Enduring Patterns:

Standard Language and Privileged Identities in the Writing Classroom
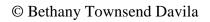
by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(English & Education)
in The University of Michigan
2011

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2011

To Frank, Julius, and Kai

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my committee for their support and careful attention to my project. My dissertation is the result of collaboration—of conversations and written feedback, of hard questions and generous encouragement. Each committee member has left a mark on this project—and me—in her own way.

I especially want to thank my co-chairs, Anne Curzan and Anne Ruggles Gere. Both have been generous with their time and attention, engaged me as a peer, and given me the confidence to keep pushing this project forward.

Thank you to my peers. I am humbled by the generous, even selfless, support I receive from other E&E students on a regular basis. Hannah Dickinson deserves a special thank you for always having time for all of us and for the wisdom in her advice. Thank you to the rest of my cohort (Brett, Laura, Melinda, and Randy), to Staci and Mike who went through it first, to my writing group partners over the years, and to all of the other wonderful friends and colleagues I have been blessed with during my time at Michigan.

I would like to thank Bonnie and Lisa for making the EDWP office a welcoming space and for their unconditional confidence.

I also want to show great appreciation for my family, especially my parents, Steve and Peggy and my sisters, Becca and Emily. Your constant reminders that anything is possible has nurtured my insistence on always focusing on solutions instead of problems, which—as it turns out—is really useful when writing a dissertation.

Of course, thank you to my husband, Frank, who has offered endless support and encouragement over the years—support and encouragement that have allowed me to follow my passion for which I will always be grateful.

Finally, I want to thank my children, Julius and Kai, who are my daily dose of perspective, filling me with love and laughter and always reminding me of what's really important.

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Introduction

During my Master's Program I worked as an intern teaching first-year composition at a community college. After the first assignment, a personal narrative, the supervising instructor asked me to join him in meeting with Jason, a male, African American student in order to discuss the grammar "issues" in his paper. I also had noted Jason's essay as problematic when I read it. In fact, given my commitment to allowing marginalized dialects into composition courses, I had been surprised by how quickly I decided Jason's narrative wasn't working—largely because of grammatical difference.

After class, the instructor and I met with Jason to discuss his paper. While the instructor focused on correcting Jason's grammar, I talked to Jason about his voice[1] and identity in the paper. I told him that many of his readers could interpret evidence of his dialect (African American English) as error. I asked him to consider maintaining his voice through vocabulary and the dialogue, but to adhere to "standard" English at other times, for example when indicating the tense of verbs. Following the meeting, I reminded Jason that I was available to meet with him if he wanted more feedback or direction in revising his paper. Jason never came to meet with me.

I wrote in a reflective journal I was keeping at the time that I had "no idea how to help Jason navigate instructors' expectations and his own goals," especially given my initial instinct to "ask him to erase much of the culture from his paper." Looking back at this experience and the words I used to describe it, I was enacting and perpetuating many of the ideologies I critique in this dissertation: I located "standard" edited American English (SEAE) only at the level of the sentence, did not acknowledge its connection to meaning, and often conflated it with grammar; I reacted to "difference" as inappropriate for college writing; and I assumed that other language varieties, but *not* SEAE, work to signal identity.

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[1] At that time, I understood *voice* to be a written identity largely related to style that is controlled by the author and expressed through the text. In Chapter 1, I draw on recent work by Matsuda and Tardy to expand and complicate the concept of *voice.*

My difficulty responding to both Jason and his writing illustrates the complexity of considering SEAE's role in writing classes. As a field, composition studies recognizes SEAE as a gatekeeper that often excludes nontraditional students from academia (Bizzell, Fox). However, instructors who want to resist SEAE and its gatekeeping function often feel conflicted because of the strong possibility that other classes and other contexts will expect mastery of this dialect. Indeed, many instructors feel compelled to demand SEAE for that very reason (Smith, Delpit). In large part, this dilemma explains why there has not yet been a strong challenge to the privilege afforded SEAE by composition studies: despite the field's recognition that this dialect functions as a gatekeeper, instructors are convinced by the argument that students need SEAE in order to access mainstream power and success. Scholars who address the role of SEAE in composition studies have not, as yet, considered the indexicality—the ideological process that links language and identity—of this privileged dialect. As a result, the stakes of mandated SEAE in composition courses have been undertheorized. As is evident in my reaction to Jason and his writing, though, the relationship between writing and identity matters greatly when considering the tensions surrounding SEAE in composition.

When I equated Jason's written identity (what I called "voice" at the time) with African American English and noted that asking Jason to remove some features of the nonstandard dialect from his paper amounted to "eras[ing] *the* culture" from his writing (emphasis added), I revealed an expectation that SEAE would not have "culture" of its own and would be identity-less. This project argues that the portrayal of SEAE as nonindexical—as not connected to identity—prevents composition studies from fully understanding the relationship between writing and identity and has, thus far, precluded an interrogation of the role of identity in SEAE's gatekeeping function. This dissertation, then, examines instructors' responses to non/standardness in anonymous student writing, exploring both the indexicality of SEAE and the rhetorical construction of SEAE as linguistically neutral.

Throughout the dissertation, I consider the presence, perpetuation, and production of ideologies related to language, standardness, and privilege—specifically standard language ideology and whiteness—in instructors' talk about student writing. I begin, in Chapter 1, by providing the reader with an extended description of composition studies'

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scholarship on SEAE, the connection between writing and identity, and linguistic neutrality. In this chapter, I challenge existing scholarship that locates SEAE at the level of the sentence and treats the dialect as both linguistically neutral and capable of erasing identity. I then shift to describing my own research on instructors' positioning of and response to this privileged dialect. In Chapter 2, I offer an explanation of my theoretical frames—language ideology and whiteness—and the methodology for collecting and analyzing qualitative data.

The focus of this project is indexicality and perceived linguistic neutrality associated with SEAE; chapters 3 and 4 explore each of these constructs in detail. Chapter 3 describes the indexicality of SEAE as it relates to instructors' perceptions of sentence- and text-level standardness and uncovers enduring indexical patterns that link SEAE with privileged, white student authors and disassociate African American students from this dialect. Despite these persistent patterns, common portrayals of SEAE as linguistically neutral—described in Chapter 1—mask the indexicality associated with this dialect and justify the privileging of this dialect. Because the indexicality of SEAE is hidden by its perceived linguistic neutrality, these patterns of identification based on language use work to produce or solidify damaging stereotypes, contributing to unearned privilege for some users of SEAE and persistent marginalization for others. Chapter 4, then, offers much-needed theorization of linguistic neutrality in order to ultimately challenge perceptions of SEAE as neutral. In this chapter, I interrogate the rhetorical construction of linguistic neutrality through an analysis of standard language discourse— the discursive manifestation of standard language ideology. This analysis not only uncovers the construction of linguistic neutrality but also challenges this harmful and inaccurate portrayal of SEAE. In addition, many of the pedagogical and practical suggestions I offer in the final chapter, Chapter 5, begin with a discursive deconstruction of linguistic neutrality that relates back to the findings of Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 makes connections between indexicality, neutrality, and related ideologies—SLI and whiteness—and articulates the stakes and affordances of my findings for composition scholarship, instructors, and students.

Ultimately, this project is part definition as I trouble the terms *written dialect*, *standardness*, and *neutrality*; part discovery as I reveal indexical patterns and constructed

linguistic neutrality; and part de-mystification as I aim to make ideologies visible in conversations about SEAE. My hope is that my readers will be troubled by the findings but also encouraged by the possibilities—the possibility to first acknowledge and then challenge the indexical patterns and constructed linguistic neutrality I expose in this project and the possibility to better understand the connection between writing and identity for the instructors who assign and read SEAE and for the students who are asked to revise.

Chapter 1
"Standard" Edited American English: Composition's Neutral Dialect

      For decades, the field of composition studies has wrestled with its position in academia, both resisting and embracing its role as a gatekeeper of academic literacies. In large part, the gatekeeping of composition studies is linked to enforced language conventions, such as "standard" edited American English (SEAE),[2] which work to maintain current power structures and ideologies. While the field largely acknowledges that mandating SEAE at the expense of all other language varieties is unfair as it privileges white, middle-class students (Bizzell, Bloom, Shroeder, Smitherman), scholars disagree about a solution. Regardless, most scholars and practitioners believe that we must teach our students to write in a way that will be academically and professionally valued. In other words, we must teach our students to be proficient in SEAE.

      SEAE is often treated as relatively stable, especially when the field considers the high stakes of learning (or not) this dialect. There is a sense that other professors and future employers can identify SEAE and, more precisely, can identify what is *not* standard. Indeed, composition studies' conception in the nineteenth century was based on this premise, with universities calling for first-year writing courses to prepare students for the demands of college writing and to "fix" any inadequate instruction that came before college (Connors). This treatment of SEAE as a singular standard that is valuable and necessary for our students has contributed to the dialect's position as the largely-unquestioned default language variety to both teach and expect in our field. When composition scholars do interrogate SEAE's position in the field and in our classes, they often focus on students' access to this dialect and the cultural shift many of our students

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[2] Although commonly referred to as standard English or, simply, English, I follow the lead of "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (SRTOL) and Lisa Delpit, adding "edited" to indicate that this language variety is both written and no one's primary dialect—though, it is more similar to some primary dialects than others. Furthermore, including "American" acknowledges the many World Englishes that also have standard varieties.

may encounter when learning and using SEAE and academic discourses (Bartholomae, Delpit "The Skin").

The concern with providing access to SEAE and the resultant issues of cultural assimilation has, for the most part, eclipsed the interrogation of common language ideologies that create perceptions of SEAE as a neutral filter through which students with "nonstandard" primary language varieties—or more precisely, their language use—can become standard. Therefore, although composition studies acknowledges SEAE as a powerful dialect that affords privilege to one group of students over others, an ideological blindspot (which I argue is related to both whiteness and standard language ideology) interferes with the recognition that SEAE also works to signal, or index, these privileged students. In fact, this dissertation argues that SEAE is often, and perhaps unintentionally, positioned as linguistically neutral[3] by composition scholarship and instructors—a positioning that contributes to the privileging of SEAE, masks the relationship between SEAE and perceived authorial identity, and perpetuates race and class-based privilege within our classrooms. To make this argument, I examine composition instructors' responses to anonymous student texts, focusing on instructors' talk about student writing, patterns of error in writing, and identity[4] as it relates to writing. This examination involves identifying indexical patterns that emerge as instructors construct and assign identity to authors of privileged language varieties, specifically student-produced SEAE,[5] and exploring the rhetorical construction of linguistic neutrality.

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[3] Briefly, I define linguistic neutrality as perceptions of language and language use as normal and unaffiliated. I will develop this definition in more detail later in this chapter and in Chapter 4.

[4] In this project, I rely heavily on Bucholtz and Hall's definition of identity, which accounts for both "the social positioning of self and other" (586) and the ways in which these means of identification and marking are "constituted in linguistic interaction" (585). Their definition suggests that identity is a relational process located within a discursive context.

[5] I acknowledge the conflict in both identifying the students' writing as SEAE and asserting that SEAE is neither singular nor stable and is context dependent and conditional. However, I contend that students are instructed in and on SEAE throughout the educational process and, given the prompt for the essays used in this study (see Chapter 2 for a description of these student papers), are writing in what they believe to be SEAE. Furthermore, the papers that I chose for this study are well within a range of standardness that composition instructors can expect to see in their first-year writing courses—a point that is further articulated in Chapter 2 and confirmed by the instructors during the interviews.

Providing Access or Valuing Home Languages: A Dichotomy is Born

The practice of gatekeeping has deep roots within composition studies. Christopher Schroeder traces the origin of gatekeeping within composition to the nineteenth century, when composition courses "were charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the cultural capital of academic institutions" (181), and he is not alone. As Sharon Crowley states, "the history of composition studies has been written in the fortunes of the required introductory course in composition" (4). These courses were viewed as remedial and were charged with bringing students up to a skill level they should have already achieved in order to function within other university courses. According to Robert Connors, composition courses were born out of an early "literacy crisis" in 1874 when Harvard "instituted its first entrance examinations in written English [and discovered that] large numbers of American boys from the best schools were incapable of correct writing" (4). The first composition course at Harvard became a requirement for first-year students by 1885 and within five years "the majority of U.S. colleges and universities had established required freshman composition courses" (Connors 5). While much has changed since then, composition studies is still linked to the first-year writing course, which although no longer considered remedial[6] is intended to assimilate all students to college writing (however that may be defined at various institutions).

As the field has grown and professionalized, there has been increasing consensus that writing does not exist apart from context and culture, and therefore, that writing courses do more than simply teach rules about writing; they also ask students to participate in and enact various Discourses[7] and cultures. According to Lynn Bloom, composition courses function as a rite of passage into academia, ensuring the "promulgat[ion of] the … values that are thought to be essential to the proper functioning of students in the academy" (656). The perspective that writing is cultural and linked to values also means that teaching writing is a political act, one imbued with power that necessarily privileges some students over others. Understandably, this view of

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[6] Remedial writing courses have since largely become the realm of Basic Writing—both a subset of composition studies and a separate field with its own journals, conferences, and courses.

[7] James Gee defines Discourses as "identity kits" that include "sets of values and viewpoints," which a person must accept in order to become a member of the discursive community ("What is Literacy" 4).

composition's role in academia has introduced new concerns about students who have not been exposed to certain values and behaviors in their homes and communities and students whose cultural beliefs are in opposition to or conflict with those required by the academy. Because the writing that we teach in academia works to further privilege those who already have cultural and linguistic capital[8] valued by academia and, to an extent, most professional settings, teaching writing is (rightly) seen as a form of gatekeeping. While many scholars and practitioners have directly resisted the gatekeeping role of composition, fighting to increase access to academia and challenge the current system of power and domination (Crowley, Shor, Bizzell, Fox), others have suggested that our students recognize composition courses—and academia in general—as a gatekeeper to the skills and abilities they value and desire, which presumably will lead to both academic and mainstream success (Smith).

As with many debates, a false dichotomy has formed in response to the view of composition as political and in service of the status quo: either respect students' home language varieties (which often includes an unstated argument that composition instructors should not demand an adherence to SEAE as it risks devaluing other language varieties) or provide *all* students with access to mainstream success by teaching SEAE (which often means that there is not enough time in composition courses to teach or allow writing in non-dominant language varieties). This dichotomy has pervaded composition studies scholarship. Here, I briefly explore the way this dichotomy is commonly represented.[9] Scholars such as Peter Elbow and Geneva Smitherman have made waves and built reputations (and followings) by arguing that students' home languages should be a welcomed and assumed component of all composition courses. Elbow, along with ten co-authors, insists that, despite the real structural constraints in which we operate—structural constraints that seem to demand the teaching of SEAE—, "it still makes good pedagogical and human sense" to invite home languages and dialects into the writing classroom (Bean et al. 37). Similarly, Geneva Smitherman in *Talkin That Talk* challenges

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[8] The terms cultural and linguistic capital come from Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that "words…are *signs of wealth,* intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and *signs of authority,* intended to be believed and obeyed" (502). The notion of capital is a useful metaphor for considering how people accumulate, pass on, and protect the power and authority associated with various valued social constructs—in this case the power and authority associated with language and language practices.
[9] For a more extended exploration of this ongoing debate, see Bruch and Marback's *The Hope and The Legacy*.

the notion that SEAE is the only dialect that can accomplish the work of academia. However, more often than not this position still works to privilege SEAE, as students are expected to learn and master "the standard"—but to do so through an acknowledged starting point of another language or dialect.

Though not a compositionist, Lisa Delpit is well-known in the field for arguing that, given the high stakes of learning SEAE, marginalized students in particular need to be offered explicit instruction in and on this dialect in order to gain access to the culture of power (*Other People's Children* 283). For Delpit, the consequences are too severe to *not* give students access to the power associated with SEAE. Delpit's perspective does not deny the unequal power relations associated with SEAE but attempts to increase access to this privileged dialect. Typically the position of increasing access to SEAE is seen as a choice not to challenge the dominant dialect in academia—or, more precisely, not to challenge SEAE by teaching or allowing other language varieties.

While the response to SEAE in composition studies is commonly constructed as a dichotomy, there are, of course, many other perspectives and approaches that attempt to bridge what could be potentially compatible positions and, in fact, argue that the division between these perspectives is neither definite nor rigid. For example, educators and scholars alike often argue for a "both/and" approach: *both* value home languages and dialects *and* teach students SEAE in order to increase the likelihood of mainstream success for traditionally marginalized students. In fact, very few scholars reside wholly on one side of the debate. Elbow and his co-authors, for example, are representative of the "value home languages and dialects" side of the debate. However, they also state that educators should at times provide assignments that students will only compose in their home languages or dialects, but also acknowledge that at other times composing in or translating into SEAE will be necessary and important. Delpit's work, which clearly supports teaching SEAE, also defies the dichotomy in its emphatic call for valuing students' primary language varieties. Furthermore, scholars like Anne Curzan, Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur attempt to challenge the position of SEAE by teaching students the politics associated with privileging one

language variety over another (and encouraging others to do the same). According to Curzan,

> [i]t is possible to teach Standard English while at the same time creating a meta-awareness of that educational process, so that students are empowered to examine the system and its language hierarchies critically, so that they can challenge that view if they should choose to—with full control of the language variety of power (342).

Horner et al. suggest a classroom practice that challenges power associated with certain language varieties by asking "what produces the appearance of conformity [to dominant standards], as well as what that appearance might and might not do, for whom, and how" (304). Despite the increasing bridges between both sides of the debate, some scholars feel more strongly about challenging SEAE than others, just as other scholars are more committed to the idea of SEAE as a key path to power.

Within the different responses to the problem of unequal power relations associated with SEAE, there are a few constants. All of the scholars who engage this "problem" are invested in a solution for their students that works to redistribute the linguistic capital that currently is "owned" by SEAE and its users by increasing the value associated with other language varieties and/or increasing access to SEAE for traditionally marginalized students. As such, there is tremendous goodwill within the field of composition studies (and other fields) toward wanting to both challenge SEAE's powerful, privileged position within academia and increase access to higher education for traditionally marginalized students through changes in language policies and perceptions. All of these scholars also feel restricted by the structural constraints within which they operate—including the widespread public and professional support of SEAE and standard language ideology, which creates commonsense beliefs about both the superiority of SEAE and the inferiority of most other language varieties.[10]

Agreements and goodwill aside, composition studies' ongoing privileging of SEAE rests on the implicit (and therefore often unquestioned) assumption that once students have mastered this privileged dialect, their language use, at a minimum, will not

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[10] While this definition of standard language ideology is cursory, I address the concept in greater detail later in this chapter.

elicit discrimination—they will be linguistically unmarked.[11] As the following example shows, the perception of SEAE as linguistically unmarked rests on an assumption that this dialect is nonindexical—that is, it does not signal or reveal identity. However, this dissertation argues that perceptions of identity-less-ness are likely a symptom of normative identities—white and middle class—being unmarked and unnamed. An example: In 1971, a professor at California State College (Jack Connor) exchanged letters with William Irmscher, the editor of *CCC,* one of composition studies' leading journals. Their exchange addresses the value of SEAE and its ability not only to increase access to mainstream success but also to erase difference and sidestep "extraneous and irrelevant things," or identity markers such as education, religion, and race (Barnett 22). To argue his point, Connor comments on the identity-less-ness of an author of newly published guidelines. Connor states:

> I cannot tell anything…about him except that he is in command of the standard written language. There is no sign of his native speech: I cannot tell what color he is, from what race he sprang, which social traumas troubled him in his youth, what occupation his parents followed, which church he has ceased to go to— nothing (qtd. in Barnett 22).

Like many who believe that spoken "standard" English in the United States (a network pronunciation) is accentless, both Connor and Irmscher assert that SEAE lacks a written "accent" or other possible social markers. Indeed, Connor suggests that because SEAE is no one's primary dialect, it is likely impossible to tell from the written language an author's race and class among other social indicators.

The assumption that SEAE can and does mask social identity is prevalent in composition studies' scholarship, regardless of scholars' positions on whether/how to teach SEAE. In fact, many scholars both believe that SEAE masks identity and object to the glorification of this linguistic "passing." In these critiques, scholars question the role of SEAE in composition courses precisely because of its ability to "unmark" text and author alike. For example, Beverly Moss and Keith Walters agree that SEAE erases difference, asserting "the more that people become educated, the more likely they are to

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[11] In linguistic scholarship, markedness is a position that is contrasted with its "neutral" opposite which is the form that is more common and viewed as "normal" (McArthur 645). Although the concept of *unmarked* is often applied to spoken English, I am interested in how written language also can be perceived as unmarked. Un/markedness is further explored and defined in Chapters 3 and 4.

have learned to bleach their speech and writing of markers that reveal their native regional and social dialect, especially if these dialects are considered nonstandard by society at large" (444). They make this point in order to implicitly argue that this practice of "unmarking" language is hegemonic. However, what much of composition scholarship ignores is that it is impossible for a dialect to be completely unmarked. According to Donald Rubin, so-called "'unmarked forms' are really just normative forms, that is, representing social and political prestige" (6). In the case of SEAE, I assert that although this normative dialect may work to erase some identity cues in texts, it still signals a privileged author, often white and middle or upper-middle class.

In this project, I argue that assumptions that SEAE is linguistically unmarked and nonindexical and the continued, nearly field-wide privileging of SEAE (in part, associated with these assumptions) work to reinforce the portrayal of SEAE as linguistically neutral. Moreover, the perception of SEAE as linguistically neutral masks the indexing work that this dialect necessarily accomplishes. However, within the confines of a debate that focuses on whether to teach SEAE or other language varieties (or both) and students' access to SEAE, both the indexicality and the linguistic neutrality of this privileged dialect go unquestioned, unacknowledged, and perhaps unnoticed.

"Students' Right to Their Own Language"

To understand the field's current position on SEAE, it is useful to look back to the first and most widely known official policy statement on this issue. In 1972, the Executive Committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication passed an unprecedented resolution entitled "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (SRTOL), which was later published in *CCC* along with a background statement providing linguistic support for the group's position on this controversial issue. The resolution argues—as its name suggests—that students have a right to use "whatever [language variety] in which they find their own identity and style" (2), further stating that privileging one dialect "amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another" (3). While the resolution itself is quite short, the accompanying background attempts to provide English and composition instructors with the linguistic background they need in order to resist many mainstream language myths, such as the superiority of

one dialect over all others. The background includes a definition of dialect, a discussion of the impact of dialect on reading and writing, possible classroom approaches for respecting language diversity, and ways to reconceptualize the perceived dominance of SEAE and spoken "standard" English.

As Smitherman argues in "CCCC's Role in the Struggle for Language Rights," SRTOL is truly a product of its time—a time of civil rights, relative political liberalism, and a heightened awareness of racial inequality in the United States. The *kairos* was right for an institutional resolution that called for linguistic equality. However, despite the political climate calling for equal rights, there had been little-to-no public education around the legitimacy of other language varieties. While in many ways it feels as though we have made little progress since that time (given the ongoing negative responses to African American English [AAE] and the extensive support for the English Only movement), the resolution represents the first official effort within composition studies to institutionalize linguistic equality.

Given the revolutionary work SRTOL aimed to accomplish, the accompanying background statement sought to predict and address possible areas of opposition—in large part by educating compositionists about dialects. The background defines dialects as "phonological, lexical, and syntactic patterns and variations of [a] given 'community'" (3). Importantly, it states that meaning, which they locate in the "deep structure" of language, is not affected by dialectal differences. As a result, the committee argues that teachers should ignore (at least temporarily) surface grammatical "errors," which—as the resolution states—may not be errors at all if the issue is one of dialect, and privilege content over "spelling, punctuation, and usage." The background statement also encourages teachers to instruct their students to similarly shift their focus from grammar to content (8). Furthermore, the background states that SEAE, a dialect, is easy to identify and teach (a statement with which many compositionists would likely disagree), but that teachers should not be unnecessarily impressed by "finicky correctness" as opposed to the "still more important features of language" (e.g., "vigorous and thoughtful statements") (8-9). To support the call for shifting attention from correctness, which they link to standardness (8), to content, the background names "the essential functions of writing as expressing oneself, communicating information and attitudes, and discovering

meaning through both logic and metaphor" (8), arguing that "all languages and all dialects are essentially the same…regardless of how varied the surface structure might be" (9). Through this line of reasoning, the background implies that dialectal differences, in writing, manifest as grammatical differences ("spelling, punctuation, and usage" [8]) that are not related to meaning or "the essential functions of writing." This positioning of dialects, including SEAE, at the surface level or even the sentence level, then, conflates dialect and grammar, linking both to issues of standardness and correctness while divorcing them from meaning, discursive identity, and rhetorical maneuvering. Conversely, meaning and ideas are located at the level of the text and linked to individual (as opposed to social) identities and are seemingly unrelated to standards, grammar, and dialect. Once dialect is reduced to the level of the sentence and conflated with grammar, it is dismissed in the name of social justice and equality, and the corresponding social identity becomes as unimportant as the linguistic difference.

Admittedly, the resolution and background tackle an enormously complicated issue. The ideologies surrounding language and standardness, in addition to an incomplete understanding of language and meaning, make for a murky problem space. For example, in the process of trying to parse the difference between dialectal difference and error, the authors seem to make an assumption that the kinds of "errors"[12] that might be attributed to dialect are and will be distinct from the kinds of errors, at either the sentence or text level, that result from a lack of experience, trying on discourses,[13] or a number of other possible causes. In fact, the background to the resolution lists several writing errors that they present as distinct from dialect and which they "do not condone," including "ill-organized, imprecise, undefined, inappropriate writing" (8). Certainly, categories of "error" and difference are not stable—any student could have multiple types of "errors" in their writing. Reasons for "error" aside, the background to the resolution largely locates error that the authors attribute to dialect at the level of the sentence and conflates it with grammar. In part, this move makes good rhetorical sense: dialects do have their own grammars, so differences in dialect will also include grammatical

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[12] I use scare quotes around error to acknowledge the complexity of distinguishing between unintentional mistakes and (un)intentional linguistic difference.
[13] In David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University," he argues that students "try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes" based on the discourse(s) they are (attempting to) appropriate (624).

differences that writing instructors may notice and wish to address—or, as the background encourages, look past in order to be more accepting of other language varieties. Nonetheless, conflating dialect with grammar and relegating these linguistic concepts to the sentence is problematic for multiple reasons, perhaps most obviously because it is misleading.

Distinguishing between dialect and grammar is complicated—in part because both of these terms are contested for various reasons. While *dialect* is frequently defined as language use marked by phonological, lexical, and syntactic patterns that are connected to regional and/or cultural difference, it is much more difficult to actually identify dialectal boundaries (including the borders between dialects and the difference between language and dialect). Furthermore, given the politics associated with language use and recognition, *dialect* is often taken to mean vernacular, slang, or simply incorrect language. *Grammar* is not as easily defined as *dialect*; however, most linguists acknowledge that there are prescriptive and descriptive grammars (the first being a set of rules that people should follow, the latter patterns of actual usage). *Dialects*, then, are distinguishable by their *grammars* (sometimes both prescriptive and descriptive) as well as pronunciation and vocabulary. Certainly, though, this explanation is lacking. To begin with, the commonly accepted definition of *dialect* seems to focus on oral language over writing by not offering an equivalent to "pronunciation" for written dialects. Yet, scholarship on contrastive rhetorics, voice,[14] and register often acknowledges (and sometimes tries to represent) the influence of cultural differences on writers' thought patterns and rhetorical maneuverings—differences that, of course, extend beyond grammar and vocabulary. This undefined and undertheorized rhetorical feature of written dialects is a key factor in considering how composition courses and teachers can be more inclusive of dialects beyond SEAE. Specifically, while SRTOL encourages teachers to "value" (or more precisely, tolerate) non-standard dialects by not focusing on their sentence-level features, it ignores the possibility of text-level manifestations of dialect (coherence and meaning, for example), which instructors could judge as incorrect or inappropriate for the classroom context.

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[14] The recent conceptualization of *voice* as a cumulative written effect located at the nexus of the writer, reader, and text (Matsuda and Tardy) will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter.

Additionally troublesome, when *grammar* and *dialect* are conflated and dismissed as sentence-level issues, they are likely to be perceived as distinct from meaning. Interestingly, the SRTOL statement encourages teachers to distinguish between dialect and meaning as a means of surmounting dialectal biases *and* acknowledges that dialects "both reflect and are determined by shared regional, social, or cultural perspectives" (3). Although SRTOL does not explicitly make the connection, these "perspectives"—these manifestations of culture—of course, are inextricably linked to meaning making. As a component of dialect, grammar also is linked to "regional, social, or cultural perspectives" *and* meaning. Linguists such as Talmy Givón and Michael Halliday have long asserted that grammar—let alone dialect—is inextricable from meaning. For Givón, the connection between meaning and grammar is largely tied to grammar's function of creating coherence between a clause or proposition "and its wider discourse context" (13). Halliday makes an even stronger argument by suggesting that language is always already about meaning—as such, no aspect of language, including grammar, can be separated from meaning (xiv). The importance of this point to the field of composition cannot be overstated, as reconceptualizing grammar beyond the level of the sentence to include coherence, which is typically relegated to the realm of rhetoric, and challenging the distinction between grammar, dialect, and meaning reintegrates dialects into the structure and meaning of texts. These understandings of grammar and dialect complicate the SRTOL background statement which asserts "dialect seldom obscures clear … writing" (8). Certainly one could argue that coherence plays a role in the perceived clarity of a text and that ultimately every language choice we make impacts meaning. Additionally complicating the relationship between dialect, meaning, and clarity is the role of readers. As the background to the resolution acknowledges, the reception of dialects—particularly stigmatized dialects—may impede meaning and clarity. So, while SRTOL is admirable in its intentions, linking dialect to grammar and divorcing both from meaning is neither accurate nor useful in addressing the overwhelming privilege afforded SEAE.

As the first quotation from SRTOL in the previous paragraph suggests, dialects are supremely cultural and are explicitly acknowledged as such by the SRTOL background statement. However, when the SRTOL background positions dialect as

something to be ignored, it also implies that the related social identities and cultural differences do not matter. In fact, the resolution states that "all languages and dialects are essentially the same" (9) and suggests that there is mutual intelligibility in all students' writing,[15] that the meaning is the same regardless of surface features, and that those surface features should be ignored by both students and teachers. The background to the resolution is likely trying to make the point that all languages and dialects are linguistically equal; however, it also argues (perhaps unintentionally) that dialect is not related to and does not affect meaning and therefore should be—to some extent— ignored. In the process of treating dialect as unimportant (in that it should not impact communication and meaning making) and something students and teachers should ignore, dialectal differences are treated as arbitrary and social identity is treated as unimportant. The linguistic differences, now arbitrary instead of cultural, are effectively brushed aside in service of what is deemed to be more consequential, and importantly, to the assumed benefit of the students who use non-standard dialects—a rhetorical maneuver that aligns with colorblind rhetorics' assertion that race doesn't matter. If dialectal difference and social identities don't matter (despite their very real political implications), the "problem" and the solution become individual not structural. As Thomas West and others (Bhabha, Lorde, Harris, Olson) have convincingly argued, differences should not be ignored—or even merely tolerated—as they are important "signs of struggle" (West) with which we should critically engage. West posits that "difference seen as benign variation (diversity) […] bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious empty pluralism" (2). In addition to engaging difference as political, Horner et al. encourage a view of difference as "a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening" (303). In the context of composition studies, engaging difference requires acknowledging the social identities associated with not just "other" language varieties but also SEAE. Furthermore, engaging difference must occur at all levels of language use, which runs counter to the SRTOL advice for teachers. Engaging difference and its implications, then, is a key element in social change

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[15] As Bruce Horner and others have argued, despite the resolution's title, there is an assumption that students will be writing in a variety of English.

Although SRTOL and its background primarily focus on encouraging instructors to be more tolerant or welcoming of multiple dialects, it cannot help but tackle issues of standardness. In fact, the background both links dialect to issues of standardness and tries to distinguish between the two. According to the background, the "standard" is produced from repeatedly positioning certain sentence-level features as "correct" (8). These features are linked to dialect, distinct from meaning and only important to those concerned with "finicky correctness" (8). However, the authors of SRTOL also identify standards they believe to be distinct from dialect (and, therefore, likely exist at the text level)—specifically organization, clarity, and appropriacy (8). Standardness, then, is not simply located at either the sentence level or text level, but is interwoven throughout language. However, the background statement is imbalanced in its treatment of standardness—locating standardness primarily at the level of the sentence—and repeatedly calls for instructors to only focus on meaning, content, and "the essential functions of writing" (8), not dialectal sentence-level standardness.[16]

The common practice of linking dialect to issues of standardness calls on powerful language ideologies that perpetuate commonsense beliefs about a perceived ranking among language varieties, with certain dialects not only afforded more prestige but also perceived as superior to others. While there are real political inequities between dialects, the field of linguistics has long argued that all language varieties are equal in their linguistic worth (Lippi-Green 10). In other words, because all languages and language varieties are socially-constructed, rule-based forms of communication that have evolved to suit the needs of their users, language varieties are not inherently good or bad, inferior or superior, and linked more or less to intelligence. In short, no one language is linguistically better than another. Nonetheless, the term *dialect* often works as shorthand for referring to nonstandard language varieties that are perceived as both inappropriate and inadequate for the work of formal educational and professional situations. This practice is further reinforced by good-intentioned calls for teachers to look past dialectal difference in order to get at the real work of evaluating content and meaning.

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[16] This problematic treatment of standardness will be addressed in Chapter 3, when I examine the ways instructors' conceptions of standardness influence their readings of student-author identities.

While the SRTOL statement is seldom critiqued for its treatment of dialect, it has been criticized for ultimately calling for the mastery of SEAE. Indeed, after arguing that dialect does not matter (since "all…dialects are essentially the same" [9]), the background of the resolution states, seemingly unproblematically, that "[t]he speaker of a minority dialect still will write [S]EAE in formal situations" (15). The embedded assumption is that speakers "of a minority dialect" always have been expected to write in SEAE "in formal situations" and always will be.[17] Here, the background suggests that students' own languages are valuable within schools if they serve as stepping stones toward mastery of SEAE or if these languages and dialects do not interfere with learning SEAE. Stated more positively, SRTOL appears to be one of the first "both/and" arguments about SEAE, calling for *both* the valuing of home languages *and* teaching students SEAE. Rosina Lippi-Green, a linguist who is not often called into this conversation, would likely label SRTOL's ultimate claim—that students will need to master SEAE because it is more appropriate in certain situations (such as for standardized testing and in professional arenas)—an appropriacy argument. Lippi-Green criticizes such arguments, which she sees as working to "simultaneously acknowledge and reject" stigmatized language varieties all the while perpetuating standard language ideologies (107). Many other educators, though, are convinced by the logic of appropriacy. As mentioned earlier, Delpit and others support teaching SEAE precisely because of its power and argue that educators must give all students access to this privileged form of communication so they can call on it when appropriate. Furthermore, Moss and Walters state that "replacing a model of language based on correctness with one based on appropriateness … forces [one] to think constantly about *why* a particular usage should be labeled inappropriate or appropriate in a given context" (445). From this perspective, teaching appropriacy would likely include more than simply telling students when SEAE is or is not appropriate but would also foreground the ideologies behind these designations and challenge traditional perspectives about the use of dialects in various contexts. Similarly, many scholars and practitioners believe that, while not perfect,

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[17] Here the background to SRTOL unreflexively moves between speech and writing—a practice that linguists have successfully and prolifically argued against as not only unproductive but inaccurate.

welcoming and valuing linguistic difference, even if one teaches and demands SEAE, is a useful first step in challenging the hegemony of SEAE.

All of the aspects of the SRTOL background that I have critiqued—that the background conflates dialect with grammar and standardness, locates dialect at the sentence-level and divorces it from meaning, erases cultural differences important to and social identities associated with dialects, and continues to call for the mastery of SEAE—allow for positioning the dilemma of dialect and language in the writing classroom as one of translation. The background itself implies that either students or teachers can do the work to "translate" ideas from one language variety to another and that meaning will not be affected in the process.[18] In fact, asking students to compose ideas and arguments that will be valued in academia using "whatever language variety" operates on likely false assumptions that all ideas and arguments *can* be written in other dialects without being stripped of important, meaning-making difference and that the ideas and arguments of these other dialects will be equally valued with ones that are more closely related to SEAE. However, acknowledging the interconnectedness of grammar, dialect, and meaning challenges the notion that we should be expecting "translation" of any kind. Unfortunately, translation is a prevalent component in discussions about SRTOL and SEAE that suggest writing in SEAE for many students is an exercise in transference.

Arguments that rely on translation (implicitly or explicitly) show evidence of powerful ideologies that imply students (or teachers) can simply transfer their ideas from one (seemingly) neutral language variety to another. In addition to the problematic nature of treating language as though it is neutral—a mere container for ideas—and ignoring the interplay between language and meaning, translation arguments also commonly confuse dialect and register. Although *register* is not often explicitly addressed and maintains fuzzy boundaries with style and genre, it is regularly understood to be language varieties that are linked to contexts as opposed to users (Biber and Finegan 4). Registers are socially agreed upon language conventions that are suited to particular topics, contexts, audiences, and purposes. For example, academic discourse is a register of SEAE that is tied to particular contexts—in this case schooling and academia. Dialects and registers

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[18] Indeed, the concept of translation is one that extends well beyond SRTOL. Again, Bean et al. is an example of a more recent argument that assumes translation is possible and desirable.

are interconnected; all dialects have multiple registers, and many registers allow for multiple dialects. A simple acknowledgement of this fact can do important work to challenge the construction of SEAE as superior, stable, and singular—SEAE has multiple registers as do stigmatized language varieties such as AAE. Similarly, academic discourse can be enacted in multiple dialects.[19] When scholars suggest that students should be invited to compose in their home language varieties and then translate into SEAE, they not only make assumptions about the registers of students' home language varieties (that students have available to them a register of their home language appropriate for the meaning-making and rhetorical task at hand) but also imply a static and singular register of SEAE and potentially ignore the possibility of allowing students to compose in (and *not* translate from) formal registers within other language varieties.

From Language Variety to Language Ideology

The background to SRTOL is decidedly focused on dialect and structures of language. However, it suggests that compositionists should be concerned with the politics and power associated with language and dialects. Specifically, the resolution states that because there is no inherent superiority or inferiority among dialects (certainly not accounting for the social and political dimensions of dialects), "the question will no longer turn on language *per se*, but will concern the nature of a society which places great value on given surface features of language and proscribes others" (9). Stated another way, the background encourages composition studies to consider language ideology as opposed to language variety—a suggestion that has been well received. For over 30 years, scholars have examined language ideology (though this term is rarely used in composition scholarship), exploring the ways in which language use indicates and constitutes social groups and suggesting ways to invite students to try on various language practices in hopes they can one day signal academic or discipline-specific group membership through their language choices. While there is much more to say about language ideology in general (and I will do so in Chapter 2), I first explore standard

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[19] Here, again, it is worth noting that while academic discourse *can* be enacted in multiple dialects from a linguistic perspective, there are political factors that limit the range of options and strongly encourage—if not mandate—the use of SEAE.

language ideology (SLI) as it works to (re)position SEAE as "correct" despite linguists' (and some compositionists') efforts to dispel myths of linguistic superiority.

According to Lesley Milroy, "the chief characteristic of a standard [language] ideology is the belief that there is one and only one correct spoken form of the language, modelled [sic] on a single correct written form" (174). This one correct form is often identifiable in contrast to all that is not standard. Indeed, in contrast to the standard, all other language varieties are labeled as "non-standard," which can quickly become *sub*standard. The standard language is viewed as superior and preferable to all other language varieties—it is perceived as rightfully privileged because it is *correct*. According to Jane Hill, "prestige and correctness go together in [SLI], because it is believed that prestigious people speak the prestigious form, which deserves its prestige because it is correct" (35). Furthermore, Hill argues that SLI asks us to believe that "to speak the correct and prestigious form will bring social and economic benefits, so it is important, as well as possible and desirable, for people to learn to speak this way" (35). From this perspective, the choice to use and advocate for the one correct standard is common sense—why wouldn't we encourage people to learn the standard language variety, thereby increasing their access to the associated powers and privileges?[20] Because SLI creates an environment in which it is common sense to privilege one language variety, it also becomes acceptable and common sense to discriminate against other language varieties. In fact, SLI is so convincing that even those who are least served by this way of thinking often believe in one correct form of the language. When people from nonstandard language backgrounds support the notion of a superior, standard dialect, they contribute to the marginalization of their own language varieties. Embedded in arguments of the standard as preferred are assumptions about common goals. In the context of the educational system, the assumed common goals are educational success (i.e. grades) and success in the marketplace. These assumptions fail to acknowledge that not only might students have different goals but also, presumably, students could achieve success (in education or the marketplace) using other language varieties.

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[20] Treating aspects of language use or reception as common sense is a key component of language ideologies. In fact, Rumsey defines language ideologies as "shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world" (qtd. in Woolard & Schiefflin 57).

Lippi-Green argues that SLI does more than identify which form of language is desirable and standard in that it "rejects or marginalizes those varieties…which are markedly [not standard]" (131). Milroy and Milroy demonstrate the rationale behind this acceptable marginalization: SLI purports that because "people *ought* to use the standard language…it is quite right to discriminate against non-standard users, as such usage is a sign of stupidity, ignorance, perversity, moral degeneracy" (33). Furthermore, Hill suggests that people can interpret the use of non-standard language varieties as "an absence of proper ambition" (35). SLI provides the belief system and justification necessary for mandating SEAE and denigrating other language varieties—and the people who use them—and masks the politics associated with such acts.

Given the perception of the standard language as "correct," it is not surprising that the "standard" is treated like capital and described by Michael Silverstein as "a realizable asset that can be achieved so as to increase overall personal value" (291). However, as the quotation from Silverstein usefully demonstrates, it is not enough for standard languages to be thought of as better than other language varieties, they also have to be widely available, "realizable," in order to be fully endorsed *and* hide power relations. Indeed, standard language varieties must be perceived as unaffiliated: *all* groups stand to benefit from using the standard language variety, no one group has more access than any other to the standard language, and the standard language is not connected to identity; it is nonindexical. I will discuss the first two aspects of *unaffiliated* here.

According to Silverstein, there is an assumed "common agreement" of support for the standard, which works to hide other power interests in particular language varieties (288, 290). This "common agreement" is associated with both "correctness" and the perception of "the standard" as unaffiliated. Deborah Cameron explains that the standard language "is portrayed above all as *neutral* and *universal* language, one that is available to all parties equally and does not predetermine the outcome of their discussion" (120, original emphasis). Understandably, this portrayal of the standard has influenced literacy education in our schools. According to Lippi-Green, "the primary educational goal in our schools brings together the acquisition of *literacy* with the acceptance and acknowledgment of a *Standard US English*" (104)—in other words, schools should teach children to read and write in SEAE. The connection between schooling and standard

languages is bidirectional: schools teach and expect standard languages because they are superior and correct, and the fact that standard languages are taught and expected in schools allows for a perception of widespread availability of these privileged language varieties. While the perception of universal availability is most commonly associated with spoken language, it also applies to written language. For example, the assumption exists that whether or not students have exposure to SEAE from their home environments, schools, as part of their equalizing function, will provide access to this language variety.

One final outcome of SLI is the "naturalization" (Silverstein 291) of standard languages. Both the perceived superiority and universality of standard languages lead to common sense support of the language variety. As Silverstein argues, there is "a background assumption that Standard is 'natural' if not neutral in some sense. And indeed, this naturalization of the commodity that people are able to acquire becomes a key leitmotif underlying specific advocacies of Standard" (291). The "naturalization" of standard languages positions these privileged dialects in direct conflict with nonstandard language varieties that are often identifiable not only through contrast with "Standard" but also through their close affiliation with a particular social group (e.g., AAE). In fact, explicitly relating nonstandard dialects to particular social groups while SEAE is perceived as linguistically unmarked and unaffiliated—despite the acknowledgement that SEAE is a dialect and dialects are cultural—is part of the justification for the use of SEAE as opposed to nonstandard language varieties. The treatment of standard languages as unaffiliated and natural, I argue, positions them as linguistically neutral, a term I take up shortly and work to (re)define throughout this project.

Despite the inability to define SEAE, aside from defining it in opposition to what is nonstandard, SEAE is commonly positioned (within composition studies, more broadly, and in SLI) as singular and stable. According to Lippi-Green and Milroy and Milroy, though, SEAE is as much a myth or abstraction (respectively) as any other language variety. Importantly, SEAE is treated as a stable construct—the one correct form of written English in the United States—when, in fact, what counts as "standard" is subjective and conditional. However, acknowledging SEAE as constantly shifting, socially constructed, and difficult to define—especially when trying to teach students not

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only what "it" is but also how to achieve "it"—is at odds with continuing to privilege and enforce SEAE as the "official" language of education and most US institutions. To do so would disrupt key premises that make SLI compelling, namely that SEAE is unaffiliated. Indeed, even an acknowledgement of the disagreement about what counts as SEAE (e.g., disagreements among handbook authors or editors or shifting levels of acceptability depending on the producers, recipients, genres, and contexts of texts) could challenge its position as natural and unaffiliated, as *the* linguistically-neutral standard.

Neutral Language in Composition Studies: Dialects, Discourses, and Registers

Standard language ideology offers an explanation for how composition studies can simultaneously acknowledge the connection between language and culture, recognize that SEAE privileges white, middle-class students, and actively—though perhaps not knowingly—contribute to the perception of SEAE as linguistically neutral. While this tension and SLI are seldom addressed in composition scholarship, there has been significant attention to the ways in which academic discourse and essayist literacy function as neutral language practices within academia. Before I go further in exploring the treatment of these registers in composition studies, I will first define academic discourse and essayist literacy and explain how they relate to SEAE, as described in the literature and for the purpose of this project.

According to Patricia Bizzell in *Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*, academic discourse is "the language of a community"—in this case, an academic community—and "at any given time its most standard or widely accepted features reflect the cultural preferences of the most powerful people in the community" (1). According to Bizzell, the "standard or widely accepted features" of academic discourse include a grapholect (presumably SEAE, though not explicitly stated or defined as such), traditional academic genres, skeptical objectivity, and an argumentative persona (2). In addition to Bizzell's explicit definition of academic discourse, this register[21] is also implicitly defined as unmarked—primarily in contrast to the "marked form of discourse use" (Matsuda 192) that the authors in the collection term *alternative* discourses.

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[21] The register *academic discourse* contains many genres, which are conventionalized language practices linked to recurring situations (Devitt).

Defining academic discourse—like all standard language practices—through contrast to what it is *not* is common practice: it is much easier to identify what is not standard than to articulate what is standard.[22] Like *Alt Dis*, Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki's book *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life* offers considerably more space to the definition of what is alternative (including acceptable alternatives) compared to what is standard—despite the fact that one of the aims of their research is to understand the standards of "academic writing" across disciplines.

While academic discourse registers are primarily relegated to the domain of higher education, essayist literacy is a Discourse comprised of multiple registers common within schooling across levels.[23] According to John Trimbur, Gary Olson, and Ronald Scollon and Suzzane Scollon, essayist literacy is language use that dates back to the enlightenment when writing became decontextualized,[24] divorced from an author (or rather, the author's identity was positioned as separate from and secondary to the meaning and truth of the text), and perceived as representative of truth and authority. Trimbur, in "The Rhetoric of Deproduction," argues that this kind of language use became simultaneously linked to objectivity and "truth" and disconnected from the author(s) who produced the text. When this happened, the written text became seen as "a self-sufficient vehicle of communication, *a non-indexical account* that supplies the contexts necessary for interpretation within the text itself" (Trimbur 73, my emphasis).

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[22] The difficulty of defining what is standard stems from the fact that standardness is conditional and variable and often is related to the context, the producer, and the recipient of "standard" language varieties as well as the language use itself. Furthermore, according to Buckholz and Hall, unmarked forms of language use (which are almost always "standard") are normalized and naturalized and "the effort required to achieve this status is rendered invisible" (372). As such it can be difficult to both identify what is standard and to describe how to achieve standardness. Lisa Delpit describes this difficulty when writing about "codes of power," stating that people who hold power (in this case, the power to both use and define the standard language) are often unable to recognize and articulate the rules associated with participation in a cultural standard (24).

[23] As with many of the terms used in this dissertation, *essayist literacy* does not have a single, agreed upon definition. Indeed, there is significant overlap between *discourse, register, dialect,* and *essayist literacy.* However, because the definitions of *essayist literacy* include values and beliefs, I define it as a Discourse. *Literacy* is a mastery of learned Discourse (Gee, "What is Literacy") and, therefore, must be embodied. As such, particular students can enact essayist literacy as a literacy, but the language use (including its values and beliefs) is a Discourse.

[24] In this case, "decontextualized" means that the "the contextual clues to interpretation are in the text itself" (Scollon and Scollon 48), and, therefore, the text itself can be "properly" received regardless of context.

Despite the positioning of the author as unimportant (compared to the "truth" within the text), conventions of this Discourse call for a fictive bond in which both readers and authors are assumed to be "members of the same social group" (Scollon and Scollon 181). As authors and readers write themselves into the same textual community, they work to produce and promote complementary representations of reality. When this single, agreed-upon perception of reality begins to be interpreted as "truth" and is disseminated through the literature of the discursive community, it limits participants both rhetorically and in terms of allowable identities within the discourse community[25]—in this way, essayist literacy "becomes less and less capable of the expression of difference" (Scollon and Scollon 182). According to Trimbur, this erasure of difference can be positioned as "radically egalitarian" (82); people of all backgrounds are seemingly able to interact equally in their shared essayist literacy. Such beliefs, though, smack of SLI as they suggest that one language variety is both superior and unaffiliated—accessible for all people in all contexts accounting for all goals of language use. Furthermore, the dismissal of the author coupled with the expectation for rhetorical "sameness" suggests that essayist literacy is not egalitarian but calls for enactments of identities that are unmarked and normative (i.e., white and middle class). The purported erasure of difference, then, actually works to continually position the white race and middle classness as the standard and the norm, which becomes unmarked and unnamed—identity-less—and marginalizes all else. In response to the masking of identities within standard language varieties, discourses, and registers, some African American academics have begun making their racial difference obvious in their texts. Geneva Smitherman, for example, often calls on both SEAE and African American English (AAE) when she composes. In the process, she makes implicit, and sometimes explicit, arguments about the value of AAE while also asserting her difference and disrupting the notion of sameness within academic discourses and essayist literacy.

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[25] Carspecken and Apple argue that "identity claims are basically claims for recognition" and that "people can only *exist* by constructing themselves through social interactions in which identities are continuously claimed and these claims responded to" (529). Furthermore, McCarthey and Moje assert that "our identities are constructed in relation to others' perceptions" and that available literacy practices can constrain our identity representations (231). Within discourse communities, then, only certain identities (or identity claims) are available and acknowledged.

Regardless of how one might mark him/herself within essayist literacy, the overwhelming assumption is that this Discourse is unmarked. In fact, all of the perceived qualities of essayist literacy—that it is decontextualized, divorced from an author, and representative of truth and authority—support the positioning of the registers within this Discourse as neutral mediums for conveying ideas and meanings and, therefore, universal, natural, and normal.[26] Articulated as such, it is easy to imagine how essayist literacy became the commonsense Discourse of schooling. In response to the common positioning of essayist literacy, academic discourses, and SEAE as neutral, this study aims to illustrate that all dialects—including SEAE—signal and constitute authorial identities.

As a dialect, SEAE can enact many registers, including academic discourse and those of essayist literacy. However, this dialect is often reduced to a mere convention of these registers and treated as a sentence-level language feature, or grammar. Indeed, time and again SEAE is represented as a site of standardness for these registers. For example, in the preface to *Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*, the editors state, "[s]o-called nonstandard dialects will appear in some of these essays" but as a whole, the chapters in this collection "move far beyond the issue of whether or not a nonstandard dialect can be employed" (x), which they imply is too narrow a scope for examining alternative forms of writing in the academy. Through this statement, the authors seemingly attempt to move away from dialect—SEAE—as the only site for standardness. However, they also maintain the division between dialect and text-level features as the collection includes discussion and examples of hybrid or alternative academic discourses that challenge conventional rhetorical approaches to writing in the academy through alternative "essay forms, cultural allusions, authorial personae" [x]—all of which could potentially be elements of dialect. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the contributors neither claim to be writing outside of SEAE nor challenge all aspects of SEAE (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and the rhetorical elements of dialect). The result is that the essays, in large part, do little to challenge the power and privilege of SEAE.

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[26] Despite this common positioning of academic registers, there are scholars who actively challenge resist this perspective, including Ken Hyland in his many articles on stance and engagement.

Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell are not alone in leaving dialect uninterrogated when considering standards in academia. Chris Thaiss and Terry Zawacki set out to determine how the academy—across disciplines—defines academic discourse. Although the authors address SEAE, they define it as a syntax and punctuation as opposed to a dialect and argue that "it is easy to overestimate the importance to the academic reader of the student's adherence to syntactic and mechanical 'correctness'" (11). They cite an increasing linguistic diversity and international presence as justification for why "it would not be practical or productive to place primary and equal emphasis on all aspects of SEAE as a 'standard' of academic writing" (11). However, the justification itself suggests that language diversity, in this case an issue of grammar and usage, is linked to students and scholars who are in some way "others"—either not Americans ("international") or not traditional students and scholars (presumably not white or middle-class). Furthermore, the concept of a standard dialect beyond grammar and usage is never explicitly addressed. Although I aim to challenge this inattention to dialect, I applaud the editors of and contributors to *Alt Dis* as well as Thaiss and Zawacki for their achievements in untangling issues of standardness from dialect and grammar.

The important work described above convincingly demonstrates the possibility for standardness not tied to dialect. However, I argue here and in Chapter 3 that some of this written standardness is likely SEAE even though it is not termed as such. The conceptualizations and definitions of SEAE discussed in this chapter along with the field's persistent privileging of text-level features over sentence-level language practices (what might commonly be referred to as privileging the global over the local in students' writing), has resulted in SEAE—at any level—being largely undefined and ignored.[27] Not only is SEAE undefined, but attempts at definitions are often incomplete and inaccurate. Indeed, by locating dialect at the level of the sentence instead of viewing it as a language variety within which genres are composed and registers, discourses, and literacies can be enacted, composition studies necessarily mislabels aspects of SEAE as being outside of dialect—perhaps linked to discourse, literacy, genre, register, or even rhetoric as a written parallel to pronunciation. Certainly, the boundaries between these

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[27] Calling on language from whiteness studies, SEAE occupies the position of the uninterrogated, normative center: nearly everyone acknowledges that SEAE exists and is powerful and privileged in many contexts, but it remains undertheorized and its afforded privilege often goes unchallenged.

constructs are fuzzy and conditional, sometimes amounting to whether a discursive feature is attributed to context or user.

However, calling for additional attention to dialect, when it is positioned solely at the level of the sentence, is potentially futile as the field of composition is largely inattentive to this level of language use and features. As Susan Peck MacDonald demonstrates with data from decades of Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) session titles, "there has been a decline in sessions explicitly focused on [sentence-level] language since the mid- to late-1970s." While "Language" is awarded its own category at CCCC, it accounts for only 3.5 percent of the total convention sessions as of 2005 (MacDonald 593). Additionally, MacDonald argues that the individual titles suggest that:

> we tend to perceive *language* as primarily of concern when students are in some way struggling…these struggling writers might be ESL students, students using 'nondominant' or 'nonmainstream' dialects, graduate students in over their heads as they face new challenges in academic writing, or students whose 'identities' are believed to be problematic within academic settings (595).

This dismissal of sentence-level language use and conceptualization of "language" as nonstandard, is telling: composition studies rarely addresses sentence-level language use and when it does, the focus is nonstandardness. SEAE, as a result, gets ignored.

Linguistic Neutrality: A Working Definition

Despite composition scholars' focus on language ideology and broad acknowledgement that writing is always ideological (and, as a result, not neutral), the continued privileging of SEAE as a default language of power and the insistent belief that SEAE can and does erase difference has contributed to SEAE occupying a very peculiar position—one of both neutrality and acknowledged privilege associated with particular groups. For example, the field's continued insistence on teaching SEAE generally hinges on the assumptions that SEAE is both linguistically unmarked (which in this case signals the perception of SEAE as neutral) and provides access to certain types of power and privilege. Before I focus specifically on the (un)neutrality of SEAE, I will offer a brief working definition of *neutral*. This working definition comes from an analysis of composition scholarship and forms the basis for my investigation into college

composition instructors' treatment of SEAE in anonymous student writing. *Neutral* will be redefined throughout this project as I analyze the participants' treatment of SEAE.

While *neutral* is rarely explicitly defined, studied, or addressed in composition scholarship, it is often used to indicate a position that is generally accepted as normal (common sense) and unaffiliated (with specific identities, groups, political positions, social structures, etc.). That which is considered neutral is often unquestioned, linguistically unmarked, and perceived as universal. *Neutral* is also often an invisible position of power for those who have contributed to its creation and reap its rewards. As an example, Lisa Delpit writes about the culture of power in education, arguing that for those who are a part of this culture, the rules—and the culture itself—are likely the least visible, if not invisible. The power and the perceived neutrality of the power are both likely obscured and/or unacknowledged depending on one's relation to these systems of power.

What is considered to be neutral is, of course, a result of ideology; it is one of the "[h]undreds of minor and arbitrary truths" created by ideology and "taken for granted, unchallenged, accepted as inevitable" (Clifford 43). According to Althusser, ideology is "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162), or stated another way, it is a process (ideation) that acts upon cultural norms, helping people to interpret meaning in their lives and to make what is (collectively) imagined become real. In addition to providing a frame for interpreting meaning, ideology also acts as a filter for what is deemed meaningful and worthy of attention. For example, it is not unusual for powerful and privileged social structures to occupy positions of neutrality— indeed, whiteness studies focuses on how the white race, through the perception of neutrality, has become unmarked and deraced, and disability studies examines the perceived naturalness and universality of health and able-bodiedness. *Neutral*, then, is an often unchallenged, unmarked, and powerful position that is viewed as normal and unaffiliated and is possible only through ideology. The neutral position (whether a neutral language variety, a neutral identity, or a neutral social structure), finally, is self perpetuating as it gains power as a result of such perceptions.

In the case of written American English, SEAE functions as a standard that occupies the powerful neutral position. When closely examining scholarly conversations

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about SEAE, it is possible to see the tension and confusion between neutral and powerful as both are often used concurrently as a justification for SEAE. For example, in the debate about whether to privilege SEAE or value students' home languages, scholars acknowledge the power associated with SEAE—power that they would like to make available to their students—but also often treat SEAE as the commonsense medium of instruction and assignments in their courses. Indeed, the strong negative reaction to AAE or "Ebonics" demonstrates the difficulty educators, parents, and even students may face when attempting to envision other *dialects* fulfilling the expectations of the academy. However, these same people would likely quickly and easily acknowledge that other *languages* (i.e., foreign languages) can function well in academic settings. (Perhaps this is one explanation for the editors of *Alt Dis*'s decision to "move far beyond" dialect when exploring acceptable alternatives in academia.)

As in other academic and professional realms, composition scholarship and publications often position SEAE as unmarked; instead of naming SEAE as a dialect, it is treated as a set of grammatical and mechanical conventions that students must follow when composing. It is "English." However, even when SEAE is named and explicitly acknowledged as powerful and privileged, its position as neutral is perpetuated by the continued perception of this language variety as normal and unaffiliated: anyone can and should write in SEAE to get ahead, and SEAE does not index identity—in fact, it erases identity. Regardless of individual instructors' beliefs about or stance toward SEAE, the field has yet to offer a true challenge to the power associated with and afforded by SEAE and, therefore, continues to operate under the assumption that all students must—in some way—gain mastery over this dialect. Indeed, SEAE's persistent and secure position in the normative center contributes to its perceived linguistic neutrality as its path to the normative center is ignored, if not forgotten, leaving an often unnamed and difficult to define, but purportedly superior and widely accessible, dialect.

Indexicality and SEAE: Examining the Link Between Language and Identity

Ironically, at the same time that SEAE has been portrayed or viewed as linguistically neutral within composition studies, other conversations in the field explicitly address the relationship between language—specifically writing—and identity,

much of which interrogates literacy and D/discourse. This scholarship largely depends on an ideological framework from a group called New Literacy Studies, which posits literacies[28] as processes that help people to make sense of their realities through the interpretation and propagation of cultural codes. From this perspective, to be literate is to be an agent of a discourse; or stated another way, to be literate is to prove you belong. This view of literacy—and Gee's definition of Discourse as an "identity kit"—permeates composition studies scholarship, links language and identity, and often works as a frame for considering the dilemma of whether and how to teach SEAE in composition courses, focusing much of the conversation on issues of access and power.

However, despite these trends in the field, there are some scholars (often on the margins of composition studies and other fields) who do turn to language features to examine identity. For example, over the years compositionists have wrestled with *voice,* including how to define and teach this construct. Scholarship on *voice* has ranged from describing this construct as individually situated to "collective or social" (Prior qtd. in Matsuda and Tardy 237). More recently, Paul Matsuda and Christine Tardy have revisited this construct, arguing that voice is a written identity created by the writer, the text, and the reader. More specifically, they conceptualize voice as a collection of features that span the levels of sentence, text, and discourse and include anything from citations to formatting. Matsuda and Tardy's work offers another possible theorization of the relationship between writing and identity and has been well received by the composition community, including an invitation to a featured session on voice alongside Peter Elbow (perhaps the field's most prolific author on the subject) at the 2009 Conference on College Composition and Communication. Nevertheless, published composition scholarship continues to give short shrift to the relationship between identity and written language features within a text.

Matsuda and Tardy's *voice*, though not termed as such, corresponds closely to indexicality, a sociolinguistic construct describing the link between language (not just at the level of discourse and/or literacy) and identity. Sociolinguists have long recognized

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[28] The idea that literacies are multiple, or "a plural set of social practices" (Gee *Social Linguistics* 49) can be traced back to multiple scholars from multiple fields who challenged the representation of a singular literacy that divides the civilized from the savage. Gee has since "named" this body of scholarship, which approaches literacy from a sociocultural perspective, "New Literacy Studies." Notable scholars include Brian Street and Shirley Brice Heath, among others.

that linguistic features, including whole languages, can index social groups (Irvine and Gal 37).[29] Broadly speaking, indexing is "the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings" (Bucholtz and Hall 594). This means that people rely on various language practices, or languages in general, to determine or create identity, to assign various characteristics to people and social groups, and to mark group membership. Indexicality, of course, is inherently ideological. Linking language to identity (and using language to constitute identity) "relies heavily on ideological structures […that include judgments] about the sorts of speakers who (can or should) produce particular sorts of language" (Bucholtz and Hall 594). Not only is this a natural—but not neutral—process of categorization and judgment, but also it is often positive. People make language choices as a means of performing identity, positioning themselves in relation to other individual and/or groups, and achieving various desired outcomes to name a few.

Although indexicality is ideological in nature, its effects are very real. For example, a person who uses the word *wicked* as an intensifier will likely be perceived to be young and from New England (and potentially as aligned with certain sports teams, schools, dispositions, etc.). Moreover, others who also identify with these identities may be more likely to treat the person in positive ways—inviting them[30] to a social event, offering help if the person seems to be in need, preferring them for a job position over other applicants, etc. Although an everyday (all day) practice that people use for various outcomes and purposes, indexicality can also be used as a means of stereotyping, justifying inequality, and perpetuating oppression. John Baugh, a prominent scholar on this topic, argues that people regularly participate in "linguistic profiling," or "identify[ing] an individual or individuals as belonging to a linguistic subgroup within a given speech community, including a racial subgroup" based on "auditory cues" (363). According to Baugh, this profiling is often used for discriminatory purposes. Baugh is not alone in his concern with people's judgments based almost solely on language use. Michael Stubbs articulates what many sociolinguists believe when he states that:

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[29] What Irvine and Gal call social groups, I term social identities, or identities that are "attributed or imputed to others in an attempt to situate them in social space" (Snow 2).
[30] Like many others, I have turned to the third-person pronoun as a gender-neutral alternative to singular third-person pronouns.

[i]t is difficult to overestimate the importance of people's attitudes and beliefs about language. It is almost impossible, for example, to hear someone speak without immediately drawing conclusions, possibly very accurate, about his [*sic*] social class background, level of education and what part of the country he [*sic*] comes from. We hear language through a powerful filter of social values and stereotypes (66).

Stubbs asserts that these perceptions about people based on their language use are often based on slight dialectal differences, which "although often small and not clear cut, are often the focus for powerful feelings of group loyalty and for far-reaching social judgments on speakers" (73). Again, this linguistic stereotyping can have both positive and negative results.

The principles of indexicality and linguistic profiling, though typically used to analyze spoken language, can be applied to writing as well. In addition to redefining *voice* conceptually, Matsuda and Tardy also conducted two studies to better understand how voice is constructed by readers. After a small initial study that suggested that readers do construct authorial identity ("Voice in Academic Writing: The Rhetorical Construction of Author Identity in Blind Manuscript Review"), they broadened their scope and surveyed blind manuscript reviewers (from the fields of applied linguistics and rhetoric and composition) asking if and how reviewers construct identities for the writers of the anonymous manuscripts they read. Quickly, it became apparent that readers do look for clues about writers' identities—whether or not they are established scholars or students (do they know the conventions), their race (are there any linguistic markers), their gender (what is the tone), their nationality (are there indicators of English being the second language), etc. According to their research, "over 80% of participants [stated] that they had speculated or had a sense of the author when reading a blind manuscript" (Tardy and Matsuda 43). Moreover, Tardy and Matsuda believe this figure likely understates "the extent to which [readers] actually think about the characteristics of the author inferred from various discursive and non-discursive features of the manuscript" (43). Not only does this research suggest that readers do construct voice or authorial identity but also it indicates that these constructions of identity are in large part related to "the lack of conformity to particular discourse or genre expectations…[or] deviation from a perceived norm—whether it be in relation to topic, disciplinary breadth, or linguistic variety" (44,

46). In other words, their research suggests that indexicality is largely related to written markedness.

Continued research on the ways in which readers construct identities for anonymous authors offers promise for understanding linguistic profiling and indexicality as it occurs in written language. Of particular importance to my research is the potential for both understanding how a dialect can occupy a neutral position and also challenging that very position through a focus on the indexing work that it, of course, does. Interrogating instructors' perceptions of standardness offers not just a challenge to SEAE's perceived neutrality but also another opportunity to understand this dialect and its multiple levels of language use, ultimately (and hopefully) affording additional productive conversations about the role of SEAE in composition studies.

Composition Instructors' Perceptions of Student Authors: The Indexicality of SEAE

To explore issues of linguistic neutrality and markedness related to SEAE, I asked composition instructors to read three anonymous student essays and to mark the texts where they strayed from their expectations for college writing. I then interviewed the instructors about their readings of the papers and the identities they imagined for the student-authors. I analyzed the interviews using thematic analysis and discourse analysis.

The following research questions have guided the design, implementation, and analysis of my study:

As composition instructors read anonymous student writing written for a first-year composition course,

1. how do they construct or challenge beliefs about neutral language practices and neutral authors?
2. how is neutral defined through this practice of identification and how does it related to notions of standardness and markedness?
3. how do instructors infer details about authorial identity?
4. what aspects of written language do they perceive as indexical (such as words or phrases, sentence structures, rhetorical choices, topic, etc.)?
5. how do they understand and talk about the relationship between language and identity?

The four chapters that follow are dedicated to better understanding the indexicality and perceived linguistic neutrality of SEAE in order to challenge current and

enduring power structures related to mandated-SEAE instruction and pedagogy in composition studies. As a point of departure for this investigation, the next chapter—Chapter 2—describes both the theoretical frames through which I approach this research and my methodology for collecting and analyzing the data presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 2
Research Design and Methods

Given this study's focus on ideologies of privilege and neutrality—and conversely, prejudice and difference—associated with SEAE, I approached the research through the frames of language ideology and whiteness. These interrelated, and in some ways inseparable, frames allow me to examine explicit and implicit assumptions associated with language use and standards, indexicality, neutrality, and markedness.

Language Ideology

Language ideology is a theoretical construct that is taken up across multiple fields—most notably among linguists, anthropologists, and linguistic anthropologists—to examine and understand the relationship between language use and social structures and groups (Woolard and Schieffelin, Wortham). Simply put, language ideologies are language users' socially-constructed understandings about language. They are "sets of interested positions about language that represent themselves as forms of common sense, that rationalize and justify the forms and functions of the text and talk" (Hill 33-34) and act as "interpretive filter[s] in the relationship of language and society" (Mertz qtd. in Woolard & Schieffelin 62). However, because language and literacy are social and political, language ideologies are also wrapped up in issues of power. Judith Irvine defines language ideology as "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together *with their loading of moral and political interests*" (255, emphasis added). Language ideologies, like all forms of ideology, often carry a commonsense status and perceived universality,[31] which can render them largely invisible to the people who ascribe to and perpetuate them. Regardless of the invisibility of language ideologies, patterned ways of thinking about language can have a significant impact on people's lives. As I argue in my definition of *neutral*, this position of invisible power can be

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[31] Woolard asserts that the beliefs and truths forwarded by ideologies are commonly positioned as and perceived to be universal (237).

particularly pervasive as the invisibility of the "thing" contributes to its power. Ferguson states:

> The place from which power is exercised is often a hidden place. When we try to pin it down, the center always seems to be somewhere else. Yet we know that this phantom center, elusive as it is, exerts a real, undeniable power over the entire framework of our culture, and over the ways we think about it. (qtd. in Nakayama and Krizek 291).

Indeed, the power and invisibility of language ideology make it an important site of study, for only when we are able to recognize ideologies are we able to understand and, potentially, challenge them.

In this project, challenging language ideologies is a matter of social justice and inclusive education. Not only is language use a common justification for discrimination but also it contributes to perceptions of students' character, motivation, ability, intelligence, etc. This process of characterization and categorization based on language—indexicality—is dependent on language ideologies. Language ideology not only acts as an interpretive filter for the way people feel about and recognize languages, but it provides justification for labeling languages (or language use) and language users as "good or bad, moral or immoral" (Hill 34). Language ideologies and indexicality not only allow people to recognize and characterize other's language use but to make decisions, conscious or not, about expressing their own identities through language. According to Wortham, this process of "position[ing] [our]selves and others in characteristic ways" according to language use can lead to "enduring identities for individuals and groups" (256). These "enduring identities" linked to language, of course, can significantly impact individuals' opportunities for and access to mainstream success. Irvine highlights the consequences of these positionings when she suggests that because of language ideology "some groups (or activities, or varieties) become invisible and inaudible" (39). Conversely, one could imagine that other groups, through language ideology, gain disproportionate power and prestige.

Like Irvine, Lippi-Green also highlights issues of power and subordination when she provocatively defines language ideology as "the promotion of the needs and interests of a dominant group or class at the expense of marginalized groups, by means of disinformation and misrepresentation of those non-dominant groups" (64). Lippi-Green's

definition implies purposeful action or explicit intention related to power and domination, which I argue in Chapter 4 may not always be the case. Additionally, her take on language ideology is focused wholly on domination and oppression and, as a result, seems to ignore aspects of language ideology that are less political. For instance, there are ideologies that work to explain the function of language and the relationship between language and meaning. In contrast to Lippi-Green's definition, I, along with many other scholars, view language ideology as a guiding factor throughout all levels of interaction with language and language users—from defining language use along axes of sameness and difference and linking traits to social identities to assigning values to both the language practices and social groups. However, I add to this understanding of language ideology Lippi-Green's perspective that the way we conceive of language has political implications, including domination and oppression, thereby highlighting the importance of studying this construct.

Given the relationship between language ideologies and indexicality, this project involves studying both. According to Silverstein, who is largely credited with acknowledging, describing, and defining *indexicality*, language ideologies provide an interpretive framework for making sense of the indexicality of language ("Ideology" 315). Because whole languages as well as instances of discourse can index identities, studying indexicality through a frame of language ideologies means attending to both macro (whole languages) and micro (local language use) processes. Indeed, one of the functions of language ideology is to connect the ideas we have about language to specific instances of language use, often in the service of indexicality. In addition to examining the macro and micro processes of language ideologies, this project also explores both first- and second-order indexicality. Silverstein argues that indexicality operates in stages: first-order indexicality is the initial recognition or construction of a link between language and identity, and second-order indexicality is the "social meaning listeners [or readers] make of a particular form" (Wassink and Dyer 6).

In this project, I focus specifically on the relationship between standard language ideology (which I describe in detail in Chapter One) and indexicality. This narrowing of language ideology to SLI comes, in part, from my guiding research questions that seek to better understand instructors' conceptions of standardness and neutrality related to the

indexicality of SEAE. Furthermore, my interview questions about instructors' expectations for "good" college writing were designed to provoke instructors' reactions to and beliefs about standardness. It is no surprise, then, that SLI is a prevalent and persistent thread throughout the interview data. SLI is also particularly relevant to this project given its implied understanding of language as ideally neutral. In other words, SLI purports that language can and should be neutral and that the "standard" language *is* neutral which is partly why it is better than other language varieties. This reliance on a perception of neutrality is integral to this study and all conversations about the role of SEAE in composition courses.

I call on SLI as a frame for my interview data not only to examine sentence-level language use—the common focus in linguistic scholarship about SLI—but also text-level standardness, arguing that although text-level language use offers more inroads for challenging SLI, it also works to perpetuate this powerful ideology. Specifically, in Chapter 3, I describe the relationship between SLI and instructors' conceptions of standardness at both the sentence and text level. Finally, in addition to using SLI as a theoretical frame, I also explicitly examine SLI, its role in indexicality and perceived linguistic neutrality, and its manifestations in language, which I term standard language discourse (SLD). SLD is described in greater detail later in this chapter.

Whiteness

My second theoretical frame for this project is whiteness—in part because my understanding of whiteness as a race-based ideology of domination and privilege means that it is always already a part of conversations about equity and access. In addition, whiteness is often an underlying thread in perceptions of neutrality and markedness. As such, whiteness is a useful frame for approaching both the privilege associated with SEAE as well as its presumed linguistic neutrality and the related hidden indexicality of this dialect.

Although whiteness studies typically (and understandably) focuses on race, I argue that it is also appropriate for studying other privileged social identities (e.g., class- and gender-based identities) and cultural representations (e.g., "standard" language varieties) that, in part, maintain their power through the perception of neutrality. In fact,

Ruth Frankenberg and Peggy McIntosh, both leading figures in studying whiteness and white privilege, applied their background in feminism to race studies in order to argue that the white race occupies an unmarked position, which works to maintain privilege at the expense of other racial groups. Similarly, there is a steady presence of whiteness studies scholarship that highlights the many connections between race and class and argues the importance of class in studying whiteness (Hartigan, Winans). It is important to note that my decision to use whiteness studies as a frame to approach my data reveals my commitment to this field, but does not imply that I will examine the social identity of race more than other categories.

Before explaining the role of whiteness as a theoretical frame in this project, I begin with a definition. In the 1980s, white scholars across the disciplines began studying how the white race has become the "deraced" standard against which other races are compared. Three decades later, whiteness scholars are still working to label "norms" as White and, in effect, re-racialize that which was considered neutral. Because the focus of the field has been on what is or is not recognized as White, there has been less attention to defining whiteness and developing this construct as a conceptual framework. According to Nakayama and Krizek, "whiteness has assumed the position of an uninterrogated space…we do not know what 'whiteness' means" (293). Indeed, within the literature, whiteness—though rarely explicitly defined—can mean white privilege, white racial identity, or Racism.[32]

While my understanding of whiteness is always changing, I locate myself primarily alongside Alice McIntyre, Peter McLaren, and the larger body of scholarship that views whiteness as an ideology of privilege and domination. Importantly, these conceptions of whiteness do not elide whiteness with white racial identity or experience. Alice McIntyre defines whiteness as "a system and ideology of white dominance that marginalizes and oppresses people of color, ensuring existing privileges for white people in this country" (3). McIntyre's definition is useful in that it paints a picture of whiteness as both structural and ideological. Conceiving of whiteness as a structure draws attention to the long history of racial inequality that impacts current race relations and nearly every

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[32] I use capital-R Racism to mean institutional and structural racism as opposed to individual occurrences of racism.

institution and culture in our society—in short, defining whiteness as a structure works to connect the white race to institutional racism (or Racism). McIntyre goes beyond linking the white race with Racism, though, and offers an explanation of how this relationship is enacted when she defines whiteness as an ideology. If whiteness is an ideology, then, it is both imaginary (socially constructed) and real (material effects). Furthermore, defining whiteness as ideological suggests that domination is more than physical—it can also be potentially subtle values and practices that (sometimes unintentionally) support racial inequality. McLaren agrees that whiteness is ideological, but also argues that it is an "ensemble of social relations and practices" and is "reproduced through specific discursive and material processes and circuits of desire and power" (66). McLaren's definition of whiteness asks us to not get lost in the theory of whiteness as an ideology, but to consider the very real ways whiteness is enacted and constituted in daily life (relations, practices, and processes).

However, despite McIntyre's compelling definition and McLaren's attempt to locate whiteness in praxis, studying this construct remains challenging, in part because it is socially constructed and, therefore, dynamic. Whiteness changes as our societal understandings of race and racism change and as contexts change. Indeed, Nakayama and Krizek, who interrogate whiteness as a rhetorical construct, argue that "there is no 'true essence' to 'whiteness'; there are only historically contingent constructions" (293). Furthermore, they articulate the difficulty of defining and studying whiteness given its ability to "[make] itself visible and invisible, eluding analysis yet exerting influence over everyday life" (293). Conceiving of whiteness as rhetorically constructed is useful and offers hope: if it can be rhetorically constructed, it can be rhetorically *de*structed. Indeed, my focus on SLD in Chapter 4 rests on the belief that understanding the discursive practices of ideologies creates opportunities for transgression.

Given these understandings of whiteness, I have come to a working definition of whiteness as an ideology of privilege and neutrality that actively creates continued white dominance, drawing on and reinforcing historical and structural inequality while denying its existence and/or power. Finally, any definition of whiteness must consider its intersections with other ideologies of privilege and neutrality (for instance, race and class). In this project, I describe the ways whiteness draws on and reproduces SLI.

Using whiteness as a theoretical frame to approach my data encourages attention to markedness and neutrality born out of critical understandings of difference. According to Thomas West, one of the leading compositionists concerned with critical difference,

> cultural differences are supremely rhetorical: they are defined in language and have real consequences. They are about the ways in which groups of people feel, talk, and think about other groups of people; about the assumptions and judgments groups make about other groups; about how those assumptions and judgments "compose" society—how they influence philosophy, determine policy, and incite action. (1)

Both race and language are ways in which people categorize one another as different (or "other") or same. And, as West argues, based on these categorizations, difference influences nearly every aspect of our social interactions. Part of categorizing people as different is to mark them negatively "not white, not European, not male"—and in this study, not standard—"in order to relegate their rights to an inferior or lesser status" (West 4).

I call on whiteness in this project to better understand the perceived neutrality of SEAE, the power and implications that result from this positioning, and the negative valuing of difference that allows a positioning of SEAE as superior to other language varieties.

Design and Methodology

Both language ideology—SLI in particular—and whiteness are embedded in the main focus of this study: the indexicality and perceived neutrality of SEAE. To fully interrogate the indexical process, I examine instructors' responses to anonymous student texts, focusing on their conceptions of standardness, construction of neutrality, and the ideologies of privilege and neutrality (SLI and whiteness) that inform their beliefs about written language and standardness. Furthermore, I describe and analyze the rhetorical maneuvering that participants call on in order to create perceptions of linguistic neutrality and justify and perpetuate privilege. These discursive features—which perpetuate both whiteness and SLI—are aspects of standard language discourse, which I define below and examine in Chapter 4.

To explore these issues, I collected nine papers written by incoming college students as part of a directed, self-placement process and interviewed twelve composition instructors about their responses to three of these papers. The interviews centered on the ways in which the papers did or did not meet the instructors' expectations for "good" college writing and the way the instructors imagined the student authors of the essays. I analyzed the interviews using thematic and discourse analysis.

The object of this study is composition instructors' reactions to and beliefs about anonymous student texts and their constructions of authorial identity for the students they imagined as having written the essays. Throughout this dissertation, I put my findings in conversation with existing composition scholarship in order to theorize constructs central to this project—standardness and neutrality—and to better understand the field's concurrent treatment of SEAE as working to the benefit of certain groups of students and linguistically neutral.

Why College? Why Composition?

The issue at hand in this study—the perceived neutrality and indexicality of SEAE—is relevant to any level of schooling. I chose to locate this study at the level of college composition because I am professionally and personally committed to enacting socially-just change within this academic context. Furthermore, I designed this study to address the tension and gaps in composition scholarship I describe in Chapter 1: a tension that positions SEAE as both unduly accessible to certain students and linguistically unmarked; and gaps in the definition of SEAE, standardness, and the relation of both of these to perceived author identity. Finally, college composition courses often serve a gatekeeping function that is directly related to SLI and perpetuates both SLI and whiteness through its ongoing privileging of SEAE and its treatment of this dialect and its privilege as neutral (this argument is elaborated in Chapter 4). Because composition instructors operate as a local site for the larger practice of gatekeeping within the university (as noted earlier), they also have the opportunity to challenge or reproduce this gatekeeping within their classrooms in the ways that they teach, assess, and interact with student writing. Researching composition instructors, then, allows me to identify

moments in practice where ideologies are reproduced and also where they can be challenged.

<u>Study Location</u>

  I interviewed composition instructors from two, public Midwestern universities—City University (CU) and Midwestern University (MU). CU is an urban university with a student population of approximately 29,000. According to data from its website, the racial demographics of students are as follows: 50% white, 26% African American, 6% Asian / Pacific Islander, and 2% Hispanic. In contrast, MU is located in a college town with students making up 32% of the city's population. The more than 41,000 MU students are considerably more racially and economically homogenous than at CU, with 75% of undergraduates self-identifying as white.[33] And although there are no statistics available to make generalizations about students' socioeconomic status (SES) at each institution, the significant difference in tuition (with MU costing approximately 60% more than CU) suggests that students at MU are likely to be, on average, from a higher SES. In addition to those differences, the data from this study reveal strong perceptions of privilege associated with MU students and perceptions of CU students as coming from an inner-city background and under-resourced high schools.[34]

  My decision to interview instructors at two different sites reveals the importance of context to this study. Instructors' expectations for "good" writing, distinction between standards and norms, and perceptions of available student identities vary by context. For example, one CU instructor (Rachel) responded to one of the papers she read by first describing protypical students at every college and university at which she had previously worked. This instructor also gave each paper she read two grades depending on whether they had been written by a CU or MU student, despite never having been asked to do so. This instructor's response reflects the importance of context in the reception of student work both in terms of indexicality and assessment. While other instructors were not as

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[33] The 25% of undergraduate students who do not identify as white are not separated by race. According to the MU website, these students are "African American, Hispanic American, Native American, or Asian American."

[34] Although I did not ask instructors about their perceptions of overall student wealth and economic background at each institution, their responses to the interview questions were telling. Chapter 3 provides information and evidence about these differences of perception associated with the two institutions.

explicit about the importance of context, many instructors at both institutions referenced a range of standardness at their school and located the students and their papers within that site-specific continuum. Finally, multiple instructors from both CU and MU noted their inexperience with particular identity categories—specifically African American males and Hispanic students (males or females)—as strongly influencing them to *not* imagine student-authors from those identity groups.

Despite these contextual differences, the indexical patterns I describe in Chapter 3 exist across study sites and suggest that ideologies of privilege and neutrality are compelling, pervasive, and often eclipse local meaning making. In addition, both CU and MU instructors share certain student identity profiles—specifically those of privileged white male students and underprivileged, inner-city African American students. In Chapters 3 and 4, I present the data from both sites together in an attempt to demonstrate the full spectrum of responses from study participants. The similarities across sites make clear the prevalence of SLI and whiteness in the indexicality and perceived neutrality of SEAE. When relevant, I note instructors' institutions and comment on the possible influence of context on instructor responses.

Participants and Recruitment

The participating instructors in this study are all current composition instructors who have taught at least ten sections of college writing—often more. Of the twelve instructors, all are white, and there are equal number males and females. Ten instructors self-identify as coming from a middle-class background; the remaining two self-identify as coming from a lower or working SES. While I had hoped to have more (or any) racial diversity among the instructors in this study, it is not surprising to have all white instructors. In fact, if membership in composition studies' professional organization is any indication, the vast majority (86%) of composition instructors are white (Middleton). Therefore, while it would have been instructive to comparatively interrogate the role of instructors' race in their production of student identities, it is also useful to examine the practices of the powerful racial majority within the field of composition.

Of the six MU instructors, five (Darrell, Emily, Jonathon, Melissa, and Nate) are graduates of MU's MFA program and teach both composition and creative writing

courses. These instructors have taught all of their composition courses at MU. One of the five works as a faculty member in the university's writing center. The other participant (Julie) is a graduate student focused on composition-related issues whose teaching experience primarily comes from other institutions. Four of the CU instructors (Carol, Nan, Rachel, and Richard) have significant teaching experience at multiple institutions. Two of the participants (Chris and Henry) are graduate students within a composition and rhetoric program and one (Nan) is an English Literature graduate student.[35]

At both CU and MU, I emailed instructors who had taught at least 10 sections of composition courses asking for volunteers. In this email, I briefly described the study, participants' role in the process, and offered an incentive of $50 for their time to read and respond to three student essays and allow me to interview them about the papers. As instructors responded to my request, I verified their eligibility (in terms of composition teaching experience) and scheduled interviews. At both institutions, I was able to select the first six instructors who responded to my emails as the participants from that site. Instructor demographics related to race, class, and gender were not a factor in the selection process.

Data Collection

The primary data set for this study is the transcribed interviews of twelve composition instructors. I chose interviews as my method for data collection as they provide space for instructors to respond to questions about writing and identity in ways that were meaningful to them with as little or as much detail as they wanted. In addition, interviews allowed for both predetermined questions to make sure I covered the topic in a similar fashion with each participant as well as clarifying questions in order to better understand instructor responses and local meaning making. Following is a detailed description of the process of the interviews as well as the crafting of the questions.

The interviews, which lasted between 60-90 minutes, were semi-structured in that I had an interview script with questions I asked of each instructor; however, I also let the instructors' responses guide follow-up questions as warranted. Prior to being interviewed, each instructor read and responded to three anonymous student papers, following

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[35] See Appendix A for a chart of participant demographics.

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instructions that asked them to mark the papers where they did not "fit [their] expectations for what college writing should look like" (the full instructions for the participants is included in Appendix B). I also asked the instructors to grade each paper.

<u>Crafting the Interview Questions</u>[36]

Because this study asks potentially sensitive questions about race, class, and gender, I thought carefully about how to structure the interview in order to best capture instructors' initial reactions to the papers before they were tempted to self-censure or over-analyze their responses. Of course, it is impossible to actually recreate and capture the "initial" reaction during an interview. Nonetheless, I crafted the first question of the interview ("please briefly describe the student-authors you pictured when reading these papers") in a deliberate attempt not to interfere with the process of indexicality. More specifically, I purposefully began with a broad, even vague request so that instructors would not be overly guided by my question. Had I begun the interviews by asking instructors to describe the race, class, and gender of the student-author they imagined, I might not have created space for the instructors to describe the "type of student" they pictured, which many of them did.[37] Additionally, by using the word "briefly," I hoped to encourage the instructors to answer with initial reactions but not to give much explanation or justification. Finally, I chose the verb *pictured* after receiving feedback from a participant in an earlier pilot study I conducted on this topic who specifically stated that *picture* would have been clearer than *imagine*—the verb I had previously used. My attempt to elicit initial reactions to the student papers did not end with the first question. Later in the interview, I asked instructors if there were "particular details that [were] striking" for each of the papers. My use of the word *striking*, I hoped, would encourage instructors to recall their immediate reactions when first reading the papers, before analyzing or reflecting on their response.

In addition to trying to capture initial, indexical reactions to student papers, I also worked hard to create an interview protocol that would make instructors feel comfortable talking about loaded identity topics. To accomplish this aim, I ordered the questions in a

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[36] See Appendix C for a full list of the interview questions.
[37] "Type of Student" is an emergent category of response to the first interview question. I describe this category in detail in Chapter 3.

way that I thought would make the participants grow increasingly comfortable talking about student-author identity before getting to race, class and gender. For example, I began the section of the interview that asks questions about specific aspects of identity with "how old do you think the student is?" Questions about race, class, and gender were the last questions I asked about student-author identity. I also built redundancy into my questions when possible, asking, for instance, questions about where the student grew up and the student's education background as well as the more pointed question of "What socio-economic class do you think this student comes from?"—all in an attempt to better understand class-based indexicality.

Whether or not it was due to the order and wording of my questions, most of the study participants did answer the questions about student-author identity.[38] However, many of the participants commented that the interview experience or the interview questions were "hard." For instance, when asked to describe the student-author "in as much detail as possible," Emily said "I, boy, gosh this is hard," but then went on to describe the educational background, socio-economic class, gender, and race of the imagined student-author. Jonathon responded to the same question by saying "this must be an incredibly hard question for you to deal with as a researcher, because no one wants to answer it," but insisted that he would answer it if he had had a "clear picture." Julie and Nan noted that they felt uncomfortable making assumptions, and Emily called the generalizations she made "horrible." These instructors' reactions to my questions are likely to be at least partially related to common ideologies that suggest that identity shouldn't matter and that SEAE does not reveal or signal particular identities. In fact, Julie stated that she has "been probably trained…to try, to try not to make assumptions (laughter)." The process was so uncomfortable for Nan that she commented on it again during the member checking process (described below), calling it an "unnatural" task that she was conflicted about during the interview. As uncomfortable or horrible as it was to make assumptions about student-author identities, the strong patterns in instructors' responses indicate readily available ideologies and suggest that while consciously participating in this process is uncomfortable, subconscious participation is likely. Again,

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[38] Two MU instructors, Darrell and Jonathon, were notably distinct in their adamant response that they did not know or have a guess about student-author identity. I address these instructors' reactions in detail in Chapter 4.

returning to sociolinguistic scholarship, indexicality is natural and common—it is part of the way we process and respond to language. What makes talking about indexicality uncomfortable, then, is likely the acknowledgment of troublesome patterns and stereotypes. As Nate notes in an email response to excerpts from this dissertation I shared with him: these research interviews "are usually honest in a way that I find uncomfortable after the fact. It's hard looking back at this stuff. But, it's accurate."

Another challenge when creating interview questions was deciding how to elicit instructors' full expectations for standardness in student papers without using the word "standard." I worried that asking questions specifically about SEAE or "standard" English would influence instructors' responses in a way that might continue to conflate standardness and grammar and lead to continued inattention to standardness in other aspects of language use, such as register and rhetorical maneuvers. To address this possibility, I asked instructors about their expectations for good college writing, including asking them to identify moments when student writing did not meet their expectations, both through marking the students' texts and by talking about patterns they have noticed throughout their teaching experience. Specifically, I asked the instructors to walk me through and explain their comments to one of the texts. During this portion of the interview, instructors often noted how they typically respond to student writing to contextualize their comments in terms of content (i.e., what they are commenting on) and form (i.e., what kinds of marks and/or language they use on student papers). This information, along with responses to my question about the kinds of patterns they've noticed in student writing that does not meet their expectations, helped me to get a better sense of the participants as instructors and often revealed which "issues" in writing were most important, presented the biggest challenges, were the most frustrating, etc. Finally, when instructors responded talked about their comments to the student paper and their sense of when and why student writing does not meet their expectations, I was able to note how they characterize or talk about nonstandard student writing. Despite the apparent success of this approach—instructors commented on both sentence- and text-level standardness—this wording had its own drawbacks: one instructor noted that he interpreted my wording to mean that I was only interested in what was nonstandard and another called my wording "odd."

Throughout the interview process, I was struck by the instructors' desire to be "good" interviewees, to be helpful. Repeatedly, participants asked me to confirm that they were answering questions in the right way and/or apologized for not being able to answer questions. This impulse may have led instructors to posit assumptions about student-author identities beyond their normal scope of indexicality. It is also possible, however, that the tension between the discomfort associated with explicit indexicality and the desire to be "good" interviewees may have had a balancing effect.

Student Papers

To collect student papers, I emailed students who had written a directed-self placement essay to ask them for permission to use their essay anonymously in my study about instructor expectations and the link between writing and identity. In return, I offered them both a $10 gift card and access to a writing workshop the following year. I asked the students to, in their response, include their gender, SES, and race. I then responded on a first-come basis within two racial categories: white and African American or Hispanic. Through this approach, I was also able to achieve SES and gender diversity within each racial category. I describe the importance of and rationale behind my chosen racial representation below.

Though not an object of study in this research project, the student essays were the springboard for discussion with the composition instructors about expectations, standards, and identity. Therefore, collecting and choosing these texts was an important aspect of the study design. Although I interviewed instructors from two different universities, all of the student papers were written by incoming first-year students at Midwestern University the summer before they matriculated as part of the directed self-placement process. The students all responded to the same prompt, which asked them to read and analyze an article and write a 750- to 900-word argument in response. The article the students read for this particular year was "Most Likely to Succeed" by Malcolm Gladwell, which argues for a reformation of the hiring, training, and tenure of teachers. In this article, Gladwell describes the inadequacy of predicting the success of a quarterback in the NFL based on his college football career as an analogy for the difficulties associated with choosing good teachers based on college transcripts alone.

I did not choose papers based on approach to topic, presence of textual markers, or other content-related criteria with the exception of reading the papers to ensure that they did not include personal narrative or obvious ESL markers that would have overly disclosed student-author identity to the instructors. Although I screened the papers for these elements, I did not exclude any papers from this study.

Using student papers that all came from the same prompt ensured a certain amount of consistency among the student essays: they all would be approximately the same length, address the same article, would likely include both an argument and analysis (as asked for in the prompt), and, finally, were unlikely to include personal narrative. Because the response to an article is a common genre assigned in first-year writing, I felt confident that instructors would focus more on the students' writing than the prompt or genre of writing. Furthermore, when collecting the papers, I asked the director of both MU's writing program and its writing center to review the nine essays to confirm my sense that the sample reflected writing commonly encountered in first-year composition courses in terms of genre, topic, and skill level.

This study centers on issues of privilege and standardness; as such, I chose papers written by students who self identified as white, black (or African American), or Hispanic (or Latino/a). I chose this racial distribution because the white race typically represents a privileged and powerful position in the academy while African American and Hispanic students are not only underrepresented, but historically marginalized by their language use.

The nine essays chosen for this study were written by male and female students ranging from working class to upper-middle class (according to their own self-identification). Four of the essays were written by white students; three were written by black students; and two were written by Hispanic students. (See Appendices D and E for more information about the papers according to the race, class, and gender of the author and the distribution of papers to the 12 instructors.)

My initial plan was for each of the nine papers to be read by four different instructors in order to get a range of responses. However, due to difficulties reaching one of the student authors for additional permissions, five papers were read four times, three papers were read five times, and one paper was read only once.

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Thematic Analysis and Coding

Interviews were transcribed (primarily by a transcription service) to allow me to analyze the interviews as text. The transcriptions are verbatim, with the exception of the exclusion of the discourse marker "um." Because my analysis of the data does not focus on pronunciation, intonation, or non verbal communication (gestures, facial expressions), these features are not included in the transcripts.

Given the purpose of this study and my research questions, I approached the analysis of the interview transcripts with some themes and categories already in mind—specifically those of race, class, and gender. However, I also read and reread the transcripts in order to notice and acknowledge other patterns in the data that might be indicative of what is meaningful to the instructors. Thematic analysis, a kind of inductive analysis, involves "identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief" in order to identify "grounded categories of meaning held by participants" (Marshall and Rossman 158-9). This form of analysis worked well to reveal patterns of response to certain types of questions. Most notably, thematic analysis uncovered the category "type of student" as a response to the first (and deliberately vague) question of the interview: "describe the student you picture as having written these papers." In Chapter 3, I describe the significance of this category.

To analyze the interviews thematically, I read the transcripts multiple times; coded the transcripts for each research question (for example, I used purple to indicate moments of indexicality, green to indicate moments of perceived neutrality, etc.); and looked across the interviews in order to note patterns. Throughout the coding process, I wrote analytic memos to capture initial reactions to the data as well as to begin to track and categorize types of responses that were repeated within and across interviews. Finally, I created profiles for each of the instructors in order to begin to make sense of the coding and to be able to better understand similarities and differences between instructors and study sites. To represent the themes and patterns I uncovered in this process, I made charts (Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 in Chapter 3) to represent indexicality—or more specifically to show the relationship between various language features and class-, race-, and gender-based indexicality. These charts became an integral component in theorizing

the role of standardness in indexicality and in identifying the enduring indexical patterns that are prevalent in the data.

As an example of thematic analysis that is not represented in the charts referenced above, several of the instructors make assumptions about students as readers—particularly home literacy practices—based on how they evaluate their writing. After noting this theme as being relevant across multiple cases, I worked to decode the theme, asking: why are home literacy practices connected to student writing?; what do instructors mean by "home literacy practices"?; how is this category connected to student identity? As I describe in Chapter 3, through analysis, I determined "home literacy practices" was often a statement about students' SES, their motivation and character, or both. As another example, thematic analysis—in particular, the act of looking across cases using the identity profiles—encouraged me to consider the importance of instructors' interpretations of difference as errors or mistakes and revealed the tendency for instructors to describe standardness as a continuum with markedness (in terms writing and identity) existing at both ends of the spectrum; these findings are described in Chapter 3 and 4 respectively.

Discourse Analysis

While thematic analysis was essential to identifying patterns within and across interviews, discourse analysis was essential to unpacking the meaning in individual transcripts, especially given the importance of ideology to this project—ideologies that shape beliefs about written language, identity, privilege, and neutrality, and ideologies to which I am not immune. Indeed, I found myself turning to discourse analysis as a way to force myself outside of the ideologies I share with the participants. Discourse analysis offered an orienting approach to my data and tool to ground myself within the language, studying what was said, what was not said, coded language, and rhetorical maneuvering in order to understand how the instructors conceptualize standardness, create and justify perceptions of neutral language practices, and talk about sensitive issues surrounding identity and privilege.

Using discourse analysis as both a methodology and a form of analysis reveals my understanding of language use (discourse) as social, dynamic, and political. In this study,

my participants make meaning of the student texts and issues of language and identity through discourse with the texts, with me, and with ideologies. Discourses are culturally-situated frameworks for social interaction that reflect and create reality, meaning, identity, etc. James Paul Gee's defines discourses (his big "D" Discourse) as "identity kits" that include "sets of values and viewpoints" and behaviors which a person must accept in order to become a member of the discursive community (4). Taking up Gee's definition of Discourse leads to a methodological challenge: how do you study Discourse if it can be almost anything—including speech, writing, gestures, appearance, actions, and other representations of self? In order to focus my analysis on language, I call on Jane Hill's definition of discourse as "all the varieties of talk and text … the invitations and clues, the silences, the inferences that the literal content of a text or an utterance invites" (32-3). Putting Gee and Hill in conversation, I define discourse analysis as studying language interactions (with texts, ourselves, one another, and the world) in order to gain understandings about the social factors in the production and reception of language, the relationship between language and meaning, and the interplay between macrodiscourses and local meaning in particular communicative instances. Said another way, discourse analysis, in this project, is the act of studying language in order to make ideologies visible. As such, studying language requires attending to language use, including "what is said [and] what is not said" (Hill 32) and the meaning and "values and viewpoints" (Gee 4) associated with language use. In this study, I critically examine what instructors say (or don't say) about student papers, standardness, and identity in order to better understand how their talk reproduces and/or challenges SLI and whiteness.

For example, discourse analysis of the following quotation from Rachel reveals the tensions associated with instructor's expectations as societal standards are put in contrast with local norms.

> I'm just surprised at how kind of, how little they care about the writing. I mean, I'm used to it now because I've done it for so long but I, you can't really expect most of them to care about writing; certainly to the extent that, that I do (Rachel).

In this passage, Rachel admits to being "surprised" even though she is "used to" nonstandardness, which she conflates with students' investment in writing. In fact, despite being surprised, Rachel says she doesn't "expect most of them to care about

writing." In this contradiction, Rachel reveals a tension between an acknowledgement of students' nonstandardness in their writing and her awareness of local norms that are nonstandard. Here, discourse analysis allows me to interrogate this relationship and as well as to examine the indexicality associated with non/standardness. In this passage, Rachel associates nonstandardness with student-authors who do not "care about the writing." Additionally, Rachel contrasts students who do not care about writing with her own level of investment. In doing so, Rachel aligns herself with the standard and creates social distance between her and the student-authors, as evidenced by her use of pronouns "they" and "them." This social distance is linked to both the nonstandardness in student writing and Rachel's perception of the student-authors' lack of investment. In this example, discourse analysis allows for both careful consideration of related, and often conflated, concepts such as standards and norms and an examination of indexicality.

As this example shows, discourse analysis is a method for approaching excerpts of text in order to better understand instructors' meaning (especially related to particular key terms or concepts), to reveal ideologies and tensions, and to interrogate the process of indexicality. Before beginning discourse analysis, I first identified passages—based on my thematic analysis and coding—that warranted additional close readings and analysis. For example, because I was particularly interested in the process of indexicality, I often looked for passages that were not obvious in the connection between student identity and writing. In other words, when instructors said they assumed a student-author was a male because of the many references to football in the text, the explanation was clear enough so as not to warrant discourse analysis. However, if an instructor assumed a male student-author because of the "vibe" of the paper (Nan), I might choose to look more closely at the text to determine exactly what "vibe" means.

In fact, discourse analysis is particularly useful for interrogating coded language, which is common in this study. For instance, instructors use "language," "standards," "correct," and "clarity" (among other terms) to signal SEAE; several of the instructors reference students' home literacy practices in a way that signals SES; and "inner-city" or "urban" often serves as code for poor African American students and, similarly, one instructor uses the term "rural" to reference poor white students. Finally, DA also allows

for an extended exploration of and engagement with ideologies—specifically, the manifestation of SLI in discourse: standard language discourse (SLD).

I use discourse analysis to examine SLD in Chapter 4 where I identify the various discursive features that allow for the rhetorical construction of SEAE as linguistically neutral. Part of the perceived and constructed desirability of the standard language relies on SLD to position the standard in the normative and neutral center. While SLD is as broad as SLI, in this study, I focus on the aspects of SLD that contribute to perceptions of linguistic neutrality, including: designations of unmarkedness; contrast with "other"; not naming "the standard"; diverting attention from language features and use; the metaphor of clarity; assertions that SEAE is widely accessible; and beliefs that SEAE is nonindexical. Chapter 4 of this dissertation offers an extended description and analysis of SLD. In Chapter 4, I turn to discourse analysis of instructors' language not only to identify the features of SLD but also to better understand how using language in particular ways constitutes SEAE as linguistically neutral—that is, for example, how instructors' regular reference to SEAE as unmarked, a feature of SLD, positions SEAE as universal and invisible which serves as justification for its position in the normative center and reinforces such a positioning. Discourse analysis, in this example, allows me to identify what the instructors are doing as treating SEAE as unmarked, and to examine the effects of this positioning. As such, the discourse analysis in this project is part rhetorical analysis.

Role of the Researcher

In a study about language and identity, it is hard to overstate the role of the researcher in the collection and interpretation of the data. Certainly, multiple aspects of my personal and professional identities are relevant to my interactions with the study participants and the data. Specifically, my identity as white and middle-class aligns precisely with 10 of the 12 study participants. Although there is considerable variation with those social categories, the privilege associated with the white race and middle-class status rely on certain worldviews and make me especially vulnerable to the ideological masking I hoped to uncover in this study. Despite my good intentions, my position in the normative center in many aspects of my life and my experiences in the world as a white,

middle-class woman have undoubtedly created certain blindspots in my view of the problem space and my interpretation of the data. To address this dilemma, I rely on both discourse analysis and collaboration. More specifically, I turned to the language again and again, in order to pull me out of compelling, commonsense notions about language, privilege, and identity. Indeed, I used *commonsense* as a barometer for the presence of ideology, attempting to question all that seemed too obvious or easily understood in the data. In addition, I talked about my research to others regularly—to friends, colleagues, advisors, committee members—in order to ask them to ask for help identifying my blindspots and also to gauge their reactions to my argument.

Undoubtedly, my gender, race, perceived class and status as a writing instructor and MU graduate student influenced the ways in which the study participants responded to my questions, my topic, and me. In addition, the reverse is true—the gender, race, and perceived class of my study participants also likely influenced the way I interpreted what they said and how they said it. These factors of research are unavoidable. Instead of attempting to work against these realities, I attempted to work with them—to be aware of potential biases, to reflexively consider the role of race, gender, and class (and other relevant identity markers) as I engaged with my participants and the data. However, reflexivity alone is limited. Therefore, I also incorporated member-checking in order to address the many ways in which my role as a researcher could potentially interfere with the validity of my research.

Ethics and Validity

Because talking about issues of power and privilege can make many people uncomfortable, I have worked with MU's Institutional Review Board to ensure a research design that protects my participants. In particular, I removed identifying information from student papers and maintained the strictest confidentiality when interacting with the instructors, protecting their identities at all times.

When approaching the data in this study, I assumed that the instructors would use coded language to talk about issues of power and privilege and may be unaware of ideologies undergirding their beliefs about standardness in language and student-author identities. As such, I often worked to uncover meaning that was not explicitly stated

within the interviews. When doing this work, there is always a risk of misinterpreting meaning and misrepresenting participants. To address this risk, I often compared what individual participants said with the patterns uncovered during thematic analysis and with literature on language ideologies and whiteness. Furthermore, I avoid making assumptions about instructors' intentions and focus instead on the constitutive power of language in creating perceptions of language and privilege that may or may not align with instructors' explicit beliefs about these issues. Finally, I provided each participant with excerpts from the dissertation so they could see how I represent them in this project. This process, member checking, included sending each instructor three excerpts of the dissertation: the short description of all study participants from earlier in this chapter; one of the indexicality charts from Chapter 3 to show the ways quotations from their interview are used alongside quotations for other interviews; and an extended quotation from their interview along with the related context and analysis. I offered the instructors an opportunity to clarify or correct their responses to my questions within the excerpts provided to them. Of the twelve instructors, five asked for an elaboration or clarification of what they said during the interview. I worked with these instructors via email until they were satisfied with the solution—ranging from changing a word to adding a footnote.

Finally, this project aims not only to present the findings of a research project but also to come to new understandings about SEAE through the interplay between this study and existing scholarship on language, identity, and related ideologies. Calling on scholarship from multiple fields (most notably composition studies, linguistics, and whiteness studies) acts as a form of triangulation in that I do not rely on the data alone to make my central arguments. The next two chapters do exactly this: they put the findings from this study in conversation with existing scholarship in order to better understand the indexicality and perceived neutrality of SEAE.

Chapter 3
Indexicality and "Standard" Edited American English: Examining the Link Between
Conceptions of Standardness and Perceived Authorial Identity

This chapter explores how SEAE functions indexically, including examining the enduring patterns[39] that link certain identities or identity profiles to written standardness while making other identities incongruent with SEAE. Examining the indexicality of SEAE, I argue, offers an opportunity to challenge the perceived neutrality associated with this language variety and adds complexity to composition studies' conversations about the existing and ideal role of SEAE in composition courses. In this chapter, I describe the role of language in creating readers' perceptions of student-author identities, the role of perceived student-author identities in influencing the interpretation of "difference" in student texts, and the role of standardness in this bidirectional indexicality. Indeed, I argue that standardness and indexicality are mutually informative. The standard and nonstandard features of student texts operate as indexicals for student-author identities *and* the identity profiles created through this process influence the reading of a text as non/standard.

Given the central role of standardness in this chapter, I begin by exploring instructors' conceptions of standardness and defining this construct within the context of this study.

"Bring everyone up to a standard": Conceptions of standardness

Because what counts as standard (at any level) is fluid, varying greatly according to context, I follow James Milroy and Lesley Milroy in making a distinction between "local and non-local norms" (103) or, *norms* and *standards,* respectively. In this dissertation, I use the term *standard* to refer to instructors' expectations for "good"

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[39] The term "enduring patterns" comes from Wortham's description of indexicality as "enduring identities" resulting from individuals "position[ing] [them]selves and others in characteristic ways" through language (256). This chapter looks not only at "enduring identities," but also the enduring indexical patterns that connect language to identity.

college writing regardless of context—their non-local norms. This understanding of *standard* aligns with common perceptions of SEAE as the writing that appears in published texts and that follows the rules of language use housed within handbooks and dictionaries. Furthermore, this conception of *standard* conforms to and perpetuates the standard language ideology (SLI) as it positions "standard" languages as singular, identifiable, accessible, and better than other language varieties. *Norms,* on the other hand, reflect what is common at an institution or in an instructor's experience; they are "local" to a particular context, a particular instructor, or both. *Norms* are instructors' expectations for *their* students' writing, which may or may not include assumptions that the writing will be "good" and align with the "standard." The distinction between *standard* and *norm* is most visible among the instructors who have taught at multiple institutions or the CU instructors who commonly expect student writing not to meet the "standard."

With this distinction between *standard* and *norm* in mind, I now focus almost exclusively on standardness. One of the findings of this study is that standardness operates at two levels: the level of the sentence and the level of the text. In this study, sentence-level standardness is nearly always dialectal and, therefore, synonymous with SEAE (the exceptions being some usage-based sentence-level standardness). However, because I argue that SEAE should not be located only at the level of the sentence, I use the term *SEAE* to mean written standardness that can exist at both the sentence- and text-level. I use the term *standardness* more generally to signal privileged and normalized features that may include, but are not limited to, dialect.

The notion of text-level standardness for SEAE and more broadly is both obvious and surprising. While it is not new to acknowledge text-level standardness, such as "organization, clarity, and appropriacy" (SRTOL 8), it is much more common to relegate standardness to the level of the sentence and conflate it with both grammar and dialect. In fact, the ideologies that link standardness with grammar are so strong and prevalent that as I wrote this dissertation, I regularly "forgot" about text-level standardness, discovering it in the data again and again. Furthermore, I repeatedly had to challenge myself not to locate grammar only at the level of the sentence. It seems that despite my concern about many "common sense" language ideologies, including those that divorce grammar from

meaning and link it to correctness, I find it hard to completely "unlearn" them. In other words, I am guilty of nearly all of the practices and ideologies that I critique in this dissertation. Despite the difficulty—or, perhaps, *because of* the difficulty—I argue that conceptualizing standardness at both levels of language use is crucial to all conversations about SEAE in composition courses. At the most basic level, composition instructors need to fully acknowledge all of their expectations for standardness in order to teach and/or challenge SEAE and work toward increasing access to academia for linguistically-nontraditional students and expanding the range of language varieties that are recognized and accepted within academia. For example, instructors can better teach SEAE by acknowledging text-level features of the dialect. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge standardness *not* related to dialect so that both students and instructors can begin to imagine the possibility of standard writing in academia that does not use SEAE. Furthermore, this chapter suggests that recognizing and examining both levels of standardness offers one means of challenging the often complete conflation of grammar, dialect, and correctness and the positioning of grammar and dialect as distinct from meaning. This section, then, works to describe the differences between text- and sentence-level standardness as well as forcibly extend our understanding of SEAE beyond grammar and sentence-level features.

Like many other ideological and politically-loaded concepts, standardness is often undefined and undertheorized within composition studies and more broadly. For example, in academia and many other contexts, SEAE is the standard dialect. However, not only does SEAE lack a precise definition but also it is seldom referred to as *standard*. Instead, most of the instructors talk about "expectations"[40] or writing that is "good," "great," "college-level," or "sophisticated." These lexical proxies for standardness and SEAE vary according to whether instructors are referencing sentence- or text-level standardness. For example, instructors label sentence-level standardness as "good," "standard," or correct. To refer to text-level standardness, the instructors note "great" or "sophisticated" writing. Furthermore, the instructors often conflate sentence-level standardness with grammar and correctness and elide text-level standardness with generic

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[40] The reliance on the word *expectation(s)* in my interviews likely influenced instructors' use of this term. Nonetheless, the word *standard* is notably absent from much of the interview transcripts.

conventions and college-level writing. Despite this basic distinction, there is crossover between levels of perceived standardness when instructors talk generally about "good" writing. The most common categories for standardness across the two levels are as follows: grammar and usage (including spelling, misused homonyms, punctuation, sentence boundaries, subject-verb agreement, pronoun-noun agreement, missing words, syntax, and concision), audience awareness (including tone and context), academic conventions (including diction, incorporating cited material, analysis, and thesis statements), organization, and clarity.[41] All perceptions of standardness contribute to instructors' expectations for and reactions to student texts, including how they imagine the student-authors and their dispositions toward the student-authors. I will return to this claim in the next section, adding detail and evidence to the argument. First, I will continue to explore differences between instructors' conceptions of sentence- and text-level standardness and the role of SLI at each level.[42]

Sentence-level standardness

Although conceptions of standardness at both levels rely on and perpetuate SLI, the belief that sentence-level standardness is singular, desirable, accessible, and unaffiliated most closely matches and supports this powerful and prevalent ideology. The relationship between sentence-level standardness, grammar, and SLI is clearly visible when Carol shares her opinion of a well-known court case on African American English (AAE) in schools. In the passage that follows, Carol emotively extols the value of "standard" English, arguing:

> You know, you're in school to meet a certain educational standard, and…it is absolutely crazy to single one group out and say that their use of language is somehow permissible when you're trying to bring everyone up to a standard…this is a pretty diverse country and that's fine; that's great. But I think language is one of the very few things that, you know, we should have a standard for in our schools.

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[41] There is considerable crossover between these levels of language use and the categories I use to organize them. *Tone*, for example, is both an issue of audience awareness and academic conventions. Furthermore, it is a language feature that is related to diction and can impact grammar and usage.

[42] Existing scholarship on SLI focuses on sentence-level standardness. However, I suggest that in the process of attending to both sentence- and text-level standardness, it is also important to attend to sentence- and text-level language ideology.

Although Carol doesn't define what she means by standard, it is likely that she is referring to sentence-level standardness given the focus on dialect—in particular AAE, which is commonly positioned as both slang (vocabulary) and incorrect (grammar) (Rickford and Rickford). Additionally, throughout the interview, Carol regularly calls on what she perceives to be grammatical errors as cues that student authors might be African American. Given the common conflation between dialects and grammar, it seems likely that the "standard" she is referring to is associated with both dialect (*not* AAE) and grammar. Carol's positioning of the "standard" language as correct and singular does not allow for the possibility of positive language diversity. Instead, she states that it is "absolutely crazy" not to have every student in the school conform to *the* standard— indeed, the point of going to school is to provide access to the standard and improve nonstandard language users' educational level by bringing them "*up* to a standard" (emphasis added). Carol positions what is not standard as *sub*standard and suggests that it defies common sense to have students use or learn anything other than the correct standard language. In fact, learning and using "standard" English goes beyond common sense for Carol as she implies that it is impermissible to allow "one group" (i.e. African American students) to use nonstandard language because the standard is not only better but also an end goal of schooling. Finally, because Carol does not believe that linguistic diversity is acceptable in schools, she promotes an understanding of the "standard" language as available to, required for, and to the benefit of *all* students. In this way, the "standard" language is positioned as unaffiliated with any one group even though it is also positioned as incongruent with African American students. This tension between portraying the standard as linguistically neutral and accessible *and* contrasting the standard with "other," often African American, dialects permeates the instructors' talk about racial indexicality in this study and is explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

Like Carol, all of the instructors in this study refer to a correct and desirable, rule-based, sentence-level standardness to which student-authors should conform. They justify the superiority of this kind of standardness by positioning language as a neutral, transparent vessel for ideas that can either allow ("clear prose" [Nate]) or impede ("a very muddy sentence" [Carol]) meaning. Indeed, many instructors reference the importance of *meaning* when justifying their sentence-level expectations. Rachel states, "I don't want to

be like [an] English school marm, but the apostrophes, they're for a reason, and it can impede comprehension. It has meaning, so *(laughter)* I do think it's important." Although as Rachel asserts, punctuation *has* meaning, the instructors mostly address grammar and usage as an aspect of writing that can interfere with meaning. For example, Darrell explains his negative reaction to a paper, claiming "the number and variety of sentence-level errors…really inhibited meaning. I mean, it was hard to figure out what the writer was talking about in some places…you know, there's a reason why I'm marking these things. It's not just to be picky." Henry and Nan also place sentence-level language use in service of meaning when they note its potential for "interfer[ing] with" (Henry) or "confus[ing]" (Nan) meaning. All of these instructors both affirm the importance of sentence-level standardness (in its role of not interfering with meaning) and position this level of language use as secondary to—and distinct from—ideas and meaning. The perception of language as in service of ideas comes directly from SLI, which suggests that it is both possible and desirable for a language variety to not interfere with or influence communication. In Chapter 4, I argue that treating language as a vessel for communication is a feature of SLD that creates the perception of linguistic neutrality. Here, instructors face pedagogical conflict as they navigate the intersection of what they expect in student writing and what they expect (or want) to teach.

In addition to positioning sentence-level language use as secondary to ideas and meaning, the instructors also express a seemingly uniform belief that sentence-level standardness is fully accessible. Again, these assumptions carry significant implications for instructors' beliefs about and commitment to teaching sentence-level standardness and their reactions to nonstandard sentence-level features. Because the instructors assume that students should have had opportunities to learn sentence-level standardness prior to entering their classrooms, they imply that it either does not need to be taught or that it is not their job as composition instructors to do the teaching. For example, Richard believes that students have an "innate sense of, of language" that they can be taught to access. It is not the rules that Richard expects to have to teach, but tricks for learning how to "tap into" and "recognize" the existing knowledge of language in order to "correct" their syntactical and/or usage problems "on their own." Here, again, sentence-level standardness is not only accessible, it is superior. Similarly, Julie assumes that the

students at her current institution already know grammar and usage rules. When something does not meet her expectations, she does not teach the rule, she points out what she believes to be a mistake. As Julie explains, "I usually, when I see stuff, I just circle it on their, like if it's just grammar stuff, I just circle it to point it out to them. At least [my] experience here is that most of the students here, they know it. It's just a matter of proofreading. So, I just catch it for them as we go through." Julie "catch[es]" the mistakes for her students but believes they have the necessary knowledge to transition to the standard on their own.[43] The assumption that there is one, agreed-upon and accessible standard is so strong that Richard and Julie do not even name what it is they think their students know, even though the "grammar stuff" (Julie) and "innate sense of language" (Richard) can only be "standard," which does not allow for even the possibility of acceptable difference. Because of their beliefs about the accessibility of the standard, Richard and Julie (instructors from CU and MU respectively) do not teach "grammar stuff" or syntax. As these quotations demonstrate, the assumption that students have had access to this level of standardness before entering college greatly impacts instructors' practice and pedagogies.

While Richard and Julie also do not say *how* or *where* their students should have gained mastery of sentence-level standardness or an "innate sense of language," other instructors explicitly name prior schooling and reading practices as two possible points of exposure and access. Melissa articulates the assumption that students have learned sentence-level standardness—especially grammar and usage—in their pre-college educational experiences when she states, "on the sentence level, the writing is not what you would hope from a college freshman." Similarly, Jonathon expresses his expectations for sentence-level standardness by describing his own path to standard grammar use, which does not include college composition. Instead, he says, "I learned all my grammar—which still, in a 300 level class, most of my students don't know the basic rules of grammar, which always surprises me—but I learned all my grammar in middle school, a little bit in high school and in my foreign language classes in college." For Jonathon, the assumption that grammar instruction happens before college is so strong

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[43] However, Julie did note after reviewing this passage of the dissertation that she also tells students to come to office hours if they have questions about what she has circled. At other institutions, Julie has approached grammar instruction differently, offering more extended and direct lessons.

that he is surprised when "most of [his] students don't know the basic rules," even though he (as well as several of the other instructors) has learned to expect some (or most) students to struggle with this level of language use. Positioning sentence-level standardness, including SEAE, as "basic" contributes to the sense that this dialect is widely accessible.

Although many of the instructors believe that students have had access to sentence-level SEAE through their prior educational experiences, some note that certain schools or school districts are failing in this instructional area (for specific examples of these statements, see Figure 3.1, numbers 17, 20, 24, 25, and 26 and Figure 3.2, numbers 10 and 11). Positioning reading as another vehicle for "the standard" allows instructors to both acknowledge discrepancies in access and still demand adherence to the standard without explicitly teaching it. Darrell describes his expectation that readers (a seemingly uniform category) have had access to the standard through interaction with texts when he states:

> I think as readers, we sort of absorb [a familiarity with the conventions of English language] without really thinking about it. We understand when a preposition is used wrong, and it sort of falls on the ear wrong. If you're a reader, you pick that up, but if you're not a reader, if you're not familiar with conventions of English language, you know, you're less likely to catch that.

Darrell does not specify the kind of reading practices nor the texts that would help give students access to standards, likely because the standard, and by extension "standard" reading, is treated as normal (commonsense) and unaffiliated. Sentence-level standardness here is so accessible that it should be something we can accomplish without much effort—by developing an "ear" for it. In fact, Darrell positions both "English language" as equivalent to SEAE and the category "readers" as equivalent to being "familiar with [the] conventions of English language." If students do not demonstrate sentence-level standardness, then, they are to blame for not being a "reader" and "pick[ing the conventions] up." All of these instructors, in positioning sentence-level standardness as widely accessible (basic, even), call on and perpetuate SLI—a circular process that justifies and reinforces their commitment to sentence-level standardness. Despite the sense that sentence-level SEAE is widely accessible, there is a consistent

acknowledgement that structural inequalities influence students' sentence-level competence. Nonetheless, because the instructors believe students have had multiple opportunities to learn sentence-level standardness (through schooling, reading, public and private language use, etc.), they are disappointed or annoyed when students fail to meet their expectations.

The perception of open and multiple access to the standard averts the possibility for systemic institutional critique about unequal opportunities and shifts the responsibility and/or blame to the individual. If the standard is better, accessible, and basic (pre-college level), trouble with sentence-level standardness can be interpreted as an issue of inadequate effort and motivation on the part of the student, or worse, "intelligence" (Jonathon). Or, as Milroy and Milroy argue, if the standard is better, not using the standard "is a sign of stupidity, ignorance, perversity, [or] moral degeneracy" (33). Nan demonstrates the emotion attached to expectations about standards as she "detest[s] having to teach punctuation," but does so once a semester, "run[ning] through like major reasons to use a comma, to use a colon, to use a semicolon. And what's a complete sentence? All that kind of junk." Nan not only hates teaching grammar and usage but also she does so quickly and only once per semester, assuming that students can then go back to her handouts on their own if they need additional instruction. It is likely that SLI's positioning of the standard as readily available and basic contributes to Nan's assumption that students should largely be able to teach themselves from her handouts. Moreover, SLI justifies Nan and other instructors' frustration with and possible assumptions about the students who do not meet their expectations for sentence-level standardness.

<u>Text-level standardness</u>

While the instructors' constructions of sentence-level standardness are relatively uniform, there is more variability in their understandings of text-level standardness. In particular, all of the instructors believe text-level standardness is desirable (superior); however, most of them acknowledge the importance of context in determining what counts as standard. It is unclear, though, whether the instructors explicitly teach their students the contingency of text-level standardness. Text-level standardness is also not positioned as widely accessible—especially prior to college. Regardless of these

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differences, all of the instructors relate expectations for "good" (or "great" or "sophisticated") writing that are linked to text-level language features. In fact, when I asked instructors about student writing that does not meet their expectations, the majority note breaks in text-level standardness such as organization, critical thinking, incorporating cited material, and suitable academic arguments. This overwhelming expectation for text-level standardness demonstrates a positioning of text-level standardness as desirable and accessible, whether or not the instructors see themselves as gatekeepers to the standard—a positioning that aligns with SLI.

Text-level standardness can also be connected to perceived value systems, and in the cases described below can lead to emotional reactions from instructors when student texts do not meet their expectations for standardness at this level. For example, Rachel passionately expresses her expectations for and commitment to "good" organization, stating "you have to be flexible a little bit…I'll let even [punctuation of plural possessives] go, but not organization. I never would give up on, that's, like, if that doesn't matter any more, then I stop teaching writing because there's no point in writing." She hangs the entire value of writing on organization—a text-level feature—and expresses complete dedication to standardness within this textual feature. Additionally, by contrasting organization with the punctuation of plural possessives, Rachel positions text-level standardness as potentially more important than sentence-level standardness, demonstrating again the tension surrounding instructors' expectations and their sense of responsibility for providing access to standardness. As I will show later in this chapter, the strong possibility of negatively-valued difference at the level of the sentence is often related to these expectations (both for standardness and when/where it should be taught) and is an integral aspect of both indexicality and the reception of texts.

Julie also reacts emotionally when one of the student papers does not include proper (or any) citations, another text-level feature.[44] She admits to being preoccupied with and upset by the student's presumably inadvertent plagiarism and says, as though speaking to the student, "stop pretending like that's your idea…stop doing that!" While Rachel both acknowledges and condones her own attachment to organization, Julie

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[44] There is one student paper in this study that uses an unconventional citation system. All other references to citations and incorporating cited material treats this "issue" as conceptual and text-level.

explicitly criticizes her emotional response to the inadvertent plagiarism and acknowledges the importance of context to beliefs about originality and ownership of ideas. Nonetheless, she cannot stop herself from reacting with frustration or irritation when reading the student paper, and her command "stop doing that!" implies an assumption that a student should know better. Both Rachel and Julie's commitment to text-level standards reveals text-level SLI, as their conceptions of organization and citations are positioned as desirable, better than some other models, and accessible. Furthermore, their emotional reaction to text-level nonstandardness seems to stem from an expectation for a shared value system, as opposed to the emotion that results from sentence-level nonstandardness, which is often connected to beliefs about student effort and motivation.

Unlike instructors' expectations for sentence-level standardness, there is less consensus about the accessibility of standardness at the level of the text. While some of the instructors cite reading as a point of access, most instructors believe they (and composition courses more broadly) are the gatekeepers to the text-level standards their students need. Henry expresses this belief when discussing the transition to an academic tone that his students often need to make. He states,

> students are decent writers, and they have to make this transition from a sort of conversational tone to a more academic, exploratory tone. But that's fine. I mean that's exactly the kind of transition that especially freshmen writers need to make and don't necessarily know how to make. So that, I have no problem with that. That's stuff we can work on.

Henry expects to teach an academic tone and believes that composition courses should help students with this transition. He states that he has "no problem" with having to help students with this transition, which is a marked contrast from some of the emotional reactions to both sentence- and text-level nonstandardness. Indeed, when instructors believe they are responsible for providing students with access to text-level standardness, they are much less likely to have a negative emotional reaction to corresponding nonstandardness, at least as they first encounter it. Julie also demonstrates patience and acceptance in the face of nonstandardness as it applies to arguments, asserting "the things that I see the most, that seem to me to be not yet college-level writing—and which I think is fine, because I think it's my job to help them just recognize that, is—so in my *(sighs)*,

in my class this term I see a lot of students who are still writing papers where the argument is really obvious." Again, Julie and Henry's commitment to teaching students these standards as a way to transition them to college writing is notably different from the instructors' distancing of themselves from sentence-level standardness referenced above. Nonetheless, both Julie and Henry reference a seemingly singular standard (academic tone and college-level arguments) which they still expect their students to learn and master—though they are willing to assume responsibility for providing their students with access to this kind of standardness.

Instructors' beliefs about their role in the accessibility of standardness influences not only their reaction to non/standardness but also the indexicality of non/standard language use. If instructors believe standardness is a matter of effort, motivation, and values, nonstandard writing likely indexes a student-author who lacks some or all of these traits. In contrast, if instructors take responsibility for teaching standardness, student-authors of nonstandard texts are less likely to be positioned as lacking (motivation, effort, etc.), and there are potentially fewer inferences that can be made about students' personalities and character in light of nonstandardness. However, as the remainder of this chapter will show, the instructors use both sentence- and text-level standardness to index student-author identity. Furthermore, as this chapter will demonstrate, there are clear patterns of indexicality grouped around either text-level or sentence-level standardness.

Initial Impressions: "Picturing" student-authors

In Chapters 1 and 2, I define indexicality as a natural, but not neutral, ideological process of characterization and categorization based on language. Indexicality relies on language ideologies as a guide for recognizing what is meaningful about language use and attaching meaning to language use, and language users. In the responses gathered in this project, the standard language ideology heavily influences instructors' perceptions of student texts and the student-authors who produced the texts. Indeed, SLI both creates and justifies (perceived and often enduring) connections between language users and various types of language use and assumptions about social groups based on their language use. In other words language ideology, including SLI, can both create a perception that a particular group of people are more likely to use "slang," for example,

and can justify the belief that people who use "slang" are inferior to "standard" language users. In this section, I show that instructors' understandings of the relationship between writing and identity, which rely heavily on both SLI and whiteness (an ideology of privilege), repeatedly link white and upper/middle class students with standardness and create identity profiles that influence instructors' interpretations of difference within student texts.

The data from the interviews clearly show that instructors imagine students based on language in the student essays—or if they do not have a picture of a student-author at first reading, they are able to turn to various aspects of language use in order to make "guesses" about student identities. Although I asked specific questions about student-author identity throughout the interviews, I began with the deliberately vague question: "briefly describe the student-authors you pictured when reading these papers." My primary aim with this question was to capture the instructors' initial impressions about identity before they had a chance to reflect on, and possibly edit or censor, their reactions. In other words, because I believe the act of imagining identity (when identities are unknown) is often subconscious, I hoped to come as close as possible to recording the instructors' subconscious reactions. In retrospect, asking this question first, before asking more specific questions about identity, also offers a useful point of comparison between unprompted and prompted identity categories. In particular, the unprompted identity categories include *race, class,* and *gender* as I would have expected,[45] but they also include another category: *type of student.*

Type of student, an emergent category that includes assumptions about various student characteristics, such as their level of preparedness, is the most common response to the first question. The prevalence of this category suggests that it might be common practice for instructors to assess students—not just their texts—early in a course, perhaps even beginning with instructors' first encounters with student writing. In this data set, the *type of student* category includes instructors' suppositions about students' ability level, approach to the class, personality, and educational background. The following quotations are representative of the range of responses that fall within this category.

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[45] My expectations for types of responses come in large part from a pilot study in which I asked many of the same questions.

I had one image of this student who thinks they're a pretty good writer, um, and who maybe is, has some features of being a strong writer but is still developing. And then I also had the picture of the student who is kind of struggling who comes up to you after class and says, "I had no idea how to do this. This was really hard." (Henry)

This person has personality (*laughter*), and, I don't know why…this is the kind of person who I, I would think might actually become a writer. (Rachel)

This is a student who comes from a, a, a good background…they've come from a high school that has them writing a lot, I would suspect, and has some kind of rigor in how they're responding to that writing. (Nate)

Several of the instructors not only posit guesses about students' ability levels but also have assumptions about students' confidence in their ability, as evidenced in Henry's quotation. In fact, later in the interview, it is not uncommon for instructors to hypothesize about how easy (or difficult) they expect it would be to work with the students, which they base largely on the attitude they perceive in the student papers. Although less common as an initial reaction, Rachel's quote represents instructors' sense of students' personalities or educational interests. Finally, a clear pattern of response in this category (illustrated by the quotation from Nate) is commentary about students' prior educational experiences. All of these ways of imagining student-authors contribute to instructors' affective responses to the students and their papers, often influencing the more detailed identity profiles they create for the students.

Class, race, and gender was also a clear category of response to the first interview question. Later in this chapter, I will break the category of *class, race, and gender* into three distinct units, but because this category is distinct from and much less prevalent than the category *type of student,* I first treat it as one identity category. It is noteworthy that instructors not only have assumptions about students' class, race, and gender based on the texts but also are willing to share them—even when unprompted. Furthermore, because all of the instructors who respond to the first interview question with only a *type of student* response also, later, have at least some sense of students' class, race, and

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gender, it is possible that they simply chose to remain silent about these potentially fraught identity categories early in the interview. Regardless of whether or not the instructors initially picture the anonymous student-authors according to their class, race, or gender, this category of response is less common than describing the students according to their behaviors and abilities. Quite likely, the instructors feel both more qualified to talk about student characteristics and less comfortable talking about identity categories that come loaded with political implications.

Following are responses to the first interview question that represent the *class, race, and gender* category:

> My guess would be middle class, definitely. Very middle class,
> could even be some upper middle class…yeah, and, and I would
> say probably white would be my guess. (Richard)

> There was one in particular I was almost certain was probably an
> African American student. (Carol)

> They seemed like males. (Darrell)

Not only do the above quotations reflect instructors' perceptions of students' identities but also they represent the varying degrees of certainty instructors express when talking about class, race, and gender. Carol was the most sure of her perception of identity by stating that she was "almost certain." Richard and Darrell on the other hand respond with a "guess" and a clear articulation that this is their "sense" as opposed to a reality (respectively). In contrast to the quotations that represent *type of student* responses there is noticeably more hedging involved when instructors reveal their thoughts about students' class, race, and gender. Again, the hedging is likely related to the fraught nature of each of these terms and their significance in our society. Furthermore, ideologies about how quickly instructors should be able to assess their students (in terms of ability and how they will interact in the classroom environment) differ greatly from ideologies that suggest class, race, and gender should not matter in education and that SEAE does not reveal and is not connected to individual's identities—ideologies that contribute to the tension associated with the category *class, race, and gender*.

In the sections that follow, I show that the categories *type of student* and *class, race, and gender* are closely connected, arguing that regardless of instructors' initial approach to "picturing" student-authors, they are likely ultimately to make assumptions about student identities that perpetuate the privileging of both SEAE and the identities that are commonly associated with this powerful language variety.

"Obvious tip offs": Classed, Raced, and Gendered Language

In this section, I describe the ways student writing signals classed, raced, and gendered identities for the instructors. As I describe below, these identity categories— particularly those of class and race—are positioned as integrally related to educational exposure and achievement for students in our society and in the geographic context of this study. For these reasons, and because this project aims to further conversations about equity and access for traditionally marginalized students, I focus on class, race, and gender in this chapter and throughout the remainder of the dissertation. However, given repeated patterns of perceived connection between educational experience and SES, the category *class* almost always includes elements of *type of student* responses, too, in that instructors often comment on students' prior education—one feature of the *type of student* category. Indeed, each of the identity categories discussed in this section includes *type of student* features. However, I will not explicitly discuss *type of student* indexicality until later in this chapter when I explore the full identity profiles instructors sometimes create for student authors.

In addition to illustrating indexicality within this study, this section also aims to address the relationship between sentence- and text-level standardness and perceived identity as instructors repeatedly rely on their beliefs about "good writing" to make sense of student identity and to explain indexicality.

Class

Because of the instructors' overwhelming sense that students' socioeconomic class both impacts their educational experiences and can be seen in their writing, the category *class* almost always includes comments about students' prior education as well. Only one instructor explicitly challenges the connection between SES and the quality of

students' previous education when he says, "I've certainly known many well, working class families who somehow or other figured out a way to get their kids to private school…[and] some people have…scholarships" (Henry). However, he still admits to generally assuming that "if a family can figure out a way to send their kids to [a private school]…they're middle class." Like Henry, Melissa expresses a tension around the connection between class and education, stating "I feel weird always equating class with education, but it really seems to be overwhelmingly the case." The majority of the instructors seem to agree with Melissa's logic as they repeatedly link class and educational background. Furthermore, although a few of the instructors acknowledge that it is possible for students to go to a "good" high school and not pay attention or for students to have influences outside of schooling that can account for good writing, the vast majority of the participants repeatedly link "good" writing with a good high school education, and by association, class.

Because class is so tightly linked to prior educational experiences, which is presumed to greatly impact students' writing holistically, a wide range of language features function indexically for this category. In general, though, the indexicals for class are text-level language features such as tone and analysis. More specifically, when student writing exhibits text-level standardness, instructors often assume the student-author comes from a "good" educational background and a higher SES (middle to upper-middle class). The reverse is also often true, that when instructors do not see text-level standardness, they imagine a less- or under-prepared student and attribute that to their prior education and SES. The following comment by Jonathon represents both the indexicality of text-level language features for class and prior education as well as the connection between text-level standards (in this case "great" writing) and identity. He states, "I think that this is not great writing, and I imagine the kid who wrote this may have come from an under-resourced school where he or she was deprived of some basic lessons about academic argumentation. Maybe they don't read as much as someone who went to a fancy, privileged school." Jonathon's "first and maybe only image" relies on his assessment of the text as nonstandard in terms of quality of writing and argument and works to, by contrast, link text-level standardness to students from the "fancy, privileged schools."

As this example demonstrates, indexicality in the category *class* connects standardness (at both the sentence- and text-level) and perceived identity. More specifically, "good" or "great" writing (the standard) indexes students from economically privileged backgrounds, which in turn perpetuates the perception that students from economically privileged backgrounds will be (or, at least, are likely to be) better writers and are closer to the standard than students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These perceptions lead to enduring patterns within indexicality that are tied to standardness and privilege.

The chart in Figure 3.1 shows the full range of indexicality for class in this study. In particular, the chart demonstrates that indexicality for class (and perceptions of standardness) occurs at both the sentence- and text-level of language use. Seeing the data represented in this way makes clear the importance of academic conventions— particularly related to tone, diction, and argumentation—when it comes to perceived SES as many instructors rely on this broad category of language use as a signal for the type of schooling students have had prior to college. Not surprisingly, instructors believe that students who have gone to good (i.e. wealthy and well-resourced) high schools have had more exposure to the conventions of academic discourses, which is evident in their writing.

Although tone and diction are related categories of language use, I chose to separate them in order to locate them at the text level and sentence level respectively. *Tone* is an attitude in the paper which is often governed by generic expectations. For example, instructors repeatedly reference confidence (see Figure 3.1, numbers 1, 2, and 3) or, conversely, uncertainty (see Figure 3.1, number 5) in student prose as an indexical for *class*. *Diction*, on the other hand, is vocabulary or syntax linked to registers. In this study, instructors often comment on students' facility with vocabulary (see Figure 3.1, numbers 10 and 15) or awkward syntax resulting from an attempt to mimic an academic register (also called "over-writing" or "Engfish" in this study; see Figure 3.1, numbers 11 and 13); these language features help instructors to make assumptions about students' past educational experiences and SES. In particular, instructors seem to assume that an awareness of academic conventions, including a confident tone and word choice that creates a distanced, objective diction, suggests a better high school and higher SES.

While the grammar and usage category has the most examples of any given category in the following chart, the conflation of class and race in this study makes it difficult to tell which identity category is more relevant to the instructors. The many references to the *inner-city* or *Metropolis Public Schools* in this section (as well as the less common reference to *rural*) show the tangled connections between the categories of *race* and *class.* Specifically, *inner-city* and *Metropolis Public Schools* refer to poor or working class African Americans for the instructors in this study—a point I will elaborate when discussing the indexicals for race. For now, it is worth noting that indexicality associated with grammar and usage is almost always tied to nonstandard features (see Figure 3.1, numbers 18, 19, 20, 21, and 23); by and large, the language is treated as "clear" or unmarked unless there are errors, mistakes, or other kinds of difference.

Because the chart is comprehensive, I have used bold and underlining to highlight the aforementioned patterns and help the reader navigate all the quotations. Specifically, the bold words or phrases in the chart illustrate indexicality associated with confidence (or anxiety) and a sense of academic conventions; the underlined words or phrases illustrate the role of grammar and usage features in indexing both race and class simultaneously.

Figure 3.1: Indexicals for Class

Language Feature	Examples from Interviews
Tone	1. "the **confidence** of the prose sort of reinforce[s] a class identity that this is a person from the upper middle or upper class. That this is a person who went to a good school" (Nate) 2. "this student reads to me like somebody who probably had a more college prep oriented education…this student seems to have the **confidence** in their convictions, so whatever education they were getting, they were encouraged to believe that" (Julie) 3. "He came from a decent situation economically and, um, maybe a suburban school [based on]…the fact that this person was able to make reference to Ed Deutschlander a coup—and I think I said to you that it showed me he had a certain

	confidence about making reference to a person's name and status" (Carol)
	4. "I would say [the student is] middle class…for some reason, that's the **vibe** I get" (Nan)
	5. "the awkwardness of this prose is an, is an awkwardness that comes from **uncertainty about position**" (Nate)
	6. "I don't think it **sounds as sophisticated** as the kids who are coming from … some of those [wealthy, high achieving] school districts who would pay more attention to audience for example" (Melissa)
	7. [he comes from a] "good background…[based on the] frank, direct language" (Nate)
	8. "they've got clear prose…they've come from a high school that has them writing a lot, I would suspect, and has some kind of rigor in how they're responding to that writing" (Nate)
Diction	9. "Something about the socio-economic class I would maybe put a little higher because there's like **a sense of good writing** sounding a certain way, like there's an awareness of it, but it's not happening there…they understand that academic writing sounds a certain way, as opposed to maybe a kid who just has no idea and is just writing very personal kind of non-academic sort of stuff" (Emily)
	10. "I think [he or she] probably [had] a pretty good educational background…I guess there's enough of **an attempt at academic writing or sounding formal and distanced** to make me think that…there are nice introductory phrases and…the language is vaguely professional. I mean it's trying to talk in a, a sort of distanced way about the essay. They're not using the first person pronoun 'I,' and that kind of thing." (Melissa)
	11. "I did not see any **attempt to over write**, which I thought was really significant" (Nate)
	12. "I would say middle lower class…not thinking that the student came from a wealthier district in that they're **not quite as well-versed in the academic voice** makes me think that I might classify them as on the lower end of, of middle class" (Melissa)

	13. "maybe a lower socio-economic area where they're not exposed to much academically and therefore, they're **trying to over-compensate** with this sort of elevated language" (Emily)
	14. "when you teach urban kids you tend to get more colloquialisms, slang, jargon; they repeat a lot of stereotypes and clichés" (Rachel)
	15. "He came from a decent situation economically and, um, maybe a suburban school [based on]…the fact that this person was able to use the word *philosophy*…and *psychological battle*—that's sort of an interesting concept" (Carol)
	16. "Misuse of *prejudice*…I would say [he] didn't get the best writing exposure in the world" (Carol)
Grammar and usage	17. "I would guess either a middle or upper-middle class student…and this is all based sort of on the grammar and punctuation…<u>Metropolis Public Schools</u> don't seem to emphasize that grammar and punctuation at all" (Nan)[46]
	18. "this one, too, had trouble with verb tense. And that's a—to me, is a bad sign. That's, that's an <u>inner city</u> sign, I've come to—the verb tense issue" (Carol)
	19. "a very muddy sentence. A very muddied expression of it. Um, okay, um, pronoun/noun agreement here. Yeah, I *definitely* I would say that this is an <u>inner city</u> [student]" (Carol)
	20. "the language problems are so bad…this feels to me like a kid from the <u>inner city</u> or a kid from a very <u>rural town, rural</u>, under-resourced. I think under-resourced school when I look at this prose" (Jonathon)
	21. "especially, a lot of times, for <u>inner-city</u> kids…sentence boundaries, that kind of thing. And not understanding some of the basics of grammar, let alone the more complicated stuff" (Richard)
	22. "Let's see…they spelled Malcolm Gladwell correctly,

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[46] During the member checking process, Nan noted that her students from Metropolis Public Schools often explicitly told her that they did not receive instruction in grammar and punctuation. As such, the connect she makes between grammar and prior education is not based on assumption as much as reporting from students.

	too…Here I get Malcolm spelled, or I get Gladwell with three l's or four l's or something" (Rachel)
	23. "because of the technical issues…the student's probably coming from an educational background that's a lot weaker" (Nate)
	24. "pretty quality high school…[based on] pretty standard English…the way the student handles some complex punctuation, things like colons" (Julie)
	25. "some people were never taught grammar, and some people came from prep school and have grammar down" (Nan)
	26. "I find the kids, for some reason, who come out of like the Jesuit academies or have had nuns, like at the Catholic schools, tend to be really, really excellent on the sentence level…whereas a kid who went to the kind of a big, giant public school doesn't have, doesn't seem to have the same level of skills for execution" (Emily)
	27. "They know to put the article in quotation marks for example" (Melissa)
	28. "it's attitudinal. I mean part of that, though, is you can see it in the grammar. That there are these sort of interlaced but clipped sentences, like, that there is, and, and that's good writing…it's the absence of words…it's that control of language" (Nate)
Argument and analysis	29. "I think that this is not great writing and I imagine the kid who wrote this may have come from an under-resourced school where he or she was deprived of some basic lessons about academic argumentation. Maybe they don't read as much as someone who went to a fancy, privileged school" (Jonathon)
	30. "[urban kids] substitute what they have always heard on TV for actual analysis" (Rachel)
	31. "if you told me this student went to a, a, not very good school, I would say oh, that, that makes sense…it seems like the student has not learned a lot about analysis; from, from what I'm saying, of course I'm associating that with a lesser school" (Emily)
Citations and quotations	32. "community college students who weren't particularly well prepared [often had] real problems…wielding snippets of text"

	(Julie)
	33. "the quote from the text is integrated into a sentence…and that, that's a sort of elevated thing…they cited a fact that didn't have a quote associated with it…that clearly come[s] from somebody who's had training" (Nate)
Quality of writing	34. "my first assumption, if I can be honest, would be she'd gone to private school. She's the daughter of physicians or something…it's the quality of the writing" (Rachel) 35. "I've definitely seen a lot worse. I wouldn't expect that this student comes from an inner-city school in Metropolis, for example. I think it's a lot more sophisticated than the kind of writing I've seen from most students who come from that background" (Melissa)
Engagement with topics	36. "the meritocratic emphasis on performance rather than prestige makes me think this could be [a] working class or lower-middle class student" (Chris)

Race

While class is linked to instructors' conceptions of standardness, race is often linked to class—at least implicitly. The instructors' assumptions about the relationship between educational privilege and race cannot be separated from socioeconomic class. The evidence of white privilege in our society, in this case manifest as economic and educational privilege, is convincing to the instructors and serves as a backdrop for nearly all conversations about race, class, and education in the interviews. More specifically, instructors often explain racial indexicality as linked to an assumption that white students "have been given more of an education" (Richard). As such, for many of the participants in this study, White is linked to standard or "good" writing. Rachel expresses this connection explicitly, stating "mostly the quality of writing with people of color tends to be not as good as the white folks." Although few instructors note this connection between race and standardness explicitly, the logical progression of assuming that better writing is linked to better preparedness, which is likely to mean that the student comes from a wealthier school district, meaning the student him/herself is probably middle to upper-

middle class and likely to be white, ultimately functions to create a stereotype of privileged white students who have had better educations and are, therefore, better writers. This logic-based approach to considering the role of race and class on educational experience and writing ability relies on an interconnectedness of multiple aspects of identity—especially race, class, and quality of educational background.

It is not uncommon for instructors to mention exceptions to the connection between race and class or to refer to students who defy these expectations; however, it is much more common for the instructors to have a structuralist (and deterministic) view of the role of race and class in educational experience and opportunity—at least as expressed in the interviews. Of course, the interview specifically asks instructors to call on and note patterns from their teaching experience, which implicitly encourages stereotyping. Therefore, the repeated conflation of class and education and the connection of these categories to race is understandable and even, to some extent, common sense. Nonetheless, this logical reasoning ultimately works to reinforce and perpetuate standard language ideology and whiteness (an ideology that positions the white race as superior and protects related race-based power and privilege), a claim I will elaborate and warrant throughout the remainder of the chapter.

One important factor in the consideration of race in this study is that race is commonly reduced to African American or White.[47] In this study, African Americans are frequently perceived as coming from Metropolis, a large, predominately African American city with a failing school district. This assumption is likely related to the close proximity of both CU and MU to Metropolis—CU is located in Metropolis and MU is within an hour's drive from the city. The perception of African American students as coming from Metropolis Public Schools and the resultant identity category contributes to instructors' sense that white students are often better prepared educationally than black students. In fact, when instructors talk about "urban" or "inner city" students, they always do so to signal race (African American) and class (low SES or working class). For example, Carol first specifically refers to "urban black kids," which she holds in opposition to "middle class kids." Later, she reduces this identity category to "inner city."

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[47] The only exceptions involve discussions about ESL or EFL Asian students and an acknowledgement of other prevalent racial categories on each campus *after* first constructing race as only African American or White.

When asked about class and race associated with this category, she affirms that "inner city" has SES connotations and that she envisions an African American student. Melissa also racializes "urban" when she says, "a lot, some students coming out of more urban school systems do have some, black vernacular issues." Finally, Chris illustrates that the suburban versus urban dichotomy holds racial implications for him when he states "I would say this is probably a student from the suburbs…and…I suppose by implication that probably means I'm envisioning the student as being white…because a lot of the African American students I have come from [an inner-city school district]." He later affirms this connection when he states "because Metropolis is a predominately African American city, my guess would be that this is from a student from African American race." For many instructors, these two assumptions—that the available races for students are either African American or White and that African American students are products of poor, inner-city schools—reinforces the perceived connection between "nonstandard" writing and African American students and "standard" writing and white students and perpetuates whiteness.

Although the instructors commonly link race and class, the indexicals for these identity categories differ. In particular, the indexicals for race are almost all located at the level of the sentence. Grammar and dialect—both of which, in this study, are treated as sentence-level features—are the most common indexicals for race. The patterns for indexicality involving grammar and dialect are: 1) language features that stray from the instructors' expectations almost always signal someone who has had "less" of an education and therefore is more likely to be African American (see Figure 3.2, numbers 1, 2, 3, and 5); and 2) the absence of AAE, "idiosyncratic diction" (Nate), or other "obvious tip offs" (Richard) signals a white student[48] (see Figure 3.2, numbers 6, 7, 8, 12, and 13). These indexical patterns position nearly all nonstandard grammatical features as error (often connected to African American students) despite some instructors' awareness and seeming acceptance of AAE as a nonstandard dialect. Stated another way, although some of the instructors acknowledge that there is a dialect of English associated with African Americans, they never consider the possibility of grammatical difference being dialectal difference, even when they state that those grammatical differences (read as

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[48] Although some instructors mention AAE, none identifies AAE in any of the student papers.

errors) specifically signal African American students. Because of this tension, I had difficulty assigning moments of indexicality solely to either the grammar and usage category or the dialect category and recognize significant crossover and interconnectivity between these two types of indexicals.

The chart in Figure 3.2 is representative of the full range of racial indexicality in this study and makes visible the prevalence of the deficit model when instructors make assumptions about African Americans' language use. Specifically, there is not one example of instructors noting a positive feature in the text as an indexical for African American students. Furthermore, the chart shows the importance of sentence-level language features in racial indexicality. Grammar, dialect, and diction, which as taken up by these instructors are all primarily located at the sentence level, are the most common indexicals for race. The bold language in the chart highlights the reliance on SLI (specifically related to a singular, correct, and superior standard) and dichotomous thinking (black/white; good/bad) when looking for racial clues in language. Writing that is "bad" or "weird" is linked to black students, while the absence of racial markers or "much better" language use indexes white students. I will address the importance of "absence" (i.e., the absence of AAE features) in Chapter 4; it is worth noting here that in the absence of nonstandard dialectal features, instructors always make assumptions about race as opposed to class or education, a connection that is potentially due to the strong racial indexicality of sentence-level features in this study.

Figure 3.2: Indexicals for Race

Language Feature	Examples from Interviews
Grammar	1. "this one, too, had trouble with verb tense. And that's a, to me, is a **bad** sign. That's, that's an inner-city sign, I've come to, the verb tense issue" (Carol)
	2. "I think it's probably an African American because of the way some of the language is used. Um, the **mistake** of using 'has'" (Carol)
	3. "Um, okay, um, pronoun/noun agreement here. Yeah, I *definitely* I would say that this is an inner city [student]"

	(Carol) 4. "The, oh, the grammar, of course. The grammar is much, tends to be much **better** with my white students by and large" (Richard) 5. "Sentence structure's huge. Especially, a lot of times, for inner-city kids" (Richard)
Dialect	6. "there are **features [of BVE]…that I don't see** in this draft, which makes me, you know, possibly make the distinction that this student, at least to my mind, is more likely to be of white, you know, of white ancestry than African American" (Chris) 7. "**doesn't have any distinctive black features** in the writing: grammar clues, that kind of thing, that I tend to get…dropping S's" (Richard) 8. "**I didn't see any of those, like, non-standard English inflections**…so, if I had to guess, white" (Julie) 9. "some of my African-American students will have **trouble** with subject-verb agreement. Instead of, like, 'He makes,' 'He make.'" (Darrell) 10. "African American students [from Metropolis] …will [sometimes] have sort of idiosyncratic diction" (Nate) 11. "a lot, some students coming out of more urban school systems do have some, black vernacular issues or, issues, they're not really issues (*laughter*) but they become issues in the academic context" (Melissa) 12. "I think he's white…**the lack of any**, I don't see any English as a foreign language problems. I don't see any, as we said, any issues with any kind of cultural vernacular" (Melissa) 13. "**I'm defaulting to [white]** just because that's most of the students, and there's nothing there signaling to me otherwise, I guess, which is, I don't know, it sounds strange or marginally racist or something but there's nothing, there's nothing indicating something else, I guess" (Emily)
Diction	14. "I think it's probably an African American because of the way some of the language is used. Um, the **mistake**

	of…using prejudice as a noun there" (Carol)
	15. "a very **muddy** sentence. A very muddied expression of it…Yeah, I *definitely* I would say that this is an inner city [student]" (Carol)
	16. "There was one in particular I was almost certain was probably an African American student because the way the language was used. You know, there was certain idio…idiomatic ways of spee, you know, speech." (Carol)
	17. "I notice [differences between my white and black students in] the wording…the language usage." (Rachel)
	18. "the way [black women] speak gets into the paper and you get this very kind of colloquial word use, **weird** constructions and just can't understand the individual sentences" (Rachel)
	19. "when you teach urban kids you tend to get more colloquialisms, slang, jargon; they repeat a lot of stereotypes and clichés" (Rachel)
Organization	20. The "logical progression [is] completely gone" in black women's writing (Rachel)
	21. Sign of African American from Metropolis: "like a paragraph that just would ramble and ramble and ramble and not go anywhere" (Emily)
	22. "I see it more with my African American students than I do with my white students so it makes me think they *really* aren't taught [organization]. My sense is that in a lot of ways, a lot of times, my white students from the suburbs are taught organization fairly well a lot of times. I can really see it in their, in their writing…But also, I see it between the white and black students at CU, too. It's, you can just tell that the white students have been given more of an education" " (Richard)
Argument and analysis	23. African American students from Metropolis "weren't taught kind of rigorous argumentation skills" (Emily)
	24. "black students tend to, especially the women tend to, they draw upon their experience more…as opposed to looking at what data and research tell us. Anecdotes are very important" (Rachel)

	25. "[urban kids] substitute what they have always heard on TV for actual analysis" (Rachel)
Quality of writing	26. "the **worst** writers…are black women" (Rachel)[49]
	27. "I would make general statements about ethnicity, again, because mostly the quality of writing with people of color tends to be **not as good** as the white folks" (Rachel)
	28. "there's a spoiled[50] and untrained quality to [the African American students from Metropolis" (Nate)
Engagement with topics	29. "if I had to guess at race, I'd say this is probably a white student [because] the logic here—whichever one performs better, etc—that's the sort of logic that could be used against Affirmative Action" (Chris)
World view	30. The black students "just [had] certain views about the way the world is and what's appropriate in writing and what's not" (Rachel)
	31. "An awful lot of urban black kids do not have that [sophistication about how the world works]. They simply do not" (Carol)

Gender

　　　Gender is the only identity category for which instructors rely on their intuition (often described as having a sense) as opposed to identifying particular textual features as markers. The willingness to express assumptions about gender without linguistic evidence could indicate that the instructors feel most comfortable making suppositions in this identity category. In fact, Chris admits that he is more comfortable talking about gender than race. The instructors' approach to considering gendered identities for the student authors could also suggest that ideologies about gendered communication styles

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[49] Although this comment is explicitly linked to race and gender, during the member checking process, Rachel stated "I assume this is the result of poor secondary education (or earlier) rather than anything related to their ethnicity—or gender for that mater." Here again, the link between race and class is apparent. However, it is important to note that, regardless of *why,* Rachel links African American students (females in particular) to nonstandard writing.

[50] Nate's use of the word *spoiled* refers to children who get their way or lack discipline and boundaries.

are more prevalent and more accepted in our society and, as a result, that we are less guarded about our gendered assumptions and less likely to feel the need to justify them. Whatever the reason, some instructors do not provide textual evidence for their assumptions about students' genders. For example, Darrell states, "it's really hard to put your finger on what it is that makes a paper seem as if it's written by a male versus a female. I just sort of instinctively feel like this was written by—all three were actually written by guys." Melissa is another instructor who does not identify specific markers for gender, stating "I don't know if I could say what gives me that sense at all [that the author is a male]."

For the instructors who do cite specific cues in the text, engagement with the topic is the most prevalent marker for gender. Because the student essays were responses to a Malcolm Gladwell article that compares teachers to quarterbacks, the ways the student-authors interact with that analogy commonly signals gender in this study. Instructors repeatedly cite "the way the student latched onto the football thing" (Julie) as an indexical for gender. Additionally, many of the instructors reference existing stereotypes about differences between male and female communication when acknowledging gender indexicality in the student essays. For example, assertions and a linear organization index male authors, and hedging and storytelling through examples signal female authors. The most extended example of calling on societal stereotypes about gender is Nate's explanation of the indexicality associated with two specific phrases. He says,

> "The torch of excellence and efficiency" has a kind of heroic romanticism right? And "vastly intelligent and ground-breaking" is a kind of subservient praise, right? Both of these people are, are in positions of weakness. Both of these people feel kind of panicked about their position. But that would be, to me, the distinction between the male voice and the female voice in similar circumstance. That it's like Paper I wants to aggrandize the whole situation and create a kind of pomp to the situation that [he] can maybe participate in, whereas [in] Paper C the author wants to aggrandize Gladwell right? And, and in some ways, not necessarily move herself from her position beneath Gladwell, right. In the submission, she, she just wants, she wants him to be great. She wants to know that she thinks he's great, and he [the author of Paper I] wants the whole enterprise to be great, and I guess by participating in the enterprise, to elevate his own status.

Nate references stereotypes about gender and submission to explain his sense of "the male voice and female voice" in Papers C and I. In both papers, he turns to the students' choice of vocabulary as evidence of a gendered voice, describing how the phrases position the student-authors in relationship to Gladwell. These likely unintentional positionings, he feels, signal gendered identities. In addition to signaling gender for Nate, these phrases are marked in other ways as well (and for other instructors, too). As Nate states at various points throughout the interview, the positions of weakness and sense of panic associated with these phrases are likely related to class, and it is the class identities that he connects to standardness as opposed to gender.

Like Nate, the other instructors in this study are more likely to connect race and class with issues of standardness. Although instructors may turn to perceptions of standardness for clues about gender, there is not a consistent linking between either males or females and the "standard." For example, while women (and for Rachel, *white* women) fare well in terms of the overall quality of writing in these instructors' perceptions, they are also perceived to employ circular logic, to make fewer assertions, and to use less "rigor" in their argumentation. The common treatment of gender as irrelevant to issues of privilege and standardness is expressed through the lack of connections made between gender with race or class and instructors non systematically linking gender with non/standardness.

The chart in Figure 3.3 demonstrates that, in contrast to the language features that index race and (to a lesser degree) class, those that index gender are almost always text-level language features. Notably absent from the indexicals for gender is grammar and usage, which is likely related to the perception that gender and sentence-level standardness are unrelated. Instead, instructors largely rely on text-level standardness including engagement with topics; the inclusion of personal experience, affect, and emotion; assertions; organization; and vocabulary for clues about gender. While vocabulary falls within the category of diction for race and class indexicality, it does not work in the same way for gender. When the instructors reference particular words or phrases as signals for gender, they do so because of the meaning of the words or the ways that the words position the author, not because of the accuracy of these words or the

resulting level of formality associated with the vocabulary choices as evidenced in Nate's quotation above.

Although the chart below is meant to be comprehensive, I did not include all of the instructors' comments regarding the indexicality of the football analogy. Eight out of the 12 instructors referenced students' take up of Gladwell's football analogy as an indexical for gender. The seven examples in the chart represent the range of ways that indexicality was expressed.

Figure 3.3: Gender-based indexicality

Language Feature	Examples from Interviews
Engagement with topics	1. I would guess probably a girl because "the student doesn't go into much detail describing, um, the football analogy" (Chris) 2. "given the, the way the student latched onto the football thing, I would probably assume the student was male" (Julie) 3. "probably a male…probably because of the way he was talking about football" (Richard) 4. "I think it would be more likely to be a female [because it] doesn't talk a lot about football in a really knowledgeable sort of way" (Richard) 5. "[It] might be a girl. Talks about something about being kind…there was something in here about teachers who were kind…[I] kinda thought it might be a girl" (Carol) 6. "this student seems a little more likely to emphasize the evaluation question in Gladwell's essay and at a couple of points it seemed almost authoritarian…the interest here in performance, evaluation, meeting expectations, you know those features seem much more masculine to me" (Chris) 7. "this person…made reference to this quality of, um, you know, the interactive quality, which I think girls are typically more attuned to" (Carol)
Personal Experience	8. "a lot of women tend to talk more about personal issues" (Rachel)

	9. "it does tend to be white males who kind of rely more on data" (Rachel)
	10. "I think men probably, especially white males, are loath to talk about personal matters. I would say, in general, it's easier for them to write the quote, unquote dispassionate critique" (Rachel)
Affect and emotion	11. "a lot of women tend to talk more about…emotional stuff" (Rachel)
	12. "that emphasis on an affective experience rather than on a more analytic sort of response to personal experience that I suppose would be maybe where I would point in this draft as a textual cue to the gender of this student" (Chris)
Assertions	13. "this one sort of seems masculine…because it seems sort of confident, I guess, in the, in it, in its assertions…I guess, which, whether I like it or not, is something I probably associate with male students" (Nan)
	14. "a lot of forceful assertions…maybe that's part of why it reads a little bit male, too" (Julie)
	15. "this one felt feminine to me….there's something tentative and, and hesitant there and also thoughtful, like you don't want to step on anyone's toes… 'I wholeheartedly agree' feels very feminine" (Emily)
	16. "even the most brilliant women in the class are afraid to articulate that brilliance and everything is a question and their writing sometimes ends up being a little bit more hesitant. Whereas the men, even if they are total dolts and morons, have nothing really interesting to say, will act as if they do" (Emily)
S/he pronoun	17. "might be a girl because this person…was a little bit more cognizant of the he/she and the pronoun usage" (Carol)
Organization	18. "feminine writing is more circular and masculine writing is more linear" (Nan)
	19. "I guess I would say it would be a girl…because [she does] provide more examples, more analogies, which is less of that, like straight to the point linear sort of thinking and more of, let me, let me tell you a story about this that makes this example clear…it gives it sort of a storytelling aspect of it, I guess I would call it" (Nan)
	20. "males might have a way of expressing themselves that's a little more

	direct and a little less connected and sort of holistic, if we want to talk about it that way, that in some ways, male papers tend to be idea-idea-idea-idea and sort of blocks of ideas" (Darrell) 21. "the better organizers tend to be female" (Rachel)
Vocabulary	22. It seems feminine because of "things like 'a torch of excellence and efficiency of tomorrow,' just kind of, just kind of clichés" (Rachel) 23. "'an interesting and intelligent conclusion…psychological battle'…it's just language that I would more associate with a female" (Richard) 24. "vastly intelligent ad groundbreaking." I guess 'vastly' by itself is a word that feels feminine to me…Again, brilliant, brilliant and vastly intelligent. Generally speaking I wouldn't associate that kind of language with a boy…I more strongly associate it as, as, as a feminine tic. As an unfortunate feminine tic" (Nate) 25. "there's something masculine about ['a torch of excellence and efficiency of tomorrow']" (Nate)
Quality of writing	26. "I still think women write better" (Rachel) 27. "it was that precision of thought and analysis of the assignment" (Henry)

Enduring Patterns

As the above sections on class, race, and gender show, indexicality associated with standardness spans both sentence- and text-level features. However, there are clear patterns regarding standardness and indexicality. Of particular importance is the repeated linking of sentence-level nonstandardness with African American students and text-level standardness with middle to upper-middle class white students. Indeed, given the lamination of race and class, African American students (who are always assumed to be from a low SES) are consistently linked with nonstandardness at both the sentence- and text-level and white middle to upper-middle class student are consistently linked with standardness at both the sentence- and text-level. These enduring indexical patterns are particularly visible as Melissa describes her continuum of standardness and the

corresponding student-author identities.[51] Melissa, like other instructors, relies on a continuum of standardness and privilege in order to understand both student writing and student identity. In the quotation that follows, Melissa positions one identity category (a student from "an inner-city school in Metropolis") as the proxy for nonstandard writing. She uses this identity profile as a point of comparison for the paper she is responding to and her perception of the student's class identity, asserting "I've definitely seen a lot worse. I wouldn't expect that this student comes from an inner-city school in Metropolis, for example. I think it's a lot more sophisticated than the kind of writing I've seen from most students who come from that background." Later, she also reveals the identity category for standardness as "kids who are coming from … some of those [wealthy and high-achieving] school districts." Melissa's scale of standardness is linked to prior education and, therefore, class, but also "linked to race, certainly" as she explicitly states that prior education has racial connotations for her when imagining student-author identity.

The indexical patterns described above offer an opportunity to examine the co-occurring ideologies of SLI and whiteness. SLI creates the assumption that all "good" schools offer access to SEAE (at the sentence- and text-level), and all students who have access to SEAE will use it because it is better and desirable. Whiteness creates the assumption that white students are from a higher SES and have gone to better schools. Whiteness also affixes standardness with white people (or worse, equates standardness with white) and makes other identities, particularly those in opposition to white—in this case, African American—incongruent with the standard. SLI and whiteness, then, work in tandem to perpetuate the belief that SEAE is widely accessible and not affiliated with any one group of people, but also less accessible to certain marginalized groups and incongruent with African American language use. These ideologies functionally prohibit indexical patterns that would allow African American students to be linked with anything other than nonstandardness. Instead, the enduring indexical patterns continue to privilege white middle to upper-middle class students *at the expense of* students of color—in this case, African American students in particular.

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[51] While I offer Melissa's quotation as an example of enduring racist and classist indexical patterns, all of the instructors in this study perpetuate these beliefs and patterns to varying degrees.

The following section, which describes the creation of identity profiles, shows these enduring patterns associated with race, class, and standardness to be so powerful that they influence instructors' reception of texts and even perceptions of standardness. Furthermore, the identity profiles described in the next section reinforce my claim that indexicality often occurs across identity categories.

"Spiraling out a narrative": The making of identity profiles

This section describes a second level of indexicality in which instructors create identity profiles for student-authors, which often extend beyond the categories of race, class, and gender to include "type of student" indexicality. While "type of student" indexicality adds nuance to instructors' perceptions of student-author identity and influences instructors' interactions with the text, the enduring indexical patterns related to standardness and identity work to solidify stereotypes based on class, race, and gender. Examining these patterns—both the construction and explanation—offers another point of access for making language ideologies and ideologies of privilege visible as instructors' perceptions of identity are linked to both understandings of standardness and assumptions about students' access to "the standard." Moreover, examining these profiles allows a better understanding of the bidirectionality of indexicality in which non/standardness is indexical of certain identities and certain identities influence instructors' readings of texts and identities.

In addition to having a general sense of student identity from reading the papers, the instructors also provide more details about identity when asked and even create identity profiles for many of the students. These identity profiles are powerful forces in influencing instructors' interactions with texts. As this section demonstrates, once instructors develop an identity profile for a student-author, it changes the way they interpret textual features in the student's text. According to a study by Piché, Rubin, Turner and Michlin in 1978, "writing evaluators are not always accurate in discerning the actual social identities of writers. But if they decide (for any reason, plausible or not) that a particular writer is a member of a socially stigmatized group, then they are more likely to perceive the writing as nonstandard and error-laden" (qtd. in Rubin 5). The findings from this study align with those of Piché et al. In addition, this study shows the opposite

to be true as well. When instructors imagine a privileged student-author, they tend to either overlook errors or to interpret them as mistakes.

While not all instructors in this study created identity profiles (and even those who did, often only created them for some of the students), the examples below show that some instructors turn to existing profiles of former students in order to imagine the student authors of the papers. In fact, several instructors state that they imagine specific former students as they create identity profiles. For example, Henry notes, "I actually had a specific student in mind from this semester who I thought was sort of a proxy, who could easily be this student." Other instructors develop identity profiles based not on a specific student but on patterns (indeed stereotypes) rooted in their experiences with and expectations for students; these constructions are often marked by language such as "generally speaking." Returning to Henry as an example, both the signaling language and the practice of creating "enduring identities" are visible. He says, "women students…are *generally* just more engaged at all levels" regardless of their writing abilities (emphasis added). Regardless of whether the identity profiles are linked to one student or many, these profiles—and the act of creating them—reveal powerful ideologies about standardness and whiteness, and offer a glimpse of how enduring patterns are created and reinforced.

Following are examples of identity profiles, which range from very specific, such as "High-achieving, Catholic-high-school female" to general stereotypes based on dichotomies such as inner city versus suburban. Although I have not included every instructor's identity profiles here, the following categories are representative of the full range of profiles in this study. The first profile makes clear the persistence of whiteness (regardless of instructor intentions) and the influence these profiles have on instructors' interactions with student texts and likely student-authors.

Female, Catholic high school graduates:

> These young women who came from Catholic high schools are
> pretty sharp. They come from middle-class families…there's a
> value on education and they're usually pretty sharp. (Henry)

The first indexical in Paper B is what Henry calls a "precision of thought"—it is

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both an acute awareness of what the assignment is asking for as well as a good start at meeting those requirements. The understanding of and approach to the assignment—a text-level feature—is a strong marker for the "female graduate of Catholic high schools" identity profile. According to Henry, the female graduates of Catholic high schools are consistently high achieving. Henry comments that from his experience teaching at CU, he has come to know "that kids from certain schools," for example Catholic high schools, "are going to be pretty sharp thinkers and kids from other schools and other districts aren't," which he acknowledges "is a horrible thing." The identity profile of female graduates of Catholic high schools locates the student of Paper B on the high end of the standard continuum. In fact, of all the ways Henry talks about identity and standardness, this identity profile is the closest to standard for Henry and is used as a point of comparison for other students and other student writing.

Unlike gender, which is a non-negotiable component of this identity profile ("I don't have the same category for Catholic boys. I don't know where they, they go" [Henry]), race and class are based on weak assumptions. Henry states that although his "assumption is that [the] majority of these kids are middle class," he's also had students from lower-middle or working class who have gone to Catholic schools. Furthermore, although the students from these schools are "black and white," he reasons that they are "probably more white than black." Henry's assumptions about class and race are a result of ideologies of privilege that connect both higher SES and the white race with privilege and, as a result, better preparedness and higher ability. Because this identity profile is linked to standard writing and is gendered, it also likely indicates Henry's expectation that females are closer to standardness than males. In fact, although Henry does not share any explicit beliefs about females' writing abilities being better than males, he does admit to believing that females are better students. He says, "the women students in my class are always, are generally just more engaged at all levels. So not only the students who are high achievers, but the students who maybe are unconfident writers are still more engaged."

The female, Catholic high school graduate profile is rooted in Henry's experiences as a teacher. He cites these experiences as evidence for the validity of this profile and, by acknowledging that it "is a horrible thing," shifts the blame for the

inequality in education he has noticed to someone or something else, positioning the inequality as largely unchallengeable. In this way, Henry justifies the enduring pattern he has created between female, Catholic high-school graduates and standard writing. Furthermore, while likely not his intention, this identity profile reproduces a connection between standardness and upper/middle class, white, female students.

This identity profile is connected to race, class, and gender; however, it includes significant "type of student" indexicality. Henry depicts these students as high achieving and having a high ability level, stating that they are a "cut above what a lot of students come to freshman comp with." Additionally, when describing these students as having a good understanding of how to approach a writing assignment, which Henry relates to the Catholic high school background, he implies that they are both good students and easy to work with. It is this "type of student" indexicality that seems to be the most influential to Henry's engagement with the text and imagined student-author. Importantly, Henry notes that once he identifies the text-level standardness that signals this identity profile, it "radically…changes [his] reading practices." Although it doesn't come up in the interview, it is likely that once Henry engages this profile, which he says happens "in the very first sentence" of the paper, he is less likely to interpret aspects of the paper as nonstandard or to link nonstandard aspects with the paper with negative personality traits or deficits in prior education.

The next profile demonstrates how two instructors come to a similar identity profile through different paths of reasoning, ultimately working, though, to perpetuate the link between white, middle to upper-middle class females and standardness.

White females from the suburbs:

> I tend to think it's a chick…a good student, conscientious, well-educated … somebody who cares about their writing…My first assumption, if I can be honest, would be she'd gone to private school. She's the daughter of physicians or something. (Rachel)

> I would guess that a young woman wrote this…[she] probably comes from a family background in which literacy practices are fairly important…[it is] probably someone who reads of her own accord outside of assigned class reading…she might be an

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education major…I know this sounds really horrible, but I would say this is probably a student from the suburbs…And at least in [this area], I suppose by implication that probably means I'm envisioning the student as being white. (Chris)

Like Henry, Rachel and Chris's "standard" identity is a white, upper/middle-class female. Also like Henry, Rachel relies on the text-level indexical of good writing in order to signal this profile. Rachel's profile, though, explicitly offers assumptions about the student's commitment to writing ("somebody who cares") and even "her" character ("conscientious"). Throughout the interview, Rachel comments on "type of student" indexicality that references students' commitment and level of investment—issues that are very important to Rachel. In fact, she regularly positions herself as the standard against which she evaluates other students, stating that most students fail to meet the standard, in part, by not putting enough time, effort, and emotional investment into their writing. In this way, Rachel largely attributes "good" writing to effort and character (as opposed to exposure and education) and, to an extent, positions the "type of student" category as more important than class, race, or gender. However, for Rachel the text-level indexical of "good" writing does signal class, race, and gender in patterned ways. Just as Rachel uses her commitment and drive as the representation of standard for "type of student" indexicality, her own class, race, and gender also align with the identity she positions most closely to "good" writing.

While Rachel claims to not think about SES much, and expresses discomfort making assumptions about class (signaled by the phrase "if I can be honest"), she links private schools, professional parents, and home literacy practices to "good" writing. These methods of identification, then, act as a code for talking about class. Indeed, when Rachel connects SES to "good" writing, she relies on several white talk tactics, including code words, justification, avoidance, and absence, as evidenced in the following quotations. Rachel says she does not "want to make the distinction between public and private" but states "public and private does, does make a difference" and that "generally speaking, students who come from a house where there's a book around, if you have professional parents…I've noticed a big difference." Rachel first avoids claiming that students who come from private high schools are better writers, but then asserts that it

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"does make a difference." Additionally, she calls on her experience as a teacher in order to generalize ("generally speaking") the importance of class to writing ability through the use of coded phrases about home literacy practices and professional parents. Finally, Rachel's reference to the importance of home literacy practices ("when there's a book around") includes an unstated assumption about the type of book that would hold value in influencing students' writing ability. By not naming the type of books and type of language use that is connected to good writing as standardness—by creating absence instead of descriptively modifying the literacy that is connected to privilege and standardness—, she firmly roots "standard" and privileged literacy practices in the normative center and positions them as unaffiliated. All of these tactics allow Rachel to create a strong connection between white women from a middle to upper-middle class background and "good" writing, without having to explicitly state her biases.

Chris's identity profile—although ultimately the same as Rachel's—is created through a very different justification process. Prior to describing this identity profile, Chris had been explaining the importance of citations in student writing. He explained to me that students often use citations as evidence as opposed to putting their text and arguments in conversation with the citations. It is not surprising, then, that the student's use of citations is the first indexical for him. In this case, the student's use of citations signals a female author. However, the citations do not function alone in indexing gender. Instead, the quality of writing alongside the use of citations allow Chris to venture a guess about a female author. He states that "a lot of the male students [he has] that write this adeptly are often in the sciences." These male students in the sciences, according to Chris, "sometimes have trouble…incorporating cited material [or] quotations into their work." According to Chris, the "good" writing in Paper B could be associated with males or females, but because the text also uses citations well, and his male students "sometimes have trouble with this," he assumes the author is a female. Stated another way, because Chris links gender and "type of student" when it comes to citation practices, he assumes the author is a female.

Like Rachel, Chris makes assumptions about the student's home environment and out-of-school literacy practices. The student's "fluidity…of diction and word choice" suggests to Chris that the author is a reader "of her own accord." Chris does not name the

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literacy practices or types of books that are likely to help students develop a vocabulary that would be valued within an academic setting, again treating the "standard" as neutral. Furthermore, the designation of someone as a reader, especially outside of school assignments, likely carries with it implications about "type of student" characteristics that instructors align with "good" writing—such as a strong work ethic and motivation. Finally, the reference to home literacy practices likely carries class connotations as well. Certainly, both the kind of reading that would result in valued "fluidity…of diction and word choice" and assumptions about parents' education that would influence whether there are (appropriate) books at home often include assumptions about SES.

Although Chris does not explicitly link those literacy practices to SES, he also does not avoid the *class* identity category, stating that the overall quality of writing is too strong to come from the inner-city school district. Therefore, he assumes that "this is probably a student from the suburbs" and, as he states in the quotation above, that assumption also signals race. Chris does not explicitly state that he believes white students are stronger writers than black students, yet the connection between race, school district, and quality of writing lead him to the same perceived identity and racial assumptions as Rachel. Chris's identity profile, then, explicitly links a higher SES with standardness and implicitly links white students and good writing. Finally, the student's good writing and "logical structuring" along with her approach to the topic prompts Chris to imagine her as an education major. Chris's assumption about the student's major (as well as his comment about the male science students) is likely also tied to gender.

Rachel and Chris's two different paths to such similar identity profiles suggest that enduring indexical patterns limit the identity profiles available for "standard" writing. In other words, it is likely that the identity profile of white, middle to upper-middle class female students who are "good" writers and connected to positive "type of student" characterizations is both prevalent and powerful, and perhaps has begun to serve as one available proxy for standardness for these instructors.

The profiles that follow—those of privileged, white male students—demonstrate the powerful influence of a highly privileged identity profile on instructors' readings of text and conceptions of standardness.

Privileged, white male:

> I can sort of picture this white, middle-class guy with a baseball hat and a plaid button down shirt (laughter) and it, it doesn't seem uneducated. It just seems like 'this is my perspective and I can't sort of imagine why you would have a different one'…It seems like somebody who has a little bit of a chip on their shoulder I think… and is cocky I guess (Nan)

> This is a person from the upper middle or upper class…a person who went to a good school…I can only, I could only infer by likelihood that this is a white person…I think about [a friend of mine]…rich real estate developer's son, [private prep school], very cultured, very, that's, that's what I see (Nate)

The privileged, white, male student is a relatively common identity profile for the instructors that, at least for Nan and Nate, is partially connected to an attitude or tone in the writing and corresponding assumptions about these authors as particular "types of students." For both Nan and Nate, the language in Paper H indicates a white, middle- or upper-middle class male student, a profile they come to via different paths of reasoning.

Nan begins with gender, noting that the assertions in the essay seem masculine. She then quickly notes that the tone, linked to both the assertions and vocabulary ("horrible teachers" and "horrible facilities"), seems "cocky" to her. This attitude or "vibe" signals multiple "type of student" categories, including approach to writing, personality, and educational background (the latter of which Nan assumes to be either "a middle-class private school" or an "upper-middle class, maybe, wealthy public school district"). Nan's identity profile offers another example of patterned connections between "type of student" and class, race, and gender: "cocky" is gendered, classed, and raced for Nan. It is noteworthy that although Nan finds fault with the paper, grading it as a C, she attributes that to the student, not his educational background. She says, "I think [he] probably had a decent education but did not care much about it…took it for granted, I guess." These assumptions about prior education and class are very much tied to "type of student" indexicality. Nan states, "the sort of profile that [she's] come up with," the "cocky" attitude, and the student's approach to argumentation ("this is my perspective, and I can't sort of imagine why you would have a different one"), are all linked to a sense

of educational and, therefore, economic privilege. Importantly, although this student does not produce "good" writing, the identity profile is not held in contrast to the standard and does not challenge the link between "good" writing and white, upper/middle class students. Indeed, Nan notes the perceived privilege of the student and based on this, interprets the difference in the paper as one of choice and attitude.

Unlike Nan, Nate's identity profile does not originate from gender as he believes "there's nothing gendered about this text." Gender, then, is one of the last categories for Nate and is entirely based on a friend who he is reminded of when reading the paper. Nate cites the "confidence [in] the prose…the confidence of wealth…that you've been born to" as the indexical for SES, privilege, and related "type of student" categories such as prior education, ability, and personality. The confidence and privilege are also the markers that remind him of his friend, the real estate developer's son. This confidence and the presence of academic conventions (such as citations, "integration of quotes," and "the engagement with text") signal both "a class identity" and a strong educational background, which alongside the friend he is imagining result in the picture of a student who is "very cultured." Nate says that the text is marked most strongly for class, which he then connects to race, inferring that the student is white. Furthermore, Nate cites the absence of any markers for race along with the presence of markers for class when justifying his assumption that the student is white. However, what Nate does not explicitly say is that the confidence and wealth that he notes as indexical for class are raced. To speak of "wealth…that you've been born to" and its resulting confidence is to speak of persistent white privilege and the confidence associated with both historical and persistent privilege and having an identity that falls within the normative center. "Confidence," then, is more than a marker for class, it is also likely a marker for the white race.

Like the other identity profiles I've addressed so far, the privileged, white male student—regardless of how the instructors evaluate the writing—reproduces whiteness and perceptions of white superiority. Indeed, this profile, more so than the others described so far, solidifies connections between the unmarked standard in writing and the unmarked standard in identity, making a connection that is so strong, the instructors don't have to like the writing to assume that the student is privileged. Nan gives Paper H a C,

but despite poor argument "structure" still imagines a privileged background; Nate states, "I find it interesting how many little errors I missed in Paper H because of its authority (*laughter*). Like, I'm, I'm willing to forgive like an extra "to" and a, the lost "n" in an "and" because it just seems like it's in charge." This identity profile works to redefine standardness, making projected authority and tone—related to "type of student" indexicality, but also class and race—more important than the organization and development of the argument and positions the sentence-level difference as "lazy" proofreading mistakes as opposed to features of nonstandardness.

In direct contrast to the privileged, white male profile, the inner-city, black student is a profile based on deficit, and to some extent, lack of privilege.

Inner-city, black student:

> This one, I sort of, this one might be a inner city…I thought this might be a boy…[he's] badly prepared… [and hasn't] had a lot of good writing experience…[He's had] an education with some deficits (Carol)

> This is a person coming from a disadvantaged background of some sort…probably an African American…African American, African American Metropolis…[this person is] really trying to do the task, but is severely hampered by poor education (Nate)

The identity profile associated with inner-city, black students is largely associated with deficits and is one of the least-developed profiles. Carol first notices "trouble with verb tenses" in Paper D, which she says is "a bad sign. That's, that's an inner-city sign." Problems with word choice also indicate to Carol that this student is "badly prepared." All of the problems in the essay signal to Carol a certain "type of student" that went to an under-resourced school, probably in the inner city, which is connected to both race (African American) and class (poor). However, race is not only tied to the student's presumed inner-city schooling. Carol states, "I think it's probably an African American because of the way some of the language is used. Um, the mistake of using 'has' and using prejudice as a noun there." In fact, these indexicals signal prior education, race, and class—all of which fall under the category of "inner city" for this instructor. Gender is the only category that is not linked to the quality of writing for Carol. Instead, the

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student's approach to the topic ("it talked about NFL") indexes gender. Carol justifies the connection between an urban, black student and nonstandard writing based on problems with the education system; regardless of this rationale, the identity profile further establishes enduring indexical patterns that link African American students with nonstandard writing.

Nate also calls on enduring patterns that link African American students from Metropolis and nonstandard writing, which stem from his experience working with "students from academically nebulous backgrounds" that are admitted through a special program. Nate's experience with this program leads him to make assumptions about "type of student" categories—students who are under-prepared educationally but "really try"—as well as class and race. According to Nate, these students "never had the resources put in front of them to actually shape [their] energy or intellect into something usable and they know it. And they feel desperately panicked about it." It is this sense of "panic" that indexes both prior education and race for Nate in Paper I. Because Nate mostly has experience with female African Americans from Metropolis, but notices vocabulary cues for a male student, he is unwilling to state with any confidence a perceived gender for the author Paper I.

In contrast to indexicality that signals a white author, Nate's identity profile shows the perceived role of structuralism rather than individual choice. Despite Nate's perception that the student is trying hard, structural constraints interfere with the student's access to SEAE and success in his or her paper. This pattern of indexicality is prevalent as the identity profiles for white students reveal a belief in individual effort and will, which is in striking contrast to African American identity profiles where the nonstandardness is wholly attributed to structuralism associated with SES and prior education. In this study, then, success is attributed to the individual—importantly, unearned privilege is not acknowledged when considering success. Furthermore, nonstandardness in writing when paired with a "nonstandard" identity—which is almost always an African American student identity—is read as structural inequality associated with SES. In these patterned responses to student writing, institutional racism is not acknowledged or addressed. This positioning also justifies racial stereotypes, which in this study seem to be less acceptable that class-based stereotypes, and exonerates

instructors by linking the "problem" of certain students being more likely to produce nonstandard text with structural inequality and outside the control of individual instructors.

Both Carol and Nate attribute error or deficits in the paper with deficits in prior education, a lower SES, and the African American race. The different justifications and lines of reasoning for these identity profiles likely signal the pervasiveness of this identity profile, which may indeed limit the perceived range of possible identities that can be linked to nonstandard writing. Conversely, this identity profile likely also limits the possibility for there to be a profile that links African American students with standard writing.

Taken together, these identity profiles reveal the power of enduring indexical patterns and profiles to influence instructors' interactions with texts (and likely students), to shape conceptions of standardness, and to limit possibilities for additional identity profiles connected to non/standardness. Additionally, these profiles demonstrate the connectedness of "type of student" indexicality with class, race, and gender.

In the section that follows, I explore the other resources instructors call on (aside from identity profiles) to make sense of indexical ambiguity. Doing so allows for close examination of the possible relationships among indexicals and the ideologies that justify indexicality.

Indexical Conflict, Visible Ideology: Interpreting "Difference"

Although the instructors often have a sense of authorial identity based on language use at both the sentence and text level, there are also moments when opposing or ambiguous indexicals complicate this process. For example, certain language features show up as indexicals for both class and race in the charts earlier in this chapter. As with the majority of the indexicality that I describe in this chapter, moments of indexical conflict are often centered around notions of standardness. The ways that instructors interpret difference on a continuum of standardness influences these moments of conflict.

Early in my interview with Nan, she acknowledges having trouble picturing the student authors because of the conflicting indexicals of "organizational problems" and good "punctuation and sentence structure." Because of her experiences as a teacher, she

has come to expect that "the papers…with…organizational problems also have an abundant amount of like punctuation and sentence structure issues." When the papers she reads for the study fall outside of that pattern, she is unsure of student-author identity. Although Nan does eventually turn to other markers in order to get a sense of authorial identity, this initial reaction suggests that Nan expects some degree of uniformity of standardness across levels, allowing her to place students on either end of the continuum of standardness.

Nan is not alone in positioning students and textual features as either standard or nonstandard (as opposed to partially [non]standard). And, not surprisingly, this creates some tension when students or their writing occupy both positions at once. For example, Rachel consistently labels African American student writing as nonstandard, though she offers one exception: a former student who was both an African American female and a good writer. This example is necessarily different because Rachel knows the student and is able to go outside of the writing for additional identity cues to help her make sense of the discrepancy between her rigid expectations that all African Americans—and especially African American women—will be nonstandard writers. In particular, Rachel turns to the student's class, asserting that she "was very poised, very ambitious, and was the daughter of professionals, so it made sense to me." Although not linked solely to writing, this process of justification reveals Rachel's understanding of privilege in our society and the small space she has created for African American students to defy her expectations: if African American students come from a higher SES (middle to upper-middle class since her expectation is that these students will be poor), it would make sense that their writing would be better. This process of allowing for exceptions does not challenge Rachel's category of African Americans as nonstandard writers but does reinforce the connection between class and standardness.

While Nan and Rachel's understanding of standard and nonstandard as mutually exclusive complicate their perceptions of student-author identities, Emily encounters indexical conflict within the category of nonstandard when she finds that nonstandard grammar and usage could signal two distinct identities. She states,

> I guess it depends on do I think this is a, do I think this is a African American kid in the inner city of Chicago or do I think this is a Korean kid whose parents are

both doctors who came here when she was 12 and…went to a very good boarding school…I can't decide.

The difference between these identity profiles, according to Emily, is one of exposure and access. She says,

part of me wants to say […the student was] not exposed to much academically and therefore, they're trying to over-compensate with this sort of elevated language. The other part of me feels like they've been very much exposed and is having this, this problem accessing that.

While both identity profiles are linked to nonstandard identities, their relationship to privilege is vastly different. Most obviously, Emily signals SES differences by calling on the location "inner city" and contrasting that with a student "whose parents are both doctors" and who "went to a very good boarding school." These constructions of SES dictate access to standardness for the imagined students Emily describes. Finally, given the importance of reader reception in this study, it is important to note that nonstandardness associated with African American students versus nonstandardness associated with a Korean student for whom English is his/her second language are likely to result in different assumptions about the student author and their engagement with schooling as African Americans and their language are stigmatized in academia. Although Emily's understanding of nonstandard is nuanced and allows for multiple identities, it does not challenge the strong link between white and upper/middle class with standardness or African American and inner-city with nonstandardness.

The two possible identity profiles that Emily references indicate that she interpreted the nonstandard grammar and usage as errors; had she considered them to be mistakes, the identity profiles would likely have been different. Indeed, for many instructors determining whether nonstandard grammatical features are errors or mistakes[52] is an integral, but not always easy, component in the construction of student-author identities and also the source of some indexical conflict. Henry articulates the difficulty of this process when he states, "I don't know until I start talking to the student whether they just left out words because they were writing so quickly and it was so late

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[52] The distinction between error and mistake rests on a student's knowledge of rules. If students know a language rule, but inadvertently don't follow it (a typo, for example), the misuse of language is a mistake. However, if a student is unaware of the rule or is following a different set of rules that are not recognized in that particular context, it would be considered an error.

or whether there's actual syntax, there's actually problems with sentence construction."
Whether Henry decides the missing word in a student's paper is a mistake or a problem
with sentence construction likely has implications for the way he imagines the student. If
Henry follows the indexical patterns in this study, determining that the missing word is
an error could lead him to picture an African American student and/or a student from a
lower SES (or possibly that the student is an ESL learner). In contrast, if the missing
word is a mistake, he might imagine a white student from a middle or upper-middle class
background. In the example above, Henry does ultimately decide that the missing word is
a mistake; however, he does so because he first turns to other markers to create an
identity profile that influences his interpretation of the grammatical "issue." Henry states,
"my male, jock student, this [missing word] kind of fits with that. I guess maybe that
would make me assume more this was just kind of the writing quickly." He imagines the
student preoccupied with sports to the point where the student does not allow enough
time to write and properly proofread his English paper. In this instance, Henry uses his
identity profile for the student as a guide for reading the missing word as a mistake. This
example of interpreting the cause for a missing word again illustrates the bidirectionality
of indexicality: language use can create identities just as identities can change the way we
receive and interpret language use. Better understanding indexicality, then, can allow for
better understanding of standardness, or SEAE.

The Implications of Enduring Indexical Patterns

This chapter has argued that examining the indexicality of SEAE—at both the
sentence- and text-level—uncovers often-hidden ideologies of standardness and
privilege, reveals enduring indexical patterns, and adds complexity to composition
studies' conversations about the (existing and ideal) role of SEAE in composition
courses. In particular, this chapter has demonstrated that instructors rely on their
perceptions of written standardness for indexical clues, a finding that aligns with Tardy
and Matsuda's research. Additionally, the analysis of this data suggests that while the
indexicals for class, race, and gender span many levels of language, they are often
clustered in one area and at one level of standardness (i.e., engagement with topic for
gender and grammar and punctuation for race).

The indexical patterns revealed in this chapter are compelling and enduring. Though not all of the instructors noted all of the patterns, the link between privileged language and privileged student identities and conversely the disassociation between African Americans, in particular, and SEAE is pervasive and, in the majority of cases, reinforced regardless of the study site or instructors' personal experiences; regardless of instructors' intention.

When error—in this case grammatical error—becomes the most common signal for a particular race (African Americans), it is hard to imagine how that would not impact classroom instruction and overall access to academia for some students. The enduring pattern of linking African American students with nonstandard writing is prevalent across study sites and for nearly every instructor in this study, just as the enduring pattern of linking white, middle to upper-middle class student with standard writing—at times even redefining standardness to maintain this link—occurs across sites and for nearly every instructor. Importantly, there are *no* instances of a positively-evaluated feature in students' texts signaling an African American student author. This fact alone demonstrates a continued reliance on the deficit model for making sense of African American students as writers. Furthermore, because these enduring indexical patterns also influence instructor interactions with texts, it is likely that all difference in texts perceived to have been written by African American students will be read as error and/or nonstandard.

Finally, the role of SLI and whiteness in linking white, middle to upper-middle class students with standard writing and positioning African American students as incongruent with SEAE cannot be overstated. Indeed, SLI provides the justification and logic necessary to buy into the existence and value of "the" standard, and whiteness allows instructors to both acknowledge a link between "good" writing and already privileged students (based on class and race) and remove themselves from either blame or responsibility for finding a solution for this unequal power system.

One important factor in the continued privileging of SEAE despite the indexical patterns presented here is perceived linguistic neutrality. Chapter 4 defines linguistic neutrality and describes the features of SLD that not only create this perception of neutrality but also perpetuation SLI and whiteness.

Chapter 4
Standard Language Discourse:
The Rhetorical Construction of Linguistic Neutrality

This chapter theorizes and defines linguistic neutrality through an interrogation of a set of discursive practices I have termed standard language discourse (SLD). In this chapter, I examine not only SLD, but its rhetorical effect: the creation of linguistic neutrality. I argue that the composition instructors in this study position SEAE as linguistically neutral by using SLD to create perceptions of "sameness," shift focus onto the "other," and deny unearned privilege. Furthermore, linguistic neutrality is created by not acknowledging (and, therefore, likely reproducing) the indexical work of SEAE that connects this privileged language variety with privileged identities and links standardness to individuals and individual effort. This last aspect—positioning standardness as only a matter of effort—effectively works to "blame the victim" for inequality.[53]

Despite the negative implications of treating SEAE as linguistically neutral, the power and prevalence of SLI make this positioning common and often seemingly subconscious. As I argue in Chapter 3, raising awareness about the indexicality of SEAE—especially the problematic enduring indexical patterns—is one means of challenging the perceived linguistic neutrality of this privileged dialect. Here, I argue that given the inherent abstraction of ideologies, one productive way to better understand and challenge SLI is by examining SLD, which is both a material outcome of SLI and a discourse that (re)produce this ideology. Therefore, I suggest that identifying and interrogating SLD allow for a critique of not only the perceived neutrality of SEAE but also SLI. Furthermore, examining SLD and its rhetorical effect demonstrates the creation of linguistic neutrality associated with SEAE *regardless* of instructors' intentions.

The analysis in this chapter identifies key features of SLD and their rhetorical effect through a process of discourse analysis, which asks: "what expressions…of

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[53] Blaming the victim is a rhetorical feature of whiteness that suggests that minorities are responsible for their own subordination.

discourse give rise to what kind of inferences" (van Dijk 143) and to what effect? This analysis considers *discourse* to be the text and its features and *rhetoric* to be the effect of the discourse. Maurice Charland defines ideological discourse as "discourse that presents itself as always only pointing to the given, the natural, the already agreed upon" (133). Given this definition, SLD is certainly an ideological discourse. Indeed, SLD relies on the same common sense beliefs and presentation of beliefs about standard languages as SLI. According to Charland, the given-ness of ideological discourse is problematic in the way "it presents that which is most rhetorical…as extrarhetorical" (138). In the context of this examination, I show that SLD positions the superiority and accessibility of SEAE as "extrarhetorical," as existing outside of discourse. The effect of this rhetorical strategy is both SEAE's perceived linguistic neutrality and the common acceptance of this positioning. Furthermore, discourse both enacts ideologies and persuades its audience of its position (van Dijk 146). For this reason, studying SLD and the rhetorical creation of linguistic neutrality can reveal the process by which perceptions of linguistic neutrality are created and maintained *and* allow for a challenging of the discourse, as ideological discourse depends on the "already agreed upon" (Charland 133).

Because markedness is a key component in the construction of neutrality, I begin this chapter by examining and defining this construct. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to examining features of SLD that rhetorically produce perceived linguistic neutrality.

Markedness

Integral to this study and the examination of the indexicality of SEAE is the concept of markedness, which is intimately connected to notions of standardness. The term *markedness*, as it applies to language, originates in linguistic scholarship where it is used to describe several aspects of language use, including morphemes (e.g., adding an *-s* to make a noun plural or an *-ess* for gender), inflections (e.g., adding an *-ed* to a verb to indicate past tense) and adjective pairings. This last category—adjective pairings— illustrates the relationship between markedness and neutrality well as one half of the pair is always treated as neutral. Take for example the pairing of *tall* and *short*: when we ask questions about a person's height, our default question is "how tall is s/he?" In this

pairing, *tall* is unmarked and neutral and *short* is marked. Linguistic markedness in this project refers to language use (including both sentence- and text-level features) that is perceived as different.

The permeable boundary between *different* and *nonstandard,* though not surprising, is noteworthy. In fact, theorizing markedness as nearly synonymous with nonstandardness is common within multiple fields, including linguistics, communication studies, and various fields interested in studying identity, to name a few. For example, Stephen Banks, from the field of communication, states that "markedness generally signals nonstandardness in a negatively valued sense, such that an individual who exhibits markedness is seen as different from a standard, normal, and natural reference category" (176). Marked language, according to Banks' definition, is not only nonstandard, but *sub*standard. Markedness, then, is perceived to be undesirable. This understanding of un/markedness as it pertains to language is clearly visible within SLI, which labels the "standard" as neutral and positions all else as marked and, often, substandard. Just as markedness is often treated as synonymous with nonstandardness, *un*markedness is conflated with not only standardness but also "normalcy" and neutrality. Indeed, a common understanding of the unmarked position is that it is both more common (aligned with norms) and "neutral" (McArthur 645). These understandings of markedness are notably context-less as they forward an assumption that standardness will always be expected and, therefore, what is nonstandard will always be marked.

In contrast, the data from this study complicate a complete conflation of nonstandardness and markedness as the instructors comment on both standard and nonstandard textual features as marked. Additionally, because local conceptions of standardness and expectations for student writing are constantly shifting, context greatly influences the relationship between un/markedness and non/standardness. Like standardness, markedness is most complicated for the instructors at City University and for instructors who have had teaching experiences at multiple institutions, as these participants differentiate between the standard and norms—a distinction that creates space for "good" writing to be both marked (not the norm) and standard or close-to-

standard[54]—and vary their expectations for "good" college writing based on where they are teaching or have taught. For example, while instructors at both institutions indicate that students often do not meet their expectations for "good" writing, some of the CU instructors *expect* that student writing will be nonstandard. For these instructors, nonstandard writing is a norm that is marked negatively. "Good" writing is also marked (because it does not align with the norm), but it is marked positively for its position as (close to) standard. The following passage from Rachel (a CU instructor) demonstrates the importance of context and experience to markedness. Reflecting on her assessment of student papers on a scale of standardness, Rachel says,

> I've taught some places that you never get anything this good so it might be an A…I mean I always change [my grading scale]. I haven't ever taught at a community college, but I've taught at a lot of schools that have different student populations, so I always vary my assessment. It would also be true that I would look at the [unintelligible] papers to see where it fell. I mean if they're all like this or better, then obviously this would be closer maybe to a B+. But I'm assuming this is, this would be among the, the better papers. This [other paper] is much more common in my opinion in terms of what I, I usually get.

This passage is representative of the possibility for markedness and standardness to co-occur. The paper Rachel refers to, Paper B, is marked positively for being better than (but different from) the norm and more closely aligned with SEAE than most of the papers she encounters at her current and previous institutions. Conversely, the other paper, which she says is "much more common," is a paper she "hates." That paper, which aligns with the norm at CU, is also marked for being different from her conception of standard. In short, both of the papers are marked and viewed as different, but the one that is closest to the standard is marked positively while the one that is closest to the norm is marked negatively.

Another example that challenges the conflation between markedness and nonstandardness is Carol's discussion of the range of writing ability at CU. Like Rachel, Carol references both positive and negative markedness, though she assigns these designations to the students as opposed to the writing. In the passage that follows, Carol

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[54] Indeed, none of the papers in this study is considered to be wholly standard by the instructors—nor do the instructors expect college students to produce completely standard writing as they consider it to be their job to teach students certain academic conventions and text-level standardness.

connects marked identities to both standard and nonstandard writing. In response to my question about writing that does not meet her expectations, Carol states:

> You know, it's kind of hard to say because at CU the kids come with so many different levels of capability….because it's a city school and because the top 10 percent are there on presidential scholarships…that are totally academic, and so you know, you do get some kids who are very well prepared and are, you know, thoughtful and good writers. Um, so you get a tremendous disparity. You know, you have kids who are first generation Americans, kids who are from the inner city—you just get this huge…disparity. Um, so, in terms of expectations, you know, um, some of the students really come so poorly prepared that I, you know, it's hard to know what kind of expectations to have. [*laughter*] I'm always happy that there are a few that know what they're doing and obviously had some good writing encounters.

Carol's experience with varying levels of abilities within one institution makes it "hard [for her] to know what kind of expectations to have." According to Carol some students are "thoughtful and good writers… [who have] had some good writing encounters"; others are "poorly prepared." In this passage, Carol articulates a spectrum of standardness with students who have received Presidential Scholarships on one end and first-generation American students and students "from the inner city" on the other end. This range of standardness illustrates the "tremendous disparity" of ability that Carol sees in her classes and largely aligns with indexical patterns described in Chapter 3.

Positioning student identities at either end of a spectrum of ability calls on and reproduces enduring patterns between certain identity profiles with writing ability—especially the link between inner-city students and nonstandardness, as the location "inner city" is conflated with SES, prior education, and writing ability. This conflation of nonstandard writing with students from a particular linguistic background or location stands in contrast to the more general details Carol provides about students' whose writing is standard; these students who are "thoughtful and good writers" are "very well prepared," "obviously had some good writing encounters," and "know what they are doing," but there is rhetorical space for multiple student identities to fit this description. Because the students who are linked to nonstandardness are described first by social position ("first generation Americans" and "kids who are from the inner city"), the secondary comment about their lack of preparedness ("so poorly prepared") is already

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linked to the particular social identities. Returning to the concept of markedness, at each end of the continuum the students and their writing are marked as either much better than she would expect or much worse than her understanding of "good" writing.

Both of the above examples challenge Banks' definition of markedness as "different from a standard, normal, and natural reference category" (176) by demonstrating the possibility for marked texts and identities to be associated with either standardness or nonstandardness. The data from this study, which demonstrate that writing is rarely ever fully marked or unmarked, standard or nonstandard, challenge the impulse toward forming dichotomies that seems to accompany considerations of the role of SEAE in composition. Furthermore, as the examples above suggest, instead of conflating markedness with nonstandardness, it may be more useful to think of markedness as context-dependent *difference*. Conceiving of markedness as difference works to highlight the role of opposition and contrast in creating designations of un/markedness. Also, and importantly, defining markedness as difference draws attention to the likelihood that unmarkedness is perceived as *sameness*—either linguistically or in terms of identity—and is often unnamed. Indeed, returning to the passages from Rachel and Carol, both instructors comment only on marked language (and identities) and define what is marked through a process of contrast. Rachel contrasts Paper B with writing that she has read throughout her career as an instructor as well as one of the other papers from this study. Carol describes identity profiles at either end of standardness as context for describing her expectations (or lack thereof). Later in this chapter, I label "contrast with 'other'" as a form of SLD that works to position SEAE as "natural" and "normal," often leading to perceptions of linguistic neutrality.

In addition to challenging the conflation between markedness and nonstandardness, this project also calls for a careful consideration of the relationship between markedness and indexicality. As the example from Carol makes clear, designations of un/markedness can be applied to both language and language users. Additionally, the data in Chapter 3 demonstrates that un/markedness in language is often indexical for particular identities. Indeed, the countless examples of instructors using markedness as the springboard for indexicality makes it easy to assume that markedness is *always* indexical. Darrell's interview, however, resists an assumed and determined

connection between markedness and indexicality when he responds to the papers he read for the study as marked but not indexical. Darrell repeatedly positions the papers he read as negatively marked, stating that the papers do not meet his expectations for college-level writing. However, he does not associate identity with this markedness. In fact, Darrell insists that the papers are largely nonindexical, noting only that he has a sense that they were written by male students. Despite this "sense," though, Darrell does not reference specific indexicals for gender in the texts and states that the papers are not marked for class or race. The papers, then, are unmarked for identity but marked due to their difference from both the standard and the norm. Later in this chapter, I further interrogate Darrell's insistence that the papers are unmarked for identity, or are nonindexical. I argue that although student papers could certainly be nonindexical, positioning SEAE as *never* indexical disconnects SEAE from identity and/or shifts attention away from identity, contributing to the perception of this dialect as linguistically neutral.

The following section outlines four key aspects of perceived linguistic neutrality and identifies and describes the features of SLD that contribute to this rhetorical effect.

Constructions of Linguistic Neutrality

As with the other theoretical constructs in this dissertation, linguistic neutrality is slippery and difficult to both define and study, in part, because of its inherently ideological nature. In an attempt to offer a more precise—though contextually-bound and contingent—definition of linguistic neutrality, I have turned to instructors' talk about students' texts, standardness, and their expectations for student writing. My analysis of the data in this study identifies four features of linguistic neutrality: SEAE as normal, SEAE as natural, SEAE as non-interfering, and SEAE as unaffiliated. The representation of these categories as discrete is artificial and misleading. Instead, the categories overlap, work together, influence, and inform one another. Nonetheless, in the sections that follow, I attempt to disentangle the four categories of linguistic neutrality in order to interrogate their individual definitions, construction, and implications. I call on discourse analysis to identify features of SLD that create and perpetuate the aforementioned four aspects of linguistic neutrality and to examine the rhetorical construction of this

ideological positioning. I argue these discursive practices not only create the rhetorical space for perceptions of linguistic neutrality but also are a manifestation of SLI and, therefore, (re)produce this powerful and enduring understanding of non/standard language. Furthermore, throughout this section, I employ whiteness studies as a theoretical frame that clearly and forcefully demonstrates the stakes of positioning SEAE as neutral. Using whiteness studies in this way also allows for a comparison between whiteness and SLI, which I begin in this chapter and extend in Chapter 5.

The first two sections that follow—SEAE as normal and SEAE as natural—are closely related. Both perceptions of SEAE put this privileged dialect in a normative center against which other language varieties are valued and defined, often negatively. Furthermore, contrast is an important element in the construction of perceptions of SEAE as both normal and natural. Despite these similarities, the category of normalcy relies on assertions of sameness while perceptions of SEAE as natural can often be attributed to unexamined expectations and conventions.

SEAE as Normal

In the interviews with composition instructors, SEAE is treated as though it is normal; that is, the instructors represent this language variety as common and defined by sameness within the language and among language users. This positioning of SEAE, which decreases the possibility for acceptable linguistic difference within SEAE, is likely related to the "fictive bond" between a reader and writer that Scollon and Scollon argue is common in the "essayist literacy" Discourse[55] and born out of a commitment to truth and objectivity that dates back to the enlightenment. This rhetorical relationship between readers and writers creates perceptions of sameness and, Scollon and Scollon argue, makes this register nearly incapable of expressing difference (182). The perceived sameness between readers and writers relies on a shared "reality" (via content), but also is connected to shared language practices—as any difference disrupts the illusion and could shift attention from the "truth" of the content to the author and his/her subjectivities. In addition to relying on sameness, essayist literacy also creates an expectation for sameness by conventionalizing standard language practices.

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[55] Essayist literacy is described in detail in Chapter 1.

In this project, implicit assertions of sameness associated with SEAE are largely visible in the unnamed norms, and that which is perceived to be different is located both outside of SEAE and outside of the rhetorically-created social group. The following quotation from Richard offers an extended illustration of three forms of SLD that position SEAE as normal: designations of unmarkedness, contrast with "other," and an absence of name or label. In response to a question about the race of a student-author, Richard states:

> I don't, once again, see any obvious tip offs of any particular dialect or anything. Yeah. So it's really hard to tell. If I had to guess, I'd say white. I see a white female here, but that's (*laughter*), would I bet any money on it? (*laughter*) I mean, because that's the only thing you can go on. I mean I get, I mean I, like I said, you can't really tell. I mean, unless you get obvious tip offs (*laughter*). There's really no way of telling. And there are some fairly obvious tip offs, but if you don't get them then you can't, yeah.

In the first line alone, Richard treats SEAE as unmarked (it doesn't have "any obvious tip offs"); contrasts it with a "particular" (and "othered") language variety and leaves it unnamed (it is simply *not* a "particular dialect"). These three SLD practices are not easily separated as they often work side by side—even constructing one another—in the positioning of "standard" languages as normal. In the passage above, contrast can mask the absence of a name by shifting attention to the "other" just as the absence of a name, in some ways, necessitates contrast. Likewise, unmarkedness is created both through contrast with what is marked (in this case, SEAE is not a "particular dialect") and through the absence of markedness (there are no "obvious tip offs," a phrase that is repeated three times in the above quotation). Unmarkedness in this passage is related to both identity and dialect as Richard is specifically responding to a question about the student-author's race, but in the process positions the language as dialect-free. Again, this unnamed and purportedly dialect-free language can only be addressed—is even constituted—through contrast. All of these features of SLD rely on a perception of sameness so as to make a name, label, or marking unnecessary and contrast with "other" the key means of demarcation and identification. Indeed, the perception of sameness associated with SEAE

is so strong that SEAE becomes universal, and in that universality, invisible (unmarked and unnamed). [56]

Richard's quotation demonstrates that, often, the opposite of what is marked can be both unmarked and an absence of markedness. This distinction is particularly important when considering indexicality. For example, Richard uses the absence of the "obvious tip offs"—the absence of markedness—as justification for his guess that the student-author is white but calls on the unmarkedness of the language to assert "there's really no way of telling" the student-author's identity. In this case, Richard, like many other instructors at both institutions, assumes a white identity in the perceived absence of dialectal markers and uses contrast as his method of both treating a particular language variety as "normal" and justifying indexicality. This example, then, demonstrates an indexical pattern in which language varieties or features that lack markedness signal sameness or "unmarked" identities—here, the absence of markedness indexes a white student-author and positions both the language and identity as normal. Unmarked identities have already been theorized in other scholarly conversations. To name a few, whiteness studies explores the unmarked white race; feminist studies explores the unmarked male gender; and queer studies explores unmarked heterosexuality. As the above quotation from Richard suggests, the white race is unmarked in this study—more so than any other identity category. Indeed, as I show in Chapter 3, absence of markedness almost always serves as a racial indexical in this study as opposed to indexing education or SES.

While the data from this study do not offer an explicit rationale for the strong link between an absence of markedness and the white race, it is likely related to what Milroy and Milroy describe as U.S.-based "language ideology focused on racial discrimination" that stems from "bitter divisions created by slavery and the Civil War" (160). In other words, in the United States, the "othering" associated with language use is likely to be related to race. As this study suggests, the opposite of that "othering" is also racial, that is, perceptions of sameness are, to some extent, perceptions of whiteness. Furthermore, given the persistent conflation of race and class in this study, it is likely that the white

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[56] Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek describe whiteness as a strategic rhetoric that uses universality and invisibility to maintain its position in the normative center. As I suggest here, SEAE's position in the normative center follows a similar ideological path.

race includes an assumption of middle or upper-middle SES, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

In addition to functioning indexically, perceptions of absence are also a common sign of constructed normalcy, as what is perceived to be absence is actually sameness that is unnamed and normalized. For example, absence of a "particular dialect" does not mean that the language is truly dialect-free: instead, the student is writing in an unnamed, normalized dialect—SEAE. Treating SEAE as absent of dialect and a point of comparison for other language varieties works again to create both universality and invisibility and positions this language variety firmly in the normative center. Just as the unnamed dialect can only be described in opposition to what is marked, nonstandard language varieties are also recognized and defined in contrast to the unnamed, normative center. Treating SEAE as unmarked and putting it in opposition with "other" further justifies SEAE operating as the normative center against which the "other"—often AAE—is compared and evaluated. This process, then, is self-perpetuating.

The implications of SEAE operating as a normative center extend beyond the negative evaluation of other language varieties, although that is a serious issue. John Hartigan, a leading figure in the field of whiteness studies, articulates some of the implications associated with the white race occupying the normative position— implications that appear to apply to this situation as well. He states that by treating race "as a category of difference," all that "white people, generally speaking, do and think" become norms and any deviance is racialized and viewed negatively (496-7). Similarly, "standard" language is created, in part, by associating linguistic "standardness" with privileged people, including—and maybe even especially—white people (Hill 35). Deviance from SEAE is not only negatively-valued and named as "other" but also is linked to non-privileged people. Allowing SEAE to continue to reside in the normative center makes it nearly impossible for any other language variety to be seen as equal to SEAE, let alone for linguistic difference to be conceived of positively. Furthermore, just as whiteness is a largely invisible ideology that perpetuates white privilege and domination, the indexicality and perceived neutrality of SEAE are also largely invisible and perpetuate both race- and class-based unearned privilege and dominance.

SLI and whiteness—and the discourses that reflect and create these ideologies—are often perpetuated through social conventions. The next section focuses on the unquestioned, even unacknowledged, conventions that lead to the perception of SEAE as "natural."

SEAE as Natural

Treating SEAE as unmarked and unnamed creates the perception of this dialect as not only "normal" but "natural." However, perceptions of SEAE as natural are born out of firmly entrenched expectations that are not acknowledged as political or socially constructed. When one language variety is perceived to be "natural," it is often also perceived to be so common and accepted—so much of a "given"—that it is no longer recognized as a "variety" of language and simply becomes an unmarked, unnamed, and unmodified "language" that functions in the service of ideas or meaning and need not be addressed. Indeed, the two primary practices of SLD that contribute to SEAE as "natural" in this study are: not naming "the standard" and diverting attention from language features and use. These forms of SLD work to mask awareness of the social construction and political implications of the conventions of SEAE, of SEAE being treated as a convention, and of linguistic difference that is "othered" and put in opposition to the "naturalness" of SEAE.

The SLD practice of not naming "the standard" contributes to the perception of both a "normal" and "natural" language variety—one that need not be named in light of an assumption that "the standard" is obvious and common sense. However, as opposed to contrasting an unnamed SEAE with "other" dialects (as described in the previous section), instructors create perceptions of naturalness by making general comments about "language" or "grammar." For example, nearly all of the instructors refer broadly to "grammar" without specifying which grammar they expect or teach. Similarly, Darrell and Richard state that they expect their students to know the "conventions of the English language" and to have an "innate sense of language" (respectively). However, within the larger context of the interviews, it is clear that both of these instructors are actually talking about SEAE as opposed to *any* dialect or language. By not naming this dialect, instructors avoid addressing the cultural and political implications of expecting, for

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example, that all students should have an "innate" sense of SEAE. Additionally, the act of not naming SEAE reveals instructors' complete acceptance of SEAE being treated as a generic or register-based convention—especially when SEAE is reduced to grammar or sentence-level language features. Certainly these instructors would not say that language varieties aside from SEAE are not "language." Yet, Darrell and Richard elide SEAE with these broader terms, suggesting that they perceive SEAE as natural—at least in the context of their classes and likely beyond.

In addition to not naming SEAE, many of the instructors divert attention from this dialect by focusing on the *ideas* within student papers. This diversion of attention is a key feature of SLD that contributes to perceptions of naturalness by positioning language as something that can function from the background to communicate about, but not influence, ideas and/or meaning, thereby valuing ideas as more important than language. When instructors privilege ideas over language features and use, they communicate an implied ideal that students produce correct, "natural" language that would allow instructors to focus solely on the content. This expectation or goal is often most visible when instructors note a tension about whether to address language features within student papers or to focus mostly—if not solely—on the students' ideas and arguments. For example, Henry says that he "tr[ies] to get a sense of what the student's trying to say and what their purpose for the paper is" *before* he comments on usage. Similarly, Jonathon asserts that ideas are the most important part of student essays despite the striking "deficiencies of language" he notes in two of the three student papers he reads. In these cases, the instructors distinguish between ideas and language use, privileging the former. While Carol does not explicitly create a hierarchy between content and language use, she does struggle with the tension between the two when she encounters a student who "has absolutely no idea what a sentence is…but…does have an imagination…does put things together […and] have interesting ideas." In all of these cases the instructors express a commitment to students' ideas and position language use as "natural" and unnoteworthy when it correctly functions in service of ideas—that is, when it is standard.

The tendency to put ideas in contrast with language features and use permeates composition scholarship and pedagogy as well as, apparently, instructors' practice. In *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing,* Glenn and Goldthwaite describe the act of

responding to student essays as noting both "formal standards," which they define as "formal errors in standardized English" (116) and "standards of content" (117). Research by Connors and Lunsford suggest that, of these two approaches, which could be referred to as attending to the local and the global (respectively) in student writing, "more teachers comment on *ideas* than on any other single area" (qtd. in Glenn and Goldwaithe 118, original emphasis). This separation between ideas (or "standards of content") and language (or "formal standards") and focus on the former is inline with the call put forth by SRTOL, which asks instructors to rank ideas and content—or language issues perceived to be related to ideas and content—as more important than sentence-level language concerns or issues. The advice by SRTOL to privilege ideas implies that instructors would only comment on language use if it were problematic, nonstandard. Here again, standard language is positioned as unmarked and unnoteworthy. The nonstandard, though, is marked and in conflict with ideas because content and meaning *should* be more important.

However, this treatment of language as independent from and in service of ideas reinforces the field's inaccurate understanding of dialect, both positioning it at the level of the sentence and treating it as distinct from meaning. Additionally, it creates rhetorical space for arguments of superior language varieties that don't interfere with meaning in their transmission of ideas (a feature of SLD which I explore in the next section). Perhaps more importantly, though, suggesting that "language" doesn't matter—that it is the ideas we should focus on—when instructors obviously have strong and negative reactions to language use that doesn't meet their expectations is misleading and problematic for students who have not mastered these conventions as it both masks the power and importance associated with "language" and makes it less likely that instructors will prioritize language features in their instruction, despite their expectation for linguistic standardness. This approach to student papers effectively makes sentence-level (and likely some text-level) standardness a "culture of power" (Delpit 282) with rules linked to and controlled by those in power—in this case, those who are responsible for demanding adherence to the rules and those who gained access to the culture of power tacitly. So, while the impetus for privileging global concerns—ideas—in student writing is

understandable and admirable, this study suggests that language and ideas/meaning cannot and should not be addressed independently from one another.

An effect of treating SEAE as natural, in addition to contributing to perceived linguistic neutrality, is that when students' language use fails to meet common conventions, it disrupts expectations for sameness, resulting in "difference" that is "othered." Quotations from both Darrell and Jonathon demonstrate the "othering" that can occur when encountering linguistic difference. In response to my question about how he pictured the student-author of a paper, Darrell describes "usage troubles" as "puzzling." He goes on to say, "I wasn't sure where [the student] had come up with that notion of this being a correct way to express themselves." The reference to correctness signals Darrell's commitment to standardness. In this case, the writing strays so far from his conception of standard that he is "puzzle[ed]" by the student's language use. Darrell's complete acceptance of both the conventions of SEAE and SEAE as a convention in student writing leads him to assume that the student is trying to write in a standard language variety when he surmises that the student thinks his/her writing is "correct." When his expectations aren't met, Darrell creates social distance between himself and the author by not understanding either the "usage troubles" or a context in which this kind of language use would be acceptable. Darrell's reaction to language that he perceives as "different" or "other" is not unique. Jonathon has a similar response to a student paper with many grammar and usage "errors," calling these language features "strange" and wondering about their origin ("I would have to ask where that's coming from"). In both of these instances, the effect of positioning SEAE as natural is the "othering" of linguistic difference, treating it as unnatural ("puzzling" and "strange"), which leads to negative evaluations and protects the perceived naturalness of SEAE.

If the instructors were to conceive of linguistic difference as social or cultural, they might be less likely to be confused by its presence. Indeed, both Darrell and Jonathon suggest that if they were to better understand the origins of the difference it might not be "puzzling" or "strange." As such, this "othering" of nonstandard language use may be, in part, related to a positioning of non/standardness at the level of the individual. Furthermore, Darrell's stated assumption that the student was aiming for "correct[ness]" when in fact s/he produced what Darrell interpreted as error signals a

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belief that nonstandardness is purposeful. The student chose "to express themselves" in a way that Darrell evaluated as nonstandard. Conceiving of nonstandard language use as choice (and likely effort) relies on, but also perpetuates, the SLI tenet that "standard" language is widely accessible[57] and, therefore, the individual's responsibility. Positioning linguistic difference as both individual and deliberate (though it may be both at times) ignores the societal and structural influences on and causes of such difference.[58]

When conventions are no longer perceived to be socially constructed, they are divorced from power and culture. Instead, "natural" language appears to exist organically, extrarhetorically even, or at least by apparent common agreement, and for uninterrogated "good" reasons that are usually associated with notions of correctness and language as a vessel for ideas. SLI relies on these perceptions of "the standard" language as accessible and desirable in order to maintain its power and justify the denigration of "other" language varieties and the people who use them. Positioning SEAE as natural, then, not only works to create the perception of linguistic neutrality associated with SEAE but also is integral to the perpetuation of SLI. Finally, whiteness studies scholarship suggests that unexamined conventions and norms (in this case, associated with SEAE) contribute to the unearned privilege of white people as norms are connected to privileged group's behaviors and habits. The data in Chapter 3 support such an argument.

In the section that follows, I return to the imposed separation of language use and ideas in order to better understand the perception of SEAE as non-interfering.

SEAE as Non-Interfering

Positioning "standard" language as non-interfering is a common element of SLI, serving as partial justification for why "standard" languages are superior to other language varieties and more appropriate for public language use. The metaphor of clarity,

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[57] I discuss the perceived accessibility of "standard" languages in depth in earlier chapters of the dissertation and later in this chapter.

[58] This positioning, however, is not consistent throughout the interviews. As discussed in Chapter 3, when linking African American students with nonstandard writing, instructors often note SES and under-resourced schools as the source of the nonstandardness. In those instances, linguistic difference is portrayed as determined by class-related structural forces.

a commonplace in talking about student writing, is a common representation of the belief that writing can contain but not interfere with or influence meaning and ideas. Indeed, "clear" writing implies transparency on the part of language that allows writers to precisely transmit ideas and meaning to an audience. This likening of language to an ideally translucent container for ideas, meaning, thought, etc. sets up dialect as either functioning properly (not interfering with access to the ideas, etc.) or obstructing meaning.

Each instructor in this study refers to clear writing or clarity of ideas at least once, and often more, during the interviews. Furthermore, the ideology of language as a container is visible outside of composition studies in expressions such as "putting it in writing" and references to writing having content or containing ideas. Treating language like a container carries an assumption that content is more important than the medium through which it is delivered and, more importantly, that language does not influence meaning or content; language can impede or enhance access to meaning, but it does not interact with the meaning itself. This perspective of the function of language positions writing as non-interfering with meaning or ideas, serves as partial justification for the superiority of the "standard," and is integral to SLI.

The metaphor of clarity—a feature of SLD—relies on several other, already-introduced features of SLD and aspects of perceived neutrality, most notably not naming "the standard" and diverting attention from language features. When positioning language as transparent, instructors in this study never name this language as "standard" or SEAE and implicitly discourage the study of language features because "language" is simply a means to an end: the expression of ideas and meaning. In this way, the metaphor of clarity is similar to the colorblind rhetoric of whiteness: it asserts that something doesn't matter when in fact it matters greatly. Indeed, in this study, clarity is always used to signal readers' perceptions of writing as non/standard.

By examining instructors' use of the metaphor of clarity as a reflection of and contribution to the perception of language as non-interfering, it is evident that clarity or "clear writing" serves as a code word for both text- and sentence-level standardness. At times, instructors refer to sentence-level "difference" as an impediment to meaning, suggesting that if students could clean up their "muddy" (Carol) sentences, the meaning

and ideas would be more accessible. Indeed, whether or not the instructors explicitly call on the metaphor of clarity when talking about grammar and usage, statements about language interfering with meaning or the importance of ideas over language often rely on the same conception of language as a vessel.

Interestingly, as I began interrogating the metaphor of clarity, I assumed that it would be commonly associated with sentence-level standardness—an assumption that exposes the pervasiveness of ideologies that work to divorce sentence-level language features from meaning. However, in this study, notions of clarity are often called on when instructors are tackling the complicated intersection of sentence-level and text-level language features. For example, instructors cite transition phrases and appropriate signaling for summation and/or argument as specific moments in sentence-level language use where students could be more clear in their expression of ideas and better produce text-level standardness. Darrell articulates the role of clarity in both sentence- and text-level standardness and the relationship between the two, when he asserts:

> I find that many students, even if they're having trouble expressing their ideas in a complex way, many times won't be able to express their ideas clearly… because if [clarity] doesn't exist on that sentence level, I think…the cumulative effect is sort of a fuzziness in terms of what the focus is, what the approach is.

The metaphor of clarity as used in this passage creates a perception of linguistic neutrality that aligns with and reproduces SLI—specifically the notion that "standard" languages are superior to nonstandard languages, in part because of the assumed fact that they will not unduly impact the outcome of communication (Cameron 120).[59]

An often unacknowledged first step to the positioning of SEAE as a clear vessel for meaning is portraying this dialect as unaffiliated, that is, not linked to any particular group. In the section that follows, I examine this final construction of linguistic neutrality.

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[59] However, as an aside, Darrell also does encouraging and important work to challenge the artificial separation between language (i.e. sentence-level features) and meaning (i.e. text-level features) that is common in composition studies.

SEAE as Unaffiliated:

Two aspects of SLD, the portrayal of SEAE as widely accessible and the positioning of SEAE as nonindexical, divorce this dialect from groups, cultures, and identities, creating a perception of this dialect as unaffiliated. Positioning SEAE as unaffiliated is crucial to the rhetorical construction of linguistic neutrality. To begin with, perceptions of SEAE as widely available suggest equal access and opportunities, removing the possibility to claim or acknowledge structural inequality by shifting responsibility—and blame—to the level of the individual. Indeed, the perceived accessibility of SEAE allows for the portrayal of this privileged dialect as "equalizing." Trimbur notes that SEAE's perceived accessibility for people of all backgrounds has been positioned as not just linguistically neutral, but "radically egalitarian" (82), erasing differences that could, in other contexts, result in discrimination. Through this logic, SEAE, unlike other dialects, is acultural and nonindexical, making it the common sense choice for a standard language that "anyone" can use. The more wide-reaching the perceived access to SEAE is, the more likely this dialect is to be thought of as not only widely accessible, but fully comprehendible and communicative; for instance, SEAE is positioned as so widely accessible that it is unlikely to interfere with communication because everyone can understand and use it, again securing its position as the preferred medium for public discourse.

Although this section focuses primarily on the perception of SEAE as nonindexical, I begin with the portrayal of SEAE as accessible. In Chapter 3, I describe at length instructors' positioning of SEAE as basic and, relatedly, accessible through multiple contexts, including schooling, reading, home literacy practices, or even simply an "innate sense of language" (Richard). This positioning of SEAE as widely accessible encourages an acceptance of the myth of meritocracy, which positions all success in this country as a result of individual effort—not unearned privilege—and, therefore, as fair. And, if everyone begins at the same starting line, standardness, like success, is also an individual accomplishment based on effort. The portrayal of SEAE as widely accessible alongside the SLI tenet that the "standard" is superior to other language varieties contribute to indexicality, or assumptions about students who do not write in SEAE. Yet,

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because indexicality is justified through ideology, SEAE is perceived as *non*indexical and unaffiliated. That is, SLI's positioning of SEAE as widely accessible contributes to the perception that this dialect is not linked to any social group and the logic that blames nonstandard language users for not trying hard enough to achieve standardness, a type of indexicality based on contrast. Ironically, then, the two features of SLD that are called on most often in this study to create the perception of SEAE as unaffiliated are in conflict with, but also work to justify and constitute, one another.

Earlier in this chapter, I provide a quotation from Richard in which he references the unmarkedness of SEAE when justifying his claim that "you really can't tell" a student-author's identity. While unmarkedness is not an uncommon path to proclaimed identity-less-ness associated with SEAE, this section focuses on common positionings of the academic discourse register and the genre of academic student essays—and relatedly, SEAE—as nonindexical. These representations are primarily linked to two additional features of SLD: assertions that identity doesn't matter and assertions that certain genres and registers related to SEAE disallow or erase identity.

Both Jonathon and Darrell repeatedly state that student writing is largely nonindexical and are outliers in their unwillingness to even *guess* about most aspects of student identities. As such, they are the focus of the remainder of this section, in which I argue that their assertions constitute student texts and the language they are created in as identity-less. This positioning of student texts along with Jonathon and Darrell's portrayal of students' identities (real or perceived) as not important when responding to student texts are functions of SLD and mirror aspects of whiteness that deny the importance of identity to structural inequality. It is important to note that while I would not argue that all papers are always indexical for all instructors, I identify the repeated insistence that academic student papers are nonindexical as an aspect of perceived linguistic neutrality that can mask indexicality when it does occur and prevent action in response to the pervasive and destructive enduring patterns described in Chapter 3.

To better understand Jonathon and Darrell's focus on genre, it is worth noting that both instructors have backgrounds in creative writing and at the time of the study were teaching creative writing and composition courses. Furthermore, both of these instructors cite creative writing as a space where writing and identity intersect and contrast it with

academic student essays, which they state do not allow for the expression of student identity, except for very specific instances (e.g., incorporating anecdotal evidence). Darrell says,

> I do think that, especially with creative writing, there's a sense that yes, you can point to a text and say that there's an identity; there's a voice; there's a personality behind this text. Transferring that into the composition classroom, I think, is a more curious question, because I think even more advanced writers don't feel many times like they can express that identity in the framework of a college essay…it's more that you have to sort of conform with this outside structure and there isn't much room for one's personal identity in that equation.

Here, Darrell's description of the conventions of the "college essay" and students' agency within these conventions constructs identities as individual, self-contained, and deliberate. Each student has a "personal identity" that can be inserted into creative writing or that is constrained by the "structure" or "framework of a college essay." The writer, then, can choose—to some extent—whether or not to "express that identity." In this quotation and throughout the interview, Darrell does not acknowledge, nor seem to allow for, identity that is either attributed to writers by readers or interactionally created by writers, readers, and texts. Furthermore, Darrell does not acknowledge the possibility for writing to be unintentionally marked for social identities.

Jonathon also describes the relationship between writing and identity as one of choice, saying that "diction and syntax and other non-narrative, non-anecdotal rhetorical strategies" reveal only "academic preparation." Furthermore, Jonathon suggests that the conventions of the academic student essay *discourage* representations of identity so that this genre can function as a true measure of ability. In this way, Jonathon implies that there is a purposeful erasure of identity within the conventions of this genre. While Jonathon's understanding of identity doesn't allow the author quite as much agency as Darrell's (given the constraints of the generic conventions), he does position identity as an individual presentation (or performance) that is not influenced through interaction with a reader. Furthermore, Jonathon removes the importance of his own identity and subjectivity when he describes his grading process as mechanical; he says he has trained himself to respond to student papers "like a robot…feeding the, the language into that computer part of my mind." He goes on to say, "I mean I think grading is such a strange process and to do it fairly, I really, I think I, and I think a lot of us have done this, I feel

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like I've developed a mechanism by which I take a language [sic] from a student and shovel it in there and out pops a grade." According to Jonathon, the possibility for identity to be connected to student writing is "not part of [his] rubric for processing writing." Jonathon's representation of the grading process asserts that identity (the author's or his own) does not and should not matter. Given the potential for conflict in the grading process and in order to "do it fairly," Jonathon attempts to grade like a literal machine ("like a robot"), suggesting that through will and training a person can focus only on the language, which is either nonindexical to begin with or through the process becomes nonindexical because identity *doesn't matter*. What matters are ideas, which he says ideas are the most important aspect of student papers.

Here, social identity is put in opposition to ideas (similar to treating language as non-interfering), which becomes a proxy for "individual." This metonym,[60] or reduction of social identity to individuals, using the coded language of "ideas," is a common theme in colorblind rhetoric, which attempts to shift focus from race in order to assert that race doesn't matter. Jonathon shifts attention from social identities to an individual's ideas. Asserting that social identity doesn't influence the grading process or the way language is received ignores evidence to the contrary—evidence from this dissertation and evidence that attempts to describe and explain the existing educational achievement gaps. Furthermore, approaching responses to student essays as only a response to individuals works to, again, perpetuate the myth of meritocracy and treat identities as individual and deliberate.

At one point in the interview, Jonathon engages a thought experiment to test his positioning of identity as a matter of authorial choice. Jonathon notes a piece of published, creative non-fiction written by an African American woman and considers whether he could have determined her race from the language in the text. After thinking about it for a moment, he asserts, "I don't think her written voice, her diction or syntax, etcetera sounds necessarily black or necessarily white. I think it sounds educated because it's intelligently written and the sentences are sharp and clear and smart and complex." Jonathon's conclusion is that ("standard") writing is nonindexical for many social

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[60] Victor Villanueva, a compositionist who has describe the rhetorical turns of colorblind discourse, describes metonym as a reduction, using the example of reducing institutional racism to individual racism, which is easier to dismiss.

identity categories but that it can signal education, which earlier in the interview he links to SES. Jonathon's selection of a piece of creative writing by a black, female author, though, is revealing. Again, he links identity to genres of creative writing; again, he asserts that ("standard") writing is nonindexical (in this instance, for race), creating the perception of linguistic neutrality. Nonetheless, his focus on an "othered" author in order to test for "othered" language features suggests a belief that unintentional representations of identity in written texts would be marked both through linguistic difference and as marked identities. Certainly, Jonathon's reason for choosing the text and author that he did could also be attributed to countless other factors—perhaps he recently read the text or was just talking about the author with a student or colleague. However, given the patterns that associate marked identities—*particularly* African Americans—with negatively marked language, it seems likely that this exercise further demonstrates the connection between the normative center of SEAE and the white race.

The example above demonstrates a positioning of SEAE as nonindexical. Additionally, both Jonathon and Darrell disassociate academic student essays, in particular, with identity because of certain academic writing conventions—such as a distanced, objective tone—that Trimbur argues reveal the register's aim to be objective and its historical link to truth. In fact, although Jonathon and Darrell are unique in their insistence that the student essays are nonindexical, other instructors similarly describe the generic of academic student essays as ideally identity-less. Several instructors even suggest that the academic writing register actively works to erase identity—a position that is common in composition scholarship (and explained at length in Chapter 1). For example, Emily states that the student essay "kind of wanted to sort of wash that [identity] all out," and Melissa says that academic writing "tries not to" reveal identity. But as Nate shows in the quotation below, instead of erasing *identity* academic discourses may actually erase *difference.* In response to finding out that Paper H had been written by a black, middle-class female as opposed to the white, upper-class male author identity he had assigned to the paper, Nate replies,

> Well, good. Okay. Then that proves the point...If you're well trained as a writer, and, for, for an academic context, either A; it will correctly strip you of identity, right? That it will be your ideas, content of your character, etcetera, it will be your ideas and your engagement with those ideas that is the thing that the person

notices, or B; you will, like all other well-trained people, look like a rich white guy.

The first part of this comment about the connection between academic writing and identity mirrors those mentioned above that deny the importance of identity and shift a focus from structural or institutional patterns of privilege to individuals and their ideas. In fact, this passage demonstrates the portrayal of the academic writing register as doing more than masking identity by shifting focus to ideas: it erases ("strip") identity and makes authors identity-less. By beginning this response with "well, good. Okay. Then that proves the point…," Nate suggests that stripping authors of their identity is a laudable goal of academic writing. Like Jonathon, Nate says that removing identity allows readers to correctly focus on the author's ideas. However, Nate's allusion to Martin Luther King Jr. ("content of your character") also positions identity as social and contrasts it with one's character and ideas. The opposition between social and individual identity does not allow for the two types of identity to influence and constitute one another.

However, the second half of the above quotation directly contradicts and challenges a portrayal of academic writing as erasing social identity. Indeed, Nate's second point seems to suggest that, at least in this instance, the writing was not stripped of identity; instead, he states that "good" academic writing signals a privileged identity— particularly given his initial perception of the student-author of Paper H. According to this perspective, "all…well-trained" student-authors are likely to "look like a rich white guy." Not only does this second interpretation of the indexicality in Paper H align with Nate's indexical response to the paper, it also fits the patterns described in Chapter 3.

It is important to note that although it is common to position academic writing as something that "strip[s] you of identity," Nate's actual response to Paper H was to imagine a very privileged, white, male student-author. Despite Nate's explanation of the process of shifting attention from—or, rather, removing—identity in order to focus on "ideas and…engagement with those ideas," Nate did not perceive Paper H to be identity-less or unmarked for identity. For Nate, the writing was marked as privileged and stripped of racial difference that would likely have resulted in assumptions about nonstandardness. Even though Nate later goes on to describe the identity work in Paper H

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as one of masking certain identities in order to signal a privileged class, race, and gender, his first offering reveals an elision between normative social identities—in this case, the white race—and "identity-less-ness." Nate acknowledges this connection later in the interview when he says, "as we elevate in power, we conflate that with identity-less-ness. Like that white men are not white men. They're just the people in power." In this quotation, Nate astutely notes that privileged identities can be interpreted as identity-less-ness.

Despite Nate's acknowledgement of the indexicality that is hidden behind presumed "identity-less-ness," the repeated expectation for identity-less-ness in "good" college writing—throughout many interviews—implies a common positioning of writing (or, more precisely, SEAE) as nonindexical. However, as this dissertation aims to prove, these portrayals of SEAE shift attention from both the indexicality of this dialect and the ongoing structural inequality associated with language use and, in the process, creates presumed linguistic neutrality.

Identifying Neutrality, Challenging Ideologies

This chapter demonstrates the central role of perceived linguistic neutrality in the privileging of SEAE. Specifically, SLD's construction of SEAE as linguistically neutral relies on and allows for the continued masking of this dialect's indexicality and contributes to constructions of SEAE as both widely accessible and superior to other language varieties. Furthermore, SLD's treatment of SEAE as linguistically neutral make the perceived accessibility and superiority appear "extrarhetorical," a given component of SEAE. All of this—treating SEAE as linguistically neutral, widely accessible, and superior and not acknowledging this positioning as rhetorically constructed—perpetuates the unearned privileging of the dialect and its users and also reinforces SLI.

The consequences of positioning SEAE as linguistically neutral are multiple—especially in regards to indexicality. As I demonstrate earlier in this chapter, when SEAE is positioned as neutral through perceptions of the dialect as unaffiliated, standardness and identity become individual and a matter of choice, which justifies indexicality, and shifts the responsibility for linguistic equality to the subordinated group. Additionally, because language use and identity *are* connected, perceived neutrality in one category

can signal and/or create perceived neutrality in the other. When it comes to perceptions of identity-less-ness related to SEAE, privileged identities continue to be privileged but under the guise of neutrality, of identity not mattering.

According to Bucholtz and Hall, "when one category is elevated as an unmarked norm, its power is more pervasive because it is masked" (372). Through this project, I attempt to challenge SEAE's power by revealing its position in the normative center—a position that is perpetuated and protected by the rhetorical positioning of this dialect as linguistically neutral. Indeed, I argue throughout the chapter that identifying the particular discursive practices that create linguistic neutrality associated with SEAE creates opportunities to challenge this presumed neutrality and, in the process, undermine both SLI and whiteness, both of which rely on normative centers and perceptions of neutrality. As an ideological discourse, SLD must be perceived as "given" to be persuasive. Exposing the features of SLD as discursive and rhetorical, then, challenges this discourse's "given-ness" as well as SLD and, ultimately, SLI.

The next and final chapter of this dissertation shifts from uncovering problematic perspectives associated with SEAE—such as troubling indexical patterns and perceived linguistic neutrality—to discussing the affordances of this research.

Chapter 5
Breaking Patterns and Opening Gates

This dissertation is highly theoretical—it takes on standardness, neutrality, and multiple ideologies in order to investigate the reception and treatment of SEAE in composition courses and scholarship. At the same time, the project aims to be practical in its challenging of unearned privilege associated with SEAE and *some* of its users. In this final chapter, I focus on the implications—both theoretical and practical—of my findings and on where to go from here. After connecting the pieces from Chapters 3 and 4, I use the insights gained from this research to suggest possible challenges to current composition scholarship and to offer pedagogical recommendations. Finally, I share my plans for future work on this topic.

Indexicality and Neutrality

As this dissertation has demonstrated, SEAE signals identity *and* is rhetorically constructed as linguistically neutral. The fundamental contradiction between these two positions is born from ideology—specifically SLI and whiteness—and works to a particular end, serving particular groups. SLI and whiteness allow for and mask both indexicality and perceptions of neutrality and are deeply ingrained in composition studies and beyond. One important and unanticipated outcome of this project is a better understanding of the relationship between these powerful ideologies. Considering the findings from this study alongside scholarship on SLI and whiteness makes clear the interconnectedness of these ideologies: they rely on and create perceived neutrality, rely on and create one another, and justify indexicality.

Whiteness studies' scholarship has long noted the importance of perceived neutrality to whiteness and the privilege associated with white people. The findings from this project show the same is true of SLI, which affords SEAE privilege, in part, based on a presumption of linguistic neutrality. SLI and whiteness, though, don't just depend on

perceived neutrality; they create it. The ideological creation of perceived neutrality

happens, in part, through discursive practices (SLD and white talk) that position SEAE

and the white race in the normative center, a positioning that powerfully shifts attention

to the other and makes "standard" language practices and identities commonsense, or

universal and invisible. This project focuses on the creation of neutrality associated with

SEAE through SLD. Similar discursive practices exist within white talk that associate the

white race with neutrality[61]; for example, the white race is often positioned as normal and

natural when not named and contrasted with "others" (Hartigan).

SEAE and the white race are connected not only in that they are perceived to be

neutral and reside within the normative center but also in the ways they signal and

constitute one another. The indexical patterns described in Chapter 3 demonstrate a

strong link between standardness—including SEAE—and privileged identities, primarily

white, middle to upper-middle class social groups. Additionally, because of the

bidirectionality of indexicality, an imagined white author can also create perceptions of

standardness. SEAE signals a white author just as a white author (real or perceived) can

signal SEAE. Both standardness and race are created in this process. In short, SEAE and

the white race—and the ideologies associated with them—influence and (re)produce one

another through enduring connections between "standard" language and identities:

privileged languages and language practices are used by privileged people, justifying

their ongoing privilege.[62] Privileged people maintain their privilege by asserting

superiority associated with presumably widely accessible and neutral cultural practices—

using a "standard" and "superior" language variety, for example.

Finally, both SLI and whiteness justify the indexicality of SEAE. As I

demonstrate in Chapter 3, instructors call on beliefs that SEAE is superior and widely

accessible as well as their understandings of privilege as justification for making

assumptions about students' race and class, repeatedly linking standardness with the

white race and middle to upper-middle class students. In addition to linking standardness

with race and class, instructors also turn to non/standardness in order to make

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[61] Indeed, I plan to better examine and describe the ways white talk rhetorically creates neutrality for an article on whiteness.

[62] Traditionally underprivileged people also can perpetuate SLI and whiteness as well as use privileged languages. Nonetheless, the findings from this study demonstrate strong indexical patterns linking privileged languages with privileged identities.

assumptions about students' effort and investment, or as I call it in Chapter 3, "Type of Student" indexicality. As with most of the indexicality in this study, there are patterns within "Type of Student" responses that are linked to structural inequality. For example, although instructors at times note positive characteristics of African American students (e.g., effort), the overwhelming sense of structural inequality related to access to education seems to lock instructors into an essentialized and deficit model of thinking associated with these students. Similarly, when instructors imagine students who are economically privileged and white, the structure of privilege trumps the category of "type of student"—so even though instructors often note negative individual character traits linked to students' writing (e.g., laziness and cockiness), the students and their writing are overwhelmingly perceived as positive and "standard." SLI and whiteness, then, are intertwined in their influence on instructors' understandings of language and identity, severely limiting the range of allowable identities linked to standardness and instructors' descriptions of types of students.

Allowable Identities and Identity-less-ness

Given the indexical patterns revealed in this study, it seems clear not only that identity is a part of the reception of student texts but also that there are limited recognizable identities based on instructors' experiences and compelling ideologies about SEAE and privilege. Indeed, there are few allowable identities that can be associated with standardness in this study. McCarthey and Moje assert that literacy practices can limit our identity representations and reception, particularly when the range of acceptable literacy practices is constrained within a given context (231). In this case, the strong expectation for SEAE in academic contexts is likely one limiting factor for possible identity representations *and* the reception of identity.

The reception of standardness—and corresponding perceptions of identity—in this study is highly patterned. The patterns of indexicality, which I describe in Chapter 3, call on stereotypes about language, language users, and privilege in our country and more locally. However, this indexicality also works to produce and/or solidify existing stereotypes. As Wortham notes, "position[ing] [our]selves and others in characteristic ways" according to language use can lead to "enduring identities for individuals and

groups" (256). For example, as I state in Chapter 3, there is not one example of instructors noting what texts do *well* as an indexical for an African American student. The only indexical features for African American student-authors are negatively valued, assumed to be error resulting from inadequate education, often positioned as an educational obstacle, and used to create social distance between the instructor and perceived student-author. Indeed, the instructors repeatedly access a deficit model when considering African American students' language use. This perspective of African American language use is undoubtedly linked to popular representations of AAE as "wrong"—which effectively links AAE and, to some extent, African Americans with error—and instructors' sense that African American students are economically and educationally under-privileged. Because indexicality is bidirectional, though, instructors are more likely to perceive discursive difference as error if they believe the author is an African American. This reverse indexicality further works to justify existing stereotypes.

The concept of linguistic profiling—of making often negative assumptions about people and their identities based on their language use—is central to my research interests. However, this project also reveals the importance of the opposite, the potentially unearned positive evaluations associated with particular dialects and discursive features. In particular, the findings from this study show a strong link between SEAE and the white race and middle to upper-middle SES, suggesting that SEAE is a raced and classed social dialect. Even though there is no inherent link between race and dialect, when one dialect is both "read" as white and deemed more acceptable than other dialects, it becomes raced in the reader's mind, and often more broadly, and perpetuates whiteness. Furthermore, as certain language practices or dialects are connected to race, other dialects in that same context can be raced through contrast. Finally, as this study shows, racialized language use also racializes language users; however, whiteness and SLI mask this process by simultaneously racializing SEAE and arguing the neutrality of this often unnamed, privileged dialect (e.g., "English").

Returning to the tension at the heart of this project, the indexicality (racial and otherwise) associated with SEAE is hidden by perceived linguistic neutrality and an expectation for identity-less-ness in SEAE and, more specifically, student academic writing. The assumption that SEAE can erase identity, including race, contributes to the

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myth that race and other identity categories are not factors in educational inequality. Any individual, then, can choose to succeed through effort and achievement in literacy and education. Through this lens, structural inequalities are no longer relevant. Moreover, expectations for identity-less-ness can be problematic for students as they navigate available identity representations in their writing for composition courses. For example, racelessness—which this study suggests is actually masked whiteness—may be to the detriment of students of color. Studies indicate that students who are able to maintain strong racial identification throughout schooling achieve higher levels of success (Dehyle, Mattute-Bianchi, Carter, Akkom). If whiteness—packaged as racelessness or identity-less-ness—is required of students in our classrooms, these students may have a harder time maintaining connections to their racial communities. Although these studies do not examine identity representations associated with writing, the findings may be relevant to ongoing research on the role of SEAE in composition courses and scholarship.

Clearly, the stakes surrounding SEAE and identity are high. This study suggests that instead of asking students to use a dialect that masks identity, we are asking students to use a dialect that signals identity—and for some of our students, an identity with which they may not want to be associated. Gatekeeping associated with SEAE, then, is not only a result of insisting that academic writing be produced in SEAE but also is connected to the reception of and indexicality associated with non/standardness. Traditionally marginalized students may be held at a distance from academia due to their language use *and* due to the fact that there are no allowable identities that are both linked to standardness and representative of their various social groups.

One of the valuable contributions of this project is that it reveals the often invisible ideologies involved in both SEAE's indexicality and perceived neutrality. Because ideologies gain power through their invisibility, recognition of these processes and their implications can be transgressive. Furthermore, because the perceptions of SEAE revealed in this study are ideological in nature and, in the case of perceived linguistic neutrality, rhetorical in construction, the intentions of the individual instructors do not matter. Stated another way, instructors may not agree with the stereotypes reflected and perpetuated by the indexical patterns in Chapter 3, or they may not believe that SEAE is linguistically neutral; however, their discursive practices work largely to

reproduce SLI and the problematic representations and perceptions of SEAE. Therefore, my hope is that composition instructors and scholars will take action, will change their practices—discursive and pedagogical—and challenge policies based on this awareness.

Practical and Pedagogical Approaches

The findings from this project suggest that addressing indexical patterns and perceived linguistic neutrality requires a constant consideration of the relationship between dialect and identity. For example, teaching SEAE as an issue of appropriacy (which I will discuss in greater detail shortly) asks students to evaluate contexts in order to decide when they should use SEAE and, in the process, attempts to avoid positioning any dialect as better than another. Considering the relationship between dialect and identity, though, begs the question of whether it is pedagogically responsible to tell students that some identities (e.g., African American identities) are not appropriate in an academic context. Additionally, as I argue in Chapter 1, so many of the pedagogies that include "nonstandard" dialects in composition classes expect translation from dialect to dialect. Certainly identity complicates this already problematic pedagogical approach. The sections that follow consider alternatives to the models of appropriacy and translation and offer suggestions for teacher preparation and professional development programs. These suggestions are rooted in discourse—as I argue in Chapter 4 and again here, what is constructed through discourse can also be deconstructed through discourse.

Naming SEAE

This study makes clear that despite attempts to label SEAE as a dialect, it is seldom acknowledged as such by individual composition instructors and composition studies more broadly. Dialects are "other"; they are cultural and connected to social groups. Dialects are indexical. SEAE, in contrast, operates from a normative center, allowing it to go unnamed and forwarding perceptions of it as unaffiliated—all of which contribute to the perception of SEAE as linguistically neutral and the masking of indexicality associated with this dialect. However, as this study shows, SEAE—like all dialects—functions indexically. In this study, the tension between the indexicality of SEAE and the rhetorical construction of SEAE as linguistically neutral often worked to

position this language variety as both not a dialect and nonindexical. In reaction to this positioning, composition scholars and instructors can purposefully acknowledge SEAE as a dialect, that is, as language use that is cultural, indexical, and *not* linguistically neutral.

Taking a lesson from whiteness studies, the first step in repositioning SEAE is an act of naming: in our practices, in composition scholarship, and in others' engagement with this topic, we must insist that SEAE be labeled as "standard" and recognized as a dialect—as opposed to, for instance, simply being "English" or "language." Naming SEAE challenges the perception of SEAE as natural and normal and works directly against SLD. Additionally, acknowledging the interdependence of language and meaning—that both shape one another—resists perceptions of SEAE as a container for ideas that is ideally non-interfering. And, perhaps most importantly to this study, recognizing the indexical work of SEAE serves as a reminder that this dialect is affiliated with and signals particular social groups. These acts of resistance, though small, challenge SLD and can contribute to the rhetorical deconstruction of linguistic neutrality.

In previous scholarly conversations about SEAE's problematic role in composition courses, many scholars and educators recommend acknowledging the legitimacy of other written dialects (Bizzell, Elbow, Smitherman). I suggest that we should also work to disrupt the unearned privilege associated with SEAE by exposing and breaking the enduring indexical patterns that link SEAE with white, middle to upper-middle class students. As we know, African American students (and other historically marginalized students)—regardless of their primary language variety and educational background—*can* and do master and produce texts in SEAE. Despite this knowledge, pervasive ideologies create a likelihood that SEAE will signal white, privileged identities. As such, scholars and educators need to actively work to imagine diverse successful identities as a means of challenging these enduring patterns. Attacking indexical patterns offers the potential for new and expanded allowable identities associated with SEAE. Because identity is interactionally and discursively produced, there is potential not only to allow for a wider range of indexicality associated with SEAE but also to create new and more diverse successful and "standard" identities, thereby challenging whiteness.

To introduce this issue (both the indexicality and perceived neutrality of SEAE) to instructors, teacher preparation and professional development programs can incorporate

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activities that ask instructors to consider their own linguistic biases and the ways their perspectives about language and identity may influence their practice. The section that follows suggests a few such activities.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Asking instructors to consider their own linguistic pet peeves, the kinds of characteristics they associate with them, and the possible implications this could have on assessment of student writing allows for a discussion about indexicality associated with dialects, including SEAE, as well as portrayals of SEAE as linguistically neutral. Facilitators can be ready with examples that might elicit discussion, including consideration of nonstandard language features (such as elements from other dialects) to put in conversation with other "errors" that instructors might mention (for instance, misused homonyms). In these discussions, facilitators can note both the perception of SEAE as nonindexical and the indexicality of SEAE as demonstrated by this research, drawing attention to the connections between standardness and particular identities. Facilitators can also introduce into discussion research that suggests the implications of expected non/standardness on assessment (both this study and Piché et al. qtd. in Rubin). Instead of simply talking about this project, though, facilitators can also mimic part of this project by asking instructors to read an anonymous text and then having a group discussion about perceived student-author identity. This kind of an activity allows facilitators to continually ask instructors to provide specific examples from the text so that discussions can consider specific moments of indexicality, resisting a conversation based in abstraction. Additionally, the discussion can encourage instructors to reflect on not only their own perceptions of authorial identity based on the language but also the patterns that may emerge within the group.

Teacher preparation and professional development programs also need to acknowledge institutional discourse that calls on and perpetuates ideologies of privilege and neutrality and the related expectation—or mandate—that writing instructors demand SEAE from their students. These programs should provide instructors with a means for challenging the discourse within which they are embroiled. Challenging the institutional discourse, which likely relies heavily on SLI, can begin with making visible the

discursive practices, such as SLD, that perpetuate notions of SEAE as superior and widely accessible. For example, training sessions can include a short demonstration of how to examine one's learning objectives for students in order to identify and resist SLD. Facilitators can provide a sample objective about students' ability to demonstrate control over grammar and syntax. Discussion about this learning objective can include whether the expected language variety is named, whether "language" is positioned as working in the service of ideas, and how instructors might address identity in learning objectives. Additionally, teacher preparation programs can consider the relationship between various pedagogical approaches and the institutional expectation for SEAE. For example, both translation and appropriacy pedagogies seek to acknowledge and legitimize nonstandard language varieties, but ultimately expect SEAE for most, if not all, academic writing. Positioning these pedagogical approaches as coming from and perpetuating powerful discourses that support ongoing privileging of SEAE sets programs up well for offering alternatives such as the ones that follow.

Teaching SEAE, a Conventional Dialect

As a first step, if writing instructors expect SEAE, then they also need to talk about and teach SEAE.[63] However, given the portrayal of SEAE as normal and natural within this study, which often means this dialect goes unnamed, it is possible that SEAE is an unstated expectation. Indeed, the WPA (Writing Program Administrator) teaching outcome statement for first-year writing never once references SEAE, instead calling for students to "use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation" and "control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling." While the absence of specific reference to SEAE creates space for nonstandard dialects, instructors must be clear about their dialectal expectations (and indeed they may be in their syllabi or writing prompts). More than just stating an expectation for SEAE, instructors need to teach it—and, as I've argued throughout this dissertation, teaching SEAE involves more than teaching grammar. Based on the findings from this

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[63] In this study, all of the instructors expected SEAE in "good" college writing. Additionally, the review of composition scholarship provided in Chapter 1, including my examination of SRTOL, suggests that *most* composition instructors expect SEAE in student papers. However, I recognize that there may be instructors who do not require students to write their papers in SEAE.

dissertation, teaching SEAE must include defining SEAE as a privileged, written, social dialect that, as with all dialects, is tied to users and is, therefore, cultural and indexical. It also includes acknowledging the interdependence and fuzzy boundaries between SEAE and academic registers.

In addition to the act of naming SEAE as an expectation for the course (if indeed it is) and a dialect of English, instructors can also resist SLI by avoiding vocabulary associated with correctness when talking about sentence- and text-level standardness and dialect. Some scholars have suggested replacing this highly evaluative model of right and wrong with appropriateness, begging the question "*why* a particular usage should be labeled inappropriate or appropriate in a given context" (Moss and Walters 445). Although this approach may allow for questioning the rationale behind designations of in/appropriate, it does not require it. In fact, SLI presupposes an answer to this question by positioning the "standard" as superior and accessible. Additionally, appropriacy language includes evaluation—though *inappropriate* may be more positive than *wrong* because it is more likely to be perceived as a context-dependent evaluation, labels of appropriate or inappropriate still imply that a particular language variety is wrong for a context or occasion. As Lippi-Green says, appropriacy arguments—despite their intentions—work to "reject" nonstandard language varieties (107).

I suggest, then, using the labels *conventional* and *unconventional* as a frame for describing language practices within particular contexts, which avoids an immediate valuing of the language use: conventional is not always deemed "good" and unconventional is not always perceived as "bad." Indeed, academics and students are often very willing to challenge the conventional. It is important, here, to note the distinction between *conventions* and *conventional* as the term *conventions,* when associated with language use, can be coded language for grammar and are often seen as good. Framing the conversation about SEAE as un/conventional language use allows instructors to acknowledge a "typical" and typified approach to language use in a given context but also makes clear the social construction of these positions as opposed to allowing them to be "extrarhetorical"—given—and, potentially, perceived as neutral. Again, describing certain language practices as un/conventional does not carry with it judgment about correctness, but asks for careful consideration of the benefits and risks

associated with following or breaking conventions, thereby encouraging reflection on why some language practices are conventional and under what circumstances it may be important to stray from a typical approach.

In addition to changing our vocabulary—and thereby, practice—any pedagogical changes we make must also include an awareness of the relationship between language and identity. To use my own suggested term, the conventional perspective of SEAE has been to assume that this dialect works to erase identity. As we teach SEAE, we need to be explicit with our students that dialect does not erase identity; in fact, it signals identity. Talking with students about the relationship between writing and identity encourages explicit instruction about the ways students can develop rhetorical strategies for purposefully signaling an identity that is both successful and aligned with their own goals. For example, Christine Tardy spoke at the 2009 CCCC about the ways ESL writers can position themselves as multilingual in order to avoid having readers interpret their writing through a deficit lens. Additionally, to augment conversations about and instruction on signaling successful identities in student writing, instructors will likely want to have models of successful *non*standard writing. Geneva Smitherman's writing is one such example; however, instructors should also turn to their own students' work for models of powerful, unconventional texts.

Finally, composition instructors can include students in the process of challenging the indexicality and perceived neutrality of SEAE by creating activities that: encourage students to recognize and name SEAE as an (unstated) expectation; allow for an examination of indexicality associated with SEAE and other dialects; and explicitly take on issues of standardness at both the sentence and text level, reintegrating dialect with meaning and ideas. For example, instructors can ask students to read an anonymous text and then answer questions about identity (just as I recommend for instructors in teacher preparation and professional development programs). Students can extend this exercise outside of the classroom by asking some of their friends also to read the text and describe the authorial identity they imagine. Students can then be asked to write a reflection about any patterns they note and the relationship between writing and identity. Additionally, educators could ask students to consider their own linguistic resources, identifying the kinds of non-classroom written dialects and registers they control, and reflect on whether

these languages or elements of these languages could be used in their essays. Finally, instructors could assign a paper in which students *must* incorporate multiple language varieties or registers and consider the affordances and limitations of their text and the kinds of identities they hoped to portray rhetorically. All of this would create opportunities for discussions about language politics, language and identity, and SEAE as a privileged, written, social dialect that is linked to and does signal identity.

A Call to Action: Future Research

Given the limited scholarship on written dialects, this project and the field of composition studies enters conversations about SEAE with an incomplete definition and understanding of what it is we are talking about and/or studying. As I suggest in Chapter 1, our current understanding of dialect as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar does not translate well to writing. Furthermore, the common conflation between grammar and dialect positions dialects as distinct from meaning, and as a result, less important than discourses or genres. Furthermore, the regular separation of sentence-level language use from ideas and meaning works to position dialect (and its related cultural difference) as unimportant, creating an idealized "correct" language variety that works in service of ideas. Of course, this perception of language as non-interfering contributes to the construction of linguistic neutrality associated with SEAE. Additionally, if the "appropriate" focus for composition instructors is ideas and meaning, which is attributed to individuals, there is less opportunity for structural critiques about unequal access to standardness.

I argue that we need more scholarship on what written dialects are beyond vocabulary and grammar, especially at the level of the text. In fact, in response to Delpit's call for transparency of expectations and "rules" of standardness, I assert that we cannot provide access to SEAE for students operating from other dialects without acknowledging and teaching dialect at both the sentence and text level and without addressing the interrelatedness of dialects, register, discourse, and rhetoric. Additionally, we need to study written dialects other than SEAE in order to consider their possible role in composition courses. We cannot challenge SEAE's privilege in composition courses without being able to show that other dialects have formal registers that are appropriate to

academia. Geneva Smitherman, Victor Villanueva, and Gloria Anzaldua (to name a few) have begun this work by producing scholarship in mixed dialects. Despite these scholars success, the "gate" remains primarily closed to nonstandard written dialects. Furthermore, there are significant pedagogical challenges to allowing or encouraging students to writing in "nonstandard" dialects. For example, many "nonstandard" dialects do not have a standardized orthographic system. There is also a high likelihood that instructors will not have much experience with, let alone mastery over, "nonstandard" dialects and, therefore, will have difficulty teaching and coaching students as they work to develop rhetorical sophistication in a language variety other than SEAE.

In addition to needed research on written dialects, there is also need for ongoing research on the indexicality of SEAE. Indeed, some of my personal plans for future research come from the limitations of the current study—most notably the lack of racial diversity among the instructor participants. There is scholarship that suggests that SLI is convincing to people of color or people who use nonstandard dialects, which may mean that even with additional racial diversity, composition instructors would still engage and reproduce SLI and treat SEAE as neutral. However, it is less clear how indexicality would work for instructors who themselves are likely to be exceptions to the indexical patterns noted in this dissertation. In other words, if an African American instructor has mastered SEAE, he/she may be less likely to link nonstandard language practices with African American student-authors and standard language practices with white student-authors.

Truly, the possibilities for future research associated with this project are many. In the near future, I also plan to conduct research that examines *students'* perceptions of authorial identity based on SEAE. Another future study involves examining instructors' reactions to standardness when the identity of the author is known to further interrogate the bidirectionality of indexicality.

Concluding with Questions

My project ends with questions rather than conclusions. I return to my interaction with Jason. I wonder how my insights from this project could help me—and other educators—address similar interactions in the future. How does my project help Jason?

Would it have helped to talk about SEAE as raced and classed? Would it have helped to talk about how writing signals identity? To be honest, I'm not sure that it would have. But, I do think it would have made a difference if I would have started that class by talking about SEAE as a privileged dialect, by addressing the different tools and resources we all have available to create (as much as possible) a successful authorial identity, and by incorporating the activities described earlier as well as representations of successful authorial identities linked to both standard and nonstandard language varieties. Even if I didn't have *the* solution for Jason, I would have had a shared vocabulary to use with him to talk about the issue, and I may even have had the beginnings of his trust in order to tackle the difficult terrain of language, privilege, and identity. Moving out of the past and into the future, I feel confident that challenging composition studies to more carefully consider written dialect, to recognize indexicality associated with SEAE, and to rhetorically *de*construct linguistic neutrality are steps in the right direction, steps toward undoing harmful patterns, steps toward linguistic equality in practice not just theory.

Appendix A
Instructor Demographics
Note: Gender, Race, and Class were self-reported during interviews

Midwestern University Instructors

	Gender	Race	Class	Other
Darrell	M	White	Middle	MFA
Emily	F	White	Middle	MFA
Jonathon	M	White	Working Class	MFA
Julie	F	White	Middle	Composition studies graduate student; taught mostly at other institutions
Melissa	F	White	Middle	MFA; works in university's writing center
Nate	M	White	Working Class	MFA

City University Instructors

	Gender	Race	Class	Other
Carol	F	White	Middle	Has taught at multiple institutions
Chris	M	White	Middle	Composition studies graduate student
Henry	M	White	Middle	Composition studies graduate student
Nan	F	White	Middle	English Literature graduate student; has taught at multiple institutions
Rachel	F	White	Middle	Has taught at multiple institutions
Richard	M	White	Middle	Has taught at multiple institutions

Appendix B
Instructions for Instructors on Responding to the Anonymous Student Papers

Please read the following three student papers (all written by incoming first-year students). As you read, mark the text as you notice anything about the writing that does not fit your expectations for what college writing should look like. Please also describe what it is that you are marking and why?

When you have finished reading each paper, please take a moment to write about any big picture or global writing issues that did not meet your expectations but could not be identified in one place in the paper. Finally, please provide a letter grade (A-F) for the paper.

Following is the prompt to which all of the papers responded:

Prompt: Analyze Gladwell's proposal on how to select and retain teachers in the United States, and argue for or against his proposal using evidence from the article.

Your essay will be evaluated for the following elements:

1. Focus: your essay should be developed around a clear central thesis or argument, integrating your own views with material from the article.
2. Structure: your essay should be clearly organized in a way that elaborates on and supports your central thesis. Individual paragraphs should be cohesive, and your reader should be able to follow the logical progression of your ideas from one paragraph to the next.
3. Evidence/Analysis: make sure that you support your claims with well-chosen examples from the article, and that you explain how these examples support your points.

Appendix C
Interview Protocol for Composition Instructors

Part I
1) How long have you taught?
2) Where else have you taught?
3) Please briefly describe the student-authors you pictured when reading these papers.

Part II
1) Pick one text and walk me through the notes you made to the paper. As you are talking, use as much detail as possible to explain what you marked and why you marked it.
2) Please also tell me how you would talk to the student who you imagine wrote this paper about what you marked.
3) From your experience, what does it look like when writing doesn't meet your expectations? How do you account for these instances?
4) In your experience, how common are these occurrences?

Part III* -- Questions for each of the student papers
5) Are there particular details that are striking to you in this paper? Why?
6) In as much detail as possible, describe the student you pictured as having written this paper.

If not addressed by the response to Question 6:
7) How old do you think the student is?
8) What kind of education do you think this student had before coming here?
9) Where do you think the student grew up?
10) What political affiliation do you think the student has?
11) What race do you think this student is?
12) What socio-economic class do you think this student comes from?
13) What gender do you think the student is?

Part IV
1) Did you identify with anything in this paper?
2) Can you imagine writing on this topic?
3) Do you personally agree with the argument or stance in this paper?
4) Would you ever use language or phrases similar to this student?

Part V
Reveal gender, race, and class of student author

A) If it matches up with the instructor's profile: Do you think this means that our writing reveals our identity? Or that our writing is connected to our identities?

B) If it doesn't match up with the instructor's profile: Do you think in other instances you could tell a writer's identity from the text? Do you think there is a connection between writing and identity?

Part VI
1) How do you self identify in terms of race?
2) How do you self identify in terms of socio-economic class?
3) How do you self identify in terms of gender?

*For each of the questions in Part III, I will ask, if necessary: What from the text and your prior teaching experiences make you think that?

Appendix D
Student Author Demographics
Note: Race, class, and gender are self-reported

Paper A: White, middle-class male
Paper B: White, upper-middle-class male
Paper C: White, middle-class female
Paper D: White, middle-class female
Paper E: African American, working-class male
Paper F: Hispanic, middle-class female
Paper G: African American, working-class male
Paper H: African American, middle-class female
Paper I: Hispanic, middle-class male

Appendix E
Distribution of Student Papers

	Paper A	Paper B	Paper C	Paper D	Paper E	Paper F	Paper G	Paper H	Paper I
Inst. 1		W		W	AA				
Inst. 2		W		W					H
Inst. 3						H		AA	H
Inst. 4		W	W					AA	
Inst. 5	W			W			AA		
Inst. 6	W				AA		AA		
Inst. 7				W	AA		AA		
Inst. 8			W		AA			AA	
Inst. 9	W						AA	AA	
Inst. 10			W					AA	H
Inst. 11		W			AA				H
Inst. 12	W		W						H

Legend:

W = White

AA = African American

H = Hispanic

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