"The Youth Shall Lead": A Linguistic Justice Project on Student Linguistic Profiles in Higher Education

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Abstract

With institutions of higher education making great strides in introducing DEI initiatives into policies, programs, and curricula, the linguistic dimension remains unexplored. As standard language ideology permeates academia, students are forced to abandon their cultural and linguistic identities and endure misrecognition and othering. To address this gap, this article presents a linguistic justice statement for faculty at George Mason University that addresses the need for allowing students to use and exist in their own linguistic profiles within the classroom and the university as a whole. The statement is accompanied by a framing essay examining how the oppressive and inaccurate nature of standard language ideology marginalizes students by stifling their senses of self. Ultimately, both statement and essay explore how, through forcing students to conform to standard language ideology in both written and spoken language standards, a communal disconnect and power imbalance are fashioned between a student's relationship with their instructor(s) and other authorities in academic spaces.

Keywords: Standard American English, viewpoint diversity, linguistic discrimination, translingualism, standard language ideology

[1] A third author collaborated on the writing of this project, but has chosen to remain anonymous.

Introduction to Key Terms

Standard language ideology (SLI), defined as a value system or ideology prioritizing one specific form of language as the ideal language to aspire to, is constructed from and informed by dominant identities comprising our society (Lippi-Green, *Facts of Life*). Put simply, the language we use, and encourage others to use at all times, is rooted in white, middle-class backgrounds, which forces people from other backgrounds to aspire to use that language under any and all circumstances, including academia, the workplace, and even casual conversation.

The language form prioritized by SLI is the so-called *Standard American English* (SAE). As described above, SAE is the variety of English spoken primarily by the white, upper middle= class. It is also the variety from which the written form of English is based and is thus the model utilized in discussions of "proper" grammar, syntax, or spelling. SAE is the form of English taught in schools, spoken by media figures, and used in federal reports, and consequently is associated with "educated" or "eloquent" speech (Lippi-Green, *Standard Language Myth*). Although SAE proliferates discourse andsociety, there is nothing more objective, foundational, or correct about it than other Englishvarieties. It is widespread because it is and has been the language of those in power (Lippi-Green, *Linguistic Facts of Life*).

Linguistic discrimination is a method of discrimination that relies on language as a proxy to target race and ethnicity; prejudice against the way one speaks is necessarily prejudice against the aspects of identity that that specific speech is grounded in. As an institution leading nationwide efforts to reflect the diversity of its student body and the campus community as a whole, rarely does George Mason University discuss or include linguistics, let alone the individual language profiles of every individual comprising the university community, in its

efforts to create an inclusive, equitable academic realm.

Purpose and Vision

From K-12 to higher education, SLI and SAE are permeated in the language we use in classrooms and, in turn, teach students to use, even if unconsciously known to us. Between written and spoken standards of language, to the relationship between students and their educators, the reinforcement of SAE as the ideal form of language through SLI in turn establishes the notion that students must reject their personal identities in order to be accepted in the greater realm of society—not solely academic or professional settings. There is a relationshipbetween power, knowledge, language, and ideology, and the relationship between these conceptsis what informs our reality and upholds the institutions, physical and non-physical, we rely on in our everyday lives (Mayr). The insistence that students constantly, consistently use SLI in the classroom, in the workforce, and in their everyday lives requires students to uphold institutions of oppressive that use SLI as a vehicle for linguistic discrimination. Often, these systems activelywork against the students in question, thus making the students unconscious yet unfortunate accomplices in their own subjugation. Some ways in which SLI manifests itself in university settings include:

- Inflexible statements in syllabi outlining expectations of written and spoken assignments having no spelling or grammatical errors**,** especially in order to achieve and maintain a passing grade;
- Student reluctancy to contact professors and/or teaching assistants, due to fearing scrutiny and/or lack of assistance;
    - For instance, faculty correcting students' pronunciation, spelling, grammar, or

syntax in day-to-day conversations or over email contributes to student hesitance in asking for help or support with something.

- Student hesitancy to share their viewpoints or overall contribute to classroom discussions;
    - SLI also contributes to a growing hesitancy of students to contribute in the classroom at all. For fear of being criticized by their classmates or professors for their views, including for how those views are articulated, the percentage of student reluctancy to participate in class discussions and share their viewpoints—including for "non-controversial" topics—rose about 7.1% from 2019 to 2020 (Stiskma).
- Faculty refusing to provide recommendation letters, references, or other professional materials to non-standard language students (Figuero & Gillon);
- The fixation on Standard American English as the only acceptable model of "formal" expression and communication.

The enforcement of SLI and SAE in the classroom not only reinforces institutionalized oppression and casts aside students' individual identities, but it also affects students' confidence and willingness to participate openly in class and creates an imbalanced relationship of power between students and faculty members. Drawing on scholarship from Michel Foucault and Andrea Mayr, we assert that institutional power is structured, networked, and diffused. "Institutional power" is a system of oppression and imbalanced power relations, in which an entity adhering to a specific set of social or cultural conventions is awarded more power and influence over others. Through scrutinizing, penalizing, and otherwise forcing students to

conform to SLI and SAE at all times, institutional power manifests itself in an oppressive relationship between student and professor, where the professor is the authority in power and the student is oppressed by the same, restrictive system that marginalizes them in the first place.

Our vision is that George Mason University, as a community and institutional body, commits itself to creating and maintaining a learning environment in which viewpoint diversity thrives and where standard language ideologies are given no quarter. In describing what SLI is, what is at stake under its ideological regime, and proposed, actionable solutions to its effects, our purpose is fourfold:

1. Illuminate the workings of an often-overlooked system of oppression and hegemony which has become "the last back door to discrimination" (Lippi-Green, *Language Subordination* 74);
2. Situate languages as forms of sociocultural expression that exist within larger networks of power, discourse, and ideology; language is more than communication, it constructs its speaker as social beings with particular identities and histories (Lippi-Green, *Language Subordination* 74); Language is always political;
3. Assist administration and faculty with recognizing the relevancy of SLI and linguistic discrimination within the context of higher education;
4. Provide a foundation the University can use to foster greater inclusivity and descriptive, rather than prescriptive, linguistic values.

Although we acknowledge the argument that a single, uniform standard of language promotes linguistic competency and prepares students for the expectations of future employers and other entities in the professional realm (Smith), we assert that advising students to always

adhere to SLI—particularly with consequences threatened against them—stifles their individual expression and engagement in the classroom. Such changes in how we use, promote, and think about the language we use in our academic spaces and projects can help increase classroom engagement and student inclusion by facilitating viewpoint diversity, creating more equal student-faculty relationships, and prioritizing student learning above idealized or expected "perfection."

With linguistic profiles being so deeply rooted in and unique to specific cultural experiences, as well as the history of linguistic variants being part of a greater legacy of racial and ethnic communities, we argue for the academic realm and its participants (e.g. professors, administrators, researchers, et cetera) to allow students' linguistic profiles to freely exist and be used in educational spaces, without scrutiny or penalization. Consequently, permitting the use of non-standard English in the classroom in this manner would serve as a vehicle for racial and linguistic justice (e.g. usage of AAVE for Black racial justice) and a way of equalizing opportunity for nonwhite students with their white counterparts.

Recommended Solutions

To ameliorate the effects of SLI in the classroom and foster a more inclusive academic environment for students of all linguistic backgrounds, profiles, and experiences, we have created the following solutions, which are informed by synthesizing selections of recent linguistic scholarship:

1. Creating less restrictive guidelines for course syllabi and allowing students to submit written and spoken assignments in their preferred language structures.

This includes refraining from penalizing or correcting notational, grammatical, and syntactic errors in written and spoken assignments. Instead, we encourage faculty to ask questions that challenge students to think beyond the course material and make connections between it and themselves, their other courses, their experiences, and the surrounding community (i.e. campus, local, state, regional, global).

We believe this would also reduce faculty members' workloads in their courses, as it would eliminate the task of reading through, scrutinizing, and editing hundreds of assignments. In emphasizing that students use their linguistic profiles freely, we dually believe in creating an environment for faculty to feel safe, comfortable, and included in the academic realm: this includes lifting work-related burdens in the academic realm as much as possible, including in this manner.

2. Implementing a blanket statement in course syllabi acknowledging that while non-SLI languages may be deemed unacceptable in professional & corporate settings, assignments that are understood by faculty and otherwise follow a cohesive narrative structure will be accepted without penalty.

E.g. "In prioritizing learning in this classroom and maintaining an inclusive environment for all of my students, I will not dock grades from your assignment(s). If you follow assignment instructions to the best of your ability, ask for help or clarification as needed, and continue to engage with course material, you will receive credit for your work. [While I acknowledge that jobs or employers may prefer students acquire a standardized, consistent form of language, I encourage all of you to prioritize engaging with the course content and challenging yourself to expand your ideas.]"

3. Training faculty to recognize non-standard forms of language (e.g. Black English/AAVE,

English as a second language, Southern English, "Spanglish," et cetera) as legitimate linguistic profiles, and prompt them to work toward dismantling linguistic discrimination in their curricula, instruction, research, and pedagogical practices (Baker-Bell et al.).

4. Creating space in the classroom for students to contribute their viewpoints and experiences, not solely answers to questions or responses to course material.

Drawing on scholarship on student viewpoint diversity from Stiksma, Singer, and Ludlow-Broback, we encourage three potential ways to eliminate SLI in the classroom and in turn promote viewpoint diversity on college campuses. This includes shifting diversity-based discussions led by faculty to students, including student input and leadership, thus allowing these discussions a more inclusive atmosphere; welcoming and affirming uncertainty within these conversations, especially emphasizing that no question is trivial, in order for the conversation to be more holistic; and allowing discussion participants to use sources outside of the course to find meaning and value for themselves in the material presented to them, which increases further student engagement (Singer & Ludlow-Broback).

5. Implementing inclusive hiring practices when onboarding new faculty, staff, and researchers in order to diversify authorities in classrooms and other academic spaces.

Hiring practices centered around experience-based credentials, rather than objective standardized measurements such as degree requirements, grade transcripts, and writing samples, can augment our faculty's composition and promote non-traditional learners and teachers through the ranks of academia. Not only would a reassessment of hiring practices such as degree requirements, transcripts, and writing samples promote non-traditional learners through the ranks, but it would also make room for language users who have historically been marginalized by conceptualizations of academic or standard English. This is not merely diversifying based on

ethnicity or gender representation but based on an array of possible credentials; we believe diversifying hiring practices could help build an inclusive environment from the inside out.

Making allowances for non-standard resumés and applications, cover letters, work histories, and personal strength sections of resumés are difficult for even the most adept practitioners of SAE. For those whose primary orientation to English is from outside the insular sphere of SAE, these sections on a resumé can be an unnecessary impediment to their getting hired within academia. We are not advocating for the outright abandonment of standardized hiring criteria, only that allowances be made where and whenever possible for individuals to showcase their abilities in ways that do not force conformity to the arbitrary standards of traditional conceptualizations of SAE.

6. Implementing a course dual-grade system, in which one grade is entered into grading systems and a separate space is created for individual feedback and attention to work, even though we acknowledge that this system of grading may not be feasible or applicable under every circumstance.

We understand that as an academic institution, there is an expectation that individuals who graduate from this University be capable members of the workforce, fully equipped to create the products necessary for their employment: however, *this is only one facet of this institution's purpose*. Education is for more than employability; education is also a process of self-improvement and personal fulfillment, which does not necessarily serve any conventionally termed productive capacity other than the satisfaction of gaining knowledge. With this, we encourage faculty to use a dual grading system: in which students have an official grade which is based on a descriptive rubric, and another where feedback based on the conventions of SAE is provided. This feedback would be given with a mutual student-professor understanding that

although the student's argument was clearly made and the professor could understand their point, there may be technical errors and details that could be improved upon if the student strives to navigate and succeed in the professional realm. In this scenario, we give students the choice to decide the type of education they want for themselves: be it a rigid prescriptive experience that well-prepares them for the labor market, or a more personalized experience in which the student explores a subject for individual enrichment and descriptive assessment.

7. Introducing concepts of SLI, SAE, and linguistic discrimination from upper-level classes into lower-level, mandatory courses.

We encourage making content from 300, 400, and graduate-level classes available to non-upper-level courses, especially if they are on a lower level (i.e. 100 and 200-level) and/or required for all majors. For example, we know that introductory writing courses are required for all degrees, whether or not students are in a humanities-related major or field of study. Having a lesson or curriculum of linguistic justice somehow embedded in lower-level and/or mandatory courses would expose more students to the harms SLI and white linguistic supremacy impose and could also encourage more students to use the languages they're most comfortable in, thereby prompting them to share their diverse experiences, backgrounds, and beliefs in the classroom. We believe this would not only be a way of dismantling the implementation of white linguistic supremacy in academia, but also a method of encouraging student viewpoint diversity and active participation in the classroom.

Our ultimate goal is to allow students to freely exist in their linguistic profiles at all stages of their educational career, without punishment, scrutiny, or eventual repercussion for doing so. We acknowledge that although our approach may be viewed as promoting linguistic "incompetency," ill-preparing students for realms outside of academia, or freely

distributing passing grades, we in turn emphasize that conforming to a standard of language, an *ideology*, does not necessarily equate to educating students or producing "competency" (Canagarajah). We use the terms "incompetency" and "competency" in quotations here, as we dually believe that students' own linguistic profiles are themselves competent and that adherence to SLI refers to following the expectations of that particular ideology. We argue that the idea of correctness, and what constitutes language as acceptable, is itself embedded in SAE and the conventions of SLI, and that correctness assumes the existence of a universal linguistic profile that all students use and come from.[15] Considering the diversity of our institution, we know that a single, uniform worldview is inapplicable to all students: the same can be said for imposing a standard of language for students to adhere to at all times.

One of the hopes of our institution is to create and shape the future leaders of our communities for generations to come. Through creating a more inclusive academic environment by addressing and ameliorating linguistic discrimination, we hope to establish spaces in schools, jobs, and our local and global communities where the youth shall lead.

Framing Essay

Embedded within the conventions of standard English are discriminatory norms of white supremacy. Our statement calls upon all language users of George Mason University, staff and students alike, to acknowledge the possibility of their own complicity in the reinforcement of racist ideologies and to take a proactive stance against the harmful effects of overly prescriptive linguistic regimes. Our values, goals, and work are influenced in equal measure by research and experience: the evidence we draw upon is academic and testimonial. We rely on scholarship in rhetoric, composition, and linguistics in order to orient our beliefs within the academic realm, but we refuse to do so at the expense of our agency and identity.

After all, we are much more than any ideology. Among the philosophical "isms" that influence our rhetorical frames are poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and more broadly postmodernism: our demands move forward with wholly deconstructive intent.

It is with these orientational influences in mind that our linguistic justice statement attempts to outline a set of practical demands, which we feel can ameliorate the differential effects of Standard American English and its more overtly discriminatory counterpart: white language supremacy. Only by confronting and eliminating the discursive practices that reinforce these exclusionary ideologies can we foster an academic environment in which inclusion and tolerance become the normative rhetorical frame. Ultimately, it is our intent to help George Mason University create a space in which students can exist authentically and exercise linguistic agency as they prepare themselves for the future of *their choice*. We acknowledge our institution's responsibility to prepare students for the realities of the professional world, but we do not accept that this sort of preparation must come at the expense of students' individual linguistic identities. Furthermore, we believe that it is reasonable to expect George Mason University to be able to accommodate both pedagogical orientations of professional preparation and linguistic agency.

A one-size-fits-all approach to the assessment of communicative ability is no longer viable. The institutional language and pedagogical practices of George Mason University must reflect the chorus of voices that make up its student body. Students are the backbone of any educational institution, but all too often are their perspectives absent from the curriculum. This contradiction destabilizes our institution by relegating student thought, voice, and language to theperipheries of academic life. Our statement centers its rhetorical frame around the student experience in an attempt to disrupt the power asymmetries that have accumulated in higher

education. It is our intention to rebalance pedagogical and curricular practice through student language advocacy. Specifically, we take aim at the institution of Standard American English andchallenge its arbitrary prescriptions.

Among those scholars whose work and words we rely on are Andrea Mayr, Kevin Singer& Sam Ludlow-Broback, Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, John Trimbur, April Baker-Bell, Bonnie J. Williams-Farrier, Davena Jackson, Carmen Kynard, Teaira McMurtry, Melissa Stiksma, Rosina Lippi-Green, Keith Gilyard, Asao Inoue, Peggy McIntosh, *The Vocal Fries* (Megan Figueroa & Carrie Gillon) and their guests: Wendi Manuel-Scott and Shernita Parker. In the sections that follow, we attempt to orient our goals within the context of relevant research by disarming their arguments and relating them to the academic conditions – aswe see them – here at Mason.

Research

Let us begin with the *Linguistic Facts of Life,* of which there are five. As scholar Rosina Lippi-Green notes in the first chapter of her book, *English with an Accent:*

a. First, “all spoken languages change over time.”
b. Second, “all spoken languages are equal in terms of linguistic potential.”
c. Third, “grammaticality and communicative effectiveness are distinct and independent issues.”
d. Fourth, “written language and spoken language are historically, structurally and functionally fundamentally different creatures.”
e. Fifth, “variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level, and much of that variation serves an emblematic purpose” (Lippi-Green 6–7).

These facts, when taken together, describe a communicative landscape in which the prescriptive values of standardization stand at odds with essential linguistic function: language cannot effectively be standardized, because language is, by its very nature, transitory. If anyonereading this finds themselves in doubt, we direct their attention towards the first chapter of Lippi-Green's *English with an Accent* for a more complete explanation of these facts. Language can be, and is, every bit as flexible and dynamic as its users. This understanding of language as a wholly descriptive enterprise is critical to our orientation toward institutional reform.

While the facts themselves undermine the notion of a central, standardized language, further scrutiny betrays the fact that standardized language, in particular the idea of Standard American English (SAE), is a hypothetical construct. As Lippi-Green demonstrates in the fourth chapter of *English with an Accent,* frequent "proofs" for the existence of standard language often appeal to institutional authorities and other ostensibly objective sources: language guides, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and so on and so forth. Why these bodies are given authority is never explained but is instead simply assumed. The definitions given by such authorities always refer to the language of the "educated," but who the "educated" are typically left unexplored or assumed. Although such definitions are descriptive, they are descriptive of a select few—the "educated" —who are often members of the same institution providing the definition. The evidence of standard language points to itself. Thus, not only are the structures of authority on standard language arbitrary constructs, but the answers they give serve only to reify their institutional power. Accordingly, SAE is not objective, apolitical, or even concretely real. Instead, it is a set of conventional linguistic disambiguations, rooted in the societal norms of a ruling elite; SAE enshrines a small yet powerful segment of the population's ideological

valueswithin the communicative fabric of our society.

In order to follow these premises it is imperative that we adopt practices reflecting the descriptive foundations of language in order to ensure institutional fidelity here at George Mason University: for what is at stake is not solely language as a medium of communication, but language as a form of individual expression and social being. At issue here is the act of (mis)recognition: whether we use someone else's language to recognize them as human or misrecognize them as the Other. The reinforcement of SLI is not only problematic from a scholarly perspective, but it is also socially damaging by the way it denies groups recognition by subordinating their linguistic identity to SAE. This subordination process begins with mystification: "SLI proposes that an idealized nation-state has one perfect, homogenous language. That hypothetical, idealized language is the means by which (1) discourse is seized, and (2) rationalizations for that seizure are constructed" (Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent* 68). This mythological angle is important to recognize because it persuades the subjects of language subordination to become accomplices in their own oppression. The child who is told time and time again by teachers, peers, and media that their language is wrong, is not good enough, will internalize those narratives and tell themself that as well. The consequences of any further commitment to the arbitrary prescriptions of SAE are to the detriment of our institution, as the discriminatory norms it establishes are rooted specifically in white language supremacy.

According to Asao Inoue, the linguistic norms of white middle-class culture are superimposed upon the institutions of our society, including governments, businesses, and schools: such as George Mason University. The prioritization of white, middle-class cultural norms within our institutional language confers supremacy upon a portion of the population:

> "White language supremacy, therefore, can be defined as the condition in classrooms, schools, and society where rewards are given in determined ways to people who can most easily reach them, because those people have more access to the preferred embodied white language habits and practices" (Inoue 15).

This imposition creates an environment in which white culture—as reified by its linguistic orientation—then becomes the universal standard by which everyone is judged. The linguistic norms of SAE manifest an invisible system within our society's institutions that give deference and reward to the traditions and customs of white language and culture, in such a way as to create a prejudicial system of judgment that advantages practitioners and dismisses dissent and/or perceived misorientation.

Peggy McIntosh outlines the effectual reward of this largely unseen practice of prejudicial normalization as she unpacks what she terms the invisible knapsack of white privilege. Her own experience supports Inoue's claims of a system in which the norms of white middle-class culture go unchallenged, and subsequently orient our institutions' standards around their reinforcement: "My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture…whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average" (McIntosh 1). McIntosh continues her text by listing all the baseline conditions that she experiences as a member of an inherently privileged community, which are not simultaneously conferred to, or experienced by, her "African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances" (McIntosh 1). McIntosh exposes the primary orientation of our most active societal institutions as one that

tends overwhelmingly and systematically towards conferring preferential treatment to white language and the culture it manufactures.

This preferential treatment of some narrative voices over others' within our society's institutions creates an environment in which discursive formations of the past are allowed to calcify themselves within our present and extend their influence into the future. Andrea Mayr's scholarship details, contextualizes, and deconstructs language's specific function as an instrument of subconscious power. More broadly, her work explores the power differentials which manifest themselves around the realities that language—an institution in and of itself—creates: as such, her influence on our project is indispensable. Mayr's use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to trace the differential effects of institutional language's power proved foundational to our own examinations of George Mason University's linguistic orientation. Mayr's methodology lays bare the power differentials embedded within language and the other institutions it subsequently legitimizes. Our linguistic justice statement pursues these same critical ends as it seeks to highlight the power imbalances within the classroom that are reified by the prescriptions of SAE. The limitations which standardized language demands stifle learning opportunities by subordinating the student voice to arbitrary ideological constructs.

In order to combat the asymmetrical power dynamics of SAE, we recommend that the University take a more conscious approach to building a translingual campus environment. Translingualism, as a theory, is an elevation of linguistic heterogeneity; it is an orientation about language in which linguistic differences inform the normative position. It is an acknowledgmentof language's inherent fluidity and an acceptance of its transitory nature. As a pedagogical method, translingualism is an orientation toward language

instruction and assessment in which the full breadth of a communicative party's linguistic profile is taken into account, rather than solely their performance against an arbitrary linguistic standard.

The Rhetoric of Translingualism by Keith Gilyard explores the potential benefits, challenges, and practical applications of the approach, In it, Gilyard acknowledges the competing values at play within translingual methodology and the tensions that accompany them. The crux of the issue is how to create a non-uniform system of evaluation that does indeed have certain communicative standards: "I imagine that proponents of translingualism will still have to grapple with the question of how much language prescriptiveness they are comfortable with—lest they assert 'none at all'" (Gilyard 284). No system that can be practically applied—even a translingual one—can be devoid of all prescription; so, the question then becomes, what exactly do translingual prescriptions look like?

Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur attempt to confront some of these challenges in their paper, *Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach*. Their arguments span a range of positions, from support for a pre-existing institutional policy incentivizing multilingual education, to increased cooperation between writing departments of all fields and foreign language departments, and to collaborative policy efforts between faculty, administration, and students (Horner et al. 308). Among the most salient of their offerings is a suggestion to include, within all language curricula, a discussion of linguistic differences within the language of primary communication. This sidesteps the demand that educators be necessarily, and under a strict interpretation of the sense, multilingual. There are enough differences within what we term the English language that even monolingual classrooms

can have constant exposure to linguistic differences.

Another portion of our solutions is informed by the linguistic justice statement demanding Black linguistic justice, as written by Baker-Bell et al. In the statement, one of the demands to create and sustain inclusive academic environments—especially for Black students—was that "teachers are trained to recognize Black Language and work toward dismantling anti-Black linguistic racism in their curriculum, instruction, and pedagogical practices'" (Baker et al.). We, in turn, implemented this as a solution in our statement. While we paraphrased this demand to be applicable to all students, as opposed to solely focusing on Black students and language, we agree with Baker et al.'s overall argument of the necessity of teaching instructors, teaching assistants, and other educational faculty to recognize non-SLI language structures and work to dismantle linguistic discrimination via letting students' linguistic profiles freely existand be used in the classroom.

The final pieces of research from which we gain orientation are of a different variety, rhetorically speaking. Stiksma and Singer & Ludlow-Broback's campus climate studies, which detail student opinion through statistical analysis, ground our work in the student experience. Through the inclusion of these studies' results, we hope to convey to faculty what is internally happening with students' hesitations regarding full participation in the classroom, as well as outline actionable steps faculty can take to foster a more inclusive environment for all of their students. Alongside this, however, we hope also to show students just how powerful their linguistic profiles and viewpoints are: not just to their courses, but to the university as a whole.

We also intend for our statement to illuminate the issue of linguistic discrimination for university administrators, in order to see and understand what happens in classrooms outside of

reported successes. When we penalize students for using the forms of language that are natural to them and/or students feel most comfortable using, we deny students their right to exist as their authentic selves: especially in an environment where we encourage said authenticity and acknowledge that our institutions thrive off of it. Just as we previously discussed how linguistic discrimination is a way to discriminate against race and ethnicity without explicitly pointing to race and ethnicity, the same can be said here. When we penalize, condescend, and restrict historically marginalized students from using the non-standardized forms of language they're most comfortable in, we discriminate against them, as we simply don't do the same for white, native English-speaking students.

Evidence

A prominent instance of SLI/SAE enforcement in the classroom that we have noted, both from personal experience and general anecdotal evidence (e.g. testimonies), is the penalization of students' assignments for simple notational and/or grammatical errors. For example, embedded in the syllabi of some courses are requirements that students adhere to SLI virtually at all times, particularly in written assignments. Failure to do so results in students' grades being penalized. Rather than solely existing in English, Rhetoric, Communications, or Linguistics-related topics, forced adherence to SLI in students' language is also evident in other academic fields, be it humanities-related or otherwise: from Legal Studies to History, to Business and even Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Take, for example, the syllabus of a course during the Fall 2022 semester, which was cross-listed between Government, History, African & African American Studies, and Women & Gender Studies:

2. Journal Posts (6) - 30%
In order to facilitate class discussion, students should post on 6 different classes under the Journals tab of Blackboard. Post on 3 separate classes up to and including **Oct. 6**, and the last three must fall between Oct. 18 and Dec. 1. I strongly suggest that you not wait until the last three classes of either deadline to complete your posts.

Your post should be in the form of a reflection and not simply a regurgitation of what was written or said. In other words, your posts should engage with the text. You may reflect on the perspectives that people had at a given time and the forces that may have led to a change of perspective. How did that person's activism shape perceptions or have an impact on movements, politics, ideas? Discuss contradictions found within a movement, in laws, or in an individual's activism? How does gender, race, class, and region affect politics and activism? Analyze the role of religion, racism, sexism on ideas and movements. What connections can you make to other material you've learned in the course.

Please refrain from veering into a discussion of current events or personal experiences at the expense of an analysis of the readings.

Requirements for credit for posts:
- Please do not post as ab attachment. Write directly on the Journals page or copy and paste your post directly to the page.

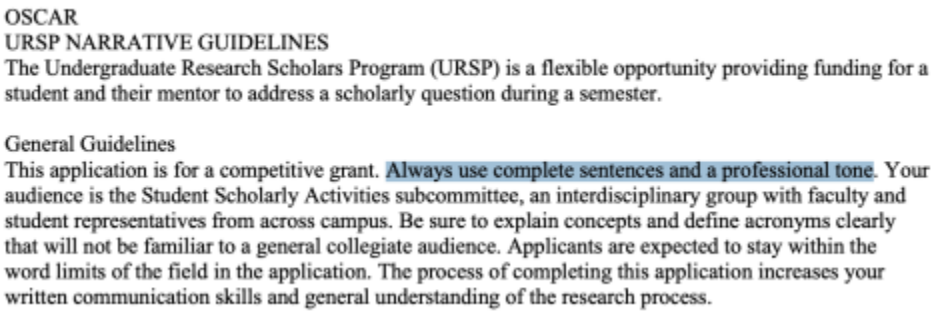
-Post no later than **10:00 am** on the day of the class readings.
-You must be in class and prepared to discuss your post for the post to count.
-Posts should be no less than 10 sentences and no more than a page in length.
-Perform a grammar and spell check on your posts. Having misspelled words and grammatical mistakes could lower your grade.

Figure 1
Example Assignment Instructions

These journals, which are the second highest-graded assignment in the course, list among their requirements for students to ensure the written language is flawless. As opposed to emphasizing that students utilize these assignments to develop a cohesive argument and explain their ideas in a manner relating to the overall course, the syllabus instead declares that, regardless of the response's cohesiveness and relevance, "having misspelled words and grammatical mistakes could lower [a student's] grade." From personal experience, even minor errors result in considerable reductions in the journal grade; an entry can decrease from 100 to 98 total points from simple misspellings due to typing quickly. As a result of this penalization, not only are students' grades in jeopardy for minor, typical, and fixable errors, but students prioritize adhering to SLI over learning and absorbing the knowledge from the course content. In other words, students are less focused on learning the lessons described in the course, but are instead forced to focus on correcting their individual linguistic profiles to conform to SLI.

We also notice how enforcement of SLI and SAE are evident in institutional standards outside of the classroom, such as campus offices: our primary example here is Mason's Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research (OSCAR). As the main office affiliated with undergraduate and graduate projects to delve further into their designated fields

of study, OSCAR provides funding for students' research and creative endeavors; if interested, students go through an extensive application process to achieve funding for their projects. One of OSCAR's initiatives, the Undergraduate Research and Scholarship Program (URSP), provides undergraduate students with the opportunity to work with a mentor for their research project, with the option of receiving financial support and/or academic credit. To apply for the URSP, applicants must submit a narrative detailing their personal background and goals for their project. The full narrative guidelines for URSP can be accessed here. Among the narrative guidelines are instructions such as:



OSCAR
URSP NARRATIVE GUIDELINES
The Undergraduate Research Scholars Program (URSP) is a flexible opportunity providing funding for a student and their mentor to address a scholarly question during a semester.

General Guidelines
This application is for a competitive grant. Always use complete sentences and a professional tone. Your audience is the Student Scholarly Activities subcommittee, an interdisciplinary group with faculty and student representatives from across campus. Be sure to explain concepts and define acronyms clearly that will not be familiar to a general collegiate audience. Applicants are expected to stay within the word limits of the field in the application. The process of completing this application increases your written communication skills and general understanding of the research process.

Figure 2
OSCAR URSP Narrative Guidelines

In other parts of the narrative guidelines, the instructions assuage students that not completing preliminary work for their projects is acceptable and will not impact their research funding. Despite this, the application requirements stipulate "complete sentences and a professional tone" at all times, thus signaling adherence to SAE and conventions of SLI at all times in the research and application processes. What OSCAR may constitute as "a professional tone" falls in line with SLI through the insinuation that non-standard forms of English (e.g. Black English, "Spanglish," multilingual English, etc) would be unacceptable for the grant.

SLI, however, manifests itself beyond the page and in the interactions students have with faculty and the institution of the university itself. As discussed by Megan Figueroa and Carrie Gillon, SLI is enforced both through institutional structures (e.g. the media) and through everyday interactions with other people. This everyday aspect is exacerbated in the university setting because of the power relationships between students and professors, which put more pressure on students to sacrifice aspects of their identity and conform to SAE. While there are extreme examples, such as professors withholding letters of recommendation on the basis of the way a student speaks and writes,[17] most instances of language subordination are found in more subtle circumstances: correction of speech or pronunciation; visible annoyance at the difficulties an accent presents; insistence on English-only environments; and the pointing out of grammatical, syntactical, or even tonal "flaws" in a student's email message or post on an educational forum (e.g. Blackboard, Canvas). One defense for such strict adherence to SAE in higher education is the concern for being "realistic." In addition to acting as the language of wider communication, SAE is made necessary for navigating the world beyond the university, which is generally not as liberal or accepting of other linguistic identities. It should be addressed that the issue of intelligibility is often used as a front for discrimination, both on an institutional and interpersonal level. Although there is an indelible need for balancing practical communicative concerns with the acceptance of non-SAE varieties, the balance struck by universities too often skews towards SAE in oppressive ways. While faculty may not be intentionally discriminatory, the dogmatic prioritization of SAE often has the same effects: the reinforcement of SLI, devaluing of student identities, and stifling of campus-wide expression.

On the whole, penalizing, or even suggesting consequences for, not adhering to the

conventions of SLI and SAE burdens students by placing unnecessary stressors on their academic performance. The enforcement of SLI/SAE via penalizing students' grades or rejecting breakthroughs/expansions in scholarly research overall suggests to students that their natural, individual linguistic profiles are unworthy: in academia, the professional realm, and society as a whole. When we penalize, condescend, and restrict historically marginalized students from usingthe non-standard forms of language they are most comfortable in, we discriminate against them *as people* and force them to uphold and conform to the history of white supremacy. Thus, under the Solutions section, our statement proposes ways for faculty to refrain from penalizing studentsfor not adhering to conventions of SLI, as well as ways to promote viewpoint diversity and spread awareness on SLI, SAE, and linguistic discrimination in the classroom.

Concluding Remarks

While this statement is mainly targeted toward faculty, as we focus on creating inclusive classroom spaces for students, we also hope that administrators benefit from this statement by learning and understanding what SLI, SAE, and linguistic discrimination are, as well as what truly happens in the classroom outside of reports or positive PR. With the strides Mason has taken to foster an inclusive, democratic, anti-racist campus environment, we believed that a linguistic justice statement outlining the issues, values, and solutions we proposed could add to existing campus efforts to build an institution reflective of all its students.

Our linguistic justice statement and this accompanying framing essay were both created in response to the many manifestations of SLI and its effects on students within higher

education, particularly here at George Mason University. Alongside our personal testimonials, we have presented scholarship documenting the ways SLI and white language supremacy have embedded themselves in the discourses, power structures, and institutions of our society, including higher education. Following this, we have offered recommendations for reform rooted in the philosophical and pedagogical orientation of translingualism, deconstruction, and post-structuralist thought more broadly. Such reforms are significant for not only rectifying the asymmetric power dynamics inherited by the legacies of colonialism and white supremacy, but for improving the campus expression climate and providing recognition of the diverse linguistic identities that make up our student body. At the very least, we hope that our work here dispels the notion that language is neutral, as well as encourages critical reflection on the role of language within society. Language is more than communication: it is culture, it is expression, and it is identity; it is the means by which institutions seize and maintain power; and it is a tool we can use to either reinforce the status quo or build a better tomorrow. Language is always political.

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