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Gatekeepers and Guides: Preparing Writing Teachers to Negotiate Standard Language Ideology

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Writing teacher educators and educational linguists have grappled for some time with how to help teachers engage productively with language in classroom teaching, particularly as many teachers work with increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse student populations.¹ This article shares results from a study of pre-service English teachers that has implications for how writing teacher education may benefit from a more explicit focus on language, specifically standard language ideology.

My hope is that this piece sheds further light on the implications of the side comments I've heard from pre-service teachers who encounter their first placements in diverse schools. My concern is that sometimes these well-meaning new teachers enter schools and correct their bi-dialectal students' oral or written language on the first day of class in their fervor to take on the role of "English" teacher. These new teachers express shock that students find their corrections to be offensive at worst, mystifying at best.

And while some novice and experienced English teachers take part in conversations about respecting student language and working with English language learners, these discussions raise questions of how to incorporate linguistic understandings into classroom practice, particularly writing instruction. Every year at NCTE's Annual Conference, I listen to educators and linguists discuss what teachers need to know about language (i.e. see NCTE Commission on Language, 2008), and the conversations often lead back to providing equitable, effective writing instruction for a range of students.

During the discussions, questions often are raised that reflect the existing gaps between linguistic scholarship and everyday practice: Do writing teachers already know linguistics on some intuitive level? What are the ideological implications of particular language about language or particular writing activities? How can writing teachers enact understandings of "Standard English," "academic English," and "formal English" within a frame of respecting student language?²

This study points to the ways that concepts like standards, correctness, standard English, and language appreciation matter for pre-service teachers, and how it may be crucial for us to understand how they struggle with these concepts in relation to writing instruction. As they enter the field, pre-service English teachers are positioned to be language authorities and often express anxieties and uncertainties about how to fulfill that role in relation to the teaching of writing. The traditional position of writing teachers as standard-bearers, or "gatekeepers," creates potential conflicting ideologies for pre-service teachers who are also taught about language variety and culturally relevant pedagogy during teacher education. These future teachers of writing, in many ways invested in standardization, take up linguistic understandings within the contexts of their own experiences of writing instruction, range of coursework and field-based practicum experiences, and language beliefs.³

This article focuses on interviews with seven undergraduate pre-service secondary English teachers during their initial semesters of teacher education. The interviews revealed standard language ideology, or ideologies about standard English and correctness. Close analysis of the pre-service teachers' language moves revealed ideological stances that are interlinked with their understandings of English teacher authority and beliefs about providing access for students.⁴ The study showed that understandings of language use, particularly traditional views of grammar,⁵ are often disconnected from understandings about how language works within classroom interactions or in writing instruction. Furthermore, the subject position of English teachers as standard-bearing language authority prevents some pre-service teachers from taking up new understandings that promote student learning.

Even teachers who espouse language appreciation may lack strategies or re-interpret strategies through pre-existing filters. For instance, the study shows how pre-service teachers' comments often rely on a commonsense belief about language acquisition

1 The population of teachers has become increasingly white, monolingual, female and middle class, and these teachers will teach an increasingly linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse group of students (see Melnick and Zeichner, 1998; Hollins and Guzman, 2006).

2 Even the language about language carries ideological implications. For instance, composition scholar Bethany Davila (2012) points us to the unearned privilege attributed to "standard" edited American English (SEAE).

3 The standardization of language is a process during which aspects of language use become selected, accepted, diffused geographically, maintained, and elaborated upon; they acquire prestige and are prescribed, codified, and maintained (Milroy and Milroy, 1991). English teachers have been placed traditionally in the role of codifiers.

4 I define stance as "methods, linguistic and other, by which interactants create and signal relationships with the propositions they give voice to and the people they interact with" (Johnstone, 2007, 137).

5 The traditional model of "grammar" in English language arts defines grammar as a distinct set of prescriptive rules to be learned.

even though participants were seeking to affirm student language. The interviews show how pre-service teachers' approaches to "access" for students may or may not align with linguistic understandings. While seeing themselves as language authorities, they are also trying to apply new understandings about accepting language variation and giving students access. Even as pre-service teachers talk about embracing language variation, they may revert to traditional practices of "teaching grammar," such as conflating oral and written language use (McBee Orzulak, 2012).

This article outlines ways that the pre-service teachers faced dilemmas related to beliefs about standard language and their positions as gatekeepers; it will explore implications for how additional subject positions for writing teachers, such as guide or language user, may help support stances that promote equitable writing instruction.

Standard Language Ideology and Subject Positions

Standard language ideology provides one frame for analyzing the underlying language beliefs that emerged in the interviews. As a type of language ideology salient in the schooling context,⁶ my analysis looks at *standard language ideology* or what Milroy (1999) defines as "the belief that there is one and only one correct spoken form of the language, modelled on a single correct written form" (174). Standard language ideology materializes as the norm of one unified standard to which other languages or dialects are "substandard" or "nonstandard." Instead of stigmatized features being seen as part of a language variety, just like standard varieties, these "nonstandard" features become defined in contrast to a perceived standard promoted by schooling or are generally seen as "substandard."

This frame calls our attention to how language beliefs are often invisible or commonsensical in nature. There is a general sense that we are all experts of our own and others' language. This "folk linguistic" view of language can obscure the need for expert understandings of language. Future English teachers, in particular, are not only language users but also are often good at "English" and writing, meaning that folk theories about language may be even more entrenched.

Standard language ideology may be particularly salient for teachers of writing at the secondary level due to socially reinforced views of English teachers as gatekeepers and prescriptivists. Pervasive beliefs can position language users in relation to one another according to Wortham (2001): "Drawing on ideologies that circulate widely in a society, particular speakers position themselves and others in characteristic ways. Consistent positioning over time can establish more enduring identities for individuals and groups" (256). Standard language ideology has implications for how English teachers are positioned as language authorities. Yet, increasingly in writing teacher education, new teachers also are positioned as needing to be equitable and culturally relevant.

In response to these multiple ways that pre-service teachers are positioned by standard language ideology, I use the concept of subject position to conceptualize the storylines that emerge when pre-service teachers manage multiple language understandings over time and across multiple contexts. *Subject positions* are created through ongoing discourses and these discourses' relationships to ways of thinking, or ideologies. In contrast to "roles," available subject positions are multiple, contradictory (Davies and Harré, 2001). For future English teachers, this contradictory view is useful for thinking about their multiple subject positions in relation to language use, English teaching, and writing instruction. Analysis of subject positions in the interviews included open coding of interviews, thematic analysis, and creation of new categories for thematic grouping. Appendix One provides a summary of salient subject positions that emerged during analysis.

Extending Past Research

The interpretive lens of standard language ideology offers writing teacher education ways to consider the positioning of multilingual writers and the privileging of standard English. This area of inquiry offers insights useful for all levels of writing instruction: by focusing on secondary English teachers, my work extends past work focused on in-service teachers (Godley, Carpenter, and Werner, 2007), college composition instructors (Davila, 2012), and elementary teachers (Laman and Van Sluys, 2008).

Furthermore, I draw on research that suggests that language beliefs have implications for the success of writing instruction at the secondary level. In a study of in-service English teachers, Julie Sweetland (2006) demonstrates how sociolinguistic training, acknowledging both attitudes and linguistic knowledge, enabled secondary teachers to develop more positive attitudes about student language practices and to use strategies of affirming linguistic diversity. The result was that these teachers taught students about language variation and dialect awareness in ways that improved students' writing and sense of self-efficacy. However, this study responded to the site-based needs of in-service teachers and was not focused on pre-service teacher preparation.

In "'I'll Speak in Proper Slang': Language Ideologies in a Daily Editing Activity," Amanda Godley, Brian Carpenter, and Cynthia Werner further show the ways in-service English teachers grapple with conflicts around celebrating student language and teaching "grammar." Their study found that even a well-meaning English teacher used commonsense understandings of language (such as correcting students' oral language) in ways that did not support students' writing, including the use of a daily editing exercise.

6 I use language ideology to refer to perceptions about language that perpetuate inequity by marginalizing non-dominant groups and promoting a dominant group's interests (Lippi-Green, 1997) and as a more neutral belief system that can function normatively: "an underlying, consensual belief system about the way language is and is supposed to be" (Wolfram, 1998, 109). In both neutral and critical views, language ideology can apply to unquestioned beliefs about an assumed, monolithic standard or beliefs about the relationships between written and oral language.

This study points to the ways that standard language ideology can blur oral and written language distinctions, stymieing even experienced teachers of writing who mean to be equitable.

I extend this work into the domain of undergraduate pre-service teacher education. Not only do pre-service English teachers have to grapple with beliefs from their K-12 learning, but they also have to consider new understandings from coursework compared to those in student teaching and other field placements. Pre-service teachers' understandings of writing instruction further interact with multiple contexts that can influence their language beliefs. As we know, field experiences can be a powerful source for understanding new concepts and ideas; knowledge learned in methods courses can conflict with field experiences, sending competing messages (see Clift and Brady, 2006). Research also shows that school policy can influence language attitudes more than certain kinds of coursework (Blake and Cutler, 2003). Furthermore, national and local standards expectations provide contexts for teacher beliefs. As Amy Carpenter Ford and Tracy Davis (2012) point to in "Integrating Standards: Considerations for Language and Writing," the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) ask teachers to acknowledge language variation in standard English in the writing and speaking of others and themselves. Although this inclusion offers an entry point for attending to language variation in the classroom, the phrase "standard English" also reifies a monolithic standard.

Study Design and Findings

Interviewees were members of a secondary English undergraduate cohort and were in their first two semesters of teacher education at a large Midwestern university at the time of the interviews. The cohort included ten members of which four female participants (Kate, Amy, Susan, Mary) and three male participants (Dan, Matt, Zack) participated in the study.⁷ All participants identify as native English speakers and as white, lower to upper middle class. Interview questions focused on how the pre-service teachers thought about language in the English language arts classroom, including standard English, stigmatized language varieties, and linguistic diversity. Participants also described their views of successful English teachers and the types of schools where they hope to work in the future. In most cases, the pre-service teachers had taken comparable coursework in English language before entering teacher education.⁸ As noted later, however, they filtered understandings from these courses through their existing experiences with and beliefs about language and English teaching.

I analyzed the interviews with the following question: *What ideological stances (about teaching English, standard English, and "correctness") are reflected in the language moves of pre-service English teachers?* In addition to the patterns of subject positions (see Appendix One), common patterns emerged in relation to the pre-service teachers' multiple subject positions. First, while most participants talked about appreciating language variety or creativity in some way, there also was a range of ways in which participants positioned themselves as gatekeepers and users of "nonstandard" English or other languages as a problem or limiting factor. Second, in contrast to a desire to support student access to language, conflation of oral and written language practices was common, especially as participants imagined approaches to teaching methods.

The sections that follow focus on the ways that standard language ideology manifested as participants explored multiple, often conflicting positions related to providing access, engaging with language authority, and expressing language appreciation. I provide an in-depth look at specific new teachers' language moves in order to help us better understand the ways that language beliefs, such as those supported by standard language ideology, might filter pre-service teachers' take up of linguistically-informed writing methods.

Gatekeeper and access provider?: Dilemmas of leveling the playing field

In all of the interviews, participants discussed the importance of providing students with access to standard English, yet dilemmas emerge in their descriptions of approaches to providing this access. The common shock of dealing with their first sets of student papers showcases the familiar thread in writing methods of helping new writing teachers manage their reactions and pre-existing beliefs about "good" writing.

Excerpt One:

Amy describes how it is important for English teachers to address "grammar" in order to level the playing field for students (see transcript conventions in Appendix Two):

⁷ All names used are pseudonyms.

⁸ Although participants took similar classes and even used the same books, I recognize that this does not mean that the instructors' approaches to language were similar.

1 "I think um after being in my Practicum (yeah) looking at how the
2 students write (okay) um is very surprising # we my practicum
3 partner and I # wanted to actually go out and make a lesson about
4 gram:mar and how you form a paper because I was surprised at the
5 junior and senior level # how many mistakes were being made, and
6 that's one thing I would like to change # if I can um is just try to sit
7 down with them and go over some basics that they might have
8 miss::ed (umhuh) from earlier grades and (uhuh) try and set the uh
9 playing field level, and try to make sure that everyone has a good
10 idea of what they're doing in writing. I guess is one thing I would
11 change."

Amy's emphasis on the number of "mistakes," and her need to respond to these mistakes as a writing teacher, shows an internalization of the gatekeeper discourse for English teachers. Later in the interview, Amy talks about working with standards as being like a "game you have to play" which could be seen as an extension of her metaphor here of leveling the playing field.

Excerpt Two:

Amy describes her strategy for teaching students standard English for a standardized test context:

1 "um first I think speaking in that, and then going into writing it
2 (okay) because I think if you change the way you speak first of:f
3 um that will change your writing and I hate to say that, I'm not
4 trying to [laughing tone] change everybody's way of speaking but
5 just from the standardized test standpoint, I guess you can't really
6 get around it. So um I guess I would just try and make sure that
7 everyone has the right idea, of what it is an:d to make sure they're
8 using the proper words (okay) um and at least kind of give a
9 disclaimer and say [laughing] that "you know this is just for
10 English lang:uage learning, and, you know when you go home
11 speak whatever[ac] you want I'm not trying to chan:ge who you
12 are, or anything like that but just for the *standardized test basis*"

Relying on commonsense understandings of standard language, Amy's language moves express her belief that "proper words" take on "the" unified form dictated by standardized tests and that students can learn this first through spoken English. Amy remains unaware that the spoken standard shifts more than the written version advocated by standardized tests and style manuals; there are important distinctions between written and spoken standard English (Cheshire, 1999). In lines 1 and 2, standard language ideology emerges in the belief that changing speech equals changing writing. This conflation ignores the differences between written and oral language acquisition. However, her response is unsurprising due to the pervasiveness of a commonsense belief in standard language ideology—a belief that a single "correct" form of spoken English exists and is based on a one "correct" form of written English (Milroy, 1999).

Similarly, Matt reverts to an oral correction model of parroting back student language in standard English, a strategy that reveals similar ideologies about oral transfer of language: "I don't think I would ever chastise somebody for not using standard English"... "I can say, 'Right so what you're saying is?' and repeat it in standard English? I guess." Other studies have revealed that this strategy undermines effective classroom interactions and does not contribute to learning (see Godley et al.). This view of oral language ignores how the constant creativity of communication means that "absolute standardisation of a spoken language is never achieved" (Milroy and Milroy 22). Yet, when Amy uses "it" in lines 1 and 6, she implies a belief in a standard as one unified "proper" form to be learned. This belief is confirmed with "the right idea" in line 6, which echoes Amy's earlier desire to make sure all students know "the" grammar rules so that the playing field is level for all students.

Amy grapples with the dilemma of providing access to the "right idea" of standard language or "proper words" and yet not asking students to change their home languages. Amy doesn't want to change "who" students are and sees her role as encouraging students to learn English for the standardized test context. Amy takes on a subject position of English teacher as someone who provides "access" and "makes sure" all students ("everyone") use proper language or have the "right" idea. However, this idea of access rubs against Amy's sense of herself as a gatekeeper, creating a dilemma that she attempts to mediate. Amy uses a laughing tone to mediate her statements of authority. She tries to express openness to home language as she says, "this is just for *English* language learning" (lines 9-10), while still partitioning it outside of the school context.

Rosina Lippi-Green's (1997) discussion of "appropriacy" arguments in *English with an Accent* points to the dilemmic nature

of this position: “the message remains the same, and typically schizophrenic: appreciate and respect the languages of peripheral communities, but keep them in their place” (109). In fact, “you can’t speak like that here” is a recognizable form of standard language ideology that subordinates “home” language use. The most extreme option is ignoring the sense that students from various language or language variety backgrounds have a place in an English language arts classroom, a position that disinvites and partitions students based on perceived language and ability (Yoon, 2008; Siegel, 2006).

Beyond zero tolerance: The dilemmas of language authority and deficit thinking

In composition studies, the emphasis on students’ right to their own language points to a consensus that zero tolerance for language variation is not an acceptable goal for writing instruction (Scott, Straker and Katz, 2009). However, the language moves in the interviews trouble the idea that moving teachers beyond a zero tolerance approach means that deficit thinking has disappeared or that their teaching approaches reflect new philosophies of language appreciation.

While teacher educators Arneha Ball and Rashidah Muhammad (2003) conclude that coursework in language variation might change ingrained attitudes like “zero tolerance” in response to stigmatized language varieties, my interviews complicate this as a sufficient goal for writing teacher education. Myths pervasive amongst teachers in Ball and Muhammad’s teacher education course mirror those of most of my interviewees: 1) “there is a uniform standard English that has been reduced to a set of consistent rules,” 2) “that these ‘correct’ consistent rules should be followed by all American English speakers,” and 3) “this mythical standard English must be safeguarded by everyone connected with its use, particularly classroom teachers” (Ball and Muhammad 77).

Unpacking such myths requires engaging with less obvious intolerance and unexamined language understandings. Research shows that unchallenged myths about language deficiency—and assumptions about what students can and cannot do based on those myths—can influence teachers who will teach in high-need areas but have little experience in those communities (Bauer and Trudgill, 1998; Valencia and Solórzano, 2004). Myths of verbal deprivation have historically led to attempts to fix students’ “deficits” rather than recognizing the systematicity of stigmatized varieties of English (Labov, 1967).

As a case in point, Kate’s stances in her interview reveal the ways that standard language ideology intersects with anxieties about fulfilling the subject position of a language authority, or writing instructor who knows all rules needed to correct student writing.

1 “I think the grammar thing I just need to do for my own benefit just so
2 like I feel like I am giving right instructions. I took a class [Modern
3 English] first semester here that I thought was that but it wasn’t... It was
4 more linguistics than I thought it was going to be, so I thought I was kind
5 of like checking one off the list there, and it didn’t happen. So just I think
6 that going through things and being able to say, ‘Yes, that’s supposed to be
7 there. No, that’s supposed to be there. That’s wrong.’ I think that’s really
8 important, you know.” [Kate talks about how what she learned wouldn’t
9 help her respond as a writing teacher to students’ papers, and she explains
10 what she thinks would help.]
11 “I think about language, just the absolute standards, absolute rules.
12 Just not having to look it up every time to be sure that I’m right. Just have
13 them really in my brain so that it is has a sense of authority almost. And
14 because I know I have so many grammar mistakes all the time, and it’s
15 just, you know, to have that absolute certainty when you are instructing
16 other people.”

In this excerpt, Kate takes a more traditional view of English teachers as the standard-bearers for one right way to use written language. Her focus on “right instructions” in grammar (line 2) and knowing “absolute rules” (line 11) is aligned with her view of a standard-bearing English teacher. The concept of a rigid written standard develops due to standard language ideology that “encourages prescription in language, dedicated to the principle that there must be one, and only one, correct way of using a linguistic item” (Milroy and Milroy 52). This “public *consciousness* of the standard” means that “people *believe* that there is a ‘right’ way of using English, although they do not necessarily use the ‘correct’ forms in their own speech” (Milroy and Milroy 30). With her belief in the one right way, Kate’s need for absolute rules means that her class in linguistics did not help her with grammar “mistakes,” something which she feels disappointed about not being able to check off her list.

Although a goal of writing teacher education is certainly to improve the confidence of new teachers of writing, Kate’s rigid beliefs may not support her ongoing learning as a future teacher. On the other hand, other participants’ responses point to the potentially more productive position of teacher as a guide. For example, Mary did not express the same anxiety as Kate; she took the same course but described her plans to use the book as a resource rather than feeling like she needed to internalize a right answer. Similarly, Susan rejected the view of a single “right” answer; she describes herself guiding students through multiple varieties and

even redefining what is “correct” while providing access to standard English. Positioning herself as a teacher who is a guide to language varieties and what is “considered right,” Susan uses her own language learning experiences and discussions of power during coursework to frame her future teaching approach.

However, even Susan labels her own language as “very lazy English”—“I don’t speak grammatically correct; I need to work on being a good example.” This stance seems to conflict with her other stance that questions language authority and reveals how pervasive standard language ideology remains even in the language moves of a pre-service teacher who articulates fairly complex linguistic understandings. This example reveals the rooted nature of expectations around English teachers’ identities as language users even though Susan’s other language moves avoid casting her future students’ language as deficient.

Susan’s subject position as guide through varieties seems to be predicated on her appreciation of language varieties. Conversely, Kate imagines that she won’t have to deal with linguistic diversity and describes language varieties as an obstacle. This theme emerged in other interviews—even with participants who talked about appreciating student language. They described working with English language learners or African American English speakers as a “difficulty,” “challenge,” “problem,” or “harder.” Some participants imagined that these students should or would be the domain of another department or school.

Such deficit beliefs about language variation can filter how pre-service teachers interpret writing methods introduced in coursework. As a case in point, in Kate’s discussion of what she calls a “codeswitching” example from a Composition Methods class she was taking, she outlines a contrastive analysis approach presented in an article from class. She describes how when the author’s students used “incorrect slang,” the teacher/author translated their words into standard English. As Kate describes the contrastive analysis approach, her language moves reveal a deficit model of student language rather than a recognition of the systematicity of stigmatized varieties of English. This ideology is linked historically to beliefs about verbal deprivation. Specifically, history shows how understandings of a standard have been linked to race or ethnicity in the U.S. (Milroy). Evaluations about language often are connected to beliefs about intelligence, morality, and social identities, and Kate’s description of the class activity reveals that she still uses a deficit model to frame certain student language practices. Furthermore, Kate confides that “I don’t really think that I think that it’s all English” as she talks about language varieties related to race. Her beliefs influence her take up of methods; what is useful here may be the ways her language moves reveal such beliefs in a way that could be interrogated in a writing methods course if standard language ideology were explored explicitly.

Participants’ understandings of themselves as language users provide another possible entry point for unpacking standard language ideology. While Mary also describes language difference as a challenge, she adopts linguistic understandings about language varieties and differences between written and spoken language:

“It might be harder as a teacher to like work with speakers of African American English, like since it’s kind of different, it’s like not so formal... I don’t speak African American English but the way I speak isn’t the way I would write... so I don’t think there’s like one right or wrong.”

Mary uses her understanding of her own written and oral language to contextualize her approach to language variety. However, by describing African American English (which she has an awareness of as a separate language variety with a title) as less “formal,” Mary still represents common beliefs about vernacular varieties as always informal.

Even though Kate, Mary, Susan, and others do not describe zero tolerance approaches to language varieties, their language moves reveal their shifting stances in relation to standard language ideology. These stances have implications for how they see themselves and their students. In order to attend to the underlying, complex beliefs of pre-service teachers, writing teacher education might address possible positions of the writing teacher as gatekeeper as well as language user and guide to standard English(es).

Everyone is an expert: The dilemmas of folk linguistics and language appreciation

Although many participants spoke overtly about language appreciation, their approaches to language variation reveal inabilities to operationalize linguistic principles as future writing teachers. Even though interviewees could describe ways they might use mini-lessons to teach prescriptive grammar, many struggled with imagining specific ways they might work with English language learners, new technology-based registers, and other areas of language variation as part of their teaching repertoires.

For instance, Dan, who like Kate imagined working in a homogenous white middle class school, espoused an equitable view of language with an emphasis on bridging to “standard English,” but he could not name clear strategies for approaching this in the classroom beyond his own “intuition.”

We must take into consideration that Dan and the other pre-service teachers interviewed were in their initial semesters of teacher education. On the other hand, ideologies about who can be an expert on language also may influence the ways pre-service teachers engage with language understandings in relation to writing instruction. Certainly, teachers can begin to see language patterns and develop techniques to support their students’ writing without learning exact linguistic terms. On the other hand, the language moves of the pre-service teachers may lead us to interrogate assumptions about what level of linguistic understandings are available through tacit understandings.

As a case in point, some interviewees reflect a language user as expert model in some of their comments. Zack assumes that he will be able to translate language varieties for students without specific preparation: “I might just have to read it and kind of interpret it on a case by case basis.” This may be partly due to his sense of expertise with standard English, as he claims standard English as his perspective; “way I would teach.”⁹ Additionally, Zack dismisses linguistic understandings as extraneous and claims that he would just brush up on “grammar rules” if he were teaching a lesson about “grammar.” He transfers authority to the current prescriptive grammar guide without seeing how other linguistic principles could help him teach his students. Zack’s unexamined language understandings may lead him to miss key ways that these “rules” need to be analyzed in terms of language change and varieties in his particular classroom.

Similarly, Matt espouses appreciation for language varieties, but he plans to only “actively” teach standard English and provide access to a “preferred type of English.” Yet, he imagines “styleshifting” with students, including using “AAVE” if he encounters speakers in his classroom. Matt’s confidence in his ability to shift readily into African American English may reveal that he does not see AAE as a code that requires systematic learning. This stance also ignores the social implications connected to using language varieties.

According to Irvine and Gal (2000), stances like Matt and Zack’s may function as *erasure* of specific linguistic codes by assuming that ability to command those varieties could be intuited or appropriated easily rather requiring teachers to learn rule governed systems or consult linguistic resources. We can see how dilemmas emerge for these pre-service teachers who pay lip service to language appreciation, yet whose imagined approaches as writing teachers may reveal limiting standard language ideology.

Implications: Engaging Pre-service Writing Teachers with Standard Language Ideology

Implications from the study include the need for writing teacher education to focus on the relationship between ideologies and enactment of specific methods. The study suggests that attention to the subject positions of writing teachers might help pre-service teachers think through dilemmas they may face in the complex intersections between non/dominant discourses around language in schools and writing instruction. Standard language ideology provides a lens for naming common dilemmas or aspects of the dilemma.

As Leah Zuidema (2011) discusses in “Contentious Conversations,” part of being an English teacher historically has included engaging with dilemmas and debates, specifically ongoing debates about grammar and writing approaches. The importance of engaging in these conversations persists, as ignoring standard language ideology can mean that new teachers succumb to inequitable methods due to powerful myths about language and writing instruction that they may face in the field. In a follow-up study that tracked a different group of new English teachers into classroom practice, findings showed participants’ need for affirmation and ongoing access to resources related to language dilemmas in writing instruction (McBee Orzulak, 2011).¹⁰

New teachers may take solace in understanding how other teachers manage such dilemmas and the reality that some dilemmas may not be resolved. Understanding larger conversations about “correctness” and language variety could provide new teachers with choices for responding to issues of language authority and teaching their students how to negotiate shifting understandings of standard English. Conversely, a lack of awareness of how language works in relation to circulating ideologies could limit their responses due to adherence to traditional approaches or commonsense beliefs.

In particular, I suggest that future writing teachers need to critique traditional, monolithic understandings of standard English even as they learn to understand language patterns in student writing. In writing methods courses, models of experienced teachers might demonstrate possibilities for teachers of writing to work alongside students in inquiry-based learning about language while admitting the possibilities for not knowing every grammatical term in order to be a “good” teacher of writing. Writing teacher educators might provide resources or models of experienced teachers who work with student language, supporting access to new uses and varieties while rejecting authoritative or language maven positions (McBee Orzulak, 2012). A text like David Brown’s (2009) *In Other Words* can be used to spark conversation about the ideologies related to specific writing methods used to teach academic writing. Or, an article like “Analyzing the Writing of English Language Learners” by Mary Schleppegrell and Ann Go (2007) can be used to help new teachers analyze what English language learners are able to do grammatically in their writing. An activity like this one can help new writing teachers note the ideologies inherent in their initial deficit reactions to a non-native English writer’s text (i.e. correcting all errors based on their native intuition) versus using a student’s text in order to learn more about its linguistic patterns.

The pre-service teachers’ language moves in the study may help us consider ways to help future teachers critique and manage the ideological, dilemmic nature of language understandings in writing instruction. Their interviews raise questions for writing teacher education and research: Which stances might help pre-service teachers understand how language works contextually and interactionally in writing classroom settings? How might writing methods curricula help pre-service teachers engage critically with standardized testing and implicit language beliefs in ways that help them to be agentive in a variety of contexts? What is the best means for engaging pre-service teachers with critical language understandings, particularly how to deal with the dilemmas they face

⁹ Language users like Zack who make claims about these preferred forms often contradict their reports in their actual usage (Milroy and Milroy).

¹⁰ This later study further affirmed the ways that positions taken up by English teachers have implications for equitable instruction: Multiple positive positions of students and teachers emerged, such as students as knowledgeable and teachers as equitable, student-centered, or appreciative. Other less generative positions also emerged, such as students as deficient; teachers as authoritative, racist, or all-knowing.

as they simultaneously seek to respect student language and provide access to standard English? Whatever the answers, the study suggests that we need to move beyond simply fostering language appreciation or preventing a zero tolerance approach; instead we should move towards promoting sustainable positions for equitable writing instruction.

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Appendix One

Subject Positions in Interviews:

English language arts teacher as

Authority, standard bearer

- Teacher disseminates fixed content; gatekeeper of one correct way
- Oral language correction leads to standard written English
- Teacher has responsibility to "level the playing field" through grammar

Guide, supporter of mutual understanding

- Teacher guides through multiple varieties while providing access
- Teacher works with what is "considered right"
- Teacher teaches students not content

Language user

- Teacher only teaches and/or uses standard English
- Teacher models appropriate language with own language use
- Teacher is a style-shifter or multiple language user
- Teacher language is imperfect, needs improvement

Appendix Two

Transcript Conventions:

() Brackets show overlap

= latching

Italics show emphasis

Period or comma shows falling intonation

Question mark shows rising intonation

shows pause of less than a second

(1.6) shows pause of more than a second

: drawn out speech

[ac] accelerated speech

About the Author

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