTOL? Do you think teachers should follow this resolution? Do you think teachers are following this resolution?” After students handed in their journal responses, we had a discussion of SRTOL, and it was immediately clear that more explanation of the statement would be needed if I wanted students to be able to answer my questions concerning the SRTOL resolution.

I then conducted a pilot study during the 2011 Summer sessions at Texas State University-San Marcos. During the pilot, I experimented with different ways to present the SRTOL resolution to students. During the pilot study, I allowed students to ask

questions before responding to the same questions I gave the Developmental Writing students the semester before: “Do you agree or disagree with SRTOL? Do you think teachers should follow this resolution? Do you think teachers are following this resolution?” When allowing respondents to ask questions about SRTOL, I found it difficult to answer in ways that did not show my personal biases and beliefs. I wanted respondents to have enough information to answer my questions, but I certainly did not want to influence their responses.

After both early studies, I decided to draft an introductory paragraph that would give respondents some contextual information about the SRTOL resolution in the most unbiased, neutral language I could find. Making a discussion of SRTOL politically or ideologically neutral is a difficult task because of the wording and content of the document, especially the following statement: “The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans” (CCC 25.3 n. pag). While I recognize the limitations and inability of a single paragraph to provide respondents with all the necessary information related to SRTOL, I found it to be the most practical and neutral way to provide information to respondents.

I collected writing samples from 107 students during the Fall 2011 semester at Texas State University-San Marcos. During my pilot study, I focused on first-year composition students. After the pilot, a discussion with a colleague helped me recognize that nonstandard language users may feel language panic simply because they are being asked by an English teacher in an English classroom to discuss standard English. To overcome the possibility of a higher number of negative ideologies present in their

responses because of the location of the composition classroom within the English department, I decided to expand my sample and collect writing samples from students in composition as well as from other disciplines.

To locate participants, I requested permission to collect writing samples from students in first-year composition classes and elementary education teaching classes. I chose to survey students in composition classes because I believe that analyzing their responses will help inform an effective future pedagogy and practice for the composition classroom; once we identify patterns of response and language misconceptions in student responses, we can address them more explicitly. I chose to survey education students because understanding the language attitudes produced and endorsed in the field of Education will also inform a usable pedagogy and practice for composition classes because a majority of students in composition classes have been trained and prepared for college in public schools, and public school educators are largely trained by Education departments. As Geneva Smitherman explains, “Everybody goes through school, and it is in school that negative language attitudes are reinscribed and reaffirmed” (*Word* 138).

An interesting, and unintended, side-effect of collecting samples from education students was the way they chose to respond. Respondents in composition classes spoke as students; respondents in education classes responded as future teachers. While I had not planned for such differences in their responses, these different perspectives enrich my study by providing separate areas of analysis: responses by students and responses by teacher-students. When analyzing the data, I found some overlap in the responses from education students and composition students, but there were also interesting differences in patterns of response from both groups. Participants’ personal information was kept

totally confidential. Participants were asked to write their age, ethnicity, and gender on the writing sample, but not their names. Because I asked students to self-identify their ethnicity, their terms of ethnic identification are found in the parenthetical information provided with responses in the next chapter.

Data Analysis

I analyzed 107 student responses because a sample of this size was manageable, but also large enough for patterns of language attitudes to emerge. I recognize that because of the qualitative nature of this study and the limited number of participants, no scientifically generalizable conclusions could be reached. I do believe, however, that these writing samples will give depth to my analysis and understanding of current attitudes toward SRTOL and language use in the composition classroom. A qualitative design offers access to information that can create depth and complexity in our understandings of SRTOL.

After reading, discussing, and signing an Informed Consent form, the SRTOL resolution and a paragraph of explanation were presented to the respondents. They were asked to spend between 10-15 minutes writing a journal-like response to the resolution and to the following questions:

- Do you agree or disagree with the resolution? Why or why not?
- Do you think professors/instructors/teachers follow this resolution?
Please explain.
- Do you think professors/instructors/teachers should follow this resolution? Why or why not?

By journal-like response, students were asked simply to freewrite and answer the questions in the way they felt most fitting. Students were told that spelling and grammar should not be a major concern during this exercise, and to focus instead on clearly and specifically explaining their opinions and beliefs concerning the SRTOL resolution and language use in the academy.

After collecting the data, I transcribed the hand-written responses collected from students. Then, I read each response multiple times and annotated, marking instances of interest, ideology, misconception, or any other remarks/comments that seemed to shed light on my research questions. Each response was considered within the larger social, cultural, political, and academic contexts under which participants were operating. Patterns of response show more clearly how dominant language ideology is influencing classroom practice and language attitudes. It is important to note that, though I had specific questions in mind, the responses of participants guided the direction of my analysis. I found three notable patterns that will be discussed at length in the next chapter: American Ideals Ideology, Dominant and Standard Language Ideology, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Ideology.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

I conducted a critical discourse analysis of the student responses to gain greater understanding of student perceptions of the SRTOL resolution. According to Fairclough and Wodak, “CDA is the analysis of linguistic and semiotic aspects of social processes and problems. The focus is not upon language or the use of language in and for themselves, but upon the partially linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures” (271). In other words, CDA seeks to highlight the ways we use language to recreate or resist social and cultural norms. Several interesting patterns emerged during data analysis that shed light on my research questions, in particular, what dominant ideologies and (mis)conceptions of language are present in student responses to SRTOL and how student responses to the SRTOL resolution show acceptance of and resistance to the status quo. It is my belief that we must understand the ideologies and perspectives of students if we, as composition instructors, are to effectively teach and help students understand the nature of language and effective communication. But equally, if not more importantly, we must help students recognize the influences of ideology that affect their choices and opinions about language and otherwise which they make every day.

The data collected for this thesis project showed patterns of resistance, confusion, and misunderstanding, but also acceptance of the SRTOL resolution and language diversity in the classroom. The most obvious and common pattern of response related to SRTOL resolution to the American Dream or students’ personal understanding of

American ideals. While most respondents used American ideals ideology to endorse the SRTOL resolution, some used these same American ideals to reject the SRTOL resolution in favor of a national or universal language. It is clear that students have varied and conflicting understandings of the American Dream and other American ideals, though they use these terms as if they have concrete, absolute, universal definitions.

The influences of ideology were present in all the responses; more importantly to this project, dominant ideology often showed itself as resistance to the SRTOL resolution and language acceptance. Dominant ideology also showed up as confusion or as contradictions in student responses, as in the statement, “I believe language variation should be accepted with the exception of ebonics which makes the speaker sound ignorant and uneducated. Diversity is what makes society interesting and beautiful. We should embrace our differences in any way, shape, or form it may come” (Female, 18, Hisp/Cauc). While all of the patterns contain ideologies both reinforcing and/or resisting the status quo, the standard language ideology, as defined by Rosina Lippi-Green and evidenced in the statement above, was so prevalent in their responses that it warrants its own section. Other dominant and common ideologies were also present in student responses and will also be discussed.

The final sub- pattern of dominant ideology was present in both the responses of composition and education students. These respondents claim to agree with the resolution, but statements and opinions in their response seem to show that they disagree rather than agree. It is as if some respondents felt the “correct” answer was to agree. I believe dominant language ideology as well as the ideology of political correctness (PC) that has been so common in American culture since the early 90s made students feel

pressure to agree or accept the SRTOL resolution. Regardless of belief, it seems some respondents felt that overt rejection of a resolution calling for equality would not be PC. The language of the resolution is also highly political and may have made students feel uncomfortable disagreeing, particularly the statement: “The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another” (CCC 25.3 n. pag). Moreover, as Gloria Anzaldúa tells us, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity– I am my language” (81). Perhaps the highly political language of the resolution and the close relationship of linguistic and racial oppression caused students to feel the non-racist or anti-racist response was to agree, whether their hidden or embedded ideologies endorse racism or not.

This final pattern of response was found more often in responses from education students, but was also present in responses from composition students. This pattern of response, in my view, has been influenced by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which drastically altered the discourse of American education. Under the new accountability and testing regime, we see an increased focus on discussions of fairness, being on the “same page,” and fears of difficulty and of having the ability to teach using an SRTOL pedagogy in real classroom situations while also teaching the required curriculum and “teaching to the test.”

These three patterns, American Ideals Ideology, Dominant Ideologies, and No Child Left Behind Ideology, shed interesting light on my research questions and allow me to more clearly understand how an informed SRTOL pedagogy and practice can benefit students much more than by simply making them more tolerant of language diversity. By questioning embedded racist, sexist, oppressive, hierarchical ideologies that many

students bring with them, and teaching critical thinking and analytical skills, perhaps we can teach students out of their learned racism, as Vershawn Ashanti Young might say. Further, by highlighting these language ideologies, teachers might create a learning environment where students will be more likely to question ideologies that influence other aspects of their lives or at least have the tools to identify and name these ideologies when they encounter them.

American Ideals Ideology

In the most common pattern, students called on their understanding of American ideals to argue both for and against the SRTOL resolution. Responses like this are not surprising because of the language of the resolution: “A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects” (*CCC* 25.3 n. pag.). This statement evokes emotional responses of national pride and led many respondents to relate the SRTOL resolution to their understanding of American ideals. Three smaller categories emerged from within the pattern discussing American ideals: Rights and Freedoms as American ideals; Diversity and Equality as American ideals; and, closely related to Standard Language ideology, the idea that knowing English is a necessity for participating in American society and is therefore an American ideal.

Rights and Freedoms as American Ideals

For respondents in this sub-pattern, language diversity is protected by our uniquely American system of freedoms and rights. Interestingly, all but one of the responses that discuss rights and freedoms were collected in the composition classrooms. Very few respondents discussed which specific rights protect language; only two

responses use the term “First Amendment” or “freedom of speech.” The rest choose to discuss rights more broadly, as though these rights are universal and understood by all:

I agree with the SRTOL’s resolution. I feel that every individual has their own style of writing and to be made to conform goes against Rights given to all Americans. (M, 18, White)

I agree because if you take their native language away you are overstepping on their rights. (M, no age specified, Hispanic)

For these respondents, and others like them, it seems obvious that the audience will understand and automatically know which rights are given to all Americans. For these students, definitions of American rights and freedoms are concrete, absolute, universal. They feel no need to explain which rights and freedoms because, to them, this is common American knowledge.

I find the language of the first statement interesting because this respondent speaks not only of language, but of conformity – of assimilation. To this respondent, individualism – another uniquely American ideal – protects our right to speak. The ideology of individualism, what Harlon Dalton called “the curse of rugged individualism” complicates students’ understanding of the outside forces that affect our experience. As she states,

the inability to “get” race, and to understand why it figures so prominently in the lives of most people of color, stems from a deep affliction – the curses of rugged individualism. All of us, to some degree, suffer from this peculiarly American delusion that we are individuals first and foremost, captains of our own ships, solely responsible for our own fates. (15)

This is problematic because, as Dalton writes, “When taken to extremes, this ideal is antagonistic to the very idea of community. Even families cease to be vibrant social organisms; instead they are viewed as mere incubators and support systems for the individuals who happen to be born into them” (15). A focus on individualism was present in several responses, both in this and other pattern groups. The American understanding of individualism makes it difficult for students to recognize systemic or institutional oppression – those patterns that consistently privilege one group over another, as in the case of the status of a standard language.

American discourse, that is, discourse that elevates, describes, and praises an American Idealism, is often centered on the idea of freedom, so it is not surprising that students also utilized this discourse in response to the SRTOL resolution:

I personally agree with the Students’ Right to Their Own Language because it allows students to exercise their freedom and for them to be successful with the language they are comfortable with. (M, 18, Hispanic)

I believe that our Country agrees with the resolution, if you were to ask someone randomly if these statements were true or not they would say, “yes of course, this is a free Country.” In reality in the school systems depending [on] the location, there is almost always a dominance in a particular social group or dialect over others. (M, 18, White)

In the first statement, the audience is assumed to know what it means to “exercise . . . freedom” because freedom is a shared American ideal; these terms are often not problematic for most students. It is as though the combination of the ideologies of individualism and freedom lead some students to believe that we are, in fact, free to do

and be anything we want because we live in a free country. The second statement addresses the disconnect between the idea of a free country and the reality of social hierarchies and dominance. How can we have both a free country and a dominant group? What about the oppressed? Aren't they also in a free country, and can't they also "exercise their freedoms"? Without questioning these hidden assumptions and embedded beliefs – without complicating what it means to live in a free country – the discussion stagnates, and we cannot move forward.

Some respondents connected the idea of freedom to why people come to America:

Those who come to America were hoping for freedom to be who they want and if our schools are depriving the students of their heritage and culture, then what kind of country are we? (F, 21, White)

People come to America b/c they can practice their religion & speak freely in whatever language they prefer. (F, 21, ethnicity not specified)

Again, as in the last statements, the idea of freedom extends to all individuals in these respondents' understandings. After all, this is why people come to America; this in large part is the American Dream. The global discourse about America tells us that people who come here come to be free; it tells us very little about what that means. These respondents assume that all people come to America for the same reasons and with the same expectations.

With the prevalence of such responses in my sample, it is clear that the discourse and ideology of American rights and freedom are significant to the experience and world view of students. The context of the classroom within American culture allows topics of

freedom and individuality to highlight the slippery and contextual nature of language, as well as helping students to recognize embedded ideologies.

Diversity and Equality as American Ideals

The next largest sub-pattern within the discourse of American ideals positioned diversity and equality as American ideals or, as one respondent put it, “It is because of America’s diversity, that makes us who we are and what we ‘stand for’” (F, 20, Caucasian). I believe the language of this pattern was also influenced by the language of the SRTOL resolution which mentions diversity and discusses equality of dialects. All respondents who discussed diversity and equality as American ideals were in support of the SRTOL resolution and an equal number of responses came from composition students and education students.

America was formed on different cultures coming together so the education system should embrace all languages. (F, 18, African-American)

The SRTOL resolution is another way Americans try to maintain equality amongst its citizens. People from all over have suffered for their equality.

This resolution is another step forward in our society and is proof that Americans are ready to accept people from all races, religions and sex.

(M, 18, Hispanic)

For the first respondent, American ideals provide endorsement of the SRTOL resolution in the classroom. The country was “formed” on diversity, so logically, we must embrace difference. The second respondent sees the SRTOL resolution as an endorsement of newer American ideals – a “step forward in our society” – but also as a recognition of the

struggle for equality. This respondent does not see equality as a founding principle or ideal of Americanism, but instead sees it as a constant, conscious struggle in American society; therefore, the SRTOL resolution is seen more as an endorsement of diversity and equality becoming American ideals. While both respondents call upon diversity and equality as American ideals, their starting points are very different.

Two education students responded by first stating their support for the SRTOL resolution and then discussing the reality faced by many educators when attempting to embrace diversity in the classroom:

Although, I would like teachers to follow this resolution, I don't think it is being done. Unfortunately, our society has given more power to one cultural group and neglecting the others. I hope that we can evolve as a nation to stay true to its diverse roots. (F, 20, White American)

This resolution isn't even near getting into school and having a chance. Schools teach diversity but very low forms of it. Many schools in the U.S.A. are level one monocultural schools that do not plan on changing. (F, 20, white)

The first respondent believes that diversity is a founding principle or American ideal, yet she also realizes that the reality of American classrooms does not always match the discourse of diversity. The second respondent does not, in her response, address diversity or equality as American ideals. Instead, she poses the opposite: many schools are monocultural, resistant to diversity, which is why SRTOL doesn't have a chance. If diversity were an American ideal, schools would value students' home cultures, and embrace linguistic diversity. While these responses differ vastly, both recognize this

disparity/discrepancy/split between classroom realities and the discourse of diversity and equality, which is an important first step toward change.

Knowing English as an American Ideal

The final category within the pattern of the American Ideals Ideology speaks to what Americans should know:

I believe it is very important for people to maintain their culture & heritage however, I also believe that is important for students to know English so they can participate in American society.... Even though I feel that if you live in America you should be able to speak, write & read English that doesn't mean that I think other languages & cultures should be looked down upon, or not appreciated. (F, 21, White)

I believe it is a good thing for students to all learn the proper and grammatically correct language of the country they live in. (F, 38, Hispanic)

I highlight this briefly here only to show the relation of standard language ideology, which will be discussed at length in the next section, to the ideology of American ideals. In the first statement, the respondent believes that English is necessary to “participate in American society.” This response seems to be directed more at different languages, such as Spanish or French, than at different dialects, such as Chicano English or African American Vernacular English. I believe this to be a product of the normalization of whiteness. The respondent, a white female, does not seem to recognize that American English does not necessarily mean White American English, nor does she recognize that the standard is based on white middle-class language habits.

The second statement calls more directly upon standard language (SL) ideology, privileging a standard, homogeneous (read white, middle-class) language. Both statements are examples of what Pimentel calls the ideology of “linguistic conformity . . . the idea that this nation must conform to one linguistic code in order to ensure national unity, social stability, and the preservation of democratic values,” and will be discussed further below (“Color of Language” 342). One student spoke from experience about being in a classroom with a teacher who believes that knowing English is an American ideal: “I’ve had the unpleasurable opportunity of having teachers who believe because we are in America that we should all speak the same kind of way. So to speak, we should all speak properly in English, because ‘your not in your country, your in America’” (F, 19, Hispanic). Recognizing the linguistic terrorism which nonstandard language users often face in American schools and society is important to the process of understanding the necessity of acceptance of linguistic diversity. From this response, it is clear that some teachers whom this student has come in contact with have internalized the dominant discourse of English as an American ideal and therefore reproduce the damaging messages of dominance and social hierarchy to students.

Dominant Ideologies

Dominant ideologies reproduce hierarchies of power in a given society that favor the dominant group. In analyzing responses to the SRTOL resolution, I found that the most common dominant ideology enlisted by students to discuss the SRTOL resolution was, not surprisingly, standard language ideology. Other dominant ideologies were also present. It is important to note that dominant ideologies permeated my sample. While I

am devoting a pattern to dominant ideologies, I want to make it clear that all identified patterns are informed by patterns of dominant ideology.

As discussed above in the literature review, standard language (SL) ideology is defined by Rosina Lippi-Green as “a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogeneous spoken language” (166). This was the second largest pattern to emerge in my research. This is not surprising when you recognize that “Standard language ideology is a basic construct of our elementary and secondary schools’ approach to language and philosophy of education. The schools provide the first exposure to SL ideology, but the indoctrination process does not stop when the students are dismissed” (169). Because of its prevalence in our society and culture, it is interesting and important to examine the lasting effects of SL ideology on the thinking of students. In SL ideology as well as in other dominant ideologies, students show resistance and endorsement of the status quo. SL ideology and dominant ideologies were equally present in the responses of education students and composition students.

Standard Language Ideology

As in the previous patterns, I believe the language of the resolution affected student responses. The phrase “Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity” directly challenges SL ideology (CCC 25.3 n. pag). In their responses, students both reinforced and rejected SL ideology.

By far, the most common standard language ideology present in student responses related to an aspect described by both Lippi-Green and Pimentel. As Lippi-Green explains, students believe that “There is one correct way to speak and write English” (168). Pimentel describes this same response as “*Language Elitism* ... within this

ideology, the English language is perceived as being superior, a language of intellect and enlightenment...[;] non-English languages are imagined as – at best – peripheral (nonessential languages that can be spoken in private contexts) or – at worse – expendable” (“Color of Language” 343). In such responses, students consistently used language such as “proper,” “correct,” “formal” and “professional” to describe language and explain the necessity of teaching standard English in American schools. Such language implies that respondents have internalized the erroneous belief that SAE is a superior code:

Although there is no specific American dialect, there is proper grammar and the desire for social and racial equality should not lay a blind eye in this fact in order to create “equity. (F, 21, White)

I have to disagree with the Students’ Rights to Their Own Language. it is not that I disagree with expressing and upholding the value of a person’s culture, I disagree with not having a universal standard of speech. I understand that the idea of ‘proper English’ may be outdated, but we, especially educators, must hold to a certain standard. (F, 20, Hispanic)

The first respondent is skeptical of “social and racial equality” and clearly rejects the SRTOL resolution’s claim that “Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity” (*CCC* 25.3 n. pag). This skepticism is closely related to another dominant ideology that will be discussed in the next section – the erroneous belief that racism has ended and that we are, in fact, living in an equal society.

The second response recognizes that the idea of “‘proper English’ may be outdated” (read oppressive), but the elitism of SAE over all other codes in the thinking of

this respondent still leads her to endorse and promote the continued use of these oppressive approaches to language.

The following responses also call upon language elitism, but focus more on the nonessential nature of non-English languages and nonstandard dialects:

I agree with this to a certain extent. I understand and see the importance of the uniqueness of each individual however I also believe it is important for students to learn the proper way of speaking in certain situation, such as a classroom. By proper I mean grammatically and formally, without slang or slursI believe that teachers should follow this code when students are talking with peers and in social situations but should make sure that each student has the ability to speak properly and formally in the classroom setting. (F, 20 White)

I believe that students do have a right to using their own use of language when they are not in a classroom. I believe that it is still crucial that students understand the importance of using correct dialogue when they are in certain places, talking with certain people. I believe it is important that all geographic or social groups know and use the correct grammar. (F, 23, Caucasian/White)

Both of the above statements were made by education majors – future teachers. Each response shows how powerful SL ideology and, more specifically, Language Elitism has become in our society. By framing SAE as the superior code, these respondents reject the validity and structure of other codes as “informal” or “slang” and, therefore, as inappropriate for use in formal settings such as the classroom or business world.

There is also a large group of responses that directly refute or challenge the ideology of language elitism. Interestingly, all challenges of this ideology came from composition students:

I agree with the SRTOL resolution because if the teacher were to try to “correct” the language of a student of any age according to his/her own discretion it amount to that instructor saying his/her view of communication is superior to that of the student’s parents, family, or social group that the individual learned his/her style of communication in. (M, 23, other)

If teachers try to brainwash students to thinking that their own is not right but that the teacher’s language is correct, then students will not be proud of who they are, knowing that it is wrong and unaccepted according to the teacher. (F, 18, Hispanic)

I don’t think that any student should suppress their culture or dialect at risk of feeling like they could be punished by their professor, for not speaking proper “English.” (F, 19, Hispanic)

Of all the dominant ideologies present in student responses, none were more resisted or refuted than the ideology of language elitism. Because so many responses from the composition classes contained this resistance to the status quo, it is likely that class time and resources have been spent discussing language diversity and, possibly, dominant ideology. Still, as Fairclough and Wodak tell us, “every instance of language use makes its own a small contribution to reproducing and/or transforming society and culture,” and

seeing such resistance of the status quo is a positive sign for change and future acceptance of language diversity (273).

Perhaps the most shockingly contradictory response I received relates to SL ideologies. The first, exemplified in the introductory section of this chapter, supports Lippi-Green's argument that students recognize "a direct link between 'nonstandard' language and a lack of logic and clarity" (167). The respondent shows support for diversity while simultaneously rejecting linguistic difference. This contradiction shows that SL ideology is largely unquestioned and, as Lisa Ede reminds us, "works most powerfully when we are so immersed in it that we do not even recognize its existence but rather see it as natural or commonsensical – as how things are" (49).

Another shocking response I received aligns with Pimentel's Fear of Language Ideology. In this ideology, linguistic difference is seen as a threat "to existing power relations in this country that privilege Whites" ("Color of Language" 343). This response also touches on the next pattern to be discussed – the ideology of No Child Left Behind and the fear of many teachers that using the SRTOL resolution makes teaching too difficult.

Also I will present one of the most overtly racist/White dominant responses received in its entirety:

I disagree with the SRTOL because it makes teaching more difficult. I agree that teachers should take into account the different languages students speak and different dialects they have but to teach in multiple languages would be inefficient. How many schools in Mexico teach English alongside Spanish? How many schools in Central America, Asia,

the Middle East, Africa? I do not consider myself to be racist or believe that my culture is dominant over all others. The Conference on College Composition and Communication stated that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. You are forcing teachers to take courses and saying that if they do not complete them, they have no respect for diversity, which is a totally false statement. The reason this issue has surfaced again is because of the growing problem of illegal aliens entering the United States. Those people that enter this country legally, such as my mom, and learn English, such as my mom, have a choice to speak their native language. It is not the responsibility of the teacher to educate the students on their own culture; it is ultimately a personal decision and up to the parents. (F, 21, White)

This respondent seems to fear language diversity and even relates it to illegal immigration: “the only reason this issue has surfaced again is because of the growing problem of illegal aliens entering the United States.” It seems she believes that entering the country legally means assimilating, with learning the language being an indicator of a willingness to assimilate.

Further, her closing statements about culture show that she believes American culture is white culture. In other words, she neglects to even consider that American schools are promoting any culture at all; she has so normalized whiteness that its transmission and reproduction of white dominant culture is completely hidden.

A noteworthy response, though not large enough to warrant a pattern, relates to a concerning dominant ideology: “I feel that at the time this piece of legislation was passed we were in an era that was striving for coexistence and acceptance in the classroom, which was a brilliant move. However, in today’s era where kids are treated the same, I feel the acceptance of every dialect is a slippery slope teachers are caving into” (M, 18, White). We saw a similar response in the first example of language elitism, in which the respondent seems to be skeptical of rejecting SL ideology and the idea that SAE is a superior code. The example above more overtly expresses this student’s belief that racism was a concern of the past. Another student expressed similar views: “I agree with SRTOL because it does show that our nation has come a long way from where we were 200 years ago” (F, 18, Caucasian). In this statement, the respondent uses the SRTOL resolution to endorse the ideology that America is no longer – or is moving away from being – a racist country. This is a common discourse of whiteness (Rothenberg), and according to Tatum, “in almost every audience I address, there is someone who will suggest that racism is a thing of the past” (3). SL and dominant ideology were present in all patterns I found, and will be discussed in connection with the next pattern – NCLB ideology.

There are also many examples of students resisting dominant ideologies in response to the SRTOL resolution:

its sort of like Freire and his problem-posing and banking models. SRTOL seems to fit the problem-posing model. Teachers learn from students. Students learn from teachers. (F, 18, Middle-Eastern)

The concept of students obtaining ‘their own patterns and varieties of language’ is a way for teachers to learn from students, as well as the students being able to learn from the teacher. (F, 18, White)

In these responses, students resist the dominant ideology that Freire defines as the “banking model”:

The teacher teaches and the students are taught;
 the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
 the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
 the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly.... (Freire 54)

Because several students brought up this idea of problem-posing and a reciprocal learning relationship between teacher and student, it seems clear that these have been topics of discussion in class.

Still other students resisted SL ideologies:

Just because someone talks with an accent doesn’t mean they should be singled out or trained to speak a different way. (F, 20, White)

Every one is different and has a different way of speaking their language. Yes, I think teachers should follow this resolution because if not it is like you want them to all be the same and it is not teaching students to embrace where they come from. (F, 22, Hispanic)

In both examples, respondents resist the ideology of linguistic conformity and language elitism. For every endorsement of dominant ideology present, there were also responses of resistance. At least some students seem to be questioning the embedded ideologies that so influence American society and thinking. By giving more attention to these issues,

perhaps more students will begin to question assumptions and beliefs that influence the choices they make.

Said agree, but...

The final category found under this pattern of dominant ideology includes respondents who state that they agree with SRTOL, though the rest of their response seems to reject or contradict their acceptance of language diversity. As in previous patterns and categories, I believe the language of the resolution might be partly responsible for the prominence of this pattern in student responses, especially the highly political statement, “The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans” (CCC 25.3 n. pag.). The political nature of the first statement, coupled with the emotional language of the second, seems to have caused many respondents to feel that the “right” or “correct” answer was to agree and accept the SRTOL resolution regardless of whether it aligns with the ideologies they have internalized.

It is interesting to note that in every instance of inconsistency between stated agreement and support that marks this pattern, respondents’ inclusion of dominant or SL ideology caused the inconsistency:

I agree with the SRTOL resolution as long as students are still using correct grammar and spelling. If you let students get too comfortable using their dialect then it almost starts to not make sense to people who don’t speak that way and it could hurt them in the professional world. I think

teachers should follow the SRTOL Resolution to a certain extent to where their english for the most part is still proper. (F, 21, ethnicity not specified)

I agree with almost all of the resolution except for the last part that says teachers must have the training. What kind of training? Will the training be another certificate requirement? It seems a little pretentious to expect all teachers to learn all types of dialect because there are students who will take advantage of the system and make up dialects to use against teachers (particularly in the higher levels). This is not a pessamistic view it is a reality check. (F, 20, White)

I agree with the SRTOL statement that students should have a right to their culture & language. We should not be taking that aspect away from students at all. However, I do not know how students who speak a different language other than english, would be taught if the teacher only spoke English. Would all teachers need to learn a second, third, and fourth language in order to teach? And if there was a classroom filled with students who spoke different languages, how would the teacher go about teaching? I agree that teachers should follow the SRTOL Resolution, but like I said, I just don't know how. I'm sure there is a way though for students to keep their culture & language, and we just need to come up with a way to do so. I do not think that teachers follow the SRTOL resolution. (F, 20, Caucasian)

The first response's endorsement of SL ideology, language as a liability, and language elitism contradicts the stated acceptance of the SRTOL resolution. The second response

calls upon a dominant ideology that marks “others” as tricky and deceitful. The final response uses the NCLB ideology of the SRTOL resolution being too hard to teach as well as language as a liability and fear of language in contradiction of the initial agreement with SRTOL.

Growing up in the United States in the 1990s, a majority of respondents grew up during a time when American culture was obsessed with political correctness. The focus on political correctness has led many in American culture to fear seeming prejudiced, intolerant, oppressive, or insensitive. Still, when the ideologies that have been internalized are prejudiced, intolerant, oppressive, and insensitive, the outcome is inconsistency and contradiction.

No Child Left Behind Ideology

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) with its focus on accountability and high-stakes testing has altered since its adoption, and continues to alter the discourse of American Education, and not necessarily for the better. The federal Elementary and Secondary Education act, known as NCLB, was passed in 2002 and, according to Angela Valenzuela,

is deeply flawed, for three interrelated reasons: for attaching high-stakes consequences – in the areas of retention, promotion, and graduation – to a single measure of students’ academic abilities; for attaching high stakes consequences to schools and districts and thereby encouraging a reductionist, test-driven curriculum; and from promoting a uniform and objectivist way of knowing, to the detriment of other cultures, languages, and approaches to knowledge. (2)

In my research, I found education students to be especially aware of the system of beliefs and understanding created by NCLB, though composition students – many of whom attended public schools under NCLB – also internalized these ideologies. Two distinct categories fall into the pattern on NCLB ideology: discussions of Fairness or of being on the Same Page, and discussions of the SRTOL resolution looking good on paper, but being too complicated or too difficult in practice.

It is interesting, though perhaps not surprising, that only education students commented on the difficulty of putting the SRTOL resolution into practice, while both education and composition students employed the Fairness/Same Page reasoning. It is also interesting to note that in every instance of respondents claiming that SRTOL is too difficult in practice, dominant or SL ideology is used to support the claim. All but two of the responses in this pattern either completely reject or partially disagree with SRTOL and its principles. It is clear how powerful and effective NCLB ideology has become; some aspect of it was present in almost half of the responses received from education students.

Fairness/Same Page

In this category, students used phrases such as “when in the classroom I believe that everyone should be on the same page” (F, 20, African American) and “I think that all students should be taught in the same way. Doesn’t mean that this is the ‘right way.’ Just so everyone is on the same page and has the same opportunities” (F, 24, White). Others discussed the necessity of “commonground in learning.” This focus on being on the same page and teaching every student in the same way appears to come out of the high stakes accountability teachers in our public education system face. By staying on the same page

and teaching to the test – by not taking risks or pushing students – teachers feel more protected and safe from the accountability machine that may take their job for thinking/teaching outside the box.

Another aspect of this category may be related to future teachers' concerns of understanding and of communication in the classroom. Pimentel's explanations of the ideologies of language as a liability and of the fear of language were highly called upon to explain why the inclusion of language diversity in the classroom would have negative effects on students:

I think teachers should follow the resolution but teachers also need to ensure that everybody's learning. If the language is getting in the way of learning then it becomes a problem. I think that most teachers have the intention to follow the resolution but find it difficult to do once actually in a classroom because they either don't know that language or find it often disruptive to other students. (F, 21, Caucasian)

If teachers encourage students to use their own language, how will she or the students know what that student is saying. (F, 21, White)

I disagree with the SRTOL (Students' Right to Their Own Language) because it overall slows the learning process in the classroom. While personalizing each students learning experience, teaching a classroom of twenty to thirty students how to learn and progress with their own style of language that they have grown up seem not only impossible, but implausible as well. Offering the same english to every student can easily be misconstrued as dominance, but what people are failing to see that it

also offers a norm in the classroom and in real life. In some states it is hard to obtain a job with the natural “slang” the applicant has been raised with, in such cases it would be a benefactor to teach students the same english. (M, 18, Puerto Rican, Russian, British)

While the first response includes both categories from this pattern, it clearly shows the language as liability ideology and also illustrates how closely related these two categories are.

According to Pimentel’s explanation, this ideology “constructs non-English languages as social impediments that prohibit students from learning...” (“Color of Language” 343). Clearly, the above respondent views language diversity as “getting in the way of learning.” All of the above respondents fear stagnation and miscommunication in the classroom. The Fear of Language Ideology is seen as the fear of misunderstanding in the classroom and sees the view of language diversity as a problem that “slows the learning process.” The emphasis on the pace and speed as being paramount in a course is directly related to NCLB ideology in that high-stakes testing and accountability require teachers to adhere to a strict time regimen.

The two respondents who employed this pattern but agree with the SRTOL resolution actually employed the pattern to refute the language as a liability ideology:

I agree with the resolution because saying that the way one person speaks is any better than another is wrong. As long as you can comprehend what they are saying, a student should be able to use language they deem necessary. Teachers should follow this because when you’re telling a kid the way they’ve learned to speak is wrong, they’ll be extremely hard on

themselves. Not all teachers follow this though because they're more concerned with proper grammar rather than with allowing a student to use their own language to express themselves. (F, 21, Caucasian)

Everyone deserves to be open about who they are and to have respect.

Teachers encouraging individuals personal characteristics will have a positive effect on their students' self esteem. No one should have to feel like who they are or where they come from is 'wrong' or 'not good enough'....If a teacher is unfamiliar with a specific dialect, exposure to it will make it possible to understand fairly quickly. (F, 21, Caucasian)

In both examples, respondents resist the status quo of language as a liability and endorse the SRTOL resolution and language acceptance. By addressing students' self-esteem or students being hard on themselves, both respondents seem to recognize that students internalize explicit and implied messages about their culture and who they are (or about who society thinks they are) based partly on the acceptance of their language by teachers.

Too Hard to Teach

For respondents in this category, "SRTOL is one of those ideas that looks better on paper than in practice" (F, 21, White). These respondents seem to agree with the ideals of the SRTOL resolution, but are concerned or disheartened by the difficulty of turning it into actual teaching practice:

I agree to an extent with the resolution. I think that we are a country trying to be accepting of all different kinds of people, so this resolution goes hand in hand with what we are doing and wanting. However, I do think

that it would be harder for teachers to deal with so many different dialects if students were able to use their own language. (F, 28, Caucasian)

I do agree with the resolution, and I see it as a great idea. How this can be accomplished is more difficult to think of....Our education may not allow for it, or the omission could be due to the question of validity of dialect.

The only dialects I have experienced in a classroom were from the students themselves or literature read in class, never present in writing done by students. (F, 20, White/Caucasian)

I agree to a certain extent. While speaking in their native dialect is comforting and they should be allowed that comfort, I do not see how a teacher can effectively teach them. If a teacher has 5 different students in her class that all speak a different dialect, is that teacher expected to know all dialects to enable the students to learn? There is No way a teacher can spread herself so thinly and accommodate all students. (F, 20, White)

Again, I believe we see SL ideology coming into play. It is interesting that almost all respondents in this category discuss dialect. Further, these respondents do not seem to have a clear understanding of what a dialect is; no language use is dialect free.

According to the SRTOL background statement and elsewhere, most speakers operate within many communities and, therefore, use many different dialects. Further, the SRTOL background statement explains,

Although they vary in phonology, in vocabulary, and in surface grammatical patterns, the differences between neighboring dialects are not sufficiently wide to prevent full mutual comprehension among speakers of

those dialects. That is to say, when speakers of a dialect of American English claim not to understand speakers of another dialect of the same language, the impediments are likely to be attitudinal. (*CCC 25.3 n. pag*)

In other words, speaking or writing in different “neighboring” dialects is not a hindrance to learning. While it may take longer to communicate, students should recognize that, in a global economy, they will constantly encounter various and diverse dialects and must have practice and experience communicating across difference.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative research project seeks to address the rift between SRTOL theory and practice by highlighting the ideologies currently affecting students' acceptance of linguistic diversity. As previously stated, I believe that we must know what ideologies are most affecting student thinking in order to overcome them.

Discussion

The first pattern, American Ideals Ideology, shows the necessity of complicating students' understanding of the nature of language. From the responses, it is clear that many students believe that American ideals are freedom, rights, diversity, and equality. These vague terms tell us very little about actual American ideals, yet students call upon them regularly to support their claims. Students need help understanding that language is slippery and problematic, not a transparent medium of communication. As Tatum explains, "it is not agreement that is essential, but clarity" because "[i]f I also understand how you are using the term, our conversation can continue" (11). If students fail to recognize that definitions and connotations of language affect the reception of their message, their message will fail. It is clear that defining terms is a necessary and important step that many students overlook. It is interesting to note that students used the same arguments for and against SRTOL. Conflicting definitions are partially responsible. The second pattern, Dominant and SL Ideology, highlights the many erroneous and ideological beliefs students carry about language and minoritized groups.

Nonstandard language use is described by respondents as “informal,” “slang,” “incorrect,” “unintelligent,” difficult to understand, dangerous at times, and a hindrance to learning in the classroom. A few respondents even made judgments about the nonstandard language user, claiming they will make up dialects to trick teachers.

The contradiction of ideology in student responses in this pattern and in their desire to be PC leads me to believe that a majority of students have internalized and believe the ideologies of justice and equality; these students want to live in an equal and just society and many believe they already do. Because Dominant and SL Ideology are so hidden, I believe many students do not know or recognize that the ideologies they ascribe to are racist, sexist, elitist, nationalist, and oppressive. For the most part, I believe that students can overcome these contradictions once they recognize and understand what ideology is and how it works. As Fairclough and Wodak explain, “contemporary life is reflexive in the sense that people radically alter their practices – the ways in which they live their lives – on the basis of knowledge about those practices” (260).

Because of the size of this pattern, the impact of Dominant and SL Ideology on students’ thinking cannot be denied. These unquestioned and hidden ideologies cause contradiction and inconsistency in the thinking and responses of students. This shows that students need help in identifying ideology and critically examining patterns of belief. As instructors interested in teaching critical thinking and analytical skills, highlighting such ideologies in composition classes can be monumentally beneficial to students.

The third and final pattern, NCLB Ideology, shows how damaging and dangerous high-stakes testing and accountability systems can be. Students and future teachers have internalized beliefs that privilege sameness and uniformity, including standard language.

In 1974, Smitherman wrote, “Though Americans preach individualism and class mobility, they practice conformity and class stasis” (“soul n style” 16). The NCLB Ideology has further embedded this desire for conformity and sameness, making Smitherman’s observation as true today as it was 37 years ago.

As a whole, I was pleasantly surprised by the number of responses I received expressing positive attitudes and acceptance of the SRTOL resolution and language diversity. Overall, composition students were more receptive than education students, though I believe this is closely related to NCLB ideology and teachers’ fears of accountability. Also, the prevalence of resistance to and the transformation of dominant ideologies is promising.

Conclusions

My research helped me figure out what students need in order to understand the SRTOL resolution, which also aided my understanding of what teachers need to implement an effective SRTOL pedagogy and practice. As stated in the introduction, opinions of language diversity and accepted use are directly related to one’s understanding of the goals of first year composition: Is the goal to help students gain success in academic writing using standard Edited American English, or is the goal more broadly aimed at effective written communication? Are we attempting to aid students in communication only in the limited context of the academy (to please professors), or are we attempting to aid students in effective communication in all (or most) situations by making informed rhetorical choices? My teaching philosophy and worldview cause me to endorse the latter. I am passionate about antiracist, inclusive teaching practices that

promote respect and celebrate difference. Because of my personal beliefs, implementing an SRTOL pedagogy and practice is necessary in my composition classroom.

Looking at student responses to the SRTOL resolution shows that students need a safe space to experiment with language, ask questions, and be exposed to language diversity. It can be an uncomfortable experience to question embedded ideological beliefs, and students need support and encouragement throughout the process. I believe this space has not often been provided, which accounts for some students' difficulty understanding the resolution or clearly articulating their opinions about the topic. As explained in the discussion section, students also need help understanding the slippery nature of language. Students' lack of understanding of what language and dialect are and how they work also affected their ability to understand SRTOL and articulate their views. The context of the composition classroom is ideal for discussions of ideology because it so often exposes itself through language use, and discussions of language are central to the composition classroom.

While attempting to implement an SRTOL pedagogy and practice in my own classroom, it became evident that, due to the curriculum and time constraints of first-year composition, spending significant amounts of time discussing SRTOL and ideology, specifically, can be difficult. However, because language diversity and acceptance are central to my worldview and philosophy, it is less difficult to include such discussions in every lesson. Further, composition teachers can choose texts and writing prompts that highlight these issues, expose students to different languages and dialects, and force students to think through these complicated issues critically and thoroughly, basically, a writing about writing pedagogy. In other words, the inclusion of the SRTOL resolution

in the classroom does not impede an instructor's ability to teach students the necessary components of first-year composition.

While textbook companies could make the inclusion of SRTOL in the composition classroom easier by producing a first-year reader that focuses on issues of language and diversity, it is not necessary because the effects of ideology are present in all discourses (Fairclough and Wodak). In other words, any text can be the vehicle for discussions of ideology. While some texts may more effectively highlight ideology and lend themselves to such discussions, no text is ideologically neutral.

Further, an important aspect of first-year composition – regardless of your endorsement or rejection of the SRTOL resolution – is to help students recognize the weight and connotation of different words. For example, students must understand that while “fragrance” and “stench” may be listed as synonyms in the thesaurus, they have very different meanings/connotations. Another important aspect of language that must be addressed in first year composition is that meaning and connotations change over time. For example, the phrase “war on terror” means something very different in post-9/11 America than it had ever before. To improve student writing, we must teach students to choose words wisely and recognize the weight and contextual nature of language. Through such discussions, the ideological underpinnings of language are exposed; if we take advantage of these teachable moments, we provide students with valuable knowledge for college students and writers, but also for citizens in a democratic society.

Critical thinking skills are also a necessary component of any first-year composition class, regardless of one's understandings of the goals of the course. Looking at language, ideology, and their intersections with rhetoric in a text is an effective and

useful way to help students critically examine the arguments of others. In my classroom, students have enjoyed critically viewing texts from this perspective, and their discussions and analysis of texts improved, partly because they have a new vocabulary to talk about language and partly because they have new skills to identify ideology.

Finally, it is my belief that discussions of language acceptance and diversity must begin much earlier than in first-year composition classes. After spending 18 years ascribing to a set of beliefs, students are more resistant and skeptical to linguistic diversity than they would be if they had been exposed to language diversity and positive opinions about language acceptance at an earlier age. The prevalence of dominant ideology and NCLB ideology in the responses of education students leads me to believe that these damaging and inaccurate beliefs about language will be reproduced by future teachers for future generations of American students. We must stop this cycle. And how might we stop this cycle? Tatum provides an excellent metaphor for antiracism that I argue is also effective for how we might stop the perpetuation of damaging oppressive language ideologies:

I sometimes visualize the ongoing cycle of racism as a moving walkway at the airport. Active racist behavior is equivalent to walking fast on the conveyor belt.... Passive racist behavior is equivalent to standing still on the walkway. No overt effort is being made, but the conveyor belt moves the bystanders along to the same destination as those who are actively walking...unless you are walking actively in the opposite direction at a speed faster than the conveyor belt – unless they are actively antiracist – they will find themselves carried along with the others. (11-12)

I choose to actively resist negative and oppressive language ideologies, and I believe we must continue to raise awareness and knowledge about these issues in order to make progress.

In closing, all students will benefit from the implementation of an SRTOL pedagogy and practice. Removing the hold of dominant ideology is necessary and important to the growth and advancement of society. As one student respondent put it, “If we really followed this in schools and made our students informed in multicultural studies I truly believe we wouldn’t only be a more educated country, but a more peaceful one” (F, 21, Caucasian). This is because the understanding of difference and the questioning of dominant ideology will lead to more tolerance and acceptance of difference. The SRTOL resolution is a valuable and useful practice because it enriches the learning and knowledge production of the composition classroom, promotes diversity and respect, and encourages acceptance and cultural pride. This project started with students, so it only seems right to end with a call to action and a powerful statement by a student respondent:

This resolution offers not only a fair treatment promise for peoples of “non-white” descent, but also provides an explanation and means to end cultural warfare and discontent. I wholeheartedly agree with this resolution, but I have to pause for a moment as ask this question: Why have I never heard of its existence? One would imagine that a country priding itself as being “diverse” and “equal” might educate its inhabitants on how such things are achieved. Instructors in schools today definitely preach “American English” as the superior tongue, coaching Hispanic girls (such as myself) to say “underwear” instead of “chónes” because

(and I quote) “I can’t understand you and you should say ‘underwear’ because it’s better.” Teachers must approach language diversity with curiosity and excitement, not fear and animosity as is present today. (F, 20, Hispanic)

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