

Linguistic and Rhetorical Ideologies in the Transition to College Writing: A Case Study of  
Southern Students

by

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## **DEDICATION**

To my family:

Krista, Mama, and Daddy, in loving acknowledgment of your unflagging support and unconditional love.

And in memory of my grandparents:

Francis and Robert Henderson and Stevie Swofford,  
who believed in the power of education...and in me.

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history archives, and my Granny always had a stack of library books waiting on the kitchen table for me when I visited. They, too, are part of this story. Thank you to my grandmother Karen Swofford and to my PaPa, Stevie Swofford, who passed away before I could finish this project, but whose legacy looms large in its pages. To my sister, Krista Swofford, for the smiles and laughter. We've taken different paths through life, but our footprints remain similar in ways that only sisters' can. And to my mother and father, Karen and David Swofford, to whom I simply don't have the words to express how grateful I am. You were my first teachers, and I teach because of how you taught me.

## PREFACE

“We’re from Cowpens, Ms. Swofford. You can’t expect us to talk like you do.” I was in the middle of a writing mini-lesson on how to structure a thesis in an “academic essay,” but when Blake spoke, I stopped in mid-sentence. I was not shocked that Blake, one of my energetic 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, had interrupted me. Rather, I was dismayed that his defiant plea for me to consider his local identity and language was something I simply did not feel prepared to address. I am, in fact, from Cowpens, South Carolina, a small town in the Piedmont region nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Cowpens is best known for its role as one of the “turning points” in the American Revolutionary War,<sup>1</sup> but it has been a relatively quiet little town ever since then. My connections to the Cowpens community run deep. My grandmother attended school in the very building where Blake and I stood, and I had taken 8<sup>th</sup> grade algebra in the same classroom where I taught English/Language Arts and South Carolina History. My senior year of high school, I drove my first car through the winding “mill hill” roads past kudzu-encrusted homes every morning. My great-grandparents had lived in one of those houses, and they worked in one of the local textile mills for many years.

At the time, I thought Blake’s comment surprised me because he knew about my long-standing family history in the area, a piece of knowledge that just the week before had sent Blake and two other students scurrying to the school library in search of old yearbooks, where they found typically awkward pictures of me in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. So I was, frankly, a little confused by Blake’s assertion that I, somehow, was an outsider who could not understand something about his home language, because Cowpens was my home too, and I thought I talked like it too. I consider myself a speaker of Southern English, though when I taught K-12 I experienced the tension many non-standard speakers feel when they enter the classroom as educators. I wanted

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<sup>1</sup> The battle of Cowpens is often hailed as the “turning point” of the American Revolution because the victory brought about by Commander Daniel Morgan’s innovative military strategy was the first decisive victory on the road to the Yorktown, Virginia, where just ten months after the Battle of Cowpens, General Cornwallis surrendered to General Washington. The battle was and is a point of much local pride. In fact, at the time I taught at the middle school in town, our school motto, “A Revolutionary Past, an Extraordinary Future”, hearkened back to the battle and was a constant reminder of the importance of local history.

my students to have access to the cultural capital of Standard English, but I never explicitly told my students that their dialect was inappropriate for our classroom. Still, Blake's comment made it clear that he found my instruction frustrating, and that he wanted room for his local language in the learning opportunities I offered.

I stammered back to Blake a reminder that I am from Cowpens too, but my response did not actually address what I now believe to be Blake's real concern. I was, partially, confused by Blake's assertion that I couldn't expect my students to *talk* like I do because I was in the middle of a *writing* lesson. That particular day, I had passed back a graded writing assignment that the students had completed the week before, and we were discussing what I perceived as a pattern of grammatical error in those drafts—an issue of subject-verb agreement in several students' papers. I intended the lesson to help students acquire the more standard verb construction, but it was clear from Blake's remark that I did not take into consideration the fact that many of my students spoke a variety of Southern English where they could systematically use the verb *was* in the place of *were* (e.g. "You was sittin' in that chair"). Blake's comment revealed an ideology that I was (at least partly inadvertently) reproducing in my classroom—that speakers of non-standard dialects must leave something of their local identities behind if they wish to be successful in academic writing.

Blake had the sense that the instruction that day was not about his formal academic writing, but about the way he spoke—and about an integral element of his identity. When he ascribed to my writing instruction an implicit criticism of his local speech, he conflated the registers of written and spoken English. Blake spoke a non-standard variety of English, one that is persistently associated with low intelligence and lack of education, and his comment demonstrated that he felt the language required in academic writing was dissimilar from the language required to be successful in his home environment. Blake indicated he found his local dialect was not acceptable in my classroom, and he felt this ideology alienated me, as his teacher, from him.

I can't say that Blake's sense of the situation was wrong. I was concerned about my students' ability to write in Standard American English (StAE). I was receiving updates from former students that detailed their struggles with writing in college, and I wanted Blake and his classmates to be well-prepared for the transition from our local school district into the college writing classroom. At the same time, my district (and many others in the state) was putting more

and more emphasis on making sure that our students were “college ready,” and I felt that ensuring that students could succeed in their first-year composition courses was an important element of this preparation, though I had little sense of exactly what my students might encounter in their first-year writing classes. I felt certain that their college instructors would expect them to write in standard written English, and to follow the conventions of academic writing, so in my attempts to give them access to the language I felt would offer them success, I inadvertently denigrated the home dialect we all shared.

As Blake’s comment indicated, being a speaker of a non-standard dialect can influence the way that students think of themselves as writers in academic settings, especially as these students leave their local communities and school systems and transition into the post-secondary writing classroom. His comment also demonstrated that speakers of Southern American English (SAE) speak a variety of English that has negative associations with which students (and teachers) must contend, in that he felt that his home dialect was somehow at odds with the language valued in academic writing (and more specifically, in my classroom). These negative associations are strongly connected with perceived education levels, but there is little research on what speakers of SAE experience in classroom settings. Likewise, there is little research that explores the ways students experience ideologies linked with their language and local discourse practices in post-secondary composition classrooms. In many ways, this dissertation study is a result of the conversation I had with Blake that day in Cowpens. Through this study exploring the experiences of rural Southern students in this transition, I hope to better understand how the ideologies surrounding both Southern English and the kinds of rhetorical strategies that rural Southern students like Blake bring into the writing classroom.

## **CHAPTER OUTLINE**

*Chapter 1* establishes the theoretical frameworks of *language ideologies* and *linguistic capital* as well as the research questions about the role of language as a rhetorical resource in the writing classroom that undergird this study and reviews the relevant research on the transition to college writing, Southern American English, the treatment of SAE in educational linguistics, and the ideologies that surround SAE and its speakers.

*Chapter 2* offers an overview of this research project and the research methodology. This chapter describes the rationale for the project, the procedures for site and participant selection, the participant populations, data collection, and analysis.



*Chapter 3* presents the first of three major findings of this study. This chapter looks closely at the language ideologies surrounding SAE that students brought with them to college from the context of their local high school. The students in this study both take up and resist the predominant ideologies surrounding themselves as individual speakers as a means of establishing their social class and differentiating themselves from their peers and family who did not go to college.

*Chapter 4* explores the rhetorical resources that students bring into the college writing classroom, in the form of an ideology of what is rhetorically effective in argumentation, in their academic writing classes. The students felt this local “rhetorical ideology” was tied to their linguistic identities, and resisted feedback that positioned their local capital negatively.

*Chapter 5* explores the third, and final, major finding from this study. This chapter considers how the students in this study adopted “MLA” as the corresponding global rhetorical ideology, and examines how this global ideology lacked the rhetorical sensitivity of their local strategies.

*Chapter 6* examines the implications of this study and suggests directions for future research. I consider the role of both language and rhetorical ideologies in the transition to college and offer potential pedagogical interventions for this population and potentially other non-standard speakers as well.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative longitudinal study responds to recent conversations in composition studies about the role of first-year writing in the transition to college, and it suggests that writing teachers should consider the linguistic and rhetorical resources, as well as the ideologies that surround those resources, students bring into the writing classroom from their local communities. Rural Southern students are one such population who need this consideration, because of their low persistence to graduation, and the fact that many of these students are speakers of a non-standard dialect of English that is strongly associated with ideologies of low intelligence and limited education.

This dissertation project offers a new perspective on the presence and (re)production of linguistic and rhetorical ideologies in the first-year writing classroom and suggests that not only are these ideologies salient for students, they are more complex than the current body of research might suggest. These “first generation” college students use the set of persistent ideologies associated with their home dialect to differentiate themselves from their peers they attended high school with and their family “back home” who did not attend college, and to set up a hierarchy of dialects as a means of distinguishing social class. The nine students in this study, all of whom came from a single high school in South Carolina, used language ideologies to distinguish themselves in their new social environments at college and attempted to leverage their understandings about what is rhetorically effective in academic writing in their first-year composition courses.

These students’ voices and experiences are not well-represented in the present body of work about their transitions into college writing. Their perspectives could prove particularly useful for researchers trying to address the challenges that rural Southern students face as they leave the local high school and the linguistic and rhetorical capital valued there, especially as they make the transition into the context of the post-secondary writing classroom, which values a different kind of linguistic and rhetorical practice.

## CHAPTER 1: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### INTRODUCTION

The transition to college is a critical educational moment for most students, as their success navigating this transition is crucial to their ability to persist to graduation (Kuh; Addison and McGee). Within that transition from high school to college, First-Year Composition (FYC) courses play a particularly important role, as they act as a gateway to mastering university/academic discourses and endeavor to help students gain the necessary cognitive skills of critical thinking and analysis that they will employ in other courses throughout their undergraduate experiences (Kuh et al.; NCTE). While recent research, much of it in response to federally-mandated educational reforms, has sought to explore the skills students need to be “college and career ready,” this body of work has not considered many of the complex factors like language ideologies that may affect students’ transition experiences in composition classrooms. This is particularly true in the case of rural Southern<sup>2</sup> students, who have not garnered as much attention from researchers as have their urban counterparts, though they often come from similarly economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The research that does address this population of students acknowledges that they may require some educational interventions (Byun, Irvin, and Meece; Donehower, Hogg, and Schell; Hendrickson). In his article, “Preparing Rural Students for Large Colleges and Universities,” Douglas Guiffreda even suggests that rural students be considered an “At-Risk” population for college advising purposes because of their low rate of persistence to graduation.

The factors that influence students’ abilities to navigate the transition from their local

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<sup>2</sup> Defining the boundaries of “The South” has long been a contested activity. William L. Andrews, for example, completely avoids defining “The South” in his *Norton Anthology of Southern Literature*. In an article about his work as editor, Andrews defends his choice by pointing out how many other Southern literary scholars and anthologists avoid defining the region, or merely define its “separateness” and rely on defending the idea of “Southern identity” rather than drawing geographic boundaries (Andrews et al.). An online article from *The Atlantic* in January of 2011 suggested various ways of defining “The South,” all of which would draw different boundaries based on religion, history (primarily involvement with the Confederacy during the Civil War), dialect, food preferences, and politics (Ottenhoff).

high schools to their post-secondary institutions are complicated and often difficult to disentangle. For these rural Southern students, the ideologies associated with their home dialects are one of the factors that complicate their ability to “seamlessly” transition, as some scholars suggest should be the goal (Creech and Clouse). The ideologies associated with Southern American English (SAE) are persistently connected to perceptions of intelligence and level of education, so it follows that students who are also speakers of SAE may experience their FYC courses differently than their peers whose dialects are less-often discriminated against.

While much of the literature on transition into first-year writing has focused on the curricula students are exposed to during high school and the need for more communication between educators at the K-12 and post-secondary levels, there has been little attention paid to the other factors, like language and its associated ideologies, which might affect students’ success in the transition from high school to college. Likewise, there have been few scholars who solicit student voices and experiences as a means of better understanding the factors that may affect more and less successful transitions into college writing. Researching the transition to college writing without considering the complexity of the factors involved in this pivotal educational moment only serves to reify oversimplified explanations and blame-placing for the relatively high percentage of students (especially rural Southern students) who do not transition successfully.

### *Research Questions*

I began this study, then, with a qualitative longitudinal design based on the theoretical constructs of language ideologies and linguistic capital to explore the experiences of rural SAE-speaking students as they transition from their local high schools to the post-secondary educational context, and I sought to address the question:

***How do the ideologies surrounding SAE influence the educational experiences of rural Southern students as they transition from high school to college writing?***

Underneath this broad question are several “sub-questions” that guided my interview protocols:

- What happens in the transition from high school to college writing that reifies/challenges the ideologies surrounding SAE?
- How do students’ perceptions of themselves as speakers of SAE change (or not) throughout their first semester of college?
- How do rural Southern students see themselves as college writers?



- In what ways do the ideologies surrounding SAE affect students' writerly self-conceptions?
- In what ways do students' conceptions of themselves as writers change as they move from high school English to college writing courses?

My initial research question utilizes the theoretical frameworks of *language ideologies* and *linguistic capital* to offer a new perspective on the role of first-year writing in the transition to college. In so doing, this study brings the fields of composition studies and educational linguistics into conversation with one another. As a theoretical framework, *language ideologies* offers great promise to the field of composition studies because it offers a lens for composition scholars and instructors to consider the linguistic resources, strategies, and beliefs that their students (and, for that matter, that they themselves) bring into the composition classroom. The field of composition studies has not drawn heavily on theories of *language ideologies*, but this framework offers a perspective on the unspoken assumptions that both students and teachers bring into the writing classroom, where prolonged engagement with language forms the basis of classroom interactions and assignments. The theory of *linguistic capital* serves to highlight the kinds of language resources that are highly valued in both the FYC classroom and in the corporate cultures that educators imagine students will encounter once they leave school.

### *Rhetorical Ideologies*

Though I initially entered this study intending to focus on the language ideologies and linguistic capital students brought from their local communities into the FYC classroom, as the participants in this study shared their experiences with me through our conversations, it became clear that they brought another, related, set of ideologies from their home community into the college writing classroom. These ideologies centered around what the students considered rhetorically effective in writing in different settings and different registers of English, and the students' experiences with these ideologies demonstrate another kind of resource that the students brought with them into college writing. Language is, after all, a rhetorical tool. Speakers are able to use different registers and dialects as a means of accomplishing different purposes for different audiences, and in this way, they utilize linguistic features to be more rhetorically effective in various contexts. It was not altogether surprising, then, that the students discussed their beliefs about what is rhetorically effective in writing when I asked them about the role of language in the writing classroom. The questions I designed to surface their thoughts

about how language ideologies influenced their experiences seemed to prompt them to also reflect on the ways they used elements of their language to be effective in academic writing.

The context of the academic writing classroom seemed to surface these ideologies for students, as it was a site where they were asked to use language (primarily in its written form) to compose rhetorically effective texts. The rhetorical ideologies that students discussed, then, came out of our conversations about language ideologies and the role of language in students' experiences with FYC. While my first research question is based on theories of language ideologies and linguistic capital, the findings generated by this study led to an additional question that considers the role of what I have come to call "rhetorical ideologies":

***In what ways do the ideologies that surround Southern discourse and what students consider rhetorically effective influence students' experiences with academic writing?***

Through this question, I was able to explore the students' beliefs and attitudes around what they anticipated would be valued in college-level academic writing.

In this chapter, I bring together the fields of composition studies and educational linguistics and suggest that examining the transition to college writing through the theoretical frameworks of language ideologies and linguistic capital offers college writing instructors and secondary teachers alike a new perspective on non-standard grammar, supports student-centered pedagogical approaches by foregrounding their experiences and voices, and establishes a new perspective on the role of language and language variation in FYC classrooms. I also explore the portrayal of SAE-speaking students in the field of educational linguistics and argue that this population of students provides an interesting case for examining both language ideologies and rhetorical ideologies in the transition to college writing.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### *Language Ideologies*

As rural Southern students enter college, they bring with them a complex set of ideologies associated with both their home dialect(s) and with StAE. For speakers of SAE, the ideologies associated with their home language include assumptions that Southerners are ill-educated or stupid, have bad grammar, or are polite (among others). In the transition from their local high school to post-secondary educational contexts, these students are often being asked (usually implicitly) to confront their existing ideologies and to consider new ideological

perspectives. By their nature, language ideologies are often considered self-evident or commonsense, and are rarely questioned. These powerful perceptions or beliefs, which can be more fully defined as the ideas, attitudes, and judgments surrounding language that often contribute to the production and reproduction of power (Irvine, “When Talk Isn’t Cheap”; Woolard and Schieffelin; Lippi-Green), typically lurk under the surface of speakers’ interactions, which means that students, and educators, for that matter, are usually unaware they have or are affected by language ideologies.

The concept of *language ideologies*, which are sometimes called *linguistic ideologies* or *ideologies of language*, has only relatively recently garnered much scholarly attention, perhaps because it represents “an indeterminate area of investigation with no apparent bounds” (Woolard and Schieffelin 56). There is not consensus among scholars regarding where, exactly, language ideologies come from, how they are produced, or who “controls” them. In their review essay “Language Ideology,” Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin observe that scholarly conversations invoking language ideologies seem to be taking place in three different areas of language study: studies concerning language contact, historiography of linguistics and public discourses of language, and studies of the relation of ideologies to linguistic structures. These conversations are occurring in a variety of disciplines but do not often cross disciplinary boundaries. Studies with both explicit and implicit acknowledgments of language ideologies are contributing to a growing literature, one that seeks to explore the complex, tangled relationship(s) among language, society, and identity.<sup>3</sup>

My theoretical framework and definition of *language ideologies* are heavily influenced by anthropologist Judith Irvine’s assertion that language ideologies highlight the social conditions and power relations inherent in utterances (“Ideology, Metapragmatics, and Related Concepts”). The moralizing and power relations inherent in language ideologies are significant to this study because they showcase the ways that beliefs about speakers’ linguistic choices affect the experiences of those speakers as they move in and through various social contexts. As

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<sup>3</sup> Though a thorough exploration of *identity* is beyond the scope of this project, I define *identity* as both a person’s understanding of who they are and the ways they try to enact that understanding. Most often, our understanding and performance of *identity* occurs below the level of consciousness. Through our performances of identity, we also try to understand who other people are (or aspects of who other people are) (Moje and Luke). As we index our identities through performance, we are also trying to make sense of the performances of other people. Language is one way that we understand who we are and something we use to perform that understanding in front of others (Ochs), and language ideologies affect our understandings of ourselves and other people. In this way, *identity* and *language ideologies* are related concepts.

James Milroy points out in “Language Ideologies and the Consequences of Standardization,” the real power of these ideologies is that speakers consider them so obvious that the beliefs remain unspoken and unquestioned. For example, it seems so *obviously* true to many people that non-standard dialects are inferior to “standard” English varieties that they do not stop to question or explain why different varieties of English may exist, nor do they consider the circumstances under which a speaker may employ a non-standard dialect for their own purposes.<sup>4</sup>

For the rural Southern students in this study, the ideologies commonly associated with SAE—those of politeness and pleasantness, but also of poor education and even stupidity—shaped their interactions with other speakers and influenced their educational experiences. The transition to college was not the first time they encountered these ideologies, as even speakers within this speech community often reproduce the perceptions of SAE (Preston) and these ideologies are often represented in popular culture (Bernstein). As both speakers and writers, many of these students had difficulty navigating the ways that their new educational context required them to utilize different language varieties than those they were accustomed to back home. Even more difficult for these students to negotiate was the fact that the collegiate environment, and the writing class in particular, assigns different cultural values to different language varieties and does not always make that valuation explicit to students.

One such language ideology is what Rosina Lippi-Green calls “Standard Language Ideology” (SLI), which she defines as “a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the middle class” (64). SLI is highly valued in the context of higher education, and in this SLI-created hierarchy, non-standard dialects are positioned as less valid, bad, or broken forms of language. When speakers assert the dominance of one language variety over another, they participate in a process Lippi-Green calls the “language subordination model,” through which local varieties of language are devalued in favor of SLI. For example, the non-Southern speaker may trivialize a feature of SAE like the vowel merger that causes *pen* and *pin* to be homophones by mimicking the pronunciation or by asking the *pen/pin* speaker to repeat themselves again and again, suggesting that this usage is too confusing and that the speaker should conform to the “Standard” pronunciation if they wish to be understood. Southern

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<sup>4</sup> In this paper I use *they* as a singular pronoun because it offers a gender-neutral alternative to singular third-person pronouns. As a singular generic pronoun, *they* has widespread, systematic use in spoken English, and like other writers, I find it can also be used effectively in formal written English as well (Curzan).

speakers, too, may reproduce such negative ideologies by characterizing their language use as “bad” or by marginalizing non-standard usages. As Blake’s response to my writing lesson described in the preface indicates, I replicated these ideologies by suggesting to my students that something about their spoken local language was unacceptable for the writing they produced in the ELA classroom. By no means am I the only teacher to use the language subordination model to justify asking students (implicitly or explicitly) to replace their home dialect with StAE, and though my intentions were to offer my students the cultural capital of StAE, such ideologies are nevertheless damaging.

SLI represents a partiality towards this idealized speech, but its effects on speakers are often realized through language ideologies that subjugate speakers’ home language and create a hierarchy of dialects. The language subordination model, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 3, champions StAE as offering speakers more success and cultural capital than other, more non-standard dialects and varieties of English. As the language subordination model is enacted, speakers may also denigrate the local language as “quaint” or “homey” and make threats that students who persist in using non-standard English will never be successful, a move that reproduces the negative ideologies associated with SAE. In Southern classrooms, this can take the form of teachers promising success to students, but only if they adhere to the conventions of StAE, particularly in their written work (Hudley and Mallinson; Lippi-Green).

Though Lippi-Green’s definition of SLI explicitly states that it is based on the spoken language of the middle class, the strong association of spoken and written language she references in this definition is one indication of the popular conflation of spoken and written registers. The ideologies surrounding SAE, like the ideologies surrounding other non-standard dialects, circulate around spoken language. SLI is also relevant for writing classrooms, as writing classrooms represent a site where students are evaluated based on their abilities to efficiently communicate in writing. The students in this study conflated registers of spoken and written language, which meant they applied the negative ideologies associated with their home dialect to the language of the writing they produced in their FYC courses, and to the interactions they had with other writers in those courses. More generally speaking, the conflation of speaking and writing is problematic because it assumes that speakers’ home (spoken) languages are “close enough” to StAE that speakers can employ whichever variety is most appropriate for the rhetorical situation in which they find themselves. In this way, though SLI is an ideology

primarily based on spoken language, the popular conflation of spoken and written registers of language only serves to reify the notion that non-standard speakers may be deficient in academic writing, and promotion of SLI values the cultural and linguistic capital preferred in corporate culture rather than the capital valued in local communities.

### *Language Capital*

In his book *Language and Symbolic Power*, Pierre Bourdieu argues that language acts as a form of cultural capital, granting speakers resources that they can leverage in various social markets. There is a rhetorical dimension in using language as a symbolic capital, in that speakers are able to leverage various linguistic forms to accomplish specific purposes within the market where that capital is valued. This rhetorical dimension has garnered less scholarly attention, but it is an important to this study and will be explained in detail below. For Bourdieu, language is an essential element of social life, and of the social relationships that people establish with one another, and he claims that speakers use their various linguistic forms as a way of establishing their social positions and interpreting the social positions of others. Bourdieu calls this the *linguistic marketplace*, which, according to Bourdieu, "...is based, first of all, on the distinctive value which results from the relationship that the speakers establish, consciously or unconsciously, between the linguistic product offered by a socially characterized speaker, and the other products offered simultaneously in a determinate social space" (38). Within the linguistic marketplace Bourdieu describes, speakers can leverage various aspects of their language as a form of social capital. Language, then, carries value in this marketplace because, among other uses, it is the way that speakers establish who has the "right" to speak, to be considered trustworthy, and to make decisions. Within this linguistic marketplace, speakers use what Bourdieu calls *linguistic capital* as a means of reproducing and establishing power relations. Bourdieu observes that speakers move in more than one social space, and that the capital valued in one space may not be valued in another. Rural Southern students, for example, may find that the kinds of linguistic capital that are highly valued in their local markets may not be valued in the context of their post-secondary writing classrooms. Instead, these classrooms privilege a different set of language resources, and the students in this study found themselves attempting to determine what rhetorical resources offered them more capital in their new educational context.

This rhetorical dimension of language is not only useful in spoken language, it also offers

writers a way of accomplishing different purposes in different contexts. Just as speakers carry around and reproduce language ideologies, they also maintain and reproduce a set of beliefs and judgments about what is rhetorically effective. Students in FYC courses may use StAE as a way of leveraging credibility with their professors, for example. In this sense, StAE is a kind of language capital that students can utilize to indicate their membership in the academic writing classroom. While these rhetorical resources and ideologies have not been granted the scholarly attention that language ideologies have garnered, Bourdieu's theory of *linguistic capital* offers a useful perspective on the rhetorical resources that students bring into the FYC classroom. Students may also use the rhetorical dimensions of language as capital in the writing classrooms, in that they may use argumentative structures they have been taught are appropriate for school (though, as I explore in Chapter 5, these structures are not always what college writing instructors deem appropriate), or they may mimic rhetorical moves they have been taught by high school teachers and college writing instructors. In this way, students use the rhetorical aspects of their language capital in an attempt to establish their trustworthiness as academic writers, or to assert their social positions in the academic writing classroom.

The students in this study brought these rhetorical resources with them from their local community into the college writing classroom. Though Bourdieu recognizes the capital of the local market, he primarily discusses the linguistic capital of the global market. Penny Eckert's research expounds on his theory to consider in more detail the two major linguistic markets that speakers (and in the case of Eckert's study, high school students in particular) must navigate: the "local market," which highly values local linguistic and rhetorical resources, even when those resources are considered non-standard by outsiders; and the "global market," which trades in Standard Language Ideology (14). The capital of the global language market, according to Eckert, is strongly associated with "corporate culture," and in this market, speakers of non-standard English are denied access to the resources offered by more standard linguistic capital. Language is, after all, one way that speakers assert local identities, as they use local linguistic forms to demonstrate their social affiliations and identifications (Labov). Speakers may use local linguistic forms as a way of indicating that they belong to a particular social group, or that they have a particular local history, even if these linguistic forms carry no global linguistic capital. As speakers encounter the ideologies of the global marketplace about their home dialect(s), they may take them up, but this should not be taken to mean that they find their home dialect(s) to be

wholly negative, or even that they do not find these negative perceptions to be denigrating to some aspect of their identities. In fact, these speakers may find the resources offered in the local market to be quite valuable, and may resist efforts to make their language conform to the linguistic capital valued in the global market. This pushback against standardization in local markets may result from a resistance to a non-local marketplace where resources are controlled by entities outside of the community. Such pushback is an example of a rhetorical ideology, where the speaker asserts the rhetorical effectiveness of their local language capital and reproduces a belief that values the local language and locally-controlled rhetorical resources over the rhetorical capital offered by more standard varieties and the rhetorical resources of those varieties.

The tension between the local and global markets is highlighted in the context of the rural Southern K-12 school, where teachers often see themselves as representatives of the global market, even when they themselves are part of the local market, as linguistic insiders. As students move from the “market” of their local high school to the “market” of their post-secondary environment (which, for the students in this study, was geographically close to home), they bring with them linguistic capital and a set of language and rhetorical resources that are not always valued by the academy. In the local environment students were accustomed to within their home community, the expectations surrounding writing were markedly different than what these same students encounter at college. One example of the rhetorical dimension of the linguistic capital that rural Southern students bring from home into the classroom can be found in Shirley Brice Heath’s seminal study of a textile mill community in the Piedmont of the Carolinas, *Ways with Words*. In this book, which is set in a community very similar to Upstate during the adjustment to racial integration, Heath outlines how the students bring various forms of literacies into their schoolwork. Though Heath does not explicitly use the terminology of language capital, what she describes of the white community in Roadville is very similar to the resources that the students of Upstate brought from home into the college writing classroom. The children of Roadville learned at home and at school to be conversational partners with adults, to answer questions from teachers, to read cooperatively, and to label and name real-world objects (146).

When those children and their descendants went on to college, as Heath describes in *Words at Work and Play*, this knowledge translated into their college courses less directly than the students expected. The students in the present study, like many of the children of Heath’s



Roadville, have had years of “home training” that emphasized being polite to teachers and authority figures (Heath 142), and of producing the expected responses to teachers’ questions (144). They then enter college, where their writing instructors expect them to “consider questions for which they don’t have answers, or to write for readers who aren’t already converted to their way of thinking, and to accept their own minds as capable of synthesizing and making judgments about dense ideas” (Sommers and Saltz 133). Students, then, attempt to leverage the local capital they are most familiar with as they make the transition from high school to college, but they are often unaware that they are being asked to navigate a new linguistic market that values different rhetorical and linguistic resources than they may control. Thus, the ideologies that surround SAE shape how rural Southern students view themselves as college writers, and/or how they, in turn, might be viewed by others.

In the transition from the local school system into higher education, the contrast highlighted by the differing value placed on local and global language capital is surfaced, as rural Southern students navigate both the local and the global linguistic markets, and considering how they navigate these discourse communities<sup>5</sup> offers a useful perspective on what students experience in the transition to college writing. The academy itself, individual institutions of higher education, and classrooms all also function as elements of the global linguistic markets that value a different form of capital than what students typically encountered in their local high schools. As students enter these more global markets, they unconsciously bring with them their complicated notions of linguistic identity and the ideologies associated with the dialect(s) they speak. As Keith Hjortshoj notes in his textbook for first year college students, *The Transition to College Writing*, “the journey from high school to college is not just a step onto a higher rung of the same educational ladder. Instead, going to college offers the opportunity to ascend different ladders altogether” (vii). For many students, part of the tension they experience springs from the differences between the “local market” of their home communities and the “global market” of higher education.

Navigating the markets of the academy, the institution, social situations (including institutionally-sponsored residence halls and student-run clubs and groups) and the individual classroom is one part of what makes the adjustment to college difficult for many rural Southern

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<sup>5</sup> I define *discourse community* as a community of interlocutors who adopt a set of communicative practices that they utilize to reach a common set of goals. (Swales)

students, especially given that it is often unclear to these students what kinds of language resources are valued in these markets. The education most students experience in grades K-12 is grounded in the local community, but as these students move into post-secondary education, they are required to interact in far more global communities, like the more global marketplace of their college writing classroom. In rural K-12 schools, students often experience the school and the community working in tandem, with teachers and community members alike reinforcing the lessons students are expected to have internalized as both learners and citizens (Heath, *Ways with Words* 342; Tieken 7). Though the students in this study described a lot of conversation from their families and high school teachers about being prepared for college, they, like many other high school students entering college, could not have predicted the challenges they would encounter.

As these students transition into college writing, they are leaving the familiar linguistic market of their local high school and being asked to simultaneously navigate multiple markets in their new educational contexts, all of which value different linguistic capital and different rhetorical strategies. At college, the students are asked to negotiate new classrooms, with instructors who many times do not hail from the local area (Donehower, Hogg, and Schell), which presents a marked difference from their K-12 classroom environments, where the majority of their instructors were members of their community (Hudley and Mallinson). The students also find themselves navigating the institution itself, as they are asked to communicate with various on-campus offices and personnel, and to socialize with fellow students from a wider range of backgrounds than they may have been accustomed to in high school.<sup>6</sup> The students who lived on campus also necessarily encountered yet another linguistic market, as they left their hometown and moved into a new community in their residence halls on campus. The markets students encountered as they entered higher education, though they are not geographically distant from the students' hometown, do not typically value the capital that students learned to employ in their local markets.

At the same time, though, the kinds of capital that are more highly valued in the global markets of the academy, institution, and writing classroom are not explicitly taught as a different set of language resources than those that students bring with them from their local community.

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as Chapter 4 will explore, the students in this study keenly felt that their new classmates came from a wider range of backgrounds than the demographics from most of their institutions indicate.

Though the students were expected to use the global linguistic capital of StAE, they did not perceive that their instructors were asking them to standardize their language (or, as they called it, their “grammar”), nor were they able to articulate clearly (as Chapters 4 and 5 will demonstrate) the rhetorical capital of academic writing and how the expectations of college writing differ from the writing they had done previously in their K-12 classrooms.

## REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

### *First-Year Composition and the Role of Rhetoric in the Transition to College*

In recent years, there has been rising concern about students’ ability to successfully transition from high school to college. Such concern is not new, as teachers and instructors have long bemoaned the preparation (or lack thereof) of students entering FYC courses (Watt). This concern is partly driven by college faculty, who report that their students are underprepared to face post-secondary level work, and partly driven by public conversations about educational reform. These concerns seem to have only deepened with the passage of recent legislation, in the form of English/Language Arts standards for K-12 classrooms. These Common Core State Standards (CCSS) place a renewed emphasis on “college readiness” for high school students, as they are anchored by a set of “College and Career Readiness” standards, which outline “the vision of what it means to be a literate person in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” (“Common Core State Standards English/Language Arts” 3) and have been adopted by forty-two states at the time of this writing.<sup>7</sup> The public conversations surrounding these standards have placed blame on high schools and high school teachers<sup>8</sup> when students fail to successfully transition to post-secondary educational contexts, and have only recently begun to acknowledge that the CCSS and its accompanying assessment does not adequately represent the knowledge and skills students need to be successful past the high school diploma (“High School Students Not Prepared for College, Career”; “Unprepared College Freshmen Faced With Remedial Classes”; Strauss; Riley).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Originally, forty-six states voted to adopt CCSS, but in recent months, several of those states have retracted their agreement, and have instead adopted state-written standards. On March 11, 2015, South Carolina’s board of education voted unanimously to adopt a set of standards “written by South Carolinians” in lieu of the CCSS (“Common Core Standards Dead in South Carolina”).

<sup>8</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I use the term “teachers” to refer to the students’ high school teachers, and “instructors” to refer to their college writing instructors. Though college instructors are teachers, I adopt these separate terms to easily distinguish between the two roles.

<sup>9</sup> Much of the blame-placing in these online articles takes place in the comments section, where people who fill various stakeholder roles (some identify these stakes, others do not) often suggest that local schools and teachers are responsible for students’ lack of preparedness.

Focusing exclusively on the written genres students need to pass the CCSS test or other high-stakes large-scale writing assessments does not necessarily prepare students to engage in the critical thinking, reading, and writing that is highly valued at the collegiate level (Hjortshoj; Addison and McGee). The high-stakes standardized tests, most of which focus on personal narrative genres, do not give students practice with the rhetorical resources they will need to succeed in college-level writing courses, such as summative and argumentative genres of writing they will be expected to produce (Knudson).

In contrast to the public discussions surrounding the transition to college, the primary scholarly conversations regarding the transition from high school English to college writing take an entirely different tone. Rather than blame-placing, most of this work calls for greater communication between K-12 and post-secondary faculty as a means of improving students' transition experiences. Individual instructors may suggest that students' unpreparedness is the fault of their previous teachers (Nelson 38), but the research suggests that faculty perceptions of students' preparedness may rise from a lack of communication with K-12 faculty and a lack of vertical alignment with K-12 curricula (Addison and McGee). This growing body of research calls for collaboration between colleges/universities and their "feeder high schools" (Creech and Clouse) and for more open communication about course expectations between faculty at both levels (Nelson) as a means of developing a literacy curriculum that is scaffolded for K-16. This kind of scaffolded curriculum would require much more communication between high school and college writing instructors and would likely focus on instructional practices and a "common language," (Hannah and Saidy) including the language of rhetoric, that teach students a flexible set of writing skills they can then apply across different educational contexts.

High school is often positioned explicitly to students and community stakeholders as preparation for college (Hjortshoj), as if the writing students do in high school is simply less difficult than the writing students will attempt in college. In reality, writing in high school is often focused on different learning outcomes than writing in college. High school English teachers are tasked with teaching their students literature as well as "language arts"—reading, "grammar" (Standard Written English instruction), vocabulary, and writing. The primary thrust of the high school curriculum is often constrained by national/state standards and the high-stakes assessments that accompany such standards. Though most FYC courses use "the rhetorical situation" as a foundational concept, grounding writing instruction in purpose, audience, and

genre is less familiar to high school teachers (Yancey). Though instruction in high school classes varies widely from state to state and classroom to classroom, the role that the rhetorical situation plays in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms seems to be limited in comparison with the role it plays in FYC courses. The writing strand of standards in the CCSS reference elements of the rhetorical situation, calling for students to analyze texts for “their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features,” and to “produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience.” However, these standards do not invoke the language of rhetoric, nor do they indicate that rhetorical knowledge is important for students to acquire to be “College and Career Ready”.<sup>10</sup>

Like instruction in high school classrooms, the goals of required FYC courses similarly can vary from institution to institution, but the “WPA Outcomes for First-Year Composition” represents an understanding of FYC courses that, while not universally accepted, is authorized by one of the primary professional organizations of the field of composition and rhetoric to both “recognize and regulate writing programs’ priorities for first-year writing” (1). While an analysis of the extent to which the participants’ FYC courses adhered to the guidelines in this outcomes statement is beyond the scope of this study, the outcomes statement offers an important insight into what FYC courses offer students in their entry to the university. This statement of outcomes demonstrates the primary role of rhetorical knowledge in FYC courses, and offers an example of one of the key differences between the high school writing curriculum and the expectations in FYC courses. The “WPA Outcomes” are organized into four primary domains: Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing; Processes; and Knowledge of Conventions. Some of these four domains are familiar, at least to some degree, to high school students. In fact, the CCSS address three of the four in some respect. These standards suggest that students learn to be critical thinkers and readers, use “the writing process” to compose their school texts,<sup>11</sup> and use the conventions of StAE and citation guidelines to produce their documents.<sup>12</sup> What students are less familiar with as they move from high school

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<sup>10</sup> The CCSS is based on a strand of “anchor standards” of “College and Career Readiness,” so the standards found in this document explicitly purport to prepare students for post-secondary writing classrooms.

<sup>11</sup> Though “the writing process” is often positioned to high school students as a linear process and many FYC courses emphasize the iterative nature of writing, both the “WPA Outcomes” and the CCSS invoke similar notions of the process of drafting and revising, so the terminology would be familiar to students in the transition from high school to college.

<sup>12</sup> The CCSS specify that students should be able to “attend to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing .... avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one text and following a standard format for

into college is “Rhetorical Knowledge.”

As the comparison between the CCSS and the WPA Outcomes Statement indicates, there is a distinct difference in how the curriculum in high school addresses the rhetorical situation and how the stated outcomes for FYC position the importance of rhetoric. Writing instruction in high school might obliquely or implicitly reference the rhetorical situation, but in first-year writing, the rhetorical situation is a foundational piece of knowledge, and thinking about writing rhetorically is one of the primary learning outcomes. While it is not surprising that high school writing and college writing have different stated outcomes or goals, the lack of attention to the rhetorical situation in the CCSS means that students enter first-year writing without a vocabulary for talking about their own writing, or for discussing the rhetorical situation. Indeed, as the students in this study moved from high school into college writing, they indicated familiarity with narrative genres and literary analysis, but expressed little to no understanding of key components of rhetorical theory. The curriculum at the high school level is typically based less on how rhetorical knowledge about audience, context, and purpose might ground a writer’s composition, which means that students transitioning from high school into FYC often lack the vocabulary to discuss the role of rhetoric in their own writing. The students in this study encountered a very different concept of rhetoric than the one they brought with them from their high school, but as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the students in this study nevertheless developed their own set of ideologies about the kinds of rhetorical resources that were valuable to them as writers and attempted to use the rhetorical resources they believed would be most beneficial to them as they entered the FYC classroom and discovered a new set of writing expectations.

There is little research that compares the expectations of writing at the high school level, nor is there work that compares the “WPA Outcomes” to the CCSS, but the calls for collaboration between high school teachers and administrators and college writing instructors might also highlight the significant differences in the goals and outcomes of writing that students experience as they move from one level of education to another, in that this research indicates high school teachers and college instructors often have little understanding of what is expected of students’ writing outside of their own classrooms and accompanying standards/learning

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citation.” As Chapter 5 describes, the students in this study entered college with an adisciplinary sense that “MLA” is the only way to cite sources (among other uses of the term “MLA”).

outcomes (Nelson). Methods textbooks that prepare educators at both levels further demonstrate the divide in shared terminology about the rhetorical situation between high school teachers and college writing instructors. These textbooks indicate that high school teachers are not prepared to teach using the vocabulary of the rhetorical situation, and that some of the shared vocabulary (the “writing process,” for example) is likely enacted in starkly different ways in high school than it is in college (Burke).

Part of the challenge of understanding the transition from high school to college is that, as previously alluded to, the local educational context shapes the experiences of students in that particular place. Students’ experiences with writing in both high school and college can vary widely from institution to institution, so it is difficult to answer questions about the transition from high school to college broadly. The research on the transition from high school to college in the field of composition studies does not yet explore the ways in which the local rural context some Southern students are transitioning from might introduce unique challenges for this population. There has been a growing interest in rural educational contexts within the field of composition studies and literacy studies more generally, but this scholarly conversation has not yet broadened to explore the crucial moment of the high school to college transition. Scholars in composition studies have recently recognized that educators need a “more complex understanding of rural life” (Donehower, Hogg, and Schell 3). This growing body of work positions rural Southern students, as well as rural students in other regions of the country, as a marginalized community whose pedagogical needs should be considered through place-based pedagogies. Scholars who research rural education note that rather than being merely a function of geography, being a rural student is an identity or that identifying as rural “provides a geographically-dependent sense of belonging” (Tieken 5).

In *Words at Work and Play*, Heath’s update to *Ways with Words*, Heath describes the tension of being a college-bound rural student for the students from Roadville and Trackton who ventured to college. These students, though they had been very successful in the local K-12 environment, rarely met with success in college. Heath outlines several reasons for their difficulty in graduating: a sense within the community that college-bound students had “made it” (and the tacit expectation that they would “help out” financially that accompanied such understandings), family expectations that the college-bound student would return home for various functions and family events, and an unrealistic expectation of the financial and

institutional resources that students required to achieve graduation. As many of the first-generation college students in this book discovered, transitioning from the rural community to the college classroom was challenging, and, in many cases, a challenge not met with success. Heath's work is an important contribution to understanding the experiences of rural Southern students, especially as it offers this perspective on the college-bound students of Roadville and Trackton, Heath's most recent work contributes to the research on rural students in composition studies and literacy studies, which represents a small but growing body of work.

Within this body of research, rural Southern students are described as community-driven and tightly connected to their homes (Brooke; Tieken; Webb-Sunderhaus), religious (typically as Protestant or evangelical) (Carter; Donehower; Pennington), and obsessed with the past (Brooke; Donehower). This recent research makes an important contribution to the field of composition studies, in that it argues rural students have a specific set of educational needs and may be in need of interventions within the composition classroom. However, this recent research does not explore the influence of language ideologies or the related rhetorical ideologies on this transition. Examining language ideologies in composition classrooms, particularly in students' transition experiences, is important because speakers' deeply held and typically unquestioned beliefs about language have the power to structure interactions, shape attitudes, and link language to social class and morality (Lippi-Green). For non-standard speakers, these language ideologies have the power to "other" them in settings like academic writing classrooms where StAE is championed to the exclusion of students' home languages and rhetorics.

SAE in particular has garnered little attention in composition studies, and while there is a significant body of research on non-standard dialects like African-American English (AAE) in both dialectology and educational linguistics (Sweetland, Rickford, and Rickford), there is much less work looking at the needs of these speakers in the composition classroom. In fact, the majority of composition studies that explore the influence of non-standard dialects in FYC classes merely examine how dialect (almost always AAE) affects "error" (Bean-Folkes; Johnson and VanBrackle), not how powerful and persistent ideologies may shape students' experiences in those courses and their understandings of themselves as writers. There is one dissertation that explores the linguistic choices of SAE-speaking students in a business-writing class (Brammer), and one dissertation that explores the experiences of a Southern student in regards to her literacy skills (Pennington), but there is still much to be done to meet the educational needs of rural



Southern students.

### *Southern American English*

The South is home to approximately one-third of the U.S. population (“U.S. Population by Region”),<sup>13</sup> and perceptual dialectologist Dennis Preston has found that the Southern dialect is the most-often identified dialect area on perceptual dialectology maps. The students in this study all speak some variant of SAE, which is one of the most recognizable varieties of American English (Preston; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes). Of course, its notoriety does not mean that it is monolithic, and by categorizing the participants in this study as “SAE speakers,” I certainly do not intend to reduce the nuanced variety that comprises what might be called “Southern English.” Just as there are many Englishes, so are there many “Souths,” and each has its own distinct language features. That is, the dialect region commonly characterized as “Southern” is comprised of a group of related language varieties, each of which has its own distinctive features and history. Generalizing about the linguistic features of any speech community is, by its very nature, reductive. The literature on SAE has, thus far, resisted compiling a systematic overview of the dialect, perhaps because scholars are understandably wary of essentializing such a large speech community.

Though there is a body of work in dialectology that examines SAE, it has by no means been thoroughly explored; as Walt Wolfram notes, “Southern English remains a trove of undiscovered dialectal configurations for vowels as well as other variables” (5). Part of this “undiscovered treasure” is work that synthesizes the research on the various elements of SAE in an effort to more thoroughly investigate how it is systematically distinct from other dialects of English. The work that currently exists, as Wolfram notes, is primarily concerned with phonological difference. This focus on the sounds of SAE unfortunately reifies the notion that when SAE speakers use non-standard grammatical forms (like multiple modals, multiple negation, or the perfective *done*) or unique lexical items (notably, the second person pronoun *y’all* or the generic *coke* for carbonated beverages, they are simply being “lazy” speakers of

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<sup>13</sup> The Census Bureau’s definition of “Southern” is problematic, in that it includes states like Delaware, Maryland, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Texas. Delaware is rarely considered “Southern” by scholars in dialectology, and the other aforementioned states are sometimes considered “Southern” and sometimes considered “border states,” depending on the criteria used for defining the region, which, as the previous footnote indicates, can vary from scholar to scholar. Not all people who live in the South consider themselves “Southern,” and not all Southerners are speakers of SAE. Nevertheless, this region is home to a large portion of the country and represents a significant speech community.

StAE.

However, despite the predominant focus on the phonology of SAE, speakers of this systematic dialect control a variety of English that differs from StAE in several key aspects. SAE utilizes a verb system that is distinct from StAE in tense, aspect, and modality.<sup>14</sup> Speakers of SAE have the option of not only the well-known pronoun *y'all*, but also a system of multiple modals that function to express hedged agreement as a face-saving gesture (McNair). SAE speakers can tell a friend “I might could take you to the store today” as a strategy of politeness and thereby indicate agreement without obligating themselves or offending their friend. The double modal *might could* functions much like *might be able to*, but it differs in meaning in that it expresses less commitment than *might be able to* and indicates that the speaker is willing but not necessarily able. For speakers of SAE, double modals function as a politeness strategy that allows the speaker to save face, and there is a clear rhetorical dimension to this language feature, as it offers SAE speakers a means of attending carefully to their audience to accomplish their communicative purpose. Some SAE speakers utilize quasi-modals like *useta* as in “I useta could sleep until noon,” where *useta* functions as a modal in the past perfect tense. SAE also makes use of a system of honorifics, including the well-known *ma'am* and *sir*, but also a set of rules for addressing those who are considered authority figures or elders. Small children are taught to call adults by *Miss* (pronounced this way regardless of marital status) or *Mr.* and the person's first name, so John Smith becomes Mr. John and Jane Doe becomes Miss Jane. Many adults (myself included) retain this system when speaking to the elderly (Johnstone 193). As previously indicated, the unique sound system of SAE is much-discussed by both scholarship and pop culture (Bernstein), and includes the Southern vowel shift and a vowel mergers that turn *pen* and *pen* and *pull* and *pool* into homophones. Many speakers of SAE display “glide weakening” or diphthong smoothing in words like *tide* and *right* (Weil, Fitch, and Wolfe).

The students in this study likewise talked frequently about accents—their own, their classmates' at college, and their friends' back home. The ideology that SAE is primarily defined by either a drawl or a twang (the “Southern accent”) could contribute to the relatively small body of work on SAE in educational linguistics<sup>15</sup> because scholars (like lay speakers, for that matter)

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<sup>14</sup> This verb system includes the perfective *done* (“I done washed the dishes”) (Elson); a deleted copula verb in present-tense constructions (“we happy”), particularly when the next phrase in the utterance begins with *gonna*, *Verb-ing*, or a noun phrase; and *a-verb-ing* (“the dog went a-runnin’ after the possum”) (Tillery and Bailey).

<sup>15</sup> I discuss the lack of attention to SAE by educational linguists in greater detail in the following section.

may not perceive a phonological difference as necessitating educational interventions. It is possible that the focus on SAE speakers' phonological difference obscures the other, more syntactic differences in SAE speakers' language patterns. In this study, I examine the role of the powerful ideologies surrounding SAE and the students' rhetorical practices. I do not consider the extent to which the students used features that might be perceived as "Southern," nor did I look for those features in the students' writing. As I will explore further in Chapter 6, there is still yet much work to be done on SAE, especially in educational linguistics, to examine the experiences and necessary interventions for this population of speakers.

### *Educational Linguistics and Southern American English*

Scholars in educational linguistics and professional organizations like the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the International Reading Association (IRA), and the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) have long acknowledged the need to recognize and value students' home languages and language varieties. Both NCTE and CCCC approved a position statement in 1974, "Students' Right to Their Own Language," which affirms that students have the right to use "the dialect that expresses their family and community identity, the idiolect that expresses their unique identity" (NCTE).

A few years later, in 1979, the parents of several students at Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School sued the Ann Arbor School District for failing to recognize the ways that social, cultural, and economic factors affected the educational experiences of African-American students. The judge in the case ruled that the schools needed to take the home language of children into account (Yellin). This position statement and the subsequent court case represent an effort by some educators and parents to garner respect from a wider audience for students' culture and identity through understanding students' language variation (Hudley and Mallinson 1). Language variation in education was once again brought to public awareness more recently, in 1996, when Oakland County schools in California recognized AAE as the primary language of the majority of the district's students and passed a resolution to consider language diversity when teaching Standard English. The public outcry following this decision was swift and sharp. AAE, the home dialect of a large portion of the students in Oakland County, was denigrated as "broken English," and popular media fretted that students were being taught "Ebonics" instead of "good English" (Rickford).

In the wake of these resolutions to recognize language diversity in educational settings and the public opposition to these efforts, the field of educational linguistics has worked to promote a rich linguistic awareness among students and teachers, particularly in K-12 settings. Many of these efforts have taken place in districts like Oakland, where the student body consists primarily of speakers of AAE, though recent effort have diversified the speech communities for which educational linguists seek to make interventions. Christine Mallinson has begun incorporating Chicano English into K-12 classroom curricula, and Jeff Reaser and Hannah Adger at North Carolina State University have written a language curriculum for K-12 teachers that uses the various dialects of North Carolina as a basis—in particular, the Appalachian English and the Ocracoke dialect. These efforts represent inroads into exploring the influence of non-standard dialects in classrooms at various levels, but the field of educational linguistics as a whole has given comparatively little attention to speakers of SAE in classrooms settings.

The most substantial consideration of SAE by educational linguists is a chapter by Anne H. Charity Hudley and Christine Mallinson in their book *Understanding English Language Variation in U.S. Schools*, though this chapter does not consider Southern students beyond the K-12 educational context, nor does it pay much attention to the influence of language ideologies on these students as writers. Instead, the book offers advice to teachers in K-12 classrooms, offering a chapter on Standard English, a chapter on AAE, and a chapter on SAE. The chapters on AAE and SAE detail examples of vowel mergers that can create homophones, diphthong and glide deletions that change vowel quality, and consonant alterations (51-52, 83-84). The chapter on SAE, though, focuses primarily on cultural and politeness norms (49, 62-63). In the chapter on SAE, Hudley and Mallinson outline some of the cultural and linguistic factors that often prove difficult for Southern speakers to navigate in classrooms to a presumed audience of K-12 educators. Hudley and Mallinson describe differences between SAE and StAE like pronunciation (50-52), grammar (52-60), melodic features (60-61), rate of speech (61), conversational norms (61-62), politeness strategies (62-65), and vocabulary (65-66). Some of the linguistic factors Hudley and Mallinson discuss, particularly the conversational norms and politeness strategies, demonstrate the rhetorical dimensions of language. As Hudley and Mallinson detail, SAE is often associated with indirect speech, which Hudley and Mallinson indicate is a politeness strategy. As they describe it, SAE speakers may use indirectness as a way to save face with their audience, in order to accomplish the speakers' communicative

purposes. Though the data from the present study complicates Hudley and Mallinson's depiction of Southern politeness (see Chapter 4), their chapter nevertheless highlights the rhetorical factors inherent in speakers' use of their language capital. In so doing, Hudley and Mallinson reiterate the fact that SAE is a robust dialect of English, and they discuss many of the difficulties speakers of SAE may face in classrooms. However, their very detailed list does not account for an element of SAE that my participants encountered: navigating the competing ideologies surrounding argumentation as they navigated the transition from high school to college writing.

Within the field of composition studies, the primary attention to SAE as a non-standard dialect has been one dissertation exploring the linguistic choices of SAE-speaking students in a business-writing class. In this dissertation, *Identifying Southern Dialect Influences on Student Business Writing*, Charlotte Brammer aims to "focus attention on how typical Southern English dialect characteristics manifest themselves in writing, particularly in student business writing, and how these influences affect perceptions of competence" (1). She notes the difficulty many Southern students have with writing because they have been taught to "write it like they say it," yet the linguistic capital of their speech, SAE, is not valued in the more global market of the business-writing classroom.

As Brammer discusses the questions that motivate her study, she describes how text is not neutral, that instead, "our language influences how others view us, marking us as 'other'" (3). Despite this early implicit acknowledgment of the language ideologies that could influence SAE-speaking students' experiences, Brammer does not acknowledge *language ideologies* as a theoretical framework or as a factor in her research participants' linguistic practice, and her findings about how "error" based on SAE might be perceived are based solely on an imagined reader, not on actual instructor responses. Expanding the discussion Brammer begins by including these ideologies and perceptions as they influence students' experiences in the transition from high school to college writing creates a space to consider how better understanding language, linguistic capital, and the rhetorical resources that are related to such capital can inform writing pedagogies. Including student voices in the research on speakers of SAE also serves to deepen the field of composition's understanding of how being a non-standard speaker of English can influence a student's experience with FYC and, potentially, the transition to college.

Brammer only gestures at the important role language variety plays in how speakers

perceive one another, but SAE is strongly associated with a complex set of ideologies that have the potential to strongly influence how rural Southern students are understood as they navigate the transition to the more global markets of their college composition courses. Speakers tend to embrace two competing ideologies about Southerners and their language. Southern speakers themselves embrace and reproduce both the positive and negative ideologies that surround their dialect, which makes the lack of attention from scholars in educational linguistics and composition studies alike striking because it suggests that scholars may be responding more to the positive ideologies of pleasantness or politeness and not the persistent negative ideologies associated with education and intelligence. Because the scholarship in educational linguistics creates little space to consider the linguistic needs of rural Southern students and their teachers, teachers in rural Southern schools have few resources to help them approach grammar with research-driven instruction. The literature in educational linguistics does not readily support teachers of SAE-speaking students in endeavors to gain understandings about their students' language practices. The even more scant research on SAE in classrooms is largely based on anecdotal observations. This lack of empirical attention has, in turn, reified and reproduced the ideology that SAE-speaking students are not in need of educational interventions.

Though there is still much work to be done in the field of educational linguistics, this field offers composition studies a more descriptive approach to language in writing instruction. Writing pedagogies at both the high school and college level are generally not offering students, especially students who are speakers of a non-standard dialect, like SAE, an understanding of language that values it as a system and as a form of symbolic capital that can be usefully leveraged in different markets. As a field, educational linguistics also acknowledges that learning registers is a significant part of learning academic writing, which is also important for students who are speakers of non-standard dialects of English (Brown). However, few teachers approach language or writing instruction in this way. Instead, as teachers and other "language gatekeepers" fail to acknowledge the linguistic capital non-standard speakers bring into the classroom, they often reduce anything that is not "standard" to "error." While there is a growing interest in educational linguistics among compositionists, there is still little conversation between the two fields. There are a few studies in composition studies that explore how dialect influences "error" in student writing (Johnson and VanBrackle; Bean-Folkes), but none of these studies explores how language ideologies might offer a new perspective on how students who speak

non-standard dialects might fare in FYC. There is, however, some work in K-12 settings that suggests language and rhetorical ideologies are valuable concepts for considering how students experience academic writing. One study in particular, “I’ll Speak in Proper Slang: Language Ideologies in a Daily Editing Activity” (Godley, Carpenter, and Werner), argues that by privileging one form of language as “correct” over another, speakers of the privileged form were given power over speakers of the more non-standard dialect, especially when classroom activities asked students to make stylistic choices and the difference between “style” and “error” was not made explicit to students.

Exploring the influence of language ideologies on students’ writing experiences can give scholars a different way of thinking about writing pedagogy, and about grammar pedagogy in particular. For “lay speakers” (a group comprised, in this context, of non-linguists, including teachers and post-secondary writing instructors), the linguistic definition of grammar subverts the authority of the standard in favor of recognizing the native speaker’s competence. This can be an uncomfortable place for teachers, who may feel a moral obligation to assert and (re)produce SLI as a way of granting students access to the linguistic capital of the global market.<sup>16</sup> When these teachers hear linguists say that all forms of language are equally valid, or when teachers read position statements published by organizations like NCTE, which state that students have “the right to use the dialect that expresses their family and community identity, the idiolect that expresses their unique personal identity (1974),” it can produce tension for them. Part of the tension these teachers feel may be rooted in the fact that they do not fully recognize the rhetorical implementations of language capital. That is, these teachers may not understand the ways that local language capital can offer speakers effective communicative strategies in certain circumstances and with certain audiences, especially in the local market. These teachers have found success in mastering StAE, and have often worked very hard to do so—and thereby to gain access to the cultural and linguistic capital StAE offers speakers.

As Blake’s teacher in a rural school in South Carolina, I keenly felt a tension between what I saw as my role to help students be successful in academic environments and my identity as a member of the local community and as a native speaker of SAE. Looking back now, I regret the ways I replicated negative ideologies about my own language and rhetorical resources but at the time I, like so many other teachers in these places, felt that I was helping my students be

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<sup>16</sup> Chapter 4 explores this phenomenon in greater detail.

ready for environments that were unlike the one where we learned together as members of the same community. I am not alone in this mindset. As Hudley and Mallinson note, many Southern K-12 teachers return to their home communities to teach, and using SAE with their students is often seen as a mark of cultural authenticity, but “educators know that students who do not sound Southern are more likely to be told that they sound educated and succeed in their educational and job experiences and less likely to be told that they country, redneck, or uneducated” (49). The students in this study, as I detail in Chapter 4, expressed their desire not to be seen as “redneck,” but unlike Lippi-Green’s characterization, they used “country” not as a way of perpetuating SLI, but instead as a means of asserting their local identity and of distinguishing themselves from “redneck” speakers. When I began talking with my participants in this study, I expected to hear them describe this tension from the perspective of a high school student—that they would see the academic environment as a different space than their home communities. Instead, these students spoke of their high school teachers, and indeed, even the school itself, as an integral part of their home communities.

#### *Language Ideologies and Southern American English*

The ideologies surrounding SAE as a non-standard dialect are unique, in that speakers tend to embrace two (possibly three) competing language ideologies about Southerners and their language. Southern speakers embrace and reproduce both the positive and negative ideologies that surround their dialect, which makes the lack of attention from scholars in educational linguistics striking. It suggests that scholars may be responding more to the positive ideologies of pleasantness or politeness and not the persistent negative ideologies associated with intelligence. In this section, I argue that the competing ideologies of pleasantness and low intelligence that surround SAE make the lack of attention from scholars in educational linguistics striking, and that the representation of SAE not as a robust dialect but as merely an accent or a set of loosely connected linguistic may contribute to this positioning.

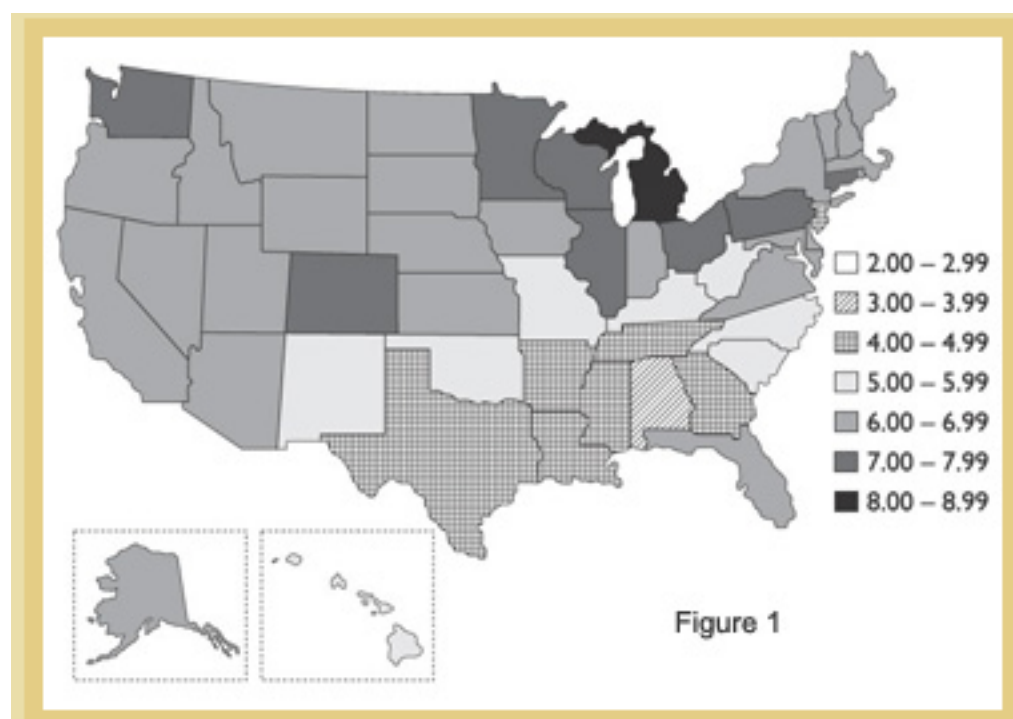
In her article “Misrepresenting the American South,” Cynthia Bernstein claims that SAE has been misrepresented by the stereotypical portrayal of Southerners in pop culture as ill-educated, ignorant, and racist. These images of Southerners presented by the media contribute to the production and reproduction of negative ideologies of Southerners within American culture. The predominant negative ideology associated with SAE is based on intelligence, which suggests that these cultural ideologies should be a concern for educators.



SAE speakers are perceived as stupid or ignorant, though this ideology is complicated by the perception that SAE speakers can code-switch without instruction (as seen in Hudley and Mallinson 43). If this perception is common, then it may be that SAE speakers are also associated with a certain amount of “linguistic rebelliousness.” That is, people may believe that Southerners *can* speak Standard American English (StAE) and choose not to. This ideology of (primarily (and typically implicitly) white) Southerners as rebels traces back to the Civil War, when the term “rebel” was a designation many Southerners wore proudly. Traces of this ideology persist, as Dennis Preston finds when at least two respondents label the South as “Rebel” (145). This ideology reveals an attitude that suggests speakers are willfully flaunting the “rules” of grammar. Speakers who enact the language subordination model are attempting to align speakers of SAE with SLI may find this perceived rebelliousness particularly frustrating. Moreover, this move to classify SAE speakers as rebels elides the status of SAE as a rule-governed, systematic dialect of English.

Dennis Preston’s research explores the ideologies associated with American dialects by asking speakers across the country to label blank maps into dialect regions, then asking them to answer questions in a survey about characteristics of language like “correctness” and “pleasantness.” These maps reveal the complexity of the ideologies surrounding SAE. Preston finds that the South is the most-often marked dialect area on the blank map he gave respondents (143). In fact, Preston notes that 94 percent of Michigan respondents marked a “South” on the map, and only 61 percent of these same respondents marked a dialect area that included their home region. This suggests that SAE, as a dialect region, holds greater prominence in the culture than some other dialect regions of American English, like the Pacific Northwest or the Midwest. In the survey responses, these speakers also indicate a particular ideology they associate with SAE. As Figure 1-1 demonstrates, respondents in southeast Michigan rank their own state as the “most correct” English, and the states in the “South” as among the least correct.

**Figure 1-1 Rankings of "correct English" (Michigan speakers) (Preston 142)**



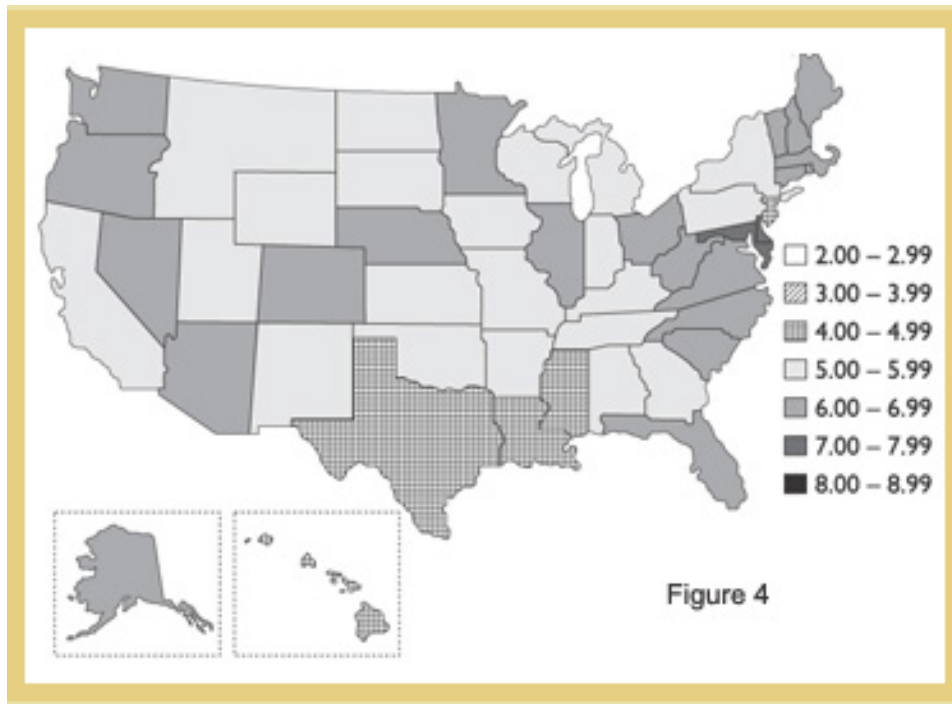
Mean scores of the rankings for 'correct English' of the fifty states, Washington, DC, and NYC by south-eastern Michigan respondents ('1' = 'worst English'; '10' = 'best English')

Figure 1-1 is a striking representation of one ideology that Michigan speakers associate with SAE. Indeed, Southern speakers are often represented as having “bad grammar” or “errors” in their speech (Hudley and Mallinson, 42; Lippi-Green 210). This perception of SAE as somehow “bad English” feeds the stereotypes of Southerners as ignorant or illiterate, or that the perceived “slow speech” of speakers of SAE is indicative of a slow-moving mind.

Outsiders are not the only speakers who maintain these ideologies, though. When Preston asked Alabama speakers to rate the level of “correct English” of the states in the U.S. (Figure 1-2), they also rated Southern states as less correct than their Northern and Western neighbors. In a move that reflects linguistic insecurity, these speakers ranked their own state as among the least correct—even less correct than some of their Southern neighbors. This negative ideology of “incorrectness” is an example of the language subordination model at work. Here, Southern speakers trivialize their own language. By ranking their own speech as less correct than their Northern and Western neighbors, these Southern speakers may also be working to promote SLI by suggesting their own speech is deviant or inferior to the “correct” English found in other regions of the country. Given these negative ideologies, it is surprising that educational linguistics has not granted greater attention to SAE, but educational linguists may instead be

responding to the positive assertions speakers of SAE make about their language.

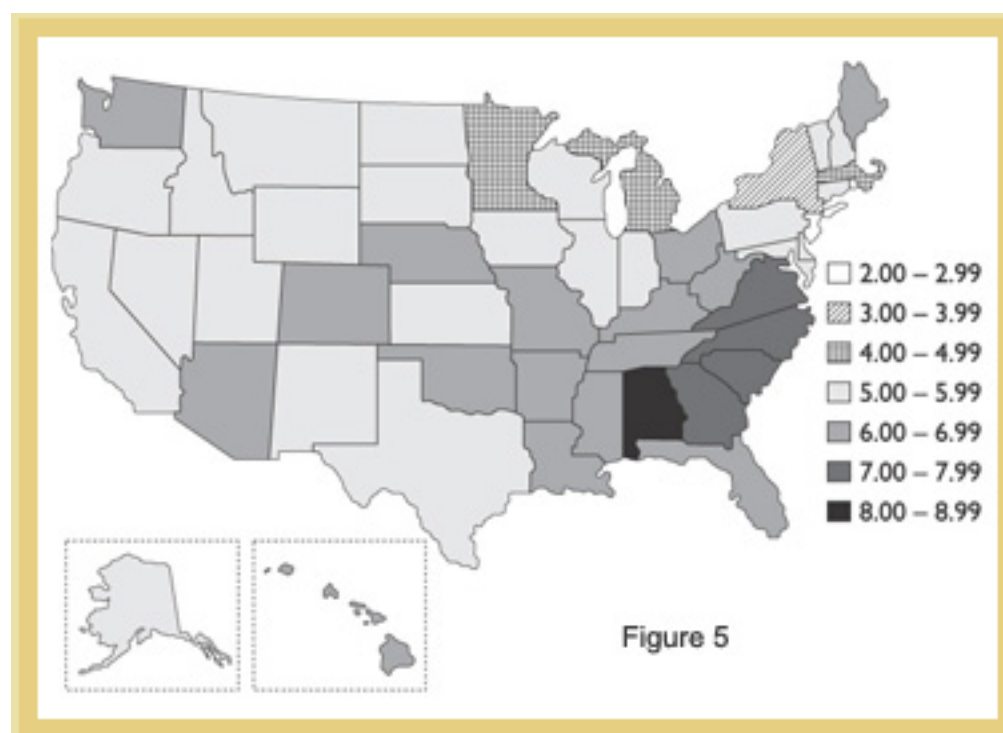
**Figure 1-2 Mean Scores of "Correct English" (Alabama speakers) (146)**



Mean scores of the rankings of fifty states, Washington, DC, and NYC for 'correct English' by Auburn University (Alabama) students (ratings as in Figure 1-1)

If the only ideology of SAE was that it is among the “least correct” varieties of American English, perhaps it would have been granted greater attention by educators. But ideologies are rarely (if ever) so simple and uncomplicated. While Preston found that the Southern dialect was most often cited as the least correct by speakers both within and outside the South, attitudes towards SAE are not entirely negative. When Preston surveyed speakers about the “most pleasant” variety of English (Figure 1-3), the responses are a near-mirror opposite of the responses about correctness

**Figure 1-3 Mean Scores for "Pleasant English" (Alabama speakers) (147)**



Mean scores of the rankings for 'pleasant English' by Auburn University (Alabama) students ('1' = 'least pleasant English'; '10' = most pleasant English')

The same speakers who subordinated their linguistic variety as “incorrect” also assert its positive quality as “pleasant.” As Lippi-Green notes, white Southerners are often constructed by outsiders through imitations and cultural stereotypes as “backward but friendly, racist but polite, obsessed with the past and unenamored of the finer points of higher education. If they are women, they are sweet, pretty and not very bright” (212). Speakers of SAE, as linguistic insiders, reproduce different ideologies about their language, part of which is its “pleasantness” or “sweetness” (Figure 1-3).

For speakers of non-standard dialects like SAE, though, their home dialects also often offer a kind of local language capital. As Hudley and Mallinson and Lippi-Green note, speaking SAE is a mark of cultural authenticity in the South, and may prove beneficial to speakers in their personal interactions. Lippi-Green also observes that speakers of SAE (especially female speakers) often benefit from using this variety in customer service situations (210). The fact that SAE offers cultural capital to some of its speakers in some contexts, but not others,<sup>17</sup> may lead to

<sup>17</sup> While females in customer service positions report benefits from speaking SAE, other speakers do not fare as well. Atlanta DJ James Carney, for example, was fired from a country music station because his Southern accent was “too strong” (Hudley and Mallinson 42).

an ideology that erroneously suggests SAE speakers are confident in their own speech, but this cultural capital offered through local dialects is an example of how speakers might use linguistic forms as a means of attending to their specific audience and thus utilize the rhetorical dimensions of language capital.

As Preston's data confirms, Southerners take up both the negative and positive ideologies associated with this variety. They cite its incorrectness, but also its pleasantness, which expresses, at least in part, an element of local pride. Southern speakers, therefore, demonstrate conflicting ideologies about their own speech, and the push-pull of pride and shame<sup>18</sup> may contribute to a sense that speakers of SAE do not need much attention to their language or rhetorical resources throughout their educational experiences. The scholarship on SAE in educational linguistics does little to acknowledge the complexity of these competing ideologies for members of this speech community, nor does it consider how the complexity of these ideologies might affect speakers. After all, these speakers assert a feeling of competence that their speech is proper and pleasant (Hudley and Mallinson 62). But this ideology of pleasantness, while beneficial in some respects, can also lead to students' complicated relationship with their home dialects. Lippi-Green describes this tension:

When persons who speak languages which are devalued and stigmatized consent to the standard language ideology, they become complicit in its propagation against themselves, their own interests and identities. Many are caught in a vacuum: When an individual cannot find any social acceptance for her language outside her own speech communities, she may denigrate her own language, even while she continues to use it. (66)

These students feel they must assert the value of StAE, even when promoting StAE means that they position themselves (or, in the case of the students in this study, their fellow speakers of SAE) as less intelligent than speakers of StAE. Many Southern teachers likewise find themselves caught in the dilemma Lippi-Green describes. Though they are also speakers of SAE, they believe that success is found through adopting StAE, but as they attempt to give their students access to StAE, they denigrate the home dialects and rhetorical resources they share

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<sup>18</sup> By "shame," I mean the insecurity about their language many Southerners display. Michael Montgomery (Elson) demonstrates that many speakers of AppE assert the historical accuracy of their dialect through claims that people in the mountains speak "The King's English," and I have heard Southerners respond to criticisms of their language by making similar assertions. In fact, my History of the English Language professor in my undergraduate coursework taught me that Southerners make the best Shakespearean actors because our dialect is "closest to Elizabethan English." This myth has been debunked, but its persistence speaks to the defensiveness Southerners feel about the "incorrectness" of their language and its perception by outsiders (Montgomery).

with their students.

## CONCLUSION

The field of composition studies could greatly benefit from research that considers the role of ideologies of language and rhetoric in students' experiences with the transition into first-year composition. Because the language capital of the global market is more highly valued in the academy, students, high school teachers, and writing instructors alike may (re)produce ideologies that devalue the local capital of students' home dialects and the rhetorical resources they developed in their home communities before entering college. Rural Southern students are one population of students who could benefit from such research, as their home dialect, SAE, is persistently associated with ideologies of low intelligence and perceived education levels, but also with pleasantness, politeness, and friendliness.

A more nuanced understanding of the influence of language ideologies offers writing instructors at both the secondary and post-secondary levels a different way of helping students acquire academic registers of English. Instead of focusing on "error," and the influence of their dialects on "error," this study uses the theoretical framework of language ideologies to position students' home dialects as one kind of linguistic capital, and explores how they might leverage different kinds of capital in different linguistic marketplaces as they move from one educational setting to another. The transition from the high school English classroom into the college writing classroom is one marked by great change, not only in location, but also in the expectations of what students will know and the kinds of writing they will produce. These expectations are not always made explicit to students, as there is a substantial difference in the role that the rhetorical situation plays in high school and in college. College writing asks students to use language as a means of persuasion, and uses the language of the rhetorical situation to ground students' understanding in such a task.

As a rhetorical tool, language works to give speakers a way of communicating effectively in different contexts. For the students in this study, the ideologies that surrounded their language were tightly intertwined with a set of ideologies that surrounded their rhetorical practices and strategies. Without the students' perspectives on how they attempt to employ these strategies and how the ideologies surrounding their language affect their experiences with the transition into college, though, the research remains incomplete. As this study will explore further, rural Southern students' voices have much to contribute to the conversation surrounding the transition

from high school to college writing.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODS

### STUDY DESIGN

In the previous chapter, I examined the theoretical frameworks of *language ideologies* and *linguistic capital*, as well as the notion of *rhetorical ideologies* and argued that these frameworks can usefully inform research in composition studies by offering a new perspective on rural Southern students' experiences in the transition from high school to college writing. In this chapter, I describe the ways in which I elicited students' voices and experiences of this transition and consider the role that their identities as speakers of SAE might play in that transition. This chapter explains my study design, research site, participant selection, data collection and analysis procedures, and the ethical considerations that arose in the course of the study.

This study was born out of my experiences as a speaker of SAE and as a teacher in South Carolina and Texas. For the study, I returned to my home state, so the participants were students from the same graduating class at Upstate High School (UHS), a rural high school in the Piedmont of South Carolina. Through this exploratory longitudinal qualitative study, I sought to offer a necessary complement to the quantitatively-focused research on the transition to college, which has offered information about students' experiences in the form of grades, years to degree completion, and test scores. This project fills a gap in the research on the transition to college writing by bringing students' voices and lived experiences more clearly into focus, placing them at the forefront of analysis and portraying the complex range of experiences related to language and rhetoric that students encounter in this pivotal educational moment. In order to highlight the experiences of rural SAE speakers, I collected detailed accounts of their transition into college through a series of qualitative interviews.

#### *Site Selection*

I am a native of South Carolina and a speaker of SAE, so choosing a small school in South Carolina using my personal contacts gave me access to the small rural schools my research



questions targeted. Though there are many ways to define “The South,” South Carolina is, by any set of criteria, part of the region, and its population is strongly associated with the ideologies of being “Southern” and with being a speaker of SAE. The northern part of the state, where the majority of my family has lived for several generations, sits on a dialect isogloss between “Midland Southern” and “Appalachian English,” and the speakers who live there have features of both dialects. While schools in the coastal region of the state (“the Low Country”) struggle to provide basic necessities like heat in the winter and classrooms for all of their students,<sup>19</sup> the districts in the northern part of the state (“the Upstate” or “the Piedmont”) are typically better funded, though this funding is not evenly distributed among all of the districts in the area. Though the schools in the Piedmont are typically considered “better schools” than those in the Low Country, many of them are still not well-resourced.

It was these smaller, more rural districts that I targeted as options for my research site. I wanted to select a school that is generally considered “a good school” by both the community and the state department of education,<sup>20</sup> and where students are relatively well-prepared for college because I wanted to see if the ideologies surrounding SAE are a factor in transitions to college that are, more often than not, “successful” (if “success” is defined as persisting to graduation, in alignment with the student’s individual goals).

Most of the rural schools in this area have never been approached by researchers with requests to do research in their classrooms or with their students, so there was not a clear set of protocols for gaining district approval. I initially contacted a district where I had several personal contacts and a professional history, a choice that is in line with other qualitative and sociolinguistic research studies, where researchers have found such personal connections to offer them crucial “relational equity” that can translate into more informal relationships with participants and interviews where participants are more comfortable sharing their experiences with the researcher (Heath, *Ways with Words*; McDavid; McNair). When I approached the district, I felt that my longstanding history with them would engender trust and would facilitate

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<sup>19</sup> In 2005, thirty-six districts in the so-called “Corridor of Shame,” which runs along I-95 from the coastal region of South Carolina, sued the state because of the state’s failure to provide an equal and minimally adequate education for their students. The schools in this part of the state consistently score well below average on standardized tests, and their high school dropout rate is higher than other districts in the state. In November 2014, the SC Supreme Court ruled in favor of the districts, requiring the state to bear the burden of better educating its children. The state governor, Nikki Haley, has vowed to appeal the court’s decision.

<sup>20</sup> Upstate School district received a score of “Excellent” on the state report card in 2013.

participant selection. The district, however, denied my request, citing concerns that I did not intend to have a “control group,” and that my prior relationship with the district made them a “convenience sample.” My attempts to explain the goals and methods of qualitative research were unsuccessful.

Again relying on my personal contacts, I next contacted the administration at Upstate School District. I obtained approval to conduct the study in March 2013.<sup>21</sup> The administrators and teachers I met at Upstate High School were welcoming and interested in the research, and agreed to participate if two conditions were met: 1) I would recruit students from their senior English classes after standardized testing was complete, and 2) and only recruit from the “College Prep” (CP) and “Advanced Placement” (AP) classes. The second request seemed to be from the teachers, who told me that few of these students enrolled in college and that they tried to keep disruptions in the “Tech Prep” classes at a minimum. I would have preferred to recruit a more representative sample of students at Upstate by including Tech Prep students, but accommodated these wishes to ensure access.

I visited UHS in May 2013 and attended each of the CP and AP sections of senior English. Ms. Jones,<sup>22</sup> who taught the AP sections, and Mr. Jones, who taught the CP sections, allowed me to explain my study to each of their classes, and to distribute a survey that would aid me in participant selection. I had anticipated distributing the survey in class and having the students return it to me at a later date, but both teachers encouraged their students to complete the survey on the spot. I received eighty-nine completed surveys from all of the sections, which were likely many more responses than I would have otherwise received.

### *Upstate High School*

Upstate High school is located in the small town of Upstate, SC, in the Piedmont region of South Carolina. Upstate was previously the site of two textile mills, but both mills closed between 1970 and 1980. As Walter Edgar observes in his book *South Carolina: A History*, the closure of the textile mills had far-reaching consequences for small towns like Upstate in South Carolina, “the closing of the mill meant not only the loss of jobs, but often financial ruin for local businesses” (576). Upstate’s main thoroughfare reflects the changes that losing the mills have

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<sup>21</sup> The administrator I spoke with at Upstate indicated the district’s desire to support “research-based instruction” as the primary motivation for allowing a researcher into their school. This, too, is evidence of the district’s commitment to preparing their students for life after high school.

<sup>22</sup> Teachers and students are referred to by pseudonyms throughout this study.

wrought on the town, as occupied buildings are rare. Most of the adults who live in Upstate commute to nearby larger cities for work. UHS is the only high school in Upstate, and is similar to many high schools in South Carolina, demographically speaking. It has a population of well under 1000 students, and just over sixty percent of students receive Free and Reduced Lunch, which is the most common measure of socio-economic status (SES) in American public schools. Statewide, nearly fifty percent of students receive Free and Reduced lunch, which puts UHS slightly over the state average (“E-Rate Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility”). Demographically, UHS has more white students than the state average. Approximately three-fourths of UHS students identify as white, in comparison with about half of the public school students statewide. Around twenty percent of UHS students identify as African-American, compared with thirty-seven percent of the students in the state. At the time I visited UHS, the College Board classified it in the “High School Cluster 7” group, and their description of “Cluster 7” schools aligns fairly well with what I saw in my time at UHS:

College-bound students tend to have low standardized test scores but average high school grades. They tend to have less focus on post-secondary education and less guidance during the selection process (which usually begins at a late date). They have a higher likelihood to target a local community college because of academic and financial issues. High schools in this cluster tend to be large public high schools with less emphasis on college preparation. Only about half of all graduates will pursue post-secondary education. Parents tend to have a lower income level (“Descriptor PLUS: Neighborhood Clusters and High School Clusters”).

UHS is not as large as the other high schools in the area, many of which are the result of district consolidations that have taken place in the past three decades. Though the High School Cluster description would suggest that students from UHS are not well-prepared for college, the school has received excellent “report cards” from the state for the past three years, and the students reported hearing about college frequently from their high school teachers.<sup>23</sup>

### *Participant Selection*

In this section, I detail the process of participant selection and describe demographic

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<sup>23</sup> This is not to suggest that the students were completely prepared for college. As the chapters that follow will highlight, the students in this study were not ideally situated (academically speaking) as they entered college. They also struggled with some of the material concerns of college and indicated they would have benefitted from knowing what to expect. Abigail in particular had difficulty with her financial aid and was unsure who to ask for help.

information for the students who were selected for this study. During my visit to UHS, I distributed a paper survey in each of the English classes I visited (Appendix). The survey asked students basic demographic information and about their plans for college enrollment, as well as information about where the students had lived (and for how long), if they considered themselves “Southern,” what languages students spoke, and about their parents, including their highest level of education and where they were from. I also included a version of the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension measure, which I modified to make appropriate for high school students. The Daly-Miller questions were included to get a sense of the students’ confidence about academic writing. All eighty-nine students who began the survey attempted to answer every question.

**Figure 2-1: Essential Selection Criteria (in selection order)**

Agreed to participate
Planned to enroll in college
Lived in SC, NC, or GA (all but 1-2 years)
Self-identified as “Southern”
Parents from SC, NC, or GA
Parents’ education level (no post-secondary degree)
Institution (out of state)
Male/Female balance
AP/CP balance
Variety of institution type
Enrolled in “writing intensive” course in fall

From the eighty-nine survey responses, I selected twelve students who met a set of criteria (See Figure 2-1). These criteria were selected as a means of allowing me to choose participants for whom the ideologies surrounding SAE might be most salient. I began the selection process by removing all students who said they were not interested in participating, then removed all students who did not plan on attending college in the fall. From the students who remained, I selected those who reported spending all (or all but one or two years) of their lives in North Carolina, South Carolina, or Georgia. Most of the students in this group reported spending nearly all or all of their lives in South Carolina, but the close proximity with North Carolina means that a few of the students have spent some time in the Piedmont of North Carolina as well. From this group, I selected native English speakers who self-identified as “Southern” (or a similar identifier like “country,” as described in Chapter 3:) using their responses to an open-ended set of two questions that asked them if they considered themselves to be Southerners, and to define what it means to be “Southern.” I also eliminated students whose

parents were from other regions of the country. I was most interested in students who identified themselves as “Southern” and whose speech would mark them as speakers of some variant of SAE, and selecting students whose parents were also from the South offered a pool of participants with greater ties to the local community.

I further reduced the group of potential participants by selecting students whose parents did not complete college degrees, which left a group of students who could be considered “first generation” college students. I chose to select first generation students because parents’ educational attainment levels can be a marker of social class. Of course, “class” is a complex social construct, and it is not easily attributed to merely one factor of a student’s life. Other factors, like family income and parents’ occupations, are also significant in determining socioeconomic status. However, these factors could be difficult to obtain in a short initial survey, so asking about parents’ educational attainment was the most expedient way to approximate students’ social class.

This study focuses on working class students, and while I recognize that not all first-generation students are from working class backgrounds, first generation students are proportionally low socioeconomic class as compared to their continuing generation peers. This study focuses on working class students and their experiences with the ideologies that are connected with SAE because these ideologies are, in many ways, connected to social class (Eller; Heilman).<sup>24</sup> I selected a population of students for whom these ideologies and the accompanying notions of the speaker’s class might be especially salient in the transition from high school to college. The predominant negative ideologies that position speakers of SAE as lacking intelligence or education have the potential to affect these speakers.

While the category of race is one of the descriptors for student participants in Figure 2-2, I do not thoroughly develop the category of race in this research. I included this information primarily to enhance learner profiles. Within the literature on SAE, “Southerner” has been a label that is attached to White Southerners, but I wanted to leave open the possibility that students of other races would find that descriptor salient for themselves or that they might identify as speakers of some variety of SAE. It is significant to note that my discussion here focuses on white and African-American students, as no students of any other racial identification also identified as “Southern” in their responses to the survey I distributed. Instead, students of

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<sup>24</sup> Chapter 4 discusses the role of social class in greater detail.

other races tended to identify themselves by their heritage (“Mexican” or “Filipino”) and denied a Southern identity. It is certainly possible that other students with other racial backgrounds might identify themselves as Southerners or speakers of SAE, but that did not happen in this study. I did not exclude African-American speakers because it is very possible that African-American speakers living in the South speak a variety of SAE—either SAE as it is typically described or a regional variant of AAE. Indeed, Isabelle identified herself as a speakers of SAE, though her speech also showed features of AAE.

A thorough examination of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study, but future research should certainly investigate the regional variations of AAE, and research on SAE should be open to the experiences of speakers of all races. In the South in particular, the specter of racism still looms over our social interactions. However, my decision to allow students’ voices to be the focus of this study meant that I needed to consider the experiences of all students who identify as speakers of SAE, not only the white speakers, so I decided not to select participants based on race. The survey I distributed to students in the classes at Upstate High School asked no questions about race or ethnicity, only whether they identified as Southerners or speakers of SAE.

Two of the students who were originally selected as participants for my study (and thus who identified as Southern on their surveys) were African-American, which suggests that the current assumption that speakers of SAE are necessarily white is not entirely accurate and merits more research. I was not drawn to my research questions by a specific interest in race (or gender, for that matter), so I acknowledge that my own interests influenced the interview protocol, which did not explicitly address race as a factor in the transition, or in students’ experiences as speakers of SAE. I recognize that my own race may have led students to represent themselves in certain ways. I also acknowledge that students’ experiences with the transition to college and their experiences in the South more generally are marked by racial identification, prejudice, and discrimination, but that was not the focus of this research. Instead, my goal was to be directed by the students and their recollections of their experiences, and they did not address race explicitly.

While race is certainly a salient factor in social interactions in the South, I am hesitant to draw any conclusions about the role of race in students’ perceptions of their transition to college writing. This is especially true because many of the negative ideologies associated with SAE

(such as low intelligence and lack of education) are similarly associated with speakers of AAE (though those speakers must also contend with a separate set of negative ideologies not typically associated with speakers of SAE). Future research could usefully examine class, race, and gender issues in relation to language ideologies in Southern classrooms.

After I winnowed the pool of potential participants using the “essential” criteria listed in Figure 2-1, I was left with a pool of participants that was significantly larger than I required. When I planned my selection criteria, I initially planned to select any students who left the state (with a particular focus on those who planned to leave the South), but not a single student who met my “essential” criteria planned to leave the state of South Carolina for their post-secondary education. This is not entirely surprising, especially considering that the state of South Carolina offers an “Education Lottery” scholarship called the “Life Scholarship” of approximately \$5,000 a year to any student meeting the scholarship requirements<sup>25</sup> who enrolls at a 4-year college, public or private, in the state of South Carolina. This scholarship is a significant financial incentive for students to choose an in-state school, although many of them would likely stay closer to home anyway. Because all of the students in my pool of potential participants planned to stay in state, I focused on balancing male and female students, as well as CP and AP students. This purposeful sample includes students who attended a variety of institution types for post-secondary education, which allowed me to see a wide variety of transition experiences. See Figure 2-2 for participants’ demographic information and college plans (at the time of the survey).

The twelve students initially selected for this study all completed the first interview, which was held before they graduated from high school. This group of participants, listed in Figure 2-2, included five male students and seven female students, six students from the AP class and six students from the CP class, ten White students and two African-American students, and a wide range of institution types where students planned to enroll.

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<sup>25</sup> In 2013, in order to get the Life Scholarship, students had to meet two of the following three requirements: 1100 SAT score, class rankings in the top 1/3 of their class, 3.0 GPA. The scholarship is renewed for four years, provided that students maintain a 3.0 GPA in college. Students also must keep a clean criminal record.

**Figure 2-2: Selected Participants\***<sup>26</sup>

<b>Name<sup>27</sup></b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>English Class</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Planned Admitting Institution Type</b>
Aaron	Male	AP	White	Community College
Abigail	Female	AP	White	Single-gender Liberal Arts College
Annabelle	Female	CP	White	Comprehensive 4-Year University
Bess	Female	CP	White	Community College
David	Male	AP	White	Research University
Derrick	Male	AP	White	Research University
DJ	Male	AP	White	Satellite Campus for University
Dustin	Male	CP	White	Community College
Haley	Female	CP	White	Religious Liberal Arts College
Isabelle	Female	AP	African-American	Satellite Campus for University
Melissa	Female	CP	White	Junior College (religious)
Veronica	Female	CP	African-American	Community College

\* Students in unshaded rows were dropped from the study when they no longer met the selection criteria (e.g., if they did not enroll in college or a first-year writing course in Fall 2013).

Given the longitudinal nature of the study, and the fact that there would be a significant gap between the first interviews and the second interviews, I recruited more students than would be necessary to get a wide range of transition experiences to account for potential attrition. My final selection criteria for participants, enrollment in a writing intensive course, could not be implemented until students enrolled in their courses for the fall semester, so I interviewed the twelve participants listed in Figure 2-2 before they graduated from high school, with the understanding that their fall enrollment choices might reduce my participant pool. During my second interview with students, which took place just after their first week of classes, I asked students what courses they had enrolled in. One student, Haley, did not respond to any of my attempts to contact her and was dropped from the study. Another student, Veronica, told me that she was not going to enroll in college during the fall semester, so we set up an exit interview to discuss her decision to postpone college.<sup>28</sup> During the second interview, I discovered that another participant, Bess, was enrolled in a 3-semester certificate program for veterinary technicians, which did not require any writing courses. She no longer met the selection criteria,

<sup>26</sup> Participants in shaded rows were included in the final sample, for the reasons outlined below.

<sup>27</sup> Students were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms. When students said they had no preference, I chose a pseudonym for them, which they approved.

<sup>28</sup> Veronica called me in May of 2014 to inform me that she has now enrolled at SC Technical College.



so her initial interview is not included in the data analyzed for this study.

Though the initial sample of participants included a balance of AP and CP students, the final study sample reflected a higher number of AP students than CP students. The final study sample included seven different institutions across the state of South Carolina, including five different institution types. Due to the nature of longitudinal research design, I could not have possibly predicted which students would actually enroll in college, or which students would take a writing course in the fall. Though I attempted to select a purposeful sample in the initial participant selection, the research design meant that much of the balance I initially sought would be changed once the fall began.

### *Participant Profiles*

**Aaron** had been an avid baseball player since he was quite young. Aaron's family owned a vineyard in the country, though he had no interest in working the land after he finished his education. He was a member of the AP class, and he enrolled at the local community college in the fall semester. Aaron began the semester with the goal of completing a bachelor's degree in engineering by completing his general education requirements at the community college before transferring to Southern Research University. By the mid-term interview, Aaron indicated that his plan had changed. He was unhappy at SC Technical College: he felt he was not connecting with his instructors and advisor, he disliked his courses (especially his engineering courses), and he wanted to play baseball at the collegiate level. He decided to transfer to Satellite College, and to change his major to Physical Education. Aaron was a confident writer, though his experience with his first-year writing class was frustrating for him.

**Abigail** began her K-12 education as a homeschooler. She went to middle school at a small private Christian school, where students did the majority of their work on their own. She didn't care much for this school, and when she was ready to begin high school, she enrolled at UHS. Abigail chose a private single-gender liberal arts college. She was excited about her decision to begin at Women's College because she felt the education she would receive there would encourage her to be more confident and take more leadership. Abigail found the first semester of college personally difficult, but academically she seemed to do fairly well. Abigail deeply valued the new experiences she had at college, so much so, in fact, that around the mid-term she hatched a plan to "college hop," moving from institution to institution by semester. I initially thought she intended to transfer, but she explained to me that she wanted to transfer to a

different college each year (possibly each semester). She was an Art Education major, and felt that having the ability to take art classes in different places would benefit her. At the end of the final interview, she asked me what I thought about her plan. I expressed some concern about credits transferring from one institution to the next, and about whether or not her financial aid would “hop” with her, but I encouraged her to talk to someone at Women’s College about their study abroad program. She contacted me after the data collection period to let me know that she had decided not to “hop colleges,” and that she had been fairly successful in her classes (and with her writing in those classes) during the spring semester.

**Annabelle** enrolled at a public four-year comprehensive college, with a plan to major in nursing. She was not only the only person in her family to enroll in college; she was also the first person to graduate from high school. Annabelle was friendly and chatty in our interviews, but she struggled to explain some of the phenomena she named as she talked about her writing. Though she was not a terribly confident writer, she paid keen attention to the instruction in her college writing class and would recount her instructor’s words to me. She was felt writing was important for her education.

**David** was a wrestler at UHS, an activity he talked about frequently in our interviews. He did not wrestle at State Research University, though he discussed wrestling for the club team if he could make weight the semester after data collection. Like Annabelle, David was the first person in his family to finish high school and enroll in college. David entered State Research University as an engineering major, and lived in a dorm with other engineering students. David found college writing to be exceptionally challenging, and despite the fact that he was in the advanced placement course in high school, he felt unprepared for college writing. He did not do as well in his classes as he had hoped, but at the end of the semester felt confident he could do better in the spring semester.

**Derrick** decided to enroll at Southern Research University, where he also decided to major in engineering—in his case, computer engineering. Derrick was a quiet student, whose answers to the interview questions were brief, even after I probed. He was friendly and regularly expressed genuine interest in this research project by asking questions about the research process. He did well in his writing class, but being at Southern Research University meant he felt far from home. He went home every weekend to see his girlfriend, who lived near Upstate. Though he seemed to manage decent grades, he reported having difficulty making it to class every week,

particularly at the beginning of the semester. He felt fairly confident about his writing, and received positive feedback on his writing in his first-year writing class.

**DJ** decided to enroll at Satellite College, which allowed him to live at home and commute to class. DJ loved British television, especially the long-standing science-fiction show *Doctor Who*. He appreciated teachers who brought new perspectives into the classroom and challenged him to rethink his previous perceptions. Though DJ was unsure what he would major in, at the time data collection concluded, he was leaning towards history, largely because his history teacher in high school offered him the kind of class he most appreciated. Like Derrick, DJ regularly expressed interest in my graduate studies, often asking about the research process and what graduate-level coursework is like. Even after data collection was complete, DJ continued to regularly text me to ask after this project. He mentioned once or twice that he had thought about attending graduate school, which might account for his interest. DJ also felt that he was different than his peers at UHS. He recounted (and seemed to revel in) the ways he did not conform to what he perceived as the social norms at UHS: he was not religious, not conservative, and not “country.” DJ enjoyed the transition to college, where he felt there were opportunities to meet more people with whom he had things in common. He did well in his classes that first semester.

**Dustin** chose to begin his post-secondary education at SC Technical College, with a goal of completing his general education requirements there and transferring to a four-year university where he could complete a bachelor’s degree in preparation for an occupational therapy degree (not a occupational therapy assistant degree). Like Derrick, Dustin was quieter in our interviews, though he was more reserved than Derrick. He felt fairly confident about his writing, and did well in his first semester of coursework.

**Isabelle** was the only African-American student who completed all of the interviews in this study. She attended Satellite College and planned to major in nursing. Isabelle took the first nursing course her first semester, which at Satellite College is notoriously difficult. This class took up much of her time and attention, which she felt negatively affected her writing. Isabelle thought the writing she was asked to produce in her writing course challenging, and it took her much of the semester to find her footing in that class. Isabelle also found the personal aspects of the transition to college very difficult. She experienced quite a lot of conflict with her roommate, though she was hesitant to confront her roommate with the problems she had. She began to go

home more on the weekends, and by the end of the semester, she was traveling home during the week as well. She expressed to me that it was easier to focus on her schoolwork at home and that she was better able to study for her pre-nursing class there, rather than in the library or in the dorms.

**Melissa** went to a junior college, a two-year liberal arts college, which she initially chose because of its paralegal program. However, at the beginning of the semester, she discovered that her financial aid would not cover the paralegal program, so she decided to enroll in the accounting major instead. At Junior College, she planned to complete an associate's degree in accounting, and then transfer to a nearby four-year college to complete a bachelor's degree. Melissa found the first semester of college very challenging. She was placed into a basic writing class based on a grammar test that she was required to take during orientation. This writing class was frustrating, in that there was far less writing than she expected, and that she felt less competent about her writing than she had before. She also had difficulty with the online course management systems she was asked to navigate for several of her classes. She was required to complete her tests for her economics course online, but she did not understand how to submit it properly and was given a failing grade, which her professor would not change. Melissa found this, and other similar experiences where she struggled to adapt to the requirements of her new environment, to be particularly challenging in her transition into college.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

### *Student Interview Procedures*

For each of the students selected for this study, I planned five interviews. The first interview took place just before their high school graduation. The three interviews took place at key moments throughout the students' first semester of college: just after the first week of classes, immediately after they received their first major paper back in their writing class, at the mid-term, and just after final exams were complete at the end of the semester. I contacted students using their preferred method of communication (all of the students, save Dustin, who preferred email, preferred to text, so that was my primary method of communication throughout the study).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The initial survey I distributed to students asked for both their phone number and email address, and asked students to indicate which method of communication they preferred. Texting proved an easy and casual method of

Given my background as a high school teacher, and the fact that their own high school teachers allowed me to speak to the classes, I had some concerns that students would see me as an authorized extension of the high school and might not be as forthcoming about their transition experiences. To that end, I made an effort to appear less “teacher-like.” I wore casual clothing and spoke casually and with a fairly informal register of my own native SAE. I also answered students’ questions about my own transition experience as a student, not as a teacher (“When I was in college...”) and reiterated my own background growing up nearby.

Interviews were conducted in public or semi-public spaces one-on-one with students, in hopes that students would be comfortable enough to discuss the range of their experiences with me. We met in coffee shops, study rooms in libraries, at a local Burger King, and in the lobbies of students’ dorm buildings. The interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed by a transcriptionist.<sup>30</sup> I developed the interview protocols, which were shaped by the concept of “active interviewing,” which recognizes that meaning during interviews is co-constructed by the interviewer and the interviewee, rather than simply being elicited directly from the mind of the interviewee (Weiss; Merriam).

The remaining nine students participated in all five interviews, which is a much higher rate of participation than I anticipated. I attribute this higher rate of participation to several factors. I compensated students for their time by offering them a small monetary incentive for each interview. Though this incentive was not substantial, several students reported in casual conversation that they intended to put that money towards their next semester’s tuition.<sup>31</sup> Based on our conversations, the majority of my participants did not come from families of means, so financial incentives almost certainly encouraged continued participation. Another likely factor

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communication. The students responded quickly to my texts, and continued to use that method to contact me long after data collection was complete.

<sup>30</sup> Interviews were transcribed for the purpose of documenting the words of the interviewees and interviewer, with minimal attention paid to details found in other forms of transcription, like length of pauses or intonation. Transcripts in this study use standard orthography and make note of laughter and pauses, as well as back-channeling (like *ok* and *right*) and discourse markers (*mm*, *uh*, *like*) are also transcribed. I checked transcripts for accuracy, and words that could not be heard or understood are marked by time stamps. See Appendix A for a single page sample of transcripts.

<sup>31</sup> Qualitative longitudinal work of this nature requires significant financial support. In this case, expenses related to data collection for this project were generously provided by the Rackham Graduate School and the Joint Program in English and Education, both at the University of Michigan. The director of the Sweetland Center for Writing, Anne Ruggles Gere, also allowed me to fulfill my responsibilities as Graduate Student Research Assistant remotely, so that I was able to spend the entire Fall 2013 semester in South Carolina. Each participant was given a financial incentive totaling \$100 for all five interviews.

was the rapport that I developed with each of the participants. At the end of each interview, I asked if they had any questions for me about the things we had discussed. While they never asked any questions related to the topics of the interviews, several of them took the opportunity to ask me questions about the transition to college, college life more generally, or my experiences with post-secondary education. Isabelle frequently asked for advice about her difficult roommate situation, and I once helped Annabelle decipher her writing instructor's handwriting when she could not read her feedback. Derrick and Aaron asked about my research and my experiences in graduate school on a regular basis, and Abigail asked for my advice about her financial aid situation and her plan to "college hop" by transferring to a different college each semester. This rapport and my role as someone who had successfully navigated the transition from a small rural Southern high school through college (and graduate school) probably facilitated the excellent rate of participation in this study, despite the significant time commitment required for students to participate fully in a longitudinal study of this nature.

During the second interview, I collected a copy of the syllabi from the students' writing classes. From these syllabi, I determined when students' first papers were due. I contacted students one week after they submitted these papers to see if they had received feedback yet, and if they had not, I contacted them once a week until they received them back. Several students texted me when they got their papers back. For the other interviews, I used the academic calendars posted on each respective school's web site to determine when to schedule the interviews for the first week of class, the mid-term, and the end of the semester. Because the end-of-semester finals are a particularly stressful time for students, I scheduled the final interviews after exams, over winter break. Approximately twenty-four hours before each interview, I sent a reminder text to the student with the time and place of our meeting. With the exception of several rescheduled meetings during the holidays, the students were remarkably consistent about coming and being punctual for each interview.

The first interview of the study took place just before students' graduation from high school so that I could have a "baseline" of their reactions before their college experience began. It was also useful in this interview to get a sense of what it was like for these students to be from Upstate, SC and to be looking forward to college and imagining their lives as college students. The second interview I conducted with students took place after the first week of their college classes. In this educational moment, students had been oriented to the institution they are

entering, and experienced their first few sessions of class, but had not yet completed major assignments and were still attempting to understand their instructors' expectations and the shifting workload of college life. This interview asked students to reflect on their new environment, the material conditions of that environment (roommates, finding their way around campus, logistics of living off-campus, etc), as well as the more abstract notions of their first impressions of being a college student.

In the third interview, I waited until students received their first major writing assignment back, graded and with feedback, from their writing instructors, and the student and I discussed this writing assignment and their feedback together. This interview was the most difficult to schedule, as each student's class schedule was different, and the students had no idea when they would receive their papers back. I was highly aware of the demands on their time, as many of my participants also worked long hours and had family obligations, so I was hesitant to bombard them with text messages. In an effort to remind them of my desire to talk about their paper while not bothering them, I texted the students once a week after their papers were due to check on the status of their feedback. Some students replied more quickly than others once they received their paper, but I was able to interview most of them within a week of when they received their grades and feedback.<sup>32</sup> In this interview, students discussed their experiences with college writing and compared those experiences to their previous experiences of writing in high school. They also discussed the feedback they received in high school, and their sense of the changing expectations that college-level writing demanded of them. This interview was particularly enlightening in regards to students' experiences with language ideologies, as many of the students discussed their previous communicative strategies and evaluated how those strategies were received in their new educational context.

The fourth interview took place at the mid-term, which is a key educational moment for many students because it is the first time that they get a progress report of their grades for each of their courses. By this point in the semester, the students had adjusted more to college life and demands of a collegiate workload, and it was a time when many of them reevaluated their previous expectations that they would enjoy the same success (as they defined it—by grades) in

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<sup>32</sup> The exception to this was Isabelle, who did not pass the paper the first time she turned it in and did not wish to speak to me until she revised and received a better grade. In the end, we talked about the paper after her second revision. While I would have liked to discuss her experience with the first paper of the semester while it was "fresh," I respected her wishes.

college as they did in high school. The majority of the students had also written more than one paper by this point, and therefore had a fuller sense of what college writing is and how they were doing in meeting the expectations of their writing courses. Finally, the fifth interview took place over the break after first semester, during the winter holidays. This timing allowed students the chance to complete their coursework and exams for the semester and to have a sense of what their final grades for courses would be. During the fifth interview, the students reflected on their first semester and discussed their perceptions of their transition to college, and the role that being from Upstate and being a speaker of SAE played in that transition.

### *Interviews*

All interviews with students and instructors occurred between May 2013 and December 2013. My goal for the interviews was to collect a range of student experiences with the transition from high school to college, and the qualitative longitudinal nature of these interviews meant that I was able to collect students' impressions of these experiences as they were happening.

I followed the same basic interview structure in each of the interviews with each participant. All interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, covering what I considered to be my essential questions at each of the key educational moments in students' first semester of college, but also leaving the interviews open to unanticipated shifts in the conversation and elaboration (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña). Each of the questions in the interview protocols was aligned with the research questions of this study, to ensure that those driving questions were addressed. This structure gave some consistency, and it enabled some comparison of experiences and responses among my participants, while allowing opportunities to explore tangents or to return to previous topics of conversation (see Appendix for sample protocols).

I attempted to schedule interviews in quiet secluded places, but my unfamiliarity with all of the students' campuses (and their unfamiliarity, as new students in these places) meant that on occasion interviews were in places with more noise than was ideal, as in the case with Isabelle, whose campus coffee shop was unusually loud. I offered participants the choice to schedule in any "quiet place" that was convenient for them. More often than not, they expressed no preference, or stated that they were not sure what would be a good place to meet, so I chose. Still, I was able to keep the interview space confidential and my recordings were clear. I scheduled interview times and places based on my participants' expressed preferences. All



interviews were face-to-face to permit in-person review of the consent form and to allow me to gauge participants' responses based on body language and eye contact.

**Figure 2-3: Interview Schedule**

<b>Name</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Interview Date</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Interview Date</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Paper Back</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Interview Date</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> Interview Date</b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup> Interview Date</b>
Aaron	5/28/13	8/30/13	9/25/13	10/4/13	11/22/13	12/20/13
Abigail	5/22/13	9/4/13	9/30/13	10/7/13	11/6/13	12/17/13
Annabelle	5/23/13	9/9/13	10/11/13	10/23/13	11/21/13	12/17/13
Austin	5/28/13	9/11/13	11/9/13	11/22/13	11/22/13	12/28/13
David	5/23/13	9/3/13	9/30/13	10/1/13	10/15/13	12/19/13
Derrick	5/22/13	8/29/13	9/15/13	9/19/13	10/22/13	12/19/13
DJ	5/23/13	9/5/13	9/30/13	10/3/13	11/7/13	12/18/13
Isabelle	5/28/13	9/2/13	10/11/13	11/6/13	11/21/13	12/10/13
Melissa	5/23/13	9/6/13	11/30/13	12/6/13	10/17/13	12/20/13

Figure 2-3 demonstrates that the interviews for this study were staggered throughout the Spring and Fall semesters of 2013 as planned. At the beginning of each interview, the students reviewed the consent form with me, and I offered them the chance to ask any questions before they signed it. I asked permission before recording the interviews, and I briefly outlined the topics of conversation that would be included in the interview. Each interview began with a general question to allow students to become comfortable and relaxed with the interview setting. I found that it was helpful to remind students what my study was about before beginning the interview, and they often made comments about how people treated them based on their language after I did so. Each interview covered a set of essential topics, as determined by the interview protocols, but no two interviews followed an identical order, as participants told me stories and described what was happening in their classes and social lives in their new educational context. Sometimes students addressed a topic early in the interview, though it was a much later topic or question on my list. When this happened, I allowed the student to lead, which offered them more agency and a greater level of comfort with the interview situation than a strict question and response format. One or two of the students only responded directly to my questions without much elaboration in the interviews.

### *Contextual Data*

In addition to the interviews I conducted with students, I also collected data intended to

provide context that would support the analysis of the interviews. This contextual data included interviews with the participants' high school English teachers and college writing instructors, as well as documents about their writing experiences in the transition from high school to college (including syllabi from their courses and writing samples from both high school and college).

I initially planned to conduct interviews with the students' high school English teachers and college writing instructors for background information. To that end, I conducted one 50-minute interview with Mrs. Jones and an hour-long interview with Tom, Aaron's writing instructor. Though I contacted all of the students' instructors, Tom was the only instructor who replied to my emails. Since the instructor interviews were intended solely to provide context, the lack of response from writing instructors did not negatively affect the data collection or analysis. Though the two teacher/instructor interviews I have no doubt were helpful in my understanding of the students' experiences, they were not analyzed with the student interviews.

Similarly, I collected artifacts from the students that gave me a better understanding of their experiences with writing in the transition to college, but these artifacts were not the primary data source. I collected a writing sample from high school, and a copy of their first graded paper (with instructor feedback), as well as syllabi for their writing classes. These documents were used for the purpose of prompting students to reflect on their writing in our interviews (for example, in the third round of interviews I asked students to look over the paper they had just gotten back from their instructors and to reflect on their experience writing it, and on the feedback they received from their instructor). While these documents certainly offer promise for future study, a full analysis of the students' writing is beyond the scope of this study.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative research studies offer a thick, rich description of human experiences. These studies are "a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of human processes" (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 4), and they help researchers move beyond their preconceived notions and generate new conceptual frameworks. This study is no exception, as I began with theory-generated codes, but did not seek to find support for an "answer" I wished to confirm. Due to the nature of language ideologies, which are often found lurking beneath the surface of interactions and gain much of their power from the fact that they are typically unspoken and unquestioned (and, very often, assumed to be "common sense"), I could not simply ask students *How have the ideologies associated with your language affected your experiences as a student*

*moving from high school to college?* Most of my participants were unaware of the terminology associated with language ideologies, though they certainly described such experiences in our conversations together. The extended line of questioning I developed to help students have a way of talking about such experiences, as well as giving them the opportunity to reflect on their experiences transitioning more generally, meant that I collected far more information than I needed.

This study includes fifty-three interview transcripts from over forty hours of recordings; an eighty-eight page research journal detailing my research efforts and interactions with participants; eight syllabi from first year writing courses at seven different South Carolina institutions; of student essays (most with instructor feedback); and numerous text messages and emails. While this list comprises a large amount of potential data, not all of this data was analyzed for this study. Some of the data I collected, like the syllabi and the writing samples, were simply to gain context, or to help with the logistics of scheduling interviews. These contextual pieces of data served as a good reference as I was analyzing the student interviews, but I did not analyze them in the same way, as they did not support exploration of my primary research question as the student interviews did.

After I limited the data for primary analysis, I analyzed that data by following the two-cycle coding process described by Matthew Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana in *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (2013). I began the data analysis while I was still collecting data, as I listened to prior interviews and wrote reflective memos, which allowed me to revise my interview protocols based on my early findings. This early analysis also enabled more detailed follow-up questions, which allowed me to challenge my own assumptions and clarify with students that I accurately understood their experiences.

Once data collection was completed and the interviews were transcribed, I began coding the data using qualitative coding software. In this initial round of coding, I relied primarily on the in vivo method of coding, as its focus on honoring the participants' voices mirrored the goals of this study. Though I began with a provisional set of codes based on prior research on SAE as a non-standard dialect of English as well as research on how undergraduates develop as writers, the in vivo coding showed several clear patterns of phrases that students used to describe the people in their communities, their language, and their transition to college.

I began the second round of coding by writing memos that captured my impressions from

the first coding cycle, which led me to identify three codes that were used frequently, which merited more analysis. I delved into a second round of coding for each of these key codes, looking for patterns within each and continuing to memo about my findings as I considered the patterns and themes I saw. Through this analysis, I determined that two of these three key codes formed threads in an overarching theme—a connection between the spoken and written registers of students’ language practices in their transition to college and the rhetorical practices students bring from their home communities (primarily being “short, sweet, and to the point” or writing in a “simple” style, as well as their comments about “MLA”). I returned to my first list of codes and found instances where this connection seemed salient for the students, and incorporated this data into my analysis of the key codes. From these key codes, I developed the arguments that structure each chapter.

## **RESEARCH ETHICS**

### *Limitations*

A study of this sample size, which considers students from a single high school, will necessarily have its limitations. Though I attempted to keep the gender and high school English class demographics balanced among my final set of participants, the longitudinal nature of the study precluded a perfect balance of demographics in my final set of participants. The time with which I had to collect data was also a limitation, in that I could gather a more full understanding of how influential students’ transition experiences are if I had time to follow students through their entire collegiate experiences (and, as Anne Beaufort and Shirley Brice Heath’s recent work suggests, beyond the post-secondary degree as well).

Initially, I had intended to interview students’ high school English teachers as well as their college writing teachers to give me context and to allow me to triangulate my data (in conjunction with the students’ writing samples and the syllabi they shared with me) and to give me contextual data to better understand the students’ experiences with writing in their first semester of college. However, I was only able to interview one of the high school teachers. I asked the students for their permission to contact their writing instructors, and explained to them what I would discuss with their instructors. I gained all nine students’ consent to contact their instructors, but only one instructor replied to my email. I interviewed this instructor, but the interview did not offer much insight into the students’ experiences. Still, interviews with other

instructors might have proven helpful for understanding students' transitions to college writing and to college generally. The absence of this contextual information likewise is a limitation of the study, as is the absence of classroom observations, which would have offered a picture of what students are being taught. However, the analytic focus of the study is on how the students *perceive* their experiences in the transition to college writing, so this limitation is a reasonable absence from the data.

### *Researcher Subjectivities and Treatment of Participants*

I approached this project as an invested member of the community I endeavored to study, though I do not currently live in this community. As such, my own subjectivities—as a speaker of SAE, a former middle and high school teacher of students in South Carolina and Texas, and as a scholar interested in both composition research and sociolinguistics—heavily influenced the study design. I entered Upstate High School and my subsequent interactions with students as a curious and dedicated researcher, but also as someone who has personally experienced the tensions inherent in negotiating my identity as a non-standard speaker while successfully navigating the transition to college and to StAE. I am a graduate of a high school very near to Upstate High School both geographically and demographically,<sup>33</sup> and my family has long-standing ties in the area. These local ties proved valuable, as the students knew that I currently live in Michigan and “checked in” with me several times during the interviews to remind themselves of my background. When I visited Upstate to recruit students, Mr. Jones was polite but somewhat distant, and within a few minutes of meeting me asked why I chose their school. When I explained my reasons for choosing Upstate and my own ties to the region, he visibly relaxed and warmed almost immediately.<sup>34</sup> It seemed that to my participants, my background meant it was unlikely that I would portray them as “backwoods,” “ignorant” or even “stupid,” because I would be characterizing myself in those ways as well. I endeavored to honor the trust these participants placed in me by being cognizant of my treatment and representation of their experiences. The students' quotes in this dissertation have been carefully checked and are presented using the students' words and grammatical patterns. While the standard convention is

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<sup>33</sup> At several points, the participants in my study directly compared Upstate High and my alma mater, which gave us an opportunity to connect as graduates of similar schools and as being from similar places.

<sup>34</sup> It's also worth noting that I was introduced to him by my first name only, and when I mentioned my last name to the students, he relaxed even further. As a former pastor and missionary to China, he was familiar with my father, who is a local pastor in the same denomination.

to mark non-standard grammar with a “[sic],” I have chosen not to do so, because doing so in this case would only replicate ideologies that these speakers use “bad grammar,” and that “correct” spoken language is identical to written registers of English.

As a researcher, I was aware that asking questions that required students to reflect on an aspect of their identity, as I did when students and I talked about their experiences as non-standard speakers of English, could be unsettling for the students. I therefore took the following steps to ensure ethical treatment for all of my participants. I applied for and received IRB approval (Exempt 2 status), which ensured that my study design and plan were within the accepted parameters of ethical treatment as defined by my sponsoring institution. The IRB deemed my study to pose no more risk to participants than normal educational practice, but I wanted to ensure additional ethical safeguards, so I reiterated to students that they did not have to answer questions that they did not want to, and I re-consented them at each interview. I conducted interviews in public or semi-public spaces like coffee shops, library study rooms, and outdoor tables on the students’ respective campuses (or at the Upstate Public Library branch, for students who commuted to campus for classes only). During interviews two through five, I asked participants to clarify or extend remarks they made in the previous interview(s), and “checked in” with them to see if their experiences and/or opinions changed throughout their first semester of college.

It was also crucial to me that participating in this study would be beneficial to the students. The very nature of qualitative interviews is often a benefit for participants, as the interview questions prompt them to reflect on their experiences in ways that they might not otherwise have done (Weiss). In this study in particular, such reflection has the potential to assist students in navigating their transition, as reflecting on one’s writing experiences is an established method of teaching writing (Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi). In this way, participating in my study unavoidably contributed to my participants’ experiences as they navigated the transition to college. In addition to the natural benefit of reflection, I recognized that there was the potential for my participants to see me as a resource who could help them as they transitioned to college writing, particularly because I positioned myself as a member of the community who had obviously already successfully navigated that transition. This was indeed realized when students sought my advice about everything from personal relationships at college to their class selection and financial aid. When students explicitly asked for such advice or help,

I answered their questions to the best of my ability, but I did not intervene or offer advice without their prompting. As a non-monetary form of incentive, I offered students writing tutoring or feedback once the data collection was complete, but to date none of the participants has requested any such assistance.<sup>35</sup> After the semester of data collection, I continued to contact participants at the end of each semester to ask about their progress and for a quick update on their experiences. More often, they text me to give me updated phone numbers, ask about the progress of this dissertation, and to offer me reports on their experiences in college (most typically, reports of good grades in their courses). Bess, who was dropped from the study after the first interview, texted me a picture of her brand-new baby in the spring of 2015. When they ask about the dissertation, I offer summaries and ask them if they want more details. Not a single student has requested more information, but the continued contact from them suggests that the relationship between researcher and participant in this kind of study can be beneficial and important to the participant.

### *Validity*

Though the primary focus of this study is on student voices and experiences, I have gathered a variety of artifacts and taken several measures as a means of enhancing validity. The most essential sources of data for this research are the students themselves, as they are the people who are most capable of expressing the complex nature of the transition from a rural Southern high school into college writing. These students enrolled at a wide variety of institution types, and had a diverse set of experiences as they transitioned into college. The longitudinal nature of the study also allowed me to explore the experiences that students had as they were in the midst of the transition to college, rather than simply asking them after the fact, as have many studies about the transition to college. My prolonged engagement with the participants also enhanced validity, as it gave participants time to grow comfortable with me and with the interview environment, and to reassure them of my genuine interest in the range of their experiences (not merely the positive ones).

The longitudinal nature of this study also allowed for consistent member checking while I was collecting data, as I was able to ask students for clarification and to verify my understanding of what they said in earlier interviews. These follow-up questions proved very fruitful in the

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<sup>35</sup> In February of 2015, Isabelle texted me and asked if I would be willing to give her feedback on her admissions essay for the nursing program. I readily agreed, but she has not yet sent the writing to me.

interviews and allowed me to get more insight on students' perspectives and experiences as they were happening. I sought students' authentic experiences, but I recognize that my participation in conversations with them about these experiences inherently influences these interactions. In the interviews, therefore, I asked questions from multiple angles, and asked students to explain their reasons for participation in college, their "student-ing" behaviors, and their goals for the future.

Before each interview (in rounds 2-5), I listened to the student's previous interview again and took notes on the interview protocol, adding questions that asked students to clarify their previous remarks, or to assess whether a belief or experience was still true for them. These clarifying questions proved very generative. I also added a question to the final interview protocol when I realized that all of the students had discussed "rednecks," though that was not language that the protocol introduced. Many of these comments offered fine-grained distinctions between "redneck" and "country," so I decided to ask all of the students whether/how they felt these labels represented different groups of people. Again, this question offered much in the way of students' ideologies about the people around them (and about themselves, for that matter). At the close of each interview, I also gave students the opportunity to introduce any topic that they wished or to say anything they wanted to, in case they wished to change their answer to a question, clarify a comment they had made, or correct a misrepresented experience.

As a result of the iterative interview process that a longitudinal design offered me, I was able to adapt the interview protocols to suit the themes that were emerging, which allowed me to clarify with the students and to collect more data on aspects of their experience that my initial protocols could not have anticipated.

## CONCLUSION

I designed this qualitative longitudinal study to explore how language ideologies play a role in students' experiences with the transition from high school to college writing. As it happened, eliciting their experiences with the transition from their local high school to the college writing classroom also brought to the surface their ideologies about what rhetorical strategies and practices are valued in the academic writing classroom, where the linguistic capital of the global market is often prized. By valuing the students' voices as they experience this transition, I was able to document and analyze how the unspoken, unquestioned ideologies that surround their language and rhetoric have powerful influences on the participants' transitions



into college. In the chapters that follow, I present three of the major findings from this study. First, in chapter three, I explore the ways that the predominant language ideologies surrounding SAE influenced students' experiences in the transition to college writing. Then, in chapters four and five I consider how these language ideologies and the ideologies around what is rhetorically effective that students bring form a complex set of resources that the participants tried to implement in their college writing courses.

## CHAPTER 3: REDNECKS AND PROPER ENGLISH: LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES AND SOUTHERN AMERICAN ENGLISH

*I don't know. I just feel like, if you're not speaking proper, I just feel like your paper might not go in the right direction either .... I just think it's the whole college experience. You don't want people thinking you don't know how to speak to them properly. Some people, they already know how to speak properly, so I do want to sound a little educated to them.*

*--Isabelle*

### INTRODUCTION

Isabelle's understanding of herself as a speaker of a non-standard dialect, a variant of SAE, is clearly a factor in how she conceives of herself as a new college student. As Chapter 1 indicated, this dialect is strongly associated with ideologies that position its speakers as less intelligent or well-educated—but more polite and pleasant—than more “standard” speakers. As Isabelle acknowledged, these ideologies have the potential to be especially powerful as students move from their local communities into higher education. Isabelle pointed out that sounding “a little educated” to her peers at college was something she was concerned about.

As Chapter 1 noted, very little research exists that explores the experiences of SAE speakers in educational contexts. There is a body of work that examines SAE and the ideologies most often associated with it. Most notably, Dennis Preston's research in perceptual dialectology (described in detail in Chapter 1) reveals that speakers of SAE are ranked as having the “worst English” by both Northern *and* Southern speakers, but also that they rank highly among the “most pleasant” speakers in the country. Preston's work demonstrates that, in general, speakers are rated favorably on affective measures and less favorably on descriptors related to correctness or level of intelligence/education. Preston's research is also significant in that it reveals the persistence of the ideologies associated with SAE, not only among linguistic outsiders, but also among speakers of SAE themselves. Assertions that SAE is not as “correct,” like what Preston found in his research, are a form of standard language ideology.

The data from these students' experiences in their first semester of college align almost

exactly with what Lippi-Green describes of *Standard Language Ideology* (SLI) and the experiences of non-standard speakers, who do not benefit from the privileges of SLI. As Chapter 1 indicated, Lippi-Green defines SLI as “a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class” (64). The dominance of SLI makes for an often-complicated linguistic experience for speakers of non-standard dialects. They must communicate with their friends and family, most of whom speak in ways that are similarly marked as non-standard, but they must also contend with “a web of common sense arguments” (66) that position their language as difficult to understand or less correct than StAE. As speakers attempt to assert StAE’s dominance over other dialects and varieties of language, these speakers participate in the process of language subordination.

Lippi-Green describes this process as the “language subordination model” (68). The model (Figure 1) is particularly useful in understanding how the ideologies associated with participants’ dialects were influential in their transitions into college writing, because it describes one process through which speakers justify SLI, impose it on other speakers, and reproduce negative ideologies associated with non-standard speakers. As I examine further in this chapter, the speakers in this study also used the language subordination model to distance themselves from peers and family “back home,” perhaps in an effort to position themselves for more success in their new academic contexts. However, their reaction to the ideologies surrounding their dialect were not entirely that simple. Even as the students replicated the language subordination model, they also resisted it. This resistance primarily took the form of students pushing back or distancing themselves from the negative ideologies associated with SAE, particularly as those ideologies apply to the participants themselves as individuals.

**Figure 3-1: A Model of the Language Subordination Process (Lippi-Green 68)**

Language is mystified  
*You can never hope to comprehend the difficulties and complexities of your mother tongue without guidance.*

Authority is claimed  
*Talk like me/us. We know what we are doing because we have studied language, because we write well.*

Misinformation is generated  
*That usage you are so attached to is inaccurate. The variant I prefer is superior on historical, aesthetic, or logical grounds.*

Non-mainstream language is trivialized  
*Look how cute, how homey, how funny.*

Conformers are held up as positive examples  
*See what you can accomplish if you only try, how far you can get if you see the light.*

Explicit promises are made  
*Employers will take you seriously, doors will open.*

Threats are made  
*No one important will take you seriously, doors will close.*

Non-conformers are vilified or marginalized  
*See how willfully stupid, arrogant, unknowing, uninformed, and/or deviant and unrepresentative these speakers are.*

The students in this study described SAE and speakers of SAE using language that was, at times, eerily similar to the language Lippi-Green offers as exemplars of how speakers typically enact the language subordination model. For example, Aaron attempted to disclaim ideologies that position speakers of SAE as less intelligent in our very first interview, when he claimed, “Well, for somebody that is educated, that actually knows we’re not stupid, the Southern drawl actually ends up being a very soothing thing to talk to.” Aaron resisted vilifying speakers who do not conform to SLI by pushing back on the ideology that positions them as less intelligent, though in doing so he acknowledged that his speech may mark him as lacking in intelligence. Rather than wholly embracing this ideology, as Preston’s research and Lippi-Green’s model suggests he might, Aaron pushed back, asserting that it is the people who consider Southerners to be stupid who are, themselves, uneducated. In doing so, Aaron also directly connected perceived intelligence with perceived levels of education. In other words, he suggested that intelligence and “being educated” are aligned with one another, and that not attributing SAE to a lack of intelligence is the mark of an educated person.

Aaron’s description of the Southern accent as “soothing” might be a move to assert the positive associations of the dialect, but it might also serve as an example of how non-standard

dialects can be trivialized as homey, quaint, or cute; and it seems significant that he associated the negative ideologies surrounding intelligence with the *speakers* and the soothing qualities with the *dialect*. Rather than noting that speakers of SAE are soothing to talk to, Aaron says the accent is soothing to talk to, so that even as he asserts the positive qualities of SAE and the ways he finds it preferable to the English spoken by Northerners, which he later called “harsh,” the fact that his assertion regarding the language is that it (and, by extension, he) is “not stupid” betrays his linguistic insecurity. Speakers who consider themselves to be speakers of StAE would likely not feel the need to claim their dialect is “not” some negative qualifier, but as this chapter explores further, Aaron’s defense was far from unique among these participants.

In this chapter, I consider the ways that the students in this study had a complicated reaction to the ideologies associated with their home dialect, neither fully taking up nor completely resisting the predominant ideologies associated with SAE. Instead, they feel insecurity about how these ideologies position speakers in educational settings, and they react not by rejecting the moral loadings and class-based reproduction of power, but instead by off-loading these assumptions and beliefs onto their peers and community members “back home,” and on cultural representations of “rednecks.” This distancing move allows the participants in this study to at once acknowledge the linguistic insecurity they feel about being “othered” by their instructors and peers, and to assert the ways they felt the ideologies associated with their home dialect benefitted them.

## **DISTANCING MOVES**

For many students, the transition into college is a challenging educational moment. Students from rural and first generation backgrounds may find the transition to college even more challenging. For speakers of non-standard dialects like the participants in this study, entering into a new speech community contributed to the challenges they faced because speaking a non-standard dialect positioned them as “other” in the context of higher education. StAE offers the most social capital in settings of higher education. Given the role of FYC in successful transitions to college, being a non-standard speaker can make a college writing class especially difficult. There were very few instances of the students reporting that their instructors subordinated their language or that their instructors reproduced negative ideologies associated with SAE. Nevertheless, the students felt the ideologies associated with SAE were salient in their experiences, though they responded to these ideologies in slightly differing ways.

A few of the students, most notably DJ and Isabelle, felt that the affordances of StAE were greater than what SAE offered them, so they consciously decided to change their language use. In doing so, they adapt the language subordination model in Figure 1 as it applies to other speakers of SAE. They used their changed language to distance themselves, so that the negative ideologies associated with SAE were not applied to them. DJ, Isabelle, and, to some extent, Derrick, all spoke disparagingly of SAE and used their decision to change their language as a way of distancing themselves from the associations of being “country” or “redneck” that they do not feel represent their experiences and do not give them the cultural cachet they need to be successful in college.

For DJ, this decision was made before he went to college, and it seemed to be largely about class and the social mobility that going to college, and, for that matter, speaking a more standard variety of English, offered him. As DJ described it, his paternal uncles enjoy hunting and fishing, while his maternal uncles go skydiving and take Brazilian jujitsu lessons, hobbies that require significant financial resources. DJ reported that he “caught [himself] with an accent” that reminded him of his father’s brothers, and worried that people would hear him talk and would assume that he, like his uncles, liked to hunt and fish. In his description of his uncles’ lifestyle is an ideology that hunting and fishing index something about social class that DJ wanted to distance himself from. He did not want people to apply that ideology to him, so he “fought against [himself] for months until that accent was [gone.]” This decision to change his language seemed to rest almost entirely on DJ’s uptake of SLI and his reproduction of the language subordination model. DJ was understandably reticent to be associated with the ideologies that position speakers of his native dialect as “less than” speakers of standard English. When I spoke to DJ after he began college, he seemed even more sensitive to the way that his dialect had the potential to “other” him, and he expressed his distaste for SAE, saying, “It [the Southern accent] makes people sound not intelligent. Even if they are, it makes them sound not .... There’s that stigma, I guess is the word.” DJ reproduced the ideology that SAE speakers are not as intelligent as more standard speakers, and after I asked him about the role of “other people” in his associations of SAE with low intelligence, he noted that there is a “stigma” with SAE. Without being prompted, DJ attributed the perception of low intelligence not to the ideologies associated with language, or to the cultural reproductions of power, but to the dialect itself, essentially reproducing the threat in the language subordination model that non-standard

speakers will not be taken seriously.

By choosing to change his language, DJ both reproduced the negative ideology that connects SAE and low intelligence, and distanced himself as an individual from such associations. He did not question why SAE could make a speaker sound less intelligent than other varieties of English, but neither did he wholly accept that these ideologies might be applied to his speech (he had, in fact, worked quite hard to make sure they were not). DJ described his decision to change his language as a choice centering on how he wanted to be perceived and the social mobility he aspired to, and it seemed that while his plan to enroll at college influenced his choice, the actual decision was made long before he entered college.

Isabelle, on the other hand, purposefully changed her language as a strategy to help her be more successful in college. Isabelle enrolled as a nursing student her first semester, and at her institution, the first anatomy and physiology class is so difficult that it “weeds out” many students from the nursing program in their first semester. Isabelle passed the course, but it was an incredibly challenging semester for her. She did not receive a passing grade on her first paper in her writing course (she revised the paper twice and subsequently received a passing grade), and her relationship with her roommate made studying in the dorm difficult. Isabelle turned to more experienced peers in a student-run Health Professions club on campus for support. Among this group was a friend of Isabelle’s from her hometown, who was a junior nursing major at Satellite College. In my second interview with Isabelle, she noted that her friend had changed her language—a choice that Isabelle initially had reported saddened her.

However, when we met a little over two months later, after Isabelle received a grade on the revisions of her first paper, she reported making a similar choice to change her language because:

I think it’s a part of, like, being in a different location. Like you adapt to different changes and I guess that affects you personally. I think I saw her [her friend from home] once, ‘cause she’s Nursing too, and so she’s always busy studying, so I don’t know .... I don’t really use slang anymore, ‘cause I feel like it affect my writing in college, and I really can’t do that.

Isabelle, who along with DJ decided to change her language use, attributed her language change partly to her new context and partly to a change in her own development, and observed that this change affected her personally. She also noted that the choice to change her language had the

potential to affect her performance in her writing class, as she felt that her speech had the power to shape her academic writing in a negative way. While academic writing rarely (if ever) supports the use of “slang” or non-standard dialects, it is significant that Isabelle felt that her dialect was inappropriate for not just her writing class, but for the college context in which she found herself. She did not question why she felt her language was inappropriate in her new educational context. In fact, at the end of the semester, Isabelle told me that the changes she had adopted were beneficial to her as she sought help with her difficult nursing courses:

I’m actually happy that I’ve changed the way I talk. It’s like, in college, if you talk a certain way you get a lot of different treatment, I guess you could say, up here, I think the more proper you are, you’ll get recognition, like, people will communicate with you better, especially upperclassmen.

Isabelle felt that changing her language use gave her a certain amount of cultural cachet with the upperclass students in her Health Professionals student group, and in her future profession. In her description, she seemed to suggest that “proper” language offered success in college and more professional settings.

Isabelle resisted the “slang” she felt affected her academic writing, but “slang” was not the most common descriptor that students responded to. Most commonly, the students in this study resisted being considered “redneck,” and they suggested that the language of “rednecks” might trigger associations they were uncomfortable with. Instead, like Isabelle, they seemed to have a goal of being “proper,” as Aaron described:

We use, obviously, y’all or ain’t. Yeah, ain’t isn’t the proper term to use ever. Ever. Under no circumstances, I mean, we get caught up sometimes and may say it, but never ever will I use it in a paper, I will never use it in a paper, I will never use a contraction in a paper. Everything will be spelled out. Sarah: So you did pretty formal writing. Aaron: My writing is formal to the nines. Everything is going to be no contractions, no numbers are going to be spelled out if they’re less than 100, all that.

Aaron described these two seemingly non-standard words as having distinct levels of appropriateness within SAE. While Aaron suggested that *y’all* is sometimes acceptable, he rejects that *ain’t* is ever “the proper term.” Both *ain’t* and *y’all* are features of SAE, but *y’all* is a feature that SAE speakers are unlikely to shift out of in more formal spoken registers. As David West Brown argues, “Few students code-switch consistently in their speech. More code-switch



in their writing.” (111), and there is certainly evidence of this code-switching, or register-shifting, in Aaron’s description of what he considered to be appropriate language. Though Aaron rejected any contraction as “proper” for his writing, he seemed to find *ain’t* less proper than *y’all*, which suggests that he sees *ain’t* as a feature that is often considered less formal. Like other speakers, the SAE-speaking students in this study were suspicious of *ain’t*’s legitimacy as a lexical item.

Aaron’s disassociation of *ain’t* with “proper” words was similarly reflected in DJ’s comment that *y’all* and *ain’t* were words that are strongly associated with SAE. He asserted, “Y’all is like, it’s a very specific, it’s used the way it actually, like, ain’t is overused. They use it for, like, they<sup>36</sup> made the definition ‘am not,’ there’s still people that say ‘you ain’t.’ You am not?” Both DJ and Aaron explicitly commented on *y’all*’s appropriateness and *ain’t*’s inappropriateness for their writing, and both suggested that *ain’t* is never acceptable. Aaron suggested that *ain’t* was not something he used in his language (written or spoken), except when he got “caught up.” Aaron used *ain’t* several times throughout the course of our interviews, though, which suggests that he either recognized the non-standard-ness of this aspect of his dialect, or he was unaware that he used it in casual conversation. For DJ, *y’all* is a more legitimate word because the contraction makes more sense to him than the (admittedly multiple) uses of *ain’t*. In the case of both of these students, their comments on *y’all* and *ain’t* reflected an ideology that positioned some features of SAE as more appropriate than others, especially in more formal contexts, though they acknowledge that academic writing demands a more formal, “proper” kind of language. For Aaron and DJ, the “proper” quality of the second person plural pronoun *y’all* seems to rest in its appropriateness for spoken language.

For Isabelle, however, “proper” language was language that was appropriate for formal written English. She explained:

I don’t know, I think [my dialect] is probably what makes my writing kind of difficult for me in a way. I’m not very sure but that’s probably why. Sarah: How so? Isabelle: Well cause you know how everything in like an essay needs to be fully proper? Down here, I mean, hearing people talk all my life and it’s rubbin’ off on me a little bit and makes it

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<sup>36</sup> DJ went on to clarify that the “they” here was the “they” who put *ain’t* in the dictionary and specified the definition. He was not sure how, exactly, words were added to the dictionary, but he calls upon the unnamed authority of “the” dictionary’s definitional power, yet another example of the language subordination model in progress (Figure 3-1: A Model of the Language Subordination Process (Lippi-Green 68)

difficult for me. So when I talk or text it's reflecting my writing. Cause I actually want to write my paper like that.

In Isabelle's view, writing needed to be "fully proper," and SAE acted as an obstacle to her reaching that goal. It is striking, though, that she does not say that the writing needed to be correct, or error-free, as some other students noted. Instead, she described the writing as "fully proper," which has a connotation of appropriateness and perhaps even politeness in addition to being correct. David found the line between correct and proper to be a bit fuzzy, as he stumbled over his description of how people on campus expected him to talk:

He [his roommate Rob] said just a lot of things that I say are, he's never heard before, and then like he'll have other people from down here comment and like back him up saying they've never heard it before when I know for a fact they have. Sarah: Huh. And why do you think they say they haven't heard it before if they have? David: I, I guess they want to sound like educated and, not educated, like proper. I don't know. Yeah, I just, just because you say certain things doesn't mean you're not educated. I, I don't pay attention to grammar or anything like that when I talk. I really don't care about any of that.

David's defense of SAE speakers' intelligence, despite their lack of formal education, might be a factor in his description of how his fellow Southerners at college wanted to portray themselves. In his description of how speakers perceive Southern speech, David notes the explicit commentary surrounding SAE that he had encountered at Research University, and it appeared that he may have experienced some mocking. At several points throughout the study, David noted that he and his roommate ribbed one another about their speech patterns. This encounter, though, seemed to include several people (including fellow Southerners, "other people from down here") who reproduced an ideology that SAE is incomprehensible. In this moment, David resisted the ideology that positioned speakers of SAE as less intelligent, though he also resisted attaching the label of "educated" too. Instead, he used "proper," which may have felt like a more attainable descriptor. The students, therefore, distanced themselves as individuals from negative ideologies surrounding SAE, but they also demonstrated a complex reaction to the classed associations with SAE and its speakers.

## **DIFFERENTIATION ABOUT CLASS**

The students in this study used language as a means of distinguishing themselves from

cultural and class associations that they felt did not represent their lifestyles or their new roles as college students. The way the students talked about other kinds of SAE speakers is an example of *linguistic differentiation*, which Irvine and Gal describe as “the ideas with which participants frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and the differences among them, and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them” (Gal and Irvine 970). In this case, students have created their own hierarchy of dialects and speakers, which they used in the transition into college as one way to understand their new environment. In this section, I discuss the ways in which students: differentiated themselves from speakers of lower class, whom they called *rednecks*; identified most strongly with speakers of middle or lower-middle class, who they called *country*; and offered a (less well-defined) conception of *Southern* speakers that positioned these speakers as middle- or upper-middle class. I argue that this class-based differentiation is, at least in part, a way students were able to off-load the negative ideologies surrounding SAE onto other speakers.

### *Rednecks*

Both the initial survey I used to select participants and the first two interview protocols included questions that asked students whether they identified as “Southern.” While several students did identify in this way, what the students mentioned more often was the way they did *not* wish to be identified with “rednecks.” As DJ’s previous comments about his uncles’ affinity for hunting and fishing suggest, popular lifestyle activities associated with the out-of-doors were a common topic of conversation in my interviews with the students. These activities served as cultural markers, which the students used to establish their own identities and to index the ways in which their language indicated their cultural affiliations to other speakers. The students often distanced themselves from associations with activities related to the land, and from accompanying connotations with being “redneck.” While “redneck” was originally a term for subsistence farmers whose necks were literally turned red from the sun, it today evokes “a derogatory description of poor working-class whites who work in a variety of lower-class and manual occupations” (Malone). The students in this study used the term to discuss what they perceived as linguistic markers of social class, but they did not discuss the ways this term is often also a marker of race as well, so it is difficult to say if they conceptualized rednecks as being

primarily White.<sup>37</sup>

Over the past fifty years, the South has experienced a massive cultural shift as it has moved from being an agrarian society to embracing more industrial and corporate economies. The students in this study are from a textile mill village (very similar in nature and quite close geographically to the “mill hills” described by Shirley Brice Heath in *Ways With Words*). Though the mills have been closed for decades now, the textile roots remain in the community. It is not uncommon for locals to identify their family history by identifying which “mill hill” they grew up on. When the textile mills were open, they owned the churches, the schools, the baseball teams, and the homes that employees lived in. The workers shared not only their working hours, but their leisure ones as well. My father grew up on a mill hill near Upstate, and he often describes how the families in the community would even share pantries with one another, with children running between the halves of mill hill duplexes from one kitchen to the other. These communities were tightly knit by their shared work experiences and the bonds that life on a mill hill necessarily created.

The students in this study have not been raised with the same sense of community, and they look to a future where their professional lives are dependent not on cotton, but on finding a place in corporate culture. While the students in this study did work to affirm the positive ideologies associated with their home dialect, they did much more work to distance themselves from the negative ideologies that positioned them as less intelligent or well-educated than their peers in other parts of the country. Moreover, they worked to distance themselves from the elements of “redneck” subculture they did not want to be associated with. For these students, “redneck” seemed to index various aspects of ruralness and Southern culture, as well as pop culture associations that paint rural Southern life in ways that only perpetuate negative stereotypes. Because “rednecks” are portrayed as lower- or working-class, “denying an association with *redneck* characterizations and identifying as *rednecks* on one’s own terms can both be forms of resistance to marginalization (e.g. based on region, race, and class)” (Shirley 57). The students in this study only chose the former option, rejecting the idea that they might identify as “rednecks,” most likely because of their perceptions that such identifications would not be welcomed as they entered the college community.

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<sup>37</sup> The exception to this was Abigail, who suggested that rednecks were racist, but did not discuss the linguistic difference between rednecks and other speakers.

The students unanimously agreed that “redneck” was an insult, and they felt that the somewhat similar identifier “country” was not an insult. Not a single participant in this study identified as “redneck,” though they talked a great deal about rednecks as a way of differentiating themselves (and their language use), especially as they moved from the context of their local high school into the post-secondary writing classroom. The distancing students enacted to put themselves at odds with “redneck” subculture was one way that the students attempted to align themselves with the social capital they felt was likely to be highly valued in the academic writing classroom. Though they had a sense of what kinds of politeness offered them social capital, they were unsure of what kinds of rhetorical resources they might need to be successful in college writing; they only knew that “redneck” discourse would very likely not lead to success.

Using the term “redneck” as a way of differentiating themselves from the people from home who were not with them at college gave these students a way of separating themselves from the associations of rednecks that circulate in the culture. The students, therefore, created a space that established themselves as speakers who should not be mocked, and off-loaded the negative ideologies that might otherwise be applied to themselves onto “redneck” speakers, who then are “othered.” Annabelle performed this distancing move explicitly by telling me how rednecks are mocked as inbred: “And people who think of, people who think of rednecks—I saw this on Facebook—redneck murder cases are always the hardest to solve cause the DNA is always the same and there’s no teeth to identify the body. That’s what people think of rednecks.” For Annabelle, rednecks are a community of people who are worthy of being mocked, so it makes sense that she would not want to count herself among them. She did note, though, “Being redneck is the fun way of being country,” and given her own identification as “country,” this acknowledgement seems to indicate that she does not have wholly negative perceptions of rednecks. Though she indicated that being redneck is “fun,” she still reproduced ideologies of rednecks as inbred and having poor oral hygiene, which demonstrates the power of this ideology. Annabelle talked about people she knew who she considered redneck, but the belief that rednecks are toothless and inbred was not something she ever challenged in our interviews.

Like Annabelle, the students in this study distanced themselves from their peers “back home” whom they perceived as being “redneck,” and used “country” as a way to establish an identity that was still rural, and, for them, Southern, while also distancing themselves from the most

negative ideologies associated with SAE, being considered working class, and Southern culture more generally. In fact, they went out of their way to distinguish themselves as “not redneck,” though the stated reasoning for this disidentification varied from student to student. Melissa, Annabelle, David, Aaron, Austin, and Derrick all identified as “country,” and all explicitly stated that they would prefer not to be seen as hunters or fishers by their peers or instructors at college—even if, as Melissa noted was the case for her, they do hunt and fish. In part, the students may distance themselves from associations with lifestyle activities like hunting and fishing because they are reluctant to associate themselves with activities connected to the land, and the “lower class or manual occupations” they hope college will move them past.

The students frequently used language as a distinguishing feature between themselves and rednecks, which was another example of the language subordination model in action. In this move, they vilified the “redneck” speaker, and subordinated non-standard language as evidence of their lower social standing. Austin distinguished himself from rednecks by discussing his perception of how rednecks talk; as he explained:

I guess their grammar would be, you know, would just be terrible, ‘cause, you know, like the stereotype of them that most of them are very uneducated, so their grammar would be terrible. You know, they’d probably have, weird, you know, a weird lisp when they talk because their teeth would be rotted out, and, you know, all that stuff that surrounds the stereotypes.

As Austin described the “stereotypical,” toothless uneducated redneck, he acknowledged that the ideologies surrounding the language of these redneck speakers contributes to the ways they are perceived as being less intelligent than other speakers. He identified their “terrible grammar” as contributing to the perception that they are uneducated, effectively reproducing the ideology seen frequently in Preston’s research that SAE speakers are less intelligent than more standard speakers. Austin did not question the stereotypes of rednecks as less adept with StAE, and he associates their perceived poor oral hygiene with their poor grammar. Preston’s work, though, would suggest that Southern speakers see *themselves* as less correct. In this way, Austin, along with several other students in this study, complicated the data found in Preston’s research.

Derrick similarly reported his attempts to disidentify himself from the ideologies associated with SAE by placing those ideologies onto other students, then differentiating himself from them:

Some of [his classmates at UHS] have the sick, the thick Southern accents, and I’m just like,

‘Dude, you sound so country. Like, you sound so crazy...’ I’ve never really had to tell myself, ok, don’t say this this way because it’s gonna sound redneck. I just kinda talk and this is how it comes out, so...

Derrick demonstrated a keen awareness that using SAE can mark speakers in negative ways. Rather than acknowledge that his language (his accent, in particular) might “other” him, he claimed that the language choices he made would not mark him as “redneck.” Derrick did not reject the ideologies surrounding SAE by saying SAE speakers are equally intelligent as speakers from other parts of the country, but neither did he accept that such ideologies could be applied to *him*. As he rejected that these ideologies might be applied to his speech (and, by extension, to himself), he distanced himself from the peers at UHS who he deemed sounded “redneck.” As I will discuss later in greater detail, while the students in this study were wary of identifying themselves as rednecks, they had little hesitation in claiming their association with being “country.” Derrick, in the comment above, was the only student who felt that “sounding country” and being considered “redneck” might be the same thing.

The students in this study felt that “rednecks” are somehow different from themselves, and they seemed to find that “rednecks” are a group of people available for them to mock. This is certainly not an ideology that the students invented, though. The notion that “rednecks” are “easy target” for mocking circulates in the general culture, and the students reproduced the ideas they saw in popular culture representations, which likely solidified their (perhaps unconscious) decision to differentiate themselves from rednecks.

The growing attention to rednecks in popular culture is generated, at least in part, by reality TV shows. As the students described their conception of “redneck,” they referenced reality TV shows like *Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo*, *Lizard Lick Towing*, and *Duck Dynasty*.<sup>38</sup> As David noted, these shows also communicated something about the language of the speakers they showcased, which he used as a way of talking about his own language,

People can understand me really clearly compared to people down here, like the people on the shows I was talking about [*Honey Boo-Boo* and *Lizard Lick Towing*], you cannot understand them at all. They have subtitles under the screen for that reason. And, I mean,

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<sup>38</sup> These three shows represent a range of portrayals of “redneck lifestyle”—on one end of this range is *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* is a show about a poor white family in east Georgia, while on the other end of the spectrum, *Duck Dynasty* shows the lives of a wealthy family from Louisiana. While the family on *Duck Dynasty* are self-proclaimed rednecks, much of their “redneck lifestyle” was adopted around the time their show began filming, and their duck-calling manufacturing business has made them quite wealthy indeed.

there's people that go to Upstate that I can't even understand half the time.... That have to talk slow and kind of try to take the accent out of it for me to understand it.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of David's description of reality TV rednecks and the depiction of their speech is his assertion that his own dialect is incomprehensible to him. To David, the subtitles that play across the screen whenever many of the characters on these shows speak is a cue that that their language—his language—is not understandable.

This ideology, too, aligns with Lippi-Green's language subordination model, in that it marginalized SAE and its speakers, and suggests that their voices need a form of translation to even be comprehended by other speakers. It is not surprising, then, that David dissociated himself from these speakers. In his experience, rednecks are portrayed as unintelligible, and he related the portrayal of rednecks on reality TV shows to the people he knew back home in Upstate, whom he also separated himself from by noting that his speech, unlike his perception of theirs, is "understandable." David did not question the producers' choice to subtitle the characters' speech, nor did he quibble with the perception that this ideological action reproduces. David further distanced himself from portrayals of rednecks, especially those on *Honey Boo-Boo*, a reality TV show based on the lives of a rural east Georgia family not too far geographically from Upstate, SC. As David noted, the portrayals of Southerners on reality TV perpetuate negative stereotypes about Southerners more generally:

I love *Duck Dynasty*, so I'm not going to call it stupid, but like that *Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo*, that makes us all look bad .... it's perpetuating that Southerners are stupid, idiotic hillbillies. Most of us aren't. Every time I think of rednecks, I think of that show *Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo* on MTV.<sup>39</sup> No .... I mean, every time someone says, 'you're a redneck,' I'm like, 'I am not like one of those idiots off that show' .... For one, I have common sense. Two, I have a brain. Three, I can read beyond a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level .... They act like complete idiots, like they, they act like they have no common sense, and they, they can't even read words longer than four syllables. They just act like complete imbeciles .... Just because I'm from the South doesn't mean I'm stupid.

Though David noted that popular media portrayals of Southerners position them as "stupid, idiotic hillbillies" and seemed bothered by this ideology, he did not embrace that portrayal as indicative of himself. He notes that *most* Southerners aren't the "stupid, idiotic hillbillies" that

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<sup>39</sup> *Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo* airs on The Learning Channel (TLC).



the show makes them out to be, but the hedge *most* suggests that, at least in part, David reproduces this ideology. Instead of wholly agreeing that Southerners are less intelligent or well-educated than people in other parts of the country, as Preston's research suggests he might, David took these negative ideologies and applied them to one subset of Southerners—rednecks like those he saw on television. Applying those ideologies to “rednecks” allowed David to reproduce them, but only as they apply to other people (“I am not like those idiots on the show”), and gave him the space to assert his own intelligence and level of education (which he defined based on his literacy level), and his level of “common sense.” Though he commented “just because I’m from the South doesn’t mean I’m stupid,” he did not attempt to overturn the ideology that links SAE with low intelligence. Instead, he applied it to people on these shows and others of their ilk.

In contrast, Aaron, who did not describe himself as a redneck and who staunchly defended the intelligence of Southerners in the quote at the beginning of the chapter, found the characters on *Duck Dynasty* to be worthy of respect, noting that the label was something the Robertsons gave themselves:

Oh yeah, they call themselves rednecks, yeah, that’s what they call them. Sarah: Yeah. Do you think people have perceptions about them based on the way they talk? Aaron: I really wouldn’t think so because maybe when the first show started and you saw like just a bunch of, think they were just a bunch of country bumpkins, because like moonshiners and stuff like that, we give another bunch of country bumpkins some show, but no. I think now that they know the values that the Robertson Family has and the fact that they still pray after every single event... and that’s the thing, like you go ask the professing Christian of a Christian TV show what his beliefs are and then get shocked when he says them. (Aaron 5)

Aaron seemed to find the Robertsons’ outspoken faith and conservative values admirable. On the day of this interview, Pat Robertson, the family patriarch, was undergoing scrutiny for homophobic comments he made during a *GQ* interview. Aaron, a self-described conservative Christian, felt that the interviewer from *GQ* should have expected Robertson to have this viewpoint, and defended Robertson in our conversation. While he did not feel an association with the redneck persona the Robertsons portray on *Duck Dynasty*, he did find some of their lifestyle to be worthy of admiration, and he seemed to feel that the “redneck persona” was just

that—a persona. Later in that same interview, Aaron talked about the way the Robertsons dressed and behaved before their show began, and indicated that he had seen them “clean cut,” all dressed in khakis and button-up shirts in family photos on the beach, and we talked about the ways that the Robertsons capitalized on the redneck persona.

As both Aaron and David’s comments indicated, this distinction between “rednecks,” “Southern,” and “country” was one way that the students in this study distanced themselves from the negative ideologies associated with their language (and, by extension, their culture). In doing so, they neither questioned these ideologies nor attempted to upend them. Instead, they created a kind of hierarchy, where they all (except for Derrick) acknowledged their regional ties by labeling themselves “country,” but distanced themselves from the rednecks with whom they do not wish to be associated. As the students transitioned from their local high school into college, they used the hierarchy they created/reproduced to help them navigate their relationships with both their peers and instructors. The students were able to differentiate themselves from “rednecks,” and off-loaded the negative ideologies that might be associated with SAE onto these speakers instead of allowing those ideologies to be connected with them. The students in this study, therefore, may distance themselves from “redneck culture” as a means of enacting the language subordination model and acquiring the social and language and capital they feel they need to be successful.

### *Country*

Though the students aligned themselves with people who are *not* rednecks, they did not entirely distance themselves from associations that tie them more tightly to agrarian life than corporate boardrooms. They push away the “rednecks” whom they perceive as being tied to the dirt: they play in the dirt by hunting, fishing, or muddin’; they talk “dirty”; they don’t bathe enough and are therefore literally dirty. They do not, however, completely distance themselves from rural culture. Nearly all of the students identify themselves as “country,” which seems to be a middle ground between the rednecks and middle class speakers, whom they call “Southern.” For the students, being “country” is much less pejorative than being “redneck.”

Identifying as “country” gave them a way of distancing themselves from the people back home they considered “redneck”, and from classed associations of rednecks as working or lower class. For some of these students, not being portrayed as “redneck” is a way of embracing the positive ideologies associated with SAE, as Melissa explained it:

Country is like where you can talk, but you don't have to be like act like a hoodlum. I'm not saying all rednecks are hoodlams or anything, right, but I guess rednecks are kind of like always playing the mood or acting up, like don't really have manners – good manners - at all. Because I guess you can say that's the main difference; like country people actually have manners and some rednecks, like, they don't have any manners at all.

Though the ideology positioning speakers of SAE as polite and pleasant is quite popular, Melissa suggested that “country” (which is how she identified herself) people are polite and have good manners, while “redneck” people may have manners, but not good ones. In this way, Melissa distanced herself from “redneck” speakers and asserted her own politeness and good manners. Implicit in Melissa's acknowledgment that “country is like where you *can* talk” is a sense that perhaps rednecks *can't* talk, or, at least, do not talk in a way that Melissa finds appropriate. Given that her next comment addresses the ways that rednecks act like “hoodlams,” it seems that this comment is not really about ability to speak, but rather about being polite and well-mannered, about the rhetorical dimension of language where Melissa and speakers like her articulate a sense of understanding what kind of communicate is or is not appropriate given the context in which they find themselves. Melissa's description of rednecks highlights the classed understanding of “redneck” that circulates in the culture, as “*Redneck* is a gendered [often masculine], regional social type that was developed and imposed by upper-class Southerners in order to distinguish themselves from the ‘lower orders of Southern society,’ particularly in terms of ‘manners’ or ‘lifestyle’” (Shirley 37). The students in this study complicated this definition, though, in that they are not, themselves, from the “upper-class.” They do, however, consider themselves of higher class than the “rednecks” they seem around him, so they align themselves instead in a kind of middle ground, as “country people.”

The differentiation students enacted to put themselves at odds with “redneck” subculture was a way that the students attempted to align themselves with the social capital they felt was likely to be highly valued in the academic writing classroom. In some cases, the students used “redneck” as a marker of English that was inappropriate for their new educational context, as Annabelle did when she described her writing teacher's prohibition on “the pronoun shift.” Though she seemed a bit unclear how, exactly, Annabelle was to correct this issue, she felt very strongly about what she should *not* do, saying, “I can't remember, exactly, but she said it's best to stick with ‘you’ and ‘they’ or ‘you’ and ‘I’ because ‘you’ and ‘they’ just sound redneckish ....

it sounds redneckish to me.” Annabelle does not seem to have a handle on this mechanical expectation, nor is she sure why this is a “rule” (and, based on her explanation and the example I elicited from her, I’m not exactly sure what she’s attempting to correct or how), but I find it interesting that to Annabelle, not following this convention is somehow “redneckish,” something she seems determined not to evoke with her pronoun choices. Making the distinction between “redneck” and “country” allowed the students to take up the predominant negative ideologies while not applying those ideologies to themselves. In this way, calling themselves “country” allowed the students to acknowledge the most pervasive negative ideologies exist, and to acknowledge that those ideologies apply to some SAE speakers, yet deny those same ideologies apply to them.

### *Southern*

The third, and final, way that students differentiated themselves from other speakers by social class was the way that they talked about “Southern” speakers. Considering that my interview protocols directly prompted the students to talk about “Southern” speakers and speech, it is a bit surprising that students talked about “Southern” speakers less than they talked about both “country” and “redneck” speakers. In general, they considered “Southern” either to be synonymous with “country,” or to be indicative of upper- or upper-middle class speakers. Annabelle called them “preppy Southern people,” which she thought was different than “redneck people” and “country people.” Most of the students, though, seemed to find “Southern” to be a fairly similar description to “country.”

As a follow-up to his statement above about the stereotypes surrounding rednecks, Austin distinguished “Southern” and “redneck” by claiming, “I guess redneck is more of a stereotype that you would associate with, like, someone who lives in a trailer park and carries a shotgun, you know? Whereas, a Southern person, you would just specify they were born in the South. It’s no stereotype.” Austin’s distinction between “redneck” and “Southern” is not explicitly about language, but it reveals the assumptions about *class* that the participants associated with “rednecks.” Here, Austin states that he associates “rednecks” with not only people who have “uneducated” grammar and poor oral health, but also with people who live in trailer parks, a description sometimes used to describe lower class people. Austin denies that these perceptions that mark class are applied to “Southerners” (“it’s no stereotype”), which implies that being “Southern” is unmarked. Abigail also distinguished “redneck” as more marked by saying, “I

guess everyone [near Upstate] would be country, but redneck would be the stronger kind and Southern would be everyone else,” and went on to clarify that being called a redneck would be an insult. Like Austin, Abigail finds “Southern” to be less marked than country, though she distinguished both redneck and Southern from “country” by suggesting that “country” is the “default,” and redneck and Southern represent varying degrees of “countryness” that speakers might encounter.

Other students indicated that being considered polite, friendly, or pleasant was something they found to be a positive element of being a SAE speaker, though none of them associated being impolite with being a “redneck,” as Melissa did. David talked about how Southerners are “more friendly, more informal, you can just make friends a lot easier down here;” Abigail gave a description of the limits of Southern politeness, “Southerners are really sweet and kind, until you make them mad. Then just run.” Aaron talked about how polite speech gave him ways of dealing respectfully with other people at school or at work. A couple of students, as Abigail did, noted the indirectness or passive aggression that sometimes run under the surface of polite speech in the South. Aaron also did this when he noted how his boss taught him how to manage difficult customers, “You also have the right to tactfulness, too. Winston Churchill described tactfulness as telling somebody to go to hell so well that they would look forward to the journey,” citing his own “tactfulness” as an essential skill in his job as a manager at a local fast-food restaurant.

Though Lippi-Green’s model would suggest that these mentions of the politeness and sweetness of SAE speakers are an example of trivializing students’ home dialect, their reaction did not seem to be quite that simple. Far from trivializing their home language, the students’ descriptions seem instead to point to the relational benefits that the ideologies of being polite, pleasant, and friendly offer them. For David, being a speaker of SAE makes it easier for him to make friends “away” from home in his first few weeks of college, while for Aaron, these associations give him a way to deal with difficult diners without offending them. Melissa suggested that using “good manners” in her speech allowed her to disassociate herself from “rednecks,” ostensibly so she isn’t perceived as “[acting] like a hoodlam.” These benefits, to the students, are not trivial. In fact, in all four cases, the ideologies of politeness and pleasantness offered the students social capital (and, in Aaron’s case, literal financial capital, as they contributed to his success at work) they find valuable. At the same time, though, none of the

students offered an example of a time when they felt their home dialect or any of the ideologies associated with it offered them any social capital or rhetorical resources in the context of their new academic environment.

## **DIFFERENTIATION OF PLACE**

Another way some of these students (re)produced language ideologies was to differentiate their community at home from the new environment they found themselves in at college. They distanced themselves from the predominant ideologies associated with their dialect, and particularly from associations with Upstate and with “home” and the SAE speakers at home who did not attend college. This move seemed to be connected with their transition into college, as the primary comparison they made was with people they met at college whom they perceived as not being from the South. For students in this study, going to college brought them into contact with speakers from places all over the world. This experience was obviously salient for them, as they talked to me often about all the places their new classmates were from. After the first week of classes, Aaron told me that most of the students at his community college were from other places. He told me about walking through the student parking lot and his sense that most of the students came from other states because he saw so many out-of-state license plates. Aaron’s perception was that his fellow students at college were a vastly different population than the people he knew at home, despite the fact that his institution currently enrolls less than five percent out-of-state students. David similarly felt that many of his new peers at college came from other places, a perception that was only solidified by his experiences living in the dorms at Research University with what he described as “two Jersey boys and a guy from China.” For David, distancing himself from the rednecks back home was important to him because it contributed to his ability to socialize in the dorms at college.

And like down there... You would think with it being even farther south than here, like geographically, you would think there would be like even more like actual rednecks or hillbillies or whatever. No. Half the people in that school are from like New Jersey or Ohio, which I mean I don’t have a problem with them. They just, I don’t think they’re used to seeing anyone from the south and seeing just me, they get scared. I got my best friend to come down. He scared the living daylights out of them. He walked in and all I heard was “Howdy” and then, and then everybody in the room, they’re just like, “Oh dear God. Please tell me he’s not as bad as you” and he walked in like complete camo, just to,

just to mess with them. I told him, I told him “When you come down, just make, make sure you, make sure you make an entrance.” I didn’t think he was going to do something like that.

In this moment, David not only pushed back against the perceptions of Southerners in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, but he also revealed again his perception that being from his hometown is somehow scary or even threatening to outsiders. David’s gleeful description of his friend’s visit as “scaring the living daylight” out of his suitemates suggests that David found some pleasure in being considered “not as bad” as his friends from home or as the rednecks he saw portrayed on television.

At a large research university, David felt the keen differences between speakers at home and speakers at college primarily because of the experiences he had with his roommate Rob from New Jersey. When I asked David what his roommate thought of his new setting, David said, “that we all sound like backwoods rednecks...I’m one of the few that doesn’t sound like a backwoods redneck. I just sound country. I guess. He said that he can actually understand me, versus some of the people here that he can’t....so I guess I’m a step up.” Here, David expressed pride in not sounding like the rest of his Southern peers. Central to David’s move to distance himself from his peers was, again, his resistance to being characterized as a “backwoods redneck.” In transition to college, being able to contrast his language to the people he knows “back home” allowed him to push back against the associations of “backwoods rednecks” he believed he will otherwise be lumped into. David resisted the predominant ideologies by labeling himself as “one of the few” whose speech allowed him to be “a step up,” but the fact that he characterizes some speakers as being a step up from other speakers demonstrated the ways in which he also reproduced the most common negative ideologies associated with SAE.

David, like several other students in the study, adopted the negative ideologies associated with SAE, but, as they did with the ideologies connected with rednecks, only reproduced those ideologies as they applied to *other* people back home. These students compared their own language use to that of their peers or family at Upstate, apparently in an effort to distinguish themselves as speakers for whom these negative associations simply don’t apply. Sometimes, this took the form of a general distancing of themselves from others, as Abigail did when she described her own speech to me by contrasting herself with her peers: “I mean, if I can understand you, I’m good. I mean, there’s some people that have a really strong Southern accent,

you know. It's like, can you slow down, talk normally?"

Abigail's claim that some Southern speakers are not understandable was not unique to her—several students at various points in the study claimed that their Southern peers' speech was not understandable, a characterization that I honestly found a bit baffling at first. They seemed to communicate just fine with their classmates, which seemed to belie their claim that the speech that surrounded them on all sides was incomprehensible. As students described this more, I found that their claim that their peers' SAE was not understandable seemed to stem from a need to distinguish themselves as speakers, as Austin did when he described his peer Jennifer to me:

There's this girl at my school. Her name is Jennifer, and she is the stereotypical Southern accent ... it is terrible. Like, you can't understand what she's saying half the time .... [describes Jennifer as being from Alabama or Georgia] in South Carolina, I don't really hear much of a difference when someone from up North comes up here. I don't really hear much of a difference. But talk to someone from Georgia or somewhere like that and it's instantly recognizable.

Austin's assertion that the variety of English spoken in Georgia is strikingly different than the English spoken in Upstate, South Carolina, is interesting because Austin seems to be attempting to align himself (along with his "native" Upstate peers) with the Northern speech he felt was no different than his own, and was, presumably, not "terrible," as is Jennifer's. Even in declaring her accent "terrible" rather than a less loaded description like "strong," Austin pushed Jennifer and her speech into a different ideological category than his own. In this way, he claimed a kind of authority—his language is understandable, and, therefore, better than Jennifer's.

Still other students used their own geographical histories as a means of distancing themselves from the perceptions associated with being redneck. David, who lived in North Carolina for a short while when he was in preschool, points out to people that he is not actually from Upstate, mostly because, in his words,

Even just the state of South Carolina, Upstate has a bad reputation for rednecks. And for like crazy people. Upstate has a bad reputation of that. Like if I would tell someone that's from South Carolina, 'Oh, I graduated from Upstate,' there's... they look at me for a second, like shy away from me. And I'm just like, 'Don't worry, I moved there. It's okay.' I mean I'm not ashamed of, I'm not ashamed of being from here. It's just you get a lot of people from here and they're crazy. In order to not scare somebody, 'It's okay. I



wasn't born there.'

David's need to soothe his interlocutors by reassuring them that he's not *really* from Upstate suggests that he may have felt that he could reject the associations of himself with his hometown. In front of his peers (and perhaps his instructors) at Research University, David felt that being considered a "redneck" could negatively affect his experience enough that he felt it was important to distinguish himself.

Like Aaron, David remarked that SAE should not index speakers as uneducated ("Just because you say certain things doesn't mean you're not educated. I don't pay attention to grammar or anything like that when I talk"), recognizing that his language may cause him to be perceived as "not educated," but also that his grammar<sup>40</sup> may have contributed to that perception. At the same time, though, he resisted the notion that his language is in some way inadequate. In our final interview together, David again asserted that the perception that speakers of SAE lack intelligence exists but is not something he identifies with:

Well, some people, they think that just because you're Southern, you have no intelligence whatsoever. That's not true. A lot of us are somewhat smart, at least, have some type of brain—book smart, or common sense—whatever the case may be. My dad—like for example—my dad, he wasn't very book smart. My mom, she wasn't very book smart. But they both have a lot of common sense. Me, I have common sense, but not as much as they do. I got a little more book smart than they got. I mean, my mom never even finished high school or middle school.

David's resistance to the ideologies connected with intelligence may, in part, be a form of protectiveness for his parents, neither of whom finished high school. But there seems to be more going on in his resistance to the ideologies associated with SAE. David asserts the intelligence valued in his home community, that of "common sense" is, in fact, a kind of "smarts" that he finds valuable and worthy of respect. As with David's comments above about the friendliness of SAE speakers, he notes the value of the smarts his parents have, even if that kind of intelligence is not highly valued in college. David, like several of the other students in this study, seemed to be negotiating a complex tension. In his new context at college, he sensed the need to resist being lumped in with the "rednecks" from his hometown, but he also felt protective of his

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<sup>40</sup> It's worth noting that the participants seemed to have a fairly slippery definition of *grammar*, though most of them seemed to associate the term with the conventions of StAE.

parents back home in Upstate. As the next chapter will demonstrate, David's attempts to use the kind of "smarts" from home at college were not met with approval.<sup>41</sup>

## WRITING PROPER ENGLISH

In their efforts to access the social capital of college, the students embraced, at least in part, the positive ideologies associated with SAE. Though they talked, to some extent, about their politeness and "tactfulness," more often they asserted that they were or talked "proper," which is highly valued in Southern culture, where there is emphasis on appropriate deportment and cultural norms. When the students discussed being or talking proper, they seem to mean that the speech and way of being they aspire to is at once rhetorically appropriate, correct, and polite. In some cases, "proper" may also carry connotations of formality as well. For these students, "proper" seems to be the opposite of "redneck" in terms of its acceptability. They strove to be proper, perhaps because it allowed them to keep the positive associations of SAE while conforming to the linguistic expectations in their new educational context. Because "proper" language also carries connotations of appropriateness, "proper" seemed to feel like a good choice for college. Melissa noted that her professors' proper behavior may make it difficult for them to interact with their redneck students:

Well, I guess like if you're like really proper and like say you're a college professor whatever, and you're talking to like a redneck, you're probably going to be like, what did he say? Like that's not the proper word, like, I guess you'd kind of look down; you'd be like yeah, if you don't have good education, or whatever, Yeah. So I guess it would be the education thing.

The students did not necessarily say they strive to be correct, which is what might be expected given the course expectations they are navigating through their transition into college. Instead, they seemed to want to be perceived as "proper," but they also seemed to be aware that their speech marks them as "other," suggesting that they may apply the ideologies circulating about their spoken language to their written language. As in Isabelle's earlier description of her spoken language "rubbing off" on her formal written language, several of the students in this study explained their perceptions of the connection between their spoken language and the English they were expected to produce in their academic writing courses. Isabelle felt that her spoken

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<sup>41</sup> It is likely that some of David's resistance sprang out of his position as both a first-year college student and out of the complex position he negotiated as a first-generation college student as well.

language affected the correctness of her written prose:

A lot of friends I've met from up North, their papers are error-free the first time, and from down here, since you're used to talking a certain way, it affects your paper a lot. It's not the English standard or the MLA format I guess you would say, for the writing and quoting.

In comparison to her Northern classmates, Isabelle felt that she came into the first semester of writing in college with a deficit caused by her spoken dialect. David similarly expressed concern that his Northern counterparts had a “leg up” on him when it came to producing “error-free” prose. His roommate from New Jersey tested out of first year composition, which David attributed to Rob’s more thorough preparation in high school and the fact that Rob’s language was more standard before he arrived at college.<sup>42</sup>

DJ, on the other hand, did not express concern about the connection between his spoken and written registers. Given DJ’s choice to change his language, this is not entirely surprising. Instead of being focused on how his native dialect proved a barrier in formal academic writing, DJ uses written English as inspiration and instruction on how to speak, explaining “I feel like it’s like not having as much of an accent sounds like you’re just more close to the standard English, like, everywhere has an accent so it’s hard to pick a place. Almost none of them pronounce the words like they’re spelt.” DJ went on to tell me that he aspires to the kind of English “that’s like become prevalent, where there’s no accent at all .... like they kinda go like how English looks, the way it looks, like how they pronounce it. Yeah, like the way you see it [on the page] is like how they’re saying it.” As DJ describes the accent he aspired to, he referenced written edited English as its source, mirroring the language of Lippi-Green’s definition of SLI, which states that SLI “names as its source the written language, but is in fact based on the spoken language of the middle class.” DJ’s privileging of written English as the “correct” language suggests that he has created a language hierarchy, where written English is granted a higher status than spoken language—a hierarchy where no speaker can meet the “standard,” given the history of spelling standardization in the English language. Other students, like Abigail, argued that written language offered other benefits over spoken language, asserting, “I think you’re more active thinking when you’re writing than when you’re talking,” which again privileges the written

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<sup>42</sup> In-depth explorations of the conflation of spoken and written registers of English, and of the ideology of “MLA” as “Standard English” are found in Chapters 4 and 5.

language over spoken dialects.

When the students in this study asserted the value of written StAE over their spoken language, they demonstrated almost no resistance to the ideology that suggests StAE is better than SAE. However, given that all of the students in this study chose to attend college, and given the ways that they see acquiring StAE as a means of accomplishing their personal and academic goals, it is not entirely surprising to see them making this move.

## CONCLUSION

The ideologies associated with SAE are complex, and, at first glance, might seem conflicting. Speakers of SAE are considered less intelligent, but more polite and pleasant than speakers of more standard varieties, and Preston's research suggests they may denigrate the correctness of their own language. However, the students in this study complicate this understanding of the ideologies surrounding SAE. Rather than denigrating their own language, they distance themselves as speakers from the associations that would mark them as "other" in college. For most of the participants in this study, this took the form of using the social categories of "rednecks," "country people," and "Southerners" to linguistically differentiate themselves from the negative ideologies that had the power to position them in ways they found less preferable. Instead of embracing the negative ideologies that might otherwise be applied to their speech, the students resisted by changing (or attempting to change) their language, and by differentiating themselves from speakers whom they perceived as being of lower social class than themselves.

Though "redneck" is a broad term and has been shaped by popular culture and mass media representations, the students also used this term to denote a group of people who they felt were less intelligent or sophisticated than themselves and applied the negative ideologies associated with SAE to "those people," rather than to their own language use. In the transition to college, distancing themselves from "rednecks" and off-loading the negative ideologies associated with SAE onto those speakers allowed the students to assert their own adherence to SLI, even though doing so meant that these students reproduced negative ideologies and enacted the language subordination model on their fellow speakers of SAE. That the students distance themselves from the negative ideologies by creating their own hierarchy of dialects, which they as individuals ranked between speakers of StAE and "redneck" English complicates Preston's findings and Lippi-Green's model, which both suggest that speakers might instead denigrate

their own language.

As these students enter college, they use the hierarchy of dialects they have created in an attempt to understand their own place in their new educational contexts. However, because the ideologies surrounding StAE (and, as Chapters 4 and 5 will discuss, rhetorically effective academic writing) students are navigating remain unspoken, unquestioned, and uncriticized, they lack the necessary background to upend these ideologies. Though they are able to find relational benefits in being polite and pleasant, they feel their dialect places them at a disadvantage in the academic writing classroom.

## CHAPTER 4: “THAT’S ME, I’M SHORT, SWEET, AND TO THE POINT”: RHETORICAL IDEOLOGIES IN THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE WRITING

*Papers I’m arguing, I can do that. Like trying to argue why this is better or something like that. I can do that. But just a research analysis? That one looks like a fourth grader wrote it. And he [college writing instructor] actually told me that one time .... He said, “Your writing style on this second paper is that of a nine year old.” .... He said it was just that I was pretty much repeating myself over and over again to try to make the page requirement. .... I still have to like come up with something kind of filler kind of stupid to make it. It’s not that I have enough time coming up... or a hard time coming up with enough argument. It’s that I have a hard time stretching it out that long. ‘Cause me, I’m short, sweet and to the point.*  
-David

### INTRODUCTION

When this study began, I expected to find students expressing insecurity about the level of their adherence to the norms and conventions of Standard American English (StAE). I thought I would hear students express anxiety about writing with “correct” grammar, or to find that their instructors commented on their language or corrected their speech. After all, Southern American English (SAE) is ideologically connected to both perceived correctness and perceived education level (Preston; Bernstein; Lippi-Green), and the transition to college is an important educational moment that sees rural Southern students leaving the familiar context of the local high school and entering the unfamiliar settings of higher education (Pennington; Heath, *Words at Work and Play*). While some students, as explored in the previous chapter, do feel linguistic insecurity about the correctness in their academic writing, as David’s comment above demonstrates, the students in this study experienced more anxiety about the effects of the rhetorical ideologies that surrounded their language and communication practices. For these students, what was perhaps more visible or obvious to them in their transition was that the rhetorical strategies they had previously been taught were effective were not well regarded in the academic writing classroom. In this case, David’s strategy of writing “short, sweet, and to the point,” was denigrated by his writing instructor as childish.

*Rhetorical ideologies*, which I have adopted as a term because of the phenomenon’s

parallel nature with *language ideologies* in this study, can be defined as the beliefs, attitudes, and judgments that speakers hold about which rhetorical strategies are effective or ineffective for a given audience and purpose. Like language ideologies, ideologies about rhetoric gain much of their power from their “commonsense” nature, which typically leads them to go unquestioned. The students in this study found themselves negotiating conflicting ideologies about what is rhetorically effective in writing. In this conflict, the students asserted the effectiveness of the rhetorical strategies they learned in their local communities as they struggled to understand what their writing instructors considered rhetorically effective in academic discourses. In the crucial moment of the transition from high school to college writing, the students in this study found themselves not only dealing with the ideologies associated with their language, but also how they communicate and engage with argumentation. In this chapter, I argue that the competing ideologies surrounding students’ rhetorical practices and strategies posed difficulties for them as they navigated the transition to college writing. In particular, these students perceived comments that they wrote “too simple” or that their writing was not complex enough as conflicting with their identities and with rhetorical strategies of writing (and being) “short, sweet, and to the point,” and of being “simple,” which are highly valued resources in their home communities.

Given that the students located both their primary linguistic and their primary rhetorical practice in the local community where they went to high school and in their families, both the linguistic and rhetorical practices are closely tied to students’ identities. Language is one way that people understand who they are, and it is something they use to perform that understanding in front of others (Ochs). As Rosina Lippi-Green claims, “Language, a possession that all human collectives have in common, is more than a tool for communication of facts between two or more persons. It is the most salient way we have of establishing and advertising our social identities” (5). In this way, language functions as a rhetorical tool, where speakers can lean on its social affordances as a means of connecting with various audiences. Language ideologies play a role in this performance of identity, as they affect speakers’ understandings of themselves and other people. The connection between language and identity is most salient when speakers encounter one another, though language ideologies are also at play as speakers encounter one another’s writing, as the students in this study experienced. Writing, too, is always ideological, as are rhetorical practices, which necessitate language for communication (Berlin 488). As these students moved into college writing classrooms, they found their rhetorical strategies and

practices, which had previously been successful, were not valued in the academy as a whole and in the writing classroom in particular. In fact, the rhetorical ideologies that students navigated suggested these students are ill-educated, stupid, or simple-minded, all associations that are in contrast to the educated, literate learner FYC seeks to produce.

As the previous chapter explored, students distanced themselves from the negative ideologies associated with their home dialects by ascribing those ideological connections to “other people” (usually peers at home, or peers who chose not to enroll in college). The students had a similar reaction to the ideologies surrounding their rhetorical practices and strategies, in that they both embraced and resisted certain aspects of these ideologies. However, students’ reactions to the rhetorical ideologies differed from their responses to the language ideologies that circulate around their communicative practices. With the rhetorical ideologies, the students relied heavily on their locally-valued practices and strategies, even when these practices and strategies proved less effective in their new educational contexts. The students in this study at once took up and rejected the ideologies associated with the academic strategies and practices that were highly valued in their post-secondary educational contexts. For these students, the positive ideologies associated with their rhetorical practices primarily centered on being direct communicators, while the negative ideologies connected to being simple-minded or overly simplistic in their arguments.

### **THE RHETORIC OF “SHORT, SWEET, AND TO THE POINT”**

The students in this study referred frequently to the notions of effective rhetorical practice that they brought with them. They also had (or, in some cases, developed) a keen notion that these practices were not valued by their peers and/or their college-writing instructors. For these students, the rhetorical practices they developed at home are tightly connected to their home language practices, and to the ideologies that accompany that language. In his first peer review experience at the collegiate level, David, who attended a large research university, found that the communication style he learned at home marked him as “other” in his FYC course:

She [peer reviewer] said that I wrote like a Southern hillbilly hick....I really don’t, though. I don’t talk like one either. Well, sometimes I do, but apparently around here I’m the hillbilly hick of the school, or the hillbilly hick of my floor, because everyone from my floor is from up north, or they’re international. They’ve never seen me write, like, my friends on the floor haven’t seen my writing, but they’ve heard how I talk and they think I



sound like I'm straight out of the woods, that I just got back from a hunting trip or something. It's not true, I hate being in the woods. [His peer reviewer] said I wrote simple, too simplistic, like a hick trying to get his point across. I got pissed.

While the label “Southern hillbilly hick” may seem unusually mean or shocking, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, such descriptions are commonly ideologically associated with Southern speakers like David and his peers from Upstate High School. The other students in this study were very aware that such labels might be similarly applied to them, and as David demonstrates, they realized these associations might also be applied to their academic writing. Many of the students resisted being labeled as “hillbilly,” “hick,” or “redneck,” as David does (at least in part) here. These ideologies are pervasive and deeply personal, and as the students in this study suggest, are not only connected to the language they use to communicate but also to the ways they communicate. In this quote, David's anger over his peer's comments is clear and understandable. Her feedback was offensive and not constructive. Moreover, her comments reproduce an ideology that positions David and other speakers of SAE as less intelligent and less competent at communicating ideas than their peers from other parts of the country. When David perceived his peer's response to his writing as suggesting there was a connection between being a “Southern hillbilly hick” and “writing simple,” she connected Southern (and “hillbilly hick”) identity to a particular kind of rhetoric, and she implied that this form of communication is not valued in the academy as a whole and in the academic writing classroom in particular.

More significantly, David's peer demonstrated how the ideologies associated with speakers of SAE may influence their experiences in college writing beyond their language choices. For David, and several of the other students in this study, the ideologies associated with their language were similarly attributed to their rhetorical strategies and practices. The students in this study asserted that the rhetorical strategies and practices they acquired in their local markets of home and their high school were strategies they expected to be similarly valued in the context of their college writing courses. For these students, writing “simple” or being “short, sweet, and to the point” in their written arguments was a desirable trait, and these strategies were associated with their identities and their linguistic practices.

While many first-year undergraduates, regardless of their background, similarly experience difficulty fleshing out their arguments to their instructor's satisfaction, it is significant to note that the rural Southern students in this study *perceived* this feedback as being in conflict

with their linguistic identities and the rhetorical practices that are privileged in their home communities, and with the ideologies associated with those identities. From the writing instructor's perspective, "writing simple" or being "short, sweet, and to the point," may be more closely associated with the stage of writing development most students are engaging in as they transition from high school to college, but to the students, these elements are deeply meaningful as resources that have proven successful in the past and as strategies they have been taught by parents and teachers from their high schools, whom they trust. In the discussion that follows, I do not argue that the rhetorical strategies the students describe are limited to Southern students or to speakers of SAE. In fact, there is much in this discussion that applies to rural students more generally and perhaps to first-year students across socio-economic and geographic backgrounds. However, the students in this study believed that their writing teachers perceived these rhetorical strategies as being connected to the students' home identities, just as the students themselves perceived the connection between writing and speaking as bringing the ideologies associated with their spoken language to bear on their written academic English.

The students in this study expressed pride in the positive associations with their language (primarily being considered polite, pleasant, or friendly), and they also asserted their preference for the "simple" style they learned to make arguments with in their home communities. Though David, in his retelling of his peer's reaction to his writing, expressed his displeasure at being called "simple," in other moments throughout his transition he embraced similar descriptions of being "short, sweet, and to the point" and giving a "straight-up answer" in his writing as something he valued from his home community. While his peer considered "simple" writing to be indicative of a "hick" or someone who is simple-minded, David considered such communication to be effective due to its straight-forwardness, a value shared by several of his fellow participants. He made the distinction between being called "simple" in a pejorative sense and being straightforward or direct, which he considered an asset in argumentation. Annabelle, Derrick, and Aaron similarly felt that the conventions of academic discourse as required in their college writing classes asked them to "beat around the bush." They found the rhetorical strategy of being "short, sweet, and to the point," on the other hand, to be more effective, primarily because they believed it to appeal to their audience, but also because they felt more direct arguments were more persuasive.

## POLITENESS AND LOCAL RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

The students in this study took up the positive language ideologies that characterized them as more polite and pleasant than their peers in other regions of the country, and they also asserted that their rhetorical strategies were more polite than the strategies and practices their college writing instructors recommended. Typically, Southern politeness is described in terms of the indirectness of Southern speech and conversation patterns. In their book *Understanding English Language Variation in U.S. Schools*, Charity Hudley and Christine Mallinson discuss such politeness strategies as a potential source of conflicting values for teachers (especially non-Southern teachers) and Southern students, claiming,

Southerners are often viewed as being indirect in conversations, which, in many ways, is linked to perceptions of politeness. Southerners may find direct requests to be jarring or rude. As a result, Southern English speakers may go out of their way to formulate indirect requests that include hedges or mitigations, often because they do not want to burden another person. (63)

Hudley and Mallinson go on to suggest that Southern students' feelings may be hurt by requests that they be more direct in their communication, and that teachers should be sensitive to such reactions. This description of politeness norms in Southern conversation offers one way that Southern speakers attempt to use their home language patterns to communicate, and it is certainly the way that Southern politeness is most often depicted.

However, the students in this study offered a different, and in some ways, conflicting narrative about what they consider polite to their audiences, especially in their academic writing. As these students described it, directness is preferable to indirectness (or, as the students perceive it, longwindedness) because it attends to their teachers' desire to be finished reading their paper. In the students' minds, their instructor did not want to spend unnecessary time grading their papers, so shorter arguments were a considerate gesture. This concern seemed born out of their understanding that their high school English teachers' ability to give written feedback was constrained by large classes and limited time for grading. Austin, for example, acknowledged that his high school teacher had such logistical limitations, a fact his high school English teacher shared with him to explain why their English papers should never exceed the length requirements set out in the assignment. Part of this concern may be driven by the personal relationships that students had with the local high school English teachers. Rather than these teachers merely

occupying their vocational role in students' lives, they also interacted with students in the context of the local community. The students described their teachers as the parents of their close friends, members of their local churches, and close friends with their own parents. These close relationships contributed to students' careful consideration of their teachers' needs and the demands of grading over 80 essays for each assignment. Still, the students' concern might seem primarily self-interested, in that they seemed careful not to write long papers as part of a plan to get better grades. As Austin transitioned into college writing, he worried that his attempts to meet the length requirements set out by his college instructor only "annoyed" his instructor (who he identified as his primary audience), especially given that his high school teacher preferred that students not write papers that were too "wordy."

This form of politeness is a rhetorical strategy that is not typically associated with Southern students, and represents a set of values that college writing instructors do not seem to be considering as beliefs students bring with them from their local communities. While it is not uncommon for first-year writers to see their individual instructor as their sole intended audience (Thaiss and Zawacki), the rhetorical sensitivity these students showed to their audience indicates that they are not simply uncritically reproducing what they have been taught to write. Instead, these students carefully considered what they believe their audience would value and attempted to produce texts that met their perceptions of their instructors' desires. For example, David expressed concern that writing that was not "short, sweet, and to the point" was rude:

I feel like longer arguments, people just want to tell you to shut up .... to me, if someone's arguing something, and they keep on and on about it, I don't want to hear it. I'm leaving .... it's less time-consuming, less stressful, and probably doesn't get on people's nerves as bad. There may be some advantage to the long, drawn-out arguments, but I got stuff to do. I don't want to hear it.

In David's experience, shorter arguments are preferable because they take less time for the audience, a trait he feels won't "get on people's nerves as bad." David noted that the shorter arguments attended to the reader's time constraints, which is one way he believes that such arguments are more effective, but he also observed that the advantages to the "long, drawn-out arguments" do not outweigh what he found effective about the kinds of arguments he preferred. Though David recognized that "long, drawn-out arguments" may have offered something that his shorter arguments did not, he was unwilling to give up the style of writing he learned was most

effective in his home community.

Likewise, Derrick noted that his preference is for shorter arguments, though he recognized that his college writing instructor preferred a longer paper:

I think that they [writing teachers] just try to get more material. Like they just want a big chunk of material that they can look at and, like, maybe it's easier to grade it if it's a big chunk of work that they can go through and find all the good things about it and then all the bad things, and it like maybe evens out the grade a little more, but I don't understand the need for an exact number of words. Like, that just seems mysterious to me.

Derrick's preference for a shorter argument, as he described it to me, at least, is almost entirely based on his understanding of what his audience wants, though he seemed to base his idea of his audience on the needs of his high school English teacher. Though Derrick realized that his college instructor had different needs and may have had a specific reason for requiring "longer" arguments, he did not seem to realize that the kind of argumentation his instructor called for is different in its scope and complexity than the kind of argument he learned to write before coming to college. In his attempt to give his instructor "enough" to grade, Derrick missed what his instructor actually seems to want, and in so doing, misunderstood the conventions of academic discourse that FYC calls on him to produce. None of the students in this study acknowledged that a more complex, nuanced style of argumentation might better meet the demands of college writing, though they did realize that their "simple" writing was dispreferred by their audience.

While the students suggested a "longer" form of argumentation was located firmly in the context of their college writing classes, they situated their "short, sweet, and to the point" writing as a rhetorical practice they brought with them from their home communities. Several of the students talked about how they have been taught this rhetorical strategy by their parents and/or their high school English teachers. As such, this practice was highly valued by students as a form of local capital they brought with them from home into the college writing classroom. Writing "short, sweet, and to the point" was rewarded in their local communities. Students felt successful in the arguments they made in high school, and they articulated a fairly sophisticated rhetorical concept of audience. However, the competing advice they received from their high school teachers and their college-writing instructors proved frustrating for them. As the students discovered throughout their first semester, their college instructors expected a different kind of argumentation than their high school teachers had previously required of them. Aaron noted,

He [college writing instructor] wants you to fully develop your point. Well I did. I told you what I meant. I don't know how to develop it any more than that. Unless you want to approach the topic, talk about how the topic could relate to something else and then say this is what this is. But, even then, it just seems like it's too late. Like Ms. Jones [high school teacher] always says, never use you's, always talk in active voice. But in active voice, there's not really much room for all that other stuff. So I just don't even know what to do with his class.

Here, Aaron reported that he attempted to use the lessons that his high school teachers taught him—valuing “short, sweet, and to the point,” and “active voice,” which seems to indicate a form of direct communication rather than a form of syntactic structure. Aaron found that Ms. Smith's advice was contradictory to the expectations of his college writing instructor. While it may seem that Aaron's confusion sprung from a lack of sophistication as a college writer, he was actually indicating a degree of knowledge transfer through his confusion over what his instructor wants from his papers. He saw an element of writing he learned in high school that he believed ought to apply to his college writing course, so he picked up the advice of both his 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade English teachers, and uses that advice to write what he believed would be a successful paper. While it is not clear exactly how Aaron's understanding of “active voice” left no room for the depth or analysis his college instructor required, it is obvious in this moment that Aaron struggled to connect what his high school English teacher told him was valued in writing to what his writing teacher expected him to accept was effective.

This complicated reaction to the new expectations of college writing highlights the difficulty of this transition, especially for students whose rhetorical practices and linguistic identities differ from the expected conventions of academic English. When these conventions of academic discourses are not made explicit to students, as was the case with the students in this study, the transition to college writing can be made even more difficult.

## **SPOKEN AND WRITTEN REGISTERS**

The students in this study frequently conflated the registers of spoken and written English, perceiving that their written academic English was rooted in their spoken language and that a rhetorical strategy effective in spoken English would prove similarly effective in their academic writing. Such a move is not uncommon, as written academic English is, after all, the same language and is in fact based on spoken English. However, as speakers of a non-standard dialect,

these students were aware that their spoken English is not acceptable in the academic writing classroom, an understanding they perceived as being true of both their spoken and their written forms of communication. The students seemed especially aware of the values mismatch between their rhetorical practices and those valued by the academic writing classroom after they received their first graded paper, but their home strategies had previously proven so effective and were so tightly connected to students' home discourses and identities that they were loathe to abandon them, though the students acknowledged that maintaining their home discourses was met with less success in the academic writing classroom. Several of the students argued for the superiority of the "short, sweet, and to the point" communication they found in their spoken register. Aaron, who had previously made similar points, as quoted above, made it very obvious that he saw little difference in the kinds of communication that are effective in speech and the kinds of communication that are effective in writing; he asserted:

It's not like I don't know what to do with this, well, I don't know what to do with him. I know how to write, it's just frustrating that I don't, like, Ms. Jones, she said, don't make your papers work. Get to the point of what you're saying. If you're going to say this is what this meant, say, 'This is what I meant.' Don't try to make it fancy. He [college writing instructor] doesn't like that. He wants a three-page paper when I can do it in a page-and-a-half. So, yes, grammatically, it's probably not going to be as good, because I was taught to make it to the point, and now I have to fill it. It's not vocal filler, but it is written filler. I have to go write filler now. Because I can get to the point and I don't sugarcoat things. I just say what I mean to say. That's why I don't like politicians, just say what you mean.

As Aaron described his preference for his "unsugar-coated" writing, he slipped between using terminology associated with written registers ("I have to go write filler now") and language associated with spoken registers ("I just say what I mean to say," "That's why I don't like politicians, just say what you mean"). Though many students (and teachers) might describe their writing using the terminology of spoken registers ("Get to the point of what you're saying"), the students in this study also discussed the two registers as if they were the same mode of communication with identical sets of rhetorically-effective practices. Even his description of his high school teacher, Ms. Jones, and her directions for writing academic essays makes it unclear if Aaron saw the distinction between how spoken and written registers of English "get to the

point.” For Aaron, the lack of clarity here regarding the expectations of academic written prose was frustrating. He noted the advice of his high school teacher and implied that he deeply valued this advice and carefully followed it, but also that his writing instructor didn’t “like” it.

Aaron did not seem to clearly understand that academic writing is doing something different than spoken language. Though he followed his high school teacher’s advice about the more direct style valued in his local high school, he did not similarly internalize or utilize advice from his college writing instructor. In fact, not one of the students indicated that they had a similarly concrete understanding of the conventions of academic writing, nor did they demonstrate an awareness of what kinds of rhetorical strategies are considered effective in academic writing or *why* those strategies are considered effective. The values reflected in the conventions of academic writing are not clear to Aaron, as he indicated when he described his instructor’s preferred style of “fancy” writing. To Aaron, this “fanciness” serves no real purpose, and if his instructor has explained the level of complexity demanded in academic writing, Aaron has not internalized that advice. Aaron even goes so far as to argue that the simple style he was taught in high school would have been grammatically more correct than the paper he had to “write filler” for and submit. Annabelle likewise felt that simpler writing allowed her to communicate more to her audience more effectively than the academic writing her instructor preferred, as she claimed:

Because in high school, they told you to just write everything down on a piece of paper and just hand it in, basically. You don’t have to meet the set require. You just have to say everything. So instead of just saying everything, you have to go back, say something, and then make it longer. Instead of saying, ‘My cat is a calico cat,’ say something like, ‘My cat is a mixture of orange, black, white, brown, yellow, with blue eyes.’ That’s hard. Like Aaron, Annabelle conflated the registers of spoken and written English, describing her method of effective writing in high school as “saying everything.” In college, Annabelle found that “saying everything” was not met with approval from her instructor, so she adapted her previous process by “saying everything” and then going back and adding more prose for the mere purpose of making her writing longer, which did not add the depth of explanation her instructor seems to be calling for. The example she offered, of extending the description of a calico cat reinforces her description of “saying something [then making] it longer.” In this example, Annabelle is right—the extra words add nothing but length.



Her description of making her writing longer seems to align with Aaron's idea of "filler," as according to Annabelle, she has already "said everything." Annabelle's preference for simpler writing made writing longer papers for her class difficult for her, and in her attempts to negotiate that difficulty she again conflated writing and speaking, noting, "Because I was raised, when you want to say something you just say it. You don't beat around the bush. Try to write a paragraph about it .... My daddy has a saying. I could say it in one sentence, but you used 100 words to say." Here, Annabelle connects the way she learned to communicate at home with the writing she is being asked to do in her academic writing class, though she seems to imply that even in her communication at home, not "beating around the bush" was similarly effective in both speech ("when you want to say something you just say it") and in writing ("Try to write a paragraph about it"). She also expressed her frustration at being asked to add words that she perceived as being unnecessary and less effective than her shorter style.

David, along with the other students in this study, had a complicated response to the experience of being a non-standard speaker beginning his first college-level academic writing class. In some moments, he asserted that his spoken language and his written language were distinct from one another, as he did when he said, "I write completely different than how I talk." At other times, as when he connected his peer's comment about how his writing resembled that of a "Southern hillbilly hick" to how his hallmates perceived his speech, the distinction between these two registers seemed less clear-cut. Though each of these comments came from the same interview, David showed no awareness that he was conflating two differing perspectives about his language. Later in this interview, he noted:

I think I write normally. I write normal using basic English rather than dialects and all that, but when I talk, I know I have an accent, but it's not ridiculous, people that I know from home, half these people couldn't understand people that I know from home. Like, I've got a friend coming from home not this Thursday but next Thursday, and my roommates are terrified to meet him because I said he had a lot worse of an accent than I did.

Here again, David first claimed that he wrote "normally," and positioned his written language as different from his spoken language in that he recognized there was something (in this case, his accent) about his spoken language that others may view as worthy of ridicule. Even as he asserted that his accent is "not ridiculous," he acknowledged that there is a possibility others

might view him that way. Perhaps there is something key to understanding the connection the students saw in their non-standard speech and their academic writing in David's distinction here—he saw that his “accent” is different than many of his peers at Southern Research University, but he did not acknowledge the other, non-phonological differences in his language that may cause his peers to identify him as a “hillbilly hick,” or to apply the ideologies associated with SAE to him and his writing. David lacked a vocabulary about the rhetorical situation of his communication at home, in his high school English classes, and in college writing, so he struggled to determine how to use language to meet the rhetorical demands of writing and communication in these varying arenas.

As the students navigated their transition into college writing, they realized that their simple style was not as effective in college as it had been in high school, and they attempted to negotiate their preference for writing that more closely mirrored their spoken language with their instructor's expectations, even though those expectations were not entirely clear to them. Though a couple of the students noted that what they attempted to do in academic writing and in speaking were different, they continued to conflate the methods of effective communication in these registers. Despite blending terms for writing and speaking in the excerpt above, David did make a distinction between writing and speaking, noting, “When I'm writing, I write completely different than I talk, because when I talk I try to go as short and simple as I can, and I don't really use proper grammar, when I talk, but .... when I'm writing, I try. I actually try.” What troubles David is the perception that other people have about his writing—namely, that it is too simplistic, and though he seems to understand that academic writing and speaking operate in different ways and for different purposes, he nevertheless struggled to separate them as distinct from another.

## **HOME AND IDENTITY**

When students received feedback on their writing in college, they applied some of the negative feedback onto their identities as speakers. Melissa, for example, suggested that the problem with her writing was rooted in a less-than-desirable trait in her spoken language practices, especially given her instructor's feedback on her first essay, which she described:

Don't be wordy, like I'm very wordy when I talk. I guess like, poor explanation, I need to focus more, but then again, I didn't want to talk too much about it cause he wants basically to pinpoint, here it is and keep going. But I didn't want to talk too much about it

but in the end he said poor explanations. I should talk more about it, I guess. Melissa's description of the feedback she received on her paper suggests her confusion about how her instructor wanted her to write the paper. She did not want to be too "wordy," but she also recognized that an overly simplistic style was not what her professor preferred. While some of the students asserted that the rhetorically-effective strategies and practices from their spoken language are or should be similarly effective in their academic writing, Melissa seemed anxious about the way that her communication style was not well-received by her instructor. She worried about her "wordiness," but like Aaron and Annabelle failed to distinguish the "explanation" her instructor calls for from simply adding more words to her composition.

One thing that is striking in the students' descriptions of their confusion is the way that the students discussed the conventions of academic writing in terms of what is effective in speech, and in the ways that their identities as speakers of a non-standard dialect of English influenced how readers perceived their work. As David explained:

Papers I'm arguing, I can do that. Like trying to argue why this is better or something like that. I can do that. But just a research analysis? That one looks like a fourth-grader wrote it. He [the college writing instructor] actually told me that one time....he said, 'Your writing on this second paper is that of a nine year old'....he said it was just that I was pretty much repeating myself over and over again to try to make the page requirement .... It's not that I have a hard time coming up with enough argument. It's that I have a hard time stretching it that long....'cause me, I'm short, sweet, and to the point, and when I write, the only way I'm able to sit down and write something that actually sounds good is if I pretty much just write exactly how I would talk. And college professors don't like that.

David is a confident speaker, and the messages he has received from home have only reinforced this confidence. When he received negative feedback about his writing style, though, he connected that feedback not to his development as a writer in a new educational setting, but to his spoken language and even to his very identity ("me, I'm short, sweet, and to the point"). From David's perspective, when his writing instructor indicated that he did not "like" David's writing, the instructor is indicating that something about *David* is unacceptable too.<sup>43</sup> Though

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<sup>43</sup> It is impossible to say whether or not David's instructor used these words to give him feedback; what is significant is that David *perceived* that his writing was childlike and inadequate.

David's perception of his instructor's comments here took up the negative construction of his writerly identity as child-like or overly simplistic, he continued to assert the value of the rhetorical strategies he gained at home as he connected his skill at argumentation and the association he has with "short, sweet, and to the point" to his writerly self-conception. Similarly, in the feedback Melissa quoted above, she expressed confusion about how to meet her instructor's expectations for her academic writing in terms of her feelings about her spoken language. Melissa's instructor suggested that her "explanations" were not up to par, and there is no indication that he suggested anything about her spoken language. But Melissa felt her spoken and written registers were the same, so she struggled to understand how to develop her explanations without being too wordy or "talking too much."

Several students believed that students who came from other parts of the country had an easier time acquiring academic conventions in their writing because they already spoke a variety of English closer to what those conventions demanded of them as writers. David noted that his roommate Rob from New Jersey was able to help him with the writing for his English class because Rob already knew how to use language in a way that more closely mirrored the expectations of academic writing. Rob met the FYC requirement before enrolling at Southern University, which David told me was because students "up North" are used to talking and writing in ways that are closer to the papers that FYC required them to write. For Isabelle, this sense that the patterns of language represented in her speech were unacceptable in academic writing, but her peers' spoken language was acceptable led to a change in the way she spoke. As she explained it:

I think that the standard of writing, the way it has to be, I think it changed my actually talking .... constantly working on a certain topic and the way how the teacher wants it formatted, I think it stuck in my head somehow .... You don't want people thinking you don't know how to speak to them properly, so I do want to sound a little educated to them. Sarah: How do you think they know how to do that? Isabelle: I think that they learned it in school, but I think also, when they were being raised up, I think they learned also that way, maybe .... I think writing do shape you, like speaking a lot. I think what the college experience is, writing, it just come natural.

In Isabelle's<sup>44</sup> experience, writing and speaking are inextricably connected. She keenly felt the

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<sup>44</sup> Isabelle identified herself as a speaker of SAE, but her language also displays several distinctive features of

tensions of the negative ideologies surrounding her language and her rhetorical practice in her experiences as a new college student, as her decision to change her language practices indicates. She found that as she changed her writing to match the conventions of academic writing, her speech changed to match.<sup>45</sup> Isabelle wants to sound “educated” to her peers, a reflection of how she perceived the conventions of academic English will be received by her classmates, but also a reaction to the negative ideologies that are typically associated with speakers of SAE. She suggested that both writing and speaking “proper” equally shape the ways that she communicated in this new educational context. One reason that the students may be conflating academic writing and speech is that in the transition to college writing, students were attempting to ferret out what, exactly, “academic writing” as a register means, and how they could fluently employ its conventions, and the only “clue” they had to work with was their sense of what was salient to them about their own speech patterns. The negative feedback they received on their writing only reinforced their notions that they are, in some respect, “other” despite the geographic proximity to their hometown.<sup>46</sup>

When David related his experience with peer review as described earlier in the chapter, he connected the perception his peer had of his written work to his spoken English. His peer’s comment that he wrote “like a Southern hillbilly hick” was a direct comment about his writing assignment, but he applied that comment to his spoken English as well as his written prose. He subsequently rejected the identification his peer imposed on him by saying, “I really don’t [write like a hillbilly hick], though. I don’t talk like one either.” Even though David pushed away the label of “hillbilly hick,” he acknowledged that the peer’s comment in his writing class was not the only occasion in his new environment that he felt the “hick” ideology was associated with his language. He likewise suggested that his roommates make similar assumptions, and he did not feel these assumptions matched up with how he viewed himself. David connected the ideologies associated with his spoken language to his written language. The strong association of SAE with

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African-American English (AAE). In this way, Isabelle is an example of a speaker who has multiple linguistic identities. It is certainly possible that Isabelle speaks a Southern variant of AAE, or that she considers herself a member of both speech communities, and her experiences are a good reminder that determining membership in a dialect or speech community is a complex endeavor. Participants in this study were not selected based on race or ethnicity, but on their identification as Southerners and other factors that connected them to the community where their high school was located. Recent calls in educational linguistics have suggested that researchers need to consider how social dialects like AAE vary across regions, and how the complex nature of their heterogeneity might shape the ideologies speakers contend with (Wolfram).

<sup>45</sup> As Chapter 3 explores, this change in her speech was, at least in part, purposeful.

<sup>46</sup> The student who traveled the furthest to enroll in college went an hour and a half away from home.

low intelligence is then similarly attached to David's academic writing, at least in his own perception.

As I related at the beginning of the chapter, David found his writing teacher's requests for longer, less simplistic writing not to be merely arbitrary, but to be a denigration of his very identity. Like Annabelle, David reported that he learned to highly value direct speech at home:

Absolutely the one thing I cannot stand is people that'll like beat around the bush. They won't give you a straight answer. I can't stand that. Like it....that would be the thing that would make me go off on someone....I can't stand it, 'cause my parents always taught me to just be straight-up, don't beat around the bush, don't lead somebody around in 50 circles to give them the same answer that can be used in two words....I write how I talk....why go through five pages of this when I could say exactly the point and it be the same exact point in a page. That's kind of something I'll never understand. Why come up with all that other stuff when you've got enough, when you can prove it, say your point, and get it over with in a page? Why do it in five?

In this moment in the interview, David's frustration with his writing class was almost palpable. As he talked about what his instructor was asking him to do, it was clear that he did not see the analysis he was assigned to write as a means of exploring a text or an issue, but instead as a time when he is expected to produce a right or wrong "straight answer." His parents taught him that people prefer a "straight answer," and that meandering along the way is neither preferable nor appreciated. What David does not consider, though, is that not every inquiry has a straight answer—that, in fact, most of the questions he encounters in his writing class are not going to be clear-cut, and people/texts that went "around in 50 circles" are not trying to be obtuse but are instead acknowledging that a writer/speaker cannot always "prove it, say your point, and get it over with." David's attempts to avoid repetition are certainly a reasonable strategy, but he failed to acknowledge the ways that he was not developing his thoughts, or where his arguments lacked complexity. If David's writing instructor addressed the difference between asking for longer papers and asking for papers that offer nuanced, complex arguments (which will typically be longer than the kind of argument David described here), David did not understand it. Instead, from David's perspective, as well as the other students in this study (in part, Annabelle and Melissa), the instructor was asking for longer papers and then critiquing the very strategy students were using (despite their own understandings of what is rhetorically effective) to meet

the expectations they perceived had been placed on them.

For the students in this study, the connection between the spoken and written registers of their English also connected their sense of their communities and their own places within those communities. As they indicated, the norms of what is effective at home, rhetorically speaking, are clear: short, direct, polite arguments are more highly valued than indirect, long arguments. As they enter FYC courses, they do not see the distinction between long, indirect arguments and complex, nuanced arguments, in part because they feel their home discourses are antithetical to the privileged discourses of academic writing and in part because they do not take up much, if any, instruction<sup>47</sup> that makes the distinction clear to them.

## CONCLUSION

In the experiences of the students in this study, the implicit values of academic writing and argumentation form a rhetorical ideology that conflicts with what the rural Southern students in this study were taught to value about writing, argumentation, and communication in their home communities. “Simple” or “short, sweet, and to the point” writing felt very close to the kinds of rhetorical strategies and practices that were highly valued in the students’ home communities, and as such, the students gave great weight to these practices. This form of writing, though, did not reflect the values of academic writing, and students’ struggles to navigate the demands of academic English as a register. Because of the close connection between the “simple” style of writing they have been taught in their local communities, the students seemed to feel that such writing is more reflective of their personal style and voice, and they expressed discomfort with the changes they were asked to make in their academic writing classes, even as they acknowledged the tension of being asked to negotiate their linguistic practice and the practice most highly valued in FYC courses. Given that the ideologies associated with their spoken language are tightly connected to associations of low intelligence, and the ways that the students perceived their written and spoken registers to be the same, the students are also concerned with how the ideologies associated with their spoken language will be applied to their written language.

As these students moved into an unfamiliar writing context, they relied heavily on what

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<sup>47</sup> Because this study privileges the student voices and student perceptions of their FYC experiences, I did not observe their courses so it is impossible for me to say what kinds of instruction the students received—I can only discuss what kinds of instruction the students took up.

trusted advisors (high school teachers and family members) had suggested to them was effective, and they questioned the effectiveness of what their college instructors recommended. In this way, the students turned towards their homes and the familiar rhetorical strategies they believed would be similarly reliable in the context of the academic writing classroom. Even when students began to discover that their home strategies were considered less effective by their college writing instructors, they persisted in turning back towards the literacies they acquired at home. If their college writing instructors offered articulations about why the rhetorical strategies and practices of academic writing are different than the practices and strategies they learned at home, the students did not understand or take up such explanations. The students clung to their home rhetorical practices, in part, because they did not perceive that academic discourses offer an effective alternative for making arguments. These students did not receive direct instruction that attended to the local capital that their home rhetorical discourses offered them, nor did they learn how they might leverage their resources from home as they learned to acquire academic discourses.



## CHAPTER 5: MLA: BEYOND THE *HANDBOOK*

*Like, just, MLA format, I don't know why, but apparently, I've always done it wrong. Because I failed a 12 page essay once [in high school] ...it was like my quality was almost max points, my grammar was max points, and then my MLA was zero points. And I was just like, how did I do nothing right? .... Because I did what I thought I was supposed to do, and it just wasn't right .... I remember my 11<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, I don't think [MLA] has anything to do with it, probably not, stuff about syntax, and we didn't, we never found out what syntax was .... I don't know how we didn't get it, because they started MLA in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and she's still trying to teach us the basics of it in 12<sup>th</sup>, so, it, just, like, that's the main thing they [teachers/instructors] focus on, it seems, like, how to quote, and to cite, and the works cited, seems like their [teachers/instructors] big focuses.*

--DJ

### INTRODUCTION

MLA is a common acronym on many campuses. Many post-secondary institutions offer MLA workshops to students, and the acronym MLA frequently appears as a criterion on rubrics and assignment sheets in college writing classes. It is not uncommon to hear instructors bemoaning their students' understandings of "MLA."<sup>48</sup> The students in this study brought it up frequently, especially considering that the interview protocols did not prompt them to reflect on their experiences with citation styles. As DJ noted above, his transition to college was not the first time he heard about MLA. In fact, DJ observed that he encountered "MLA" several years earlier, in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and his comment about his experiences with "MLA" is but one example of how "MLA" served, not merely as a name for a style of formatting and citations, but as something simultaneously more (and less) too. For DJ, and for many of his classmates from UHS, their discussion of "MLA" revealed a set of ideologies that reflect their beliefs about what

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<sup>48</sup> Here, I've chosen to use quotation marks to visually distinguish the set of ideologies I explore in this chapter from the name and popular shorthand of the *MLA Handbook for Writing Research Papers*, for the reasons I outline in this chapter.

is expected in academic writing. While the local rhetorical ideology of being “short, sweet, and to the point” offered these students a way to think about their audience, “MLA” seemed to obscure more rhetorical notions of what “academic writing” could mean in the post-secondary writing classroom, subsuming what students believed to be appropriate in academic writing under a single label. The students’ comments suggested that “MLA” represented their beliefs about the language and formatting guidelines they thought would offer them success in academic writing, and it seemed to function as one of the primary ways the students had of describing what they expected to produce in their academic writing classes. As they described “MLA,” this set of ideologies seemed to position academic writing more as standards (and standardization) to be achieved, rather than a set of strategies that would give them access to effective rhetorics for their given audience and purpose.

The nature of the students’ set of “MLA” ideologies comes out of the history that many of the study’s participants had with it. Like their experiences with being “short, sweet, and to the point,” students first encountered “MLA” in their local communities. Unlike being “short, sweet, and to the point,” though, the students located “MLA” not in their families, but instead situated it squarely in their high school English classes, and they often talked about how they expected to find “MLA” to be a useful tool for their college writing classes as well. When they enrolled in college, they discovered that MLA did, in fact, have a role in their college writing courses. Many of their FYC writing prompts included an admonition that writers are expected to “follow the conventions of MLA style and formatting” (or some variation of this description). The familiar terminology of “MLA” seemed to indicate that their previous experience with “MLA” would serve as a resource for them in their transition into college writing, though the role of “MLA” was not always what they anticipated. Instead, they expressed frustration and disappointment when their efforts to employ “MLA” did not result in the success (or the grade) they anticipated. The students in this study indicated that they encountered MLA in high school, and that it was given what felt to them like significant weight in the ways their writing was evaluated there. In terms of their writing in college, “MLA” seemed to represent elements of both language and rhetoric, but the students struggled to define what exactly “MLA” meant for their writing.

Formally, MLA is the shorthand for the style outlined in the *MLA Handbook for Writing Research Papers*, published by the Modern Language Association, which calls itself one of the

largest professional association of scholars in the humanities. This handbook covers everything from generating a topic to writing citations, but the majority of the book's "page real estate" is devoted to aspects of writing that can broadly be construed as "mechanical": spelling, capitalization, and, of course, both in-text and works cited citation formatting and style. The book also offers great detail on how writers should format papers, including titling, alignment of the paper's elements, pagination, and line spacing. The *MLA Handbook* itself champions the style's simplicity on the basis that it favors the needs of writers, claiming:

MLA style represents a consensus among teachers, scholars, and librarians in the fields of language and literature on the conventions for documenting research, and those conventions will help you organize your research paper coherently ... One advantage to MLA style is its simplicity ... MLA style makes reading a research paper easier on the eyes—and the brain—than other styles do. (xii)

The handbook offers no evidence for its claims of simplicity, particularly for its claim that MLA is "easier on the brain" than other styles. Indeed, the students in this study had a very different experience than the foreword to the handbook suggests they might. To these students, "MLA" was far from simple, probably because the meaning of "MLA" was neither clear nor simple to them.

As their comments throughout the study indicated, "MLA" was about much more than just citation and formatting. Moreover, the students reported being asked to use "MLA" style in genres other than research papers, which muddies the stated purpose of the style found in the title of the handbook itself. In the students' experiences, "MLA" has been positioned as "how to write papers for school," not necessarily as a citation style that is required for research papers in the humanities. As they attempted to discover what conventions of academic writing they were expected to employ in their college writing courses, they sometimes ascribed their difficulties to factors like their ignorance of the standards of academic English. Often, this took the form of anxiety about mastering "MLA," which students described as a means of citing sources, but also as something more, something that moved beyond citation and formatting and spoke to their insecurities about their understanding of the writing that was required of them in their new educational context.

Elsewhere in the foreword to the *MLA Handbook*, which is written by the current executive director of MLA, Rosemary Feal, it is suggested that following the style outlined in the

pages that follow can help students see their writing as part of a conversation. In the foreword, the handbook suggests that using MLA style allows writers to join a “consensus among teachers, scholars, and librarians,” all of whom are located outside of the local discourse. As the official style of the Modern Language Association, MLA style and formatting carries with it a form of “global capital.” Using MLA style as it is outlined in the handbook gives writers the opportunity to indicate to their readers an alliance with other scholarly writers. Using MLA gives students a way to acknowledge the global capital of academic literacies. In theory, MLA gives students access to the written conventions of the discipline or a set of disciplines, and, therefore, to the conversations of scholars within the discipline.

In practice, though, the students see MLA as a different kind of capital: instead of allowing them to engage as part of a “consensus” and conversation among scholars, their understanding of “MLA” suggests to them that global capital is to be found in standardization of both their language and in their formatting/style. Though the handbook claims the style is easier on the eyes and the brain than other styles, as DJ’s comment at the beginning of the chapter suggests, it is not as easy on student writers’ brains as it claims to be. In fact, the students’ comments about “MLA” reveal just how complex learning (and using) “MLA” was for them. As DJ saw it, “MLA” was a somewhat mysterious skill he was supposed to have mastered in high school. He conflates “MLA” with “syntax” first, before moving on to discussing his confusion with his teachers’ focus on “MLA.” This focus, both in what was apparently a multi-year instruction and in the weight that “MLA” carried in “points” (grades) suggested to DJ that “MLA” was an aspect of academic writing that mattered, though he struggled to articulate what “MLA” was supposed to do for him as a writer, or why it mattered to his academic writing. His comments suggest that for him, “MLA” was bigger than just offering him a citation and formatting style. He was not alone—several of his high school classmates experienced similar confusion. For the students in this study, “MLA” as an ideology about academic writing offered students a way of assessing how well they adhered to the conventions and expectations of academic writing, however unclear those were to the students. Students used “MLA” as a means of making sense of what “academic writing” means.

The notion that MLA style is simple and facilitates scholarly conversations, which is promoted in the *MLA Handbook* itself, is not the way that students conceived of their citation style. Instead, “MLA” has become a set of ideologies surrounding what is valued in their

academic writing courses. Some of the students seemed to have an understanding of “MLA” that spanned a variety of issues simultaneously. Other students talked about “MLA” in such a way that it seemed they *only* thought of it as a method of standardizing the conventions of their writing. In the sections that follow, I explore the various ways that “MLA” worked to cloud students’ understandings of what was rhetorically or linguistically effective in academic writing. I begin by examining how students use “MLA” to discuss their sense of what is expected in academic writing, through their use of “formal” to describe “MLA.” I then outline the ways in which students’ focus on meeting the expectations of academic writing through standardizing both their English and the mechanics of their writing overwhelmed any more rhetorically-grounded lessons from their writing instructors. Finally, I describe how students’ focus on the standardized features of writing required by “MLA” caused them to see good academic writing as more of a checklist than the foreword to the handbook suggests.

#### **A “Formal MLA Format”**

Though DJ’s perspective at the beginning of the chapter paid more attention to “syntax” than other aspects of “MLA,” one of the more common descriptors used by the students was that they believed writing in a “formal MLA format” was valued by their college writing instructors. The students indicated that they believed the “formal” writing would be more appropriate for the FYC classroom context, but what they mean by “formal” is less clear. Indeed, this sense of appropriateness, as students describe it, manifests a connection between both linguistic and rhetorical ideologies. Students use “formal” to describe both the language they find appropriate for FYC (StAE) and the rhetorical strategies they believe will help them be successful, through their extraordinarily keen attention to genre, in the form of the formatting requirements they assiduously followed. For the students in this study, assiduously following the formatting guidelines they found in “MLA” and in their assignment requirements was an implicit nod to the rhetorical situation because most of the students conceptualized their audience as their composition instructor, and the close attention they paid to the formatting guidelines of “MLA” was an attempt to meet the perceived needs of their audience. However, they did not consider the other needs of this audience, and indicated that they did not closely attend to their instructors’ desire for complex or nuanced arguments. Instead, the students focused primarily on how to cite sources and how to set up their documents. This is an example of how “MLA” is functioning to obscure the more rhetorical lessons about academic writing that students may have been exposed

to in their academic writing courses. As they described what they perceived as the expectations of their writing, the students indicated how they found “MLA” offered them a description of how to write a paper for college. One resource they felt “MLA” offered them was a sense of the expected tone of or “format” of their writing, which they described as “formal.”

In describing the “formal format” they found to be appropriate for college, the students seemed to find a disconnect between “MLA” and their own language. Aaron, for example, contrasted his identity as a speaker and the expectations of “MLA,” when he articulated what he thought academic (and, to some extent, professional) writing should look like:

That’s how it [writing] should be. At least, that’s what I’ve always been taught. We don’t write like we speak, or we shouldn’t, because I’m not going to write, you know, a letter of application to a company in, you know, my speak. You’re going to be very formal .... You’re not going to write a doctoral thesis in your own speech. You’re going to write it in a formal MLA format.

Aaron associated “MLA” with “formal” writing, and he contrasted both “MLA” and “formal” from “[his] speak.” As he discussed “MLA” and “formal writing,” it seemed that Aaron was using “MLA” to describe the register of English that he believed his writing class required of him. In this description is also an acknowledgment that “MLA” carries with it global capital (though Aaron does not use that language). Aaron valued formal writing as the appropriate way to write (“that’s how it should be”) and claimed that “[his] speak” was not appropriate for either professional settings (“I’m not going to write, you know, a letter of application to a company in, you know, my speak”) or academic contexts (“You’re not going to write a doctoral thesis in your own speech. You’re going to write it in a formal MLA format”).

In this way, Aaron’s description of the “formal MLA format” he believes is appropriate in academic writing uses “formal” to address both the expectations of the kind of language (which he describes as the opposite of his own speech) and the formatting he believed would grant him access to academic writing. In this moment, Aaron used two identifiable genres of writing, the business letter and the doctoral thesis, to describe what he meant by “formal MLA format.” Given the way he contrasted both the business letter and the doctor thesis with his own speech, it seemed that, to Aaron, “formal” was a description of both language and genre, and his conflation of language and genre here reflect the way that “MLA” is operating for him at multiple levels. For Aaron, then, “MLA” offers him a label to discuss both the language and the

format he believes will be well regarded in his academic writing class.

Aaron used “formal” to denote the linguistic resources that would be valued in a corporate context (or, as his comment outlined, the kind of linguistic capital that could enable him to successfully apply for a job). This belief, that the linguistic resources valued in corporate culture, or global linguistic capital (Eckert 13), is another form of SLI, and another example of the language subordination model in action. In this case, Aaron suggested that “formal” English has the power to give him access to jobs (through the letter of application) in a way that “[his] speak” cannot. It is not altogether surprising that Aaron contrasts “[his] speak” with “formal” English, given that such a characterization aligns with the prevalent ideologies that surround his speech (see Chapter 3). As Dennis Preston’s research in perceptual dialectology suggests, SAE is ranked highly in affective dimensions by speakers in both the North and the South, including a high measure on “informality” (Preston, forthcoming). Speakers of SAE, like Aaron, then, speak a language that is known for its informality, but Aaron’s comment demonstrated that at least some of these speakers believe they must adopt a more formal communication style for their language to be acceptable in corporate and academic environments. Aaron’s comment that he felt he must adopt a more formal writing style reproduced an ideology that SAE is too informal in professional settings.

Like Aaron, Derrick associated “MLA” with formality, but he offered less detail than Aaron, simply saying that “[The writing instructor] hasn’t really talked about it yet, but I’m sure it’s just probably going to be, just like, formal writing stuff, like the MLA format and things like that,” and didn’t offer more detail when I probed. Both Aaron and Derrick connect “MLA” format with some kind of “formality” though each of them has a different understanding of what “MLA” is supposed to offer them. Neither young man acknowledged, as the foreword to the *Handbook* suggested they might, that primary role of MLA might be to highlight scholarly conversation. Instead, they conflated “MLA” with “formal” English and reproduced ideologies that suggest their home dialect would not be welcome in the academic writing. Aaron and Derrick also described the ways they utilized (or tried to utilize) “MLA” to meet their instructors’ expectations for their academic writing.

## **STANDARD ENGLISH**

One of the primary functions of “MLA” for these students was that it seemed to offer them a means for discussing the differences they noticed between their writing and the writing of their

peers, especially the peers they perceived as being from other parts of the country. The term “MLA” functioned in part as an ideology that highlighted the role of StAE in academic writing. Perhaps because of its connection with “school writing,” “MLA” seems to have become synonymous with “Standard English,” at least for some students. This use of “MLA” privileges StAE and is, at least in some respects, a language ideology that reproduces SLI, in that it subordinates SAE in favor of more standard varieties of English and promises success to student who speak these varieties. Isabelle explained:

A lot of friends I’ve met from up North, their papers are error-free the first time; and from down here, since you’re used to talking a certain way, it affects your paper a lot. It’s not the English standard or MLA format I guess you would say, for the writing and quoting. Down here they teach you how to do direct quotes, but I think up there, somehow, I think they teach them when they’re younger, like a lot younger.

Embedded in Isabelle’s description of her friends’ papers (and the implicit description of her own papers in the comparison she draws) are two separate ideologies around what is linguistically and rhetorically effective in academic writing, both operating under the label “MLA.”

First, Isabelle suggested that “MLA” is synonymous with “standard English.” She directly referred to “MLA” as a synonym of “standard English.” Moreover, she seemed to feel that the “standard English” reflected in “MLA” was somehow regionally affiliated. She believed that her peers from other parts of the country were able to write “error-free” papers “the first time,” presumably the first time that they submitted their papers to be graded. Isabelle likely drew this specific comparison because she did not pass her first major paper the first time she submitted it to be graded. Her comments about her peers from the North indicate that she believed her speech had something to do with her difficulties in her academic writing class. Positioning her northern peers as being able to write “error-free” papers on their first try reproduced the negative ideologies associated with SAE, in terms of correctness, and promoted SLI because she suggested that speaking a more standard variety of English would make producing academic writing easier for her, as she perceived it to be for her peers from other parts of the country. When Isabelle characterized her peers’ papers as “error-free the first time,” and attributed her own difficulties to being “used to talking a certain way,” she also reproduced the common ideology that positions non-standard dialects (including both SAE and AAE) as less



correct than StAE. Isabelle's uptake of this version of SLI is yet another example of how ideologies associated with SAE can influence the experiences of Southern students in their FYC courses, in that she finds it challenging to believe that her writing is on the same footing as her northern peers. In this respect, "MLA" served as more than a means of describing a citation style: rather, it functioned as a language ideology to describe how academic writing required her to use a different kind of language than she was accustomed to using in her home community. The way Isabelle connected "MLA" to Standard English, and, perhaps more interestingly, to regional language diversity indicates that, for her, "MLA" is operating as a code word for more than mere citation and formatting guidelines.

The second understanding embedded in Isabelle's comment about "MLA" concerned the role of "MLA" in learning how to format her papers to follow the conventions of "MLA" formatting as she used evidence in academic writing. Isabelle's acknowledgment of the role of evidence (or, as she put it, the "writing and quoting") in "MLA" appeared to be focused almost exclusively on formatting—on how the quote appeared on the page (or the computer screen). In this description, "MLA" as a way of offering evidence is almost entirely arhetorical, as Isabelle does not consider how evidence might support her argument, nor does she offer an explanation of how using evidence allows her attend to her reader's needs. Isabelle was aware that evidence was required in academic writing, but her focus on producing "error-free" "MLA" papers seemed to cloud any more rhetorical notions of what might be effective in academic writing, like the rhetorical function of evidence to support an argument, establish credibility with a reader, or indicate participation in an ongoing scholarly conversation. She directly compared "MLA" to standard English, but she also noted that being "used to talking a certain way" was not [helpful] for her as she learned "the writing and quoting" included in "MLA." Again, she assigns a regional component to her difficulties—she believed that her peers from "up North" were taught how to use direct quotes at a younger age than she and her peers in the South. Her statement implied that her strategies for using direct quotes were less sophisticated than the strategies used by her peers in other parts of the country. Using evidence, as Isabelle described it, was not a means of participating in the "scholarly conversations" described by the *Handbook*, nor did she indicate that she used evidence as a means of being persuasive to an audience.

As Aaron, Isabelle, and Derrick described their understandings of "MLA," it became clear that the acronym meant something different to them than the *Handbook* suggests that it

might. They conflated “MLA” with both “formal” and “standard” English, so rather than serving as an acronym for a professional organization, or as the shorthand title for the style guide of that association, “MLA” came to mean something closer to “academic writing,” at least for these students. The acronym does a lot of work, as it seemed to cover a broad (if somewhat vague) definitional ground, and, as the next section explores, also a means of leveraging (or, more often, attempting to leverage) their previous knowledge about academic writing to meet their instructors’ expectations. As the students position MLA both as “formal English” or “Standard English” and as a means of standardizing their writing, they demonstrate that what they perceive is valued in their first-year writing courses is adhering to a set of “rules.”

### **MEETING INSTRUCTOR’S EXPECTATIONS**

In addition to operating as a label that covered multiple ideologies, “MLA” also seemed to perform an important function in the transition from high school to college, as it was the way students had available to them to talk about academic writing. They learned about “MLA” in high school, from their teachers there. In our first interviews, several of the students talked about “MLA” as a resource they anticipated would be valuable in college writing. As the students’ comments indicated, “MLA” was not a completely new concept for them. In fact, they had had several years to inculcate the multiple ideologies indicated by “MLA” (and, for that matter, the practical skills of formatting a paper for school that “MLA” indicated would be important for them to develop), as they reported learning it beginning in 9<sup>th</sup> grade English. “MLA” was something they felt their high school teachers had prepared them to face in college, so it was something that they already associated with “school writing,” and perhaps even “college writing” before they ever even enrolled. The students indicated that “MLA” was part of their preparation for college, so it is altogether likely that their high school teachers framed it explicitly as knowledge the students would need in college.<sup>49</sup>

Later in the study, Derrick noted that “MLA” was indeed a resource he found valuable preparation for college writing. He used “MLA” as a way of demonstrating how similar he found the writing in high school and the writing in his college writing course to be, saying

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<sup>49</sup> My sense that “MLA” was explicitly framed by their high school teachers as a necessary skill for college is only bolstered by an informal conversation I had with Ms. Jones, where she expressed her concern about the students “not understanding” MLA, and that the students would definitely need to have mastered MLA before entering college. Future research that examines how MLA is positioned in high school classes could offer useful background on the findings outlined in this chapter.

simply, “I don’t think the writing is too much different. It’s still like the MLA format citing sources and all these other things, and it’s not too much different .... I always go to the website, like the Purdue OWL or whatever, and like, if I’m confused about something I always look it up.” When I prompted Derrick and asked him what he understood “MLA format” to be, he rattled off a list of formatting do’s and don’t’s: “Double-spaced, one-inch margins, some other stuff, I don’t know.” Derrick found the requirements of MLA to be similar to the formatting he was required to do in his high school English papers, but he did not find in these requirements any sense of rhetorical effectiveness. Like Isabelle, Derrick’s preoccupation with formatting suggests that he used his sense of “MLA” as a set of rigid guidelines as a means of meeting the genre expectations of academic writing, but in doing so, he focused on the most arhetorical aspects of genre. Because Derrick’s focus is primarily on the formatting of his paper and the “rules” of “MLA,” he is less focused on creating an effective argument, or even on using the genre of the paper to accomplish a specific purpose or attend to the needs of a specific audience. Even though his sense of “MLA” lacked a clear articulation of why these formatting rules matter or how his arguments are more effective because of them, “MLA” is familiar—he brought it with him from his home community, and he felt competent in employing the formatting it requires.

Melissa, on the other hand, who attended a two-year college and was the only student in this study to be placed into a basic writing course, felt that the “MLA” she was prepared to use through her experiences in high school was not the “MLA” she was expected to use in her college writing course. When we met to discuss her first graded paper, which she submitted in mid-November, she expressed a bemused curiosity over what she perceived as a new set of requirements, pointing out her instructor’s expectations of her writing:

Make sure it’s all correct. That’s how it is. And he makes sure, like, we use the OWL format, the MLA format, so you have to use that. That’s something different from high school. We used regular MLA format and on there [gestures to the college paper we were discussing] we had to use the OWL. That’s something different, like name-wise you had to put Professor, the whole name, and high school I put, like, the dates didn’t matter, put it like the number, the year, whatever. It’s different. And that was something different.

It is not entirely clear what distinguished “MLA” from “OWL” for Melissa, as the Purdue OWL (similarly mentioned by Derrick) is often used by writing instructors as a reference and a resource to help students format their papers using various style guides, including (or maybe

especially) MLA. It is possible that her high school English teacher was using an outdated version of the MLA handbook, but because the data is limited to the students' perceptions, such an understanding of the teacher's methods is impossible. What is clear from Melissa's recounting of her experience, though, is that the minutiae of formatting the title of her papers overwhelmed her sense of the lessons her instructor may have been offering. For Melissa, like Derrick, "MLA" labels the ideology that successful academic writing is about formatting, not about using (or, for that matter, even attempting) strategies that she believed would be more rhetorically effective. Melissa keenly felt that something about the expectations for her writing had changed between high school and college, and it's very likely that they had. She expected that learning "MLA" in high school would give her a resource to employ in college, but that was not the case, and she does not seem to have a way to explain (or perhaps even to understand) what the differences between the expectations of her writing in high school and the expectations of her writing in college, so she uses the labels she has at her disposal—"MLA" and "OWL," but neither of these labels indicated attention to what would make her writing persuasive to an audience. Though it is not clear exactly what differences Melissa saw between "MLA" and "OWL," it seems that labeling the writing expectations at each level differently gave her a means to express her frustration that what she expected to remain constant in the transition had in fact changed more dramatically than she anticipated.

This confusion about her instructor's expectations persisted through Melissa's first semester of college. When we met at the end of the semester for our final interview together, Melissa again shared that she was concerned about not understanding how to format her papers. When I asked her about what was valuable to her about her high school preparation for college, she paused for a moment and said,

That's valuable? Like I said, it was so different. Well, I guess like my English did help with the paper-wise, like I knew how to do MLA format, which that changed when I got into college. We had to do the OWL format, so it was different. It wasn't that different, though, just writing some of the pages .... That was another thing that had me upset, my English professor, he basically told us, he's like, I don't want a five-paragraph essay, he's like I actually want you to write a paper. And I was so used to doing essay formatting then, like yeah.

As Melissa explained the difference between what her high school teacher expected of her

writing and what her college instructor expected, it appears, on the surface, that she is primarily referring to document formatting. However, as she discusses her frustration, what bubbles to the surface is a glimpse of what Melissa understood the expectations of academic writing to be, and it seemed that she did not quite understand what these expectations were. While she was not explicit about what she was expected to do, she noted what her professor did not want to see—the five-paragraph essay. It seems her professor is calling for students to produce more academically sophisticated papers (“I actually want you to write a paper”), which Melissa found frustrating because she felt confident about the writing she had produced in high school. Melissa’s perception was that her writing instructor wanted a different kind of formatting than her high school teacher had required, though her writing instructor’s prohibition against “five-paragraph essays” was almost certainly not simply a matter of “essay formatting,” as Melissa described. Again, here, Melissa focused on formatting conventions as the definition of the academic genres she was being asked to produce. She seemed to have very few ways of describing the writing she was being asked to produce, so “MLA” and, in some respects, “OWL,” operated as a way of describing the differences she saw between high school and college writing. Once she acknowledged the contrast she perceives in the formatting required in high school versus that required in college, she slips into a description of how the familiar five-paragraph essay was received by her college instructor. It is not clear if Melissa understood that her instructor’s request to “actually write a paper” was more about content than formatting, but her remarks do indicate that her use of the label “MLA” likely covers multiple beliefs about what is appropriate in academic writing, and functions as the only terminology she has at her disposal to articulate the different rhetorical demands of college writing. Like her peers from Upstate High school, Melissa seems to lack a meta-language to talk about her writing in ways that demonstrate the depth of her understanding.

Being placed in the basic writing class also complicated the college writing experience for Melissa, who had felt like she was a fairly competent writer previously. She told me about the placement experience, which she found confusing and embarrassing. Placement at Melissa’s institution was based on a grammar test (as she reported, “there wasn’t even any writing on that test!”), which she was unaware would be happening. She indicated that she would have preferred to have had the chance to prepare, and that she and one other friend were the only people she knew who ended up in the basic writing class, which primarily consisted of formal

grammar instruction until November. From the first encounter Melissa had with academic writing at the post-secondary level, writing was presented to her as a set of rules with which she needed to comply. The “OWL” formatting she needed for first-year writing seemed to be yet another way Melissa was asked to standardize her writing.

When I probed and asked Melissa to explain her understanding of the “actual writing” that was expected of her in college, her characterizations of writing were limited to “MLA,” as she described it above, and to vaguely defined genres like “essay” and “paper”:

And then our last few papers are just like essay. And I think the essay in high school is kind of a little bit harder, because they wanted more, like you had to do analysis, a book report or whatever. And since then we haven’t done anything. Like we just basically tell our experience. Like our movie essay, we didn’t have to do research or anything .... Like high school is easier grading-wise, ‘cause I know there’s like a bunch of essays that I did really good, like I made A’s on, and so far I’ve only made like a C or a B or whatever on these ... but the material is just, like, it’s easy. I don’t know, but it’s confusing. That’s the only thing I’m confused about, like how is it less writing but different grading? I thought I would have made really good grades. That’s why I was looking forward to the writing part of the semester but it’s really different than I thought. He wants it where you have all the facts. He wants it kind of, well, flow, and not just be pinpoints and he said he don’t want, he does not want, any contractions. Like some professors don’t mind or whatever and then, like, makes you all the grammar, he’s a grammar person.

Based on Melissa’s explanations of the writing she was being asked to do, “essays” in college felt different in both purpose (“like, we just talk about our experience”) and formatting (contractions, grammar, etc), and she feels her high school writing assignments were actually more intellectually demanding: she noted being asked to do analysis and research in high school, but does not recognize being asked to do similar work in her college writing class. She is able to explain the expectations of writing in high school, but as her earlier quote demonstrates, “MLA” is what she has at her disposal to explain the expectations of academic writing. Whatever notions she has of what, exactly, that means for her writing are all covered over by a single label that makes parsing the various ideologies under “MLA” difficult.

Aaron also found that “MLA” gave him a way of meeting his instructor’s expectations—or, at least, a way of attempting to use something he already knew as a way of meeting those

expectations. When I asked Aaron to explain his instructor's expectations of his college-level writing to me, he said, "you better follow MLA guidelines to a dime." When I followed up by asking if his instructor had talked about MLA in class, Aaron clarified, "He didn't say that, but he said that, number one, every point should have a reason, that every quote should have, there should be a reason behind it, because he better not read your paper and say, 'why?'" Aaron was the only student in the study who acknowledged using evidence in a way that might be read as rhetorical, in the sense that he references a "reason" behind using evidence in his writing, which demonstrates at least some attention to using evidence purposefully. Still, even in his description of evidence there is little sense of contributing to a scholarly conversation. Instead, he points to the fact that in the genre of the academic essay, quotes are expected and some purpose for using the quote should be evident. Aaron did not remember the instructor specifically discussing "MLA" as one of the expectations of college writing, but he almost immediately referenced MLA as one of his instructor's expectations, perhaps because of the way he learned about writing in high school, which he described as including "MLA":

My writing is formal to the nines. Everything is going to be no contractions, numbers are going to be spelled out if they're less than 100, all that .... Ms. Jones basically taught me how to go short, sweet, and to the point, cut out the verbage, Ms. Washington taught me how to analyze the books, the language of the books, the diction and the syntax, um, going back to that, Ms. Smith taught me to do the MLA format, my freshman year, and then 10<sup>th</sup> grade year Ms. Richards taught me how to analyze American Literature, um, Upstate High knows what they're doing, so by the time you get to Ms. Jones, she doesn't have to teach, she just has to help you analyze literature.

As Aaron described writing instruction in his high school English classes, "MLA" was an important part of the learning he did at UHS. It seemed, then, that his understanding of the importance of "MLA" was at least in part, a way of incorporating what he had been taught was expected in "school writing." Here, he brings what he learned in high school and uses that knowledge as a way of attempting to meet his instructor's expectations. For Aaron, "MLA" seems to be a stand-in for what he understands academic writing to do, and as a means of using evidence ("every quote should have a reason behind it"), but Aaron does not seem to have a meta-language to talk about his high school writing. Instead, "MLA" functions as both a description of the citation and formatting guidelines and as a way of describing whatever

understanding he has of the conventions and expectations of academic writing.

Though Melissa and Aaron seem to find their experiences with “MLA” in some way frustrating because they expected what they learned in high school about “MLA” to continue to serve them well in their efforts to meet their instructors’ expectations, and Derrick finds “MLA” to be a constant in his experience transitioning from high school to college, all three of these students lean on “MLA” as a resource to help them meet their instructors’ expectations. For all three of these students, “MLA” is one way they attempt to meet expectations and attempt to acquire a form of global capital they believe they learned in high school in their academic writing courses. “MLA” was what the students thought would be expected of them in college, and they tried hard to meet those expectations. However, their ideologies about “MLA” (ironically) seemed to obscure whatever lessons their instructors communicate about the expectations of college writing, which in turn makes doing “MLA” relatively arhetorical.

### **MLA AS A GRADE CRITERION OR CHECKLIST**

In the students’ attempts to meet their instructors’ expectations, they seemed to think of “MLA” as a checklist. The foreword to the *Handbook* claims that MLA is purposefully simple in order to facilitate scholarly conversations, and it implies that using MLA will make student writers aware of these conversations and will ease them into participating. As the *Handbook* asserts in the foreword, “Every time you write a research paper, you enter into a community of writers and scholars,” and goes on to say that using the conventions of this community of scholars “will direct your readers to the sources you consulted in arriving at your findings, and you will enable them to build on your work.” The students in this study did not see “MLA” as something that facilitated scholarly conversation. What would be perhaps even more surprising to them is the *Handbook*’s claim that “MLA style is known for its flexibility: you have options when it comes to including elements in your list of works cited.” Contrary to the way that the *Handbook* positions itself, the students in this study saw “MLA” not as a way of facilitating scholarly conversation or as a “flexible” way of documenting sources, but as a rigid checklist of formatting do’s and don’t’s and grammatical rules to follow.

Where the handbook’s focus on scholarly conversation places an emphasis on audience, the students’ ideas of “MLA” as a set of rules was relatively arhetorical. As DJ’s statement at the beginning of the chapter indicates, adhering to “MLA” was connected to getting the grades he wanted on his writing. To DJ, the fact that “points” were attached to “MLA” was an



indication of its importance, but he did not have a clear sense of *why* it mattered nor, for that matter, did he understand what “MLA” would look like in his writing. Aaron similarly experienced some difficulty with mastering “MLA”:

Well, I have not not done my work at that class. It’s phenomenally frustrating, because I don’t have time to devote that month that he wants to a paper, and even then, if I devote time to the paper, I still get flunked for grammatical errors. I can’t even get my MLA citation right from my works cited page .... that counts as a grammatical. I take it to him, he’s ‘all right, what’s wrong with this? You got this right.’ Turn it in, and he circles something around the works cited page. I don’t even know what to think as a writer anymore.

Aaron did not describe his difficulty in participating in scholarly conversations. Rather, he discussed his frustration with the way “MLA” was graded. As Aaron described it, “grammatical errors” were extremely important in his instructor’s assessment criteria. However, Aaron did not have a clear sense of what “counts” as grammatical. He mentioned that “MLA” is one aspect of writing that his instructor considered grammatical, and overtly expressed his frustration that despite seeking out his instructor’s help, he still could not seem to properly utilize the style in order to get the grade he sought. Aaron’s take on his difficulty with “MLA” and his works cited page is interesting in that it, along with DJ’s quote at the beginning of the chapter, reveals how students respond to grades that are based on their adherence to “MLA” as a set of rules. Aaron’s comment that he does not “even know what to think as a writer anymore” also shows how even these aspects of writing that instructors may feel are mechanical or insignificant in the grand scheme of students’ writing may, in fact, influence students’ perceptions of themselves as college writers.

Perhaps the most straightforward understanding of “MLA” appeared in the moments when the students discussed their understandings of “MLA” as a set of requirements for citations in academic writing. In Austin’s case, understanding “MLA” gave him confidence about entering into college writing, as he noted; “If I use quotes, I’m pretty good at, you know, remembering to cite them properly, whether it’s MLA or APA format, I’m pretty good at remembering how to cite the notes properly for each one. And, like, she [his college writing instructor] said, I can use them really well so they don’t kinda stand out in the paper.” Austin, who attended the local community college and planned to become a physical therapist, was the only student who talked about MLA as one style of several, and who indicated that he felt some measure of flexibility in

regards to which citation style he employed. Like all of the students in this study who talked about “MLA,” though, Austin’s confidence with “MLA” is about standardizing his formatting, not necessarily about his ability to enter into scholarly conversation (or even that there is a scholarly conversation to enter into). His comment also demonstrates a narrower understanding of the purpose of “MLA” than the foreword of the *Handbook* suggests, and that by standardizing the formatting of his writing and “citing properly” he can meet the requirements set out for his writing.

Even when the students adopted ideologies where “MLA” meant “formal” English, as Aaron did, that formality was still largely a function of mechanics. As Aaron explained it,

You’ve got your points. You’ve got them well developed and organized, and then, obviously, you follow MLA format because, you know, we’re going to dial in that group. I don’t even know, I don’t even understand why that is important, personally. Like, it’s just a paper, and quite personally, I think it takes up a whole lot of space....I’ve got four lines of nothing but name, section number, teacher, and date....I just never have understood the MLA format. Then I guess a good paper is going to be zero grammatical errors, even though that’s not possible, but apparently he wants it. I guess that’s it. I mean I always thought I had good papers, but apparently I’m wrong. But Ms. Jones, she was like, yeah, try to be as short and sweet and to the point as possible cause if you’re going to...just like a speech. You don’t want to make the speech long because people are going to lose interest in it.

Here, Aaron suggested that by standardizing his spelling, he could adopt a more formal style. Spelling numbers less than 100 is one of the guidelines of MLA style, so it is also entirely possible that the description he offers here is what he knows of “MLA.” Once he begins describing formal writing, he moves into talk about how writing was scaffolded for him before he graduated from high school. He lists “MLA” as one of the things he learned in his English classes in high school, that it is, in fact, the primary thing he learned in 9<sup>th</sup> grade English. In his list of important lessons he learned in high school, “MLA” is given the same weight as being “short, sweet, and to the point,” and both are aspects of his high school education he credits to Upstate High “[knowing] what they’re doing.” He finds both “MLA” and being “short, sweet, and to the point” to be valuable for him in his preparation to write “formally” in his college writing courses.

In Aaron’s description of what he has learned, the global capital of “MLA” plays a key

role, as does the local capital of being “short, sweet, and to the point.” This comment, which came in response to a question about what makes “good writing,” begins with Aaron explaining what matters in academic writing—“points,” MLA, formatting, grammatical correctness, but then his description takes a turn and he reverts back to the trusted advice of his high school teacher—to be “short, sweet, and to the point.” Though he might have begun his response by noting the need for standardized elements like “MLA” and grammar, by the end of his response, Aaron has outlined why the rhetorical ideology he brought from his home community is more rhetorically effective. In his justification, he explicitly cites a need to attend to his perceived audience. His comment that MLA is going to “dial in that group” is the closest any student in the study came to acknowledging audience, but even this comment does not contain an immediate sense of a real, live audience. Though he acknowledged that there was an audience (hypothetical and vague though it may be) who would be brought into his argument through his use of “MLA,” he also expresses some confusion about why this dialed-in audience would want him to use it, or what its purpose might be in his writing. In contrast, Aaron’s comment about being “short, sweet, and to the point” highlights the ways that this more local rhetorical ideology might attend to the audience’s needs. In this way, Aaron’s ideologies of “MLA,” which all seemed to carry global capital for him, seem more arhetorical than the local capital of short, sweet, and to the point that he brings with him from his local community into the college writing classroom.

## CONCLUSION

Though the *MLA Handbook* suggests that MLA, as a citation style, offers students an entry into scholarly conversations and operates “flexibly” as a means of citing sources and formatting academic writing, the students in this study used the acronym “MLA” differently than the *MLA Handbook* suggests they might. Instead, the students seemed to perceive “MLA” as a set of ideologies, a label under which circulated multiple beliefs about what would be considered appropriate in academic writing. The students’ experiences with “MLA” began in high school, where it was offered to them as a resource for their academic writing, one which they anticipated would be helpful for them to leverage in their academic writing as well. In high school, “MLA” seemed to function as a means for students to describe the expectations of “school writing,” and they believed it would function similarly in their FYC courses.

However, though the label “MLA” matched one of the terms they found in their FYC courses,

their concept of “MLA” did not grant them the kind of capital they anticipated in the more global market of FYC, perhaps because they persisted in conceptualizing the expectations of academic writing (through their use of “MLA”) as relatively arhetorical and primarily focused on standardizing their language and the formatting of their papers. As they described it in their first semester of college writing, “MLA” functioned as both a reproduction of rhetorical and linguistic ideologies. Rhetorically, “MLA” offered students a name for what they understood to be the expectations of genre in their academic writing. Their understanding of genre, however, was limited to formatting requirements, to their beliefs about how academic writing should look on the page (or the screen), and to fulfilling a kind of “checklist” in order to get the “points” offered for correctly using “MLA.” The *MLA Handbook* would suggest that the style offers writers a means of attending to audience by facilitating scholarly conversation, but the participants in this study did not use the term to articulate attention to their audience. Instead, they viewed “MLA,” in part, as a list of rigid guidelines they were required to follow.

The students also used “MLA” as a label to articulate the kind of language they believed was appropriate for them to use in their academic writing. In part, this sense of appropriateness was articulated through their description of “MLA” as a “formal MLA format” that included a sense of the kinds of formatting and the kinds of language that were appropriate and expected in academic writing. For the students in this study, “MLA” also represented Standard English, and some of them used “MLA” to describe how they perceived their home dialect as not working in their favor in academic writing. If students see “MLA” as a way of expressing their understanding of “academic writing,” but they think of it as arhetorical and a prescriptive checklist to work through, then they are also thinking of academic writing as a mere set of requirements to be fulfilled. In this way, “MLA” seems to be obscuring more rhetorical notions of “academic writing” that students may be bringing with them from their local high schools. Moreover, the conflation of “MLA” with “Standard English” puts non-standard English speakers, like the speakers of SAE in this study, at a disadvantage in writing classrooms because such an ideology suggests to them that their linguistic identities are not valued in the academic writing classroom.

For many of the students in this study, “MLA” operates as a cover term for a range of beliefs, and because the term is used consistently in rubrics and assignments across both high school and college without addressing the multiple meanings students may assign to the acronym “MLA,”

this range of ideologies continue to build and develop as students progress through their FYC courses. The feedback they received on their writing did not disrupt these ideologies, nor did it clarify for the students what their instructors meant by “MLA” in their grading criteria or in the feedback they offered the students. Instead, this set of ideologies continued to operate beneath the surface of students’ experiences in FYC.

When I first began to ask students to clarify what they meant when they said “MLA,” I had no idea that the meanings they associated with the term would offer so much meaning to the students, nor did I realize how important it was to the students’ understandings and abilities to articulate what was expected of their academic writing. Because it seemed to be one of the only terms students had at their disposal to describe what their instructors expected of their writing, the set of ideologies covered by the term “MLA” had a great deal of significance in their experiences. This finding suggests that instructors need to take time to clarify their terms; that even though students may have encountered a term before, they do not necessarily have the same understanding of its meaning as FYC instructors. It demonstrates the importance of explaining to first-year students the differences in the expectations of writing in high school versus writing in college, and to offer students a vocabulary and the background necessary to help them develop the meta-awareness necessary to assess the best use of the resources they bring with them from their home communities and local high schools.

## **CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This qualitative longitudinal study responds to recent conversations in composition studies about the role of first-year writing in the transition to college, and it offers a new perspective on the experiences of non-standard English speakers in their first-year composition courses. The nine rural working-class students from a single high school in South Carolina who participated in this study reveal how, for rural Southern students, the transition to college can be complicated by the popular beliefs about their dialect of English, their linguistic identities, and the ideologies about what is rhetorically effective in academic writing that they bring with them to college from their local community. This population of students has largely been neglected by educational linguists and compositionists alike, so one underlying aim of this research was to demonstrate that the experiences of these students merits further study.

My research began with questions about how students perceive the role of language ideologies in their transitions into college writing. First-year writing plays an important role in students' successful transitions from high school to college (Kuh et al.; NCTE), yet the current research on the role of first-year writing in the transition to college has yet to consider some of the complex factors that may influence students' experiences. In composition studies specifically, this body of research on the transition to college writing has not highlighted student voices as a means of better understanding how students' linguistic identities and the ideologies associated with their language varieties might have the power to shape their educational experiences. This study foregrounds student voices and lived experiences in order to promote pedagogies that respond to student needs. In this case, the students brought with them to college a complex set of language ideologies, which included a set of rhetorical ideologies that positioned some rhetorical and/or writing strategies as more effective than others.

In this final chapter, I consider the implications of the main findings of this study and what they suggest for future research. This study reveals that the transition from the local high school into the post-secondary writing classroom is indeed a process where non-standard

speakers of SAE negotiate a certain amount of tension. Many of the students want to embrace their local identities, or, at least, aspects of their local identities, but they also want to acquire the global capital of Standard American English. The students in this study negotiated a certain amount of tension with their native dialects in that they both reproduced the negative ideologies surrounding SAE and also attempted to ensure that these ideologies could not be associated with them as individual speakers, a finding which complicates both Rosina Lippi-Green and Dennis Preston's research on non-standard speakers in that these students are able to accept the predominant ideologies associated with their home dialect and yet not allow the negative ideologies to apply to themselves. In doing so, they denigrated other speakers of SAE and reproduced the language subordination model while still asserting the value of their local linguistic capital. They also negotiated a set of ideologies about what is rhetorically effective in academic writing, which seem, at least partially, to be connected to students' linguistic identities.

## **FINDINGS**

Through a series of longitudinal qualitative interviews with nine students as they transitioned from high school into college writing, I collected information from the participants about their understandings of local language, their feelings about their preparation for college writing, and their impressions of the transition into college in "real time." Gathering students' perceptions of their experiences as they lived them allowed me to see how individual events (e.g. the feedback they received on their first papers, peer reviews, and conversations with friends and roommates) in their first semester of college shaped the ways that students conceived of themselves as writers and speakers in their new environment. Though it might also be useful to talk to students after they have had some time to reflect on their time as college students, as time to reflect might allow them to think about various experiences together, or to summarize how certain aspect of their identities, on the whole, influence their experiences, I chose to ask students to describe what they were currently experiencing and learning. Conducting the interviews as their first semester of college unfolded gave me a window into the way that students attempted to use their home resources in college, and allowed me to see how students understood their own progress to develop.

Along with the findings regarding the linguistic and rhetorical ideologies that students navigate in the transition to college, the results of this study suggest that more qualitative longitudinal research on the transition to college writing would enrich the field of composition's

understanding of student development in this key educational moment. Given the significance of FYC in this transition, and the role it seems to play in student retention (Kuh et al.; NCTE), this study offers a methodology that could inform the field's understandings of students' perspectives throughout their development as college writers. Though this study's span of data collection was limited to the end of high school and the first semester of college, these findings suggest that asking students to reflect on what they are, at that moment, experiencing in their writing instruction is a valuable exercise.

When I began this study, I anticipated that students would primarily recount experiences that reproduced the primary ideologies associated with SAE. The students, after all, have been exposed to portrayals of Southerners who are not as intelligent or well-educated (but more polite and pleasant) than people from other parts of the country. They had seen these portrayals in the media, but also in interactions with other speakers, including other Southerners. Because the primary ideologies surrounding SAE are so persistent, and so recognizable to most American speakers, I anticipated these would also be the ideologies that were most significant in the experiences of the participants in this study. While those ideologies were salient for the students, their experiences were more complex than I could have anticipated. Intertwined with the ideologies surrounding language were also a set of ideologies about their writing and argumentative practices. These ideologies were primarily regarding what students considered to be rhetorically effective. Some of these rhetorical ideologies were closely tied to the ways students learned to "make a point" in their local communities, and some of the rhetorical ideologies circulated around what students understood to be valued in academic writing.

The language ideologies students brought with them from their local community into the college writing classroom led them to believe that their peers and writing instructors would "other" them based on their language and their hometown affiliations. To some degree, the students took up the predominant ideologies associated with their home dialect. They reproduced the ideologies that position speakers of SAE as less intelligent or well-educated, but contrary to what previous research suggests, the students did not apply these ideologies to their own language use. Rather, they used the negative ideologies to differentiate themselves from speakers "back home" (speakers not at college with them), and to assert that the speakers "back home" were of lower social class than they themselves. In this way, the students in this study participated in the language subordination model, but by and large, they used it in an attempt to



exempt themselves from having their own language subordinated. Several of the students also reported changing their language usage in response to their realization that their linguistic identities marked them as “other” in college. Both the linguistic differentiation and students’ decisions to change their language represent the complexity of the students’ responses to their experiences as speakers of a non-standard dialect in the crucial moment when they enter the college writing classroom. These students deal with the challenges of entering college with linguistic capital that is not valued in the more global market of the FYC classroom by distancing themselves from the negative ideologies associated with SAE, while simultaneously asserting the value of the rhetorical resources offered by their local language, which they felt would be helpful for them in their transition from high school to college.

The students in this study viewed the rhetorical resources they brought from home as valuable for academic writing, and they attempted to employ these resources in their writing assignments for their FYC courses. Indeed, rather than feeling that they were being given the opportunity to acquire academic discourses, many of these students perceived feedback on their writing as asking them to give up important elements of their home language capital and identities, as well as the rhetorical strategies that had thus far proven very successful for them. The students displayed a degree of rhetorical sensitivity when they discussed local practices like being “short, sweet, and to the point,” but they lacked similar understanding around what is rhetorically effective in academic writing. The students attempted to accommodate the expectations of their new academic context by using conventions they had previously been taught were “academic,” including their use of “MLA,” which they used to denote not only citation style, but registers of academic and “standard” English as well.

The findings from this study, then, suggest that these students are utilizing and reproducing rhetorical ideologies associated with SAE, in part, to emphasize the positive aspects of their local identities. They did not denigrate being “short, sweet, and to the point,” even when it did not work for them in their FYC courses. Rather, they asserted its rhetorical effectiveness and continued to try to use it. The rhetorical ideology about what is effective at home is valuable to them. On the other hand, they *did* take up the negative language ideologies, to a certain extent—at least as far as those ideologies apply to other speakers. At the same time, the students were not wholly dismissive of the conventions of academic English, as evidenced by their reproduction of a set of ideologies they labeled as “MLA.” For the students, “MLA” seemed to

be at once familiar territory and unfamiliar ground, as it was a concept they brought with them from their high school English classes and believed would offer them a resource that would aid their success in post-secondary writing. However, they discovered that , which they called “MLA,” were not always as well received as they anticipated. For these students, “MLA” served as a set of linguistic and rhetorical ideologies about what is valued in academic writing, and represented the expectations of effective academic writing that they brought with them from their high school classes. Though the initial research questions for this study were centered on how the predominant ideologies associated with SAE might affect students’ experiences, the set of rhetorical ideologies—both the ideologies that valued the local capital of being “short, sweet, and to the point” and the ideologies that valued the more global capital represented by “MLA”—that rose out of the data indicates that these beliefs about how students might use language to create rhetorically effective writing are equally significant in these students’ transitions into college writing.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

This study makes several contributions to the field of composition and rhetoric. First, it offers a methodology for studying student perceptions on the transition from high school to college. Information about these perceptions on the transition from high school to college writing are necessary for researchers and educators alike to better understand what students experience in FYC. While research that examines student writing and outcomes is important, it is essential to add student voices into the conversation that circulates around their experiences with the transition and with composition courses more generally. The influences of social and cultural factors like ideologies of rhetoric and language on students’ experiences cannot be effectively studied without talking to students about how their language and home discourses affect those experiences. If we, as scholars, are to talk *about* students, we must also talk *to* them about their development as writers. Further research that surfaces the ideologies that students carry with them into FYC classrooms could offer still more insight into how, exactly, these ideologies influence students’ experiences. Perhaps more significantly, this study indicates that educators can and should help students better understand the linguistic and rhetorical ideologies they bring into FYC, as well as the language capital they have available to leverage as they acquire academic discourses. This qualitative perspective on students’ experiences adds to and complicates the existing research by surfacing the ideologies that exist beneath the surface of

student writing.

Secondly, it provides evidence that the language ideologies surrounding non-standard varieties of English are salient in writing courses, especially in first-year writing courses. Though the field of composition studies has not extensively explored language ideologies as a theoretical framework, this study indicates that it offers a useful lens through which to examine the experiences of students in FYC. These ideologies were on the students' minds when they entered their FYC courses, and they were keenly aware that the local linguistic capital they controlled was not as valuable in their courses as the more global capital of StAE. Though there is research in composition studies that examines the influence of dialect on "error," this study shows that language ideologies have the power to shape students' experiences with FYC (and, potentially, with the transition to college itself), in that these ideologies often influence the students' understanding of their identities as speakers, and as the findings from this study indicate, as writers, and therefore merit careful attention and more research from scholars and instructors.

Finally, it suggests that composition instructors must carefully consider what students bring with them into first-year writing courses as we seek to contribute to students' transitions into college writing. This study offers evidence that a large portion of students in first-year writing course might well be contending with a complex web of ideologies surrounding their language and their rhetorical understanding, and these findings merit both more study and pedagogical innovations that will support these students as they acquire academic discourses. Though my initial research questions were not intended to surface students' rhetorical ideologies, the findings from this study indicate that these beliefs about what is rhetorically effective offer insights into what students anticipate being valued in their writing as they enter into FYC. Finding that students deeply value the local resource of being short sweet and to the point is important because it shows that students do not come into composition classrooms as "blank slates." Instead, they bring with them a set of beliefs about what will work in their academic writing, beliefs they've developed with advice from people who they have deep relationships with and trust much more than the composition instructor, who is new to them and with whom they don't have the same kind of relational history as they did with their high school English teachers. This finding is significant because it suggests that instructors need to be aware of the importance that students ascribe to the knowledge that they bring with them.

Likewise, the findings that surface the set of ideologies students associate with “MLA” are significant because of the multiplicity of meanings wrapped up in set of ideologies, all of which are covered by the single label “MLA,” suggest that even though “MLA” appears at both the high school and college level, students may have a different understanding of what “MLA” means than their college instructors anticipate. Based on the students’ understanding of “MLA,” they may take up criticism about their adherence to “MLA” as criticism about their language. Again, here, this finding offers a new understanding about the kinds of knowledge that students bring into the college writing classroom and the rhetorical ideologies students bring from their local communities. Once FYC instructors better understand both the prior knowledge students bring with them and the ideologies that undergird that knowledge, then we can better support them as they work towards meeting the learning outcomes of FYC at their new institution. Supporting students’ successful transitions into FYC may then also support more successful transitions into college generally.

As the findings from this study indicate, both linguistic and rhetorical ideologies offer students a resource that they carry with them through the transition. This can prove difficult for students, though, as they found that what they felt would be a resource for FYC was not well-received in their new context. These findings demonstrate that there is a potential miscommunication or the potential for misunderstandings between students and instructors about what will be valued in the FYC classroom. Students believe the rhetorical strategies that have worked in the past will work again, but they lack the meta-language to articulate what those strategies are and how they function at home (and, subsequently, how they might not prove similarly effective in college, because the students also lack a meta-language to help them articulate the goals of FYC). As educators, we can help students develop such a meta-language, which would support them as they learn to adapt what they bring with them as linguistic and rhetorical resources from their home communities.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Transitioning to college is not an easy endeavor—students enter into a new social context, leaving behind the familiar environments of home. At the same time, they are asked to navigate a new institution, where they may have few resources to support them, and, arguably most importantly, balance a more difficult academic course load than many of them have ever had before. These insights suggest a need for more research that foregrounds students’ perspectives

and greater transparency about non-standard language in the composition classroom. These findings also suggest implications for composition pedagogy, particularly for the FYC classroom.

These findings also indicate that pedagogies promoting greater meta-awareness about writing and explicit discussions of different rhetorical strategies and their varying degrees of effectiveness in academic writing could benefit students who are speakers of non-standard English. For example, it would be useful for rural Southern students if their first-year writing instructor gave them the background to understand how their spoken language differs from the written variety of StAE that is valued in academic writing. As part of this instruction, composition instructors should help students disentangle spoken and written registers of English by shifting their own language around student writing. Rather than asking students to “write it the way you say it” or “read it out loud until it sounds right,” instructors can help students identify how their written sentence structures differ from academic writing. Considering the various markets and the kinds of linguistic capital that students are required to negotiate in the transition to college, there is also value in developing pedagogies that operate to make students aware of how language functions and how speakers use language to establish their identities, which would offer students a set of resources that they could employ as a strategy to consider the rhetorical effectiveness of their linguistic choices in a given context. Other non-standard speakers of English would similarly benefit from such instruction.

One of the unexpected findings in this study was the way that students relied on advice and support from their high school English teachers, even when that advice was not in alignment with their college writing instructor’s advice. Based on this finding, it would behoove college writing instructors to develop pedagogical strategies that elicit this advice from students, to give students opportunities to share the knowledge they bring with them so college instructors can better understand the prior knowledge and assumptions about college writing that students carry into the FYC classroom. Assignments like letters of introduction or literacy narratives, given early in the semester, ask students to reflect on their previous experiences with reading, writing, and language. These assignments, and the readings around them, can serve to offer students enough background to begin to identify the resources they bring with them, which in turn will help students develop a meta-language to talk about their writing. Such work can help students identify the prior knowledge they bring into college. Moreover, such assignments communicate to students that their language and literacy backgrounds provide them with valuable resources for

the work they will do in college and the knowledge they will build in their new environment, and that their instructor does not expect them to discard the knowledge and identities they cultivated in their home communities. Rather, assignments like this indicate to students that the knowledge and language they bring with them from home can serve as a resource they can build on, add to, and reconceptualize as they acquire academic discourses.

These findings also highlight the importance of college instructors being aware of their own language ideologies and taking note of how those ideologies may surface in the classroom, even in seemingly insignificant interactions with students. Portraying ignorance or stupidity by mimicking a Southern accent (which is incredibly common, as we can see from popular media) reifies students' perceptions that their language, and an important aspect of their identity, has no place in the classroom. As the findings from this study indicate, students use these language ideologies to assert their sense of belonging at college, differentiating themselves from their friends and family "back home" who did not go to college, but students should not have to distance themselves from their identities in order to feel they belong at college. We can help students who speak non-standard dialects by explicitly inviting their linguistic identities into the composition classroom; we can help them think about the kind of language they use as one of the choices they make within the rhetorical situation, and we can surface language ideologies when we see them. Though StAE does offer a global cultural capital that non-standard varieties do not, and thus is a helpful tool for students to have in their linguistic repertoire, it is not the only valid form of language for students to use in first-year writing classrooms. It is very powerful for a student to experience, perhaps for the first time in an academic setting, linguistic acceptance.

The data from this study also indicate that eliciting more information from FYC students about the transition they are experiencing could provide valuable information for instructors, and could build scholarly understanding about the linguistic and rhetorical resources students bring with them from their local communities into FYC. These students' previous experiences with language offer them different perspectives on argumentation, and these differing perspectives also mean that students may value different methods of persuasion than those typically valued in first-year writing. FYC instructors can capitalize on students' previous knowledge by helping them recognize the ways they have previously learned to "make a point." For the population of students represented by this study, such a pedagogy might ask students to think about what it means, specifically, to be "short, sweet, and to the point," and to reflect on why this strategy of

argumentation was valued in their local communities. Then, students could reflect on the goals of academic writing and how those goals differ from the kinds of persuasion they had experienced previously (both in spoken and written argumentation). A helpful line of inquiry might ask students to then articulate the connection they see between the value of being “short, sweet, and to the point,” and the goals of academic writing before they identify the ways that what is valued in their local strategy diverges from the goals of academic writing. A useful activity might be to ask students to bring in writing they completed in high school and compare the rhetorical moves of their writing in high school to a model student essay from the end of a FYC course, with the objective of having students articulate how the argumentative structure of these essays differs in complexity, purpose, and genre.

The findings from this study suggest that there is potentially great power in making ideologies around both language and rhetoric explicit to students. Writing instructors can and should talk about language ideologies with students, helping students identify the ideologies they hold and reproduce. Having students discuss the feedback they received on their first graded paper was especially productive, as the exercise asked the students to compare the feedback they received in high school to the feedback they received on their first paper in college. It was this exercise where several of the students began discussing their experiences with their linguistic and rhetorical resources, and a similar exercise in the context of the composition classroom could offer students a space in which to make the differences they perceive to be salient in this transition explicit, which could offer instructors a space to discuss language ideologies and create conversation about the different kinds of rhetorical strategies students bring with them from their home communities.

In addition, this study highlights the ways in which students bring not only ideologies surrounding their languages into our classrooms, but also ideologies surrounding what is rhetorically effective in communication. The first of these ideologies—the sense that writing “short, sweet, and to the point” was more rhetorically effective than complex, long, or nuanced arguments—suggests that composition instructors should be aware of and address the ideologies about argumentation that students bring into the FYC classroom. The second of these ideologies, which was the conflation of “MLA” with academic writing more generally, indicates that students need a more complete meta-language to talk about the conventions and expectations of academic writing. This finding also suggests that high school English classrooms may be a place

for pedagogical intervention surrounding what “MLA” means. This study was limited to student perspectives as a means of foregrounding their voices and experiences. Now that this research has surfaced the set of ideologies surrounding “MLA” that students bring with them into FYC courses, further research is needed to explore in more detail the depth of these ideologies and their source. Future research should examine high school teachers’ understandings of and instruction around “MLA” as a means of inquiring about the source of students’ ideologies. How do high school teachers frame “MLA” in high school English classrooms, and how does this instruction shape what students enact in writing classrooms at the post-secondary level?

The findings surrounding “MLA” and being “short, sweet, and to the point” also suggest that the collaboration between high school and college instructors that past research has called for could potentially be usefully enacted through outreach that helps high school teachers understand the role of MLA in college writing classrooms, as well as illuminating the other key differences between the goals of high school and college writing. FYC instructors can make these differences explicit to students so that students better understand the shifts and transitions they are being asked to make in their writing.

There is much room for future research. Because there is so little work on SAE speakers in educational settings, this study was, in many respects, exploratory. More research is necessary to explore how language ideologies circulate in the context of the writing classroom in conjunction with student perceptions. In addition, longer studies are needed, to get a fuller understanding of the transition from high school to college writing. Following students through at least a semester of high school and a full year of college would offer researchers a more clear sense of what students are experiencing in the transitional moment. This longer, more in-depth research could also better explore the transition students are asked to make by incorporating classroom observations and analysis of the assignments students are given and the responses they write to those assignments. Research in students’ high schools of origins could also point to useful community resources that students draw on in their transition into college and could help students see these as assets in their college-level writing as well.

Though this study focused on speakers of SAE, speakers of other non-standard dialects, like AAE, Appalachian English, and Chicano English, could equally benefit from research that examines their experiences with the ideologies associated with their language, and with the local language and rhetorics they bring into first year writing courses. Students from these speech



communities all also must navigate ideologies that suggest their local linguistic capital is less than desirable in the FYC classroom, and the students who speak these varieties may similarly experience elements of their identities being denigrated. As a theoretical framework, *language ideologies* offers a way for scholars to peer into the (albeit messy and thorny) relationship between language, rhetoric, and academic writing that students carry with them into the composition classroom. Although this study focuses on a highly specific student population, it speaks to educators and scholars interested in helping all students make the transition to college writing, and suggests that college instructors must be aware of the local rhetorical and linguistic ideologies and the ways those ideologies shape students' understandings and performances of identity in composition classrooms. That day in my classroom back in Cowpens, I did not know how to respond to Blake, in part because I lacked the background knowledge to understand his concern, but also because there is so little research on this population of students to help teachers and FYC instructors who encounter moments like I did with Blake. This study highlights the importance of continuing such work, and it illuminates the linguistic and rhetorical ideologies and resources that students like Blake carry with them into FYC courses.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: High School Student Survey

What is your name? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

How old are you?

- ☐ 17
- ☐ 18
- ☐ 19
- ☐ 20

Where were your parents born and raised?

What are your parents' highest levels of education?

- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ High school diploma
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Associate's degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Post-graduate school (master's degree, PhD, law degree, MD, etc.)

How long have you lived in X county?

- ☐ All my life
- ☐ 13-18 years
- ☐ 7-12 years
- ☐ 0-6 years

Where would you say you're from?

Would you consider yourself a Southerner?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Why or why not?

What are your plans after high school graduation?

- ☐ 4-year college/university
- ☐ 2-year college/community college
- ☐ military service
- ☐ I have no idea

If you are going to college, have you decided where you're going to college?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, where are you going to college?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I avoid writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I look forward to writing down my ideas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am nervous about taking a college writing class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Handing in an essay I've written makes me feel good.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My mind seems to go blank when I start writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to write down my ideas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas clearly in writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People seem to enjoy what I write.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing is a lot of fun.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I expect to do poorly in English classes before I enter them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like seeing my thoughts on paper.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussing my writing with others is enjoyable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a terrible time organizing my ideas when I write.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I hand in a piece of writing, I know I'm going to do poorly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It's easy for me to write well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't think I write as well as most other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't like my writing to be evaluated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm not good at writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you think people talk differently around here than they do in other places?

How would you describe the language people use around here?

Do you speak a language other than English at home with your family?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What language(s) do you speak fluently?

Would you be willing to participate in a brief interview? You will be compensated for your time.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you are willing to be interviewed, please supply a phone number and email address where I can contact you to set up the interview.

## **Appendix B: Sample Informed Consent**

### **Informed Consent/Assent to Participate in a Research Study**

#### **Linguistic and Rhetorical Ideologies in the Transition to College Writing: A Case Study of Southern Students**

**Principal Investigator:** Sarah Swofford, PhD candidate, Joint Program in English and Education, University of Michigan

**Overview and Purpose:** Transitioning from high school to college writing can be challenging. I am asking you to be part of a research study that explores factors that might affect that transition for Southern students like you. I plan to ask 12 seniors at your school to participate in this study.

**Description of your involvement:** If you agree to be part of this study, you will participate in a short survey and five interviews with me. These interviews will be informal conversations about your experiences—I'm interested in learning from you! One of these interviews will take place in the next couple of weeks, around the time you graduate high school. The other four interviews will happen over the course of your first semester in college. For these interviews, I will come to you at a time that is convenient for you, and these interviews will take about an hour. I will also ask you to share two pieces of your writing with me—one from this semester and one from your college writing class. I will digitally record the interviews.

**Benefits:** You will directly benefit from participating by having an opportunity to think carefully about your educational experiences. I also hope this study will result in better educational support for students who are transitioning from high school to college, especially students like you from South Carolina.

**Risks and Discomforts:** Answering questions about your educational experiences may be slightly uncomfortable. You can choose not to answer a question or you may stop the interview at any time. Just tell me you'd like to stop.

**Compensation:** If you are chosen to participate in all stages of this study, you could earn up to \$100. For the first interview, you will be given \$15. For the second, third, and fourth interviews, you will be given \$20, and for the fifth interview you will be given \$25.

**Confidentiality:** I plan to publish the results of this study, but I will not include any information that would identify you. To keep your information safe, the digital recordings of your interviews will be kept on a password-protected computer for five years after the study is complete. At that time, the files will be destroyed. I will be making a typed word-for-word copy of our interviews, which will be kept on a password-protected computer, along with all other study data. To protect your confidentiality, your real name will not be used in the written copy of our discussions. There are some reasons why people other than me might need to see the information you provided as part of this study. This includes organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly, including the University of Michigan or government research offices. Also, if you tell me something that makes us believe you or others have been or may be physically harmed, I may report that information to the appropriate agencies.

**Voluntary nature of this study:** Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if your parents say you can talk to me, you do not have to do so. Even if you say yes, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may also choose to not answer a question for any reason.

**Contact Information:** If you have questions about this research, including questions about the scheduling of the interview or compensation for participating, you can contact Sarah Swofford, University of Michigan, [scswoff@umich.edu](mailto:scswoff@umich.edu), (734) XXX-XXXX. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 540 E Liberty St. Ste 202, Ann Arbor, MI 481-4-2210, (866) 936-0933, [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu).

**Consent/Assent:** By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. If you are under 18 years old, your parent also needs to give consent by signing this form below. I will give you a copy of this document and will keep a copy in my study records. Be sure that I have answered your questions about the study and you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact me if you think of a question later.

*I agree to participate in this study.*

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Participant Signature

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Date

---

Participant's Printed Name

---

Date

---

Investigator Signature

---

Date

### Appendix C--Sample Interview Transcript

Sarah: So how is it going so far in your classes?  
Melissa: Oh, it's good. It's getting better. It's a lot better than it was when I first started. It's better.  
Sarah: How so?  
Melissa: Well, it was like, I was all unbalanced and I was trying to make time to study and everything, but I've actually got it worked out now. And next semester, I have one class at 8:00 and then I have an hour break and I have my next class and an hour break, and the next class and then I'll be done for the day. So I have like a lot of time in between like do homework and everything. So it's gonna be a lot better.  
Sarah: So when you say unbalanced at the beginning of the semester, what was-  
Melissa: 'Cause I was trying to balance the work, my work and school and everything and now I'm trying to like, I wasn't used to it 'cause I didn't work in high school. This is my first time ever having a job and so I had to balance that. But I think it got easier. Like work wasn't that bad, it's just I had to make time to study and everything, but it's better now.  
Sarah: Yeah, so you sort of figured out how to balance it. How many hours a week are you working?  
Melissa: Well, actually this week I have 35.  
Sarah: That's a lot. I can see how you'd have a hard time balancing that. So how did you figure that out? Like what did you do to sort of get it balanced?  
Melissa: Well, I have two-hour breaks. Since I take one-hour breaks so these other breaks, like to write papers or whatever. And then sometimes I stay after school. It's like I don't usually have to be at work, I work at nights, so it's just 'til five. And plus I have Tuesday's and Thursday's off so I just work day shift for that. And I have nights to do whatever. But it's easier.  
Sarah: So are you having an easier time like sticking to your study schedule?  
Melissa: Yeah, I've gotten very more disciplined or whatever so I'm pretty good now.  
Sarah: Yeah, that can be hard for me sometimes.  
Melissa: I just don't want to do it and then I know I have to do it.  
Sarah: I know that can be really hard. What made you sort of make yourself stick to it? Was there something that-  
Melissa: Well, actually I had gotten some grades that I didn't like and I just realized hey, I've gotta do better. So it was like a wake-up call.



#### Appendix D--Sample Interview Protocol

Brief: Thank you so much for meeting with me today and being willing to chat with me. You know I'm doing this study because I'm interested in students like you, students who come from the country and who go to college. I want to understand what your experiences are like, and how being from a place like Upstate affects your experiences in your first semester of college, especially in your writing class. I'm really interested in whether people have any ideas/beliefs about the way you talk or write, and I'd like to hear about any experiences you've had with people who talk differently than you.

1. How is your first semester of college classes going so far?
  - a. Probe: What "class-related" things have been difficult for you so far? What things have been easy?
  - b. Probe: What aspects of college life outside of class have been difficult for you? What things have been easy?
2. How has writing at the college level been similar or different from writing in high school?
3. Please describe your writing class for me.
  - a. Probe: What kinds of activities have you done?
  - b. Probe: What kinds of smaller assignments have you had due?
4. In your writing, what do you feel confident about? What do you not feel confident about?
  - a. Probe: Follow up as much as possible (what has contributed to those feelings, etc.)
5. How much do you find yourself talking in class? What have those discussions been like?
  - a. Probe: Why have you chosen (not) to talk?
6. Do you consider yourself a good writer? What do you think good college writing looks like?
  - a. Probe: What makes you characterize yourself in this way?
7. To what extent do you "write the way you talk"?
  - a. Probe: Standard English in writing? In talking? Should people write the way they talk?
8. I'd like us to talk about the writing you've done for your class this semester. Please take a look at the graded paper you brought with you today and remind yourself of your paper and your instructor's feedback.
  - a. What sticks out most to you when you look back over this paper—either your writing or your instructor's feedback?
  - b. How did you feel about this paper when you turned it in? Why?
  - c. What elements of your writing do you feel were most important to your instructor as he/she was evaluating your work? What makes you think so? What other things might the instructor have been responding to as he/she was evaluating your paper?
9. Based on your writing and your class participation, how do you think your writing teacher would describe you?
10. If I asked you to describe your writing teacher's background, what would you say?
  - a. Probe: How would you know these things?

11. What was your writing process for this piece of writing?
  - a. Probe: How did you begin writing this piece, thinking about the prompt, brainstorming, what was drafting and revision like, etc.
12. What kinds of help have you gotten with your writing this semester, and who have you gotten that help from?
13. The last time we talked I asked you if people around campus talk differently than they do at home. You said \_\_\_\_\_. Do you still feel that way?
  - a. Probe: What do you think about those differences?
  - b. Probe: Do you think people on campus think *you* talk differently? What do they seem to think about these differences?
  - c. Probe: If no, what has changed your mind about your fellow students' speech?
14. Do you think the way you use language (your accent, or the words you use, or anything else) plays a role in how others perceive you?
15. Has anyone ever given you a hard time about the way you talk? How so?
16. Has your language ever benefitted you in any way? How so?
17. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experiences with writing/speaking/talking in college so far?

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