

NARROWING THE GAP: A CLOSE LOOK AT ENGLISH LEARNERS AND
EDITING PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

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SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: OCTAVIO PIMENTEL

This thesis is a close look at how English Learner writing students negotiate the complex position in which they find themselves in the American university, specifically in reference to common editing practices. That is, because the language skills of English Learners are often devalued their position in the class and thus their positions in editing practices are also devalued. This thesis attempts to explain why this devaluation occurs as well as account for how students recognize and respond to that devaluation. I also give advice on how to counteract this devaluation.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The United States university is multicultural; unfortunately, it has also been labeled just that, a term wrought with ideology and complicated inequality. The 1980's saw an explosion of work on the multiculturalism of the American College landscape which in addition analyzing and speaking to the diversity of the American university, has also popularized the idea of "multiculturalism."

This popularized notion of multiculturalism is both misguided and misappropriated, a position afforded to it in part because it is also vague and loosely defined. "Multiculturalism" has become a floating signifier, something the specific meaning of which remains uncertain and ambiguous even though the term is used commonly. Deep inside this word is a less apparent meaning that is masked by traditional ideologies and complex relations of power. In fact, these relations of power popularize the unspecific use of "multiculturalism" in part because its usage as a floating signifier allows dominating groups to effectively side-step barriers erected to keep hierarchical value systems from invading upon our quest for equal distributions of gainful outcomes. Keith Gilyard, for example, explains that "Although challenges to racism and exclusion launched the multicultural movement, the rhetoric and aims of that movement are not necessarily coterminous with the rhetoric and aims of... antiracism" (80). "Multiculturalism," Gilyard goes on to say, "serves to obscure the problematics of racism" (80). In other words, though "multiculturalism" may seem to fulfill a positive function, it is often used to the detriment of certain groups in American society.

Jay Jordan provides further research on the misguided use of “multiculturalism” in his scholarship concerning “multicultural” composition readers. Jordan found that “readers include examples of diverse U.S. and international rhetorics, but they then suggest traditionally academic and “mainstream” U.S.-centered assignments for further reading or writing” (169). Jordan also stated that “multicultural” composition readers “recognize a lot of different language and cultural practices but continue to admit only a very few as academically acceptable” (169).

The problematic issues that surround the use of “multiculturalism” may exist because understanding what it really means to be multicultural is by no means a simple task. To study and represent ourselves and each other in ways that are not demeaning or ultimately subjugating can be complicated. Comprehending even some of the vast array of cultural and linguistic forces found in our classes and in our students can be intimidating by sheer magnitude alone. This work, however, is of vital importance. The knowledge we produce, particularly that about each other, is reproduced in succeeding generations. But also, the things that happen as a result of not producing accurate knowledge are also recreated in succeeding generations; the failing of “multiculturalism” is but one example.

It is thus significant that we take a close look at the ways different groups interact within the American university to avoid both this lack of knowledge and its consequences, in the present and in the future. It is also significant that we pursue this knowledge with methods that do not produce new or reproduce older subjugating value systems that continually remain present everywhere in the United States. But, these subjugating value systems can be strikingly resilient; they can attach themselves deeply

to the ways we know and understand the world around us. And also, for those of us in academia, these subjugating value systems can be used to construct our research practices. Further still, they can remain present when we draw conclusions based on that research. That is, we pursue knowledge based on the way we understand the world around us, and if this understanding is limited in reference to the multiplicity of peoples in our world and our classes, the conclusions drawn from that research will also be limited in terms of this multiplicity despite the seemingly apparent goals of multiculturalism. The “multiculturalism” of text books as described by Jay Jordan stated above is but one example.

It is specifically American university composition classes that I wish to address here. Almost always a required course, composition classes are a microcosm of differing cultural influences. The number of cultures and languages our students bring to class can be greater than the population of that class. The problem is that colleges and universities in the United States, locations we would hope to be free of exclusionary or at best encumbering value systems, can bestow a differentiated status onto students based on their perceived ability to communicate in Standard American English (SAE). Bonnie Lisle and Sandra Mano in their essay “Embracing a Multicultural Rhetoric,” state that the profession of composition “celebrates heteroglossia and difference” (12). The irreconcilability of this description and the value system related above is the impetus for the research and theorization of this thesis.

Students with differing levels of English ability simply do not always occupy the same space in the composition classroom. And, though this may be descriptive of all the students found there, it is particularly evident for students for whom English is not a

native language. P. Bhaskaran Nayar for example, points to a “sociointellectual gap” that directly “inhibits the [nonnative learners of English] from equal status... particularly when they perceive themselves and others perceive them as deficient in the English language” (20). Nayar provides an example of this “sociointellectual gap” in the words of another scholar who wrote that “non-native speakers are capable of interesting and valid insights into the nature and system of language once opportunities have been provided” (T. Wright, qtd in Nayar 20-21). Nayar goes on to say that “the first presupposition on the part of the [author] is that he finds it unusual and hence noteworthy that the non-English speakers can be intellectually capable and would like to enlighten his readers on that point. The second presupposition is that it is the native English speaker who can and should provide opportunities and guidance in intellectually activating a nonnative” (20-21). Nayar’s example is evidence of how differentiated status can be placed on people with differentiated English abilities, specifically nonnative students of English.

To be more specific, a Sociointellectual Gap is a space, it is a void or a dislocation that separates native speakers of English from nonnative speakers of English. The gap is “Socio” in that it exists in a social context, one where the labels “native” and “nonnative” have different meanings attached to them and where this difference in meaning influences the educational outcomes for the students whom these labels are used to represent. It is “Intellectual” in that the recognition of being “native” or “nonnative” correspondingly influences how the individual’s intellect is valued or understood. A sociointellectual gap occurs where a native student gains a position of authority and knowledge-ability over the nonnative student. The gap is the distance produced by the false recognition of greater

mental capacity in the native student determined on the basis of her or his placement on a native/non-native hierarchy.

Due to the multicultural makeup of American university composition classes, Nayar's example must be representative of what many college students in America endure. And, because nonnative students often come to class less familiar with English, their struggles to learn English are likely influenced by the "gap" Nayar points to and the value system that creates the "gap." It is therefore imperative that we closely examine the situation in which students to whom English is not a native language find themselves when studying composition in an effort to facilitate their learning processes and academic success. In the face of ethnocentric assignments, narrow grading policies and unrealistic teacher expectations, all of which are in addition to the status value system that produces Nayar's "sociointellectual gap," to better understand how American academic teaching strategies interact with our students would be vastly productive. I believe this will not only facilitate the success of the nonnative student and the native student but will also facilitate the success of the instructor.

I want to be specific by stating that diversity is by no means an unacknowledged topic in composition studies. There is a significant body of research concerning how the cultural and rhetorical strategies students bring to class directly affect their academic success (Harris; Lisle and Mano; Silva). There is also research concerning how alternative rhetorical strategies manifest themselves in academic writing (Campbell; Silva; Troutman). However, if there continues to exist a "sociointellectual gap" in the composition classroom this issue must persist in part due to insufficient attention to how

the “gap” is produced and what it looks like when it rears its ugly head. It is this unexplored space that I wish to address in this thesis.

It is also this unexplored space that allows the term “multiculturalism” to remain a floating signifier. But, studying the ways in which the different rhetorical strategies our students bring to class interact with the standards of Edited American English (or EAE, the standardized written form of Standard American English. I will go into more detail on this in the next chapter), and the current methods in which they are taught, produces knowledge about our differing communities. And, it produces knowledge about what it means to be multicultural. By researching the interactions between American composition, its instruction, its instructors, and the vast array of students and cultures found within, the term “multiculturalism” might be able to take on a more nuanced meaning. Conceivably, the more specific and accurate knowledge we create, the less “multicultural” can be used without recognizing the difficulties it has been used to hide. But also, the more significance it will have for both teachers and students. And also, the more progress that we can see as a result of its use. Someday I hope we can stop being placated by “multiculturalism” and truly begin to be multicultural. The other option, of course, is to throw the word out entirely. And, if a greater body of academic knowledge would help to support its demise, I am happy to participate.

I would also like to add that the true multiplicity of multiculturalism will not be found entirely within a single dialect. Thus, I wish to relate that though this thesis focuses specifically on the acquisition of EAE in students to whom English is not a native language, I do not wish to seemingly place EAE in a theoretical location of communicative superiority. Edited American English is one arena of rhetorical strategy

among an infinitely vast universe of languages and dialects and accents and vernaculars and so on. It is not intrinsically superior to any other method of communication. It is however, for better or for worse, the language of American academia. And in many cases, to be successful in the American university, one must also learn to be successful in Edited American English. It is this success in Edited American English I wish to facilitate with this thesis. As Paul and Aya Matsuda state, “To not make the dominant codes available to students who seek them would be doing disservice to students, leading to their economic and social marginalization” (372).

It is true to say that in America, as well as in many other parts of the world, having an education is often that which also allows access to higher paying jobs. If people to whom English is not a native language are denied access to American higher education, or whose educational experience is not facilitated by adequate language teaching, it is likely that this denial of educational access will translate into a denial of the higher level and higher paying positions in the American job market. Part of my reasoning for the research conducted here is to facilitate access to the economic power base that is more open to those who can speak and write in Standard English. Additionally, Edited American English is the linguistic tool of much of the dominant parties in America and understanding it will better enable us to counteract their hegemonic powers.

This thesis will address students to whom English is not a native language, a group for whom I use the term, after much deliberation, English Learners (EL). I choose this group, among other reasons, because ELs often find themselves having to negotiate a personal space at least partially defined by Nayar’s “sociointellectual gap” and the value

system that produces it and wish to play a direct role in measures that may serve to counteract its effects, both currently and in the future. There is a great potential for the improvement of writing pedagogy in the acquisition of these data for all of our students but particularly for English Learners. By identifying, analyzing, and theorizing some of the specific ways the “gap” presents itself in the American composition class we will be better able to actively pursue its abolition.

The situation in which English Learners find themselves in the American composition classroom is complicated, so much that too broad a focus in this thesis would be to my detriment as there are simply too many factors to accurately consider. Thus I wish to narrow the focus of my researching here to a specific area that appears to be a particularly dense location where the “gap” can be identified. It is for this reason that I have chosen common editing practices to be the focus of this study. More specifically, I wish to take a close look at how English Learners and common editing practices interact.

Specifically, I want to look at two of the most common and current methods of editing that can be found in the American composition class: the in-class peer review session and teacher responses to student writing assignments. This choice is mediated in part by preliminary research I conducted involving the observation of several classes with English Learners present. At that time, I was looking to better understand how English Learners and the standards of EAE interact in the American college classroom. The data I acquired then indicated the existence of a strong relationship between peer review sessions, teacher responses to student writing assignments, and the improvement of one’s ability to utilize EAE. Thus, I decided to pursue peer review sessions and teacher responses to student writing assignments in greater detail in this thesis. The preliminary

research however, not only indicated to me that these two editing practices are important but also that their success can be relegated by the ways the students who take part in these editing practices perceive themselves and are perceived by others as part of each practice.

It is my ultimate goal to make equality an attainable task in the composition classroom. This thesis focuses on only a minute portion of what allows the inequality referenced above to continue to exist. And, with such a small sample base, the information rendered here may not be generalizable. However, I believe that this thesis will add depth to the complexity I reference above, and that also, that depth will help us to make the lives of our students, and ourselves, better.

The guiding research questions for this project are: 1) How do American college English Learners students negotiate the differentiated location in which they are placed in the American composition class?, 2) How is this differentiated location represented in the common editing practices of peer reviewing and teacher responses?, 3) How does this differentiated location change the way peer reviewing and teacher responses work for English Learners and native learners?, 4) How can these editing practices be adjusted to facilitate the education of all students?

The thesis introduced here will be broken up in the following chapters. Chapter 2 will be a review of the relevant literature. Chapter 3 will include a detailed description of the methodology I will undertake to acquire data. Chapter 4 will relate my analysis of this data. This will contain specific details on how students personally reacted to both peer reviewing and teacher responses to student writing assignments. I will also make recommendations on how to improve these practices. The 5th and final chapter will be a

conclusion where the results of the study will be brought together in synthesis with the goals of composition pedagogy and its theoretical underpinnings in an attempt to add to the current conversation concerning both composition pedagogy and second language acquisition, specifically in terms of writing.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

I would like to start this section with a discussion of the sample base, a group I have used the term English Learners (EL) to signify. This discussion will include a description of some other common terms utilized both in the past and currently to describe those whom I will refer to as English Learners. It will also be important to narrate why I have chosen to use the term English Learner over the alternatives, and also, why I did not simply invent my own.

English education to nonnative speakers was originally referred to as simply “(the) teaching (of) English” (Nayar 10; Chapman; Frisby; Palmer; Quirk & Smith); “the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language” was also utilized by some (Nayar 10; Fries; Gauntlett; Gurrey); and “Language Teaching” could also be found (Nayar 10; Billows; Cornelius). The terms ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) were in wide usage by the 1950s, becoming by the 70s and 80s the common vocabulary for describing students learning English as a non-native student (Nayar). The works of P. Stevens played an influential role in the process of supplanting the terms ESL and EFL as descriptions of non-native English learners (Nayar; Stevens *New Orientations, Teaching English, English for Cross-Cultural, World Englishes, Applied Linguistics*).

Scholarship in applied linguistics has also played a role in shaping vocabulary terms for those who may be called English Learners. In the 1950s the terms L1 and L2 began to see publication through the efforts of applied linguists who recognized influences of a first

language on the education and comprehension of a second language, in this case English (Campbell; Grijalva; Lado; Nayar; Weinreich). L1, Griffin D. Newman describes, refers to “an established first language,” “the child’s dominant language” (Newman 23; Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams; Yule). Finally, L1 has been seen as “scaffolding for L2 learning” by many applied linguist scholars (Newman 23; Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams; Yule).

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is another term not unknown to the world of English Learners and their educators. LEP can be defined as “a federal designation for children whose English proficiency is too limited to allow them to benefit fully from instruction in English” (Calderón, Slavin, and Sánchez 104). For example, Title 1, Section 11 (b)(3)(C)(9)(III) of the No Child Left Behind Act states that such assessments must provide for “the inclusion of limited English proficient students” (qtd. in Abedi et al. 3). The No Child Left Behind Act also stipulates that assessment, often taking the form of standardized testing, be the primary means of determining who is an LEP student (3).

All these terms, however, are not neutral. They interact differently both with those who use them as well as those to whom they are applied. The terms ESL, EFL, L1, L2, and LEP must be recognized as existing within a hierarchical power dynamic where the individuals labeled as ESL, EFL, L2, and LEP learners are often marginalized in the classroom (Nayar; De and Gregory; Newman; Abedi et al.). These terms are also commonly misapplied to students, a mistake that can cause the instructor to anticipate certain errors or actions that may or may not be present in the student’s texts (Newman). This anticipation can lead to more biased and preconceived notions of the student and her

or his work as a whole. Furthermore, these terms, like all terms, reflect a “history and demography rather than a linguistic reality” (Bhaskaran 9). That is, the creation of these terms, the giving of meaning to words that represent groups of people, as well as their differing applications (and miss applications), can be implicated in the creation and recreation of hierarchical value systems that stigmatize students and ultimately inhibit equal educational outcomes. It is the non-neutrality of these terms that, I must admit, at first, lead me to create my own.

I then produced the term “Non-Monolingual English Learner” (NMEL) to signify a group that others might refer to as ESL, EFL, L2, or LEP. I generated NMEL in an effort to avoid the stigma that has become specifically attached to ESL, EFL, L2, and LEP. I chose the words “Non-Monolingual” to represent students who, though learning a language that is not native to them may or may not be their second and to define it as such is to truncate the complexity of the student’s situation. It is perfectly likely that our students can be multilingual and Edited American English is but one more addition to the linguistic repertoire she or he brings to class. Furthermore, to describe the English of the EL as “second” also, though perhaps as a side effect, often also evaluates that language hierarchically. Specifically, it places the English spoken by ELs in a category that is often recognized as second best, rather than simply second in line. Dennis R. Preston, for example, when conducting research concerning language attitudes in the United States, found that “in spite of the careful wording of the instructions [of the testing procedures] it is clear that the informants took [the labeling task they were asked to complete] to be an evaluative [process] rather than a descriptive one” (Preston 238). In other words, it has been shown that a process of chronologically listing things is often to also appraise them.

EFL was discarded for similar reasons. Specifically, I chose not to utilize EFL because of the inclusion of the word “foreign.” Because there is a stigma commonly attached to that which is considered foreign, this stigma is often then attached to the student, the English of the student, or both. For example, James M. Hendrickson stated that there is a “stigma that native speakers attach to lexically, grammatically, phonologically, and orthographically deviant forms and structures that nonnative learners produce frequently in their speech or writing” (394). It is the anticipation of the attachment of such a stigma that I sought to avoid by rejecting ESL and EFL.

I abandoned the use of Limited English Proficiency because of its current and most likely lasting connection to an educational system that has stigmatized minority students from its inception. For me specifically however, it was the procedures designed to identify and label LEP students that lead me to abandon its usage. For example, “Critics declare that standardized assessments [or English Proficiency Tests] measure socioeconomic status, innate ability, and non-instructionally related material and thus yield little valid information about student achievement” (Abedi et al. 3). Furthermore, “the time commitment for test preparation robs classroom teachers of valuable instructional time and tends to water down instruction by indirectly encouraging teachers to “teach to the test”” (3; McNeil, 2000). Additionally, the term is representative of the students ignorance rather of their accomplishments or their knowledge.

Ultimately I also abandoned the use of my term NMEL because it lacks a standardization that would facilitate its understanding outside of this text. Creating a new word, though seemingly productive in terms of what it might describe, is deficient in its capacity to remain descriptive outside the pages of this thesis. Finally, I settled on

English Learner (EL) because in addition to not representing the students or their English numerically, EL is not a term defined for us by inadequate assessment procedures or related generally by the American education system. This is not to say that EL is without complications. For example, “There have been problems with definitions or guidelines for identifying which students are “English language learners” (Abedi et al. 3). Thus, I retain the term EL because it appears to me to be the least stigmatized term available with a circulation great enough to facilitate the ideas communicated in this thesis.

All the terms, ESL, EFL, L1, L2, NMEL, or EL must be seen as remaining unspecific as to the linguistic origins of the individual students to whom they may be applied. The term is also unspecific to many other identifying traits that can affect the outcome of one’s research. In other words, they do not specify the ethnicity, class, gender, language, or dialect spoken by the individual who has been placed in the category these words differentiate. I relate this because it can be seen as somewhat of a limiting factor given the presence of scholarship on how students with different first languages, dialects, or cultural backgrounds exhibit different rhetorical strategies that influence the ways that they come to write in EAE (Perry; Campbell; Harris; Lisle and Mano; Troutman, to name just a few). That is, the varying backgrounds students bring to class will affect their comprehension of EAE in different and culturally specific ways (Perry; Campbell; Harris; Lisle and Mano; Troutman) and the label I have use here, EL, does not specify for these factors. But, given that my sample base can be made up of any of the innumerable ethnicities, languages, and dialects existent in the students of Edited American English and the classrooms of the American college, I have chosen to apply the blanket term of EL. A blanket term that also becomes relevant given that part of the

purpose of this study is to seek out the success of particular editing practices across cultural lines. Thus, the word I have designated to label the study group is also one that exists across cultural lines.

Standard American English (SAE), however, does not exist across cultural lines, at least not enough. And, in that the study conducted here concerns SAE I will now provide a quick discussion of some of its descriptions. Spiecher and Bielanski state that dialects “display... lexical, phonological, and grammatical features that vary somewhat from those of other dialects although most dialects of the same language are mutually intelligible” (148). The authors go on to say that “Each country eventually elevates one dialect to become the standard” (148; Wardhaugh, 1992). “In Great Britain,” the authors state, “the standard is called Received Pronunciation or The Queen's English, and in the United States, the standard is called Standard American English or National Network English” (148). To be precise however, these are the words we have chosen to label the languages or dialects utilized by the dominant groups in English and American societies.

Standard American English is often used to describe a way of verbally communicating, while Edited American English (EAE) is a term commonly applied to this dialect in its written form. The words “‘written edited American English’ appear... in a 1974 resolution by the National Council of Teachers of English entitled, ‘On the Students’ Right to Their Own Language’” (247). The authors contend that “The term ‘Standard American English’ was avoided, in part, because it privileges American English over other forms of English... (247).

EAE is used to describe the “Regularized conventions [that] began to develop more emphatically after the invention of the moveable printing press and the subsequent

spread of literacy” (Farrell 347). Thomas Farrell, reiterating the words of E.D. Hirsch in *The Philosophy of Composition*, makes the claim that these conventions were produced, “probably because they facilitated reading” (347). Farrell continues this reiteration by stating that “As Hirsch argues, a good prose style has to be relatively readable and the mastery of regularized conventions of writing contribute to making one’s written work more readable” (347). It is also that “There are optimum conditions that speed up the visual processing of the written language, and the regularized conventions of Edited American English are part of those optimum conditions” (347).

“The use of EAE,” states Michelle Y. Szpara and E. Caroline Wylie, “emphasizes the edited nature of formal prose, written under constraints of the assessment directions” (247). W. Nelson Francis defines EAE “to mean “prepared for print”” (267). It is at least clear from the descriptions above that EAE is a highly scrutinized and highly developed written form of English. It also can be recognized as the primary dialect in which the vast majority of scholarly writing in America takes place and thus is also the primary dialect in which the vast majority of English education takes place in the United States. Next, because Edited American English must be recognized as a form of communication consisting of highly “regularized conventions of writing,” thus a discussion of the conventions and standards of EAE is at least pertinent (qtd. in Farrell 347).

Understanding the nature of academic conventions and standards in part requires a study of the discourse communities that produce them. Beaufort, for example, states that it is important to help students “understand discourse communit[ies] so that they can analyze genre conventions for a specific writing task” (qtd in Miller-Cochran 558). There is also evidence that one can locate the standards of a discourse community, like that of

EAE, through a study of the “kinds of issues a discipline considers important, why certain methods of inquiry and not others are sanctioned, how the conventions of a discipline shape text in that discipline, how individual writers represent themselves in a text, how texts are read and disseminated within the discipline, and how one text influences subsequent texts” (Spack 38; Faigley & Hansen; Herrington). Editing practices like peer reviewing and teacher responses to student writing assignments can also be representative of what a discourse community feels is important. That is, these editing practices improve the writing in a way appropriate to the conventions of the discourse community where they are utilized.

On another note, I would like to relate that these standards, and the communities that utilize, produce, and reproduce them, can appear to be a “‘hard-shelled’ community” (Saville-Troike, qtd. in Guerra 250) and “impervious to change” but it is important to remember that these communities, and the standards they create and uphold, are in a constant state of flux, they are not “closed, unchanging entit[ies] that demand... strict allegiance to its conventions” (Guerra 250 and 252). In fact, Teresa Thonney states that students should be guided to see academic writing as “dynamic” (358).

But, even though the standards and conventions of EAE can be recognized as in a constant state of flux, there are still particular ways of producing specific a text that are changing slowly enough and are thus stationary enough to be accurately studied and will thus remain pertinent after this work is completed. This pertinence can partly be seen in the work of Laura Wilder and Joanna Wolfe who have asserted that students directly taught language conventions “wrote better essays and reported comparable or higher

levels of enjoyment in the course than those receiving no instruction in writing conventions” (170).

As stated above, the different rhetorical strategies students bring to class influence their learning experiences and the outcomes of those learning experiences. In recognizing this, scholars have produced a wealth of research that has primarily taken the focus of how traditional modes of teaching are generally inferior in terms of how they interact with students such as the EL. For example, assignments can be produced in accordance with specific cultural norms that may or may not be understood by the student, let alone having been incorporated into the student’s outlook on education or life in general (Hesford; Lisle and Mano). Some scholars have identified a colonizing effect traditional western pedagogy can have on students of English (De and Gregory; Guerra). Many of these authors also offer alternative pedagogical strategies for teaching students to whom English may not be a native language or those unfamiliar with American perceptions of reality (Baca; De and Gregory; Guerra; Hesford; Lisle and Mano; Zamel). The study conducted here seeks to add to this scholarship.

As stated above, the different linguistic backgrounds students bring to class will influence their comprehension of EAE in different and culturally specific ways, and thus, many also feel that one’s writing pedagogy must be sensitive to these differences to encourage student success (Campbell; Harris; Lisle and Mano; Perry; Troutman). This is in part because these cultural and linguistic differences, and the effects they might have on one’s writing, are not perceived as neutral by either the students or the teacher. Rather, they are often recognized and positioned hierarchically. For example, Jeanette Ludwig states that “Judgments of L2 performance show consistent, markedly negative reactions

to vocabulary and discourse level errors, finding them real impediments to comprehensibility, thereby increasing irritation” (281). Ludwig also says that, “Too often students and teachers mistakenly relate linguistic accuracy with increased social acceptance,” something that exists because students and teachers often equate social acceptance with language usage (282). Wendy S. Hesford, states that, “If we do not recognize how students must negotiate their identities in response to perceived power relations and teacher expectations, we risk dismissing the complexities and the struggles involved in writing... within the academy” (134). Hesford not only recognizes unequal power relations between students with differing identities but she also makes note that student identity and the power relations that surround them must be pedagogically accounted for. Furthermore, Tony Silva wrote that “ESL students’ teachers, whether in ESL or in mainstream writing classrooms, should be cognizant of, sensitive to, and able to deal positively and effectively with their students’ socio-cultural, rhetorical, and linguistic differences,” and in doing so not only recognizes a differentiated perception of ESL students but also provides advice on how to curtail the presence of this differentiation (217).

Whatever means a teacher utilizes when teaching academic writing in the American university, most instructors agree that “Although the students may readily become aware of these differences [between the rhetorical strategies of EAE and those ELs bring to class], they will need continuing instruction in all the regularized conventions of syntax, spelling, and punctuation of EAE in order to incorporate these conventions into their writing and thereby make their writing relatively more readable” (349). Two particular means of providing students with knowledge of EAE that have

received attention for their effective capacity at doing so are peer review sessions and teacher responses to student writing assignments. It is because of the attention these avenues of instructing composition in EAE have received in addition to the influence that I have personally observed in my preliminary study, that I will focus on peer review sessions and teacher responses to student writing assignments as the instructional means I wish to analyze in this thesis.

Many scholars agree that different students will respond to peer review sessions differently. But, though some have argued that peer review sessions can be detrimental to the student's learning process (Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger), many still see the communication and interactions that occur as a result of peer reviewing as a significant element of effective second language instruction (Kroll; Leki; Mendonça and Johnson 746; Mangelsdorf; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger; Mittan; Zamel). Nancy Martin for example, speaks directly to the "unexpected power that small workshop groups generate" (Nelson vii).

Other scholars "base their support for... peer interaction upon the Vygotskian notion that language use, whether written or oral, is a deeply rooted social act and, therefore, that peer interactions bring together the cognitive and social aspects of language by allowing peers to construct meaning within the context of social interaction" (Mendonça and Johnson 746; Newman, Griffin, & Cole; Vygotsky). Elizabeth Tomlinson has noted that the gender make-up of the peer review session influences the feedback given in the review session (139). In that students can misinterpret the peer reviewing process, J. Stanley (*Coaching*) has argued that careful instruction on the processes of peer reviewing allows students to construct more successful peer reviewing sessions. Also,

because students bring different rhetorical strategies to class that affect their performance in the class these rhetorical differences can also be found in the ways they proceed within the peer review group (Allaei and Connor). For example, the differing ways in which students act when being polite, is often due to the differing ways in which politeness is demonstrated across cultures.

Concerning teacher responses to student writing assignments many agree that instructors spend “a great deal of time responding to...student compositions” (Zamel 80). And, “whether Hispanic, white, or African American, we know that children are affected by their teachers” and teacher responses to student writing assignments are no exception (Ramirez-Dhoore and Jones 76). Teacher responses can divert a student from her or his individual writing purposes to that of the teacher (Sommers). Students often “revise according to the changes that teachers impose on the text” (Zamel 80). Some instructors hold the student to “inflexible standards... and... respond accordingly to the extent to which these texts conform or deviate from these standards” (Zamel 81; Moran). Teacher responses have been shown to dictate the “decision-making processes” the students utilize concerning the texts they produce (Zamel 81; Brannon and Knoblauch). It is evident from the previous descriptions of teacher responses to student writing assignments that they remain an influential avenue whereby students acquire knowledge of EAE. And though different students will react differently to different teachers and their different responses, I believe there are relationships of effectiveness that pertain specifically to English Learner students.

Moving on, there are feasibly countless means of acquiring data about English Learners, and thus, I wish to utilize a means of acquiring that information that is

facilitated by the ways in which it becomes available to me. The research methods I will use to collect this data are those that acknowledge a belief similar to that of Paul Kei Matsuda; “that reality exists but can be only approximately understood,” that we can never ultimately know reality but are able to obtain information concerning it through varying research methods (Schultz 129). It is for this reason that I have chosen a series of mixed research methods, all of which however will be analyzed qualitatively.

Concerning a qualitative research design, John Creswell states that “qualitative research is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or a human problem... [it requires] analyzing the data inductively... and making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (Creswell 232). For the investigation described here qualitative research will take the form of interviews and observations. But also, I will be utilizing a research form that is most often associated with quantitative researching, specifically surveys. I will be using the information acquired from these surveys as supplemental to the interviews and observations previously mentioned. I will not be conducting adequate surveying such that the information they provide can be seen as generalizable to greater populations. It is for this reason that the research conducted here should be considered qualitative rather than mixed methods. I seek to add depth to the understanding of the situation for English Learners in the American composition class, not to represent it statistically.

Observations can be described as that which occurs when “the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site” (Creswell 181). Observations can also be described as “qualitative research in which the investigator obtains information through relatively intense, prolonged interaction with

those being studied and firsthand involvement in the relevant activities of their lives” (Levine, Gallimore, Weisner, and Turner 38). Moreover, “the primary data are typically narrative descriptions (i.e., field notes) based on direct observation” (Levine, Gallimore, Weisner, and Turner 38). For the research conducted here observations will take place in classrooms where ELs are present in the student population.

Interviewing will be another means I utilize to acquire data, and is described as “a basic mode of inquiry” (Seidman 2). Seidman also states that when people tell stories of their experiences that “every word... is a microcosm of their consciousness (1). And that “individuals’ consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues, because social and educational issues are abstractions based on the concrete experience of people” (1). Observations and interviews will add a depth to the data that will be vital for understanding the complex situations in which English Learners find themselves and how this situation can be identified in common classroom editing practices.

Surveys are the “only research tool available to obtain certain kinds of information, namely opinions, preferences, beliefs, feelings and other personal information” (Macnealy 149). And, it is specifically to make obtaining these data easier that I wish to use surveys here. I will not be surveying in adequate numbers to make the information acquired there accurately generalizable to greater populations. Surveys however, offer an expanded opportunity for the students who participate to provide information in a different format, and one also that can enable the researcher to refer to student remarks at later times. Survey data will exist as complementary to the data acquired through observations and interviews.

To summarize, I have chosen the term English Learner to represent my sample base from an array of other available terms because English Learner appears to be the most neutral and most productive term available to me. It is also, due to its wide acceptance and usage, more useful to greater audiences than a term I could produce myself. A description of Standard American English was provided above. It was described as the dialect elevated to its current position by the dominant groups in American society and that its written form is commonly referred to as Edited American English (EAE). EAE should be understood as consisting of highly conventionalized standards that can facilitate understanding but can also be positioned such that they subjugate students who may struggle to incorporate them into their own base of linguistic knowledge. These standards, though in some ways described by me as if they were static and unchanging, should rather be seen as “dynamic” (Thonney 358).

An account of what the standards of EAE writing are was also provided above. I stated that standards can be located in the kinds of issues a discipline considers important” (Spack 38). I spoke on some of the problems commonly associated with EAE. I related that assignments can be monologic and thus difficult for nonnative students and that EAE can have a colonizing effect.

I discussed how differences in the perception of student English ability are not neutral and often equate to a hierarchical arrangement of student status. This status extends to classroom activities such as the peer review session and teacher responses to student writing assignments. I then provided a description of peer review session and teacher responses to student writing assignments are and how they are influential to all students, EL students included. Peer review sessions “bring together the cognitive and

social aspects of language by allowing peers to construct meaning within the context of social interaction” (Mendonça and Johnson 746; Newman, Griffin, & Cole; Vygotsky). Teacher responses have been shown to dramatically affect the course of student composition.

Finally, I spoke directly to the qualitative design for the research conducted here. I stated that I will begin to acquire data through observation. After reviewing the data acquired through observation I will then proceed with the interviewing process where surveys will first be conducted. All methods of data acquisition will provide an opportunity to triangulate data acquired from any of the other methods.

The research related here is a monumental task; it requires constant scrutiny, a sensitivity for differing peoples and differing cultures, and a patience with the students that make up the sample base. It is however, given the significance that has been attached to EAE in the American university, important and pertinent research. The information this research will provide is specifically designed to make teaching EAE as easy and painless as possible. It is my wish that the work published here becomes part of the scholarly conversation concerning editing practices, EAE, and the multicultural students expected to be a part of both. It is also my wish that these findings will improve the lives of America’s students by facilitating an understanding of the cultures existent within American and the spaces academic writing is conducted. This project requires careful observation and a constant detailed oriented focus, and is of dire importance to the educational and employment success of our composition students.

Chapter 3. Data Acquisition, Methodology, and Theoretical Outlook

As previously stated the research questions I wish to answer through this study are: How do American college English Learners students negotiate their differentiated location in which they are placed in the American composition class? How is this differentiated location represented in the common editing practices of peer reviewing and teacher responses? How does this differentiated location change the way peer reviewing and teacher responses work for English Learners and native learners? How can these editing practices be adjusted to facilitate the education of all students? In this chapter I wish to speak directly to the ways in which I intend to acquire information relevant to these questions. I will also discuss how I intend to proceed to utilize that information to answer these questions.

To begin, I am privileged enough to be a graduate student at an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution). And though it is both wrong and bigoted to assume that all Hispanic or Latino students can be labeled as English Learners, I do find myself in an environment with a large population of students to whom English is not a native language and who also may struggle to write well in Edited American English. Furthermore, in addition to a large Latino population there are also international students to whom English is not a native language. Thus, given the availability of such a large sample base of possible English Learners I am in a particular position where I may be able to gain access to some of the ways their learning processes may interact with methods of editing EAE for the purpose of analyzing these interactions and ultimately improving upon them.

It is important to remember that the ways in which I seek to gain access to the aforementioned learning processes and interactions are specifically relevant to both the sample base and the kinds of data I wish to acquire. This is because I, like Susan Miller, “look for particular *social* circumstances that authorize ideas” (Miller 64, *Writing Theory*). That is, I allow situations to become apparent to me where I am open to what those situations can mean or represent. And, it is for this reason that I have chosen observations, interviews, and surveys as the primary means of data acquisition. Observations, interviews and surveys each bear an inseparable connection to the “social circumstances” from which they gather data (64).

The first step towards data acquisition was to locate instructors who utilize peer reviewing in their classes and/or who respond in writing to student writing assignments, but who also have English Learners in their classes. In order to locate composition instructors I obtained a list of who was teaching classes and contacted those individuals by email. I wrote to them asked if I might be able to join their classes for the purpose of meeting students who might be considered English Learners but who also might want to participate in my research. Only a few instructors responded to my emails initially and it is they who I worked with almost exclusively as I was able to gain access to more than enough students for the purposes of this study. There were a total of three. A conversation with these instructors provided a wealth of information concerning their pedagogical and editing techniques as well as descriptions of some of the different students in their classes.

After acquiring the proper approval from the instructor I began to observe their classes. These observations allowed me to become more acquainted with the actual

classroom proceedings English Learners undertake on a daily basis. The observations also functioned as a means for allowing the students to become accustomed to my presence in the classroom. This is important because if students are more accustomed to my presence I believe they are more likely to provide data that better represents the actual thoughts, feelings, and actions of that sample base. It was also important that the students become comfortable with me in that I also wished to interview them also. I used the platform of the classes to ask the students if they wanted to be interviewed by simply standing in front of the class and explaining what my interests are and what I hope to accomplish by doing this research. And, I was hoping that if I had gained a rapport with the students that it might help me to gain access to their personal time outside of the classroom. Additionally, I decided to give a 5 dollar incentive in hopes this might sway anyone who was undecided. Interviews however, were the last set of data collection activities.

Going back to observations, I was able to conduct several observations of English Learners while peer reviewing. This involved not only being present in the class during the peer review sessions themselves but also before the session had begun as well as after the session had concluded. I feel that it was important to observe what the students were doing prior to the peer review sessions, where the process of getting into groups for example could render specific data on how the English Learner students feel about the peer review sessions. That is, there can be auxiliary situations such as student attitudes that may have an effect on the outcome of the peer review session. A more prolonged observation, one that includes the events that led up to the session as well as those that follow, will have a better chance of capturing evidence of other such auxiliary situations.

Also, though I am not able to accurately identify all the reasons why a particular review session or a particular group proceeds in a particular way, I am in a better position to hypothesize about why. Furthermore, continuing to observe after the review sessions are over could also be telling about the sessions. Specifically, I felt that having a better understanding about how the students act both before and after the sessions may provide specific information about how and why they acted, as well as what happened, within the sessions.

The data acquired from these observations provided depth to the research overall. Though the information I was able to record may not be generalizable to greater populations it still helped to situate the data in the context of those studied. I better understand the English Learners in the study group, and thus am better equipped to make judgments about those students, the editing practices in which they are expected to participate, and the learning situations in which they find themselves.

But, why do observations make me better equipped to produce analyses about English Learner students? Getting back to the inseparable connection between social circumstances and observations, it is because observations are a means of documenting social circumstances, in this case that of the classroom, that I am able to analyze the data made available to me there. Peer review sessions are the “social circumstances” that “authorize [my] ideas,” (in addition to other dimensions of sociocultural and historical contexts) about both future peer review sessions and future English Learners (Miller 64, *Writing Theory*). Also, conceivably, the more the students participate, the deeper the analyses I am able to make and the more accurate those analyses become. The social context of the peer review session, where the students speak among themselves, where

the instructor may enter the session and then exit for another group, where everyone listens, responds, and interacts, as well as contemplates those responses and interactions, is a place where evidence of Nayar's "sociointellectual gap" can be found. And it is in an observation's ability to provide a better understanding of how the value system that serves to produce the "gap" relates to the social contexts in which it occurs that the power of observations become apparent. One can observe what transpires, document those occurrences, and use that information to gain a better understanding of what future occurrences might look like. And it is because we can do this that observations can play a primary role in the acquisition of data.

The classroom was the only setting for the observation portion of the data acquisition process. Multiple observations were important because I see a group of observations as vital to documenting the class in what can be considered normal processes, as well as in the process of peer reviewing. This also allowed for a basis of comparison between observations conducted at different times. Getting to know the students, and the class in which the student exists on a deeper level, one that includes both while peer reviewing and while engaged in other classroom activities, allowed me to evaluate the contrasting and corresponding ways in which the class responds to and works within the peer review session.

I also occasionally took part in those peer reviewing sessions. Being given the opportunity to play an active role in peer reviewing will help me to see how my presence has the capacity to change that session. A comparison between groups both with and without my presence helped to determine the actual proceedings of a peer review session by allowing for another level of contrast analysis to present itself. Being able to add this

comparison to the growing list of data concerning different peer reviewing situations will facilitate a greater depth to the data overall. Also, the data acquired from these observational endeavors will facilitate the endeavors that follow, surveying for instance.

To produce a functional survey instrument I needed to become familiar with the sample base prior to the construction of the document. This familiarity allowed me to tailor the survey instrument to the group of students being surveyed when doing so maximized the potential of the survey in two important ways. First, because the students being surveyed are in a position of still developing their English writing skills, the survey needed to have a written language that was easily understood. Providing students with an easy to understand survey instrument is more likely to also provide data with a greater degree of accuracy because students will be more likely to respond appropriately to the questions they are asked. That is, not only should the student better understand the questions and thus be better equipped to respond, it should also help to avoid any negative feelings or confusion that may occur as a result of questions difficult to understand.

The second effect a deeper familiarity with the sample base had was to give me a better understanding of the kinds of specific information available to me from the students, and perhaps more importantly, through a survey. By using the observations to become acquainted with the English Learners in the sample base I was able to ask questions specific to the types of information to which the students were exposed. Having already observed students in action I was better able to produce a survey instrument specifically relevant to the students who took the survey. A survey relevant to my specific study group had a greater chance of rendering useful data, and getting to know

the sample base will help to produce a relevant survey. The survey provided a vast wealth of very useful information, though not the majority I use in the analysis chapter to follow.

Interviewing was the final portion of my data acquisition process and was facilitated by many of the same forces that facilitated the production of an adequate survey document. I was able to ask specific students for an interview and base the questions that occurred in that interview on the information previously acquired through the observations. Additionally, because the survey was given just prior to the interview, I was able to examine the survey and utilize the information found there during the interview as well. In this manner the interview served as supplemental to the survey; I was able to probe more efficiently than the survey alone would permit. I could also change the direction of the interview immediately depending on the answers to the questions I received. Part of the strength of the interview is its capacity to be altered to appropriately fit the course it takes with the data as it presents itself.

Though observations, surveys, and interviews were a great way of gathering data on peer review sessions, gathering data on teacher responses to student writing assignments proved to be more difficult. While both peer reviewing and teacher responses can be observed, surveyed on, and interviewed about, the interaction English Learners have with the written responses to their writing assignments provided to them by their teachers should also consist of an examination of students' assignments after the instructor has provided comments. This required a student willing to allow me access to her or his assignments. Furthermore, the instructor needed to look favorably on the use of those assignments as the instructor's responses played a role in this investigation. And also, in order to understand the progression of those assignments, it was important to

view more than one assignment to see how they progressed throughout the semester. The greater number of students that allowed me access to their assignments as they move throughout the semester transfers into a greater accuracy for their accompanying analyses.

I did not ask the students to sign informed consent forms for the observation portions of the data acquisition; however, students were asked to sign consent forms prior to the surveys and the interviews that follow, as well as if there was any use of student assignments. In the informed consent documents the students were informed that, among other things, any information I acquired would be kept strictly confidential; no one other than myself would be able to match the student's name to the information she or he has provided. The students were also made aware that they can view any findings I have compiled once the study is completed, and that they are able to remove themselves from the study at any time.

Because observations were the first approach to acquiring data they were analyzed first, but were never meant to be ultimately analyzed alone. After completing several observations I read over and retyped the notes taken during those observations. I reformatted the information such that it took the form of a story, or a specific and descriptive account of what was observed on each of those class days. A reformatting of the information from notes quickly taken by hand to word processing documents allowed that information to be more easily read, searched through, and analyzed.

The preliminary analysis of these observations, what occurred prior to either giving of the surveys or conducting the interviews, first required a close reading of the notes taken. I sought to locate specific patterns that arose in my notes, and thus in the

review sessions themselves. I was also guided by the results of the preliminary research conducted prior to this researching and described in Chapter 1. That is, I first looked for patterns that ran constant among all the sets of data but was also sensitive to patterns that were found among the current sample base.

Once I located these patterns, or at least foresee the existence of certain patterns to come, I then drafted the survey instrument. The structure and language of the draft, as discussed above, was defined by two highly influential factors: readability and relevance to perceived patterns. For the survey to be successful it needed to work in tandem with the students being surveyed and the situations in which they found themselves, situations that became known to me in the observations and the preliminary research. And, on a final note, the survey instrument needed to be drafted such that it can be completed by the student in a short period of time. This was because I assumed that students would be more willing to take a survey that required less time to do so. Hurried answers, I believe, will be for the purposes of this thesis, less accurate.

It was then that I addressed the classes where I had conducted my observations and requested to meet students outside of the class for the purpose of continuing the research on a more personal level. I gave a basic description of my interests and what the goals of the research were and stated simply that I would be very appreciative of anyone who might wish to help me achieve those goals. Addressing the students took no more than 10 minutes where then I asked students who indicated to me that they wished to participate to write down there email address and that I would contact them at a later date.

In all, 7 people responded favorably to a request for an interview and survey. This group consisted of 5 men and 2 women. The majority of students are Spanish speakers with the exception of two who are Arabic and Korean speakers respectively. If given the option I would have preferred to include a more equal number of men and women, but in that I am not seeking generalizability I feel that the information I deliver here will not be skewed by their unequal distribution. The Korean speaker and 2 of the Spanish speakers are international students here in the United States to study differing subjects at the university. The remainder of the students were born in the United States and do speak English at varying levels but who also grew up speaking primarily another language at home. All students were between the ages of 19 and 26.

I would need to survey the students during the same meeting as the interview thus I needed to have the survey instrument complete prior to the interview date. The surveys provided a wealth of information about the students being studied. The surveys specified the students themselves in terms of ethnicity, gender, and the way students surveyed perceive their English ability. Perceived English ability is an important factor because it can be crosschecked by an assessment of how the student responded to short answer questions. For example, if the question was answered in a way that made sense to the question I could assume that the student is familiar enough with English to allow for the understanding of both the answer and its question. I was also able to take a close look at the answer itself to see how well it is written for the purpose of further assessing the student's English writing level. These assessments could then be compared with the student's views on her or his English level in an effort to verify how closely they resembled one another. This difference, or lack thereof, could be significant concerning

the student's responses to the survey overall in that it can provide insight into how the student's opinion concerning her or his English ability interacts with the survey, peer review sessions, teacher responses to their Written Assignments, and the class overall.

The survey also gave students the chance to provide further opinions about how well they felt their English was progressing. Rather than all multiple choice, I also asked opened ended questions designed to illicit more specific responses. This occurred by not constructing the answers for the students by simply providing them. I was able to ask questions concerned specifically with what the students felt may be helping them to progress, to not progress, or perhaps even, to regress.

Interviewing is the next portion of the data acquisition process. I conducted a total of seven interviews, one for each student who chose to participate. All students were met for the interviews in the university library. The students chose the meeting place but in that the library is in such a centralized location on campus it was a logical meeting point. All students but one chose the library to meet, the last student preferred to meet in a cafeteria. Both locations are fairly similar however in that both were large rooms that were somewhat crowded with a multitude of tables. And, though I informed the students that each interview would last about an hour it was not uncommon for our meeting to extend longer. I would first ask the student to fill out the survey, I would then look the survey over and use some of the information from the instrument to begin the interview conversation.

These interviews served as, among other things, a means of evaluating the strength and authenticity of the students' responses and interaction with both surveys and the observations previously conducted. I also took the opportunity to triangulate any

pertinent data provided to me in all of the researching endeavors. I also had the opportunity to address any limitations the survey instruments or observations demonstrated or where either methods may have rendered inconsistent data.

I also sought availability to student assignments after they had been looked over by the instructor and returned to the students. I read over the assignments with a particular interest to where students did or did not fulfill the assignment requirements and where this lack of fulfillment was communicated by the instructor's comments. I paid close attention to how the instructor responded to the students either for the purpose of reinforcing aspects of the student's writing or redirecting efforts that may have moved the student's writing away from what the instructor indicated she or he preferred. The information this part of the study rendered was added to the overall body of data thus far acquired.

Though I looked at the data acquired from each research method individually, it is the overall body of data that I wish to scrutinize most closely. Observations, surveys, and interviews are not as important to me alone as they are together. Each is designed to provide certain types of information in particular formats and in particular venues. And, if used alone, cannot render the same wealth of data that they can provide in synthesis. Specifically, the data that each contain, if drawn together and analyzed in tandem, allows for comparison and triangulation that cannot exist if analyzed singularly. The combined data of these three methods of research are greater than the sum of their parts.

I searched for specific patterns that are relevant to the research questions listed above and that can be crosschecked by data from other locations. I want to see relationships that remain consistent throughout the research and are not localized in

specific situations or are derived from only a single source. The data acquired from every step in the acquisition process was and continues to be looked at as a whole in an effort to construct meaning for the situation in which English Learners find themselves in the American composition class. It is only by examining the differing layers of data rendered from each research method that I am able to draw together enough consistency to make judgments based on that consistency.

I wish to now speak directly to an overarching reason that I have chosen to conduct the research through the methods described here. I do not choose these methods at random, and it is deeper than looking “for particular *social* circumstances that authorize ideas” (Miller 64, *Writing Theory*). These methods and means of evaluating the data acquired from those methods are representative of, and chosen because, there exists an overarching theoretical underpinning that I have about knowledge in general.

This theoretical underpinning can be found in a “Vygotskyian notion,” which states that “language use, whether written or oral, is a deeply rooted social act” (Mendonça and Johnson 746; Newman, Griffin, & Cole; Vygotsky). Thus, it makes sense that when looking for how people fit into the social acts of peer reviewing or teacher responses I have pursued a social means of doing so. But also, and to be more specific about the theoretical underpinnings that direct my research as a whole, methods and means of data acquisition more specifically, I attest to the beliefs of what some call Social Constructivism.

“Social Constructivism,” as stated by Kenneth A. Bruffee, “understands reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities or, more broadly speaking, symbolic entities

that define or "constitute" the communities that generate them" (774). This means that the ideas we refer to as "knowledge," "thought," or "facts" are produced through communicative interaction and that they are representative of those who produce them. That is, knowledge, thoughts, or facts are constructed socially and can be used to help us understand those who constructed them.

Mikhail Bakhtin stated that "idealism knows only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousness: someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it or in error" (qtd. in Yüксе 2; Bakhtin). This notion of education, this more traditional way of looking at how learning occurs, is still prevalent today. It can be seen in the structure of many classes across the United States where the teacher stands in front of the students and imparts or bestows her or his knowledge to that class. It can be seen in the top down, ultimately hierarchical approach to education that has dominated The United States since its inception. These are educational practices that are couched Enlightenmentist notions of reality and knowledge production and that fail to recognize the process of Social Construction that inherently exists within communication. They are practices that will also ultimately fail to recognize that traditional top down approaches to education are not representative of the way knowledge is actually created. "This traditional mode of education *is* education," one might say. To this a Social Constructivist might reply, "Your very idea of what exists as education is a social construct."

Thus, in seeing "reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities or, more broadly speaking, symbolic entities that define or "constitute" the communities that generate

them,” I correspondingly seek to pursue my data through social means (Bruffee 774). The ways in which I seek to gain access to English Learners’ learning processes are specifically relevant to the sample base, the kinds of data I wish to acquire, the ways in which I analyze the data, and perhaps most importantly, the kinds of theories I will seek to produce as a result of acquiring this data. I will pursue this data in social settings, where the construction of knowledge occurs. I wish to discover the ways in which the social construction of knowledge takes place in reference to English Learners and the value systems in which they find themselves located in the American university. And finally, I seek to take part in the construction of new knowledge by making inferences about the acts of peer reviewing and teacher responses to student writing assignments based on the research I conduct.

Lastly, I want to speak to who I am and how my experiences bring me to pursue this line of research. I was born in San Antonio, Texas to a white middle class family. I say this because I grew up as a native learner of English, but one who has also been privy to the differentiated positioning of English Learner students. As San Antonio is 60% Latino I grew up among a diverse population but one where the white and colored communities can be separated. But, what I saw was the resulting hierarchical positioning that occurred around me due to this split, and I saw it in the class rooms where I too learned English. Where we, English Learner or not, learned English.

Years later, in college, when I took upon myself the monumental task of learning Spanish I began to better understand the difficulty in learning a language. I found myself confounded by the intricate grammatical rules and vocabulary and I thought about all the people that grew up around me learning English. I put these two experiences together and

found that, as a graduate student studying to teach English, that I might be able to improve upon the situation my future students might find themselves, and where also I at a teacher would be a part. I am thus a future English teacher seeking the success of all his future students, success not marred by the unequal distribution of gainful educational outcomes. A success for all students, and perhaps selfishly, myself included.

Chapter 4. Analysis

As I first launched into the data acquisition phase I then believed that surveying would render the majority of the data I would use in this, the analysis chapter. The survey instrument was designed in fact with the notion in mind that the interview would most likely act as supplemental to the survey. This is not entirely untrue, but now, as I hunch over stacks of paper and an open laptop computer, as I pour over data from all of the researching sources, and pour a cup of coffee, I realize that the best and most intriguing data, and perhaps the most important, came from interviewing. There, where I was given the opportunity to speak directly with the student, to converse on a more friendly level in a comfortable and casual setting, I could see up close their reactions and in part the specific ways the students with whom I spoke understand the world as it happens around them.

The survey provided an abundance of supporting information concerning such characteristics as age, gender, and how the student chooses to identify her or himself, but I found the survey to be static and slow in a way that the interview simply wasn't. Observations were also lacking in that I was distant from those who I was studying and couldn't always, even when participating in peer review sessions, interact in a way that would enable me to acquire more data from specific situations. But the interview could be changed to suit the personality of the student. That is, through questioning I was able to (at times) focus on specific locations and inquire deeper than an observation or a

survey was capable. Additionally, the student chose the location of the interview and thus one can assume that she or he chose one most fitting for her or him. Sitting next to students I was able to hear the subtle variations in their voices, the body language, the silences, the elusive ways in which they spoke to me, without necessarily speaking to me.

Though the analysis that follows will be highly influenced by the interview data, this is not to say that the observations, the surveys, and the review of students' work that I also conducted were not extremely productive. In fact, a vast wealth of important data was rendered from each, data that fits into the overall image that I have begun to form of the situation in which English Learners find themselves in the American composition class. I was able to look at the information and form an overall opinion by pinpointing specific relationships that presented themselves in the data. I, like Susan Miller, "look for particular *social* circumstances that authorize ideas" (Miller 64, *Writing Theory*). And, though there were many relationships that I was able to pinpoint, there are some that were more prevalent than others, some that are broad and lasting. There are some relationships I found that were present before class even convened on the first day, that pre-exist both the students and the instructor, and it is this, a perception, in both the students and the instructor, that I wish to address first.

As discussed in chapter 1, P. Bhaskaran Nayar speaks to "a sociointellectual gap [that] inhibits the [English] learners from equal status and communicative contact in and with the target community, particularly when they perceive themselves and others perceive them as deficient in the English language" (20). Here, Nayar indicates the presence of a value system that relegates a perception of deficiency for English Learner students and that serves to produce what Nayar described as a "sociointellectual gap."

Nayar makes note that English Learners can have these perceptions about themselves and that they too help to produce this “sociointellectual gap.” One might look at the gap as the distance between differing students that exists due to a recognition of difference in those students, but where also a specific value is attached to that difference and to the student who bears it. And, unfortunately, but also not entirely surprisingly, looking specifically at peer review sessions and teacher responses to student writing assignments, I found evidence of this perception, the same perception that produces this “sociointellectual gap,” in the individuals I studied.

Several of the students with whom I spoke, students who were also surveyed and observed, spoke directly to the ways that they commonly felt during peer reviewing Sessions, feelings that they say influenced the way the peer reviewing Session progressed for them. I would also like to state that these feelings appeared to run somewhat consistent through much of my sample base. For example, one student stated that sharing in class was always “Kind of embarrassing, because [he doesn’t] want people to know that [he] can’t write... well” (Student 4). Another student confessed to feeling, “afraid... that he would not be able to express himself clearly” or that he might be unintentionally impolite (Student 5). A Korean student stated that she “Feels like [she] *can’t give good advice* to the other students [in a peer review session]... [because] English is a problem for her” (Student 1, emphasis added). Another was “afraid that [he] would be ridiculed for asking questions that were *too easy*” (Student 3, emphasis added).

At first glance, these statements appear similar to what any college student might say in a composition classroom. It is not uncommon for anyone to feel nervous in class, to be afraid to present in front of one’s peers regardless of home language, ethnicity, or

national origin. This nervousness can exist if presenting to the all or only part of the class. Many students feel at least some apprehension at sharing their material with others, at least initially. It is common to be fearful of public speaking for anyone and is by no means confined to college students or specifically English Learners.

However, what became evident to me during the interviewing was that these feelings of deficiency appear to be mitigated by a recognition of themselves as nonnative learners of English, or English Learners. Their exact words may have been, I “can’t give good advice,” or, my “questions are too easy,” but given the context of the conversation in which the students and I spoke, I believe that there was an underlying assumption that went unstated. Given the way the conversation progressed, what Student 1 and Student 3 appeared to mean, by what is in my notes, the information that is on the survey, and from what I recall of the conversation, was this: *because* I’m an English Learner I “can’t give good advice,” and *because* I’m an English Learner my “questions are too easy” (Students 1 and 3).

To say, I “can’t give good advice,” or that, my questions are “too easy,” I hear reference to the internalization of a value system imposed on our students, a perceived difference that exists between English Learner students and their classroom counterparts. I hear reference to the kind of sentiment that produces the “sociointellectual gap” identified by Nayar. This perception can be uncovered in the wording the students chose to describe their situations, words like “*can’t*” and “*too easy*.” I hear a starting point in these words, an understanding of their situations that begins with specific notions that are taken as truth and are not scrutinized for their realistic or practical value. I hear the internalization and recreation of a discourse of inequality and assumed deficiency. And I

heard this in the spoken and unspoken communication that occurred, and was referenced above, in the interviewing portion of the data collection process as well as in the observation and the survey portions that preceded the interviewing.

Student 1 for example, stated on the survey that she spoke Korean “Very Well.” Student 3 also responded with “very well” to the same question, but referring to his native language, Spanish. And, I do not doubt the truth of these statements in that both are easily discernible as very intelligent and very literate individuals. Having no more than an hour and a half of conversation with each student it was easy to see that neither Student 1 or 3, or any of the other students for that matter, were linguistically unable or challenged in any way. These students do not process information slower than other students, they are not limited in their capacity to conceive of complex ideas or intricate concepts more than any of the other students. They are not “slow” or “challenged” or “special.” Why then, did Student 1 and Student 3 both admit to feeling deficient in the peer reviewing Sessions?

Looking at the data, it is evident to me that Student 1 and 3 do not see themselves as an equally important or productive part of the peer reviewing group, or the class as a whole for that matter. Rather, Student 1 and Student 3 appear to focus solely on their Standard American English abilities in comparison to that of a native speaker and appear to do so by also disregarding the highly literate and highly complex linguistic knowledge they bring both to the class and to any peer reviewing group they enter. A highly complex linguistic knowledge they themselves attested to in the survey.

Many English Learners, such as Students 1 and 3, do in fact write or speak English at a more basic level than their Native classroom counterparts. It is true to say

that English Learners are seen as “English Learners” in part due to a lack of a familiarity with the English language, in this case Edited American English. But, it is this single trait, the single difference in perceived ability to use Edited American English, to which I point most specifically. The data that I have acquired indicates an overgeneralization of this difference in Edited American English ability, one that then becomes attached to the English Learner as a whole. Though there are other forces at play here, it appears that there is a jump from recognizing someone as speaking and writing at a more basic English level, to that of an overall linguistic or intellectual ability that might also be described as “basic.” Students (both English Learners and Native Learners) can buy into the discourse that produces the “sociointellectual gap,” enact the associated value system that elevates native students above English Learners and ultimately fail to recognize the classroom contributions of the English Learner as situated equally with those of the Native Learners.

Another example of where students exhibited behavior indicative of the theory above can be found in Student 2 who said that he would prefer to be the “only foreign student in the group.” The underlying assumption here is that native speakers will ultimately be able to provide a more enriching learning experience than a group with more foreigners than simply himself. Student 7, when asked about how native students peer review her work also appeared to respond to a similar issue. She stated that “most people look at basic grammar errors... and don’t [look] deep enough into her work to give real feedback.” Student 7 explained that she is then left to wonder whether or not the reason for this lack of depth is because they think she will not understand their commentary.

It is my contention however that to fail to see that English Learners bring to class a heightened and specific awareness of what English means to her or him is to also fail to recognize the complex linguistic and intellectual ability that every student, regardless of linguistic origin, brings to class and that allows them to contribute to and enrich that class. Some may fail to see that the linguistic awareness ELs bring to class can be very helpful to anyone and is by no means unproductive for any member of a peer reviewing group.

As an example of this I would like to relate something I was fortunate enough to document during an active peer reviewing Session. I observed an EL who, after reading and rereading a native student's essay, asked for clarification on what a particular sentence meant. The native student responded kindly and explained to the EL what he wanted the sentence to mean. The EL then stated that he believes he understands the sentence but was still puzzled because he didn't see how it fit specifically into the paragraph where it appeared. However, when the native student attempted to explain how the sentence fit into the paragraph he found that the sentence actually did not fit as well as he must have previously thought. In fact, the Native Learner promptly uncapped a pen from his desk and drew a line through the sentence stating that it would be removed upon editing. The native student then thanked the English Learner for his contribution.

Here we can see but one example of how an English Learner brought something to the peer review session that would not have happened if not for his specific viewpoint on that sentence, a viewpoint that is evidence of not only the complexity of the ELs understanding of the NL's essay but also the necessary linguistic and intellectual ability to achieve that understanding. This example is important because it illustrates the

contribution that ELs can bring to class, a contribution however that is not focused upon in the same way on to the same degree that unequal English ability can be. It is unfortunate, but the evidence I have acquired for this thesis lends credibility to at least part of the “sociointellectual gap” referred to by Nayar. I appear to have found evidence indicating that English Learner students can see themselves as deficient not only in their English skills but also in the classes they attend or peer reviewing Sessions in which they take part. English Learner students can fail to recognize their important contributions and demonstrate this through statements like I “can’t give good advice,” or My “questions are too easy” (Students 1 and 3).

Next, I would also like to draw specific attention to how EL students can feel shy or embarrassed, as referenced above. It is true that having feelings of shyness or embarrassment is not unlike what all students, regardless of native language, can have. However, what I am speaking to specifically is a probable effect that can stem from the consistency of these feelings of shyness or embarrassment with Nayar’s “sociointellectual gap.” If there exists a value system that locates English Learners in an assumed position of deficiency in the American composition class we can suppose that at least in some cases, the individual student’s shyness or embarrassment at allowing other student’s access to their work is facilitated by the perception that produces the “sociointellectual gap.” That is, the common perception of overall linguistic or intellectual deficiency of English Learner students in the American College writing classroom can facilitate the continued existence of personal feelings of inadequacy concerning English or writing ability. Students may come into class already feeling shy and scared to share their work, but it is the perception of inadequacy specifically in reference to what happens in the

composition class that I believe has a special capacity to correspond with these feelings of shyness or embarrassment and ultimately facilitate their continuation. This perception of deficiency can be internalized by the English Learner and can ultimately allow for these feelings to continue and to be mitigated by different factors than in the native English learner. I appear to have uncovered evidence of this facilitation.

For example, when students make statements like, I “Can’t give good advice,” My “questions are too simple,” or “Do they think I’m not going to understand?” one response might be to attribute this perception entirely to an understanding of their own personal linguistic ability (students 1, 3, and 7). But, given the preexisting discourse of inequality concerning native and nonnative student ability in, particularly in reference to student EAE ability and/or national origins, to continue to see the issues of personal feelings of inadequacy and the inadequacy as predicated by the discourse on Non-native Learners of English that produces the “sociointellectual gap,” as unrelated, is short sighted.

If only in these three students, I find not simply the exhibition of feelings of personal deficiency, but also, indications of their maintenance. By locating ELs in a subjugated position feelings of inward inadequacy are given a reason to continue to exist. They are given a “logical” backing for their continued existence. Thus, even if the discourse on ELs may not be responsible for initially producing a sense of personal inadequacy in the EL, the data I have acquired indicates that this discourse can be implicated in the continued existence of feelings of inadequacy the student may already have about her or himself.

Moving on, I must speak to a trait that helps to produce the “sociointellectual gap” related to us by Nayar. Nayer states that “others perceive [English Learners] as deficient in the English language” (20). I wish to speak to this because the data I have acquired hints at not only the perception of intellectual inadequacy concerning the EL student, but also, that there is the belief of the existence of this perception in the other students. That is, according to the data, some EL students not only seem to perceive this inadequacy in themselves, but also, appear to anticipate this perception in others.

When Student 1 stated that she “can’t give good advice,” and when Student 3 stated that his “questions are too easy,” are they not also speaking to how they *felt* their participation would be received by the other students in the peer reviewing group? More specifically, for student 1, good advice would need to be at least partially determined by its comparison to the advice provided by other students. In this case only by coming up short in this comparison could it be seen as “not good.” For Student 3, his questions might only be seen as “too easy” if he considered the other questions to be of greater difficulty than his own. In fact, Student 3 specifically stated he was “afraid that [he] would be ridiculed” for asking his questions. From these statements it appears that at least these two students anticipate believed inequality. EL students can enter a composition class not only already believing themselves inadequate but can also anticipate this perception of inadequacy in the students with whom they work.

Students who also described this include Student 7 who explained that she wonders, as stated above, whether or not the reason for a lack of depth in regards to the review of her work by native students is due to whether or not they think she will understand their commentary. Student 5 stated that his writing is “confusing... that his

wording would confuse native students.” Here Student 5 anticipates the confusion of other students in his class, but simultaneously exhibits the expectation of a lack of quality in his writing by other students in the class.

As a final note, I wish to relate a possible outcome that could occur based on the situation I have spoken to above. Because Native Learners are given a position of assumed superiority in both the classroom and in the peer reviewing group, it is conceivable that the inward feelings of inadequacy that any EL may bring to class could be validated by the corresponding belief in a Native Learner. That is, if the Native Learner agrees with the EL that she or he is deficient in any way, that perception of deficiency could be cemented in the student at least partially as a result of the authority applied to the Native Learner by the same discourse. If Native Students are located in a position of power in the composition classroom, and if these Native Students concur with the personal feelings of inadequacy existent in the EL student, then it is probable that the inadequacy felt by ELs and related above will have a greater chance at continuation.

To summarize the present discussion, there is a perception that can exist in an American college composition classroom described by Nayar as a “sociointellectual gap.” (20) Nayar stated that students can “perceive themselves and others perceive them as deficient in the English language” (20). The research conducted here indicates the presence of not only the “sociointellectual gap” referenced by Nayar but also both of the descriptions that he provided. I found that the students in my sample base did exhibit what I see as characteristics consistent with the perception of deficiency in both themselves, and in others concerning themselves. I speculated that the “sociointellectual

comprehension on one end and complete misunderstanding on the other. Rather, one does or does not understand, or partially understands, a teacher's comment due to a complex array of forces, some of which interact differently with English and Native Learners.

For anyone who has received a writing assignment back from an instructor that includes handwritten responses, they are easy to locate. Only sometimes in red ink, they are written quickly in the margins or in the minimal space between lines. A greater distance between lines helps with the minimal space but writing area can still be limited and becomes a greater issue the more that is written. It is safe to assume that at least partially as a result of this lack of space, teacher responses are often short. They come in quick dense statements or observations often having only one word to express a specific idea the instructor wishes to portray.

Regardless of these obstacles however, teacher responses are still an excellent means of communicating to any student certain issues that present themselves in the text. Even though there is not an overabundance of space a crafty instructor can effectively use the space that does exist to speak to the student and relate valuable advice on how to be a better writer. Countless instructors around the world choose to communicate with their students by responding in writing to their writing assignments on the pages they turn in. One can only assume that as long as assignments are turned in on paper teacher responses will most likely remain a constant source of good and positive writing instruction. And, it is because of their continued use that it is important to take a close look on how they work, or do not work, in this case, with English Learners.

In my research, I found that TR's are often written quickly. This I found can easily make the handwriting illegible. And, as stated above, this is a problem for any

gap” exists in part due to a generalization from that of speaking and writing more basic English, to an overall linguistic ability that might also be described as “basic.”

I also stated that if there exists a value system that locates English Learners in an assumed position of deficiency we can suppose that at least in some cases the individual student’s shyness or embarrassment at allowing other student’s access to their work is facilitated by the perception of deficiency. And finally, I related the possibility that if the Native Learner is given an authoritative position in the class in reference to the English Learner, an idea consistent with the value system that helps produce the “sociointellectual gap” referenced by Nayar, the authoritative position held by the Native Learner might serve to validate the existence of the gap.

Now that I have addressed some of the ways that ELs fit into the act that is peer reviewing in the composition class I would like to speak shortly on how some EL students appear to specifically interact with teacher responses to their written assignments. To be precise, I wish to state that I am referring specifically to handwritten notes instructors write on student assignments during the grading or review process and are read by the student when the assignment is given back.

Concerning teacher responses to student writing assignments, one of the strongest relationships I found was between their effectiveness and both legibility and depth. Legibility as a contributing factor to effectiveness came as no surprise in that if any student is unable to read their teacher’s response the response will not function. But, what I found was that some English Learner students appear to interact differently with teacher responses than their Native Learner counterparts. It is important to remember that teacher responses to student writing assignments do not exist on a binary scale of legibility with

student who cannot decipher their instructor's words. However, what I found was evidence that some ELs can have a more difficult time in the deciphering process than their Native classmates. Student 1 gave an example of how this can occur when she stated that she has a difficult time understanding her instructor's responses because they can be written in cursive, something with which she is unfamiliar. It seems logical to state that a student to whom the English letters are new, or in the case of Student 1 and cursive writing, unknown almost altogether, may have a more difficult time in reading the words than those to whom the English alphabet is more familiar. Additionally, the way that different people write their letters is not identical. In this case, EL students not only will need to be acquainted with both print and cursive but also the differing ways in which the same letter can be written.

Students also pointed to illegibility as a factor that influences the overall effectiveness of teacher responses. Student 2 for example, stated that he "can have a hard time understanding" teacher responses due to illegibility. If English Learner students are less familiar with English words, and perhaps less familiar with the letters used to write them, they may have a more difficult time when it comes to deciphering their meaning.

Student 1 also stated that sometimes she does not understand the vocabulary the instructor uses and that given the often lack of context, a dictionary is of little use. The testimony of other students appears to corroborate this statement in that 3 other students (Student 4, 5, and 7) stated corresponding opinions concerning vocabulary. Student 4 said that he is still "learning new words." Student 5 said that if she were a Native English speaker she "would have a better vocabulary." And, Student 1 confessed that Native Learners "understand more words." Here we can see that 3 students believe that their

vocabularies are smaller than the Native Students in their classes, which may or may not be true, but one might ask, do they feel this way in part due to not understanding the vocabulary relayed to them in their instructor's responses?

Another critique the students with whom I had the privilege of working relayed to me was that teacher responses can be vague and often lack depth. In this situation, the EL is presented with an unspecific idea, one that might exist as a single word, and is left to decipher the meaning behind what the instructor was attempting to say. English Learners, to whom English might still be an unfamiliar language, then must draw upon the limited association with English to comprehend the intended meaning and ultimately make accurate changes to their writing. It is true that there is no overabundance of space either on the margins or between lines and that as the instructor writes, this lack of space only increases. It is also true to say that instructors, when grading, are often grading a whole host of assignments and can be caught up in the time consuming process. In either case however, as related above, if the response cannot be understood, it will not function. And, if EL students have difficulty with the handwriting, or the legibility, or the depth of their responses, it is the duty of an instructor to minimize these hindrances.

Students who spoke about this lack of specificity include Student 3 who, referring to teacher responses stated his "teacher could explain better." He asks also for more encouragement to attend office hours, where conceivably, a discussion would occur to contend with the lack of specificity. Student 4 who stated that teacher responses become much more helpful to him if he is able to talk with his instructor about the feedback. Or, more specifically, if the teacher is able to help him decipher some of the subtleties of what she had written.

In summary of the previous pages concerning teacher responses to student written assignments, I found that English Learners can have a special relationship with teacher responses that differ from their Native classmates. English Learners for example, can be unfamiliar with the English alphabet in a way that makes writing in cursive or illegibility more of a difficulty. I found that the students I studied believed their vocabularies to be inferior to that of Native Learners and I speculated that this feeling might be mitigated in part due to the use of words the students might not know well enough to understand without more context available.

Lastly, I would like to speak to some of the ways that teacher responses to student writing assignments and the peer review session dichotomize and influence the ways in which either can be received by ELs and also influence the ways in which ELs participate in both. Firstly, I would like to draw attention back to the “sociointellectual gap” as labeled by Nayar and referenced above where English Learners can “perceive themselves and [where] others perceive them as deficient in the English language,” and how I believe that this perception of deficiency can be overgeneralized to overall linguistic deficiency (20). If, as addressed above, the English Learner feels nervous to share their written work in a peer review session because of this “sociointellectual gap” they may forgo avid participation in the peer review group in favor of teacher responses rather than relying on both to work together to enrich the assignment overall.

I suggest this scenario because it was related to me in the interviewing portion of the data collection process. Five students stated that they preferred teacher responses over peer reviewing. However, given the data I was able to acquire, I am not able to verify if the students I studied stated that they prefer TR’s to be more helpful than PR as a result

of the “sociointellectual gap.” But one must admit that a feeling of personal deficiency coupled with the perception of that deficiency in others towards one’s self, in conjunction with the availability of other means of editing, might usher EL students into focusing their efforts on working with the instructor’s responses above efforts that include working with classmates. In fact, Student 4 stated that in the first two peer review sessions he felt “afraid” to participate, but because his comments and ideas were well received and treated with their due respect, by the third session he was no longer “afraid” to interact with his classmates and to share his writing. This comment also points to the success that can be found when a conscientious group is formed, one that respects its members and seeks to build trusting relationships. If Student 4 can enter class “afraid” to share his work in a peer review session and move to a place of comfort and friendship while peer reviewing, then there is hope for other students who also feel “afraid” to share their work.

Lastly, I would like to relate another situation that has presented itself in the research conducted here. I have come to recognize a strong difference between the way students feel peer reviewing and teacher responses will be beneficial to them as students and writers. The majority of students stated that they believed peer reviewing had a better capacity to make them a better writer, but also, that teacher responses had a better capacity to improve their grade. Five out of the seven students stated that they believe this to be true, and for differing reasons. Most commonly however, the students drew attention to the instructor as being a “professional” who could provide more accurate and more valid information. Students are also fully aware that it is the instructor who grades the assignment and not the other students. It is for this reason that some students wish to put more faith in editing decisions made by the instructor over those of other students.

In either case, where students perceive TR and PR to be unequal in terms of which will provide better grades and which will make someone a better writer, the direction a student might lean can be mitigated by other factors. If good grades take precedent in the ELs life she or he might be more inclined to pay close attention to the teacher's Responses and shy away from peer reviewing. And, if the student seeks to be a better writer, she or he might then prefer peer reviewing.

I hope this chapter has been telling about how English Learner students interact with both the peer review session and teacher responses to student writing assignments. It is easy to see that this situation is complex and influenced by a vast plethora of forces, but also that these forces can be vastly different for Native Learners. The research conducted here points to the existence of what Nayar referred to as a "sociointellectual gap" is alive in the American composition classroom. But also, and perhaps most importantly, I found evidence that this "sociointellectual gap" can be counteracted by the instructor, hopefully to the point of extinction.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

There's a lot going on. The inner workings of the American University composition classroom are vastly more complicated than what I have depicted in the pages and chapters preceding this one. But, that is not what I have attempted to do here; I never tried to tell the whole story. In fact, I recognized from the beginning that what is happening around us is more complex than I or anyone else could singularly describe. Moreover, any attempt to do so would meet in failure on the sole basis that the American Composition classroom is in a constant state of change. The individuals in a composition class, the instructors, the issues and styles and methodologies are by no means stationary. But, I welcome this change because only through it can we realize the educational and social improvement many of us, myself included, seek. It is just this type of improvement, improvement that begins in the Composition classroom, that I ultimately wish for by presenting and analyzing the stories found here.

I did not attempt to reveal all the secrets composition classes hold within. Instead, knowing this location to be vastly complex I sought to take only a slice of the composition class, English Learners, and focus my researching and theorizing efforts there. In fact, because I only examined how English Learners interact with common editing practices, it is more correct to say that I only examined a portion of the slice I reference above. And, if this thesis is demonstrative of the complexity of the situation in which English Learners find themselves in the American composition classroom, it is then a testament to the vast complexity of the composition class as a whole. We, are

complex. Writing, is complex. Teaching, is complex. And, when we learn to write, that is complex too.

I have chosen this focus not only because it is of particular interest to me personally but because understanding how English Learners in effect, learn, is important to the composition classroom as a whole. This first became apparent to me when conducting a preliminary study where I attempted to understand which editing practices were more functional across cultural lines in their capacity to transmit the standards of Edited American English. In this preliminary research the sample base, also English Learners, consistently indicated to me a strong relationship between learning the standards of Standard American English and both peer review sessions and teacher responses to student writing assignments. I came to understand that editing practices, like all classroom activities, exist at an intersecting point between our students and our writing instruction, and that to improve upon this intersecting point would increase student access to the enriching processes that our writing instruction is meant to be. But, it was never entirely about editing practices, nor was it only about English Learners. It is about all of our students. It is about making learning how to write easier and more productive for everybody; English Learners and editing practices were simply my way of attempting to accomplish this goal.

Beginning was delicate. It was greatly important that this study proceed in a way that did not ultimately serve to reaffirm some of the same problems that this study sought to address. I quickly recognized that vocabulary was an issue that needed to be properly situated. The term or terms I would use to denote the individuals who made up the sample base would need to be reflective of the delicate pursuit I knew this to be.

I poured over the relevant terminology and found that, like all terminology, the words produced to represent students to whom English was not a native language were also representative of the marginalized status that has been historically placed on such individuals. Many of these terms I initially found were produced from, and serve to reproduce, a discourse that ultimately marginalizes those to whom these terms were applied. That is, the giving of meaning to words that represent groups of people, like those listed above, can be implicated in the creation and recreation of hierarchical value systems that stigmatize students and ultimately inhibit equal educational outcomes. The terms reflect a “history and demography rather than a linguistic reality,” and I believe that by using them in this thesis I would only be reifying this “history and demography” rather than encumbering its reproduction as I intend (Bhaskaran 9).

I located, researched, and ultimately abandoned a list of terms, including ESL (English as a Second Language), EFL (English as a Foreign Language), L1 (First Language), L2 (Second Language), and LEP (Limited English Proficiency). Having thrown out these terms, I must admit, I then attempted to create my own. I produced the term Non-Monolingual English Learner (NMEL). NMEL was born from an attempt to produce a word that would have positive effects on those to whom it is addressed. I am not certain it would have had this effect but I ultimately abandoned NMEL but due to its lack of standardization.

It was then that I focused on the term English Learner. I chose this term because it appears to me to be the least stigmatized vocabulary available with a circulation great enough to facilitate the intent of this thesis. While not representing students numerically, English Learner is a term that isn’t defined for us by inadequate assessment procedures or

related generally by the misguided American public education system. This is not to say however, that EL as a label is without drawbacks, for example “There have been problems with definitions or guidelines for identifying which students are “English language learners” (Abedi et al. 3). However, though these complications exist, the term English Learner still appears to be the best candidate for use here in that it appears to bear the least amount of drawbacks.

The preliminary research discussed above was instrumental in determining how I would go about acquiring the data used in this thesis. And, it is also because of the preliminary research that I knew surveying would be invaluable to me in pursuing the data. On one hand I wanted the opportunity to triangulate data acquired through the surveying but I also understood that varying forms of data acquisition would render a depth that would not exist if acquired entirely through a single avenue. It is for this reason that I chose to also utilize observations and interviewing to acquire the data. I wanted information from varying sources to illuminate different angles and uncover different facets of our English Learners and the editing practices they are expected to take part in.

I found each of the methods of data acquisition I employed to be very informative. The observations served the purpose of initially allowing the students to become adjusted and comfortable with my presence. I was able to introduce myself, speak with the students about my interests, and, as the classes and interviews progressed, help the students with their work. I was even able to take part in the peer reviewing as it occurred in some of the classes that I observed. I believe this allowed the data acquired there to be more accurate as once students became less conscious of my presence in the

class they were more likely to react in ways that were representative of how they may have reacted if I were not there. But, and perhaps most importantly, I was able to form the initial relationships with specific students that positioned me in a location where I could then approach them and ask for time outside of class for the purpose of interviewing and surveying. I informed the students that I was attempting to improve upon the situation for English Learners in American writing classes, and that I needed their help to do so.

I wanted the student to be as comfortable as possible. They signed a consent form that informed them, for example that they were not required to provide any information and that all the information obtained from the student would be kept in secrecy. I sought to make the conversation as casual as possible, I did not seek to complicate our communication with strenuous questioning or by holding the student to some ideal of what I imagined they might want or be able to relate to me. I let the student do the majority of the talking and simply attempted to direct them as they described the things that they felt were most pressing or most significant. My questions were highly defined by their comments. Each meeting with the student was highly rewarding as they rendered a great amount of data, more so than I anticipated in fact.

I was also surprised at how easily the interviews progressed. The students unanimously were excited to speak with me and demonstrated this excitement in the ways in which they interacted with me. They told stories about their lives, indicated to me their hopes and fears, they were honest and authentic in a way that informed me more than I had anticipated. If this thesis is a success in terms of accurately discussing the tribulations English Learners face when editing their assignments it is because of the

willingness of the students to expose themselves to me, and to the impending analysis they all knew would be coming. This thesis could not function without their help. Their contribution must be made known.

Once the data had been collected I poured over everything that I had acquired. It was an arduous process where I sought to synthesize the data from the observations, the surveys, and the interviews in an attempt to form an overall picture of how the students with whom I worked fit, and how they believed that they fit, into the situation constructed for them in the American composition classroom. I, like Susan Miller, “look for particular *social* circumstances that authorize ideas” (Miller 64, *Writing Theory*). It became evident to me then that there was in fact a situation that had been constructed for them, one that preexists both the students and the teachers. I found evidence of what P. Bhaskaran Nayar refers to as “a sociointellectual gap” that “inhibits the [English] learners from equal status and communicative contact in and with the target community” (20).

This became evident to me in several ways. First, I found evidence that the students felt deficient when compared to the native students in their classes and that this deficiency was predicated in part by being recognized, and then recognizing themselves, as English Learners. The exact words they stated to me may have been, I “can’t give good advice,” or, my “questions are too easy,” but given the context of the conversation in which the students and I spoke, I believe that there was an underlying assumption that went unstated. Given the way the conversation progressed, what Student 1 and Student 3 appeared to mean, by what is in my notes, the information that is on the survey, and from what I recall of the conversation, was this: *because* I’m an English Learner I “can’t give

good advice,” and *because* I’m an English Learner my “questions are too easy” (Students 1 and 3).

I then realized that this perception was based on a specific comparison that was evident in these statements. Student 1 and Student 3 appeared to focus solely on their Standard American English abilities in comparison to that of a native speaker and appeared to do so by also disregarding the highly literate and highly complex linguistic knowledge they bring both to the class and to any peer reviewing group they enter. I found that some students (both English Learners and Native Learners), and teachers, can buy into the discourse that produces the “sociointellectual gap.” This happens in part by not recognizing the classroom contributions of the English Learner as situated equally with those of the Native Learners. This failure to adequately recognize the contributions of English Learners occurs to the detriment of everyone in the class, instructor included, though English Learners most recognizably.

I found that the English Learner student can also anticipate the belief of her or his deficiency in the other students in class. That is, English Learners come to class in some cases believing themselves deficient in relation to their native counterparts but that also English Learners believe the other students in the class recognize this deficiency also. I then connected feelings of nervousness or fear that some students confessed to having while peer reviewing with this perception of deficiency they may believe to be present in their classmates. I proposed that these feelings of nervousness or fear are in fact, though only partially, mitigated by this anticipation of Native Students recognizing English Learner students as deficient.

After finding evidence of the “sociointellectual gap” concerning peer reviewing I was happy to report that I believe there are ways of counteracting the presence of this gap in the peer review session. Specifically, I found that the peer review session appears to progress highly defined by the ways in which it is introduced to the students or how the students were taught to the process of peer reviewing. In this case, I suggested that the “sociointellectual gap” be specifically addressed before the peer reviewing begins in an effort to diminish its influence on all group members. Students need to be made aware that ELs bring to the class complex and highly literate language skills that by no means dampen the productiveness of the PR Session. It can be demonstrated, as my research indicates, that EL students can have insight into a Native Learner’s paper that its writer may not have. Students can be educated in how there is a “sociointellectual gap” where linguistic deficiency is anticipated by both the Native and the English Learner and that this gap is detrimental to everyone.

I then focused my attention on how English Learners interacted with the Written Responses they receive from their instructors on their writing assignments. I found that English Learners, due to unfamiliarity that English Learners can have with vocabulary or writing styles (eg. Cursive) can have a certain difficulties with teacher responses that inhibit the success of the responses (and the students) and that these difficulties are different from those of native learners. I then provided two ways of addressing these encumbrances that presented themselves in the research and that extend beyond simply writing more clearly and with easier vocabulary. I stated that the university writing center and the instructor’s office hours can be utilized in tandem with their responses in an

effort to work more closely with the student and thus minimize the encumbrances listed above.

Lastly, I sought to bring both peer reviewing and teacher responses together in synthesis to see how they may work for, or against, one another. I found that students do not often see either editing method as situated equally. I found that the students I studied appear to see teacher responses as more capable of helping them to make better grades, and that many students thought that peer reviewing could help them to be better writers. I also speculated that, if students were nervous or apprehensive to share in the peer reviewing session that they might choose not to fully interact while peer reviewing in favor of using teacher responses and thus bypass the progress they may have found while peer reviewing.

Ultimately, the reason behind this thesis is the pursuit of progress. I seek to improve upon the situations in which the peer review session and teacher responses to student writing assignments occur for the purpose of progress, progress for everyone. The suggestions I provide in the previous chapter are by no means simple solutions, but they are realizable. And, if they can be realized, editing, in all of its forms, immediately becomes easier for English Learner students. If the encumbrances they face in the editing process are lessened, English Learners are thus in a better position to gain access to undifferentiated treatment within each editing practice, something that will not only help to ensure happier more prosperous English Learner and Native students, but will also help to ensure better writing from those students. It will help the students be better writers, and help the students make themselves better writers in the future. If peer

reviewing and teacher responses are allowed to function as they are designed then better writing and better writers will come from those practices.

We must also recognize that both peer reviewing and teacher responses need to be situated as taking place in a class where English Learner students are part of a greater whole. That is, these editing practices occur in tandem with the rest of the class. We can then recognize that if we are able to improve upon these practices by allowing for a more involved and a more equal role of the English Learner in those practices, that not only is the review session enriched as a result but the class as a whole as well. If English Learners are able to approach both peer reviewing and teacher responses with more confidence and with greater equality than what I have been able to observe then we improve the class altogether. The class then has a greater chance at becoming the location of trust and decency it is meant to be. And also, has a greater chance of making all the students in that class better writers.

I sincerely believe that all members of the class have a greater chance to prosper if some of the issues that lead to the “sociointellectual gap” are diminished. The greater chance at prosperity however, also includes the instructor. One can assume that a class able to work more productively together will also be more able, and I believe more likely, to internalize the instruction provided to them. Students will be in a better place to learn and thus the teacher in a better place to teach. Simply by making the composition class a location of greater mutual respect and involvement the teacher who seeks to create awareness of writing in her or his students will have an easier time at accomplishing this goal on the soul basis that students can work better together to accomplish that awareness.

I wish for this thesis to influence the shape teaching in the future, as I know it will my own. To that effect I would like to take a moment and identify some ways that the issues I discussed in the previous chapters, issues that serve to produce the sociointellectual gap, might be resolved. Or, at least lessened. First, concerning peer reviewing specifically, while observing classes where peer reviewing was conducted I noticed that sessions were highly influenced by the way that the instructor introduced, spoke to, or taught to, the peer reviewing session. I found that in many ways the session progressed highly defined by the specific ways the students came to know the goals of both peer reviewing in general and the particular session at hand, and how they would be expected to accomplish them. For example, it was common for students to define their peer reviewing actions with the same vocabulary as the instructor as well as to actually perform the specific duties described by the teacher while peer reviewing. Additionally, J. Stanley (*Coaching*) has argued that careful instruction on the processes of peer reviewing allows students to construct more successful peer reviewing Sessions.

In this case, I suggest that the “sociointellectual gap” be addressed before the peer reviewing begins. If the peer review session progresses highly defined by the way in which it is taught to, then a lesson in which the gap is addressed might help to diminish its influence on all group members. Students need to be made aware that ELs bring to the class complex and highly literate language skills that by no means dampen the productiveness of the peer review session. My research indicates that EL students can have insight into a Native Learner’s paper that its writer may not have. Students can be educated in how there is a “sociointellectual gap” where linguistic deficiency is anticipated by both the Native and the English Learner. And that this deficiency might be

mitigated by an overgeneralization from basic Standard American English to basic overall language skills or intellectual capacity.

While researching I was also able to recognize that, similar to how a peer review sessions progresses dependent on how they are introduced by the instructor, handout materials can also have a dramatic effect. Thus, the second way that we as teachers might be able to counteract the forces that serve to produce the “sociointellectual gap” would be to utilize any handout materials for the purpose of counteracting these forces. Handout materials can include, but are not limited to, anything from a detailed worksheet handout made to be written on and turned in to a small slip of paper with bullet points that might help to spur the conversation towards more productive topics. Regardless of the form a handout might take, ELs can be addressed in the materials and in a way that draws specific attention to the existence of a gap and its consequences. Materials for peer reviewing, for example, can be customized for particular classes, and more than one handout can be made and thus customized to fit the specific needs of particular students. If the materials that are given to students to facilitate the peer reviewing process influence the progression of the peer reviewing Session, then perhaps they can be used to inhibit the continuation and maintenance of the value system that supports the “sociointellectual gap.”

I believe that many of the problematics surrounding teacher responses to student writing assignments can also be counteracted. And fortunately, they can be addressed in more ways than simply writing in print, more legibly, or in more depth, and can be addressed in numerous ways and at varied times in the editing process. First, one way to address these issues would be to make office hours more available, perhaps specifically

to English Learner students. While working closely with the instructor the student can reference specific instances where she or he did not understand what had been written. The instructor can provide detailed responses that fill in the gaps left behind by illegibility or lack of specificity. Additionally, the instructor can take note of the types of issues where the student has had trouble and seek to alleviate them in the future. It is also possible, though perhaps not always welcomed, for a visit to the instructor's office to be mandatory.

Another method of alleviating the problems ELs might have with teacher responses to student writing assignments would be to integrate work with the University Writing Center with both student office visits and the information provided in the written response. In this case a University Writing Center can act as supplemental to meetings that occur between the student and the instructor. The instructor can go over the paper with the student and later, in the Writing Center, the student can go over the information again and be provided with another explanation that might better facilitate greater overall comprehension. It is no doubt that a Writing Center can be a locus of great writing improvement for any student, but given the complex relationship between English Learners and teacher responses to student writing assignments, I believe the Writing Center can be of particular use in our quest to achieve better writing and better writers.

Not only do I wish for this thesis to influence future teaching, but to also influence the future of research, as it will my own. In this case, as I stated that there appears to be a perception in the students I studied that posits peer reviewing as better for improving student writing and that teacher responses are better for improving one's grade, one might seek to discover if this is actually true. Then one might seek to answer

why this is or is not true? One might differentiate between ethnicity, background, or gender and see if there are any significant changes between these categories. One might also look at the ideas stated above about how to counteract the gap in both peer reviewing and teacher responses and test each strategy to see how effective they really are. A researcher could examine her or his class before and after implementing each strategy and analyze the changes, if any, they created.

Lastly, I wish for this thesis to influence the path of future theoretical discussions. This thesis and the researching and theorizing conducted within is a micro study. There are too few people to generalize to greater populations. It does however, provide highly pertinent information for someone who might be looking to study a group large enough to be generalizable to greater populations. That is, the data produced and discussed here can be fit into the larger picture for someone studying a macro group of people. The influences identified here can be integrated into the overall picture the future macro researcher might have of English Learners or perhaps the composition class in general and would thus have a greater chance of rendering accurate information.

I want for this thesis to mean something. I want for it to not simply disappear but to be integrated into the conversation and scholarship on how English Learners fit into the American Composition class. I want it to positively influence the discourse on “multiculturalism” I spoke to in the first chapter. I want to make the lives of those students, and all students, better. I want for the teacher to have an easier time teaching and for students to have an easier time learning. But, however unfortunately, I do not know if this goal has been accomplished. I can say however, I am a better person as a result of the research conducted here. And, if in front of a class, English Learners present

or not, I am a better teacher. I have a greater understanding of not only some of the subtle dynamics of classroom interaction but a greater understanding of classrooms altogether.

It is my hope that this thesis can do this for more than just myself.

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